# POSTMODERN THEORY AND PROGRESSIVE POLITICS

TOWARD A NEW HUMANISM

THOMAS DE ZENGOTITA

Political Philosophy and Public Purpose

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"Philosophy is an age grasped in thought."
—Hegel

Series Editor's Foreword

Postmodernism—the term is still resonant with controversy so many years after its faddish academicism has faded. But has it? One of the key aspects of contemporary intellectual life, politics, and culture is a decisive breakdown of the structures of shared meaning that allowed for the coherence of a democratic humanism. A new, even shallower politics of identity, a skepticism toward rationalism, ideas about a "flexible self " and social constructivism, no less than a renewed expressivism in politics and a puerile politicization of culture, are just a few of the enfeebled children spawned by postmodernism's assault on Western humanism and reason. The basis of much of what constituted the progressive social movements from the Enlightenment through the 1970s was rooted in values and principles of equality, self-expression, and non-domination. These were seen to be rational, human values: applicable to all and gradually to be extended to all human beings as members deserving respect, dignity, and self-development.

   Postmodernism was a movement that saw the intellectual foundations for this grand movement of Western modernity as flawed and self-contradictory. For the postmodern view was rooted in a critique of rationality, in an alternative aestheticization of politics as well as an anti-universalism. It posited the inability of rational categories to serve as emancipatory; instead, they served to oppress. It posited difference in opposition to liberal or even social democratic forms of equality, since different cultures and identities were to be seen as having their own privileged positions and values. What resulted was a kind of free-for-all, where

humanities departments saw themselves immersed in a politics generated by hidden assumptions lurking in our philosophical and aesthetic concepts, no less than our everyday language.

All through the 1980s and 1990s academic scene, ideas such as these—as well as deconstruction, post-structuralism, and postcolonialism, to name only a few—wormed their way through humanities and social science departments. It was a climate ripe for hyper-intellectual, abstract, and non-empirical ideas: social movements were waning, electoral politics turning more conservative, and a new era of cheap consumption and hyper-individualism was taking root. Postmodernism was the reflection of this pseudo-political terrain in theory and it gestured toward radicalism by seeking to undermine and overturn all that the traditions of Western rationalism held as central. The result was a wholesale crumbling of literary traditions, humanistic philosophical ideas, and values grounded in rationalism.

But, Thomas de Zengotita argues in this fascinating and daring book, we should perhaps see in the intellectual debris of postmodernism's aftermath the hope for a new humanism. For de Zengotita, the key issue is that a new form of universalism and humanism will now be possible because of the shredding efficiency of postmodern ideas. For now, we can actually hope to weave the different groups, identities, and voices together that postmodernism centrifugally forced into their own corners of experience and concern. Now, a humanistic synthesis can begin in earnest where there was once a pulling apart of different groups and identities. This new humanism would be cultivated by these differences, perhaps even be made more human as a result. Even more, de Zengotita claims it is necessary. For our world is continuingly fragmenting us, dividing us, mediating us. We are losing that coherence and integrity that can hold out for us the possibility for a universal humanism that—although he acknowledges its ideological aspects in legitimating forms of domination historically—remains our only hope for a rational, humane, and decent future.

This can also bring a sense of purpose and project back to the humanities, which de Zengotita rightly diagnoses as being in a state of severe crisis. The encroachment of politics into every crevice of the humanities has rendered the search for the new and the phenomenological experience of it inert. De Zengotita has produced an argument that will not fit nicely into the ideological boxes that give perverse shape to our intellectual and academic discourses. By acknowledging the necessity of postmodernism's acidic solvency on our power-encrusted ideas, we will now be able to build

a new and more textured humanism and study the human condition with more nuance, more sensitivity. Perhaps then we will be able to start anew, as he asks us to, and create a more humane, and more just cultural and political sensibility. And that, given the nature of our times, will be welcome indeed.

New York, NY, USA   Michael J. Thompson
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Contents

LIST OF FIGURES

Introduction: Phenomenology, Ideal Types, Narrative

This book is for people who care about the humanities and progressive politics and want to understand the lasting influence upon them of postmodernism as it was expressed in the academic culture wars of the late twentieth century. What to make now of those furious debates over the canon versus multiculturalism, relativism, deconstruction, on and on? These are especially urgent questions for students in humanistic disciplines today, thrown as they have been into settings shaped by those battles and obliged to make their way as best they can through the debris left in their wake.

The end of postmodernism has been announced many times—but one could always wonder if the authors were stating a fact or trying to pull the plug. In recent years there has been a shift in tone. Looking ahead to the 2012 MLA conference, Stanley Fish reported that "topics that in previous years dominated the meeting and identified the *avant-garde*—postmodernism, deconstruction, post-colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, racialism, feminism, Queer Theory, theory in general"—were "absent or sparsely represented" in the schedule (Fish 2011). And Warren Breckman, in an essay about French theory as an "historical object," said that, while "there is a widespread consensus that theory's expiry date has already arrived," it seems that "ends are at least as complicated as beginnings" (Breckman 2010, 346). That complexity reflects the range of influence of "theory." In some academic settings its discourses still flourish; in others, they have been displaced, squelched, mocked. But recent innovations in self-reference through personal gender pronouns (PGPs), millions of contributions to #MeToo, and continuing

efforts to remove or rename historically charged symbols from the public square combine to remind us: the *expressive* dimension of our politics is still dominant and that is the enduring legacy of postmodernism in general. That emphasis is so thoroughly baked into our habits of thought and action that it doesn't really matter if the people involved can cite Althusser's concept of interpellation or have read Derrida or Judith Butler. They operate in a context shaped by the reign of the signifier and the claims of desire nonetheless. And so do Donald Trump and his cohort of followers—they too are products of the conditions that gave rise to academic postmodernism, they too feel aggrieved and are demanding their due. In them, postmodern identity politics as it arose on the "left" in the 1960s and 1970s finds a grotesque mirror image of itself. In them, we see what can happen when "truth" and "fact" actually become nothing more than social constructions.

Many defenders of the traditional humanities, passionately attached to the classic works that gave meaning to their lives, dream of a return to the day before yesterday when men like Lionel Trilling presided over the canon, secure in the knowledge that it contained what Matthew Arnold called "the best which has been thought and said in the world."[1] Others, more concerned with an activist political tradition aimed above all at economic justice, try to accommodate identity politics by acknowledging the importance of intersectionality in various ways or, failing that, persist in polemical attacks that remain essentially the same today as they were 30 years ago. But the postmodern moment cannot be wished away or repressed. "The past is never dead. It's not even past," as Faulkner put it, and if the humanities are to flourish once again, if economic realities are to reclaim the center of the political stage, that moment must be incorporated, comprehended and overcome (as in, sublated).

That task does not fall to veterans of the culture wars, still clinging to their grudges. It belongs to the coming generation. But what they most need to begin with is a way to assess their inheritance as a whole and for themselves. Without that basic historical orientation, they can only drift—borne along by currents flowing from accidental encounters with particular

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[1] I owe much of my understanding of modern intellectual history to Trilling and others in that cohort. Without them, this book could not have been written. But it is worth noting at the outset how critics of postmodernism have simply assumed that *they* represent the tradition of Western thought, of Western philosophy in particular. If the focus is on method, on the value of rationality—logic, clarity—that makes sense. But if the focus is on substance, their claim looks weaker. What did Socrates ultimately care about? His famous method, his logic—or the meaning of life in the face of death?

teachers and topics that happened to catch their interest. Meanwhile the technology juggernaut assimilates everything and rolls on, offering academics spectacular solutions to "how" problems and pushing the humanities ever further to the margins of the curriculum, unable to contend with a question only the humanities can ask seriously: what next? What next for the meaning of being human in a world growing more incomprehensible and vulnerable every day? There presently exists no account of our intellectual history designed to provide that orientation. This book will supply that lack.

In *After Babel* (1975), George Steiner chose 1870 to mark the onset of the radical disruption of artistic intelligibility we know as "modernism." That disruption resonated with a crisis in comprehensibility across the cultural spectrum, from the Freudian unconscious to the uncertainty principle in physics. No surprise, then, to find the term "postmodern" first used in 1870 to describe painting styles more *avant-garde* than impressionism. In the twentieth century, historians like Arnold Toynbee used it to mark "the next age" on their big picture timelines before it was picked up and disseminated by critics like Susan Sontag, again referencing disorienting innovations in the arts and architecture. But this book focuses on a set of intellectual strategies and a certain style that shaped academic postmodernism in anglophone universities since the 1960s, also with disruptive consequences. Postmodernism in this sense is derived largely from a particular group of French thinkers and the radical artists and German philosophers who inspired them—though, of course, as Fredric Jameson (1991) and David Harvey (1990) have demonstrated, shifts in modes of production from bricks and mortar assembly-line Fordism to instantaneous digital transactions in cyberspace ultimately conditioned the emergence of the postmodern in general, in the academy and in society at large. But this book is not principally concerned with technological causes. Its focus is on their effects, on culture, on consciousness—and especially on ethics and conceptions of politics. It tries to provide a straightforward and balanced account of certain movements of thought and value, from their origins to the present moment. In that way, it hopes to exemplify the core values of the humanism it is calling for. It shows that, while absolute objectivity may be beyond our finite powers, a good faith effort to be fair is not. We expect no more of ourselves in our lives and should ask no less of ourselves in our work.

This book tells a familiar (too familiar?) story of modernity. But it does so in a particular way, to a particular purpose—highlighting those aspects of thought and culture that conditioned the emergence of "modernism" and "postmodernism." The first chapter, for example, aims to show how and why early modern thinkers were so captivated by the physical sciences.

Their concept of knowledge, of rationality itself, was shaped by that example—by what they called "the new reason" and "natural philosophy." From the beginning of the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, the conviction that knowing about human nature would be analogous to knowing about the rest of nature dominated modern inquiry into the human form of life.

But this book was written under the influence of the phenomenological-hermeneutical tradition, which is characterized, first of all, by its refusal of this analogy.[2] That tradition does not (or should not) deny that one *can* study human nature in a scientific way. It does not (or should not) deny that extraordinary results follow from studying human nature in that way—as in modern medicine, most obviously, but also in psychology, genetics, and neurology. Insofar as human nature is physically determined, the scientific study of it has been successful. But insofar as human "nature" is *not* physical, insofar as it is ethical, say, or mental or historical or aesthetic or even spiritual—then studying it *as if it were* physical was bound to miss the mark.

In a nutshell, the claim is this: you cannot understand (*verstehen)* what it *means* to be human, what it *is* to be human, by way of science. Brain scientists of the future may someday map the brain's activity so precisely that they may be able to tell from that map what a person is consciously experiencing. But such a map will never *be* that conscious experience. Such a map might help to *explain* a conscious experience; only a person can *understand* it.

Take jokes, for example. An explanation of a joke is notoriously unfunny. It may be true in every detail, but it inevitably falls short in that crucial respect. A joke is only funny when you get it—that is, understand it to begin with. The spirit of the phenomenological-hermeneutical tradition can be evoked by this requirement: any theory of humor it might produce should aspire to be funny.

All of which means that a commitment to understanding entails a willingness to sacrifice a measure of rigor for the sake of significance. Of course one strives for as much precision as the subject matter will allow, but if some things that matter to us resist perfect definition and we want to address them anyway, so be it. Once the distinction between explanation and understanding is grasped, congenial consequences emerge. There is no inherent contradiction between the analytic and continental traditions in philosophy—nor between phenomenology-hermeneutics and objectifying

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[2] For readers unfamiliar with the phenomenological-hermeneutical tradition, a lucid critique of this same analogy can be found in Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (1949).

science-inspired studies more generally—anymore than there is between abstract expressionism and impressionism (see Derrida/Searle controversy in Chap. 9). Conflict arises when these styles of inquiry get implicated in larger, essentially political, disputes. Broadly speaking, phenomenology-hermeneutics has been suspected of inspiring fashionable nonsense in the radical and relativist discourses of its postmodern heirs, while objectifying analytic systems are thought to collaborate with political-economic and technological domination.

Be all that as it may for now—the politics is one thing, to be considered in the book itself. Conceptually, methodologically, these are simply different enterprises.

The refusal of "scientific" explanation does not eliminate the possibility of constraint on method.[3] Meaningful situations entail their own kind of limits. In church, at a dinner party, people are constrained in certain ways. Methodological constraints of the same kind arise in situations of interpretation. Like the fieldworker, the historical interpreter is the (uninvited) guest. The other is the host who shows the guest about the place, the place the guest wants to know her (own) way around. A certain respect for the customs of the house is in order. Method in the humanities depends ultimately upon ethics. That is why, at the end of the day, authorial intentions matter—however compelling it has seemed at certain junctures to deny them, again for reasons to be explored in these pages.

This book is an essentialist synthesis, not an exhaustive study. An ideal type of modern subjectivity-in-context derived from Heidegger's "Being-in-the-World" and Wittgenstein's "form of life" will be shown developing over time, exemplifying modernity's characteristics through representative creators and works.[4] Postmodernism, post-structuralism, "theory" is best understood in relation to that type, classically represented in Cartesian/Kantian philosophy as a mind apart, observing and shaping the physical world. Otherwise diverse expressions of postmodernism were united in this: they made of that subject their principal enemy. In one major guise, it appeared as bourgeois consciousness, masking its self-aggrandizement

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[3] The idea that explanatory categories like those of the natural sciences constitute the only possible kind of generalization has severely distorted postmodern critique—especially in the USA.

[4] A translator of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* defined its method this way: generality and particularity "are satisfied at once if the experience considered … is treated as the experience of a generalized individual … without it we should merely have history alone, which is inexhaustible and so cannot be a whole; or a mere connexion of abstract ideas which cannot, as such, be experience" (Baille in Hegel [1807] 1967, 56).

in a supposedly universal humanism. In another it appeared as a specifically economic expression of bourgeois consciousness with its objectifying schemes and technologies of exploitation. In a third it appears as normative, white, European, masculinist, heterosexual.

This book's story, in the telling, justifies two claims: first, the phenomenological-hermeneutical tradition is the most suitable source for any theory (in the traditional sense) that would provide anthropological and historical ground for a humanism that aspires to be universal and, second, the ethical aspect of the human condition is authentically accessible only through narrative. So I am reaching here for an understanding of postmodern theorists by way of genres they disdained—yet I hope, for that reason, to do them justice. And they deserve justice because, at the end of the day and in spite of all the excesses, the historical significance of academic postmodernism has been this: in exposing the hypocrisy of traditional humanism's claim to universality, it opened up—in practice and not merely in principle—the possibility of realizing that ideal, thanks to the diversity of voices that can now be part of the conversation.

A unique feature of this book: some conceptual explication is featured, but *the emphasis is on rhetoric, motive, mood—and biographical anecdote.* I am staging a diagnostic drama on the Nietzschean model, with a more sympathetic bedside manner. This strategy allows me to make notoriously difficult works of postmodern theory accessible without betraying their purpose.

If the humanities are to thrive once again, they must recover an essentially intellectual mission. These disciplines are today in crisis (enrollment numbers don't lie) for a number of reasons—but one is especially difficult to face. People on all sides of the culture wars, swept up in decades of contention, allowed politics to override commitment to understanding for its own sake.[5] While those battles raged, commitments sustained by political outrage were maintained for as long as the outrage lasted. But when the high tide of indignation ebbed, there turned out to be little left to talk about that really mattered for its own sake and many culture warriors have continued to rely on political outrage to motivate their work and, hopefully, their students. But most of those students sampling those disciplines today can sense a certain lassitude in relation to the subject matter itself, especially compared to the

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[5] I can remember as a graduate student at Columbia in the early 1970s agreeing with demands for political "relevance" in the curriculum—but nursing doubts as well. For example, I can remember encountering this oft-cited injunction: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it" (Marx in *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* [1845] 1998, 11). I thought, "Sure … but wait, don't we need to interpret it *correctly* first?"

palpable excitement generated by technological enterprises in those glamorous new buildings across the quad. Employment prospects have been a major factor, to be sure, but stressing that aspect of the situation lets too many people off the hook too easily. Just compare the atmosphere at a typical seminar or colloquium for leading scholars in the humanistic disciplines today with the mood of the great modernists in the arts and the academy described in Chap. 3 of this book. Or sample a few pages from the works of Trilling or Howe or Barzun. That's the mood of minds engaged in projects that really matter for their own sake, as intellectual enterprises that bring inherent value with them because they serve values built into the human condition and offer accounts of that condition that disclose the grounds and possibilities of value itself. That is what has been lost and must be found.

But mood cannot be directly sought. It arises as an effect of the quest, as an aura that attends the object of desire. I think it clear what the quest should be at this historical moment. We must find common ground. We must ask again what it means to be human, what it is to be human and, when the moment for politics arrives we should orient ourselves through answers to those questions, however fallible, however provisional. When work in the humanities is empirical and specific, as most of it will be, it should be framed as contributing to our developing understanding of the human condition, still unfolding as it always has and always will in accordance with its historical nature. Likewise, for sweeping narratives, enjoying a revival on the margins of the academy that attests to a longing in people for an understanding of their place in the great scheme of things, an understanding only grand narrative can provide. Finally, as I hope to show in this book, and in work to follow, the potential for theorizing about the human condition built into phenomenology—and the philosophical anthropology it once envisioned—has yet to be realized.

1.1   Interlude

One of my earliest memories: the front lawn of my Grandfather's house in a small Massachusetts town. It is the 4th of July and the parade is underway, people gathered along the street to watch—all ages, some on lawn chairs, some standing, a few little flags waving, a smattering of applause now and then. It is 1949, maybe 1950. The veterans appear, rounding the corner, and the applause thickens and lifts as they draw near. The ranks are ordered in accordance with how recently the veterans served—the still youthful and most numerous World War II servicemen bringing up the rear. I was struck at once by a lone figure, an ancient specter, all bone and

parchment skin and blue veins, being pushed along in a wheelchair, alone at the head of the column. My mother was standing behind me and I remember her leaning over me, her face next to mine, her hair brushing my cheek, pointing out in front of us discreetly, as was only proper, whispering: "See him? He was a drummer boy in the Civil War."

So here I am, in 2017, recalling an encounter with a man who could have stood at a 4th of July parade in 1856 and seen an aged veteran of the American Revolution go by, a man who, in his turn, might have met Thomas Jefferson or known someone—an officer of rank, perhaps—who sat down with Edmund Burke in London to discuss the latest news from Paris in 1789. Or 1793. Only two more such passages and we are in the company of Descartes and Galileo, present at the creation of modern thought, or so the story goes. And it is the story that most concerns us here—the myth, if you like, of modernity's making. And in that mythology, the genesis moment was not that long ago.

It seems more distant because so much has happened. More changes have been wrought on the face of the planet in the last 400 years than in the 50,000 years preceding. The changes have been so massive and intricate that our sense of the time it took expands in proportion—as if to make room, as if to fit it all in. But it was not that long ago. We moderns—just a few generations, really—have been caught up in an explosion of events and developments we couldn't possibly comprehend with any certainty. Today, looking back, one is perhaps most struck by how willing so many of our intellectual ancestors were to assume that they could.

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Essential Background

The Situation of the Modern Subject

The master trope:

> NATURE (the art whereby God hath made and governs the world) is by the art of man … imitated [so] it can make an artificial animal. (Thomas Hobbes 1651)

Implications of this analogy shaped the modern project of progress. The "artificial animal" Hobbes had specifically in mind was the early modern state, but he was as fascinated as were all his contemporaries with the dazzling array of other contrivances the "art of man" was inventing and producing in his day. In conceiving of their innovations as imitations of God's work, early moderns gave themselves a deity who was inviting his own displacement, implicitly inviting human beings to become their own Makers. Chapter 2 offers a synthesis of John Locke's most influential ideas to justify this sweeping claim. When he argued that human labor gave worthless raw materials their value, making property a natural right—*and* that the mind, as it left the hand of nature, was a blank slate, Locke (all unknowing) opened up the most fabulous investment and development opportunity in history. The implicit question became: whose "workmanship" would humanity be? Progress supplied the answer. Over the next astounding centuries the human

life-world would be remade and title transferred accordingly.[1] The "human-ism" we associate with the Renaissance, swept up now in the project of progress, was profoundly affected; it took on a form that deserves its own rubric—call it "proprietorial humanism." When virtual realities, cloning, and genetic engineering are placed at the climax of this narrative arc, the moral of the story emerges and postmodernism can be rightly understood.

2.1   When the Shock of the New Was New: Rene Descartes (1596–1650) and Galileo Galilei (1564–1642)

Descartes and Galileo were already dealing with the "shock of the new" early in the seventeenth century. Traditional conceptions—even perceptions—of the world had dissolved under the influence of Copernicus, the Protestant Reformation, the revelations of microscopes (you thought your blood was liquid?) and telescopes (you thought the moon was perfectly round?), and the discovery of a literal "New World" across an ocean. And evidence of this dissolution was widely circulated, thanks to print and the Protestant insistence on literacy. As those traumatic and exhilarating developments unfolded, people were thrown back on their own devices, obliged to consult with themselves as never before on essential matters of belief. The Cartesian division between mind and world in early modern philosophy articulated that gigantic social fact—and Protestantism expressed it in popular terms.

What the mind confronted when it looked out at a world stripped of traditional meaning was Nature. And, as Newton would make evident, that nature had a uniform design. It was regular in describable and manipulat-able ways. Until the French and the Industrial revolutions, nature's laws, like Newton's laws, were typically conceived as synchronic. Responding to the trauma of those revolutions, the nineteenth century would preserve the idea of the natural order by historicizing it—by discovering in nature's plan an unfolding, a development over time. But the most important thing to grasp about early modern nature if "modernism" and "postmodernism" are to be rightly understood is this: it had *authority*. Its laws were *laws*, for

[1] C.B. MacPherson's influential account of "possessive individualism" (1962) interprets Locke in a similar way, but, in my view, he allows contemporary ideological concerns to distort his account. Manifestations of self-proprietorship—like manners (or dieting or an exercise regimen)—may today seem trivial compared to issues that shaped subsequent political developments. But at the time, as will be shown, they were of the first importance.

things and for people. Falling apples were, in some way, obedient and tyrannical monarchs unruly. From a place apart, the early modern mind assigned itself the task of learning those laws and applying them, technologically, economically, politically, and personally. Two texts will recall to us the basic architecture: Descartes' *Discourse on Method* ([1637] 1968) and Galileo's "Two Kinds of Properties" ([1623b] 1970).

2.1.1   The Book of the World

The Discourse on the Method for Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences was written in French, not Latin. Couple that fact with the claim in the first paragraph that "the ability to judge well and distinguish what is true from what is false … is naturally equal in all men" (Descartes [1637] 1968, 3) and you have what amounts to a provocation before the argument even begins. Apparently Descartes did not have politics in mind, but no contemporary reader can miss the echo of his words in *The Declaration of the Rights of Man* and the *Declaration of Independence*. Descartes was appealing to nature to authorize the free exercise of reason in science just as Locke would 50 years later when he called for the free exercise of reason in matters of government and economics. Modernity is inconceivable without the authority of nature trumping the authority of tradition in both arenas. It was that authority that provided the leverage needed to overcome the massive weight of history, the towering presence of throne and altar. It inspired people to look at a peasant child in its wooden crib and compare it with an image of the *dauphin*, stripped of his silken swaddling, naked as that peasant child—two eyes, two ears, ten fingers, the same heart and liver and brain. It allowed them to conceive of that comparison in terms of "natural right"—and, eventually, it incited them to action.

Something like "postmodernism" would become inevitable when nature's authority was lost—so we need to have some sense of how that authority worked.

The *Discourse on Method* was written as an introduction to a book that was to contain everything Descartes thought the sciences had achieved, including much of his own scientific work. The book was to be called *The World*—a title that says a lot about the spirit of that inaugural age. But Descartes suppressed the book after the Church condemned Galileo—and made public the introduction only. A philosophical formulation that intended to ground the natural sciences became a touchstone for the whole of modern metaphysics and epistemology.

So it is worth our while to notice how Descartes chose to introduce himself—and the first of the six parts of the *Discourse* is indeed a very personal introduction. The tone (first person, confiding) entices. The story line (how he came to doubt everything he had been taught) dramatizes the modern turn away from tradition in terms that verge on intimacy. It is as if Descartes is expressing stylistically the situation of the modern subject his philosophy will describe—a private mind, alone in its body, signaling hopefully across the chasm of physical extension, to another private mind, analogously isolated. Descartes promises to "delineate my life as in a picture, in order that each one may be able to judge for himself" as to the validity of his method and the reliability of its author. He hopes that his example "will prove useful to some without being hurtful to any, and that my openness will find favor with all." And then he takes us through his life, touching upon every aspect of his education—describing his disdain for "magnificent palaces" of traditional knowledge built on the "sand and mud" of the "disquisitions of the ancient moralists." He contrasts that with his awe at the "certitude and evidence of the reasonings" in mathematics and his hopes for their application to the "advancement of the mechanical arts." He assures us of his reverence for the truths of theology, of course—but (making a show of refusing to "subject them to the impotency of my reason") he moves quickly on. Of philosophy (as taught in "the schools"), he merely remarks (in terms that anticipate with eerie precision the judgment of analytical philosophers at the beginning of the twentieth century; see Chap. 5) that "it has been cultivated for many ages by the most distinguished men, and yet there is not a single matter within its sphere which is not still in dispute." Brushing it all aside with what will become a classic gesture, to be repeated many times in the centuries to come, a gesture that wipes the slate clean to make way for a new beginning, Descartes arrives at the climax of his story:

> as soon as my age permitted me to pass from under the control of my instructors, I entirely abandoned the study of letters and resolved no longer to seek any other science than the knowledge of myself or the great book of the world.[2] I spent the remainder of my youth in traveling, in visiting courts and armies, in holding intercourse with men of different dispositions, in collecting varied experiences, in proving myself in different situations into which fortune threw me. (1968, para 14)

[2] For Descartes' contemporaries, the implicit contrast was with books of traditional philosophy and theology. Derrida will make much of this image in "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing" (see Chap. 9). A world authored as a whole and readable as a whole is assumed by this metaphor of containment—and poststructuralist "writing" tried to disrupt both its terms.

In other words, Rene Descartes—disillusioned with traditional ways—dropped out and went on the road, looking for adventure, looking for truth, looking for himself. It doesn't get more modern than that.

2.1.2   *"I Think Therefore I Am"*

After his journeys were done, Descartes found himself in isolation, free at last of passion and distraction. He settles on a plan for inquiry into his own being, a direct encounter, eschewing presuppositions of any kind. He thinks immediately of analogies with architecture and city planning. A good citizen of France's Classical age, he takes it for granted that "there is seldom so much perfection in works composed of many separate parts, upon which different hands had been employed, as in those completed by a single master." He is not arguing, just rehearsing the whys and wherefores of an aesthetic no one would question, noting the "indiscriminate juxtaposition" of buildings in unplanned neighborhoods, "there a large one, and here a small, and the consequent crookedness and irregularity of the streets" that leave one "disposed to allege that chance rather than any human will guided by reason must have led to such an arrangement."

A glimpse from a distance of the Romantic reaction to Enlightenment reason. A hundred years and more before Adorno or Foucault, the Romantics would discern the virtues of irregularity, of chance, of events that disrupt settled arrangements—of ruins, especially—the beauty in all things gothic would become apparent to the first modern opponents of abstract mind.

Descartes was justifying his project with this imagery. You can't tear down a city, he admits (a bit wistfully?), to realize a master plan—but you can do what you like with your own house, surely? And that is his tone for most of the second and the third parts of the *Discourse*—he is determined, but also defensive, even anxious. Of course he knows as he writes what is coming in the fourth part, and he has to know how certain steps in that argument will be received. So he goes to great lengths to show that he isn't recommending this rigorous path for larger social reasons—let alone religious ones. But even though it concerns just himself, he still takes every precaution. He solemnly formulates four moral maxims in preparation for this inward journey in which "like one walking alone and in the dark, I resolved to proceed so slowly and with such circumspection, that if I did not advance far I would at least guard against falling," which is why he was taking "sufficient time to satisfy myself of the general nature of the task I was setting myself," and so on. The overall mood has been compared more than once to that which attends the preparations of

explorers about to enter a wilderness. And trepidation was surely justified. Freud will one day follow him on this journey into the inward empire of modern subjectivity—and discover monsters.

Still, it is impossible in this instance to distinguish neatly between self-description and self-dramatization. At a minimum, it seems safe to say that Descartes knew he was proposing a radical break with philosophical tradition—not only in substance, but in procedure—and that he was impressed with his own daring. Not since Augustine had a philosopher placed himself so much at the center of his thought. But no one could question Augustine's utter subordination to God no matter how self-descriptive his discourse. In Descartes' case they could and they would. He was about to make himself responsible, personally responsible, for indubitable truth—including the truth of God's existence.

The opening sentences of the fourth part of the *Discourse* should, I think, be read as drama, consciously crafted to seduce:

> I am in doubt as to the propriety of making my first meditations in the place above mentioned a matter of discourse; for these are so metaphysical, and so uncommon, as not, perhaps, to be acceptable to everyone. (29)

That is a tease. It is also a personal challenge of a kind many a modern innovator will issue to his (and later, her) audience. One wished to cull the worthy from the herd before the going gets tough, as it surely will, with the stakes so high, with truth hanging in the balance (compare Emile Durkheim and Max Weber in Chap. 3). And Descartes immediately spells out how far he is willing to go to win the day if it can be won at all. He concedes that in everyday life we must constantly act upon opinions that cannot be certain. But in philosophy—in this philosophy, at any rate—another standard would be met. The highest standard possible. Descartes is going to take an inventory of what he thinks he knows and subject it to this withering test: if there is "the least ground for doubt" it will be rejected as "absolutely false" until he comes across something—if he does—that is "wholly indubitable."

This is known as the "method of doubt"—better to call it a scorched earth epistemology. The words are so familiar, read and referenced so often, that the ferocious determination implicit in the procedure gets washed out over time. To reject as *absolutely false* what you can find *any* reason for doubting—no matter how far-fetched—testifies to a desire for certainty, a need for certainty, so deep-seated that one risks the possibility of utter failure in its name. Maybe there won't be any knowledge that

could pass such a test? Descartes will have to find out and his rhetorical stance summons us to follow him, to take that risk for ourselves—each reader with the right stuff must take the plunge alone. That is the tease and the challenge of the fourth part of the *Discourse*.

As it turned out, one entity survived the massacre: Descartes himself or, more precisely, his mind. And so it would be for everyone following the path laid out by this self-help book that secured the essence of modernity.

For the process of epistemological self-examination soon boils down to this: how do I know that I am holding this book in my hand right now? How do I *know* I'm not dreaming or hallucinating? I've had dreams where I dreamt I woke up and thought I was awake—until later, when I *really* woke up. At least, I think I did.[3] And we have all seen psychotics on the street talking to their imaginary friends, hearing voices—it's at least *conceivable* that I am one of them right now, hallucinating the book in my hand (Derrida and Foucault will fall out over Descartes' view of insanity, see Chap. 9). So that gives me *some* reason to doubt the truth of this experience. And that's all the method requires.

Now I have to *assume* that there is no book in my hand and then look around and see if there's anything left that I just *cannot* doubt.

Right away I realize that what applies to the book applies to everything I experience through my senses. On these grounds, I can doubt everything I see, touch, smell—including my own body, for the same reason I can doubt the book. Maybe I don't even have a hand. I might be a brain in a vat wired up to some supercomputer that puts me in *The Matrix*. People with an amputated limb can feel it itching, after all.

But then I suddenly realize that, while I can doubt the physical reality of all these things I am experiencing, I cannot doubt the experiences per se. I can doubt that I have a real book in a real hand, but I can't doubt that I am having book-in-my-hand sensations of various kinds—tactile, visual. If I try to doubt *that* I just add effort-to-doubt sensations to the book-in-my-hand sensations—and so on, for the entirety of my subjective experience at any given instant. All my thoughts and feelings, sensations, ideas, memories, whatever—I can doubt that they correspond to anything real, but I can't doubt that I'm having them, the pure experiences themselves,

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[3] The autumn of 1619 found Descartes, filled with "enthusiasm," engaged in fervent meditations as he conceived his life's work. On 19 November, he had a dream so vivid and so weighted with significance that he took it for a supernaturally inspired vision—of which he had had premonitions before going to sleep. Auguste Comte once lamented that modern philosophy originated in this "cerebral episode" (Maritain 1944).

at any given instant.[4] I *can't* doubt that—it is "wholly indubitable." That is what *cogito ergo sum* means.

From there Descartes goes on to derive his dualist metaphysics, an absolute ontological division between all things mental and all things physical. Those arguments were suspect even to some of his contemporaries—and to many later readers they seem downright bogus (Levinas was a notable exception), an almost fraudulent way to get out of the irredeemable solipsism of the *cogito* at its moment of self-discovery. First, Descartes says that his knowledge of his own purely subjective existence sets a standard for "clarity." That becomes, he claims, his criterion for identifying true knowledge. Then, while exploring his now secure—but entirely subjective—storehouse of ideas and sensations, he comes across one idea he can't account for: the idea of a perfect spiritual being, of God. He has this idea and it is "clear." But he, Descartes—the doubter—is not a perfect being and *therefore* could not be the source of that idea. It has to come from somewhere else. It has to come from the perfect being itself.

So Descartes is alone no more. There is his mind—the totality of his conscious experience at each moment—and there is the perfect being who has inserted this idea of itself into Descartes' consciousness like a lifeline. Then Descartes realizes that among the qualities of this idea of perfect being are omnipotence and perfect goodness. And, obviously, no perfectly good spiritual being is going to suddenly decide—for its own amusement, as it were—to create Descartes' mind and stock it with all the ideas and impressions he has of a world and other people, history, nature. That would not be good. That would be mean and deceitful.

All's well that ends well. As the fourth part of the *Discourse* comes to its conclusion, Descartes is assured of the existence of an external and physical world, a counterpart to his subjective experience of it, lying on the other side of what would come to be called the "veil of ideas" (meaning perceptions). So the situation—and this is Descartes' segue to the book—at the end of the day is this: imperfect beings that we are, our ideas and impressions of the external world may not truly represent what things are actually like out there beyond our minds, but we can be assured that there is some real physical stuff out there causing our perceptions. Enter science. It will enable us figure out what that physical stuff is really like—and its

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[4] The *Meditations* ([1641] 1968) develops the argument in detail—in Latin, for a scholarly audience. There Descartes argues that not only empirical knowledge but logical/mathematical knowledge is subject to doubt, thanks to conceivable interventions by an evil demon.

promise knows no bounds. In the sixth part, Descartes famously called for "a practical philosophy" which would allow us to know the workings of nature's bodies "as distinctly as we know the various crafts of our artisans" and so "apply them in the same way to all the uses to which they are adapted and thus render ourselves the lords and possessors of nature." In the very last paragraph, he commits the remainder of his life to the study of medicine and hints at a cure for death.

Shades of Larry Page and Ray Kurzweil.

2.1.3   The Veil of Ideas

Early modern scientists committed to "corpuscularism" had worked their way into an essentially Cartesian position before Descartes put pen to paper. Galileo's "Two Kinds of Properties" (from *The Assayer*) was published in 1623, more than 15 years before the *Discourse on Method*. In it Galileo argues that there is actually no such thing as heat; not as the "commonly held conception" understands it, anyway—namely, as a property of hot things.

The way Galileo organizes his presentation calls to mind a magician preparing an audience for some stunning effect, but of course, in this case, the procedure is inverted. The "trick" is the illusion that common sense plays on us and the magic of science is to reveal the truth behind appearances we take for granted. This gesture too will be endlessly repeated in centuries to come—and not only in the hard sciences. Later moderns—"masters of suspicion" like Freud and Nietzsche and Marx—will one day reflect upon the whole sweep of history, upon human societies and psyches, and see through what convention and consciousness accept as given, revealing the hidden forces that actually determine human lives[5] (see Chap. 6).

But will to truth, in Galileo, did not reach so far. He concentrated on the basic furniture. He was a great experimentalist, of course, but he gave first place in physics to mathematics and began with a *concept,* with a deductive argument:

> whenever I conceive of any material or corporeal substance, I am necessarily constrained to conceive of that substance as bounded and as possessing this or that shape, as large or small in relationship to some other body, as in this or that place during this or that time. … But I do not feel myself compelled to conceive of bodies as necessarily conjoined with further conditions as being red or white, bitter or sweet. (in Danto and Morganbesser 1970, 27)

[5] "Consciousness" would be a reference to what Freud exposed as a mere surface and "convention" to what both Marx and Nietzsche exposed as mere surface.

In other words, the properties of things that necessarily—logically, a priori—belong to them are also the properties that happen to be measurable. Those "primary properties"—the real ones, the objective ones—can be safely assumed to belong to the corpuscular elements, the invisible atoms, and molecules that constitute the physical world. The crucial point is this: primary properties that are inherent in matter *and* measurable are therefore mathematically representable (mass, velocity, etc.). So even though we cannot experience atoms and molecules directly, *we can theorize about them mathematically*. And, since these atoms and molecules constitute the physical world and determine all events in it—some of which we *can* experience directly—we can make predictions about observable events based on mathematical theories about unobservable causes. And we can test and refine those theories over time. Modern science in a nutshell.

So there is no heat or color or sound (let alone beauty) in the external world. These are "secondary" properties or qualities that owe their phantom existence to the human senses.[6] Those senses, and our reflections on them, place us on one side of the "veil of ideas" beyond which lies truth, things in themselves. Rightly interpreted, that metaphor captures how science as a practice has depended upon the situation of the modern subject all along. As we shall see in the following chapters, the major critiques of science and technology—from Goethe and Hegel to Husserl and Heidegger to Horkheimer, Adorno, Foucault, and Latour—assume an understanding of this situation and the aspiration to a *mathesis universalis* it entails.[7] Without that understanding, those critiques cannot be read intelligently—another reason why this is "essential background" for the story of modernity's efforts to extend and/or overcome itself.

The rigorous Cartesian distinction between mental and physical substance corresponds to a more loosely rendered division in "sense of self" experienced by ordinary people going about their business in the modern

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[6] "Suppose I pass my hand, first over a marble statue, then over a living man … the primary qualities of motion and contact will similarly affect the two objects, and we would use identical language to describe this in each case. But the living body … will feel itself affected … [for example] 'tickling.' This latter affection is altogether our own, and is not at all a property of the hand." (Galileo [1623b] 1970, 8).

[7] Said Galileo: "Philosophy [physics] is written in this grand book—I mean the universe—which stands continually open to our gaze, but it cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and interpret the characters in which it is written. It is written in the language of mathematics." ([1623a] 1957, 237–238). Compare Descartes' "book of the world."

world. Protestantism, founded on an individual's inner relationship with God (no mediating Catholic paraphernalia required), was the most comprehensive manifestation of this form of life. It provided the broader ideological framework that reflected the social and economic context in which Cartesian philosophy took shape and made sense. Max Weber famously described the pious burghers who forged the modern world in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) as being in the habit of reflecting upon their private minds of an evening, the better to keep track of their moral credits and debits, just as they attended to their commercial ledgers and enterprises by day. Though they were not typically troubled by the thought that the external world might be a hallucination, they lived the distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* nonetheless. Cartesian dualism was a philosophical distillation of a sense of inner distance from the world and from the self that characterized their mode of existence—as surely as it did Diderot's and Adam Smith's.

2.2   The Lockean Dispensation and the Project of Progress

The "moral sciences" of the Enlightenment found their Newton in John Locke (1632–1704). His philosophy offered a systematic account of human nature that was intuitively appealing and immediately useful. In effect, he drew out the consequences of the Cartesian bifurcation in relation to politics and economics in ways that inspired activists in England's Glorious Revolution in 1689 and in the American and the French Revolutions a century later. No modern thinker, besides Marx, had so direct an impact on events—and as we shall see, Marx owed his most fundamental formulation to Lockean precedent or, more precisely, to the form of life Locke articulated.

   With the situation of the modern subject stipulated, move on to this question: what did the natural world in general look like to educated men and women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? They were through with mythological explanations; even the *Book of Genesis* was just another fable by comparison with the works of Aristotle—and all the more so in comparison with the works of Galileo and Harvey, Huygens and Newton. Their perceptions of the natural world were shaped by a suddenly fashionable "new reason" or "natural philosophy." To understand what they saw we must suspend our knowledge of geology and biology.

They had no sense of the eons of time it took for the universe to take shape since the big bang, no idea that billions of years had passed since the formation of our solar system. No fossil record to consult. No dinosaurs to imagine. No knowledge of genes. No speciation, no natural selection—above all, no evolution. The great panorama of life, the stunning diversity of its forms and adaptations, the intricacies of anatomy and physiology—all this was immediately apparent and deeply appreciated, but the unexamined assumption was that all of it had always been there more or less as it now appeared, ever since it appeared in the first place.

The (almost) inevitable conclusion was that an intelligent Maker was responsible for the order of the universe—especially the intricate biological machinery. To look at nature, at all the inorganic bodies dancing to Newtonian measures and all the organic bodies sensing, respiring, locomoting, ingesting, digesting, reproducing—to look at all that and *not* apprehend design would be like coming across an array of pebbles on a beach precisely spelling out some message and perceiving it as a random effect of surf and tide. "Let there be light" was beautiful poetry, but F = MA was the word of the modern God.

But with organisms a curious difference prevailed: a healthy body was obviously in conformity with a designer's intentions. But one also encountered mortality and disease. Here, for some reason, was a sort of disobedience, a malfunctioning. Why that should be so was the subject of much debate, but almost no one doubted the framework of interpretation. Modern medicine was founded on the metaphor of repairing such malfunctions.

And so, when early moderns looked upon human history—the carnage, absurd superstitions, institutionalized barbarities—the conclusion was inevitable. Here was a disease of another order, a malfunctioning of another kind. Again, there was much debate over why this should be so, but the framework of interpretation remained. And the question became: what were the Maker's designs for His human creatures at the social level, what were *those* natural laws, and how could His creatures cure the diseases of history in accordance with them?

2.2.1   *Dr. Locke and the Body Politick*

Born into a Puritan professional family, Locke became an academic and a physician. At Oxford with Robert Boyle, he was—like all his fellows—deeply influenced by Descartes' new philosophy. Again, like so many ambitious young men of his day, he took up medicine out of impatience with "useless scholasticism." He was struck from the outset by the image

of living creatures as devices of God's making. Inspired by possibilities for imitation inherent in that image, Locke and his peers assumed the point of view it immediately suggested.

Medicine was no abstract success story for John Locke. He experienced its power as a clinician, a thinker, and a man on the rise in a changing world. There is a pretty symbolism in the manner of his introduction to his patron, Lord Shaftesbury, a leader of the Whigs in the revolution to come. He performed an innovative operation on the Earl's diseased liver that was widely regarded as a medical breakthrough. He was taken on, to begin with, as Shaftesbury's personal physician, but the Earl later turned to Locke for supervision of his family's education and for guidance on matters of political theory and policy. He became, in effect, Shaftesbury's expert on human nature at all levels of its organization on the basis of his understanding of the divine Maker's designs—whether of hearts and livers, or persons and families. Locke undoubtedly gave advice on strategy and tactics as well. Certainly, he managed his own career well; he was always a good investment.

Above all, Locke was a dutiful Protestant, a believer in scripture as well as in nature, and his efforts to reconcile those convictions would animate his life's work. It was God's will—in both venues—that concerned Locke most and discovering and promulgating that will was his calling. He followed it faithfully, wherever it led. In the *Essay on Toleration* (1667), which he wrote as a member of Shaftesbury's entourage at a time when men were haunted by memories of wars of religion, Locke set out the great principle of Classical liberalism: "Any exercise of political power over individual behavior which did not threaten peace or security… was an illegitimate exercise of power" (Dunn 1969, 30–32). So the idea of limiting the role of government for the sake of the body politic was first presented by Locke in religious terms. At first only the "subjective condition" of religious belief and its expression was off-limits to political authority and that was because such convictions were not "manipulable" by government action. For "it is not just the outrageousness of political interference in purely religious matters but almost equally its *categorical irrelevance that drives the point home*" (Dunn 1969, 33–35; italics mine).

But what at first seemed categorically irrelevant to government would become the basis *of* government—the private mind, the seat of opinion, the abstracted locus of the self-governing modern person, the practico-ethical equivalent of the *cogito* (see MacIntyre on "emotivism" 1984). Locke had no room in his philosophy for Descartes' innate ideas, but the

mind as he described it was every bit as private—a purely subjective space within which human belief was elaborated and human conduct determined.

2.2.2   An Invitation from the Maker

For Men being all the Workmanship of one Omnipotent, and infinitely wise Maker; All the Servants of one Sovereign Master, sent into the World by his order and about his business, they are his Property, whose Workmanship they are. (*Second Treatise of Government,* II, 6)

This image, a more pious expression of the master trope cited above, the analogy with which Hobbes had introduced *Leviathan*, informed all Locke's philosophical questions and inspired his politics as well. This Maker supplied the foundation for modernity, a foundation so familiar that its importance is often overlooked. Abridged editions of Locke's works leave out the many passages devoted to the Maker in favor of parts that are "still relevant"—for in those excised passages all the divine honorifics, adorned with capital letters, become a meaningless blur, outdated stylistics. But if we want to understand how we came to be what we are, the Divine Artificer must be rescued from cliché and from exclusion and returned to His rightful place in the history of ideas.

The seminal arguments of the *Second Treatise* that directly influenced the *Bill of Rights* and *The Declaration of the Rights of Man* all depend on this image of the divine Maker/Owner. The right of self-preservation is actually a duty to that Maker/Owner; suicide is wrong because it is robbery of God; for the same reason, a man could not sell himself into slavery. Even the central claim of "the equality of Men by Nature" held true because God made men "furnished with like Faculties, sharing all in one Community of Nature" and therefore "equal in His eyes." If nature was the authority that gave moderns the strength to overthrow tradition, it was because nature had designs for human beings *that functioned as orders, as commandments of new kind*.

Finally—perhaps most crucially, with the political future in view—there was Locke's account of property as a natural right. That claim was immediately intended to buttress the case for the rising productive classes against traditional entitlements of idle lords and kings, entitlements that bourgeois French revolutionaries would call parasitical. That claim found its principle of ownership in the same image. God's labor made man His property, so it followed that:

> He that is nourished by the Acorns he pickt up under an Oak, or the Apples he gathered from the Trees in the Wood, has certainly appropriated them to himself … and 'tis plain, if the first gathering made them not his, nothing else could. That labour put a distinction between them and common. (II, 28)

Locke went on to claim that human labor gave value to the "almost worthless" raw materials of nature by transforming them into "useful goods." Title belonged, under natural law, to those whose labor gave the value.

At the same time, in the context of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* ([1689] 1996), with practical politics far from his thoughts, Locke articulated the first principle of modern empiricism when he compared the human mind to a *tabula rasa*—a blank slate when it left the "hand of nature" (I, ii, 15; II, i,2).

Consider those claims together. Locke, in his piety, never saw the implications, but he was announcing to generations of striving moderns the discovery of an uncultivated and unimproved piece of raw material of a new order. And those rational and industrious human analogues of the Divine Maker were quick to seize the opportunity. The abstracted modern subject—locus now of all meaning and value—took control of raw material, of objects as "they left the hand of nature," and imposed upon them the designs of human makers. This massive, intricate process constituted the modern form of life. Implicit in the whole situation was this question: whose "workmanship" would humanity be? The project of progress, in its myriad actuality, would supply the answer.[8]

The basic plot of modernity's story has now been outlined. The underlying themes—the transformation of nature and society by modern science, technology and politics, the displacement of God—figure largely in many accounts of modernity, of course. But this particular telling brings out the fact that the Hegelian/Marxist version was continuous with its predecessor; it took Locke's labor theory of value and reassigned it from an individual subject to a social one. The complexities of dialectical materialism and the passions of politics have obscured that essential commonality—which marks both Locke and Marx as fundamentally modern and sheds much light on that "mirroring" of structures of capitalist domination by Communist institutions that so troubled left intellectuals during the 1950s and 1960s, especially in France (see Chaps. 8, 9).

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[8] Jacques Barzun once remarked the fact that "the appliance works" was "the great argument that has redirected the western mind" (1964, 19). Barzun had technological appliances in mind, but his point is only deepened when extended to include modern self-made persons and their social arrangements. And it never applied more aptly than it does today.

2.3   Varieties of Enlightenment

2.3.1   *Polishing the Rude Device: Refinement and Self-Possession*

Nothing in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discussions of progress is as foreign to us as the emphasis on the improvement of manners. But this emphasis was central to the original idea of modernity and, in degenerated forms, it persisted into the twentieth century. Nowhere were the advantages, and the sheer sensations, of self-ownership more evident. That emphasis underlies the dominant figure of the civilizing mission, one in which the child, the savage, and the vulgar are equated. What reasonable, what educated and objective observer could miss the difference? On the one hand, the unclothed and ungroomed, the babbling, the illiterate, the uncoordinated and graceless, the loud, the cruel, the hysterical, the gullible and superstitious, undisciplined and uneducated. On the other hand, gentlemen of blood and merit, disposed and displayed to mutual advantage in their persons and deportment, in their conversation, in their raiment and in their equipage—cultivated all and all in possession of themselves. Could anyone doubt where the value lay? And knowing that gentlemen were once children and societies of gentlemen were once savage, who would deny the laborer his due?

The scope of the term "manners" was larger at the time. It carried senses better expressed today by the term "custom." But the conceptual center of gravity was the same and it structured the whole constellation of "civility" terms, including "civilization" and "civil society." Manners were as central to the idea of progress as other technologies. The basic semantic opposition in discussions of improvement suggests the intimate relation. It distinguished between "gross," "coarse," and "rude" on the one hand, and "refined," "cultivated," and "polished" on the other. The terms applied indiscriminately to people, tools, and institutions. If humanity's proprietorial rights over itself meant substituting human for divine labor, then children, peasants, proletarians, and savages would provide the "almost worthless" raw materials.

For the Enlightenment's leaders, manners were *the* social strategy (Gay 1969, 41–44). *The Civilizing Process* was undertaken by men of merit making their way in a world still dominated by men of blood as they adapted to courtly modes of behavior and moved to the fashionable center

of salon life (Elias 1978). Manners were also immediate proof of the improvability of human nature. Hence, Gay's remark: "For the spokesman of the Enlightenment, progress was an experience before it became a program" (Gay 1969, 56).

Systematic differences distinguished national modes of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century and those differences conditioned the various ways modernity would eventually seek to overcome itself when the postmodern moment came. Objective conditions of life in different places had profound effects. But such conditions can be rightly understood only if this fact is grasped to begin with: for the first time in Western history, a range of "life-styles" (just the right phrase) was distributed across divisions of nationality and class. In the eighteenth century, a Scottish burgher of grave Presbyterian mien might see his son become a dancing school fop while a French noble of the sword might see his son, clad in cloth, on his knees in a tenant's field, taking soil samples.

Historians describe large-scale trends in Western Europe in this period: a population explosion, an uprooting and emigration of peoples, incipient industrialization, world trade and colonization, new modes of transport and communication under the control of a rising bourgeoisie, and a declining rural order transformed by new agricultural techniques and associated political developments. All these forces, which would culminate in the French and the Industrial revolutions, together shaped the eighteenth century—but at different paces, differently emphasized, according to national and local circumstances (Braudel 1982). Eric Hobsbawm's classic account of France and Great Britain during the "dual revolutions" of the nineteenth century is rooted in developments already well under way in the eighteenth century ([1962] 1996). Great Britain was his exemplar of modernity's economic aspect and France of its politics, because "England had already had both its religious reformation and its bourgeois revolution… whereas in France the forms and privileges of feudalism and medieval religion had survived almost intact into the heart of the Enlightenment" (Willey 1950, 120). From this fundamental difference flow several consequences that shaped the Enlightenment in distinctive ways.

In France, sumptuary laws prohibited the bourgeoisie, no matter how wealthy, from adorning themselves as lavishly as nobles, no matter how impoverished. Other laws prohibited nobles, no matter how equipped or inclined, from trade or manufacture. The Catholic Church retained its power over educational and medical institutions, and essential social rituals were still at its disposal, even after the revolution. Before the revolution,

Church prerogatives—privileges of the "First Estate"—extended into every aspect of life and were closely coordinated with the interests of noble families and the crown. No matter what individuals might do or think, the feudal order was woven into the fabric of the French society. The enormous sway of that historical circumstance survived the French Revolution and persisted into the nineteenth century and beyond. In spite of successful efforts of the Third Republic (1870–1940) to reign in the Church (and its Monarchist allies), it remained, as we shall see, a powerful force in the lives and minds of the intellectuals and artists of the modernist/postmodern *avant-garde* in France in the twentieth century. Much of what strikes Anglo-American intellectuals as excessive in recent French thought is due to that persisting influence. It is virtually impossible to understand, say, Georges Bataille or Louis Althusser without taking into account the formative influence of the Catholic Church.

But in Protestant Great Britain—and especially in Scotland—a "vista of rising prosperity appeared to lie wide open" before the industrious middle classes and their enlightened allies during the eighteenth century. The rational, tolerant deism implicit in the works of the natural philosophers was openly promoted in public disputes with defenders of orthodoxy. No enlightened exponent of natural religion in the British Isles was driven to the pitch of outrage that moved Voltaire to sign some of his private correspondence with *Ecrasez l'infame!*[9] And no promoter of political liberty or critic of established religion had to disguise his views in allegorical tales of ludicrous practices observed by some fictitious traveler in the traditions of Egypt or China. In England the middle class enjoyed equality before the law; in Scotland the middle class dominated the law and its practitioners constituted a "jurisprudential aristocracy" whose prestige exceeded that of any other group and included many leaders of the Scottish Enlightenment (Lehmann 1971, 17).

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[9] Not that the radically unorthodox were always welcome in Great Britain. Samuel Johnson stalked out of a dinner party when David Hume joined the company, and conservative forces in the Presbyterian Church were able to deny Hume a university chair. But Hume had friends in that church who prevented his ex-communication and defended his right to his opinions. In a nutshell, this contrast, known as the "Great Infidel" in Great Britain, was lionized on his visits to France—but at D'Holbach's dinners for assorted *philosophes,* he was cordially chided for stopping short of atheism. To his hosts, Hume's principled skepticism was a cop out. Hume, in turn, was struck by a certain dogmatism in the French radicals—they reminded him of Churchmen! An irony with a future (Mossner [1954] 1970, 153–163; 475–486).

The eighteenth century was an age of public fetes, follies, and pastorales that featured the public as actors and audience, an age of ever-innovating clubs, salons, and coffee houses, of Richard Sennett's "public man" before his fall (1974). It was also an age of zoos and circuses where the sight of exotic animals made familiar creatures seem less inevitable as the rage for exotic spices, coffee, chocolate, and tea made familiar tastes seem more provisional. It was an age of libraries and museums—which were surely also "public houses" open to consumers of novelty. At the same time, they were monumental trophy halls that honored public benefactors and the conquerors of history, geography, and nature whose prizes were there exhibited for those disposed to emulation. It was the age of the gourmet, the virtuoso, and the dilettante (a term of praise), of the so-called bourgeois family dramas of Diderot and Lessing, and, of course, the age of the "novel" itself—forms of art designed to provide the productive classes with reflections of themselves. Finally, and across the board, it was an age of satire, of cartoons, of social criticism and self-scrutiny. How else was one to improve?

The Enlightenment's mission was everywhere evident in European culture in the eighteenth century. Take, for example, "the most influential magazine in history," a "civilizing agent" that spawned imitators across the world: in Addison's words, *The Spectator* would "bring philosophy out of the closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea tables and in coffeehouses." It aimed to "polish man's behavior and purify his intentions" on the basis of the new natural and moral philosophy. The anonymous voice of the journal (referring to itself as The Spectator of Mankind representing a Spectator Club) spoke as a "Newton for the average man," as a painter of "lyrical portraits" of intricate and beneficent systems of industry, trade, and technology, as a constant critic of "frenzy and enthusiasm," as a satirist of superstition, and as a general arbiter of aesthetic and social taste. And good taste depended above all on the "agreement of the well-bred" and, according to *The Spectator*, the well-bred agreed that the artist should avoid Gothic excess and "take as much pains in forming his imagination, as a philosopher in cultivating his understanding." *The Spectator* was dedicated to showing its eager readers, "men and women with a modicum of learning," how to form themselves on the same model (Gay 1969, 27, 52–55, 559–660; Whitney 1965).

The very name of this publication makes the point. The vanguard had found a public. Self-possession through self-improvement was installed as a central theme in the modern form of life, although it would take time for the consequences to emerge on a significant scale. God's designs were not

replaced overnight. Still, the image of the rude, but improvable, device had given the idea of progress an irresistible purchase on history. Millions of people would come to understand and treat themselves and others in accordance with this theme. Self-possession through self-improvement was potentially the project of the whole species, already being realized in the "party of humanity."[10] And as partisans of improvement grew more numerous, so their visions of it became more various. Out of a sense of duty, out of satisfaction with their own positions, out of disgust with unnecessary suffering, out of sheer acquisitive ambition—enlightened Europeans felt their entitlements extend beyond themselves to embrace the raw material of the entire globe and all humanity. Upon them descended the glory, the burden, and the profit of leading it. Economic and missionary imperialism, abolitionism, public education, and women's suffrage were all conceived by the same style of mind.

2.3.2   *Romantic Subjectivity*

These cultural developments were intricately and ironically related—and something like a dialectical development is discernible in hindsight. When Samuel Johnson, for example, traveled to the wastes of Scotland he wanted to "experience [the] simplicity and wildness" of a "totally different … system of life." But he had to content himself with wild landscapes. Scotland's ambitious natives received him as civilized hosts, bursting with civic pride, managers of a booming economy, a united, educated, and striving people growing daily more enlightened and refined. They refused to expose the "savage," "clannish," "patriarchal family spirit" Johnson had hoped to see (1958, 92–106). In other contexts, the Scots would find a residue of virtue in the old ways, but no touring Englishman would be permitted to judge on so delicate a question.

The French, on the other hand, were inclined to view the English somewhat as the English viewed the Scots. But the French were disposed to a different kind of tour. The lure was the same, but the means were more intense and complete psychologically, less strenuous in practice. A "cult of sensibility," encouraged by the wave of anglomania that swept through the salons in the 1750s and 1760s, took shape at the heart of the Enlightenment.

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[10] Famously represented in Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment?" ([1784] 1966): "the few who, after having themselves thrown off the yoke of immaturity, will spread the spirit of a rational appreciation for both their own worth and for each person's calling to think for himself."

In his *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (1734), Voltaire's praise for English thought and politics had been hedged by criticism of English taste and manners. But his old-fashioned Classical standards would soon be overwhelmed by a fad for all things natural, simple, and sentimental, which often meant things English (Green 1931, 29–59). But the French were incubating a more radical Romantic discourse soon to be expressed by the author of, among other things, the wildly popular novel of natural sentiment—*La Nouvelle Heloise* (by Jean-Jacques Rousseau).

> Mme. d'Genlis, who laughs at these affectations, is no less affected than the rest. Suddenly, someone in the company is heard to say to the young orphan whom she is exhibiting: "Pamela, show us *Heloise*," whereupon Pamela, loosening her hair, falls on her knees and turns her eyes up to heaven with an air of inspiration, to the great applause of the assembly. Sensibility became an institution. (Taine [1867] 1931, 160–162)

The French had been performing for more than a century at the center of European fashion. They had brought manners to the highest pitch of refinement. In every social situation, "there was a certain way of walking, of sitting down, of saluting, of picking up a glove, of holding a fork, of tendering any article, in fine a complete mimicry, which children had to be taught at a very early age" (Taine, citing a contemporary memoir, 1931, 158). And, Taine adds, "Not only was the outward factitious, but, again, the inward; there was a certain prescribed mode of feeling" for every situation as well. The appeal of nature, emotion, sensibility can only be appreciated against that background. One mistress of the drawing room stage remarked in her diary: "A genuine sentiment is so rare, that, when I leave Versailles, I sometimes stand still in the street to see a dog gnaw a bone" (Taine 1931, 157).

Horace Walpole was a representative English gentleman of the eighteenth century. He resented the idea that English styles were the object of longings that might also be satisfied by the sight of a dog gnawing a bone. He would have glowed with pleasure at Rude's description of him as possessor, "an unrivaled sense of the social proprieties" (1972, 121). Like Johnson, Walpole loved to deride Scottish backwardness. At the same time, he mocked the French fancy for the natural—with their passion for doing things "A l'Anglaise" in mind, he remarked: "Their next mode will be 'A l'Iriquoise'" (1972, 152). But fashion was fashion and the French

were still its masters. Walpole built his neo-Gothic estate at Strawberry Hill under the influence he mocked.

The "cult of sensibility" is itself testimony to the breadth and depth of proprietorial humanism's dominion. Rightly associated with an immanent Romanticism, it was not necessarily opposed to Enlightenment rationality and pragmatism. The situation of Romanticism at its outset was essentially similar to its situation in decline a century later—thoroughly domesticated in ways described by Raymond Williams (1958). It began as one of many fashions in a fashioned world, hanging together with utilitarian rationality in the cupboard of the public mind as easily as day and evening dresses in the cupboard of the boudoir. And that was something hard-core Romantics would not countenance.

Scholarly efforts to define Romanticism have been legion. History of ideas distinctions are most familiar. They often come in pairs, to contrast with the Enlightenment: transcendence versus immanence, mechanical versus organic, control versus spontaneity, calculation versus imagination/feeling, society versus community, sincerity versus authenticity, abstract versus concrete, static versus dynamic, and liberty versus self-determination. Taken together, the traditional polarities point to a constitutive gesture in the underlying phenomenology. Romantic intentionality is the ongoing effort of the abstracted modern mind to refuse itself, as abstracted, and so re-fuse itself as embodied in the world. This dialectic of *refusion*, an attitude of thought in motion, evokes the gesture on the wing, as it were—it is more like a pun than a category. Actually, this pun recalls *the* Hegelian notion—for what was Hegel's project if not the refusion of Absolute Mind? Hegel would repudiate Romanticism's sentimental excesses, but he was its ultimate philosopher (Abrams 1971, 67, 173; Taylor 1979, 5–13).

2.3.3   Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)

Seeing that I am so little master of myself when I am alone, imagine what I am like in conversation, when in order to speak to the point one must think promptly of a dozen things at a time. The mere thought of all the conventions of which I am sure to forget at least one, is enough to frighten me. … I have only to be absolutely required to speak and I invariably say something stupid. But what is even more fatal is that, instead of keeping quiet when I have nothing to say, it is just at those times when I have a furious desire to chatter. (Rousseau [1781] 1953)

With his influence on the next generation of German thinkers in mind, it is helpful to think of Rousseau as "the first Romantic." That was why language itself was a problem for him—not only in his life, but in his thought. He had to express essentially Romantic ideas in an Enlightenment vocabulary. That made his work prophetic, his place in history ambiguous, and his relations with his fellow *philosophes* problematic. The passage from *The Confessions* just cited provides the interpretive key. Rousseau was not comfortable in the salons that made him famous; he was not self-possessed and self-governing, and his misery was the proof. Like so many Romantics since, Rousseau celebrated his misery as a token of authenticity in an artificial world. More flexible spirits, with that fashionable taste for the natural, made him the first victim of radical chic.

Rousseau's Romantic visions can look like Enlightenment abstractions because they were necessarily cast in the "nature" idioms of Locke and Condillac. A Romantic jargon of organic embodiment had yet to be fashioned. But that embodiment was expressed in the anguish of Rousseau's life as well as the substance of his proto-evolutionary speculations about the origins of language and property, and his hymn to the "general will," his dream of an authentic social existence.[11] In the hollow settings of salon life, the tawdry liberty of the Enlightenment style of mind was to calculate convenience and pleasure and a self-governing reason produced only manners, the appearance of virtue. In such contexts, *faux-pas* and ineptitude were manifestations of genuine virtue—and of genius. The passage cited earlier was actually introducing Rousseau's account of his own creativity. Like ineptitude, he said, illumination washed over and through him, taking him as its vessel. True genius—like true virtue, like the truly natural—was beyond calculation.

The *Second Discourse* (1754) was especially well regarded by Rousseau's later admirers. In his conclusion to a reflection on the origin of language, Rousseau left the reader with a "difficult question" that Derrida would one day confront in his own way (see Chap. 9). He asked "which is the more necessary assumption: that language could not have been invented if society had not already been established or that society could not have been established if language had not already been invented?"

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[11] Rousseau in particular and Romanticism in general are often rightly associated with solitude, rather than with what I have called "refusion" (see Rousseau's own *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* [1782] 1979). But an alienated spirit, with no authentic social connections, has no choice but seek solace in that solitude, especially in the company of nature.

No wonder he inspired the great Romantics. They would become masters of paradox—and lovers of those they could not master. The tremor of undecidability, the slippage into opposition—these sensations of dialectic would be experienced as the very life of the mind, an alternative to the dead categories of Enlightenment thought. If Romantic sensibility longed for refusion of mind and world, it also relished reaching for it—often to the point of collaboration with the unthinkable for the sake of sheer movement. For what is life, if not movement? That taste for sensations of living thought and its promise of refusion persisted long after "Romanticism" lapsed—and postmodernism owes much to that persistence: Nietzsche's unmasking of atheistic anarchists as crypto-Christians; Freudian parapraxis: Adorno and Horkheimer's exposure of Enlightenment rationality as a return of *mythos*; Heidegger's revealing/concealing of Being and beings; Derrida's *differAnce,* Deleuze's delirium, Lyotard's *differend*—instances multiply indefinitely. What they all have in common, what they retain of the Romantic impulse, is what Rousseau first found in his famous paradoxes: liberation from settled thought, from institutionalized mind—from abstracted subjectivity and its monotonous world.

2.3.4   *The German Enlightenment*

The Enlightenment in Germany deserves separate mention because the essence of Romanticism was philosophically articulated by Hegel in overcoming Kant—and Hegel, even in decline, was very much an influence on the creators of French theory. A central argument of this book involves this claim: Romanticism was the first "postmodernism" and, inevitably, when the poststructuralists set out to dismantle modernity's constructions they re-iterated much of the Romantic response to Enlightenment abstraction. That reiteration was not apparent to them because, as we shall see, they had turned decisively away from the Hegelian legacy and embraced Structuralism, which involved them with issues that seemed far removed—formal, even "scientific"—from stereotypical notions of Romanticism.

In any case, Kant was a principal foil for both Romantic and postmodern efforts to move beyond the modern.

2.3.5   *Subject and System in Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)*

When Anglo-Americans think of the Enlightenment, they often think first of Voltaire and Hume, Adam Smith and the *philosophes,* maybe Thomas

Jefferson. But when Adorno and Husserl, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida thought of the Enlightenment, they thought first of Kant. But not because of his essays dealing specifically with the Enlightenment as a movement—human progress, perpetual peace, and so on. Kant's writings on such topics were standard fare, modeled closely on the French and Scottish examples that inspired the German modernizers. And, contrary to entrenched stereotype, it seems that Kant managed his career and sought advancement in society as self-consciously and effectively as enlighteners in settings more glamorous than Konigsberg (Kuehn 2001). There is not much to distinguish Kant from his contemporaries in more fashionable venues on the level of opinion and deportment.

But the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) is in a class by itself in modern philosophy. It surpasses in depth and breadth the influence even of Descartes. The fact that Anglo-American philosophers are as likely (to this day) as the continentals to frame their concerns in broadly Kantian terms testifies to the centrality of this work. Kant is the ancestral figure even for those radical European intellectuals who would one day hold the Enlightenment style of mind accountable for the imperial depredations of bourgeois society. The *Critique* was *the* modern philosophical system upon which Hegel depended for his means and aims and Nietzsche took for his intimate enemy. Husserl himself admitted that his project was fundamentally Kantian and, no matter how determined the early Heidegger and the existentialists were to historicize and personalize Husserl's super-science, they too were inextricably bound up with what the French poststructuralists would call the "philosophy of the subject." Heidegger himself gave credit where it was due, noting that it was Kant "who for the first time came upon this primordial productivity of the subject" (in Braver 2007, 177).

In a nutshell, what Kant offered was an account of the constitution of the phenomenal world by the subject. The Cartesian *cogito*, confined initially to solipsism and understood subsequently, and more generally, in terms of mind/world dualism, was a poor tentative creature by comparison to Kant's transcendental ego. Destined to peer forever through a veil of ideas that separated mind from reality in search of what knowledge it might secure and obliged to assert its dominion over nature and society indirectly, through contrivances of technology and politics—the Cartesian subject took on a labor of centuries in pursuit of the status of Maker. But Kant's transcendental subject turned out to be, in effect, the creator of the knowable world all along! This was idealism in the service of empiricism, designed to rescue experience from Humean contingency and secure the

natural sciences on rational foundations. The forms of the transcendental subject's intuition *were* time and space. The (12, no more, no less) categories of its understanding (*Verstand*) gave the world its intelligibility. For the first time in the history of Western philosophy, subjectivity was no longer an obstacle to knowledge. It became the very site of truth, a framework—of plurality and unity, of possibility and necessity, of causality and substance—of basic structures without which human experience simply would not *be* what it is. This was indeed a "stunning reversal of attitude" toward the subject's contribution to knowledge (Braver 2007, 37). That is why it was Kant, even more than Descartes, with whom continental thinkers contended ever since Hegel resolved to overcome through Dialectic the limits upon reason the Kantian system had imposed.

Above all, the *Critique* was just that—a system. Its claims were comprehensive and absolute. It was the first and the last word. Nothing had ever happened, or could ever happen, that violated its rules—for those rules, in articulating transcendental conditions on all *possible* experience, ruled out whatever might lie beyond them. It was this "totalizing" quality of Kant's system that was most apparent to his heirs—whether they sought, like Hegel, to extend and complete the project or, like Nietzsche, to expose its pretensions. It is no exaggeration to say that when the structuralist/poststructuralist movement in France set out to topple Sartre from his throne and escape the Hegelian Dialectic, what they were also attacking was the Kantian idea of a system of thought that nothing could escape or disrupt because the transcendental subject, the source of world-ordering principles, was beyond the reach of history.

2.4   Nineteenth-Century "Evolutionism": Hegel, Comte, Spencer—Prophets of Consolation

Locke and the *philosophes* conceived of Hobbes' Maker as an engineer and a mathematician. His natural laws, as Newton showed, were a synchronic blueprint. After the traumas of the French and the Industrial Revolutions, that blueprint had to be replaced. Modernizers had to face the fact that those revolutions were the work of their own "new reason." Something had gone terribly wrong, some profound misunderstanding of nature, and especially human nature, had misled the thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A course correction was desperately needed and the great thinkers of the nineteenth century rose to the occasion, constructing

diachronic schemes based on some principle of inevitable development *that comprehended natural and social history and gave moderns faith in the ultimate outcome of their enterprise.* Hegel's version endured, by way of Marx, and it became the archetype of the tendency in modern historical thought toward "totalization," toward what would seem like death-by-explanation to postmodern thinkers when their moment came. But first, a sense of how those evolutionist works shaped and reflected this iteration of the modern form of life.

> I have read some of the speculations on the perfectibility of man and of society … a writer may tell me that he thinks man will ultimately become an ostrich … before he can expect to bring any reasonable person over to his opinion, he ought to shew that the necks of mankind have been gradually elongating, that the lips have grown harder and more prominent, that the hair is beginning to change into stubs of feathers. (Thomas Malthus 1798)[12]

That was how Thomas Malthus chose to introduce "*An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it affects the Future Improvement of Society with remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers.*" In that hugely influential work he argued for the inevitability of poverty and starvation due to differential reproduction rates in human populations and food supply. In the paragraph quoted earlier, he framed his theory with a mocking critique of the Enlightenment faith in human progress, lampooning its lack of an evidence-based developmental perspective and affording a telling glimpse of his own commitment to it.

It is widely known that Darwin's concept of natural selection was independently formulated by Alfred Wallace, but it is not so widely known that both men were reading Malthus' essay at the time of their respective "Ah-hah" moments. A cursory reflection on the concept of natural selection on the one hand and Malthus' basic argument on the other makes that coincidence unsurprising and sets the stage for the great intellectual

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[12] The "Idea of Progress" has a long history going back to antiquity if the concept is construed broadly enough (Bury 1932; Nisbet 2017)—but the modern idea has been uniquely ideological, an aspect of popular belief. In the eighteenth century, it took on certain features that prepared the way for its specifically "evolutionist" form. Robert Turgot, for example, anticipated the Marquis de Condorcet's schematic of progress (Manuel 1962). Both posited a certain direction in history on the grounds that the obvious benefits of rationality (thanks especially to literacy) would create momentum for human self-cultivation. But, for a traumatized nineteenth century, that just wasn't enough. A more comprehensive guarantee was needed and the place of the idea of Providence was open, pre-pared for a secular occupant.

adventure of the nineteenth century—the quest for a new *kind* of natural law, an "evolutionist" law, a law of *necessary* development grounded on evidence of it. That is precisely what the metaphor of the ostrich is intended to show. A "phylogeny" of history was required.

The specifics of Malthus' "dismal science"—reminiscent of the harsh discipline of a Puritan God's Providence and bound therefore to appeal to some Englishmen—were not as widely adopted as the overall attitude of objectivity he assumed. European evolutionists would one day appear to professional academics of the twentieth century as victims of fantasies more outrageous even than those that animated the natural law theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But the evolutionists thought of themselves as "facing the facts," however grim. They were determined to be empirical.

Most of the influential thinkers of the nineteenth century were more optimistic than Malthus—even in England. Jeremy Bentham, for example, held the tattered banner of Enlightenment aloft, convinced that if a utilitarian regime were implemented, the dream of the new reason could be immediately realized. And he had many followers, in politics and in philosophy. But Benthamism, with its faith in synchronic natural laws of pleasure and pain, mathematically calculable and susceptible of human administration at every institutional level—from schools and prisons to cities and nations—was a relic of the past. The prolixity of Bentham's prose, spelling out his behavioral calculus to the last jot and tittle, was what places him alongside other nineteenth-century thinkers.

It is worth a trip to the stacks of an old-fashioned library—just to gaze for a moment upon the collected works of the most eminent among them. The sheer footage and poundage on the shelves has to be seen to be believed. And then, leafing at random through the volumes—the attention to detail, the scrupulous descriptions, the exhaustive cataloguing, the manic charting, thousands of pages of "facts" and theories, from the most elemental levels of the natural sciences to epochs of world history and galactic topography—these are monuments to a desperate labor of containment, almost all of it useless in the long run, distorted, irrelevant, surpassed, or just plain wrong, a Borgesian compendium, as ponderous and absurd and touching as Mr. Ramsey of *To The Lighthouse*, through whom Virginia Woolf bid farewell to eminent Victorians, fading away in her time.

Those volumes suggest two important things to remember about the nineteenth century that bear directly on the advent of postmodernism in the twentieth century. The first is the sense of responsibility these writers carried

with them. They lived with the consequences of the French and the Industrial revolutions—and those consequences appeared as a bitter comeuppance to modernizers who identified with the whole enterprise, now threatened with disaster. So they felt obligated in a way no traditional authority ever had. For they were not merely responsible for some time-honored office they happened to hold. They were responsible for *inventing* the offices or radically reforming them—for *inventing* the social order, the technology, the economy, the settings of human life. And things were not going well.

The second thing to remember is that this was the last generation of (more or less) sane moderns who could still hope to comprehend everything. To Hegel, Comte, and Spencer, it still seemed possible to work through all the books that mattered, in every department of learning, and master them all. And then—the crowning achievement—possible also to cast that great sprawl of material into a systematic whole. No wonder the determination to face facts, to be empirical, was overwhelmed. The imperatives of such an aspiration were bound to move these men to reach too far, and hammer the facts into shapes that would fit their elaborate theoretical receptacles.

When modernists at last decided that there was no *telos* to be found in nature, they also gave up on the idea of a comprehensible world. In hindsight it is obvious: two aspects of the same moment. Without a purposeful narrative to contain its history, the world was bound to fall apart and lose its meaning.

This section cannot describe the systems of these thinkers in detail. But the selection of Hegel, Comte, and Spencer permits an overall contrast between national styles of evolutionist thought while foregrounding what they had in common. The aim is to highlight elements in those systems that conditioned the emergence of modernism.

Over the whole scene hovered the mystery of the "forces" of nature in the absence of a deity—especially life forces and their derivatives on the social level, including "forces of production" and the like. The challenge for a contemporary reader is to imagine how compelling this mystery became for thinkers who could no longer fall back on a general sense, however vague, that a deity had somehow set the cosmos in motion. What to make now of gravity, magnetism, electricity? Were they on a continuum with hunger and lust? With ambition and love?[13] What of hysteria, mesmerism, patriotic fervor, aesthetic uplift, ecstasy?[14] Most urgently, perhaps, what

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[13] Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* belongs in this context: a motley of body parts; the lightning; "It's *Alive!*"

[14] Interest in religion actually intensified during the nineteenth century. From Strauss' *Life of Jesus* to James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*—here was a force to be reckoned with all

force "ran through" an enraged mob?[15] When Comte went to exhaustive lengths to distinguish the social from the physiological in his taxonomy of life sciences, it was not because he was conceiving of society *on analogy* with an organism; it was because he thought of society as *a kind* of organism. When taxonomists of modern ideas contrast the Enlightenment's mechanism and atomism with Romanticism's organicism and holism, they miss the essential difference if they do not also highlight the *feeling* of forces. For a Romantic sensibility, such feelings were direct engagements with what holds things together in the world—or sunders them apart.

The role of *angst* in a cataclysmic twentieth century can make it difficult to recognize anxiety[16] as a dominant influence on nineteenth-century European minds, though it demonstrably was. Hegel, Comte, and Spencer were providing, not merely reassuring arguments, but reassuring experiences— a way of being in the world that might allay the anxieties that plagued so many thoughtful people swept along by the aftermath of Hobsbawm's "Age of Revolution" (1996). It is only when they are read as offering ersatz religious support in an age beset by frenzied change that we understand how radical a transformation would ensue when the ground it provided fell away. Hence, the focus on forces in this account. It will lead, through Schopenhauer, to Nietzsche. "Will to power" has a genealogy of its own.

2.4.1   G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831)

The only thought which Philosophy brings with it to the contemplation of History, is … that Reason is the Sovereign of the World; that the history of the world … presents us with a rational process. (Hegel 1837)

All the worth which the human being possesses, all spiritual reality, he possesses only through the State. … For Truth is the unity of the universal and subjective will; and the Universal is to be found in the State … in which Freedom obtains objectivity. (Hegel 1837)

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the more seriously as belief in literal validity waned. The *philosophes* and the men of '89 had fatefully underestimated the power of religious emotion.

[15] This question in particular haunted the period. The "revolutions" of 1830, 1848, and 1871 were potential reruns of 1793. For all their differences, Hegel, Comte, and Spencer were united in their opposition to democracy. They feared the "mob."

[16] W.E. Houghton (1957) convincingly interpreted characteristics we associate with the Victorians—prudishness, hard work, ambition, earnestness, respect for authority, and so on—as responses to an underlying anxiety. Both Spencer and Comte suffered severe nervous breakdowns more than once, and Hegel had to cope with depression.

Hegel delivered the lectures from which these quotes are drawn in the 1820s in Berlin, often to overflowing public audiences. He addressed the cream of Prussian society under a reactionary Hohenzollern monarchy that may have been more securely situated than the House of Bourbon in post-Napoleonic France but, with the Revolution of 1830 a looming prospect, still in need of as much reassurance as its state philosopher could provide. And that turned out to be a very great deal.

One must picture Hegel—now catching up with his boyhood nickname, old in fact as well as demeanor—standing before the audience just described. He is gravely explaining to the hushed throng why the events of the French Revolution in 1789 constituted a "splendid dawn" that all "thinking people greeted with celebration." And one must imagine them—given what they had already heard and could rightly anticipate— nodding their plumed heads in agreement just as grave (Althaus 2000, 186). And they would continue to nod as Hegel plodded methodically on, showing that *even* the Terror and Napoleon (who brought down the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation in 1806) had a place in the great scheme of things, the ultimate scheme of things—the story of the self-realization of Absolute Spirit in World History. There was nothing that did not have a role to play in that story, as Hegel told it—including Nothing itself. *That* was the sovereignty of Reason.

And his audience was willing to accept it all. For, as it turned out, they were being introduced to themselves, in their very being, as a climactic step toward some ultimate resolution—as the Absolute Spirit's chosen ones. Much could be overlooked, gazing back from such an elevation, if it could be shown that, like labor pains, those awful historical "moments" had been necessary tribulations.

From his early teens, Hegel's mission had been reconciliation. He was driven, above all, to reconcile his youthful Christianity with Greek philosophy, to synthesize the two determinative Western traditions. Because the French Revolution had appealed so incessantly to ancient models of citizenship in its attack on the medieval order, it seemed to Hegel and many of his peers that the crisis of their time could only be resolved on the basis of that reconciliation. Hegelian Dialectic developed in service of that project; it became the means by which Hegel would preserve *and* transform whatever was essential through *aufhebung*—sublation.[17]

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[17] For example: Jewish monotheism severed the immediate and irrational fusion of the divine and earthly that was ancient paganism. This *separation* of God and World was in turn

After his death, Right and Left Hegelians divided over a question that had dogged Hegel over his whole career—the question of his atheism. Hegel's basic claim was that the self-realization of Absolute Spirit in the World lifted Christianity in its (merely) representational form to the pure truth of its Idea. That means, for example (as with the incarnated God himself), that the doctrine of transubstantiation during communion—the wafer becomes flesh, the wine becomes blood—was a *representational* (imagistic, symbolic) evocation of Absolute Spirit recognizing itself as an invisible conceptual being "incarnated" in the world as the world's order.[18]

Add a dash of tolerance for ordinary folk who need visible representations of truth, however imperfect, and it became plausible for many Hegelians (and for Hegel himself) to claim that Hegelianism was the *fulfillment* of Christianity—one that promised reconciliation across the sectarian divisions that image-based dogmas inevitably entail. On the other hand, it was possible (and dialectically sound) to find in the same claim the *end* of Christianity—for what was left of that faith, as it had always been, faith in the truth of icons and doctrines, if they turned out to be mere images of abstractions to be found in Hegel's *Logic?*[19]

There is no need to dwell on Hegel's efforts to bring the Dialectic to the natural sciences. Even Goethe, otherwise so supportive of him, thought it a "bad, sophistical joke" to speak of growing plants "negating" seeds and eating as a "negation" of food and so on (Lowith [1941] 1991, 14). If Hegel was doomed in the long run to more ridicule than any other major philosopher has suffered, it is in large part because his account of

overcome by Christian incarnation which preserved (in sublated form) that separation in the paradox of an "embodied God"—and *that* preserved what had been true in paganism to begin with. See also the oft-cited Master/Slave dialectic.

[18] Hegelianism is usefully described as Platonism historicized. Karl Lowith summed up his account of Hegel by saying that "As the philosopher of the Christian-Germanic [i.e. Protestant] world, Hegel understood the Spirit as will and freedom." His problem was to reconcile this modern notion with the eternity of ancient Idealism. A narrative account of Absolute Spirit *expounding* itself *as* the world, over time, was his solution (Lowith [1941] 1991, 210–219).

[19] Feuerbach rallied left Hegelians around the claim that "Whoever does not surrender Hegelian philosophy does not surrender theology … the doctrine that reality is determined by the idea is only the rationalistic expression of the theological doctrine that nature was created by God." Left Hegelians overtly did what Hegel's orthodox critics had suspected him of doing covertly.

nature would one day appear so ludicrous.[20] But this much of how he integrated *geist* and nature must be grasped if we are to understand, not only Hegel's appeal, but Comte's and Spencer's as well. For Hegel, Spirit was not only alive in the usual sense; it was continuous with *all* activity, it was force in general, it was *motion* in the world—and in the mind.[21] The deepest appeal of Dialectic was the sensation it conferred of motion in thought, in thinking. The actual feeling of reversal that attends the experience of thinking dialectically was apprehended as the movement of Spirit in the individual mind. And, as we shall see, the most influential group of postmodernists, the creators of what would be known as French "theory" who defined themselves in opposition to a "philosophy of the subject" that went back to Hegel, were manifestly in his debt when it came to formulations of mentality that depended on its essential motility.

So, if one asks how Hegel's Berlin audience could have (thought they) understood a philosopher who strikes us today as so obscure, part of the answer lies in this: as good (or at least practiced) Lutherans, they were accustomed to the idea of personal salvation, accustomed to the idea of the Holy Spirit as something to be experienced.[22] It was no great leap for them to the idea that there was a more modern supreme being, one that traditional religions had struggled, impossibly, to picture—a World Spirit that was the true agent of history. And when they felt uplifted and redeemed by oratory, or moved by a storm or a symphony, it was not difficult to decide that *this* was the force of that Spirit, the ultimate will that

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[20] Karl Kautsky, who presided over the literary legacy of Marx and Engels, decided not to publish their *Dialectics of Nature*. It finally saw the light of day in the Soviet Union in 1925.

[21] Goethe and Hegel first bonded over their opposition to Newtonian concepts of color and force. What horrified (that is not too strong a word) them was how mathematics substituted itself for the phenomenon (see Adorno and Husserl on the same issue). How could a theory of color or force that did not convey *color* and *force* be true in any full sense of that word? Or consider Chevalier de Lamarck, most notorious of the Romantic failures in science, best remembered as Darwin's displaced predecessor. But his biological work came late in his life's work, as "an epilogue to an attempt to save the science of chemistry for the world of organic continuum." Lamarck "attached primary importance to the element of fire. … Fire is the principle of activity in nature" and, since "life and activity are ultimately one," chemistry would be a life science (Gillispie 1960, 271–276).

[22] It is striking that when Hegel refers to the doings of the World Spirit in his personal correspondence, the syntax, the phrasing is eerily familiar. It can seem as if the expression "World Spirit" was simply substituted for "God" or "God's will" in the correspondence of an orthodox believer—as if by a search and replace function.

sustained the world through all changes, the *being* of becoming, that held the world together—with mind. It was all very empirical.

Here are the words with which Hegel, addressing his students, greeted the triumphant arrival of Napoleon (Hegel called him the "World Spirit on horseback") at Jena in 1806:

> Gentlemen …. We find ourselves in an important epoch … when Spirit has taken a leap forward, where it has sloughed off its old form and is acquiring a new one. *The whole mass of existing ideas and concepts, the very bonds of the world*, are dissolving and collapsing into themselves as if in a dream. A new product of the spirit is being prepared. (Hegel in Lukacs, *The Young Hegel* [1806] 1938; italics mine)

"Ideas and concepts" are the very bonds of the world—its forms, in other words. But they are subject to change, sometimes cataclysmic change. No wonder Lowith saw Plato historicized in Hegel's thought.

2.4.2   Auguste Comte (1798–1857)

> For not only, in Comte's vision, does the Positively reconstructed project of industrialism assign to humanity objectively a cosmic mission to improve on the pre-given material world, it does so subjectively as well, as the most sublime expression of human love. That love—which Comte calls *l'amour universel* (viii:91) is … not just a love of each for all … but an affection which suffuses the whole world humanity touches. (Wernick in *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity* 2001, 176–177)

Andrew Wernick[23] is here tracing Comte's *l'amour universel* back to the quest of his mentor, the Comte de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), to his search for "a moral principle, which could connect a scientific understanding of cosmic order to St. Paul's dictum that God is love." Saint-Simon had hoped that "Newton's law of gravity, converted into a thesis of 'universal

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[23] For Karl Lowith, Hegel was the philosopher who tried to make Christianity modern—to "secularize" it without losing what was spiritually fundamental. Andrew Wernick's study of Comte proposes a revealing parallel to Lowith's account. Hegel's path to modern secularity proceeded "inward," to the realm of spirit, before turning outward, to politics and the Ethical Life (*sittlichkeit*); and it was bound to, argued Lowith, because Protestantism provided its basic orientation. So it makes sense that, in Catholic France, Comte began with external institutions and practices, with a Positivist Church that would shape the inward life of the modern citizen.

attraction' might provide the requisite link" and he envisioned a modern religion in which a "new clerical body" would be "united by a common belief in the law of gravity" elaborated in that way (Wernick 2001, 177; Pickering 1993, 85).

Hegel's sense that the "very bonds of the world" were dissolving and reassembling with the arrival of Napoleon and his revolutionary army resonates nicely with the idea that gravity might turn out to be continuous with moral forces that ensured the solidarity of the social organism. Similar aspirations and images are to be found across the whole spectrum of European thought in this period. Something experiential, something more comprehensive than philosophical doctrine, was obviously at work. Could the world *actually* fall apart?

From the beginning, Comte's mission, like Hegel's, was reconciliation. Because he was an academic outsider, he framed his vision in more idiosyncratic terms than Hegel had. Because he was French, he responded more directly, politically, to the crisis of transition from old to new. He looked, on the one hand, at the sciences (the new) and, on the other hand, at a doomed traditional order (the old) and saw what was needed: a science called "social physics" (later, "sociology") would make possible the *manufacture* of a social order with all the advantages of the old one but none of the defects. Sociology would be the most advanced of all the sciences that had developed in succession from the original one, astronomy, because it marked the moment when humanity finally made itself an object of reason—a culmination, in short, of reason's own evolution.

That, in a nutshell, was Comte's Positivism. There is little in it of dialectic, but it relies in its own way on the idea of human beings coming to objective self-consciousness, with the concomitant implications for perfected self-government. And it committed Comte to a lifelong struggle to attract supporters from both sides of the social-political divide in restoration France after 1815—to appeal somehow to Enlightenment-inspired republicans and to defenders of the old regime, especially the Catholic Church. Comte's views changed over time—more a 1789 republican in his youth, more a political elitist as he aged—but his commitment to that reconciliation never wavered and he continued through his whole career to borrow and transform elements from the institutions and ideologies of both sides, as if to sew them together by dint of the sheer density of his arguments and arrangements.

And "arrangements" is the word. Positivism was a philosophy, however elaborate, only by way of prelude. It was, above all, a gargantuan project,

a venture in social and political construction built around an idea (inherited from Rousseau) for a new religion, a religion that would transform European society (and eventually the world's). It would not, however, be dedicated to that metaphysical abstraction of Deism—that Maker of Nature, that figment of the imagination of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century modernizers which had led them so astray. No, the Positivist Church would worship something undeniably real, and really responsible for making the world—Humanity.

> The great object which Positivism sets before us individually and socially is the endeavor to become more perfect. … Towards Humanity, who is for us the only true Great Being, we, the conscious elements of whom she is composed, shall henceforth direct every aspect of our life. … Thus Positivism becomes, in the true sense of the word, a Religion. (Comte 1848)

The Positive philosophy was designed to provide its polity—and especially its church—with the firmest possible foundations. Facts. Scientific facts. The ring of that phrase, even today, carries just the connotations that Comte and like-minded thinkers wanted to give it.[24] Sociology owed its position at the summit of the hierarchy of the factual ("positive") sciences because, in taking humanity as its object, it became the most inclusive of the life sciences—the science of those special forms of life that had emerged from the historical interactions among those neuro-physiological packages of instincts and faculties that we know as human beings. These highest and latest forms of life were societies, and the laws of natural history that governed their emergence and functioning were as determined as those that govern the "fall of a stone." Those laws had ensured the sequence of stages that culminated in the Positive phase itself. Now, with Comte's science, that phase was in a position to accelerate the very process that had brought it into being.

For, at the very summit of the summit (there could never be too many summits for Comte) of the sciences stood what Comte called the "subjective synthesis." This synthesis would occur when Positivism—as a polity organized around social, educational, and ceremonial procedures spelled out in exhaustive detail—succeeded in configuring the neuro-physiological human packages that constituted it so they would spontaneously realize

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[24] Besides, the Saint Simonians, there were the physiocrats and ideologues in France, utilitarians in England, and political economy and common sense philosophy in Scotland—and Marxism. All were counting on the aura of science to *convince*.

themselves, intellectually and emotionally, *in* and *as* that polity. At that moment of secular rapture, universal love would assume its rightful place in the economy of instincts and faculties and the social organism would be perfected—permeated with a moral force as dependable as gravity.

There was no Hegelian Dialectic then—but, from the perspective of a general audience of educated Europeans at the time, there was a remarkable overlap of aim and ethos and, above all, the consolation of that promise.[25]

Positivism did not gain the kind of traction that communism eventually did. But as conceived by its principal author, it was *intended* for historical fulfillment. And to those associated with Positivism it seemed a plausible project under the circumstances. The fact that people like J.S. Mill, George Eliot, and Harriet Martineau took Positivism as seriously as they did is a challenge to our moral imaginations. To a today's observer Positivism looks more like a cult than a serious political movement. To make intuitive sense of its original appeal is to take a significant step toward understanding nineteenth-century evolutionism.

2.4.3   Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)

But rightly to understand progress, we must inquire what is the nature of these changes, considered apart from our interests. … In respect to that progress which individual organisms display … this question has been answered by the Germans … the series of changes gone through during the development of a seed into a tree, or an ovum into an animal, constitute an advance from homogeneity of structure to heterogeneity of structure. … Now, we propose in the first place to show, that this law of organic progress is the law of all progress. (Herbert Spencer 1857)

Upon this foundation of objectivity Spencer constructed an irresistible vision. As inexorable as the process itself, Spencer's argument comprehended eons of evolutionary development and ended by placing man at the pinnacle of biological heterogeneity, Britain at the pinnacle of social and historical heterogeneity, and British professionals—scholars, lawyers, industrialists, and administrators—at the head of Britain's heterogeneous population.

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[25] It is hard to determine how much exposure Comte had to German thought. He denied any influence, but there was a lengthy correspondence with a protégé who was studying in Germany and various other indications of interest and some familiarity.

It is easy now to laugh at so massive an absurdity—as foolish in its way as Hegel's discovery of Absolute Mind in 1820s Prussia and Comte's fantastic utopia. But it is more interesting to notice the relief and renewed sense of purpose that Spencer's work engendered in thousands of his followers for almost a century. To absorb Spencer in that age of spiritual crisis was to feel blessed by cosmic dice. A state of grace, as it were, for secular souls. But these were souls that also pined for softer forms of uplift and Spencer would provide that as well. Leading figures of the time—John Tyndall, T.H. Huxley, Alfred Wallace—regarded Spencer as the "prophet of a new religion" because of the aura of transcendence he bestowed upon the sciences (Francis 2007, 155).

Our image of Spencer—adjusted to suit more recent polemical needs—is dominated by the doctrine of "social Darwinism" he espoused in one form or another at various stages in his career. And it is true that when he coined the phrase "survival of the fittest," he provided biological justification for ruthless social policies. But Spencer would never have commanded the following he did if that had been all he had to offer.[26] What made his harsh short-term prescriptions palatable was the rhetoric of wonder he brought to his accounts of the fate of the universe and humanity's place in it, a rhetoric that always led to reconciliation and a gesture toward the empty throne of God. He concluded his most influential text, *First Principles* (1862), as if channeling Spinoza:

> he who rightly interprets the doctrine contained in this work, will see that neither of these terms [Spirit and Matter] can be taken as ultimate. He will see that though the relation of subject and object renders necessary to us these antithetical conceptions of Spirit and Matter; the one is no less than the other to be regarded as but a sign of the Unknown Reality which underlies both.

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[26] This reduced image of Spencer is due in large part to W.G. Sumner, the first teacher of "sociology" in an American university. He edited out the last chapter of Spencer's *Study of Sociology* (1896), a chapter in which Spencer posited a final stage of social equilibrium sustained by refined emotions, much like those Comte proposed to cultivate immediately in his Positivist polity. Spencer, of course, would not countenance the imposition of any Frenchified regulations. His science was British—the perfected social life-form had to be an evolutionary outcome. Spencer's nature did not just inform rational government, it governed—as Providence had before.

When Spencer waxed eloquent about The Unknown and, later in his career, on the tendency of living things[27] toward equilibrium, he almost invariably remarked as well upon the inexplicable presence of beauty in the world. The panorama of Life in all its forms was most precious to Spencer precisely because its beauty lay beyond the reach of his dogged efforts to explain the myriad adaptations he found in living forms. It was impossible to explain the beauty of the natural world in terms of adaptation—and yet beauty there was, and Spencer never tired of singing its praises. It was authentic appreciation of this gratuitous beauty that moved Spencer and his cohort to catalogue and depict so reverently. One has only to peruse the works—especially the sketches—to recognize them as expressions of devotion.

Spencer's philosophical meditations are marked, over time, by an increasing emphasis on the significance of instinct and emotion inspired first of all by his own personal experience and confirmed by his reading of the Scottish "common sense" philosophers with their psychological inter-pretation of Kant. When he exempted beauty in nature and art from sci-entific explanation (as Kant had *noumena*), he forgave himself, as it were, for betraying his Methodist upbringing by providing a vessel into which he could pour residual religious feelings that were harder to jettison than doctrine. And in so doing, Spencer—like Hegel and Comte before him—met deep-seated needs in his followers as well.

Early on, Spencer was involved with a "New Reformation" undertaken by a group that included Thornton Hunt (son of Leigh) and G.H. Lewes. They established a journal, *The Leader,* to promote their cause. Its flyleaf displayed a quote from Alexander Von Humboldt's great work of Romantic science, *Kosmos,* and carried pieces by Harriet Martineau, J.A. Froude, and Robert Owen, along with some of Spencer's most inspirational essays. The new reformation was an agnostic, yet intensely spiritualized, vitalist move-ment that was looking for a middle way between Christianity and rational materialism. Once again, the parallel with Hegel and Comte is obvious, but the principles Spencer articulated for his readers were British to the core. In language Locke himself might have approved, Spencer followed the most influential Scots in asserting that whatever the psycho-physical apparatus of

[27] As with Comte and Hegel, life for Spencer was very broadly defined. "Science," for example, was classified as a living thing in accordance with a definition Spencer cribbed (he cribbed so much!) from Cuvier's "law of organic correspondences."

human nature supplied by way of perception, belief, and feeling had its own kind of necessity—and thus provided, without further ado, a basis for justification and truth. And this principle applied as well to the awe we feel in contemplation of the absolute and infinite, however unknowable. The feelings in and of themselves were *valid*. They were facts.[28] Thus were the materialist reductions of utilitarianism avoided and the irrationalities of religious orthodoxy given—at long last—a natural place.

The mission of the new reformation supplied Spencer's essential framework long after the movement itself had disintegrated. No matter how his formulations varied over the decades—as they did continuously, depending on what ideas or findings this omnivorous autodidact had most recently absorbed—Spencer was always looking for ways to endow scientific fact and reason with transcendent value. For Spencer, as for Comte and Hegel, the idea of the whole, on the one hand, and immediately experienced life forces, on the other, made this synthesis possible, whatever the content of their systems. It is above all important to remember that scientists and philosophers were not Spencer's real audience. He wrote for generally educated Victorians who had a "desire to see the living universe as personally significant" (Francis 2007, 184).

And that, of course, is precisely what modernists in the arts and the academy would not be able to see.

> If you believe in improvement you must weep, for the attained perfection must end in darkness, cold, and silence. In a dispassionate view the ardor for reform, improvement, for virtue, for knowledge, even for beauty is only a vain sticking up for appearances as though one were anxious about the cut of one's clothes in a community of blind men. *Life knows us not and we do not know life—we don't know even our own thoughts. Half the words we use have no meaning whatever and of the other half each man understands each word after the fashion of his own folly and conceit.* Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore; thoughts vanish; words, once pronounced, die; and the memory of yesterday is as shadowy as the hope of tomorrow. (Joseph Conrad 1897 (italics mine))

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[28] "All reasonings must be from first principles; and for first principles no other reason can be given but this, that by the constitution of our nature, we are under a necessity of assenting to them" (Thomas Reid, 1764).

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Modernism

New Authorities, Works, and Disciplines

> Dada aimed to destroy the reasonable deceptions of man and recover the natural and unreasonable order. … Dada is senseless like nature. (Jean Arp (in Karl [1948] 1988, 349))

Of all the modernist schools and movements, Dada can plausibly lay claim to that coveted encomium, "most radical." How typically provocative of Arp to frame the project as an attempt to "recover the natural." It was heresy to challenge the self-sufficiency of art, especially its independence from or dominance over nature. But the first impression is immediately undermined and an article of faith restored—for Dada was out to "recover" a modernist nature seething with aimless forces and quantum uncertainties, obedient only to the laws of chance, the nature Nietzsche had described.

John Locke and Adam Smith had God's designs to guide and restrain them when they imagined constituting governments and political economies based on natural law. Hegel, Spencer, and Comte could no longer rely on a Deistic or orthodox Creator, but history for them was still going in some direction, however painfully. They felt supported by a *natural* process of *social* evolution—an essential continuity retained. Nietzsche's announcement of God's death stood apart from a chorus of nineteenth-century atheistic proclamations because he wasn't just talking about religious faith. Nietzsche meant that there was nothing for

humanity to turn to for guidance—not natural law, not historical progress, *nothing*. Coming to terms with that condition distinguishes modernism from modernity in general. Whatever designs might give significant form to human life had now to be conceived by human beings. Nature and history supplied the matter (instincts, bodies, resources, environments) and that matter set limits on what forms were feasible— true, adaptive, functional, even beautiful. But all meaning and value would derive from modern subjects, now alone again, with no external support—as foreshadowed in the *cogito* moment.

In his landmark account of modernism, *After Babel* (1975), George Steiner builds upon the concept of "the lacking word." It marks the "principle division in the history of Western literature," he says, and its irruption "occurs between the early 1870s and the turn of the century. It divides a literature essentially housed in language from one for which language has become a prison." He adds in a footnote, by way of caveat, that "the whole question of the etiology and the timing of the language crisis in Western culture remains extremely involved and only partly understood" (1975, 176–177).

This chapter will argue that modern subjectivity was also, and more fundamentally, at issue during this period—that the "lacking word" was a symptom of a larger crisis of representation, in the Kantian sense of *vorstellung*, which includes perception itself; a crisis, that is, for consciousness as being-in-the-world, a world that could no longer be comprehended by a self that no longer knew its own mind. It cannot be a coincidence that literature and art turned to experimental reflexivity as the modern unconscious was admitted to existence. A commitment to interpreting subjectivity as Heideggerian being-in-the-world (see Chap. 4) invites this question: what in the world of the late nineteenth century corresponded to this larger crisis of representation and to apprehensions of an unconscious at the core of the *cogito*?

If Descartes or Locke or Thomas Jefferson had been told that they were possessed of thoughts they weren't thinking and feelings they weren't feeling, they would have rejected the very idea as self-contradictory, like "round square." They took for granted Derrida's "transparency of self-presence." That is why the idea of an unconscious, especially as deployed by Nietzsche and Freud, can seem to mark the beginning of the end for the Cartesian/bourgeois subject—but it also spurred that subject to heroic labors in its own defense.

So what in the world corresponds to an unconscious mind within? Could the beginnings of an answer be this simple: sheer complexity, sheer volume, sheer speed—a crossing of some quantitative threshold in the conditions of life in refashioned cities transformed by technologies and teeming with crowds of strangers? Was "the unconscious" actually a name for being-in-a-world that had lost its worldhood?[1] Did the modern mind lose its unity and transparency because the impossibility of comprehending the world became so obvious?[2] Is the modernist retreat from the world to "the work"—and to the psyche—essentially an escape from that incomprehensibility? Did the sheer presence of so many engines, grunting and pumping and shoving; so many vehicles passing, departing, arriving; so many transmitting wires crossing and recrossing between so many mouths and ears; so many agencies, offices, and bureaus forming and collapsing and meeting and merging and ordering and reordering and urging so many people to do and wear and say this or that or the other thing; so many roads and bridges and tunnels and lights and signs and memoranda and directives announcing and cautioning and directing and enticing and reporting on unimaginably many other such circumstances—did this vast and aimless jumble of embodied intentions, this monument in history to Max Weber's "irrational rationality," constitute the decadent heir to Barzun's argument of the device? (See footnote 7, Chap. 2) Had the project of progress culminated in a mass Dada exhibit that simply *showed* that man could not be God—not in the real world, anyway?

For what would God amount to, in a modernist register, if not the worldhood of the world—the *sense* of the world, as Wittgenstein put it in "The Lecture on Ethics"? And what does the analysis of postmodernism since Frederic Jameson—the analysis that stresses ahistorical surface, fragmentation, pastiche—come down to if not the absence of that sense? This chapter will show that, if we look beyond the arts and think of "modernism" as a crisis in the mode of existence for modern subjectivity more generally, certain features emerge as characteristic of cultural developments on many fronts:

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[1] "Worldhood" is the term Heidegger used to evoke the ultimate "there" of *Da-sein*, the environing horizon of all actualities and possibilities that constitute *Dasein* as being-in-the-world.

[2] This passage focuses on everyday experience but, for the modernist elite, the impact of relativity theory and quantum mechanics reinforced the basic message. The intuitively accessible Newtonian cosmos, a monument to modern rationality, was no more.

1. Most fundamentally, the absence of design in nature and direction in history become manifest, as just described. Responsibility for authorship of meaning and direction falls to humanity. A certain toughness and/or vulnerability emerges among those who take up the challenge—and an unprecedented elitism.

2. Diachrony lapses and synchrony rises. Depths of origin in evolutionist histories are displaced by present, often elusive, psychological origins and depths ("depth psychology") and by various functionalisms. The ancient and exotic become a storehouse of resources for contemporary intellectual and artistic projects.

3. Abstraction in various forms becomes the principle strategy for gaining authority—with "abstraction" understood most generally as a gesture that separates the authored work from the senseless world, for example, "abstract art" per se, of course; but also the distinction between function and origin in the social sciences; bracketed versus actual experience in phenomenology; *parole* and *langue* in linguistics.

4. The *cogito* divides—with the emergence of the unconscious, first of all, but in a range of other ways, improvised in various contexts, to suit various temperaments and undertakings. The "abstraction" of the modernist work corresponds to an "abstracted" subjectivity—a new authority, the modernist creator. In Proust's words, "A book is the product of a different self from the one we manifest in our habits, in society" ([1913] 1998, viii).

5. Universals of some sort—however elusive, however defined—remain vital to the projects of these new authorities.

6. The distinction between fact and value is drawn in the social sciences and analytic philosophy, complement to the collapse of evolutionist narratives. Without a story, there can be no moral.

3.1   Creators and Works

Abandoned by God, adrift in natural history, besieged by mass society and culture, modernists found consolation in art. There—on the canvas, on the page, in concrete and steel—*there* could be a world with meaning and value, one that had truly been authored. Hence, the obsession with the purity of the work or the genre, with its self-sufficiency—its abstraction in the broadest sense. And these new authorities were not merely producing works, but they were defining the *kinds* of works that were worth producing in the first place. Hence, the multiplication of secessions and

movements, founded one day, dissolving the next, and then founded once more—always in pursuit of an ineffable something that lingered just over the horizon of what had already been done. The true artist was bold enough to reject a world that no longer made sense, to decline to represent it, first of all—but to repudiate all traditional themes and methods and attitudes as well. While philistines wallowed in the kitsch of history, the modernist artist refused to look back, except in search of images and allusions appropriate to present purposes. The rubble of time, the chaos of city life—it was all grist for the mill. Hence, above all, the cult of originality, the mad desire to be a genius, to *prove* oneself a genius through an authored work that transcended the given.

That is why modernist art was such an elitist undertaking. What else could be expected of an enterprise that supplied a lack bequeathed by a departed God?[3]

An assembly of reminders follows—staples in the voluminous literature on modernism. They point to a manifestation of a modernist way of being in the world that sets the stage for the emergence of postmodernism. We have already heard from Proust: "A book is the product of a different self from the one we manifest in our habits, in society."

Consider also these remarks from other writers:

Madame Bovary is based on no actual occurrence … it contains none of my feelings and no details from my own life. The illusion of truth (if there is one) comes, on the contrary from the book's impersonality. … An artist must be in his work like God in creation, invisible and all-powerful. (Gustave Flaubert, letter to Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie 1857)

The personality of the artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea. … The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails. (James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* 1914)

The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. … It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting … the business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the

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[3] William Cronin, speaking of Frank Lloyd Wright, said that "job of the artist (is) to create a vision of nature more natural than nature itself" (*Frank Lloyd Wright*, Ken Burns [1997] 2014).

ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all. (T.S. Eliot "Tradition and the Individual Talent" 1920)

And from artists:

Shapeless emotions such as fear, joy, grief, etc. … will no longer greatly attract the artist. He will endeavor to awake subtler emotions, as yet unnamed … his work will give to those observers capable of feeling them lofty emotions beyond the reach of words. (Wassily Kandinsky *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* 1914)

the artist acts like a mediumistic being who, from a labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing. If we give the attributes of a medium to the artist, we must deny him the state of consciousness on the esthetic plane about what he is doing or why he is doing it. (Marcel Duchamp "The Creative Act" 1975)

Examples could be multiplied indefinitely. A particular experience of what Nietzsche called "self-splitting" was common to most, if not all, the modernist creators. It shaped their self-understanding, even though they lived and worked in different times and places, across all the arts and—as the next section of this chapter will show—the academic disciplines as well. Whence this experience of a division between the everyday person and a mysterious, anonymous, agent of creation within? What in the world of artistic production specifically—given the overall context just described—can account for this?

Consider the founding principle of the New Criticism. It distinguished between "internal evidence"—the words on the page—and "external evidence," which meant anything outside the work, including especially the author's personal feelings and intentions. The upshot was that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 3).

Spontaneous reports of divided subjectivity offered by creators found doctrinal expression in this central tenet of the New Criticism. An explanation suggests itself: these artistic enterprises had the effect of splitting a creator's sense of self because that division of subjectivity corresponded to the "abstraction" of the work from the uncontainable flow of contemporary lived experience, shot through with random moments and meaningless routines. That correspondence is phenomenologically expectable; it

follows from the nature of intentionality. The more separated, the more exalted and purified, the more unprecedented—in many cases, the more literally abstract—the work, the more the creator felt as if the everyday person who ate and drank and chatted, the person immersed in the natural-historical flux, the person "fallen" into average everydayness—*that* person couldn't possibly be the author of something so radically unsuited to the plane of ordinary existence.

Flaubert famously quipped, "Madame Bovary, c'est moi"—which can seem inconsistent with what he wrote to Mlle de Chantepie, cited earlier. But Flaubert was speaking of himself as a person with a biography in the latter case—of himself as creator of a work in the former. Joyce and Eliot were making essentially the same point. Personal biography provided *material* for the creator's work, resources like any other—but the works did not *express* the accidental wretch the artist happened to be. That view of art went out with the Romantics, the predecessors modernists most loved to loathe. Instead, works "expressed" the potentialities of the very media of the arts with which the creators had somehow managed to merge.

It is worth recalling what "surrealism" literally means. Breton and his cohort, tapping into the depths of what they took to be the Freudian unconscious, the other-self from whom their works surged forth, fully intended the imputation of superiority.[4] A sense of privileged access founded the elitism, the contempt for mass society and sensibility that was so typical of the great modernists.[5] *In Search of Lost Time* was surreal in this enlarged sense too; not dogmatically, of course, but just as improbably—and even more strikingly when one considers the characteristic Proustian effect, the "heightened" experience of experience, the transcendence of experience by itself, as it were—thanks to a rendering more faithful than the original.

And—once again, and at a further degree of removal—modernist creators were not only producing sur-worldly works from sur-selfly sources, they were also *defining* art, defining what sort of thing a poem or a painting or a building *ought* to be—creating values, in accordance with Nietzsche's challenge to the "midnightly men" of the future for whom he

[4] Contemporary usage "it was *so* surreal" seems not to carry that connotation. High Culture brought low under the postmodern regime.

[5] Said Ezra Pound, writing from Stone Cottage, where he was at work with Yeats: "to explain a symbol is to destroy its ability to embody the divine or permanent world; knowledge that could be understood by the uninitiated masses would not be knowledge at all" (in Longenbach 1988, 91).

had written.[6] Parameters of the kind traditions took centuries to establish were being determined by a few friends sitting around a café table, organizing the Vienna secession or the publication of *BLAST.*

From this point of view, the intense focus on the elements of art—on actual media, as opposed to whatever art might be "about," if anything, besides itself—makes perfect sense. Steiner's "lacking word" takes its proper place in this context. The feeling that conventional methods were inadequate may have been most pronounced among writers, but that must be understood as part of a larger conversation about the exhaustion of traditional means and techniques across the board. Opposing that exhaustion was what stimulated modernist attempts to start again—from scratch, from the level of the most elemental materials, often to be found in universals of human psychology. Take, for example, Le Corbusier, his ambition proportional to the scale of his art, setting out to lead a movement *Towards a New Architecture* ([1923] 1986). He was planning, not just buildings, but cities, and not just cities, but a way of life, a modern way of life—"machines for living in," a way in which masses, in both senses of the term, could be contained. And "plan" is the word. He literally proposed a master plan for that gigantic undertaking. Convinced that a "a great epoch has begun," that "architecture is stifled by custom," he decreed that only "primary forms," like cubes, cones, spheres, cylinders, and pyramids abstracted from the morass of historical styles, could "make the work of man ring in unison with the universal order." The neuropsychology of vision guaranteed that universal order and Le Corbusier anchored his plan upon that guarantee. The determination to give significant form to senseless history is perhaps even more palpable in the structure, the rhetoric, of the plan itself—section titles in bold, subtitles in caps, single sentence paragraphs marching down the page at the behest of those titles and subtitles, issuing orders to generations of architects to come (in Cahoone 1996, 200–206).

And when Arnold Schoenberg was "loosening the shackles of obsolete aesthetics," he was, at the same time, asking himself "for the theoretical foundation of the freedom of my style" that he could identify with mathematical rigor (1952). Or, as Constantin Stanislavski, creator of what would be aptly called "The Method," recollected, "the founding of our

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[6] Says Nietzsche's biographer: "All of the significant currents in the early 20th century, from symbolism to *art nouveau* and expressionism, were inspired by Nietzsche. Every self-respecting member of these circles had a 'Nietzsche experience'" (Safranski 2002, 323).

new Moscow Art and Popular Theater was in the nature of a revolution," he said, in which "we protested against the customary manner of acting, against theatricality … we needed a new beginning. We needed new bases and foundations" (1924, 330, 483). Those foundations were also psychological and would eventually be represented in a chart known as "The Stanislavski System." (This particular chart is too complex for anyone not driven by obsession to decipher, but the fondness of modernist authorities for such devices will be considered in some detail later. See especially the discussion of Structuralism in Chap. 5.)

The upshot is this: a gesture of authorial definition, of completed construction in defiance of senseless surroundings—that is the intentional act that constituted modernist "foundationalism." It will become a principal target of the counter-gesture of deconstruction when it comes, a counter-gesture that the modernist *avant-garde* anticipated in various ways.

Because that *avant-garde* played an essential role in shaping French theory, Part IV will consider it in some detail. Here, a simple comparison, to highlight what is at stake:

> An immense pride was buoying us up, because we felt ourselves standing quite alone at that hour, like proud beacons or sentinels facing an army of enemy stars encamped in their celestial bivouacs. … We are on the last promontory of the centuries! Why should we look back when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? … Museums, cemeteries! Truly identical. (Filippo Marinetti, *The Futurist Manifesto* 1909)

> if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style. … Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit? (Virginia Woolf, "The Common Reader" 1925)

It would be difficult to find two more sharply contrasting exemplars of modernism than Woolf and Marinetti. Yet both saw themselves standing against a world, a universe, that was incomprehensible, even hostile. Marinetti's "army of enemy stars" is echoed in Woolf's description of an empty summer house, as spring arrives, and "the garden urns, casually filled with wind-blown plants, were gay as ever. Violets came and daffodils.

But the stillness and the brightness of the day were as strange as the chaos and tumult of the night, with the trees standing there, and the flowers standing there, looking before them, looking up, yet beholding nothing, eyeless, and so terrible."[7]

Both Marinetti and Woolf felt oppressed by conventions of a dead past deeply embedded in the general culture. Alienated from that culture and essentially alone—especially Woolf in her Cartesian envelope—each was nevertheless sustained by a small group of the like-minded, an elite few profound enough to understand their absurd situation and brave enough to produce the works that provided what redemption could be had. Boundless achievement seemed possible to Marinetti's gang of proto-fascist visionaries, or so they proclaimed while the fever lasted. More ephemeral epiphanies were all that Bloomsbury's extraordinary souls could expect, and the fact that they could settle for that testified to their exalted standing in their own minds. As with Marinetti and Woolf personally, the contrast between the ethos of Bohemian refinement at Bloomsbury and the hothouse atmosphere of the Futurist school could hardly be more striking. And yet, at the deepest level, a common form of life is discernible. Modern subjectivity, in extremis, determined to create. Let Woolf stand in for a rough-hewn category—call it mainstream high modernism. Marinetti represents a wing of the *avant-garde*.

Woolf took note of the experience of self-splitting, of a division in her psyche corresponding to the production of a work abstracted from every-day life—though she was not as categorical about it as Flaubert and Joyce. In "Notes on an Elizabethan Play," for example, she famously described the "great artist" as the man who knows "that there is a station, some-where in mid-air, whence Smith and Liverpool can be seen to the best advantage" and who knows how to sustain himself in that "place," nei-ther too far removed, nor too much involved, with the Smiths and Liverpools of the real world (1925, 17). No assertion of divine authority, of absolute separation—no Joycean flourish of pared fingernails, cer-tainly—but the essential point remains. The *truth* of Smith and Liverpool, which was the artist's special provenance, had to be precipitated in an alchemy of creation that produced, not reality itself, but an *experience* of it—through a work that registered essences and evoked them. It was that alchemy that T S. Eliot, inclined to the most stringent objectivism, had in mind when he called for a "depersonalization" so complete that "art may

[7] From "Time Passes" in *To The Lighthouse* ([1927] 1989).

be said to approach the condition of science." He provided a "suggestive analogy" that today's reader might find a bit baffling: consider, he said, "the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide"—and left it at that (1920, 7).

Eliot's analogy evokes more rarified precincts than any opened up by nineteenth-century realism and naturalism, which had also invoked the name of science. One imagines a flare, an emanation of light and spark—and a radical transmutation of the platinum. But, whatever the details, the underlying message is clear: the creator of artworks functions in his medium at a level of abstraction and comprehension to which no everyday personality could aspire. In the case of a poet, the very stuff of language and tradition is in process and a synthesis is catalyzed out of that enormous field, across which the poem on the page echoes in accordance with its own laws, supplying the resonance that marks a great work. Proust found a more modest way to evoke the same alchemy from the point of view of the reader. With his patented blend of sympathy and condescension, he conceded that Francoise, the family servant, was right when she said that characters in novels are not "real people" by way of explaining her scorn for her young charge's addiction to them. But—Proust goes on, leaving Francoise to her simplicity—she didn't understand, perhaps failed even to notice how "opaque" a real person is, hidden from us by the merely visible, grossly obtrusive, aspect of physicality—like a "dead weight which our sensibilities have not the strength to lift." Fictional characters, on the other hand, this "new order of creatures" who, though they appear to us only "in the guise of truth," are nevertheless a "decided improvement" on real people because "it is in ourselves" that those lives are lived. Our access is total, our understanding incorrigible, even if it changes ([1913] 1998, 116).

Woolf's description of Lily Briscoe's struggles with her painting in *To The Lighthouse* ([1927] 1989) affords an extended dramatic rendering of the phenomenological dialectic between work and creator upon which this account of modernism hinges:

> she scored her canvas with brown running nervous lines which had no sooner settled there than they enclosed (she felt it looming out at her) a space … what could be more formidable than that space? Here she was again, she thought, stepping back to look at it, drawn out of gossip, out of living, out of community with people into the presence of this formidable

ancient enemy of hers—this other thing, this truth, this reality, which suddenly laid hands on her, emerged stark at the back of appearances and commanded her attention. She was half unwilling, half reluctant. Why always be drawn out and haled away? Why not left in peace to talk to Mr. Carmichael on the lawn. (158)

And later:

as she lost consciousness of outer things, and her name and her personality and her appearance, and whether Mr. Carmichael was there or not, her mind kept throwing up from its depths, scenes, and names and sayings, and memories and ideas like a fountain. (159)

One of the most insistent of the minor motifs in *To The Lighthouse* involves the various ways Lily had to maneuver to protect herself and her painting (itself tending, over time, toward abstraction) from unwanted intrusions. She "kept a feeler on her surroundings lest someone should creep up," guarding against the aimless comings and goings of others in the house, with their random concerns and passing judgments, so uninformed but potentially so hurtful (17). Some of the people—Mrs. Ramsay, above all—are admirable in their way, and poignantly situated by the author's tender hand, but compared to Lily and her struggles ("against terrific odds,") she would insist, "but this is what I see; this is what I see (19)," and, by constant implication, compared to Woolf and her art—they fall short of transcendence. They belong with the masses, with all the ordinary people washed up on the shore of the historical moment upon which the modernist visionaries took their heroic stand. They matter, terribly—but they are never fully *aware*.

So it is that, at the very moment when Mr. Ramsay and his fractious son, momentarily reconciled in a common pursuit, finally reach the lighthouse of the title—the meaningless goal that means everything, if they only knew it; at that same moment, Lily, in the grip of a "sudden intensity," draws a single line down the center of her picture, completing it, and knowing it to be complete, knowing that (and with these words, Woolf in turn completes her book) "I have had my vision." A triple play, as it were, on the theme of closure, and a heroic assertion of the privileges of The Work—"the book" that post-structuralism's infinite writing will one day unbind (206–209).

Let Lily's experience represent both aspects of the dialectic of abstraction here identified with modernism, understood not simply as a revolution in the way the arts were conceived and practiced but as an existential accommodation that modernist creators of all kinds were obliged to make.

By way of contrast with this mainstream exemplar, consider the situation from an *avant-garde* vantage point:

> While an artist is labouring at his work of art, nothing prevents it from surpassing Dream. As soon as it is finished, the work must be hidden or destroyed, or better still, thrown as a prey to the brutal crowd which will magnify it by killing it with its scorn, and thereby intensify its absurd uselessness. We thus condemn art as finished work, we conceive of it only in its movement, in the state of effort and draft. Art is simply a possibility for *absolute conquest*. For the artist, to complete is to die. (Marinetti in Ottinger [1915] 2009, 21; Italics mine)

The loathing Marinetti and his cohort felt for a stifling tradition was so intense that their expressions of it—the calls for the destruction of libraries and museums and so on—sometimes feel like a parody of modernist disdain. It was as if Marinetti had appropriated Baudelaire's classic balance between the ephemeral and the eternal in art, the necessary descent, as it were, of the eternal to transitory styles in history that give it expression—and promoted, by sheer force, the transitory to the level of an absolute in itself. The doomed logic of that move goes a long way to explain why, at the limits of the modernist *avant-garde*, in Vorticism and Dada and early Surrealism too—wherever manifestos seemed essential!—there was only so much that could be done. When authorial self-assertion reached the point where finished works of *any* kind seemed alien and smacked of conformity, art lapsed and dogma produced sects and boredom.

But in the glory days of futurism, in the decade before the Great War, Marinetti used his inherited wealth to sponsor outrageous public events in various venues—demanding to be booed, provoking fights and riots.[8] When it took this form—in the name of "action art" under the slogan "art=life"—Marinetti's futurism tried to live its creed of opposition to *all* works, to all *completion*—in the name of change, in the name of speed, in the name of "absolute conquest" by the modernist creator. Mainstream high modernists abstracted finished works from the pointless churn of history in the

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[8] The pervasive influence of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* (1896) and his nonsense-science of pataphysics is most apparent in this aspect of Marinetti's work.

machine age and so, in a certain way, transcended or contained it. Le Corbusier's plan is a striking instance. But Marinetti and his gang were determined to ride the same furious energies right off the cliff of time:

> We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath … a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace. We want to sing the man at the wheel, the ideal axis of which crosses the earth, itself hurling along its orbit. … Poetry must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown, to force them to bow before man. … We are on the extreme promontory of the centuries! What is the use of looking behind at the moment when we must open the mysterious shutters of the impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the absolute, since we have already created eternal, omnipresent speed. (*The Futurist Manifesto* 1909)

It is unlikely that serious artists like Boccioni and Carra actually destroyed many of their artworks in the name of speed and absolute conquest—much as they enjoyed the atmosphere Marinetti created and the glamorous venues he secured for them. The works of the futurists have taken their place in today's museums, cozily ensconced between the cubists and abstract expressionists. A bitter fate but a revealing one—with implications for how best to approach postmodernism as a historical phenomenon. With that reckoning ahead, only the main point of this analysis need be stressed here.

Marinetti referred to himself often, and in grandiose terms. But it was himself in the first person of everyday life he talked about. In a manifesto written in 1921, for example, he announced, "last summer, at Antignano, where the street named after Amerigo Vespucci, discoverer of America, curvingly coasts along the sea, I invented Tactilism." He described how he was swimming naked in a sea "torn by rocks, foamy scissors knives razors," how he "drank from the goblet of the sea filled to the rim with genius," conceiving at that moment of tactilism (an art form for the sense of touch) and indulging in some banter with a boy on the shore who teased him about the board he was manipulating, asking if he "was having fun building little boats." Yes, Marinetti replied, "I am building a craft that will take the human spirit to unknown waters."

Or, again, writing in 1915 on the genesis of futurism he said:

On 11 October 1908, having worked for six years at my international maga-
zine in an attempt to free the Italian lyrical genius that was under sentence
of death from its traditional and commercial fetters, I suddenly felt that it …
was absolutely crucial to switch methods, get out into the streets, lay siege
to theatres, and introduce the fisticuff into the artistic struggle. … My
Italian blood raced faster when my lips coined out loud the word. It was the
new formula—of Action-Art. (in Ottinger 2009, 21)

So—a very large ego, no question about that. But not a transcendental
ego, mysteriously removed from everyday events and its own proper name.
Quite the contrary. One might say that Marinetti took on the role of god/
author openly, without much sublimation, making a personal commitment
to directly confront the senseless mix of entrenched routine and meaningless
accident that was history and, in effect, to try to beat the flux of life itself into
a work, ranting and roaring the while. Hence, the corresponding emphases
at the pole of the object—the stress on incompletion, on creative destruc-
tion—and on the original practice of "Action-Art"—genuine attempts to live
a *refusal* to separate the work from the world. It was a radical response to
the circumstances, but it too played out in the phenomenological space
structured by the subject/object dialectic of modernism so far described.

Steiner's "lacking word" can now be situated more comprehensively.
The fact that language was so promiscuous a medium, so irretrievably woven
into the fabric of everyday life in mass society, made it that much harder to
reconceive and renew. There was a near limit to what one could get out of
arranging words in new ways on the page, after the manner of Mallarmé's
Un Coup de Dés. The same goes for experiments with automatic writing and
neologisms and all the rest. At the end of the day, there were just those 20
odd letters to work with, and just so many words—all of them shamelessly
available to journalists and bureaucrats as well as the literary vanguard. So
it was inevitable that writers, reaching for glimpses of the eternal in the tran-
sitory flux, would feel more frustrated with their depreciated medium than
creators in the plastic arts. Here are two representative expressions:

once again words desert me … something entirely unnamed, even barely
nameable, at such moments, reveals itself to me. … A pitcher, a harrow
abandoned in a field, a dog in the sun, a neglected cemetery, a cripple, a
peasant's hut—all these can become the vessel of my revelation … can sud-
denly, at any moment (which I am utterly powerless to evoke), assume for
me a character so exalted and moving that words seem too poor to describe
it. (Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *The Chandos Letter* 1902)

> More and more my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it. Grammar and style! To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Biedermeier bathing suit or the imperturbability of a gentleman. A mask. It is to be hoped the time will come, thank God, in some circles it already has, when language is best used where it is most efficiently abused. (Samuel Beckett, letter to Axel Kaun 1937)

As the mimetic imperative lost its grip, the possibilities for innovation in painting, sculpture, the performing arts, and architecture would seem almost unlimited by comparison with literature. And in those media innovations were evident at first glance. The "shock of the new" depended upon immediacy—as does any genuine shock—and that was provided by Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Duchamp's *Fountain*, and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. So modernist painters did not typically complain about the "lacking color," nor did sculptors feel betrayed by their material just because, say, bronze was also used in hackneyed statues of Great Men on Horseback in the public square. The sheer appearance of Brancusi's *Princess X* overcame the happenstance of "bronze" at a stroke, and with an immediate and total effect that no amount of wordplay in *Finnegans Wake* could match.

So the difference in attitude between writers and artists toward their media was essentially an accident, a by-product of intrinsic characteristics and customary social deployments. The common ground shows through with the realization that all of them were self-consciously concerned with artistic means per se. And, whatever the medium, that concern tended to intensify as a function of artistic aspiration—the more ambitious the project, the more exalted and transcendent the aim, the more concerned with the how-of-it creators became.

Beyond that, it seems impossible to generalize much further. The sheer experimental variety is boundless and accompanying accounts—the treatises and tracts—almost as various. But whether, like Le Corbusier, Malevich, or Mondrian, a creator had identified (often on psychological grounds) axiomatic aesthetic elements or, like Kandinsky and de Chirico, was intent on eternal ineffables (or both), the characteristic rhetorical gesture—the tone, the style—is unmistakable; ultimate matters had been consigned to one's care in the absence of God and an aspect of one's being had risen to the occasion.

A final illustration of the essential point: Wassily Kandinsky spent much of his career in thrall to Schopenhauer's claim that "all art aspires to the condition of music." His greatest works, his "Compositions," were reaching for a kind of synesthesia—they were overt efforts to "musicalize painting." Master critic Clement Greenberg (who thought Kandinsky "provincial") was convinced that the triumph of the modern arts had revealed that each art attained its apotheosis when freed from models supplied by other arts and devoted itself exclusively to its proper medium—each to its own compartment in the master chart in Greenberg's mind.

Diametrically opposed views as to the *content* of modernist art, then—but both couched in terms of high authority, framed and declaimed by one with special access to truth. And it is that frame and tone that point the way. If it has proved impossible to define modernism when the procedure has been to generalize about style and the contents of works, that should not be surprising. It was the form of subjectivity in its situation, its way of being in the world, that constituted the phenomenon.

Other new authorities, working on another kind of creation during the same period, will serve to illustrate this core point more clearly and prepare the way for an account of academic postmodernism.

3.2   Founders and Disciplines: Durkheim, Ferdinand Saussure, G.E. Moore, I.A. Richards

To take a practical political stand is one thing, and to analyze political structures and party positions is another. When speaking in a political meeting about democracy, one does not hide one's personal standpoint; indeed to come out clearly and take a stand is one's damned duty. The words one uses in such a meeting are not means of scientific analysis but means of canvassing votes and winning over others. … It would be an outrage, however, to use words in this fashion in a lecture or in the lecture-room. (Max Weber "Science as a Vocation" 1918)

In this famous speech, Weber was concerned with one of the most important of modernist abstractions—the one separating "value judgments" from "judgments of fact." The social scientist, like anyone else, must live on the level of incorrigibly messy everyday experience where all factors come into play, including the values and interests of the scientist. Disciplined study depends upon the abstraction of a well-defined object from that messy actuality. When the object is society, the most urgent of

all the disciplinary tasks must be to neutralize the "values" that the man the scientist happens to be cannot help but have. The establishment of the fact/value distinction enacts a split in the consciousness of founders of the modernist (human) sciences that parallels the division between the artist as creator and the artist's personal biography. The correlations of Husserlian intentionality are operating here as well.

Weber's aim, of course, was to cleanse these sciences of bias to the extent possible and study human beings objectively, as preceding generations of moderns had somehow failed to do, in spite of all their efforts. That long record of failure to live up to the example of natural science accounts for Weber's tone—alternately steely (toward those committed to objectivity) and contemptuous (of those who lacked the right stuff). It was as if he were rehearsing the extremes of personal discipline that the purity of his academic discipline had required of him. As indeed he was. So sternly committed was he to his science that the neo-Romantic poet Stefan George and his circle saw in Weber a prototype of the alienated man of reason living through what Weber himself called the "disenchantment of the world." To them—and to many others—Weber was an impressive but tragic figure who embodied the almost inhuman resolution it took to assess the world he lived in without allowing values to cloud his judgment. Edgar Salin, of the George circle, had a ready explanation: "Weber was profoundly insensitive to the arts … instead, he created his 'sociology' in order to approach through conceptual means phenomena he could not reach by way of experience" (in Marianne Weber [1926] 2017, xli). Details of Weber's biography cut against that assessment, but there is no doubt that he made heroic efforts to live the discipline he advocated.

This section will show certain parallels between modernism in the arts and the way academic disciplines were defined by their "authors" in the academy during the same period, under the same circumstances. If the modernist context made the "lacking word" a problem for creators of literary works, creators of knowledge were hard hit as well. As the credibility of the master theories of nineteenth century evolutionism eroded, especially under pressure from developments in the natural sciences, students of humanity's ways—of history and society, culture, language, religion, and psychology—found themselves almost literally picking up the pieces of those shattered systems. Yet another embarrassment for modern thought, but this one was even more disruptive than the one that had led evolutionists to mock their Enlightenment predecessors (see Chap. 2). That had been a difference over what nature's plan was like. Now it looked

as if modernizers since the seventeenth century had been deluding themselves entirely, and in the most fundamental way. There was no plan at all. It seemed that reason and language, even when restrained by common sense empiricism or Kantian critique, could not be trusted to distinguish truth from fantasy—at least not when it came to the study of humanity and its productions.

As artists were driven to attend to their media, so academic theorists were driven to reflect upon what methods to apply to their objects of study—and upon the terminologies they contrived to ensure the precision a real science demanded. Only then, ran the common assumption, could the speculative excesses of Spencer and Hegel be avoided, and the truth at last be told about a world (without worldhood) being divided into fields, into specializations—into disciplines.

These nascent sciences obviously cannot be described in detail here. The focus is on taken-for-granted aims and assumptions—on the rhetoric of the founding gesture, the defining line, the quest for a new level of intellectual and moral rigor only a special few could attain. Emile Durkheim's *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895a, b), G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1903), Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1915), and I.A. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) supply the sample.

3.2.1   Emile Durkheim (1858–1917)

> For sociology to be possible, it must above all have an object all of its own … a reality which is not in the domain of the other sciences. (Emile Durkheim 1895a, b)

The first chapter of *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895a, b) is called "What is a Social Fact?" The answer to that question would supply Emile Durkheim with the "object" his discipline required. It would also make the distinction between fact and value essential to the enterprise. Weber—heir to Hegel and Protestantism—would stress subjective self-discipline. Durkheim—heir to Comte in Catholic France—stressed the object pole. For him, the key to objectivity lay in treating the social fact as a "thing."

Durkheim begins his "Preface" to *The Rules* on a cautionary note: "We are so little accustomed to treating social facts scientifically," he warns, "that certain propositions contained in this book may well surprise the reader." Is there an echo of Descartes' seductive tactics in that collaborative

pronoun? (see Chap. 2). The confiding tone certainly makes a promise, the title alludes to the *Discourse on Method*—and Durkheim's ambition for his science would become almost as comprehensive as Descartes' had been. But the promise of the modernist is more selectively directed. The reader is not going to be told, as he was by Descartes, that reason and good sense are naturally equal in all men, and likewise the ability to judge of truth and falsity. On the contrary, in the very first paragraph, the "accepted opinions" of the "ordinary man" are stripped of all authority when it comes to assessing social facts—Ezra Pound could not have asked for a more definitive exclusion. The reader Durkheim addresses is being invited to join him in an unprecedented quest for detachment from the "promptings of common sense" which so implacably "imposes its judgments upon us unawares" that only a "sustained and special practice can prevent" its corrupting influence ([1895b] 1982, 31–32). But this practice must be undertaken, for the "state of mind of the physicists, chemists, and biologists," a state of mind to which sociologists must aspire, is more difficult for them to attain. That is because, as Durkheim explains in a later text, "we live our lives in society" just like everyone else (1982, 37, 246).

Once again, the essential distinction between the personal-historical subject and the transcendental observer/founder/creator arises in a systematic practice that abstracts the object/work from the flow of lived experience.

The problem with common sense notions about society is that, "because they have been developed unmethodically … they no more exactly express social things than the ideas the ordinary person has of substances and their properties (heat, light, sound, etc.)" express the realities of the physical world (1982, 246). And so, full circle—back to Galileo and his particles on the other side of the veil of ideas (see Chap. 2). Hence, the built-in advantage of social facts over psychological facts: they *appear* to us, they "display much more naturally and immediately all the characteristics of a thing" in legal codes, statistics, monuments, manners, fashion, and so on. Theories about hidden factors, based on such facts, conform to the Classical model of natural science. Facts of the personal psyche, on the other hand, are "internal by definition" and cannot be treated as things "save by doing violence to their nature." That difference led Durkheim to expect that "once the principle of sociological method is universally acknowledged," it would challenge the imperial claims of that other human science and "make up the lead of psychology, which it owes solely to its prior historical place" (1982, 71–72).

As it happened, however, the more Durkheim came to view social facts as "collective representations," the more he was driven to admit that "all sociology is a psychology" while still insisting that it was a "psychology *sui generis*," that social facts occupy "*a different substratum*" in the mind from individual psychological facts properly so called (1982, 247, 40). It is as if he hoped that italics alone could somehow make his problematic distinction real, for the existence of his discipline depended upon it. That is why he, like Husserl, kept incessant watch along the border with psychology, fending off encroachments by proponents of psychology's universal application—but also those that issued, more disturbingly, from his own meditations.

He tried various formulations. With his mind on customs and tradition and education, he called it "supremely evident that the beliefs and practices which are handed down to us ready fashioned by previous generations" are social facts and noted that the "vast majority of social phenomena come to us in this way." But his need for consistency and completion could not be satisfied by mere majorities, however vast. The vexing issue of "the crowd"—always so central for French social thought—had to be tackled, and Durkheim found a way. He managed to corral "outbursts of collective emotion in a gathering" into his disciplinary domain as well. It seems that unquestioned customs and mass rage both involved thoughts and feelings installed in the psyche by "external coercion" and so—unlikely companions though they seem—belonged to the psychological "substratum" he has defined as distinctly social (56).

No wonder Durkheim fell back on nineteenth-century tropes of force and energy when insisting upon the coherence of the disciplinary object he had to posit. He was at his most Comtean, speaking of a "special energy" that animated each individual in a crowd because "it is derived from its collective origin," and of a single "force … propelling them in the same direction." Steven Lukes sees the great weakness of Durkheim's sociology in its neglect of a "micro theory" dealing with the meaningful actions of individuals—and he rightly blames a methodology that ruled such considerations "out of bounds" *on principle* (18). Such was the strength of Durkheim's implacable determination to *define*.

In other respects, however, Durkheim shows the signature disdain for nineteenth-century conventions of various sorts. So, for example, one of the "surprises" sociology has in store for the "ordinary man" is the claim that "crime is necessary" to society and that the criminal "plays a normal role in social life" (101–102). Like doctors willing to engage

dispassionately with excrement and recognize its functions, sociologists could see that social cohesion depends upon limits and that limits cannot exist without something to limit—and criminal behavior provides exactly that. The elaborate matter-of-factness of his tone as he delivers the shocking news betrays the satisfaction Durkheim felt in distinguishing himself from the common man in this way.

His attitude is much the same when he discusses the great nineteenth-century thinkers—he is looking back, and down. There is some praise for Comte—who at least recognized that "social phenomena are natural facts" in his "general philosophical statements" and wrote one chapter in his *Cours* that was of real value. But, alas, his obsession with the "sequence of evolution" drove him to bypass the proposed science before it had been "worked out" and he concentrated instead on the "wholly subjective idea" of the "progress of humanity" instead of the social facts of "particular societies which are born, develop and die independently of one another" (48, 63–64). Durkheim recognizes different degrees of development among known societies—but he sees no evidence of a unifying ladder, as it were. What the evidence does call for is a typology, an essentially synchronic taxonomy based on observable criteria.

For his part, Herbert Spencer is regularly chastised, beginning with the very first page of the introduction when the reader learns that "in the whole of Spencer's work the methodological problem has no place" and that his "voluminous" sociological studies have "hardly any other purpose then to show how the law of universal evolution is applied to societies" (48). When Spencer crops up in subsequent discussions he serves as an object lesson, showing how fatal to his sociology was the absence of methodological rigor. Again and again, it turns out that Spencer failed to properly define things in accordance with their actual nature. He didn't define "simple society" though it was essential to his scheme (112), he didn't really distinguish social facts because he was using them to validate an evolutionary theory inclusive of biology and even cosmology (179), and worst of all, he didn't distinguish sociology from psychology (127, 133). The basic problem was that, in general, throughout his work, "a certain conception of social reality is substituted for that reality" (65).

Durkheim would not make that mistake—or any of the others his predecessors had made. Completely detached at last, free of all subjective impulses and presuppositions, the science of sociology could start from scratch, founded upon an "object all its own."

3.2.2   *G.E. Moore (1873–1958)*

What, then, is good? How is good to be defined? (G. E. Moore [1903] 2005, 6)

The first chapter of *Principia Ethica* is called "The Subject Matter of Ethics." Not a word-for-word reflection of Durkheim's first chapter title—"What is a Social Fact?"—but close enough. The book reads as if G.E. Moore had been standing by as social scientists turned social facts into things and abstained from value judgments—ready, willing, and able to build *his* science out of what *their* science had banished from their domain. In effect, he envisioned a perfectly compartmentalized neighboring discipline. Moore's "science of ethics" would depend upon a uniquely non-natural and undefinable predicate—"good," the name of a simple quality that Moore had discerned in the welter of events that make up daily life within which "the good" ("the" makes all the difference) subsisted as a certain kind of situation Moore's science would define with the aid of its first principle.

His procedure was, of course, systematic. First, he took on ethics as it is encountered to begin with—in the messy terrain constituted by "our everyday judgments" where people talk indiscriminately about good and bad people and actions—but also good and bad meals and schools and who knows what else. Clearly, "there are far too many persons, things, and events in the world, past, present, or to come, for a discussion of their individual merits to be embraced by any science" (1–3). Moore began, that is, with that same sense of an uncontainable, incomprehensible world that conditioned the way modernist creators typically conceived their various works. That phrasing—"persons, things, and events" coupled with the "past, present, or to come"—registers his sense of the vast unraveling within which he assigned himself the analytic philosopher's particular task: to make sense, where it was possible, and exorcise confusion where it was not. Moore's prose—so very English—is restrained in tone, but often elaborate in structure, especially as he works his way through a legacy of useless ways of seeing and doing things until he reaches his own transparently simple resolutions. One is left feeling that what Moore asserts should have been obvious all along—and would have been, if it weren't for the hopelessly confused doctrines inherited and promulgated by his predecessors and the sloppy habits of mind that pass for thinking among regular folk.

Of all the clarifying moves Moore made as he abstracted his primary object (the property that will help define "what is good," or "the good") from the cacophony, none was more compelling than his conclusion that this property, "good," could not be defined at all! Millennia of futile debate rendered ridiculous at a stroke. So much wasted ink and energy, alas, but what liberation! Now Moore could begin again, from a real and present foundation—from "good" understood as an absolutely simple quality (compare Wittgenstein's terminal "objects" in the *Tractatus*, see Chap. 5). To be sure, before Moore could arrive at this conclusion—a perfect example of modernist origins/foundations—he had to clear a path, this time clogged with inherited ideas about what constitutes a "definition." Above all (it should be obvious, but it needed to be said anyway, because extraneous threats must be specifically neutralized), founders of a science of ethics were *not* interested in what is commonly understood by the term "definition," namely, the kind found in dictionaries. A sample of Moore's tactics:

> But this is not the sort of definition I am asking for. Such a definition can never be of ultimate importance to any study except lexicography. If I wanted that kind of definition I should have to consider in the first place how people generally used the word "good"; but my business is not with its proper usage, as established by custom. … What I want to discover is the nature of that object or idea, and about this I am extremely anxious to arrive at an agreement. (6)

Durkheim would have understood perfectly.

The reason "good" cannot be defined is because the quality it refers to has no parts. It is, in this respect, like "yellow." But, unlike "yellow," "good" refers to a *non-natural* quality.[9] Moore's discovery of this quality allowed him to identify a "naturalistic fallacy" in the logic of his predecessors. For as long as an intuitively accessible non-natural quality "good" was accepted, that fallacy would act as a sentinel on the border of Moore's domain, deflecting intruders, including especially—and yet again—that ubiquitous interloper, psychology.

The naturalistic fallacy occurs when ethical philosophies fail to distinguish certain regularly co-occurring properties from each other—when, for example, Hedonism mistakenly reduces the non-natural quality "good"

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[9] Evil, beautiful, and ugly are the other non-natural predicates Moore identifies. They are also non-physical, invisible, intangible—but intuitively discernible in ways that depend ultimately on "taste."

to the natural (psychological) quality "pleasure" and proceeds to define good as pleasure. It would obviously be idiotic to conclude that because sugar is both white and sweet, that "white" means "sweet." (Moore stressed the idiocy. He sounds as if he is spelling out a lesson for a slow-witted school boy. The reader feels the pressure. One *wants* to be on Moore's side.) If people don't make *that* mistake, it is because both the predicates involved are natural—sense accessible. But when it comes to the non-natural predicate "good," men who presumed to call themselves philosophers made precisely that elementary error for millennia.

Yet all one has to do to detect the fallacy is follow the linguistic turn: focus on language and place the sentence "pleasure is pleasure" next to the sentence "pleasure is good." It is immediately evident that they are not synonymous and that, while "good" may (sometimes) be a quality that things which are also pleasant have, it does not *mean* pleasure. It is absurdly simple—but beautifully so—a *coup*.

Wielding this logical rapier, Moore settled accounts with the historical pantheon. He touched on Plato (who got a pat on the back for realizing that good is an "intrinsic value" of its own kind), Aristotle (whose virtues were, all too obviously, mere means to what is good in itself), and Kant (who hopelessly conflated moral and natural law—the naturalistic fallacy writ large), but he gave most attention to immediate predecessors, to *Professor* Sedgwick, the utilitarian, and especially to *Mister* Herbert Spencer, "perhaps the best known" among "the very numerous and very popular" (not a good thing in the professionalized academy now being instituted) writers responsible for the "modern vogue of evolutionism."[10]

Many modernist thinkers found an ideal target in Spencer, in whom an always suspect popular opinion and evolutionist convictions combined forces. Moore added extra spin by suggesting (after selecting Spencer in the first place) that he was not so propitious a choice after all because "Mr. Spencer's doctrine, it must be owned, does not offer the *clearest* example of the naturalistic fallacy used to support Evolutionist Ethics." What it does is:

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[10] Moore skewers Spencer immediately, in his typical way, as he introduces the fallacy: "It is absolutely useless, so far as Ethics is concerned, to prove, as Mr. Spencer tries to do, that increase of pleasure coincides with increase of life, unless good means something different from either life or pleasure. He might as well try to prove that an orange is yellow by shewing that it is always wrapped up in paper."

use the naturalistic fallacy in details; but with regard to his fundamental principles, the following doubts occur: Is he fundamentally a Hedonist? And, if so, is he a naturalistic hedonist? … Does he hold that a tendency to increase life is merely a *criterion* of good conduct? Or does he hold that such increase in life is marked out by nature as an end at which we ought to aim? … his language in various places would give color to all these hypotheses, though some of them are mutually inconsistent. I will try to discuss the main points. (46)

Poor Spencer. New standards were obviously being set—and none too soon, it seems, for the old standards had countenanced a way of thinking so undisciplined that a really qualified commentator, one who had defined his field and methods with sufficient rigor, could do no more than "try" to discuss the main points made by its most prominent representative.

After Moore finished with his predecessors, he used his foundational predicate to identify and define "the good" in itself, not as a means, but as that which has the quality "good" intrinsically. He offered two kinds of "complex organic unities" summarily characterized as "personal affections" and "aesthetic enjoyments"—with a crucial proviso: the affections and enjoyments must involve people and objects that are actually worthy, which would boil down to "judgments of taste" (189, 192–193).

In *After Virtue* (1984), Alasdair MacIntyre was out to update Aristotle's socio-biological functionalism in hopes of reviving a battered Marxism in some form by at least moving beyond bourgeois "emotivism." His experience of working-class realities in mid-twentieth-century Great Britain allowed him to give, by way of contrast, an unforgettable image of Moore as a darling of the Bloomsbury group—which had received his *Principia Ethica* with rapturous enthusiasm. He cited Maynard Keynes, who was present as Moore and Woolf, and all their friends persuaded themselves that their personal tastes in matters of art and love were actually neo-platonic universals that their supremely cultivated sensibilities enabled them to intuit.

The fact that they were so easy to persuade is what makes this anecdote relevant here. As MacIntyre puts it, they envisaged "the whole of the past … as a burden that Moore helped them cast off" in discussions of love and art in which, "as Keynes tells us … 'victory was with those who could speak with the greatest appearance of clear, undoubting conviction and could best use the accents of infallibility' and Keynes goes on to describe the effectiveness of Moore's gasps of incredulity and head shaking, of Strachey's grim silences and Lowes Dickinson's shrugs" (16–17).

MacIntyre calls all this "a great silliness … but the great silliness of highly intelligent and perceptive people," so it is worth "asking if we can discern any clues as to why they accepted Moore's naïve and complacent apocalypticism (16)." This chapter is providing some of those clues.

3.2.3   Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913)

In setting up the science of language within the overall study of speech, I have outlined the whole of linguistics. (Ferdinand de Saussure [1916] 1966, 17)

It is not until the third chapter of the *Course in General Linguistics* that we reach the title "The Object of Linguistics." The titles of the first two chapters, however, make this a difference without distinction as compared to Durkheim and Moore.[11] The first chapter (5 pages) is called "A Glance at the History of Linguistics" (no more than a glance was called for) and the second (2 pages) is called "Subject Matter and Scope of Linguistics; its Relations with the Other Sciences." It amounts to a brisk house-cleaning operation in which old-fashioned diachronic studies of language evolution are allowed to retain a place under the broad umbrella of "linguistics" understood as the study of "all manifestations of human speech." The relevance of other sciences—like sociology and physiology—is admitted under that broad umbrella as well. But it is only when "The Object of Linguistics" is actually *defined* that those "other viewpoints" that have had linguists "going around in circles" for too long can be banished at last— along with "the superficial notions of the general public (16)." At that point, a *science* of language becomes possible and serious work begins. *Langue*, the synchronic code, the grammar of a language, makes that science possible thanks to the abstraction of this "well-defined object" from "the heterogeneous mass of speech facts" (14).

Another prototype of academic self-definition and containment, then, to be discussed in some detail in the section on Structuralism (Chap. 5). Here, the point is simple, categorical: Saussure's enormously influential modernist science of language was founded through the same basic gestures and tropes as the other disciplines considered in this chapter.

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[11] The fact that this "book" was actually assembled by students from their notes on Saussure's lectures may account for this divergence.

3.2.4   *I.A. Richards (1893–1979)*

The first chapter of *Principles of Literary Criticism* is called "The Chaos of Critical Theories"—and I.A. Richards was, if it be possible, even more aghast at the spectacle of past confusion than were the other founders:

> if we now turn to consider what are the results yielded by the best minds pondering these questions [of artistic value] in the light of the eminently accessible experiences provided by the Arts, we discover an almost empty garner. A few conjectures, a supply of admonitions, many acute isolated observations, some brilliant guesses, much oratory and applied poetry, inexhaustible confusion, a sufficiency of dogma, no small stock of prejudices, whimsies and crotchets. (6)

Richards concluded that "of such as these, it may be said without exaggeration, is extant critical theory composed." To ensure that his readers are aware of the scope of this archly phrased indictment, he mentions names. Beginning with Aristotle, Longinus, and Horace and ending with Coleridge, Carlyle, and Matthew Arnold—he provides a "few specimens of the most famous utterances of each" to justify the overall assertion. Another list, another long paragraph—and an impression of historical chaos is established, over which Richards presides by implication of his controlling style. Obviously, only a completely fresh start on the soundest possible foundation could dissipate this fog of *doxa*. The style is infectious. Delicious sensations of authority attend it.

Shifting to what he seemed to think was a moment of becoming modesty, Richards allows that "some of these *apices* of critical theory, indeed many of them, are profitable starting points for reflection" but (having relieved us of the suspicion that Aristotle was actually stupid) he moves on to the real point, which is that "neither together, nor singly, nor in any combination do they give what is required." And what is required? By now we know roughly what to expect. Someone who feels supremely qualified to give an incontrovertible answer to that portentous question is about to give it. "Explanations" are required, explanations that answer "the central question, what is the value of the arts, why are they worth the keenest hours of the best minds, and what is their place in the system of human endeavors?" (7).

So there it is again. To build a disciplinary compartment among other such compartments by appropriate abstraction of criteria that will define what needs explaining (in this case, the value of art) and provide the

methods and the technical language in which the explanations can be expressed. Some more preliminary work has to be done first, however. Richards has to free the reader from several specific illusions, particularly those imposed by "prescientific speculation" and by "ordinary conversation," before he can proceed. That meant, above all, that the "paralyzing apparition Beauty" and a "flock of equally bogus entities" that had long dominated the language of criticism had to be exposed for the "Mystic Beings" they are. Also some of "a less august nature"—like "Design, Form, Rhythm, Expression" and other such "*vacua* in discourse"— had to be expunged from the language of criticism (19–20, 33). For Richards, attending to tradition, lacking words were everywhere.

It is not until Chapter 6 ("Value as an Ultimate Idea") that Richards offers his affirmative claim: in "modern times," the chaos of tradition is superseded by a simple question: can value be explained by psychology? He praises G.E. Moore for "brilliant statements" in his arguments against psychology but, alas, it was all for naught. Moore's "cryptic account" of the alternative—invisible and undefinable qualities hovering about like wraiths at a *séance*—would not hold up against science in the long run. Having dispatched his most credible rival, Richards proceeds to Chapter 7 ("A Psychological Theory of Value") and introduces his program. He was not intending to found an exact science in *The Principles of Literary Criticism*. He was frank to admit that the science of psychology had not reached maturity. While he looked forward to that day, he wanted only to claim for now that "a general outline of kind of thing a mind is has begun to take shape." That outline, in turn, meant that "enough is known for an analysis of the mental events which make up the reading of a poem to be attempted." And this he does in Chapter 16—called "The Analysis of a Poem" (Note the "The," unthinkable today). He offers a visual aid (Fig. 3.1):

This graphic is worth a closer look. It is hard for me to imagine how any literary critic, in any era, could be so positioned as to find it illuminating. The actual discussions of levels I–VI are classic Richards'—witty, categorical, dogmatic, and of interest on their own. But why the diagram? Why the little logos distinguishing "auditory verbal image" from "articulatory verbal image," the little springs that stand for emotions and the arrow standing for thoughts of other things and situations? By all accounts, Richards was a passionate and brilliant reader and teacher, not unusually reductive in his substantive critical work. Yet he thought this image would help define the discipline of literary criticism.
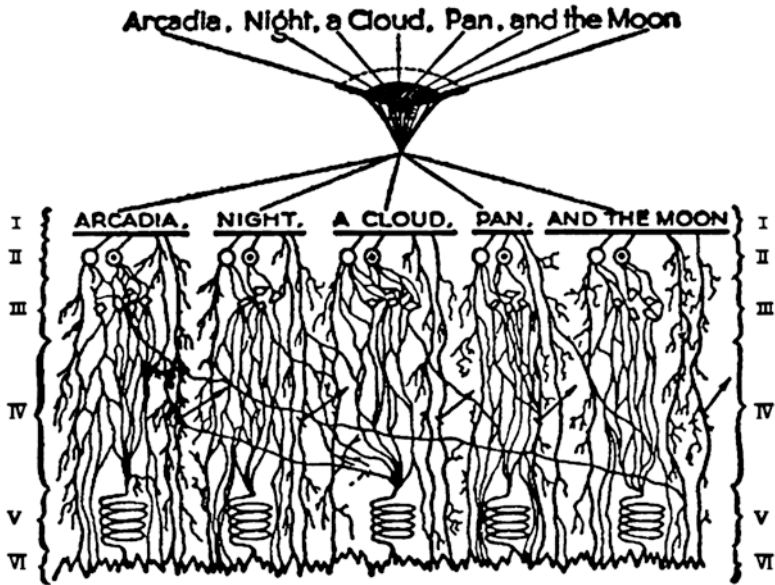
Fig. 3.1   Reading a poem: a neurological mapping

While researching this book, I confess I took a certain satisfaction in thinking (hoping?) that I had recovered something of the aims and motives of a lot of very different people in very different settings, had managed to get some sense of "what it was like" to be this one or that one in relation to some argument or figure. But this is beyond me. I can see that Richards took an interesting discussion of why images are not really that central to the impact of poetry and he *attached* levels II and III to it. I can see that his discussion of the role of incipient action impulses in shaping attitudes "goes with" with level VI—but why do it at all? Why did Richards think the visual attachment was revealing?

Certainly, this diagram testifies to the grip of psychology on the modernist imagination.[12] Could the value of the diagram have been purely totemic? Were the sheer associations charged with some power—like contagious and homeopathic magic in Frazer's classic treatment? Was the depiction serving as a complex symbol of the integrative function of language in human experience? If so, then it will serve here as an introduction

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[12] See Mark Micale *The Mind of Modernism* (2004) for a revealing overview.

to a veritable fetish in the modernist academy: the chart, the diagram, sometimes even formulas—visual tropes of definition and containment, to be more extensively discussed in Chap. 5.

So, without actually following a handbook called *How to Found a Modernist Academic Discipline,* the authorities just described proceeded with remarkable consistency. The rhetoric they deployed hammered home a simple message: we must exorcise the past and start anew; we must attend to what we can observe directly and build explanations on the basis of those observations; above all, we must define precisely the object of study by abstracting it from the welter of senseless historical events and mindless daily routines, distinguishing it systematically as well from the objects of neighboring disciplines. Only if we organize the vast and intricate field of human phenomena into such compartments can we hope, at last, to make some progress—not because progress has been granted to us by God or Nature, but because we have decided upon it.[13]

All these discipline-defining books were short. They were not manifestoes exactly, but they had some of the same qualities. They presented parameters within which empirical work might unfold over years to come. They did no more than sample such work, by way of illustration, for these treatises were self-consciously intended as founding documents—intended as "origins" of a new kind. And, while they might sample the work of benighted predecessors, it was only to show how misguided they had been; there was no credible legacy to build on. The most salient feature is the overall sense of authorial entitlement, the feeling that one had a perfect right to say things like: "What, then, is good? How is good to be defined?" or "In setting up the science of language within the overall study of speech, I have outlined the whole of linguistics" or "The qualifications of a good critic are three." Try to imagine contemporary academics in good standing in the humanities presenting their work in such terms.

A sample, then, of well-defended compartments in the modernist academy, of disciplines as analogues of artworks and their genres. "Well-defended" is not too strong a term. Much of the rhetoric, verbal and visual, that these creators deployed around their domains relied on figures

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[13] It is interesting to notice that, from the point of view of a French poststructuralist like Julia Kristeva, this modernist compulsion to compartmentalize looks like "totalizing fragmentation." That paradoxical characterization nicely highlights why the Cartesian subject, in its positivist form, can only totalize (its prime directive) by way of compartmentalizing. That subject itself is unexamined and so (unlike Kantian, Hegelian, Husserlian versions) is "outside" of all phenomena presented to it—there is as yet no phenomenological immanence.

of purity and contamination, and this is what accounts for the ferocious debates that broke out over the ensuing decades—debates about whether or not some issue at hand qualified as "philosophy" or "anthropology" or "history" or whatever. And, of course, the stakes would be that much higher when the whole idea of—the very institutions of—these modernist disciplines finally came under attack.[14]

It will be no surprise then, when we get to Part IV, to find Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, and all the rest of them taking such delight in figures of transgression, dispersion, and contamination at the expense of categorical purities and ab-solutes (not soluble, not mixable) of all kinds. In Anglo-American contexts, the politics of academic postmodernism will play out in the same conceptual arena, broadly construed. The rise of "interdisciplinary studies" in itself, of course—but the unity and purity of the disciplines would be eroded from within as well. The multiplication of perspectives and "discourses"—women, gays, ethnicities—but also, in the fabric of "theory" itself as it ramified across the humanities, the reach for margins, for multiple readings and *aporias*, for problematics that eschew solutions. The uncontainable play of Nietzschean forces that *drove* the modernists to abstraction was *welcomed* by postmodernists determined to participate in it—the only reality.

Writing, writing, writing.

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[14] Margaret Mead was my advisor at Columbia in the 1970s. She was a student of Franz Boas, a disciplinary founder of American Anthropology at the beginning of the twentieth century. Only a few decades from modernist founding to postmodern crisis, then—but in the heat of battle it felt to all concerned as if ancient testaments were at issue.

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Phenomenology

Therefore, if we think of a phenomenology developed as an intuitively *apriori* science purely according to eidetic method, all its eidetic researches are nothing else but uncoverings of the all-embracing *eidos* [essence], transcendental ego as such, which comprises all the possibility-variants of the de facto ego and this ego itself *qua* possibility. Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* (1929, 71)

If the modernist moment can be characterized in terms of self-splitting, then the Hegelian aphorism on this book's title page could not ask for more striking confirmation than the phenomenological reduction, Husserl's *epoche*—here described in terms he came to favor in his later work. It was the ultimate act of abstraction. The entire life experience of the philosopher, as personal-historical (de facto in the quote above) ego, was to be "detached" from itself, as it were, and treated as the "object" of philosophical inquiry. Descartes' epistemological prison was transformed from something one hoped to escape, with God's help, as quickly as possible to the enduring basis of philosophical contemplation. An anonymous creator-self necessarily emerged in tandem with that abstraction. It was Husserl's transcendental ego, to whose essence-grasping vision the de facto ego of the philosopher would now appear as one (actualized) possibility among an indefinite number of possible ego/worlds to be accessed by the method of "eidetic variation" in philosophic fantasy.

Notice that the transcendental ego did not merely *grasp* essences in philosophic contemplation; it was the source, by way of its "intentionality," of world-constituting essences. Could there be a more ambitious expression of the modernist aspiration to author meaning in nature and history? In the context of this narrative, Husserl looks like the Western mind's last desperate lunge toward comprehension of an incomprehensible world. He feels inevitable.

With the centrality of this distinction for modern phenomenology established, we will turn to Heidegger for a more accessible (and pertinent) account of phenomenology's pivotal role in this story. Heidegger was both a principal foil and an enduring, if subterranean, influence on postmodern theory.

But first, four very general and (once again) organizational and rhetorical elements of Husserl's work show how this discipline and this disciplinary founder belong to the same moment as Durkheim, Moore, Saussure, and Richards:

1. Husserl was obsessed with identifying the foundational elements of his enterprise, the essences (*eidos*) that would distinguish "regions" of conscious experience and apodictically guarantee their universality.
2. He was as obsessed with method and definition, perpetually tinkering with ("purifying") boundaries that would distinguish philosophical activities from each other and philosophy itself from other enterprises, especially psychology.
3. He wanted the empirical sciences to found themselves on the basis of the regions of experience identified by phenomenology. Such foundations, he hoped, would rein in the excesses of modern enterprises, especially those with technological application, shaped as they were by sciences that did not understand themselves. In this forlorn hope, a remnant of nineteenth-century philosophy's orientation toward the historical world was still operating in Husserl, as it was in Adorno and Horkheimer.[1]
4. The gesture that abstracts the Transcendental Ego from the Personal-Historical Ego is also called "abstention" (as in abstaining from judgment and belief about what presents itself phenomenally). Under that rubric, it shows itself as a more comprehensive version of the social sciences' fact/value distinction.

[1] Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* ([1954] 1970) and Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) ought to be read together.

Husserl played an influential role in the French academy right through the 1960s. The emphasis he placed in his early work on phenomenology as a kind of super-science that provided conceptual (eidetic) foundations for the empirical sciences made him part of the Kantian lineage and complement to French philosophers of science like Georges Canguilhem and Gaston Bachelard, who passed along their version of Husserl in a "philosophy of the concept" (as opposed to a "philosophy of the subject") to Althusser, Lacan, and Foucault, especially—and to Derrida as well (see Baring 2011). And when attention was given to Husserl's as yet unpublished and untranslated later works, available in the archives at the University of Leuven, he became even more relevant. Those works dealt with "genesis" and "the other" at length and were consulted and cited extensively by Merleau-Ponty and by Derrida in ways that made Husserl very much a part of the poststructuralist return to history, the body, and performance. But it was Heidegger's existential phenomenology and his critique of Western metaphysics that most directly shaped the emergence of French theory. For that reason—and thanks to its relatively accessible presentation—*Being and Time* ([1929] 1969) is best suited to our present purposes and what follows is, in effect, a gloss on the basics of phenomenology as depicted in that work.

What is ultimately at issue in phenomenology is easy to state, but difficult to grasp, not because it is complicated, but because it is so simple. Consciousness doesn't exist the way a thing exists. It has a different kind of existence. That kind of existence cannot be apprehended unless it is approached in a suitable way. All efforts to think of consciousness as a mental entity with special sorts of mental properties (i.e., as analogous to a physical thing) are doomed from the outset (I would recommend, once again, the first chapter of Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* (1949). It gives a lucid account of this profoundly mistaken analogy and its roots in the seventeenth-century epistemology directed at readers unacquainted with phenomenology.)

Martin Heidegger called the *kind* of being that consciousness has "Being-in-the-World." I will use the expression "embodied mind" to convey the same idea. Heidegger also parsed the word *Dasein* in naming consciousness, to emphasize its constituents—*Da-sein*. That literally translates as "There-being"—which sums up the essential claim very neatly.

The kind of existence that sheer things have is, so to speak, enclosed. Consider a rock on a path. A path has direction—it has a "there." For a rock, there is no such thing as a path. But the "there" of a path is as much a constituent of a person's conscious existence as the "here" of one's own

point of view. Or look at it this way: a rock may be in contact with the ground—but it cannot *touch* the ground.

If you are thinking "that's because a rock hasn't got a central nervous system," you have fallen back into the science-inspired mode of objectification which phenomenology is out to dismantle. Nervous systems may indeed be necessary conditions, as a matter of scientific fact, for touching—but that's beside the point. The lived experience of "touching" has nothing to do with facts of neurology, but with the phenomenology of touching itself.

Do we suppose that premodern people with no knowledge of neurology don't know what "touching" is? It is important to dwell upon this question. It may help to "carve out," as it were, the phenomenon of touching itself—and, by extension, the whole realm of experience that concerns phenomenology.

Back to the rock, in contact with, but not touching the path. Beyond the sensation itself, touching is directional—just as paths are. Not only can a rock not feel, it has no orientation in the world, no directionality in time or space, no implicit connections to anything else. For a rock, the world has no *significance*.

That's why equipment is such a special kind of thing, a sort of intermediary between rocks and people. A screwdriver wouldn't *be* a screwdriver if it didn't have its orientation, its functional segments all "pointing" to their purpose. It would not be "ready-to-hand," as Heidegger put it, but "present-at-hand"—a sheer thing, like a rock.

To say that we are embodied mind, "being-in-the-world," does not imply that screwdrivers are conscious. But it does imply that we are conscious only *through* the totality of oriented things that constitute our world *as* a world—screwdrivers, paths, tables, chairs, hands and feet, and, yes, rocks too can come in handy, or, in the limiting case, prove to be interesting, even beautiful, strewn across a silent landscape.

Unlike a sheer thing, which exists in an enclosed way, consciousness exists, not merely in an open way, that's not radical enough—consciousness literally ex-ists, which means it *is* outside itself. Hence, "there-being." Once that becomes evident across the board, a different way of thinking becomes possible.

In the case of the screwdriver, for example, you could say, just to get the idea started, that you exist not just "through," but *as* the pointing of the screwdriver. That idea takes on more force when you begin to realize the general implication, which is that you exist as *all* the orientations of *all* the

things that constitute your world—that is, all their interrelated pointings, some in the foreground, most in the background—and, finally, you exist as that which weaves all their pointings together *as* a world.[2]

Hence, "being-in-the-world."

Or take time. You ex-ist outside yourself in time constantly. That is, outside the present. This is easy to see. Just monitor your activity without interrupting it (as suggested by Husserl's abstention). Notice how completely your present moments are infused with past moments that "put" you in your present context and with future moments that are constantly in the process of actualizing—or not. If you do that, you will find that you, as you are now, exist almost entirely in past and future moments. And then you will notice that those moments merge with the directionalities and orientations of all the significant things and settings that make up your world. Your past and future consist of possibilities, implicit in those things and settings, some irrevocably actualized and others not yet. The future just *is* possibility and you ex-ist *as* possibility. The present moment, as an instant, can't actually be experienced at all. If you try to "fix" it with your attention, you will find that it has not quite arrived or just slipped away. Even Husserl, for all his emphasis on "presence," called the present instant an "ideal"—and Derrida would make much of that, as we shall see.

At first, as an objectifying modern accustomed to thinking of yourself as a present-at-hand mental entity lodged somehow "in" your body, you may be tempted to say, "Oh, nonsense, I exist entirely in the present and, in the present, I have *memories* of the past and *plans* for the future that condition my present activity."

But that's just how things look to you when you adopt that objectifying attitude toward yourself—which, as a modern, you automatically do whenever discussions like this get under way. Then you appear before the gaze of your own mind's eye as a mental-thing that "has" memories and plans (and feelings and so on). But when you are actually living your life you are not really like that at all—you are the way I have been describing you.

Consult Proust for confirmation.

Finally, to complete the inventory of your existence as being-in-the-world, in addition to the pointings of things and the determinations and possibilities of time, there are the people with whom you share the world—

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[2] You might feel like saying that the screwdriver is *really* a piece of plastic and metal with such-and-such shape and so-and-so mass and so on. Its *functions*, you might want to say, are *really* knowledge that makers and users of screwdrivers have in their Cartesian mind/brains. When you talk this way, you use sciencey language (that is true in its own explanatory way) to *cover up* how you actually live in the world.

a world that embodies you all, more or less intensively, more or less reciprocally, depending on the circumstances.

Heidegger thought of his "existential phenomenology" as radically opposed to the "transcendental phenomenology" of his teacher, Edmund Husserl—mainly because he had jettisoned the transcendental ego. On Heidegger's account, that remnant of Platonic/Kantian Idealism had to go if consciousness was to recognize itself as the meaning of Being unfolding temporally, and nothing besides, nothing transcendent. But that does not mean that Heidegger somehow eluded the modernist moment. The characteristic sense of self-splitting was displaced in his thought to a sense of himself as divided between an asocial and authentic "being-toward-death" and a socialized "they-self" unavoidably "fallen" into "average everydayness." In a way, Heidegger's urgent phrasing makes it a more cogent and value-laden expression of the special sense of destiny that animated the modernist creator.

It is also worth noting how much Heidegger's account of time had in common with Henri Bergson's distinction between experienced time (elastic duration) and measured time as well as the affinities between both and, as already suggested, Proust's literary treatment of time. The point is that, for all these modernists, time was no longer just an objective container of unfolding historical and natural events; it was, more primordially, a dimension of the *psyche*.

With temporality understood as elastic "stretches" of experience, sometimes punctual, as with an abrupt interruption, sometimes indefinitely extended, as when we "lose track" of it (meaning clock time), so immersed are we in duration. Time flies when you're having fun and slows to crawl when you are waiting for the test results. It seems likely that the internalization of time[3] was an aspect of the gesture of abstraction, giving modernist creators the authority, as it were, to simply stipulate—by fiat, by definition—the eternal instants upon which logic, grammar, and code depend. As we shall see, many French poststructuralists—steeped as they were in Classical philosophy, thanks to the French educational system—may have been too quick to read Plato's distinction between Being (the Ideas) and becoming into this. The modernist moment supplied motives of its own for seeking shelter from the

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[3] See Husserl's *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness* ([1928] 1964). See also Ann Banfield "Time Passes: Virginia Woolf, Post-Impressionism, and Cambridge Time" in *Poetics Today* Fall, 2003.

flux of becoming in the coherence of formal structure, though Heidegger and Derrida could still be right to think that the foundational categories of Western Metaphysics determined the space within which historically more particular moves have been made since.

Phenomenology's influence on postmodernism would be most directly realized after it was temporalized by Heidegger, historicized by Kojeve—and then folded into a critique of Structuralism.[4] In that encounter, French "post-structuralism" was born. Once the critique of the sign got under-way, all of phenomenology, going back to Hegel, would come in for with-ering criticism as well, as we shall see. But something very basic went largely unnoticed by the most influential French critics of "the philosophy of the subject"—though it should be more evident to Anglo-American intellectuals: *the phenomenological standpoint was essential to the emergence of postmodern thought, and not merely as a foil*. A narcissism of small differences was often at work when French theory launched its attack on Sartre, especially, and the tradition he represented.[5]

First of all—and going back to Hegel—phenomenology was funda-mentally a "romantic" effort to reunite mind and world, to heal the breach of Cartesian dualism. Simply characterizing consciousness as Being-in-the-world, as Heidegger did, announces that aim. With their sweeping cri-tique of the philosophy of the subject, the creators of French theory obscured crucial differences between the modern *cogito* and the subject of phenomenology. Just compare, for example, Descartes' sixth discourse—which calls upon modern scientific man to become "Lord and Master of Nature"—with the urgent critiques of science and technology by Husserl and Heidegger (Husserl *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* [1954] 1970 [originally written in 1936]; Heidegger "The Question Concerning Technology" [1954] 1977). Phenomenology was opposed from the beginning to reducing the world to Galileo's particles and Newton's equations and relegating all meaning and value to the sub-ject. It celebrated the concrete and denounced the abstract. It was deeply suspicious of Enlightenment utilitarianism and instrumental reason and deeply critical of the technological domination of nature and society.

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[4] See L. Lawlor "Phenomenology and Metaphysics, and Chaos: on the Fragility of the Event in Deleuze" (2012, 104–106).

[5] Gary Gutting calls Sartre "the perfect whipping boy for the attack on Subjectivity" (2013, 81–82).

In other words, phenomenology *aspired* to a sort of "postmodernity" from the beginning. That means that *the basic aims and values of phenomenology were retained by postmodern projects.* If I had to pick the main reason for the misunderstandings that attended French and American efforts to communicate about "theory," this would be a leading candidate.[6] When Americans deconstructed foundational categories and refused essentialism, they were typically thinking of "natural kinds" in a positivist sense—of race or sexuality as biological givens for example. But when the French went after "the concept" for doing violence to the real, they were typically thinking of how Kantian categories or Hegelian Dialectic or Husserlian essences contained and determined all possible experience. They were lashing out at a "resolution" of Cartesian dualism by a phenomenological subject that only *pretended* to give the world (the object, the body, the other, temporality) its due—and found nothing to contemplate at the end of the day but itself.[7]

So when the *textualistes* and the "philosophers of desire" joined forces to denounce the phenomenological tradition and put postmodern theory in its stead, they were attacking it for *failing to realize those basic aims and values.* They were attacking it for still being caught up in modern subjectivity, conceptuality, and practice. Like humanism itself, phenomenology's re-fusion of mind and world—whether in Hegel or Heidegger—turned out to be a sham, another form of domination, an idealist form of domination, a domination of difference (object, other, time, desire) by identity (subject, the same, concept). What was wanted was the *actual* return of subjectivity to the play of disruptive events in a Nietzschean history.[8]

In their determination to do better the creators of French theory launched an attack on all fronts, a gang-bang effort to humble the proud subject of modern enterprises by showing that it was actually a *site,* a mere locus, a subjectivity divided and essentially *subjected*—to discourses, to regulatory practices, to ideological apparatuses, to pulsions of desire and repression, to anything and everything but its own free will and intentionality. But to expose the autonomy of the *cogito as a sham* is not the same thing as actually doing without it, in practice. Deleuze and Derrida didn't actually

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[6] For accounts of such mishaps, see Cusset (2008), Derrida (2001), and Mathy (2000).

[7] Compare Adorno on the "aura of materiality" that lured adherents of phenomenology away from history.

[8] Says Gary Gutting of the creators of French theory: "for each of these philosophers there is a Nietzsche who is the primary historical antecedent to his anti-Hegelianism" (2013, 84).

stop using subject-assuming pronouns in daily life. So were the ferocious attacks, the insinuating critiques, the subtlest deflations—above all, the tortured language devoting thousands of pages to avoiding conventional references to the subject and exposing the subject as an effect of such references—was it seriously intended, serious politics? It's hard to tell; so much was performance, so close to radical art. It was being openly asserted that "cultural politics" just was politics (see Danielle Marx-Scouras *The Cultural Politics of Tel Quel* (1996), discussed in Chap. 8). But all that effort, while it does suggest some awful disappointment with life as a modern self, also conjures up a lingering specter of—if not Marx—hope? Democracy *a venir* (Derrida), the freedom of *ecriture* (Barthes), performance as the scene of agency (Butler)—on and on. Even Adorno insisted on his utopian moment. Even Lacan came down on the side of desire—and of comedy. But, as we shall see, in the European context, such moments were typically experienced as heroic gestures in the face of tragic necessities and lost causes.

As for Structuralism, to which we turn in the next chapter, the autonomy and unity of the modern subject and the synchronic perfection of Structuralism's formal codes (Structuralism's "object" or "work") came to be seen as essentially affiliated, an instance of modernist intentionality as we have described it. And, in the charged political atmosphere of the day, that affiliation seemed to reflect of a parallel relation in totalizing political regimes, capitalist or communist. Abstract modernist theorizing became a political issue and postmodern theory became "post-structural" as it undermined not only the imperial codes of Structuralism but also the anonymous agent responsible for the formalisms that turned living reality into a timeless realm of "signs." Levi-Strauss denounced the subject of phenomenology in his anthropology, but *Levi-Strauss the author* presided over his abstract works as serenely removed from history as they were. Excluding the subject for methodological reasons, structuralist theory seemed in effect to be sheltering it, *incognito*, disguising humanism as a "*science de l'homme,*" protecting it from heterogeneous historical forces no theory could contain.[9]

[9] See Merquior (1987, 52) for the difference, on this crucial point, between Levi-Strauss and Foucault. This also explains why Levi-Strauss was perfectly comfortable talking about everyday subjectivity when he wasn't practicing his "science." Indeed, several of the most compelling moments in his work revolve around such anecdotes (see, e.g., the description of the French peasant custom of wine exchange in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* ([1949] 1969) and the account of a Bororo chieftain's appropriation of writing in *Tristes Tropique* ([1955] 1992)).

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The Linguistic Turn

This chapter takes its title from a landmark anthology, edited by Richard Rorty, that contains seminal papers in the analytic tradition dating from the 1930s to the 1960s. But most attention will be given to the development of Structuralism on the continent, from Saussure's linguistics already mentioned to the work of Claude Levi-Strauss. It will also focus on certain themes developed by Wittgenstein. Together, these make up the modernist treatments of language that influenced postmodern theory most directly. This chapter aims to highlight the importance of this question: what was it about language, and about "signs" more generally, that undermined the modern sense of subjectivity when signification itself became the object of academic study?[1]

5.1   A Tale of Two Wittgensteins

Thus the fate of all "philosophical problems" is this: some of them will disappear by being shown to be mistakes and misunderstandings of our language and the others will be found to be ordinary scientific questions in

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[1] "No doubt that is why Western thought took so long to think the being of language: as if it had a premonition of the danger that the naked experience of language poses for the self evidence of I think" (Michel Foucault in "The Thought from Outside" in *Foucault/Blanchot* 1987, 13).

disguise. These remarks, I think, determine the whole future of philosophy. (Moritz Schlick "The Future of Philosophy" 1932)[2]

The modernist assumption of authority verges unintentionally on self-parody in this summary announcement of the world historical significance of the linguistic turn in philosophy. But this section will pass over the quintessentially modernist project of Schlick's "Vienna Circle" as well as those of Gottlob Frege (1848–1925) and Bertrand Russell (1872–1970). They are mentioned now, by way of introduction, simply to provide context. In these projects, the creators of modern logic were working in self-conscious opposition to the historical philosophizing of the nineteenth century and the influence of Hegel in particular. They turned instead to the creation of works so abstract and self-contained that they could count as perfect paradigms of modernism as it has been described here—were it not for an even more perfect exemplar, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, composed by their student, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1950).

And "composed" is the word. The *Tractatus* ([1921] 1961, written 1913–1918) gave ultimate expression to logical positivism and its style of mind. In substance, in structure, in tone, it is the archetypal modernist work—an age grasped in thought, indeed. So "complete" was this creation that, at the age of 29, Wittgenstein felt able to announce in its Preface that he had found, "on all essential points, the final solution of the problems" of philosophy (1961, 4). And, being who he was, he gave up its practice accordingly and retired to Austria to teach grammar school mathematics and design a house for his sisters. An awed Bertrand Russell found himself unable to do fundamental work in philosophy for the rest of his long life. Wittgenstein had said, in essence, all that could be said. "In essence," because of course he hadn't actually written down all the true and all the false (but possibly true) propositions that would have constituted the final corpus of all the sciences, a complete "picture" of all the facts and possible facts in the universe. The actual sciences were far from complete and likely never would be. No, what Wittgenstein did was show what the logical characteristics a symbolism that *could* do that would have

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[2] Multiple ironies, and a lot of moral credit, attend a comparison of Bruno Latour's "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?" (2004) with Schlick's assertion that science, unlike philosophy, is actually about something. In that essay, Latour appeals for a new realism and asks "Was I wrong to participate in the invention of this field known as science studies?"

to be.[3] He had created, at a mind-boggling level of abstraction, the specs for a perfect language.

But members of the Vienna Circle, pilgrims to the Master's retreat in Austria, found that a very great deal had—in the now famous words of the final proposition of the *Tractatus*—been "passed over in silence" by that perfect language. What could not be said was not, as they believed, mere nonsense. It was simply not sense (as in not definable or referential), a very different matter. It was beauty, goodness, freedom, being—everything, in fact, that Wittgenstein himself cared most about. The idol of positive analysis turned out to be a mystic rendered mute by his own words.

But the *Tractatus* was grounded on an absence. None of the foundational atomic propositions, whose forms atomic facts shared, had actually been stated. There were no examples of such facts and propositions. If there had been examples, they would have conducted us to the edge of a minutely fine, indefinitely extended fissure dividing language from the world. The logical forms of language could "picture" the forms of facts on the other side of that absolute divide only because simple names (if we had any) would point to simple things (if we had any). But we didn't have any. The perfect fissure was assumed—justified by its glorious consequences. Wittgenstein could dismiss the absence of examples programmatically. It was an empirical problem and his subject was logic. In his youth, a humiliating encounter with Frege had taught him to scorn all naturalistic reductions—especially "psychologism," so there was no expectation that the perfect language could actually be spoken either.

One day—goes an apocryphal story—a young Italian economist with an interest in philosophy paid Wittgenstein a visit. He was a Marxist and he didn't like the idea that language and meaning were essentially independent of the material conditions of life. Conversation grew heated. "What about this," the youth demanded, flicking his downturned hand outward from beneath his chin in the characteristic Italian gesture of contempt, "what about this? Is this language?" Wittgenstein stared at the young man's hand. The picture of the fissure between symbol and world began to dissolve; the flicking hand *was* (part of) contempt. Sublime and world-spanning logic (beyond all "empirical cloudiness," the "hardest thing there is," the "purest crystal" (1953, 97)) billowed like gossamer and began to melt into the living world.

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[3] He also (this is less often remarked) showed how the *world* would have to be in order for such a symbolism to be viable.

So Wittgenstein went back to Cambridge and spent the rest of his life doing for logic and language what Hume had once done for experience: rendering it contingent. Now there could be no conclusion to philosophy's problems. They arose in specific contexts, consequences of specific confusions. The most accomplished abstractionist of the modernist age was returned to temporality, to history, to speech and performance—to the "human form of life" in its myriad actuality. That is why the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) is full of little stories, often absurd and comical, for they are meant to render how things might go on at the very margins of the "language games" that human beings could possibly play—or maybe not.

The trajectory just described represents the passage from (Enlightenment) modernity and modernism to what came to be called postmodernism. It does so with unique cogency, since Wittgenstein made the journey on his own, in serious dialogue only with his past self, the author of the *Tractatus*. But the *Philosophical Investigations* conveys a sense of the human form of life that parallels Heidegger's "Being-in-the-world" remarkably, especially with respect to the pivotal place of "equipment" ("tools" and "projects") in that form of life—with language itself very much a part of the tool kit (compare Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari below). Even more remarkable is the convergence with Derrida. In particular, Wittgenstein's critique of sense data and private language—that is, of the modern subject—is remarkably similar, even in points of detail, to Derrida's critique of presence in Husserl's foundational notion of purely expressive interior monologue (see Chap. 9).[4]

The point here is this: if Wittgenstein, on his own, navigated a parallel path from modern to something like "postmodern" thought, then there must be something—if not logically or causally "necessary," at least deeply revealing—about the way the collapse of abstract synchronic systems (grammars, codes) into temporality leads to dissolution for modern subjectivity and indeterminacy for its essential concepts. Something very real in language and mind, in the human condition, is at work here. I find that heartening.

5.2   The Rise of the Sign

5.2.1   *Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913)*

The fact that this naïve image could ever have seemed illuminating is a measure of the distance traveled since systematic reflection on language got under way at the beginning of the last century. Most modern

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[4] See N. Garver and S. Lee in *Derrida & Wittgenstein* (1994) for an overview.

assumptions about subjectivity are implicit in this poignant little sketch, for unexamined Cartesian/Kantian assumptions shaped Saussure's linguistics and made it as representative of modernism as analytic language philosophy. And Saussure's basic concepts, applied eventually to everything that had meaning, would lead to dissolution for that form of subjectivity as well (Fig. 5.1).

Here are the three essential elements of Saussure's structural linguistics that bear directly on the advent of post-structuralism in France:

1. *Langue* as a system of signs, a grammar—is a system of *differences*. As in "bat" and "pat" are meaningful signs in English, thanks to the difference-constituting "distinctive features" voiced (vocal chords vibrate) and voiceless (they do not vibrate) that alone distinguish the phonemes "B" and "P." The *same difference* distinguishes "gat" and "cat." "B," "P," "G," and "C" do not in themselves, as sounds on their own, have any linguistic "value." The same holds, at the level of meaning, for "Man" and "Woman" and, indeed, for semantic distinctions in general.

2. *Langue*, grammar, is, in principle, complete. In practice, linguists may not succeed in completely reproducing it in their theories, but the grammar itself contains all, and only the elements and rules for their combination that constitute a particular language. The grammar is a psycho-neurological code that determines how speakers of a language produce and interpret messages, insofar as the messages are grammatical—that is, conform to the code. Other factors impinge constantly on actual speech (fatigue, distraction, interruption, etc.),
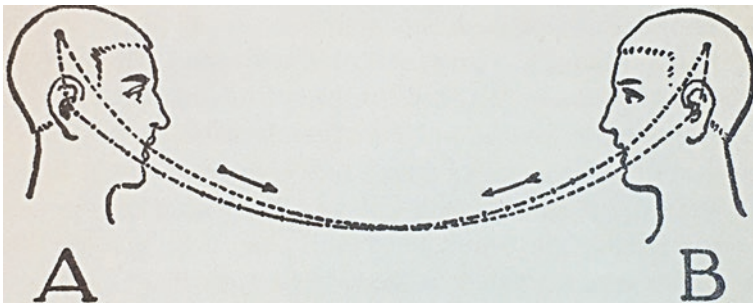
Fig. 5.1   Communication through speech

so actual speech (*parole*, performance) is very often not in perfect conformity with grammar—hence the need for the abstraction in the first place. But the code itself is complete. It has "structure"—hence, Structuralism.

3. The relationship between the signifier (sound-images in the mind/brain) and signifieds (concepts in the mind/brain) is arbitrary. "Ham" could mean spinach—there is no internal or necessary connection (like resemblance) between signifier and signified, as there is, for example, in cases of onomatopoeia ("buzz," "slosh").

A view now from a distance of post-structuralism: performance, temporality, and history return, by various ruses, and Saussure's differences are activated, released from the synchronic system—the grammar that was the product of abstraction. The arbitrary nature of the sign relation, once temporalized, severs the signifier from its conceptual ground and allows it to "play"—which means, among other things, to take on and discard signifieds or to relate ambiguously to signifieds in always shifting contexts in the flow of lived experience. The system, once complete, breaks open. Sheer association rises up to take the place of stipulated links between signifiers and signifieds. Meaning becomes event. "Ham" means a show-off actor and, actually, if you knew my insufferable cousin George, "Ham" could also mean George—or "George" for that matter, depending on what occurs to you—and George in turn (uh-oh, here he comes, with a sixth beer in hand and that look on his face) can mean Ham—or "Ham" for that matter. And so on.

The upshot of all this play, as we will see, is that signifiers can signify other signifiers and signifieds are also signifiers. Everything that can mean anything (else) becomes a sign.

5.2.2   *Claude Levi-Strauss (1908–2009)*

For people in the social sciences who got caught up in the "cultural turn," who were refusing efforts to reduce humanity to material conditions and social functions, but were unwilling (as yet) to abandon hope for universal understanding, Structuralism's formal approach to meaningful social arrangements made an irresistible promise. The diagrams and formulas that distinguished the ethnological work of Claude Levi-Strauss were a particularly potent influence across many disciplines but especially in anthropology, of course. To begin with, *The Savage Mind* (1966) was redeemed several times over. On the one hand, the depth and scope of primitive (scare quotes pending) thought was on dazzling display. Here

were people confronting basic dimensions of human experience like life and death in terms that, while not rational in the same way as physics, nevertheless constituted a "Science of the Concrete" that was as empirical, as comprehensive, as profound—and more beautiful—than explanations produced by our sciences. These "signs" reinvested animals and plants and implements and domestic arrangements with all the meaning modern thought had banished to the realm of concepts. The result was a breathtaking vista, human mentality as unconscious code—but code simultaneously "inscribed" on the very furniture of the world as well as in the mind/brain that "structured" that world. Conscious individual subjects and behaviors were irrelevant. If your concern as a linguist is grammar and you are describing the rules governing, say, prepositional phrases in English, you aren't interested in how Peter or Paul use prepositional phrases and it matters not a whit if they are aware of the grammatical rules they are following. Similarly, if you are Levi-Strauss and you are concerned with lions and cows in some pastoral African culture—you understand that actual lions and cows are *also* signs, elements of the code, and it is *as* signs that the science of Structuralism addresses them.

It is hard to overstate the impact that this synthesis of the concrete and the abstract had on so many intellectuals across the humanities and social sciences. It gave hope to those seeking the universals that had always been the holy grail of modernist inquiry while, at the same time, satisfying residual Romantic longings for fusional experience. It also became possible to jettison Western condescension toward primitive thought once and for all (the patronizing quality of this "primitivism" was not yet evident).[5] At the same time, the critique of modern industrialized society found new inspiration: how much we lost when we abandoned an unconsciously and spontaneously structured world for a consciously administered one—no wonder Levi-Strauss credited Rousseau for conceiving anthropology. Finally, the long sought re-fusion of mind and world had been attained at a level of generality that transcended the subject entirely. The Cartesian claim was neutered. A potent brew it was.

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[5] "We can understand, too, that natural species are chosen not because they are 'good to eat' but because they are 'good to think'" (Levi-Strauss, *Totemism* 1963, 89). This widely quoted remark elevated *La Pensee Sauvage* above social science explanations that typically showed how irrational tribal beliefs had latent adaptive functions and so made a kind of "sense"—our kind of sense.

What was it about the diagrams and formulas in Levi-Strauss' works on kinship and myth that cast such a powerful spell in their day?[6] I was myself a graduate student in anthropology at the time and I can report from first-hand experience that there was indeed something magical—in the technical sense—about them. One got caught up in deciphering (an apprenticeship was served) and even more caught up in creating, not least because of the almost sensual—though exquisitely refined—satisfactions involved, sensations of precision and Olympian perspective, rigorously attained. Take, for example, this template (Fig. 5.2):

This shows the universal, biologically given elements of *any* human kinship system—male (triangle), female (circle), mating, offspring, sibling. Poised over this chart, one felt present at the great divide between nature and culture, the "moment" of the sign's emergence. *Not* that Levi-Strauss, epitome of modernism, proposed an historical hypothesis as Freud and the
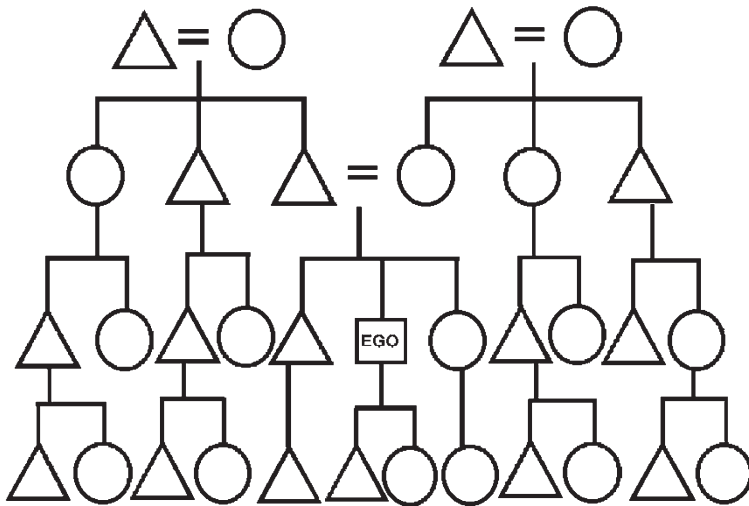
Fig. 5.2 Biological universals of human kinship

[6] It was not only Structuralism that deployed these tools, of course. It seemed the obvious way to define disciplinary compartments and fundamental subject matter—a visual jargon, emblems of expertise. And it was not just Levi-Strauss who relied upon the iconic kinship charts in particular; all the schools in modernist social and cultural anthropology were deeply invested in them and associated formalisms.

nineteenth-century anthropologists had. This was a "conditions of possibility" analysis, a logical basis for generating the *kinds* of kinship systems known to anthropology. Those kinds were constituted by rules imposed on the universal template by different cultures—rules like matrilineal descent or patrilateral cross-cousin marriage. "*As* different cultures" rather than "*by* different cultures," actually, for *with* the rules of a kinship system the givens of biology *became* cultural, became signs. From "male genitor" to "father" from "female sibling offspring" to "niece" and so on in the case of the kinship system most familiar to me.

Out of millions of logical possibilities, less than a dozen basic kinds of kinship system were discovered among thousands of historically unrelated societies in the ethnographic archive. Anyone who mastered this formal apparatus could contemplate that chart of biological givens and, in effect, take in at a glance all known forms of human sociality at a level of abstraction analogous to Chomsky's universal grammar. Expressions like "master" and "take in at a glance all known forms" dramatize how central to modernist (not just structuralist) theory were the sensations of power that attended its practice. Postmodern critique would be fully aware of that.

The (logical) emergence of human kinship depended on the Great Rule. The incest taboo. This, the primal "No," was central to Freud's work as it would be for Lacan's—but Levi-Strauss emphasized a positive aspect. Prohibiting endogamy (marrying in) instituted exogamy (marrying out). Ties between family groups—society—were the result. At the foundation of the whole enterprise was what Levi-Strauss called the "atom of kinship" (Fig. 5.3):

Instead of the nuclear family, it's the nuclear family plus the sister's brother, the one who cannot have his sister and must look elsewhere. The implication of this atom of kinship—thanks to Marcel Mauss' principle of

Fig. 5.3 The atom of human kinship
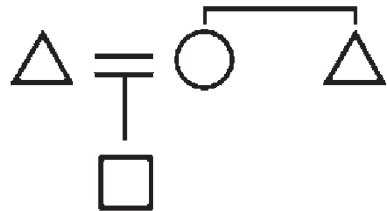
reciprocity—was the basic marriage rule "sister exchange."[7] The implication of that, in turn, was the "simplest form" of human society, a "moiety" of two clans each dependent on the other for the reproduction of their own group over time.

Field workers found moieties in unilineal descent systems all over the world. Thanks to the binary and reciprocal relations and customs characteristic of these arrangements, moieties provided a wealth of opportunities for the creation of diagrams and formulas that could be applied, at a certain level of abstraction, to hundreds of historically unrelated societies all over the planet. The impression of discovery—of the discovery of grammar-like rules for social organization—was overwhelming, and all the more so when other, more complex, social arrangements were also subjected to formalization. Levi-Strauss' figures and formulas, so meticulously set out, were little works of art in their own right—and that aesthetic was not incidental to the impact of Structuralism. It reflected a fabric of connections between the avant-garde arts and radical social theory in the work of French intellectuals generally, going back to Georges Bataille and his cohort (see Chaps. 8 and 9). It also implied that the new "human science" of Structuralism might aspire to unprecedented standards of rigor and yet, somehow, retain a sense of the significance of human existence—indeed, of its value.

By methods at once figurative and suggestive of mathematics, Levi-Strauss generated a set of "systems of exchange" that were *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969). Andre Weil of the Bourbaki group of mathematicians contributed an appendix to the original 1949 edition in which essentials of the analysis were codified algebraically. There was much talk about realizing at last the possibility of "hard" human sciences, thanks to the formal capacities of linguistics and the possibility of applying them to sign systems in general. Those were heady times. Consider a sample from Levi-Strauss' *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964)—the title returns to the central nature/culture opposition. It comes from a chapter titled "The Opossum's Contata"[8] (Fig. 5.4):

Imagine a book—actually, there were four volumes of the *Mythologique*—with dozens of such figures, presenting the myths of native peoples of the

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[7] Modernist kinship theory in the work of Levi-Strauss was built around the idea of women, as signs, being exchanged. That idiom—especially!—would not survive postmodern critique in anthropology.

[8] The preceding chapter is called "Fugue of the Five Senses." Every chapter of the book makes reference to music. In an earlier analysis, music and myth had showed up as congruent opposites in the structure of the human mind—the one a chorus of senseless sound, the other a chorus of soundless sense.
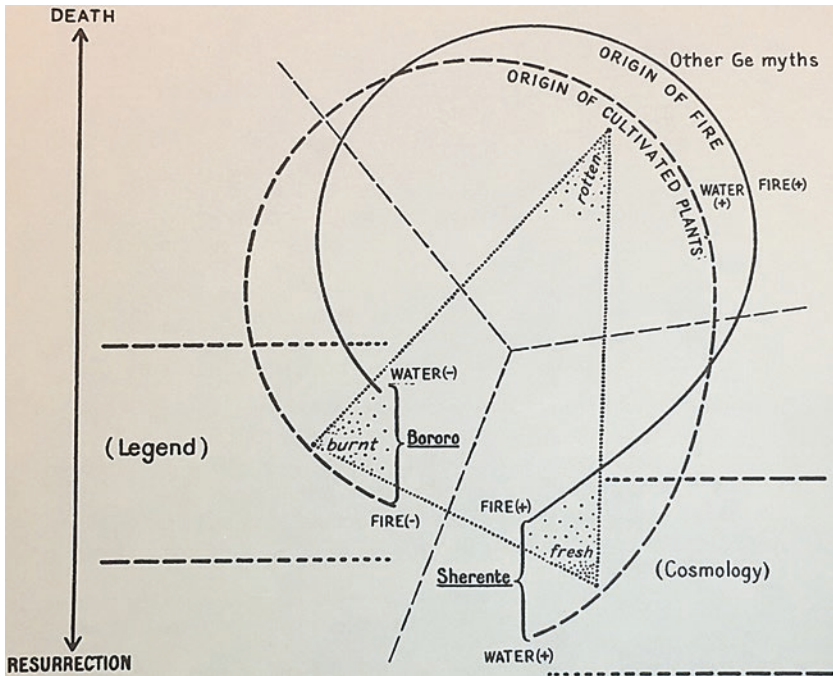
Fig. 5.4 Transformational relation between *Bororo* and *Ge* origin myths

Western hemisphere as formal, quasi-topological, "transformations" of each other, expressions of some common code underlying them all. It wasn't only that these charts purported to show something like the DNA of a group of cultures, the depth grammar of their sign systems—there was, once again, an aesthetic, a Gnostic aura, which enhanced the effect enormously. Fire/Water, Death/Resurrection, Burnt/Fresh—how elemental, how profound. A spell was cast. For many, for a while—Levi-Strauss was the shaman of universal mind.[9] To the skeptics—workaday ethnographers and positivist theorists who were unmoved by auras and Gnostic charts, who wanted to know "where" and "what" these structures actually were—Levi-Strauss offered this stupendous, stupefying response:

[9] Contrary to recent accounts, Levi-Strauss' turn from phenomenology and humanism to semiology did *not* entail jettisoning universal foundations, as this chapter's concluding quote makes clear. The incest taboo, the "atom of kinship," the principle of reciprocity, the metaphor/metonym relation, even the binary off/on functioning of neurons, all played that role in his thought. See, for example, M. Greif's *The Age of the Crisis of Man* (2015).

it is in the last resort immaterial whether in this book the thought processes of the South American Indians take shape through the medium of my thought or, whether mine take place through the medium of theirs. What matters is that the human mind, regardless of the identity of those who happen to be giving it expression, should display an increasingly intelligible structure as a result of the doubly reflexive forward movement of two thought processes acting one upon the other, either of which can in turn provide the spark or tinder whose conjunction will shed light on both. (1964, 13)

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Masters of Suspicion

Part III represents something of a detour. In various ways and to varying degrees, the three thinkers introduced in this chapter channeled certain nineteenth-century attitudes and assumptions into the twentieth century in enormously influential ways. Their ideas were of the first importance when recognizably postmodern styles of thinking and writing were emerging. Nietzsche's thought, especially, was affirmed in multiple quarters and his name and works still animate the conversation today. Freud and Marx did not fare as well—though, where Lacan's banner still flies, the name of Freud is heard and, as we shall see, a certain Marx lives on in various forms.

Paul Ricoeur's felicitous coinage—see *Freud and Philosophy* (1970).

CHAPTER 6

Marx, Freud, Nietzsche

6.1   Karl Marx (1818–1883)

The "New International" [an entity Derrida is positing] is an untimely link, without status … without coordination, without party, without country, without national community, without co-citizenship, without a common belonging to a class. The name of New International is given here to what calls to the friendship of an alliance without institution among those who … continue to be inspired by at least one of the spirits of Marx or of Marxism. (Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx* 1994)

It seems unlikely that Marx or Lenin or Rosa Luxemburg would take much comfort from this "idealist" placement of their legacy—but this was the best Derrida could do under the circumstances. The truth, after 1989, was too obvious to ignore: as a thinker, Marx belonged to the nineteenth century, alongside Spencer and Comte. The most obvious reason for the persistence of his influence was the success of revolutionary movements acting in his name, particularly in the Soviet Union and China—but eventually, even they, in their different ways, lost all credibility. Of course it was, or should have been, obvious from early on that these regimes were abhorrent, an affront to the values that had animated modern progressive movements since 1789. But such were the passions of engagement on the left and the continuing depredations of global capital—and so manifold the ways intellectuals can explain things (and explain them away)—that it

took decades of maneuvering before newly dominant discourses, aided and abetted by Nietzsche especially, finally managed to exorcise Marxism in its Classical (or vulgar) form, along with other "master narratives."

But the manifold of critical possibilities provided by the Marxist tradition also contributed to its staying power. To penetrate beneath everyday routines and taken-for-granted institutions of life in bourgeois societies, to dwell among the few who are *not* taken in, who see through the façade to a hidden truth—that is a deep satisfaction, not easy for followers of this Master of Suspicion to forgo, no matter how abortive actual efforts to realize communism proved to be. So a certain Marxist thought, broadly modeled on "critical theory" and the Frankfurt School, has survived in a critique of "late capitalism" and "neo-liberalism" and it strives to accommodate historical developments Marx could not have imagined. Outstanding examples are to be found in the ongoing work of Frederick Jamison and David Harvey, for example, as they labor to account for the impact of global finance and new technologies in something like Marxist terms. But I feel compelled to ask: without a dialectical *telos*, without a proletarian base, without scientific socialism, without a vanguard party—doesn't calling this "Marxist" function more as a tribute than as the name of a viable historical agency? If class-consciousness is true consciousness, and religious, ethnic, and other "identity" solidarities are false consciousness, and we look at the politics of the world, look at "History" as the Classical Marxists always insisted we should—don't we have to ask: if all that constitutes *false* consciousness, why has it been so persistent and so powerful?

Marxism's lasting influence among Western intellectuals had an insidiously complicated influence on the rise of French theory in particular. "Insidiously complicated" because many creators of theory maintained nominal loyalties to Marxism, prescribed by deep-seated social expectations, even as their spontaneous interests were leading them further and further away from any recognizable form of it. Those developments unfolded in a context in which the French Communist Party and the Soviet regimes that controlled it grew more and more repugnant to the postwar intellectual class for a whole host of reasons. As time went by, memories of communist heroics during the Resistance could not compensate for revelations of Stalinist atrocities, the invasion of Hungary, the Prague Spring. The result was a situation in which intellectuals had to concede that official Marxist institutions and nations were not, in fact, "really Marxist"— that real Marxism had, for some reason, been derailed and it fell to them to salvage and promote whatever real Marxism was or ought to be.

That made for a situation rife with temptations. One could pursue whatever course seemed most promising, provided only that the results could be cast in terms that might pass muster as "Marxist" in whatever sense of the word (as yet to be determined) was emerging. As Part IV will show, one of the principal motivations for postmodern jargon was to justify and, at the same time, obscure the fact that Marx was actually being jettisoned by overlapping generations of twentieth-century intellectuals who didn't want to admit they had simply been wrong; wrong about the workings of history and wrong to excuse the criminality of certain regimes. Some of the most difficult language in French theory gives an appearance of solidarity with Marxism when radical moves in very different directions were actually being made. And if the authors themselves were among those who had to be fooled, it doesn't take a Nietzsche to see how cleverly crafted those rhetorical masks would have to be.

6.2   SIGMUND FREUD (1856–1939)

The Freud with whom Claude Levi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan would be most engaged was the Freud who admitted the social, in the form of prohibition, into the psyche—classically represented by the society-creating rule against incest. *Totem and Taboo* (1913) was the seminal text and, as it happens, it precisely exemplifies the shift to depth psychology from evolutionist history that was characteristic of modernist thought and, at the same time, introduces the topic with which the so-called French Freud would be most identified.

Freud remained a nineteenth-century thinker in many respects. He was steeped in the speculative anthropology of James Frazer and E.B. Tyler, but he also consulted the work of the first field workers, people like Lewis Morgan and Lorimer Fison. Based on evidence gleaned from such sources, *Totem and Taboo* posited a transitional scenario in the evolution of human sociality that paralleled the Oedipal stage in individual (male) psychological development. It would be hard to overestimate the influence of Freud's famous description of the tribal horde of sons, desiring their mothers and sisters, killing and eating their father—and then imposing upon themselves an incest taboo and a totemic substitute for the father, thus establishing a moral imperative and a social order at a stroke. Freud offered this account as a serious evolutionary hypothesis, but its impact would persist for decades, long after it had lost historical credibility. It figured centrally not only in the work of Levi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan but also in Deleuze and

Guattari, for example, and in much feminist critique. And Freud himself had shown the way out of his own residual evolutionism just insofar as the actual practice of psychoanalysis, the "talking cure"—the scene of empirical confirmation—actually did depend on radical innovations in theories of representation in general and language in particular. Freud himself did not make the linguistic turn but he pointed prepared minds in that direction.

The key was this: Freud took for granted the psychoanalytic evidence of unconscious wishes and forces revealed to him by patients committed to close examination of their dreams and fantasies, symptomatic foibles and slips of the tongue. And what that scrutiny revealed, with shocking regularity, was the existence of incestuous and murderous Oedipal desires and conflicts in the nuclear family—and the mechanisms of their repression and sublimation over the course of a child's development. Freud grounded his evolutionist claim in *Totem and Taboo* on that "clinical" evidence.[1] And that was typical. Freud based all his sweeping cultural and historical speculations (*Civilization and its Discontents* ([1930] 1961); *Moses and Monotheism* ([1939] 1967)) on that immediate evidence. His use of ancient references was founded on the conviction that universals of human psychology revealed by psychoanalysis operated in human beings at all times and places. It was not a question of an unfolding over time—the deep psychic mechanisms he first described in *The Interpretation of Dreams* ([1899] 2010) were at work in the production of myths and fairy tales all over the world, across the ages. The axis of origination was shifting.

What took place in the distant past, after all, could never be empirically known; even archeology, Freud's favorite hobby, was necessarily highly speculative. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, dealt directly with observed speech and behavior and with theoretical entities in the unconscious that could account for those observations. The same essential situation as Galileo and his heat particles but, alas, without the quantifiable precision supplied by the "primary properties"—which is why, in hindsight, Freud's "science" looks more like hermeneutics than physics. But at the time, in its reliance on empirical immediacy, Freud's modernist creation *felt* like a science in the making (compare I.A. Richards above) because the psychology took priority—no matter how tempting the grand sweep of evolutionist speculation remained.

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[1] "Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" was Ernst Haeckel's way of summing up the general idea, which was influential throughout the nineteenth century and persisted in one form or another into the twentieth century, especially in developmental psychology. See, for example, the work of Jean Piaget.

Freud's relation to "self-splitting," identified in Chap. 3 as characteristic of modernist creators, needs little explication. From the point of view of his influence, the split that counts was the theoretical one between the unconscious (Id and Superego) and the Ego. But the self-analysis that Freud undertook as he conceived that theory may be more revealing. It was a *process*, a lived experience as significantly representative of the modernist moment as the emergence of the transcendental ego in Husserl's practice of phenomenology. But it was also a heroic effort to contain, within the "frame" that was the theory and practice of psychoanalysis, the brute and senseless nature God had left behind.

Finally, in anticipation of the upcoming account of postmodernism, the roots of Freud's extraordinary appeal to Marxists in crisis can be enumerated:

- Freud was a materialist. He built his account around various "drives"—reminiscent of the forces Nietzsche would subsume under "will to power," but akin also to that diverse array of "forces" that all the nineteenth-century thinkers, including Marx, had to contend with ("forces of production," etc.).
- But Freud's drives were more organized than Nietzsche's. He offered a virtual "economy" of them, and so accommodated a mode of thought congenial to Marx' progeny.
- What is more, the drive-economies that determine the psyche were developmental—unfolding, "historical" in that reassuring way (oral, anal, phallic, genital stages, etc.).
- Many of the Freudian mechanisms of psychic adjustment were dialectical (reaction formation, sublimation, projection, etc.).
- And Freud *was* a "master of suspicion." Like Marx, he penetrated beneath appearances and uncovered hidden causes—the very definition of achievement for modernist thinkers aspiring, consciously or not, to the place of God.
- And psychoanalysis had an application, it aimed at improvement, it was *praxis.*
- Perhaps most important: Freud found new terrain. He wasn't competing with Marx. One could submit to his influence without betrayal. These two masters of suspicion could be allies.
- Or perhaps this was most important: Freud could help explain why history wasn't cooperating with the original Marxist scheme. The enduring power of false consciousness was easier to explain with the unconscious in your tool kit.

6.3   FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE (1844–1900)

that life can be justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon applies exactly to himself, to his life, his thinking, and his writing … down to his self-mythologizing in his last moment, down to madness, this life was an artistic production … a lyric, tragic spectacle and one of utmost fascination. (Thomas Mann 1947)

Thomas Mann's assessment of Nietzsche's life would surely have met with his subject's approval—for it was precisely as an aesthetic gesture that "self-overcoming" was conceived as the defining mission of his philosophy. The first moment of truth for Nietzsche came with Richard Wagner's Bayreuth festival in 1876. Wagner, who had been something of an idol and a mentor to him, was introducing the *Ring Cycle* over the course of four days to an audience committed to that level of participation and Nietzsche was hoping for a "total work of art," reminiscent of the ritual/dramas of the ancients. But he came away appalled at the boundless capacity for trivialization and pretense on display at the event. With that event, Nietzsche began to realize that the Romantic dream of a "modern mythical consciousness" was hollow and that realization allowed him to move on (Safranski 2002, 141).

But before his break with Wagner, while still in thrall to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche was essentially the same Romantic youth who had defied his stodgy schoolmaster and defended Holderlin, his "favorite poet," against suggestions that he was "unhealthy" and "unGerman." The refusional aspect of Romanticism was especially intense for Nietzsche because of his congenital sensitivity to music, a sensitivity that remained with him long after he had turned away from his Romantic roots. It was the same with his experience of weather—especially when violent: "How different the lightening, the storm, the hail, free powers, without ethics! How happy, how powerful they are, pure will, untarnished by intellect" (in Safranski 2002, 356).[2]

The significance of forces of all kinds for Hegel and Marx, Comte and Spencer was all the more urgently felt by the philosopher who would make it official: the death of God left it up to man to create what he could out of the potent given, the wilderness of will to power at every level of natural process.[3]

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[2] Explains Safranski: "The first lecture already indicates that words bring about the defeat of music. Logos defeats the pathos of tragedy. … What is language? An organ of consciousness. Music, however, is being" (63).

[3] "Will to power" names *all* forces for Nietzsche, at biological and chemical levels, as well as at the level of human history. It does *not* just mean seeking "power." So, in a certain way, the continuity essential to nineteenth-century accounts of natural and social processes

Disciple of Dionysus though he was at heart, he conceded to Apollo from the beginning a co-equal role in the creation of great art, great culture, not only in *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* ([1872] 1967), but above all in his own attempts to shape himself, to give form to the forces that coursed through him, to create in and for himself a *style*. For a thinker determined, on the one hand, to debunk ideal entities of all kinds, and committed therefore to materialism but disdainful at the same time of its usual manifestations in atomism, mechanism, utilitarianism— for such a thinker, form, style—the *shape* of things, the *tempo* of events— had ontological significance (see especially John Richardson's *Nietzsche's System*). If Nietzsche's creed was to prove itself, if existence were to be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon, where else could he turn?

From the point of view of this narrative, the fact that the young Nietzsche still hoped for a transformation of German society, mired though it was in bourgeois enterprises, marks him as a transitional figure. It would take years for him to fully absorb the implications of the disappointment at Bayreuth, but he would eventually realize that Wagner and his music revealed the truth of the matter. The blowsy sonorities, the crashing chords, the moral platitudes dressed up as mythic origins—how the fashionable ladies swooned in that atmosphere of pseudo-profundity. Wagner turned out to be the ultimate expression of the decadence of German culture, not an authentic alternative. And he, Nietzsche, had been implicated. It had to be faced; self-overcoming demanded it. "I am as much a child of this age as Wagner; I mean a decadent," he would write in *The Case of Wagner* in ([1872] 1967), "the difference is that I grasped the fact and resisted it." At about the same time, looking back on *The Birth of Tragedy,* with its tidy reconciliation of primal force and primal form, he thought it "smelled offensively Hegelian" (Deleuze 1983, 10–11). Nietzsche had been duped.

But never again. Never again would he concern himself with remaking the world as he found it. He turned instead to his work—to a revaluation of all values, to the *Critique* Kant had only pretended to make, clinging as he had to assumptions of what constituted knowledge (Newtonian physics in a context supplied by a priori categories) and morality (the golden rule), searching only for a rational "foundation" for beliefs he never really

remained for Nietzsche, but all sense of direction was gone. This was very much the Nietzsche Deleuze would introduce to his Parisian audience in 1962—a turning point for their thinking.

questioned. Nietzsche took up the task of that questioning. In doing so, he stepped into a modernist frame of mind, characterized above all by disdain for traditional historical trajectories and bold enough in self-assertion to create alternatives from scratch. Nietzsche articulated themes of uncontainable dispersal that would shape postmodernism in essential ways. He exposed the self and all its concepts as generalizations imposed on an irreducibly particular and ever-changing reality in the service of survival and convenience. But at the performative level of authorship, in his rhetoric of mastery, his determination to account for it all is impossible to miss.

That is how Nietzsche's *genealogy* of morals should be situated for the purposes of this account. Like Heidegger and Derrida after him, he was as focused on the grand narrative of Western "onto-theology"[4] as Hegel had been. But his unmasking of metaphysics as a will-to-power strategy serving the interests of the cunning and the weak was as multifarious as it was contingent. Priests discovered one tactic; socialists found another; nagging women were especially effective at infecting the strong with guilt. There was no directional ascent to the story as Nietzsche told it, no *point* to it as a whole—that was, above all, the implication of the term genealogy. If there was progress, it was the "progress" of a disease—decomposition, decadence. History was unraveling. Forces no conceptualization could contain were escaping the *telos*. The hammer of Nietzsche's philosophy descended on the evolutionism of Hegel, Comte, and Spencer. He fully grasped and put to work the most profoundly unsettling teaching of Darwin: not (as appalled reactionaries believed) "we are descended from monkeys," but "we are a meaningless accident."

The emphasis on force and contingency meant that Nietzsche would be much more accommodating a source for postmodern thinkers than Marx. Ever since Adorno abandoned the proletariat and turned instead to modern art in search of history's redeemer, leftist intellectuals have grown accustomed to unlikely forms of Marxism that enabled them to soldier on. But, as already noted, historical events themselves made the inherent implausibility of it all more and more difficult to ignore. All that was required with Nietzsche, on the contrary, was to take him at his word and you could derive almost any version of opposition to the *status quo* you

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[4] Although Kant seems to have coined the term, Heidegger's usage and Derrida's appropriation of it are most relevant. A conflation of religious and philosophical notions is implied. That is what Nietzsche intended when he arraigned Platonism and the Judeo-Christian tradition on the same charge—disguising decadence as idealism.

wanted from his arsenal.[5] For a generation of academics driven by the desire to say something new and advance a radical political cause, Nietzsche provided this handy platform:

> The only valid tribute to thought such as Nietzsche's is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest. And if commentators then say that I am being faithful or unfaithful to Nietzsche, that is of absolutely no interest. (Foucault, in Schrift 1995, 33)

Nietzsche himself seemed to invite such treatment, it is true—and Foucault was, of course, the perfect spokesman.[6] There was ample room to overlook his manifest contempt for women, for ordinary folk, for socialism, for anarchism, for Buddhism, Africa, India, China, and, indeed, just about everyone and everything except himself, a few world-historical predecessors, and some oft-addressed band of superior beings yet to be identified. And once one got past all that and conferred self-making *Ubermensch* potential on academic practitioners of identity politics in the conference rooms at hotels in university towns all over the world—after that, the payoff was huge.

It was summed up nicely in Deleuze and Guattari's "magic formula" (as opposed to a positive claim or a dialectical positing): "Pluralism = Monism." By that they meant that, in accordance with Spinoza's ontology, Nietzsche's polymorphous "will to power" (or "desire") could take on an unlimited number of never-to-be-reified forms; texts, jargons, customs could be distributed along indefinitely various and intersecting trajectories of contention in indefinitely various contexts and still be "will to power" without reduction to some bogus sameness. That became the Foucauldian vision of history and Foucault ascended to an unmatched level of influence in the anglophone academy thanks in large part to the way it mirrored situations in which politically committed and personally ambitious academics

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[5] Speaking in the name of "youth," Nietzsche had called for "redemption from the historical sickness" of his age and urged those still healthy enough to "make use of the past in the service of life." This was "effective history" and the lesson was: take what you need from the past; don't follow history, create it. *On the Utility and Liability of History for Life* (1874).

[6] Repelling his followers, Zarathustra demanded "Why then should you not pluck at my laurels?" More specifically, Nietzsche's "Effective History" (using the past for life-affirming present purposes) in *Untimely Meditations* ([1874] 1997) inspired Foucault as well ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* 1980). Compare Deleuze on "buggering" his favorite philosophers.

pursued their careers, especially in the USA in the last decades of the twentieth century.[7] One could read about the power/knowledge dynamics in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century institutions as Foucault described them and immediately apply the notion to contemporary university battles over resources, tenure, and curriculum. And likewise for all sorts of specific institutional circumstances—power/knowledge relations shaped contemporary families, prisons, workplaces, hospitals as they were understood by theory-inspired activists "thinking globally and acting locally" in the 1970s and beyond.

So politics went on. It was in this context also that the terms "discourse" and "discursive practices" took up their now familiar mission: to weave texts and talk into the same fabric as offices and deeds. And this could all still be very radical, in some sense of the term—Queer Theory and Cyborg Manifestos were hardly mainstream. At the same time, by virtue of its diverse and situational orientation, it was generously conceived—a practical advantage. Women who wanted to run global corporations could find something for themselves in identity discourses as readily as organizers of women who labored in the sweatshops sustaining those corporations.[8]

Nietzsche had imposed *some* condition on his heirs, however—and the one that proved most fortuitous was his insistence that the Cartesian *ego* was an artifact of a grammar that insisted on a "subject" for what was actually a multifarious flowing. He thus planted the seed that would become Heidegger's "fallen into inauthentic everydayness," first of all, and then Althusser's "interpellation" and Lacan's "symbolic" and all their kindred notions. As a measure of the importance of this theme for the account of postmodern theory to be given in Part IV, consider this from Alan Schrift's *Nietzsche's French Legacy:* he is explaining Deleuze and Guattari's use of the notion "desiring machines" in their account of the play of will to power in the *socius.* "Deleuze's goal," he says, "is to place desire into a functionalist vocabulary, a machinic index, so as to avoid the personifiction or subjectivation of desire in a substantive will, ego, unconscious, or self" (Shrift 1995, 68, 69).

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[7] This helps explain the persistence of theory in the American academy, long after its moment had passed in France where educational structure and practice is centrally controlled (See Schrift 2006; Mathy 2000; Kauppi 1996).

[8] I once overheard a young man running a workshop on gender issues in a secondary school recommending a particular "advocacy camp" to a gay student who approached him after his presentation. I asked "advocacy of what" and he said "anything." The camp was "about skills and methods," regardless of content.

And that is spot-on, no doubt. But the phrasing is so telling. It reads as if everyday talk about will and desire as subsisting in a person were prohibited by fiat. Explicit critiques of the modern subject have been plentiful as well, of course, but so central to the postmodern program had this aim become that, by the time Schrift offered his account, what I will call "a ban on subject talk" had become something like the rule against touching the ball with your hands in soccer, a requirement for anyone wanting to play the language game of theory. Were we supposed to marvel at how ingeniously Deleuze and Guattari discuss desire without ever mentioning a person? Or were we supposed to discover something about desire that subject talk conceals? And the answer is …

Both/and …

As we shall see, versions of this ambiguity (mere virtuosity of expression or insight into the impossible?) abound across the spectrum of postmodern works. And both/and is typically the resolution that doesn't quite resolve. Something always has to escape—as tribute to the truly other, sustaining in this way what Deleuze called the "Philosophy of and, and, and …."

In any case, from the point of view of this narrative, the takeaway here is this: Nietzsche's critique of the modern subject and its deceptively clear concepts would be embraced by his postmodern heirs partly because it *preserved* the Marxist attack on bourgeois society—at its subjective core, as it were. An understanding was reached: we give up on dialectical materialism, we give up on the proletariat, we give up on the *telos* of history—we even give up on communism but, thanks to Nietzsche's aesthetic biologism, we are still hard-nosed materialists with our dear enemy before us: the unified and alienated bourgeois mind imposing its concepts and projects on the world and exploiting those it has dispossessed and marginalized along the way. We can still undermine this figure of modernity philosophically and oppose it politically. That much of Marx was actually saved by Nietzsche.[9]

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[9] Nietzsche has always appealed to radicals on the right, of course—the very idea of a Nietzsche for the left once seemed bizarre. One need only recall the many fascist intellectuals and artists in the 1920s and 1930s who were every bit as contemptuous of the bourgeoisie as demonstrators in the streets of Paris in the late 1960s. Hence, the importance of Foucault's permission slip.

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Critical Theory

7.1 Theodore Adorno (1903–1969)

> To think about twelve tone technique at the same time as remembering that childhood experience of *Madame Butterfly* on the gramophone—that is the task facing every serious attempt to understand music today. (Adorno in Muller-Doohm 2005, 511)

How did Adorno's initially unqualified praise for Arnold Schoenberg's musical innovations eventually turn into something like the damning indictment of modern progress leveled by *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* ([1944] 2002), which Jurgen Habermas called the "blackest book of critical theory." How did that music—of which Adorno had once remarked "criticism is inappropriate in the case of Schoenberg's recent works; they set the standard of truth"—come to be condemned as if it were an expression of Enlightenment rationality? And finally, more generally, how did this privileged youth—immersed in "an existence you just had to love, if you were not dying with jealousy of this beautiful protected life"—come to hold so bleak a view of humanity's prospects that many readers of his work found it unbearable and turned away? (Leo Lowenthal in Muller-Doohm 2005, 30). Another childhood memory provides a clue:

> In early childhood I saw the first snow-shovellers in thin shabby clothes. Asking about them, I was told they were men without work who were given

this job so that they could earn their bread. Then they get what they deserve, having to shovel snow, I cried out in rage, bursting uncontrollably into tears. (Adorno *Minima Moralia* [1951] 2006, 122)

Lowenthal had not been taken in by some façade. Adorno was haunted all his life by the (undeserved) happiness he knew as boy; he referred to it constantly, almost automatically, whenever he wanted to talk about feelings in ways that might otherwise be mistaken for Romantic indulgence. Adorno persisted in his pessimism (he idolized Beckett for purity of vision), but he still insisted that an "anticipatory glimpse" of possible utopias was discernible in the meanest products of the culture industry. And childhood, recollected, was the prototype for him.[1]

Notice this about the snow shovelers incident: however pampered he may have been, the precocious "Teddie" Adorno—who would head a Frankfurt School that did more to keep Marxism viable in the twentieth-century academy than any other body—had not broken into tears out of pity, at least not as he recalled it looking back. A closer reading (*Minima Moralia's* aphorisms are not explained) provokes the question: was little Teddie insisting that their plight *must* be deserved in an effort to subdue bourgeois sentimentality, even at that age? Or was it because it was dawning on him that he would not be able accept a society that tolerated the contrast between their fate and his own (both equally undeserved)? Such sentiments would, in any case, become a lifelong target of Adorno's considerable capacity for contempt, starting with his withering attacks on "comfort music" in concert reviews he was publishing in major venues while still in his teens. Yet it was not until the mid-1920s that Adorno began to look to "historical materialism" in a systematic way for specific intellectual inspiration.

Marxist ideas had been in the air all along, to be sure, and everyone who was anyone understood that "commodities" were the corruption of culture. Adorno was against all things bourgeois as a partisan of revolution in the arts, first of all, in the same way most of the modernists were, as we have seen—whatever their politics, which were as likely to be right as left. After WWI, especially, it was almost inevitable that young intellectuals would blame that catastrophe of modernity on the ascendant bourgeoisie

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[1] "in the prohibition of the images of hope, hope has its last dwelling place … and in the strength to name the forgotten that is concealed in the stuff of experience" (Adorno, in Muller-Doohm 2005: 395).

and all its works—in spite of, or perhaps because of, the fact that so many of them were heirs to that ascendancy. So when the time came for Adorno, under the influence of Lukacs and Horkheimer, to take up a political position, he would frame his commitment this way: "What had to be done to make the spark leap from the realm of art to that of society?" (Muller-Doohm 2005, 81).

That itinerary tells us a lot about how Adorno, and many others, could maintain themselves as "Marxists" without joining Communist parties, without much faith in the proletariat or even in "history" in the nineteenth-century sense. And, of course, it was precisely those prescient reservations that helped preserve the credibility of the Frankfurt School as Stalin rose to power and the Soviet Union asserted imperial prerogatives in Eastern Europe. Still, reading descriptions of Adorno's comfortable living arrangements in Los Angeles during WWII—the jolly parties with Chaplin and Garbo and all that—it is not hard to understand the reactions of more orthodox believers:

> A considerable part of the leading German intelligentsia, including Adorno, have taken up residence in the Grand Hotel Abyss which I described in connection with my critique of Schopenhauer as "a beautiful hotel, equipped with every comfort, on the edge of an abyss of nothingness, of absurdity." And the daily contemplation of the abyss between excellent meals or artistic entertainments can only heighten the enjoyment of the subtle comforts offered. (Lukacs 1971, 22)

But one doesn't have to be an orthodox Marxist, or indeed a materialist of any kind, to find his faith in the political potential of radical innovation in the arts implausible on the face of it. Adorno was far from being the only modernist intellectual to harbor such hopes, of course, but his single-minded focus on that possibility, coupled with his uncompromising aesthetic, makes him a particularly extreme example. For he was not—like, say, Bertolt Brecht or Diego Rivera—tailoring his artistic commitments so as to reach the masses. Adorno was a purist. The more abstract the work, the more difficult the access to conventional tastes—the more revolutionary potential Adorno found in it. He managed to maintain this arcane modernist aesthetic throughout his life and, at the same time, to insist upon its political potential in the teeth of all the evidence of the ascendency of mass culture that he himself critiqued in terms that made that ascendency seem suffocatingly inescapable.

The key to understanding "critical theory" as Horkheimer and Adorno practiced it in the *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* ([1944] 2002) is to highlight something they took for granted—namely, the aim of that critique, the capitalist world of objects defined and administered by the protagonist of our story, the bourgeois/Cartesian-Kantian subject. Descriptions of this world were always couched in terms of a neo-Hegelian "negative dialectics," on the one hand, and a neo-Marxian "commodity fetishism," on the other hand—but the ultimate target is visible behind the social and economic determinations. For what distinguished the Frankfurt School from more orthodox Communist theory and accounts for its appeal to radicals operating in an increasingly mediated world down to the present day was the move toward ideology critique—toward culture, high and low, toward mentality and the subject.

Most typically, Horkheimer and Adorno framed their enterprise as a battle on two fronts, in a tone that managed somehow to combine an almost desperate urgency with fatalistic resignation. For it was evident with every turn of history's wheel that the forces of irrational rationality were gaining ground in every department of life.[2] On the first front, the most obviously philosophical front—the enemy was named "idealism" and it did indeed include the whole range of that term's application (following Nietzsche?) from Platonic forms and Christian souls to Romantic passions and the bourgeois ideals of the politically naïve—or hypocritical. But, as Adorno's early obsession with Husserl and his ongoing and bitterly hostile engagement with Heidegger made evident, "idealism" in all its forms depended in the last analysis on the one who *has* ideas—and in the modern context that meant the Cartesian *cogito* and the Kantian subject in their most recent and most seductive manifestations, namely, Husserl's Transcendental Ego and Heidegger's *Dasein*. "Most seductive" because the language of phenomenology offered an "aura of materiality" that seemed to give historical substance to its *Jargon of Authenticity* (1964). In that way, it appealed to people who had simply seen too much to believe in conventional forms of idealism anymore but who were still drawn to the flattery implicit in a philosophy that discovers—guess who?—at the center of the universe after all. If individuals were to actually, historically, realize their potential for freedom, they would have to escape this velvet prison of reified subjectivity.

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[2] Both men were partial to the same image of their work—a note in a bottle addressed to a possible future on the other side of the Dark Age in which they lived. Compare the last chapter of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.

On the second front, and on the other hand, the enemy was named "positivism"—or materialism, utilitarianism, scientism. The threat from that quarter was not so much philosophical as it was economic and social— above all, technological in the broadest sense. This was Western reason reduced to an instrument of human enterprises, a generator of formulas and algorithms that might be tolerable if confined to a chemistry labora- tory but had long since burst its bounds and assumed the name of Reason entire. The bureaucracy and the factory were the inevitable consequence.[3] Of course, positivism/materialism *appeared* to be the enemy of idealism— the whole history of philosophy looked like a series of pitched battles between these antagonists. But critical theory was not taken in by this ideo- logical sham. In actual fact, idealism and materialism had been in cahoots all along.[4] While debating philosophers distracted those (few) who were paying attention, the forces of bourgeois society stepped in to divvy up the cultural goodies. Natural and social reality were assigned to instrumental reason, while morals, religion, art, and entertainment—the meaning of life, if you will—went to the mind, the soul, feelings, the realm of the subjec- tive, the unquantifiable. There, in a by-definition irrational space apart from the real world, people were granted their illusory freedoms.

"Traditional theory," positivist theory, was handmaiden to this arrange- ment. We have seen how claims to value-free objectivity in the newly minted social and psychological sciences justified descriptions and explana- tions of human beings of the kind an entomologist might propose for a comparative treatment of ant species (see Chap. 3, above)? And that was trumpeted as a virtue! "Critical theory" would be the very opposite of *that*. This refusal of the fact/value distinction in the name of a historical reality that included the theorist would have been enough all by itself to qualify critical theory for a place at the table when the postmodern moment came.

Now we are in a position to understand what many find most baffling in Adorno's view of art, namely, his counter-intuitive insistence that "aesthetic experience is not a genuine experience until it becomes philosophy"—that is, until it becomes rational, discursive. This accounts for Adorno's turn

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[3] The parallels between this analysis and Foucault's are eerily rich, but Foucault swears he was unacquainted with the Frankfurt School (Macey 1995, 326). More evidence of a late- breaking compressed climax for modernism in France, one that melted almost immediately from structuralist abstraction back into history—but, with Sartre dislodged, a Nietzschean history.

[4] Compare Derrida on the idealism at the heart of pure materialism in his interview about Marxism with his former colleagues at *Tel Quel* (in *Positions,* (1972) 1981, 39–91).

away from beauty to "truth-content" in works of art (compare Richards above, Chap. 3). This also explains his compulsive, almost phobic, rejection of all "pre-ordained" ideas, concepts, theories—no matter what their pedigree—just insofar as their reflexive application threatened to obscure what the art object itself had to "say." For, above all, Adorno was out to *protect the claims of these historical objects to truth,* whether it be kitsch or high art. He was determined to bring art (and religion and emotion) back into the orbit of reason from whence it had been banished when rationality was reduced to aping instrumental *mathesis.* Reason could only recover itself in all its aspects if it committed to free and open engagement with domains of experience that had been relegated to the irrational subjective. And the same went for objects in the natural and social world; they too had to be liberated from the trance of reification—from quantification by science and the market, from homogenizing conceptualization by social consensus. Only then could meanings lodged within particulars be released, thanks to the ministrations of Adorno's "negative dialectics," a procedure of negation that refused subsumption by the bogus unities of Hegelian synthesis—or any other totalizing gesture. "The Whole is the False," Adorno famously proclaimed, and that is what he meant.

"Truth content," Adorno insisted, was really "in" particular objects—that is, the work or the natural entity appropriated by culture. Somehow, it was there, waiting to be disclosed by a conceptuality that would not *dominate* the object, after the manner of Kantian categories, but would *discover* meaning in the object *in relation to changing historical context.*[5] Only in this way, could conceptual meaning be released from the subjective and returned to the historical and material world where it belonged. Only then would the "emphatic experience" of grasping truth in its particular objectivity be possible (see Bernstein (2006) for discussion of this theme).

But that world was not Marx' anymore; it was Nietzsche's and Freud's. It was "history" shaped by unconscious forces; it was decadent and fragmented, unjust, and likely doomed. But there was nowhere else to go. Not if you had the courage to ask, as Adorno repeatedly did in his lectures, how it was possible for "a rightly lived life to be lived within the wrong one."

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[5] This account obviously comes uncomfortably close to Husserl's intentionality endowing objects with conceptual identity—as Adorno certainly realized. Hence, the relentless insistence on historical context as the necessary partner in the disclosure of truth content. Hence, the changing truth content of art works over time. Compare Walter Benjamin on translation.

Adorno's mood (in the Heideggarian sense) in a nutshell. Some have found it intolerable, especially if inspiring political action is high on the agenda (see Cultural Studies discussion in Chap. 10). Some find it heroic—Richard Rorty springs to mind—and all the more so when combined with action.

It would be dishonest to avoid the most troubling question to be asked of this noble enterprise called critical theory. In the absence of a phenomenological basis for the constitution of objects, in what sense exactly is the "truth content" of an object "in" it? Making the determination dependent on the *relation* of the object to historical context only dilutes the problem—*unless* what is meant is that interpretation is *entirely* a matter of association in a context, that the object brings nothing to the moment of interpretation but its physical characteristics, that whatever there is of past or original *meaning* in those physical characteristics is lodged in, or otherwise accessible to, the mind of a knowledgeable present interpreter? Of course, Adorno would never endorse such a Cartesian account and one is left to wonder how he would respond to this question. But left also to consider, and gratefully, the many examples found in Adorno's work. Consider just two, which involve musical arrangements so specific that the "relation" with the social context is as sharply drawn as one could ask:

> A *leitmotif* or *idée fixe* in Wagner's operas is said to promote repetition over development. Does that musical gesture itself *mean* that it was somehow— at any psychic or social level, intended or not—denying the possibility of social change? By contrast, in Adorno's early assessments of Schoenberg, he found in the structure of his compositions an "image of a liberated music" that evoked a utopian "association of free men" because in the twelve tone row "each note had an equally significant yet unique role in the musical totality." By further contrast, reaching back before Wagner to the "hierarchies" of classical music, with its dominant and minor keys: in what sense do those musical hierarchies reflect or express the hierarchies of the society in which the music was composed? (Buck-Morss 1979, 130)

In each of these cases, the truth content of the artwork was uncovered in its relation to a social context. Both terms were essential. Dialectical conceptuality "negated" the reified, unquestioned object (the music taken-for-granted) and, released now from habituality, allowed thinking to be "determined" by actual material elements of the music or the context (the relations between notes, the position of a king on a throne). A connection was made, the truth content of the art object in its context

revealed. The principle of mimesis—the principle of all art going back to tribal shamans dancing in the guise of hunted animals in man's earliest (and never-ending) attempts to dominate nature—ultimately guaranteed the analogies that negative dialectics brought to light. Of course, the days of the shaman were long gone and art no longer expressed the artist's (shaman's) intentions or even his experiences—on this point, also, Adorno was at one with bourgeois "new criticism." So there can be no *intentional* mimesis at work to guarantee the analogy. For Adorno art was "objective expression" and the role of the artist was simply to "release the expression" (Adorno 2004, 137; compare T.S. Eliot, Chap. 3 above). Somehow, art objects reflect context in this way, that's what they do.

Expressive objectivity in relation to historical context also accounts for the way in which the truth content of an artwork could change over time—and that explains why Adorno's assessment of Schoenberg shifted the way it did. What had once been a rigorously abstract experiment designed to transform the very idea of "music" could—and did, with time—congeal into a formulaic straightjacket.

> Adorno believed that the philosophy of modern music was basically nothing but "the attempt … to explicate the dialectics of the particular and the general in concrete terms." … This applied with particular force to his central thesis that the twelve-tone method begins with a rational technique which then transformed into an irrational system that stifles the constructive impulses of the composer. (Muller-Doohm 2005, 275)

That placement of the art object—severance from subjectivity without sacrificing expressivity—constituted for Adorno a kind of ontological displacement to a realm where objects and situations reflected each other, expressed each other, directly—with human agency reduced to something like a medium of communication between objects and situations.[6] He needed something like that, in any case, in order to secure his negative dialectics as a process with a claim to genuine materiality and objectivity. He couldn't allow the "truth content" disclosed in the relation between the art objects and historical contexts to be simply an analogy some historical interpreter happens to notice. In the last analysis, if critical theory

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[6] Once again, phenomenology's proximity looms. People who begin to study it in a serious way often describe an experience of relinquishing agency to things and situations. See, for example, Merleau-Ponty's famous account of our three dimensional perception as dependent on the "eyes" (perspectives) of objects in the environment (in Kelly 2004).

is to distinguish itself from phenomenology in the name of something like "real history" and "real politics" it has to posit "a materiality to the world that exceeds human language and understanding" in order to "displace the humanist mythology that regards human activity as the sole generator of the world" (Aronowitz 2015, 47; see also Thompson 2015, 1–10).

But the fact of the matter is that Adorno's procedure seemed always to lead to unmasking some fairly standard ideological function.[7] Were the specific analogies, like the one between musical and political hierarchies, *discoveries* of real and material relations between art works and social context or was the process more like noticing the shapes of animals in a stack of cumulus clouds? An extended study of actual examples is needed here, because it seems likely that judgments of plausibility will have to be made on a case-by-case basis. Some instances will be more convincing than others. But this line of questioning is fundamental for a just evaluation of critical theory as an account-that-would-be-true of how history and culture actually work—as opposed to a powerful provocation for political opposition to oppressive political systems of all kinds, in which capacity it has proved its worth many times over.

> utopia is to be found essentially in the determinate negation … of what is, since, by demonstrating that what is takes concrete form as something false, it always at the same time points to what should exist. (Adorno in Muller-Doohm 2005, 421)

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[7] The reader can tell when a work is to be found guilty of commodity fetishism long before the gavel comes down. For the partisan, of course, that frequency simply reflects the ubiquitous influence of the commodity function. But it is troubling how repetitive (algorithmic?) the gesture can seem—especially given Adorno's heartfelt opposition to any theory that substitutes itself for thought.

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Postmodern Undoings

INTRODUCTION

> The conceptual understanding of empirical reality is equivalent to a murder.
> (Alexandre Kojeve, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (in Borch-Jacobsen 1991, 192))

Apart from the shock value of Kojeve's phrasing, the view of concepts he was propounding in the 1930s reflected what would become conventional wisdom among creators of French theory—a legacy of Heidegger's teaching for which they would eventually credit (justifiably) Nietzsche, a more welcome ancestry for thinkers determined to rid themselves of all things phenomenological. That transfer of credit for so essential a claim encapsulates the most proximate intellectual-historical move that shaped the postmodern moment in France. But really understanding the significance of that move means understanding the historical context that prompted Nietzsche to pursue his deconstructive mission in the first place. Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 described that context. Chapter 7, dealing with essentials of critical theory by way of Adorno, bears directly on how postmodernism was received in the anglophone academy, but French theory, in spite of striking convergences, apparently developed without Frankfurt School influence. We can hope that this is more evidence of an underlying logic at work—some logic that might be brought to light and evaluated so that we can do a bit better than blunder and grope toward whatever comes next.

So Part IV, the heart of this book, has been historically situated. It will succeed in proportion to the validity of these claims: French theory's seminal texts are so difficult because (1) they strive for an appearance of continuity with Marx when radical moves in very different directions were actually being made, and/or (2) they reject the abstractions of Structuralism and return to temporality, to performance, and to history—*but without the subject*, without allowing significant reference to the intentions and feelings of actual human beings. That profoundly counterintuitive constraint forced the framers of theory into elaborate syntactic and lexical contortions in their effort to return to the *functioning* of language without resorting to subject talk.[1] The transcendental ego of Husserl's phenomenology, like the brain-code grammar (*langue*) in Saussure and Levi-Strauss, could never be mistaken for the living, speaking person. Modernist self-splitting in creator/authors reflected that fact (see above, Chap. 3). So when those abstractions were rejected in the name of temporality—history, events—the place of the subject had to be taken by something equal to the explanatory task those abstractions had performed. That something would be described in terms like "field of the mark" (Derrida), "process of signification" (Kristeva), "event of utterance" (Deleuze), and so on. The result, as we shall see, was a strange Hegelian knock-off that, in effect, put language (or, in Deleuze's case, "expression") in place of Absolute Mind. But before that could happen the mind of Man—the existential-phenomenological mind—would stake a claim to the position once held by Hegel's Absolute, a claim that was bound to be rejected.

Among the Parisian luminaries who attended Alexandre Kojeve's groundbreaking lectures on Hegel at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in the 1930s were Louis Althusser, Raymond Queneau, Georges Bataille, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, André Breton, Jacques Lacan, Raymond Aron, and, according to some reports, Jean-Paul Sartre himself. Those lectures consolidated a turn to Hegel in France before WWII and inspired the Marxist-existential phenomenology that would dominate the scene until the rise of Structuralism and the revival of Nietzsche in the late 1950s and 1960s. In Vincent Descombes' opinion, only the Russian Revolution can

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[1] Derrida gave the game away when he casually remarked that he used the phrase "functioning of the mark" rather than "understanding the written utterance" merely to accommodate the possibility of *mis*understanding (1988: 61).

compare with Kojeve's lectures as an influence on French social thought in the twentieth century (1980, 9–10).[2]

When Kojeve indicted "conceptual understanding" for murder he was thinking of moments in the dialectical development of consciousness in which an abstract concept negates the reality it purports to define. But that same dialectic was bound in turn to negate the abstract negation and, in a determinate way, fulfill itself eventually as *realized* concept,[3] embodied in the world at the end of history. For Hegel, that moment would come when Absolute Mind recognized itself in and as (the forms of) that world. Kojeve, deeply influenced by Heidegger, was having none of that. The Hegelian Absolute was replaced by Man and History—and the end of History would come when "negating" actions of labor and political struggle achieved their aims and fulfilled the designs of Man (compare Chap. 2, above, and Chap. 11, below).

Kojeve's existential-phenomenological dialectic—this Marxist humanism, this new version of the "philosophy of the subject"—was the most comprehensive of the "master narratives" Jean-Francois Lyotard would one day repudiate in the name of postmodernism ([1979] 1984). It would be accused of crimes far more serious than murder by concept. The dialectical resolution uniting identity and difference on a new plane—the "return of the same"[4]—was a more radical violation of empirical reality than a mere moment of abstraction. Concepts constituting this dialectic would be exposed as falsifications of a reality that was truly "other"—uncontainable, inconceivable, unrepresentable (*vorstellung*), a Nietzschean reality. Practices employing such concepts were impositions of power, violations, violence.

Heidegger and Sartre, like Hegel before them, thought they were moving beyond the Cartesian/Kantian subject in daring to think The Nothing. But they would look like collaborators compared to Lacan in

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[2] Gary Gutting (2013) shows that Kojeve's influence has actually been exaggerated in hindsight at the expense of the influence of Jean Hyppolite and Jean Wahl. But it is the founding myth that concerns us here. See also Alan Schrift in Bourg 2004 for an American tendency to overlook the influence of philosophy of science during this period.

[3] The overarching example, from Hegel's *Logic*: think pure "Being" (not the being of any particular) and you will find you are thinking "Nothing." Negate the negating relation, but preserve both terms, and a synthesis emerges: "Becoming."

[4] Said Hegel: "For Spirit, there is nothing whatever that is entirely other" (in Macdonald and Ziarek (eds), *Adorno and Heidegger* (2008, 88)).

pursuit of *objet petit a* or Deleuze and Guattari cavorting across their *Thousand Plateaus* or Kristeva writing on the "margin" between her body and the symbolic order. For among the concepts charged with false clarity one stood out as central: the modern subject, the *cogito* in its various forms, the protagonist of this story. That subject was at the very top of postmodernism's hit list and existential phenomenology was its latest avatar. Partisans of Structuralism had also turned away from that subject—as posited by Sartre especially—but they did so as modernists, abstracting semiotic structures from lived experience. Structuralism excluded the subject for essentially methodological reasons (see Saussure's langue/parole distinction for the prototype, above Chap. 5; compare Chomsky on competence/performance). It was to be a *science* of signification, not a hermeneutical humanistic discipline. But "poststructuralists" saw Structuralism's formal codes as the creation of abstract modern subjects and detected as well a parallel relation in totalizing political regimes, capitalist or communist. Formal theories became a political issue[5] and "theory" became poststructural as it undermined not only those imperial codes but also the agent responsible for the formalisms that turned living reality into a timeless realm of "signs." Levi-Strauss renounced the universal subject of phenomenology in his anthropology, but *Levi-Strauss the author* presided over his abstract works as serenely removed from history as they were. The cadence of his majestic prose, the scope and depth of his all-encompassing charts and diagrams—his *style*, in the Nietzschean sense—gave unmistakable evidence of an imperial subjectivity at work behind the curtain.

The upshot: in excluding the subject for methodological reasons, Structuralism had actually been sheltering it *incognito*, disguising its humanism in an abstract *science de l'homme* that protected it from heterogeneous historical forces no theory could contain. When "poststructuralists" rejected the abstractions of Structuralism and returned to temporality and performance, they doubled down on the issue of the subject. They were not content with simply excluding it. They wanted the modern subject, the soul of traditional humanism, to actually unravel in "writing" and

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[5] Yet another, apparently historically unrelated, convergence between poststructuralist and Frankfurt School critique. For discussion of this theme in France in the wake of the 1968, see Peter Starr *The Logics of Failed Revolt* (1995).

actually disperse across the reaches of a multifarious never-to-be-fulfilled desire. They wanted theory to *be* action.

Postmodern texts deserve their reputation for obscurity. Many Anglo-American intellectuals with broadly positivist notions of what serious thought looks like recoiled from what they sampled and were left suspecting the authors of posturing and obfuscation. But a fair reading depends upon accepting the fact that these writers *intended* to test the limits of conceptuality in service of that unraveling and dispersal (see especially, Gary Gutting's *Thinking the Impossible* (2013)). And they didn't just wake up one morning and decide it might be fun to think the impossible—they inherited that intention from a pantheon of *avant-garde* artists that self-respecting French intellectuals (defining themselves, as they were required to do, in opposition to all things bourgeois) learned to idolize in their earliest years of rebellion. It was Nietzsche, after all, who urged philosophers to look to the arts rather than science and math for inspiration—and Lawrence Cahoone was surely right to call him the "godfather of postmodernism." And it was Andre Breton who first set out, programmatically, to release the word from "its duty to signify" ([1924] 1996, 101). The influence of surrealism on French theory was not incidental; it was formative.

Introducing the role surrealism played in Lacan's development, in particular, Sherry Turkle reports that psychoanalysis in France was always understood as a kind of "action-surrealism," which was why "French physicians were as reticent towards psychoanalysis as French poets had been enthusiastic" (1981, 100–102). Foucault's first publications dealt with *avant-garde* writers Raymond Roussel and George Bataille. Derrida and Barthes were engaged with radical literary figures throughout their careers. Deleuze published studies of Proust, Kafka, Sacher-Masoch, Beckett, and Jarry, and spent most of the 1980s writing about the visual arts, all the while insisting he was doing philosophy. Kristeva summed it up when she described her early work on Mallarme, Lautremont, Joyce, and Artaud as representative of the whole *Tel Quel* enterprise, inspired as it had been by those writers (Kristeva 2002, 7–12).

Perhaps more than any other single factor, this affiliation accounts for how theory was perceived and misperceived in the anglophone academy, where a convergence between the humanistic disciplines and radical experiments in the arts was barely on the agenda.

Of course, one can always conclude that trying to think the impossible was a wrongheaded way to spend time, whatever (or because of) the motives. But first the works deserve consideration on their own terms. So, in keeping with the spirit of the enterprise, this formula—meant to evoke Lacan's mysterious algebras:

$$\big((PH + STR \times N/F) - M = PoMo\big)$$

Which says that phenomenology plus Structuralism times a mash-up of Nietzsche and Freud minus Marx equals Postmodernism.

Where "–Marx" suggests the presence of his absence, of course.

The chapters in this part will discuss some of the most representative postmodern thinkers and some of their most influential texts. But in order to clarify what the texts were *doing* the ban on subject talk (see above) will frequently be violated so as to bring out what they would have been *saying* had that ban not existed in the first place. Chapter 8 begins with a brief account of Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser, elders presiding over the nativity scene—encouraging, scolding, anointing. It then attempts to evoke something of atmosphere, the mood of the moment when French theory was born—a moment-of-multiple-moments captured and released in real time through the pages of the journal *Tel Quel* and in the deeds and words of the power couple who were its guiding spirits, Philipe Sollers and Julia Kristeva. A principal aim of this chapter is to show how closely conditioned the whole process was by politics, especially by the "events" of 1968.[6] Chapter 9 focuses on individual thinkers and shows that, in spite of passionate and sometimes painful differences, they were all pursuing basic aims they took for granted even as they competed ferociously to produce the most effective strategies. Chapter 10 will turn to the reception of French theory in anglophone contexts, and Chap. 11 will offer a post-postmodern theory of "theory" that expands on the narrative outlined in Chap. 2 and brings the story to the present moment. Chapter 12 will

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[6] "Event" was the term of choice. Labels like "revolution," "rebellion," and "revolt," so embedded in French historical experience, looked almost quaint when applied to what transpired in May of 1968. Whatever this outpouring was—it was something *else*. It is no coincidence that the idea of "event" carried such heft in subsequent theorizing, especially in the work of Deleuze, Lyotard, and Baidou (who taught together at the radical experimental university at Vincennes in 1969).

argue in conclusion that, in this moment, a new humanism that aspires to genuine universality is becoming possible and, with it, a new kind of unity for progressive theory and political action appears on the horizon.

An excerpt from an early essay by Nietzsche, which anticipates Kojeve's indictment of concepts for murder by 50 years, stands as a reference point for all that follows:

> a word becomes a concept insofar as it simultaneously has to fit countless more or less similar cases—which means, purely and simply, cases which are never equal and thus altogether unequal. Every concept arises from the equation of unequal things. Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept "leaf" is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences. … This awakens the idea that, in addition to the leaves, there exists in nature the "leaf": the original model. ("On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense" 1873)

For the French thinkers whom anglophone practitioners of theory came to think of as "poststructuralists," the conceptual apparatus built into ordinary language and traditional disciplinary vocabularies was a veil of misrepresentation because it took for granted that the chief business of language was precisely to *represent*—to represent reality and so enable orderly communication between psychologically independent speakers lodged in various social roles, conducting the system's business (see Saussure's diagram). Plenty of room, of course, for poetry and play— everyone enjoyed the antics of Lewis Carroll and, though not to every-one's taste, if you fancied yourself "modern" in the new anti-Victorian, anti-Bourgeois sense of the word, you could find value in the word-play of Mallarme, the later Joyce, the Surrealists, and so on. But it was precisely the representational and communicative function of language that made such play possible—because, at the most basic level, it was obvious: literal language made figures of speech possible.

But Nietzsche, in that 1873 essay, went on to say: "What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and; anthropomorphisms … illusions which we have forgotten are illusions—they are metaphors that have become worn out and drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins." Which was to level against ordinary representational and communicative

language, literal language, a profoundly disruptive charge once expressed by Gayatri Spivak, in a moment of frustration with critics of postmodern jargon, in a clear (hence paradoxical) way: "clear language is a lie." That conviction, in a nutshell, was what creators of French theory held responsible for "the problem of language," for a naïve commonsensical conviction that shaped Western philosophy until Nietzsche's seismic intervention—the conviction that language (like thought) was, as it were, naturally adapted to represent reality. Even unrepresentable Kantian *noumena* served to delineate, by contrast, a realm of *phenomena* that language was equipped to represent linguistically just as the a priori categories were equipped to constitute the phenomena in the first place. No, it was Nietzsche (followed by a generation of radical artists) who brought his hammer down on the illusion of representational adequacy. And what emerged over subsequent decades was a linguistic self-consciousness that knew no bounds, that called into question the validity of every question and left answers to fend for themselves in accordance with pragmatic criteria improvised on the fly in an undefinable field of contending discourses.[7]

> the problem of language has never been simply one problem among others. But never as much as at present has it invaded, as such, the global horizon of the most diverse researches. … This inflation of the sign "language" is the inflation of the sign itself, absolute inflation … language itself is menaced in its very life, helpless, adrift in the threat of limitlessness. (Jacques Derrida [1967] 1974, 92)

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[7] The American pragmatists—John Dewey in particular—shared Nietzsche's view of language's representational inadequacy but, being American (hopeful, practical), they did not locate the fault in language itself but in the philosophies that made the mistake of thinking language was representationally adequate in the first place. Like everything else in Darwinian nature, language was its best self when it worked, however the face of reality might appear to God's eyes.

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The Mood of the Moment

> the peculiar modern French branch of the great western tradition of philosophical thinking … seek[s] immediate translation of all positions of debate in terms of very contemporary politics. (Alan Montefiore, Foreword to *Modern French Philosophy* 1980)

Montefiore, as we shall see, was not exaggerating—but he might have added that, in recent decades, the same reflexive emphasis on politics came to characterize intellectual production in anglophone contexts as well, not only among those who welcomed French theory but among those who opposed it as well. That politicization effect was perhaps the most comprehensive consequence of French intellectual influence since the 1960s. The initial challenge for the fair-minded reader who wants, first of all, simply to understand the rise of postmodernism is to get a textured sense of how variably, and at the same time necessarily, the intellectual and the political were fused in the thought of its leading French creators.

8.1   The Elders: Louis Althusser (1918–1990) and Jacques Lacan (1901–1981)

They belonged to Sartre's generation and were modernists in spirit, in their commitment to truth and to system building in spite of the ever-present risk of reification. But awareness of that risk, coupled with a materialist

ontology and a radical antipathy toward the modern subject, conditioned their work in discernibly postmodern ways. True, they appealed to Classical Structuralism as they re-described their master thinkers in terms borrowed from linguistics, and those terms enabled 1968ers to invoke Marx and Freud, with all the subversive authority those names still bore. But, with the exception of Lacan's largely unintelligible theoretical ventures at the end of his life, their "structures" (like Foucault's) were not formalized and so could be integrated into emerging modes of thought and practice that were actually inspired—it cannot be overemphasized—by Nietzsche.

Both Althusser and Lacan were victims of the kind of bourgeois Catholic upbringing that nurtured so many French radicals and provided deeply personal reference points for their various oppositional projects.[1] Though they came eventually to differ over theoretical issues, they were in open alliance in the 1960s and had a decisive impact on the events of that decade. Lacan was not explicitly political in his work but Althusser used his dominant position at the *Ecole Normale Superieure* (ENS) to allow Lacan to promulgate his ideas in seminar and put Lacanian Structuralism to work politically through his ENS students, a formidable cohort that included Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Regis Debray, Etienne Balibar, Jacques Ranciere, Pierre Machery, Jacques-Alain Miller, and Alain Badiou. He also saw Lacan as "an objective ally" because the way "Lacan challenged the International Psychoanalytic Association, the official Freudian group" seemed to echo Althusser's own "opposition to the centralized PCF [French Communist Party] bureaucracy" (Dosse 1997, 184; see also Rapaport 2001, 79–80).

Under the slogan "return to Marx," Althusser uncovered, through his psychoanalytically inspired method of "symptomatic reading," the "real Marx," a truly scientific Marx, a Marx of whom Marx himself (prey to a residual Hegelian humanism) was not fully aware. This scientific Marx paradoxically made it possible to rethink the "ideological field," to refuse its orthodox placement as mere superstructure and identify within it relatively independent, materially realized "ideological state apparatuses" (artistic, religious and educational institutions, journalism, etc.). Althusser

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[1] For young Americans in revolt in the 1960s, and for decades thereafter, the 1950s played an analogous role—captured in images of ticky-tacky suburban uniformity, housewives in high heels cooing over gleaming washing machines, commuter husbands in gray flannel suits. The poolside party Dustin Hoffman's parents held for their son (*The Graduate* (1967)), featured this iconic scene: an overbearing business man, intending to do his good deed for the day, drapes a possessive arm over young Dustin's shoulder and confides: "One word for you, young man, just one—plastics."

assigned an important role to these "ISAs, one which kept him on the cutting edge of theory's development for years to come."[2] They were principally responsible for reproducing "relations of production" by imposing identities defined by a "social unconscious" on society's members. For a generation of young radicals, especially party members, as anxious as their predecessors to identify with revolution against the bourgeois order and, at the same time, as anxious to keep up with the latest trends in *avant-garde* thought, Althusser offered a perfect solution. One could participate in the cultural turn, the linguistic turn—one could succumb to the lure of Structuralism and even try to move beyond it—and still claim allegiance to Marx and historical materialism. Taken-for-granted categories, norms, and activities invited a new form of "ideology critique." Thanks to Structuralism, an aspect of the personal unconscious could now be treated "scientifically," as cultural code, as what Lacan had called "the Symbolic" or "the big Other" in his account of subject formation.

Althusser's project also converged with the *Tel Quel* program for cultural politics, especially in the late 1960s when Philippe Sollers was leading that collective into open alliance with the French Communist Party (PCF). He was stressing more and more strongly the materiality of texts, thus maintaining his anti-idealist *bona fides,* while, at the same time, providing intellectual ammunition for Party intellectuals committed to de-Stalinization. So an insistence on a certain autonomy for the arts—for culture generally—was the message from both these prestigious intellectual sources, the most potent possible message to send to intellectual opponents of Stalinist orthodoxy—appealing, as it did, to their need to feel that the work they did best and cared about most could also contribute directly to the revolutionary cause by dismantling bourgeois conventions and, by extension, the institutions that sustained them (Marx-Scouras 1996, 146–149).

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[2] Francois Dosse stresses the importance of a convergence between Althusser and an ascendant Foucault: "After 1968 Althusserians left their ivory towers, where they had limited themselves to simple exegeses of Marx's ideas, in order to meet the real world. It was from this perspective in 1970 that Althusser defined a vast research program with his famous article on the SIAs: State Ideology and Ideological Apparatuses … his positions were closer to those of Michel Foucault in 1969, when he argued that the discursive order needed to be complemented by the study of non-discursive practices. … For both Althusser and Foucault, ideology had a material existence incarnated by institutional practices. … Althusser's undertaking was the most ambitious and totalizing in the gamut of speculative structuralism. … [It] prepared the way for a historicized structuralism, incarnated by Michel Foucault, among others" (1977, 167–168, 188).

As for Lacan, under the slogan "return to Freud," he had uncovered the "real Freud," a truly scientific Freud, a Freud that Freud himself (prey to nineteenth-century hydraulic models of the psyche) had not fully realized. This distinctively "French Freud" offered psychoanalysis a way to recover its original radical project, with all its tragic glamor, and so avoid the superficial hygienic applications of the "ego psychology" Americans had created when they used Freudian theory to help suffering individuals adapt to a corrupt social order. On Lacan's account, that return to Freud was made possible with the realization that "the unconscious is structured like a language," an insight that Freud himself had shared but, without Saussure's scientific linguistics at hand, could not fully develop.

The overall upshot? Both Marx and Freud got a linguistic makeover and the generation of 1968 got a new "scientific" platform upon which those two masters of suspicion retained their place, even as Nietzsche's influence began to undermine the very idea of systematic explanation. The unfolding consequences of that convergence led to the developments anglophone postmodern thinkers would call "post-structuralism" and eventually know simply as "theory."

What proved most enduring in their legacy, what the thinkers of 1968 would amplify, was the way they transformed the subject from an existential Cartesian/Kantian/bourgeois agent into an abjectly overdetermined object of "interpellation," a falsely unified *imago* embodied in the conventional symbolic order, a Marxist/Freudian version of Heidegger's "they-self," fallen and fleeing, the subject *subjected*—theory's revenge upon modernity.

But Althusser stands apart from his heirs in this way: he was inclined, as if by temperament, to a certain orthodoxy. He remained a faithful Catholic, however conflicted, into adulthood. In his early 20s he seriously considered becoming a priest and, during the five years of his imprisonment by the Germans, he converted to communism without decisively renouncing his faith. He had differences over the years with the PCF and with the Soviet model but he remained loyal to the communist ideal until his last days. Elisabeth Roudinesco, stressing continuities between these commitments, recalled how "Louis Althusser, like Jacques Lacan before him, had made many attempts to speak with the pope—clearly an attempt to unite, in a fusional act, the two tutelary figures of his history: Catholicism and communism" (Roudinescu 2010: 114; see also Roland Boer's "Althusser's Catholic Marxism" 2007). Like Comte before them (see above, Chap. 2), Althusser (and Lacan) entertained the very French hope that, somehow, the Church

could be brought into institutional alliance with a modernizing movement of thought. The lure of "system" (like the lure of "method") was deeply rooted in French intellectual culture; it retained its sway over these heralds of postmodernism, even as they helped to fashion conceptual and rhetorical weapons that would be turned against all systemic manifestations.

Hence, the importance of the fact that the foundation of Althusser's theorizing was intended to be just that—a foundation—and that intention situates him in the generation to which he really belongs. The "real Marx" that symptomatic reading had revealed to Althusser was to be the source of a genuine science. It was to be an enhanced historical materialism that would "ground" other disciplines—and this at a moment when the idea of "grounding" was beginning to suggest "embalming" for radical thinkers of the day. Like the Structuralism he incorporated into his ideology critique, Althusser's was a modernist program at its core.

He began to waver in his last work, the posthumously published, partly autobiographical, partly fantastical *The Future Lasts a Long Time* (1993). He wrote that book after being released from an asylum where he was confined for ten years after strangling his wife in 1980 (He was judged not legally responsible in consideration of a history of severe depression marked by occasional psychotic breaks). In that book, he decided to confront "the murder scene," to give an account of the deed that could only be adequate if it was also an account of the life that led up to it. It became, for that reason, an account that surrendered itself completely to personal psychology, sometimes cast in psychoanalytic terms, sometimes in the register of common sense recollections of motives and misunderstandings. So determined was Althusser to present himself to posterity that he cited with approval Rousseau's famous promise of absolute candor in his *Confessions* (Ferretter 2006, 117). With that example in mind, Althusser went so far as to trace his commitment to Marxism to the reverence he felt as a child for his mother's purity and to *his desire to fulfill her desire* for that purity in his own life, in his political thought (yet another debt to Lacan) (Ferretter 2006, 113–114).

Some of Althusser's followers were more upset by their master's lapse into subject talk to explain the murder than they were by the murder, almost certainly because the same psychological account was offered to explain his commitment to his version of Marxism—which was famous, above all, for its rejection of the existential/humanist reading of Marx associated with Kojeve, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty as well as the "personalism" of Emmanuel Mounier and various radical Catholic worker movements. So the most articulate Marxist critic of subjectivity, the creator of widely

used concepts that diminished not only its importance but questioned its very existence in the conventional sense—that critic had returned with his last words to the sanctity of the confessional in order to "represent" and "express" his personal experience as if that were, at the end of the day, what mattered most to him after all. No wonder so many of Althusser's students and allies resisted his legal heir's decision to publish *The Future Lasts a Long Time*. Pierre Machery spoke for many of them when he called it "a tissue of lies and half-truths" (in Fetterer 2006, 113).

Not coincidentally, it seemed, it was also in that last book that Althusser renounced his hopes for the realization of communism in history. At the same time, he loosened the explanatory parameters to which he had always submitted in the name of science and proposed instead an "aleatory materialism" more in keeping with the Nietzschean conjuncture of the day. But by that time no one was listening.

Jacques Lacan was a more slippery character—though tormented in his own way as well, at least in the end. He often spoke "in the Name (punning 'nom' and 'non') of the Father"—of the Law, of the Symbolic Order, and of the Oedipal scene. But that was only because he thought that unconscious subjection to society and culture was as unavoidable as falling into inauthentic everydayness had been for Heidegger's *Dasein*.[3] The constituents of the ego as *imago* (real desires having been condemned to reach perpetually for impossible fulfillment) were drawn entirely from the social symbolic, especially language. There was no other way for a person to exist. Hence, Lacan's famous "subject of the signifier." In accepting this tragic "lack" at the heart of desire, Lacan was retracing the itinerary Freud had sketched out in broad strokes in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) and taking a similar satisfaction in confronting humanity with its ultimate futility. That tragic posture appealed to many modernist creators—and one of the theory's strategies for overcoming the modern took aim at this perverse negativity in the name of proliferating *jouissance* and affirmative desire (see especially Deleuze, Chap. 9).

But if Lacan seemed to enjoy confronting his audiences (and his analysands) with the tragic necessity of prohibition in the economy of the

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[3] Gary Gutting thinks Heidegger's main legacy for French philosophy in the 1960s was the conviction that, whatever the way forward, Classical metaphysics was exhausted (2013, 60). But Heidegger's focus on the "average everydayness" of *Dasein*, thrown into a social and linguistic setting, seems to me ancestral also—not only to Lacan's "symbolic" and Althusser's "ideological apparatus," but to Barthes' "doxa," Derrida's "general text," Foucault's "discursive practices," and Bourdieu's "habitus."

psyche—his followers understood that his heart lay with hopeless desire, without object, without end, the truth of a nameless subject lost in "the real" beyond words, beyond the reach of the social symbolic.[4] That is why Lacan's influence extended beyond the Structuralism he espoused and played an important role in shaping various manifestations of post-structuralism's efforts to think the impossible (see, especially, Kristeva section in this chapter and Deleuze and Guattari, Chap. 9). Lacan's account of "castration," for example, made it a perfect "symbol for the loss of an ideal wholeness analogous to traditional notions of presence and truth" (Gutting 2013, 105; see Derrida section, Chap. 9). And that was typical of the way Freud was put to use by theory; he served as a storehouse of imagery that turned out to implicate much more than individual psychology.

Lacan made his modernist allegiance to the real more and more evident as the 1970s unfolded and he began to devote his time to lecture/performances. He turned away from the pedestrian task of therapeutic practice and committed himself fully to theory, now expressed by his totemic "mathemes" and Borromean knots by means of which he seriously proposed what he had once consigned to impossibility—namely, penetrating to the real after all. Or was this a surrealist parody of traditional "paranoid" theorizing? Or was it both? Did it start as a parody and become serious? Opinions differ. It is hard to tell. In this instance, as in so many others, we must accept that obscurity inevitably attends efforts to think the inconceivable, regardless of how sincere or insincere particular thinkers may have been in this or that context.

An anecdote to dramatize the perhaps unbridgeable gulf between an oh-so-French intellectual personality like Jacques Lacan and the solid citizens who set the tone in the anglophone academy: in *Psychoanalytic Politics* (1981), Sherry Turkle invites us to a presentation by Jacques ("I came to speak") Lacan before an audience of American mathematicians, linguists, and philosophers at MIT. It is hard to imagine a more illuminating encounter, at least in hindsight. This hilarious scene was topped off during Q&A with this response to an earnest American's inquiry about the exterior/interior distinction in human studies. Lacan was elaborately dubious—"he was not at all certain that man even had an interior":

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[4] But his language, and the categorical tone—"necessity," "the real"—no matter how obscure the referents, suggest that he retained the aspiration of an older generation: he *wanted* truth.

The only thing that seems to testify to it is that which we produce as excrement. The characteristic of a human being—and this is very much in contrast with other animals—he doesn't know what to do with his shit. He is encumbered by his shit. … Of course it is true that we are always coming across cat shit, but a cat counts as a civilized animal. But if you take elephants, it is striking how little space their leavings take up in nature, whereas when you think of it, elephant turds could be enormous. The discretion of the elephant is a curious thing. Civilization means shit, *cloaca maximus.* (In Turkle 1981, 238)

On this occasion, perhaps you didn't have to be there?

Turkle tells this story to buttress her insistence that surrealism (and the *avant-garde* in general) was an essential influence on Lacan (as indeed it was for French theory in general). The basic point is always, almost monotonously, the same. Language simply can't express or represent dimensions of the psyche it cannot designate or conceive (Turkle 1981, 146). The sympathy Turkle felt for Lacan at MIT (his *performance* of Freudian-linguistic processes went unrecognized) clashed with her frustration over his self-indulgent and intentionally provocative attitudinizing—a compelling ambivalence, even anguish, informs her account. She was the perfect witness, an American who had done her homework in France.

Lacan was as true to desire in his politics (such as they were) as he was in analysis and public performances, and in much the same manner. Another oft-cited moment to illustrate: assuming the position of the "one supposed to know," the target of transference in Lacanian analysis, he stood before a riotous assembly at the experimental University at Vincennes in December of 1969. He joined them, but then he castigated them for supposing they could live free of order, as if *that* were not an imperative in itself, and bound to become a burdensome one. "What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a Master," Lacan told the outraged students, alluding to the fate of Bolshevism, "You shall have one!"

Outraged they may have been at the moment. But as time went by, and De Gaulle returned to power with more popular support than ever (including the Communist Party and some labor unions), many saw in Lacan's political "pessimism" the beginning of an explanation. For the historical record was grim; why had revolution always ended in recuperation for reactionary forces or in a "mirroring" of past oppression once triumphant revolutionary forces were established. Was Stalin a necessary

development? Did human beings need subjection after all? Perhaps he was right, and if so, what next?[5]

And besides, could the rumor be true—had old Lacan really smuggled Danny the Red across the border in the trunk of his Jaguar?

8.2   Tel Quel (1960–1982) and the Spirit of 1968

"It is Forbidden to Forbid"

This section's lead quote is taken from a graffiti slogan that went viral on the walls of Paris in the spring of 1968. Coined by "sexo-leftists" determined to outrage bourgeois morality, its application can be expanded to capture the spirit of theory's paradoxical undertakings more generally.[6] An overview of their unfolding, as experienced month to month by Parisian intellectuals caught up in the birth of what would become "theory," is best provided from the vantage point of the journal/collective *Tel Quel*. In a 1996 review of books about that enterprise, Frederic Jameson recalled that *Tel Quel* had once "seemed to offer the most prestigious theoretical synthesis of the age, so that the fate, not just of theory itself—now pronounced dead by some—is at stake here but also some of its components: Marxism, psychoanalysis, linguistics" ("Apres le Avant Garde," *London Review of Books* 1996). And the first thing anglophone readers need to understand about the intellectual provenance of those events is this: "If there was a May '68 mindset, it was not to be found among the proponents of Structuralism, but rather among its adversaries. … May 1968 exhumed what Structuralism had repressed. History once again became a subject for discussion, even among linguists" (Dosse 1997, 115–117). No doubt the word "seemed" in Jameson's assessment should be stressed—but, to the extent that we can take his praise at face value, it is because, as a Marxist, he welcomed any effort to return to history after all that time spent languishing in *The Prison House of Language* (Jameson 1972). And this was the essential postmodern gesture, this rejection of abstraction, formalism, compartmentalization—and, even though the most vital source of French theory was certainly Nietzsche, not Marx, enough common

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[5] See Peter Starr, *The Logics of Failed Revolt* (1995).

[6] Every boundary, every category, was suspected of owing its existence to some prohibition, some violent exclusion.

ground was indicated by that gesture to keep various forms of Marxism in play as well, as we shall see.

Tel Quel was to its generation what *Les Temps Modernes* was to the existential-phenomenological Marxists of the postwar years.[7] Its rise and decline reflected the joint career of French theory and politics in the 1960s and early 1970s, and understanding that career means imagining an intellectual and political riot of competing and converging initiatives in thought and action. The mood (in Heidegger's sense) of the moment was integral to the formation of French theory and the particular intensity of its aims and claims derives directly from it. It helps if you lived through the late 1960s in New York or San Francisco or London, but no other center of that global "counter-cultural" movement could match the historical resonance and demographic intimacy that Paris provided.

Tel Quel ("As Is") was established to oppose Sartrean "engagement," which saw the arts as political instruments, for good or ill. Inspired above all by the example of surrealism (Kauppi 1996, 109), its original mission was to "take art seriously again," which meant a revival of the modernist turn to form (see Chap. 3, above).[8] And "revival" is the word because the rise of modernism, for which France could rightly claim substantial responsibility, was brutally interrupted in that country by WWII and its excruciating aftermath. "As Is" referenced Nietzsche in an *amor fati* frame of mind and, for *Tel Quel*, that meant no ideological commitments, art alone had value—and if, in its modernist iteration, it also had socially subversive potential (compare Adorno, Chap. 7), so much the worse for "Ideology." *Tel Quel*, though apolitical, was not taking an "art for art's sake" stance— it was the use of art by politics that it condemned. Like the Surrealists they consciously emulated, the founders of *Tel Quel* were only too happy to

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[7] *Les Temps Modernes* was in turn conceived in reaction to the fate of the premiere intellectual journal of the first half of the twentieth century, *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. Its apolitical commitment to literature and art made the NRF an easy mark for sophisticated Nazi occupiers and it succumbed with barely a murmur. "Engagement" became a byword at *Les Temps Modernes* for good reason (Marx-Scouras 1996, 11–17).

[8] For French intellectuals, the "postmodern" begins with the radical artistic and literary innovators of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. "Modern," unless qualified in some way, suggests the Third Republic, bourgeois convention, and so on. In his interview with Clare Parnet (see "C is for Culture"), Gilles Deleuze waxes nostalgic in very revealing ways about the Liberation, and the rich years after, discovering and especially *rediscovering* things from before the war in philosophy and the arts.

celebrate the promise of a more profound subversion of bourgeois society by radical innovations in the arts.[9]

The journal's founding coincided with the rise of Structuralism, itself a formal program. Inevitably there was a merger. Reviving modernism after the war, France came late to its linguistic turn, and the exigencies of politics in the 1960s and 1970s drove it in unpredictable directions with astonishing speed. And *Tel Quel* led the way—or rather, oh-so-many different ways.

A simple itinerary, to convey a sense of the atmosphere in which theory developed: when it was founded in 1960, *Tel Quel* renounced politics entirely, as just noted. In 1963 *Tel Quel* published Foucault's "Language to Infinity" and affiliated itself with the enormous success of *History of Madness* (1961), which Philippe Sollers, the guiding and eventually commanding figure on the *Tel Quel* scene, "considered the main event of the 1960s" (Marx-Scouras 1996, 69). That book marked Foucault's turn toward Structuralism (at least in the public mind), but it also gave Structuralism an historical and political edge that would provide lapsing Marxists with a much needed cover as they made the cultural turn, with *Tel Quel* urging them on. In 1964 and 1965, Barthes and Derrida appeared in its pages and *Tel Quel* was committing to what Francoise Dosse, in his invaluable *History of Structuralism* (1997), calls the "ultra-structuralist" program—meaning a concerted effort to bring historical dynamism and political relevance to static forms of Classical Structuralism associated with Saussure and Levi-Strauss.

With the French context in mind, Dosse prefers the term "ultra-structuralism" to the Anglo-American "post-structuralism" and "post-modernism" (1997, VII, chap. 2; and 131). He argues that the creators of what would be called French theory saw the structuralist assault on the traditional humanities, represented especially by Sartre, as their mission as well. So "ultra-structuralism" is apt because they saw their repudiation of Structuralism's abstractions (grammars, charts, codes) as an *intensification* of a basic aim they inherited from Structuralism. Temporality promised real dissolution for the modern subject, not mere methodological evasion.

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[9] By the end of the 1960s, however, when *Tel Quel* was insisting on the materiality of the text and consequently on writing *as* political action, Sollers turned against the original surrealists—especially Breton. They were indicted for an "idealist," even "spiritualist," effort to preserve the autonomy of art and artists and for the popularity of their works with bourgeois audiences. *Tel Quel* affiliated itself instead with Bataille and Artaud, "dissident surrealists" who insisted on the materiality of a subject identified with the body and whose works held no appeal for bourgeois sensibilities (Marx-Scouras 1996, 159–164).

And it promised these culture warriors that they could be good Marxists still as they returned to history in this new guise.

That promise was to be justified in theory by an emphasis on the material aspects of language—on "writing" and "textuality." In 1967, Kristeva's first paper on textuality was published in *Tel Quel*, Derrida's *Writing and Difference* appeared under its aegis, and Sollers himself announced a "Program" which explicitly, as a matter now of doctrine, linked "a theory of textuality to a critique of society and culture of Marxist dimensions" (Marx-Scouras 1996, 12). Soon enough, it would be decided that everything was writing but, at the beginning of the process of linguistic materialization, special honors went to the so-called limit texts produced by the likes of de Sade, Lautreamont, Mallarme, and Artaud and celebrated, with particular effect, by Georges Bataille who welcomed the *forces* limit texts released and disseminated. "Writing," in other words, aimed above all to distinguish itself from language understood as representation, depiction—which implicates the image of language as communication between Cartesian subjects conveying ideas between minds across divides of physical space and the bodies that populated it like so many marbles in a jar (see the Saussure diagram, above; compare Walter Benjamin's "Task of the Translator"). That was not enough for ultra-structuralists bent on intervening as Marxists in history by way of art. The materiality of writing, on the other hand, promised efficacy on the plane of actual events, and all the more so when compared (as Derrida did so compellingly) with ephemera of speech, voice, concept. Hence, an emergent article of faith for creators of French theory—even Deleuze, the metaphysical outlier, was committed to it: language, now understood as "writing," was production, not representation. In perhaps its most influential issue, the *Division of the Assembly* (*Theorie d'ensemble October, 1968*), *Tel Quel* hailed the advent of that long-sought alliance between art and action. In all caps, it admonished: "WRITING IN ITS PRODUCTIVE FUNCTION IS NOT REPRESENTATION" (in *The Tel Quel Reader* 1998, 22). Years later, looking back, Sollers identified "the fundamental aesthetic error—the political economic error" as "believing that language is a simple instrument of representation (*Writing and the Experience of Limits* Columbia 1983, 71)."

As these theoretical commitments were being established, Sollers led the journal's collective into an ongoing and, for a while at least, mutually advantageous dialogue with the PCF. *Tel Quel* got to burnish its credentials as a partisan of the working classes, an increasingly important qualifi-

cation at a moment when the distance between workers and radical intellectuals was becoming practically unbridgeable. At the same time, intellectuals in the PCF—especially younger members, anxious to be up-to-date—got permission to join Althusser in the fashionable precincts of thought opened up by Structuralism/ultra-structuralism.

To be sure, there was a price to be paid for this union and by 1968, *Tel Quel* found itself hewing the party line, ignoring the Prague Spring, and keeping a distance from the events of 1968—even as it endorsed PCF critiques of "infantile" student rebellion in the streets of Paris. These were positions Sollers would regret when he finally gave up on politics altogether. But at the time the maneuvers seemed necessary. After all, unlike "engaged" intellectuals of previous generations, the *Tel Quelians* did not suffer from a guilty conscience about their writing, as Sartre did when he continued to devote so much valuable time to his study of Flaubert in spite of the emergencies of politics. To compensate, Sartre was out in the streets during the days of May, distributing copies of *Liberation* and rallying the demonstrators with his megaphone. But for members of *Tel Quel*, writing had already been theorized as action and the PCF's acceptance of that position provided cover enough (Marx-Scouras 1996, 152–153).

Then, in the early 1970s, *Tel Quel* jumped ahead of yet another bandwagon, breaking with the PCF and declaring itself militantly Maoist. Sollers was at first inspired by Maria-Antonietta's book on Antonio Gramsci—perhaps the most influential of all the neo-Marxist partisans of Cultural Revolution. But he was even more moved, this time by outrage, when the PCF refused to feature her book on China at their festival in 1971. Another violent course correction followed—set out, as usual, by the little helmsman of Paris who had by this time acquired the nickname "Sollerspierre" in mocking recognition of his authority among fashionable intellectuals. Without further ado, he plunged the *Tel Quel* caravan into the turbulent wake of a "cultural revolution" that loomed far larger on the historical scene than any other, the one inspired by Mao Tse-tung, the "Great Helmsman" of a China that had by this time actually been a Communist state for 20 years. Once they had assimilated that gigantic event to their own ideas of cultural revolution, the *Tel Quelians* became intoxicated with a sense of enhanced destiny—all the more so when they were recognized at the very source, officially invited to lead a delegation of French intellectuals to China to witness Mao's great experiment.[10] This

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[10] "In September 1968, Tel Quel was still publishing articles on contemporary semiology in the USSR (issue 35), introduced by Julia Kristeva, but by the beginning of 1969, it turned

was truly History! Almost overnight *Tel Quel's* offices were transformed, festooned with revolutionary Chinese graphics. Mao was quoted in an epigraph to the next issue of the journal ("A mortal combat has been declared between the new culture and reactionary cultures"). Statements like this were issued:

> Down with the corrupt Bourgeoisie! Down with filthy revisionism! Down with the binarism of the super-powers! Long live *de la Chine!* Long Live revolutionary China! Long live the thought of Mao Tse-Tung! (In Marx-Scouras 1996, 169)

With a 1981 Sollers essay called "Why I was Chinese" in focus, Marx-Scouras goes on to sum up the rationale behind the fateful turn toward Maoism. She notes an underlying irony—namely, that the *Tel Quel* program for a cultural politics had actually had more in common with the partisans of May 1968 than with PCF critics of that uprising, whose views *Tel Quel* had endorsed:

> In choosing the Chinese cultural revolution over PCF revisionism in June 1971, Tel Quel was actually recognizing the legacy of May as a cultural one. Although they claim to be breaking with the PCF for theoretico-political reasons, in effect, Mao's brand of Marxism was more appealing in that it was more cultural. Mao accorded tremendous importance to the cultural revolution, which *Tel Quel* equated with its own textual revolution, its work in the signifier. The Chinese cultural revolution recognized the importance of theoretical work. … Mao appeared to emphasize ideology over politics, thereby giving TQ the impression that, in China, writers and artists had a leading role to play. (1996, 172)

The trip to China proved embarrassing enough to persuade the journal's leaders that they were playing the role of "useful idiot" for yet another communist experiment gone horribly wrong.[11] So *Tel Quel* turned away

to the Red East to the 'Great Helmsman,' to a Stalinist Marxism-Leninism purified by President Mao. … When the 'Movement of June '71' was created at Tel Quel, no compromise was possible. Bridges had been definitively burned with 'revisionists' and 'new czars.' Tel Quel became the expression of intellectuals' fascination with China and their interest was reciprocated when a team from the editorial board including Marcelin Pleynet, Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, and Roland Barthes was invited to China" (Dosse 1997, 157–158).

[11] The phrase "useful idiot," widely attributed to Lenin, was used by Bolsheviks to refer to naïve fellow travelers from Western democracies who lent their support to the Russian Revolution and the Communist Party.

from politics entirely—again! Shortly thereafter Kristeva announced that she was done with all things political, including feminism. In 1979, Sollers (still her husband, that never changed) converted to Catholicism and announced to an indifferent Paris that he was finished with "anything that says 'we'" (Champagne 1996, 13).

That sequence of conversions is a challenge to the moral imagination, especially given the tone of absolute conviction that attended each shift. The interpretive key lies in what I can only call the "conventions" of *avant-garde* performance art, which was basically what theory-driven politics became in Paris during those years. Kandinsky didn't have to justify turning from Fauvism to abstract expressionism. If theory as *praxis* was the politicized offspring of surrealism, undermining the social order by transgressing the limits of conventional conceivability—then why not a "stylistics of thought" for theory's creators? (Julian Bourg's phrase, personal communication) Even Mark Lilla, implacable critic of the influence of French theory in the American academy, understood from first-hand experience that "In France philosophy is understood to be a kind of imaginative literature or poetic performance" (*New York Review of Books* 2015, 50). That assessment—that fact about French intellectual life in this period—shapes my analysis here. The career of *Tel Quel*, taken in at a glance, evokes the mood of the moment and the ethos as a whole. Fair-minded readers, no matter how alien from their own idea of philosophy this artistic version of the enterprise may be, must at least experiment with it in reflection—if they want to understand.

In any case, as we shall see, what motivated critics of French theory on the Anglo-American Left was the conviction that progressive theory and action should not jettison conceptual clarity and factual truth in the name of some anarchic aesthetic inherited from Dada and a fanciful jargon that refigured all language as "writing" and "writing" as a mode of material production like the factory and its products as more or less arbitrary constructions that happen to work in a particular context but can never, by their nature, reveal anything like "the way things really are." Sollers committed his journal/collective to precisely that vision because he was convinced it was the only way to bring off the long-sought merger between *avant-garde* art and revolutionary politics. That was his abiding priority and it conditioned every important political decision he made. Julian Bourg was surely right to say, of the most notable such decisions, that

"Merely repeating the axiom that intertextuality was a materialism did not make it so" but this "longing to anchor their symbolic revolution in in materiality" is what "led the Telquelians, after a brief flirtation with the Communist Party, into an equally flighty dalliance with Maoism" (2011, 2). Cecilia Sjoholm sums it up this way:

> in the manifesto of the TQ group from 1968, Marxism and Grammatology are pronounced to be the same thing, whereas capitalism and logocentrism are made equivalent. … The revolution is made into a question of text, not political maneuvers, and the goal of the volume is as advocated in the preface: "to articulate a politics logically linked to a nonrepresentative dynamic of writing." (*Kristeva and the Political* 2005, 7)

Finally, Francois Dosse offers this take on *Tel Quel's* political motivation:

> Philippe Sollers, a friend of Derrida, addressed structuralism's different faces in order to sketch out what he called a "program" … which Elisabeth Roudinesco later characterized as a "flamboyant manifesto of intellectual terrorism." … Tel Quel presented itself as the avant-garde of the proletarian revolution to come and, in a Leninist fashion, was to have a "scientific" program. … "We think that what has been called 'literature' belongs to a period that is now over, having given way to a nascent science of writing." ("Ecriture et revolution," in *Tel Quel: Theorie d'ensemble*, October 1968, 72) cited in Dosse 1997, 156)

To stimulate a full appreciation of just how flamboyant Sollers' program was, Dosse goes on to emphasize that its scientific aspirations were, at the same time and immediately, joined by *Tel Quel's* claim to be the "Red Front in Art." The merger of his dreams could only now be realized, Sollers believed, because there was at last a "scientific" understanding of the implications of freeing the signifier from the signified—a liberation theoretically accomplished in Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and practically accomplished by the radical writers that *Tel Quel* had cherished from the beginning (Dosse 1997, 157; See Breton on freeing the word from its "duty to signify").[12]

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[12] Sollers once went so far as to call *Tel Quel* a theoretical organ of Derridean deconstruction. He singled out *Of Grammatology* and admonished his readers that no "thinking can henceforth avoid situating itself with respect to this event." ("Le reflexe de reduction," in *Tel*

So determined was Sollers to effect this union that he insisted that the "production and circulation of meaning" in material texts showed that "the man who is nothing [the 'dead' author, see Barthes below, Chap. 9] and the one who has nothing [the worker] are thus profoundly joined" (1983, 84).

It was a stretch, even then.

Even in 1968, with the soundtrack from Godard's *La Chinoise* pounded out invocations of "Mao! Mao!" through apartment windows thrown open to the May morning and echoing down the streets of Paris, summoning the faithful to the barricades; even then, it was a stretch; for the coming alliance of de Gaulle's government and the Communist labor unions was already taking shape.

8.2.1   *A Note on Philippe Sollers (1936–)*

Born Philippe Joyaux into the family of a successful industrialist, Philippe Sollers eventually renounced his father's name (though not, like Wittgenstein, the wealth). With that gesture, he joined a crowded field of radical French intellectuals and artists, going back to the nineteenth century, who came from *bourgeois* families they despised—and who made no secret of it. Anointed by Francois Mauriac, who saw himself in young Philippe, and promoted as enthusiastically by Louis Aragon and Francis Ponge, who similarly identified with him,[13] Sollers was the golden boy of French literature in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This was the heyday of *nouveau roman* and the development of "new wave" cinema (*Hiroshima, Mon Amour; Last Year at Marienbad*) and Sollers was completely at home in that *milieu* from the beginning. Along with his soon-to-be discarded friends, Jean-Rene Huguenin and Jean-Edern Hallier, he founded *Tel Quel* in 1960 under the aegis of the Seuil publishing house—and his choice was prescient. Seuil was already, and aggressively, promoting the Structuralism-inspired "human sciences" on the one hand, and "new left" politics on the other. The original collective (no one over 25) was at loggerheads but

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Quel: Theorie d'ensemble, 1968 p. 303). Jacques Derrida's disingenuously articulated materialism served him as well at *Tel Quel* as it did at ENS, under Althusser.

[13] Francois Mauriac was a renowned Nobel Prize-winning author, one of a cohort of Catholic intellectuals actively opposed to Fascism. Louis Aragon was a surrealist poet and journalist, actively affiliated with the PCF, who became something of a gatekeeper for aspiring writers on the Left. Francis Ponge was a poet and an essayist, influenced by surrealism, active in the resistance, and a PCF member until the end of WWII. It would be hard to imagine a core of supporters more suited to help Sollers in his ascent to the summit.

Sollers managed the infighting skillfully and, by 1962, with the well-timed publication of his own "new novel" (*Le Parc*), he was emerging as a leader without rival. Robbe-Grillet himself was happy to claim the honor of being the "father of Philippe Sollers" and Louis Pinto, in 1978, would remember him in those days as an emerging "intellectual emperor."

From that position, entirely independent of the university system, Sollers was able to penetrate the academy and engage "humanities students in their continuing search for master thinkers to legitimize symbolic ruptures" and to decide whom, beside himself, might qualify for that position. And certain professors within those institutions (Barthes, Foucault, Derrida) found it advantageous to appear in the pages of *Tel Quel* in quest of precisely that status. Its cachet contributed to their accumulating "social capital" and, of course, *Tel Quel* could claim a certain academic credibility in return. Together, then, the intellectual emperor and the rebellious academics promoted a "symbolic revolution as a way to integrate avant-gardism, structuralist linguistics, and radical politics" (Bourg 2011, 2). The arrangement was typical of the real genius of Philippe Sollers; his contributions to theory may not stand out in hindsight, especially compared to those of Julia Kristeva (they were married in 1968), but as a cultural entrepreneur in that historical moment he was without peer.

So, with 1968 on the horizon and his track record as an oracle of the *avant-garde* established, Sollers found an "echo chamber" within the institutions he at the same time scorned. His "strategy involved progressive moves announced suddenly; provocations, made largely as a function of changes in the political climate; games of contradiction; and, most of all, criticism of all institutions. … For fear of being labeled as a follower, Sollers constantly rejuvenated himself." His mission was to deposit a series of the so-called power-ideas into that echo chamber, ideas that resonated across "texts, ideas, persons, collectivities, institutions, materiality and history" (Kauppi 1994, 37). Danielle Marx-Scouras chose well when she called her book *The Cultural Politics of Tel Quel* (1996), and if, as I will argue in conclusion, postmodern politics is distinguished above all by the energy it devotes to *expression*, getting voices heard, raising awareness, collecting likes and followers, going viral, creating memes—in short, to getting attention—then that tendency was discernible long before *Facebook* and *Twitter* came along. Now, most of our politics is cultural and so-called identity politics, with all its intersectional complexity—including recent

manifestations of "autocratic populism"—is exhibit number one (de Zengotita 2006).[14]

The evolution of *Tel Quel* was largely determined by that attention-getting, conversation-dominating mission, enhanced at every turn by Sollers' insistence on identifying himself with "the collective" of the journal's contributors and, indeed, with its whole audience (Kauppi 1994, 37–39, 60).

8.3   Julia Kristeva (1941–)

Conceptions of subjectivity that once were thought to apply universally—the Cartesian cogito, the Kantian autonomous subject, the Husserlian transcendental ego, have been challenged as gender specific conceptions of man. Feminists have rejected ahistorical notions of subjectivity, which privilege characteristics historically associated with men and masculinity.[15] (Kelly Oliver, introducing Kristeva 2002, xix)

A central figure at *Tel Quel*, and a much more substantial intellectual innovator than her husband, Julia Kristeva was as committed as he to textual materialism. But the way she positioned "writing" as a vehicle of escape from the Cartesian/Kantian subject that Kelly Oliver rightly identifies as the principal target of so much Feminist theory was much more widely and lastingly influential than any of his formulations. That subject as it was understood in the phenomenological tradition and, however well disguised, as it supervened in structuralist enterprises as well would exercise a definitive influence on Kristeva's work in the crucial years leading up to the events of 1968. "Writing reads another writing," she wrote, with that air of mystery that accompanied her most oracular pronouncements, and then "reads itself and constructs itself through a process of destructive genesis" (Kristeva 1980, 77). But it is only the ban on subject talk that makes for mystery here. Violate, for a moment, that ban and her remark

[14] As we shall see in Chap. 12, the rise of academic postmodernism is only one, relatively insignificant, effect of the manifold of conditions that brought it about. But the possibility of a new humanism is lodged in the same configuration and might, if properly understood and pursued, turn out to be very significant indeed. And that is a task for serious intellectuals—a new opportunity for thought.

[15] This view of Cartesian dualism as inherently "masculine" and, therefore, imperial was more or less taken for granted by many feminist theorists. Compare, for example, Sandra Harding (1986) "From Feminist Empiricism to Feminist Standpoint Epistemologies" and Susan Bordo (1987) "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought."

refers immediately to an experience familiar to any writer: namely, the way words occur to your mind/hand/pen as you write about a text you are reading and then, again, as you rewrite while you reread what you have written. But Kristeva decided to call this workaday process of self-editing "destructive genesis." What was to be gained by that locution? Was it a mere affectation, a fancy way to state the obvious with an oblique allusion to Nietzsche?

Well, it depends on what you get out of it (as this nascent form of reader-response theory was already claiming). If you are Alan Sokol or Noam Chomsky, you get banality or nonsense. But if you were part of the movement of materialized thought the *Tel Quelians* believed themselves to be *producing* (not representing!) through writing—well, that phrase sparked a vision, a vast and virtual description that lifted you right out of your personal workaday experience and prompted you to imagine an ongoing material process on a mass scale, a scale so intricate and extensive in both time and space that individual writers and readers were effaced by it, a vision of *all* writing about writing and all rewriting just as it actually goes on, eventfully, temporally, materially—all the physical gestures and marks, millions of them, morphing perpetually: type, ink, pencil, shopping lists, letters, newspapers, magazines, books, notebooks, marginal notes in *other* books that were part of the process of writing *this* book, sentences, paragraphs and pages that end up in waste baskets, graffiti, street signs, and so forth.

Infinite writing—that would become the slogan, thanks especially to Barthes, who was deeply influenced by Kristeva, starting with her first presentations in his seminar (Dosse 1997, 54). It is impossible to comprehend that vision, of course, impossible to actually perceive what it refers to, impossible to think it in a conventional "true and false statements verifiably corresponding, or not, to states of affairs" kind of way. But that was precisely the point of the language game of theory, like it or not. And many did. It promised freedom from conventions of language. And it seemed to promise freedom from other, more obviously materialized conventions: the institutions of an exploitative society, from its infrastructure to the routine behaviors channeled by that infrastructure, irrevocably entwined as they are with customary uses of language—a relation Foucault would synthesize with the expression "discursive practices." The materialization of language as writing, as text, seemed to reinforce the intended collapse of *all* aspects of significant human situations into materiality—and hence back into time, into history, back to politics. And that was what was

wanted, for if violations of linguistic convention were to be a threat to actual institutions, they had somehow to subsist on the same ontological plane. That was why variations on the theme "everything is writing" became thematic for the ultra-structuralists.

No surprise, then, to find that they believed in the epochal significance of the linguistic turn as they conceived it. Echoing Foucault, Kristeva noted that the "cult of Man" had substituted itself during the Renaissance for the medieval "cult of God" and then claimed that "our era is bringing about a revolution of no less importance by effacing all cults, since it is replacing the last cult, that of man, with language, a system amenable to scientific analysis" (in Marx-Scouras 1996, 31).

But writing was not the only path to materiality for Kristeva. Like many French feminists, Kristeva emphasized the body and the differences it makes. As a budding psychoanalyst, she was particularly aware of its drives—its "pulsions" generally—and, in her quest for a theory of everything, she was determined to connect the materiality of desire (the umbrella term) with the materiality of writing. This was the task she assigned herself in her major work, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984a), which introduced the basic concepts she would apply and refine for the rest of her career. As a budding psychoanalyst, she was also obliged to come to terms with subjectivity somehow and, like so many ultra-structuralists, she began with Lacan's account of subject formation. If her major contribution to theory came in a critique of that account, it was nevertheless staged on Lacanian terrain. Kristeva's famous "subject-in-process" or "subject-on-trial" was, like Lacan's "subject of the signifier", essentially *subjected*. Subjected to the big Other, first of all, to "the Symbolic order" as Lacan had described it—but also to forces of all kinds, from gravity to muscle spasms and, above all, to forces of desire.

So Kristeva's theoretical work was a synthesis of the discursive strategies of the *textualistes* and the *desirants*. Those appelations applied to the principal wings, as it were, of the ultra-structuralist movement and that put Kristeva in an especially effective rhetorical position to reunite temporality and language without appealing to conventional ideas of subjectivity, whether philosophical or commonsensical. "Especially effective," first of all, because her would-be science ("semanalysis") was underwritten more obviously than Lacan's or Derrida's by our everyday experience of the gap between desire and its object. Ultra-structuralists and poststructuralists would theorize that gap in elaborately various ways—but what ultimately sanctified it all was a subjective experience of a perfectly ordinary kind. It was, to be sure,

an experience that the ban on subject talk would not allow theory to represent (that forbidden function), but it was readily accessible anyway to people playing the language game of theory. The dominating analogy from the linguistic side saw the signifier pursuing (impossible) "fulfillment" in the signified—where "fulfillment" meant union, completion (Derrida's "presence"). Kristeva herself was an enthusiastic contributor to this ubiquitous trope of the wandering signifier.[16] But in her work the oft-obscured source of the power of this image of the untethered signifier—namely, the ordinary subjective experience of desire—was more transparently proposed: the experience we have of desire as never *quite* getting there, and certainly not staying there. We all know what that feels like.

As with Lacan and Derrida and all the rest of them, so with Kristeva: she too was out to dismantle what Deleuze would call Saussure's "despotic sign." Despotic because, in the synchronic realm of the code, sheer stipulation was sufficient to command the complete presence of signified to signifier. And it was that formal (invisible, offstage) stipulation that was disrupted by the return to temporality and performance simply because of *what desire is,* what we all know it to be from first-hand experience. Structured by analogy with desire, the moment of the signifier *meaning* something (intending, pointing, naming) precedes the moment of that which is *meant* (thing, concept) and the next moment of *meaning* something is upon us before we have grasped that which was *meant* completely. Where desire propels signification, all encounters between signifier and signified are glancing. Time was back with a vengeance.

And so we have another example of how violating the ban on subject talk can help to clarify theory.[17] The question in the end will be—how much of what theory was doing gets lost when the ban gets broken?

Kristeva's use of the term "semiotic" in her "semanalysis" was idiosyncratic. She used it in opposition to Lacan's "Symbolic"—to mean the body and its inarticulate surges and rhythms (tones, gestures) and she made that body the driving force in signification, as just described. Indeed, she shared with Deleuze and other Lacan-inspired ultra-structuralists a

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[16] The proximate source of this notion of fulfillment is Husserl's distinction between an intentional relation with some entity that is "fulfilled" because it is actually perceived as opposed to one that is merely indicated or supposed in thought or speech. Once again we can't help but notice the remarkable influence of phenomenology on the thinking of its fiercest critics.

[17] Again, I am not saying "why did they indulge in obscurity, why didn't they just come out and say it thusly if that's what it comes down to?" In fact, they believed they were transgressing conventional conceivability and were committed to that project.

conviction rooted in immediate experience, a conviction that the sheer force of multifarious desire was sufficient to undermine the unity of the modern subject. Kristeva envisioned her embodied semiotic as a mother-womb sensational embrace from all sides outside and from every source within, a buzzing, throbbing, cooing, pre-thetic, pre-mirror, pre-phallic Chora[18] (McAfee 2004, 32–50, 71; compare Deleuze on the pre-subjective transcendental field of experience as delirium, below, Chap. 9)

Now we can understand why Kristeva's notion of "writing," her version of the shift to a materialized form of language specifically targeted the synchronic abstractions of Structuralism and in such ferocious terms. She felt as if she had to almost literally break into the timeless realm of the code, to force an entry that would admit desire and create a space for the consequences of that incursion to play out. So she denounced the "necrophiliac" stasis of Structuralism's elements and rules and showed herself willing to figuratively behead those "imperial thinkers" who believe "that by codifying" the "remains of a process" we "can possess them" (in Kristeva 2002, 27–31). "Imperial thinkers" being Kristeva's way of indicting structuralists who sanctified their own subjectivities as anonymous creator/gods behind an impersonal façade of abstract codes and methodological prohibitions (compare the account of Levi-Strauss, especially the implicit link between Structuralism and totalitarianism in the minds of his critics. See above, Chap. 5). Her "semiotic"—the body's tones and rhythms and the forces that incited them—was positioned as an ongoing threat to Lacan's Symbolic Order because it could not be repressed or excluded from language entirely (she began with poetry, for obvious reasons). Working together and in opposition, the semiotic and the symbolic constituted a perpetual dialectic that eluded synthesis, that escaped closure (Kritzman 2006, 559) Yet again: Hegel confounded by Nietzschean forces—and the result, in Kristeva's terms, was the subject as a "signifying process" located at the margin of the semiotic and the social symbolic, always in motion, simultaneously intelligible and unintelligible.

So this, once again, was Kristeva's particular solution to the most vexing question for French theory, so basic and vexing that it was rarely formulated explicitly, thanks to the ban on subject talk: how to recover history—events, temporality, performance—without allowing the subject to return to center stage? The overall solution, of which Kristeva's is a notably

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[18] See Plato's *Timaeus* for this term and for his description of the cosmos as "receptacle," as seething matter without form, without stable characteristics.

successful instance, was to find ways to demote (decenter, destabilize, inter-pellate) that subject, to reduce it to the status of an effect—and the radical psychoanalysts came up with especially ingenious ways to do that.

8.3.1   Kristeva's Gadget

But perhaps the most ingenious—and certainly the most influential—of Kristeva's innovations reflected her earlier investment in the discourse of writing and textuality, not psychoanalysis. At the age of 24, having just arrived in Paris from Communist Bulgaria, she introduced a new line of thought inspired by the Russian formalists to an influential seminar chaired by Roland Barthes at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* (EPHE) early in 1966 (for the importance of this seminar, see Kauppi 1996, 118–119).[19] The controlling notion was a construct she fashioned on the fly and frankly called a "gadget."[20] Francois Dosse makes clear how the pressures of intel-lectual fashion among the *textualistes* with whom she was working at *Tel Quel* and EPHE had as much to do with its creation as did the logic of her developing theory. He describes the origins "intertextuality" this way:

> Kristeva had immediately understood structuralism's historical limitations and intended to palliate these shortcomings with Bakhtin, and lend "dynamism to structuralism." The dialogue between texts that she considered fundamental could serve to address the subject, the second element that structuralism had repressed, and reintroduce it as part of the theme of intersubjectivity, much in the manner of Benveniste. *But in 1966, things had not yet evolved that far and Kristeva avoided the issue of the subject, preferring to use a new notion that was immediately successful: intertextuality.* "It was at that point that I created the gadget called intertextuality, she later recalled." (Dosse 1997, 56; italics mine)[21]

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[19] Kristeva herself recalls her arrival on the scene this way: "Having come to France under the auspice of the Gaullist dream of a 'Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals,' I felt I had found in this territory that stretched from the publishing house of Le Seoul to the … EPHE … a cosmopolitanism that transcended the socialist and European domains and that consti-tuted a continent of thought, speculation, and writing corresponding to the high points of the universalistic legend of Paris" (2002, 6).

[20] The term carry the connotation of "gimmick," to be sure—but it is important to remem-ber that Deleuze and Foucault especially were responding to deconstruction's assault on con-cepts (including the concept of "concept") by insisting that they were best dealt with as "tools," that meaning lay in their use. And this, apparently, without any input from Wittgenstein.

[21] Compare, again, Derrida coining the term "field of the mark" so that the possibility of misunderstanding a bit of "writing" enjoyed the same status as understanding it and the state of mind of the subject would be rendered moot.

In this crucial case, we have it from the horse's mouth: what I intended metaphorically when I first coined the phrase "ban on subject talk" in reference to Alan Schrift's revealing explanation of some Deleuzean jargon was experienced as a literal ban by this brilliant young woman from Europe's provinces absorbing the rhetorical customs of her prestigious hosts in Europe's intellectual capital. Perhaps only Derrida, catering to Althusser's materialism as his assistant at ENS while he wrote *Of Grammatology*, was as conscious of creating conceptual "gadgets" to disguise the subject's role in the functioning of language (see below, Chap. 9). In any case, he and Barthes were only the most prominent of the ultra-structuralists to realize the possibilities inherent in Kristeva's improvised formulation. Thanks to her contribution, it became much more plausible to claim, and perhaps even to believe, that ideas, meanings, values—all things cultural, aesthetic, ethical, mental—were actually material processes operating independently of their ephemeral and wholly derivative subjective effects. Derrida's famous paper, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," often credited for launching anglophone post-structuralism, was presented at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore in October of 1966 (after Kristeva presented at EPHE). Derrida was clearly wielding Kristeva's gadget in that seminal paper and many of the subject-avoidance techniques he deployed from then on owed much to it as well. By the time the *Tel Quelians* were meeting with Communist party intellectuals at a climactic conference in April 1968 to realize the paradoxical dream of a "structuralist Marxism," Kristeva's influence was generally recognized. Francois Dosse reports: "This colloquium at Cluny was extraordinary: Kristeva was the diva, and others were on bended knee before her. It was even pathetic intellectually to see the relationship" (1997, 90).

To be able to account for the functioning of language at the level of material events without referring to the mentalities of individual subjects was manna from heaven for Marxists in particular and materialists in general. And, moving away from the 1960s context in France, Kristeva's creation found widespread acceptance among anglophone poststructuralists because of a striking, apparently accidental, convergence with the Hypertext craze of the late 1980s and 1990s. There was no denying the experience of making and using links between online texts: it just was "intertextuality," concretely realized, not just conceptually—but the

concept ended up looking prophetic, thanks to that actualized digital gadget on the computer. (See George Landow's (1991) series for a compelling and influential overview of this convergence.) Almost as significant was the influence of Kristeva's innovation on a dominating trope among anglophone poststructuralists: namely, the subject conceived as a "site" for contending discourses and forces of all sorts (See Orr's *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (2003) for an extended effort to give Kristeva her due in this regard).

What does it mean to be a "site" for forces and discourses? It means that, if you attend to how things actually go on "in your mind," you will realize that you don't *direct* your thoughts the way you purposefully prepare dinner or brush your teeth. Your thoughts—in fragments of images, bits of language, a constant murmur of sensations and impulses—*occur to you*. Sometimes the thoughts are welcome ("a job well done"), sometimes unwelcome ("why didn't I say something?"), sometimes familiar ("home again"), sometimes strange (what's that smell?), conflicting, confusing, or, sometimes—clarity; but wait; what's next? It is also possible to identify *types* of thoughts that occur to you, depending on the circumstances: now I'm thinking "like a father." Here I go again, "playing the victim." I can "talk soccer" (or philosophy or horse breeding) with this guy. The term "discourses" is more applicable to such categories than to random individual thought, but the leverage of *agency,* or its absence, is the same.

Notice when you forget someone's name and "try" to remember it, what do you actually do? Not much. You just wait. You consider every little half-formed syllable that comes along, hoping it's going to lead to the right word. Sometimes the right one comes. Sometimes it doesn't. You have no control over this. You are the patient, not the agent, of an unstoppable process of mental events—for example, this next one that hasn't occurred to you yet. But will. Did.

Once again, the question arises: if the basic meaning of expressions like "site of forces and discourses" is really as accessible as I've just described it, why didn't practitioners of theory typically explain them as I just have? There are some ignoble possibilities, of course—pretense, professional mystique, and all that. But, once again, it must be stressed: the people who were shaping this movement, and not just trying to keep up with it, really believed in trying to express the inexpressible, to think the impossible. And the obvious place to begin, especially if you were defining your enterprise in conscious opposition to phenomenology in philosophy and common sense more generally, was to find a way of writing as if the human

subject was not central to processes of signification, on individual or historical levels—as illustrated by the prosaic examples just given. That was the experiment they were committed to.

8.3.2   Kristeva's Politics

> One of the problems with Kristeva's account of the revolutionary subject is that it slides over the question of revolutionary agency … her emphasis on the semiotic as an unconscious force precludes any analysis of the conscious decision-making processes that must be part of any collective revolutionary project. The stress on negativity and disruption, rather than on questions of organization and solidarity, leads Kristeva in effect to an anarchist and subjectivist political position. … Allon White also accuses Kristeva of political ineffectiveness, claiming that her politics "remain purified anarchism in this perpetual state of self dispersal." And Nancy Fraser said that "neither half of Kristeva's split subject can be a feminist political agent" issue. (Toril Moi 1985, 170)

Toril Moi's cogent characterizations of reactions to Kristeva in the anglophone academy, especially among political activists, shed a lot of light on how theory was read in its original context compared to the uses to which it was put in anglophone settings. Recall the contempt that Lacan and other partisans of the "French Freud" felt for the hygienic applications of Freudian theory to American "ego psychology"? The parallels are striking. The dark vision of the author of *Civilization and its Discontents* ([1930] 1961) described a destiny for humanity as ineluctable as ancient fate in the unfolding of Greek tragedy. But our unhappiness, inevitable by the very nature of our conflicted being, was occluded by the oh-so-American determination to "fix" things: if not cure, at least ameliorate—help, adjust—you can be happier, if not happy. So puerile, all that, especially if one of your heroes is Antonin Artaud—and who among the creators of French theory did not sing his praises? In his agonized staccato rants the purest poetry, the *chora* itself, erupted from the depths below and shredded the façade of the symbolic as it shattered the subject into schizophrenic delirium (See Julia Kristeva "The Subject in Process" in *Antonin Artaud: a Critical Reader* 2004 (1972). Compare Deleuze on Artaud below, Chap. 9). As Lacanian analysis offered no "cure," so radical art provided no spiritual uplift and, if radical French politics was open to hope, it often seemed to be so only to deepen the disappointment when it came.

Kristeva's political "pessimism" repelled the likes of Nancy Fraser and Allon White not only because it threatened the agency political activism requires, but also because it seemed to entail the naturalistic "essentialism" they held responsible for discursive practices that enforced traditional gender roles. Essentialism was of course anathema to all who wanted gender differences to be purely social constructions and therefore pliant grist for the mill of politics—fixable, in other words, with no resistance from "nature" that couldn't be managed. In fact, the essentialism rightly discerned in the work of Kristeva and other French feminists was not quite the "reductive" gesture in its original context that it seemed to be to many of her American critics. The focus of French feminists was not so much on automatic determinations of character and personality by biological function or genetic program—which is how many American critics, educated as they had been along broadly positivist lines, thought of essentialism in relation to "nature" and its effects. The focus for Kristeva and the others was always on *experiences* of embodiment, the phenomenology of embodiment, and *tendencies* in those experiences that unfolded in ways suggested, as it were, by bodily differences. So, for example, in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976), with the hot topic of "writing" in the table, Helene Cixous suggested that women were better suited to author an open-ended kind of writing that speaks in multiple voices and defies closure because of their diffuse sexuality ("her libido is cosmic; just as her unconscious is worldwide"). Luce Irigaray made similar claims at about the same time.

The point is, once again, that phenomenology was taken for granted by the creators of theory, no matter how intent they were on overcoming it. It just *was* philosophy—and its influence, so deeply ingrained over years of intense training, could not be neutralized at will. Phenomenology—especially in Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty—had always understood significance and subjectivity as *embodied* in arrangements of things and sexual organs were undeniably among the things that embodied subjects most significantly.

(Thanks to her background, Judith Butler was in a better position to critique Kristeva than most anglophone academics, but even her reading was eventually distorted by her political agenda. See below, Chap. 10).

At the same time, Kristeva was a political disappointment to her anglophone admirers on a more comprehensive level. After that infamous trip to China (see above, 139–140), she would retreat, not just from feminism as a political movement, but from politics more generally—from the dream of a socialism immune to Stalinism, to put it in a nutshell. In the

French context, she was only one of many '68ers who felt the impact of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* (published in France in 1973) and took part in a "turn to ethics" as the "new philosophers" appeared on the Parisian scene in the early 1970s. That was a definite moment for what we have been calling "ultra-structuralism" in France, the moment of its abrupt decline and imminent demise, leaving its orphan "theory" to soldier on for decades in foreign lands. Of the French thinkers considered in Part IV, only Deleuze stuck to his guns in that moment, expressing no regrets and attacking others in his cohort (including his friend, Foucault) for backsliding. But, as we shall see, Deleuze had always been the outlier and his politics was as idiosyncratic as his work.

Many years later, looking back on the China trip in *My Memory's Hyperbole* ([1984b] 2002), Kristeva saw the seed of her eventual disillusionment with politics in an earlier alliance of convenience she had once embraced.[22] It seemed, in hindsight, to expose an irreducible problem *with politics as such*. Of the actions *Tel Quel* took in 1968–1969 in alliance with the PCF, she said:

> What were we looking for in the PCF? My hypothesis, I think, far from exempting us, casts a less violent but more cruel light on the cynicism that binds the individual to politics, on the perversion that lies at the heart of the political institution, regardless of its nature …. PCF was the best mouthpiece for experimental literary or theoretical work. To make this work public in order to continue it, seemed to us imperative in an era of mass media … on the whole the idea was to use the Communist Party, not be used by it. (2002, 16)

By the same token, and on the other hand, in Danielle Marx-Scouras' opinion (citing Jean-Louis Houdebine), "Central Committee politicians certainly could not fathom what an avant-garde collective like *Tel Quel* could contribute to Communism. However, if having Telquelians as fellow travellers meant influencing French youth and getting their vote, then the party was in favor" (1996, 147).

A harmless enough arrangement, as politics goes, surely—but for Kristeva, whose ultimate commitment was to literature and to psychoanalytic

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[22] See Joy, O'Grady, and Poxon eds. *French Feminists on Religion: A Reader* (2002, 86–88) for a succinct account of how Kristeva's experience in Communist Bulgaria, compounded by the embarrassments of 1968 and 1974, explain why she "spurns the group identification necessary in both social and radical feminisms."

experience ("the only one in which the wildness of speaking being, and of language, can be heard" (2002, 19)), such maneuvers would eventually become intolerable. But, back in the day, her new surroundings had given her hope: even though "[It] seemed to me completely unrealistic from the point of view of the socialism I had experienced [in Bulgaria]. I knew to what extent a regime born of a Marxist social mutation rejected not merely all aesthetic formalism … but also all individual stylistic experience that could question or explore the common code and its stereotypes in which ideology must seek shelter in order to dominate" (1984, 270). In spite of that lesson learned, the Parisian scene in general and *Tel Quel* in particular had inspired her, allowing her to believe that "in France, it would be different." Her blood was up, the game was on—and she was, all of a sudden, a rising star: no wonder she thought, during those heady days, that radical art and revolutionary politics might yet coincide and what Sollers once called the "great wager" of the twentieth-century *avant-garde* might still be won.

In Kristeva's particular case, the retreat from politics was especially painful for her anglophone admirers because it was more repudiation than retreat. Its terms were characteristically categorical, adamant. Unlike Derrida and Foucault, Kristeva left no wiggle room, no rhetorical cover, no way to say—"well, yes, of course my politics has evolved but I am still committed to the basic aim of _____." Fill in the blank.

That refusal to waffle was almost certainly rooted in the added impetus the trip to China had given her. Perhaps only Barthes had been as dismayed as she at the spectacle of that profanation—yet another dream of justice realized being sacrificed before their eyes to the gods of power and the whims of bureaucracy.[23] But, in Kristeva's case, it also reflected the inherently personal orientation of psychoanalysis, to which she now committed herself professionally, and to her long-standing love of literature, to which she was devoted as a critic and a novelist—to literature understood as "free creation," with no apologies if a bourgeois value seemed to echo in that phrase. Indeed, her turn took her so far off the course upon which she had originally embarked, that she ended up expressing a certain affirmation that would prove more offensive to many than any repudiation, no matter how complete:

[23] "I myself was alarmed by the profound unflagging presence of the Soviet model, the only sign of the 20th century in this land of peasants, and all the more evident because it was violently resisted.... I saw nothing that might possibly prevent the cultural revolution from becoming a national and socialist variation. … It marked my farewell to politics, including feminism" (From "My Memory's Hyperbole" in *The Portable Kristeva* ([1984b] 2002, 19)).

an unavoidable stage of our journey was our discovery of America. … The Alexandrian, cosmopolitan, decadent climate of New York City always gives me the impression of a latter-day Rome; I find nothing more stimulating to my work then those sojourns across the Atlantic … it seems to me that the western individual … simultaneously enjoys, in the United States, a barbaric youth and an exquisite exhaustion. … I feel closer to truth and liberty when I work within the space of this challenged giant which may, in fact, be on the point of becoming a David before the growing Goliath of the [Marxist] Third World. … I dream that our children will prefer to join this David, with his errors and impasses, armed with our erring and circling about the Idea, the Logos, the Form: in short, the old Judeo-Christian Europe. If it is only an illusion, I like to think it may have a future. (From "My Memory's Hyperbole" in *The Portable Kristeva* [1984b] 2002, 21)

Once a provocateur, always a provocateur.

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Texts and Bodies

The written text, it is not to be understood. – Jacques Lacan

Now, I-woman am going to blow up the law… let it be done right now, in language. – Helene Cixous

Deconstruction is the experience of the impossible. – Jacques Derrida

Power is never represented. It is not even interpreted or evaluated. It is "the one" that interprets. – Gilles Deleuze 1962

One's responsibility before thought consists … in detecting *differends* and in finding the (impossible) idiom for phrasing them. – Jean Francois Lyotard

The abandonment of dualism and the constitution of a non-Cartesian subject demands more: eliminating the subject, but keeping thoughts. – Jules Vuillemin, sponsoring Foucault at the College de France in 1969[1]

A more or less random list of names is here appended to a more or less random list of remarks bearing on what, for many critics, has been the overriding issue raised by postmodern discourses: their obscurity. Some of these figures (Lacan, Deleuze, Derrida) will be considered in some detail in this chapter; others (Vuillemin, Cixous, Lyotard) hardly at all; here the

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[1] The chair that Foucault assumed that day had long been supposed to go to the already venerable Paul Ricoeur. A sign of the times.

only point is—it bears repeating—to remind us that they all intended and approved a way of writing that was necessarily obscure because it purposefully violated conventions of language and thought. At the end of the day, it will be appropriate to pass judgment on the value of this radical experiment. But it will not be, and never was, appropriate to attack the obscurity of these discourses (as originally practiced by their creators) without acknowledging their experimental nature.

This chapter will deal in some detail with the French theorists who had the most impact in anglophone settings and, at the same time, were most often held responsible for the obscurity of these discourses—Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze in particular. But a brief account of other important figures will show how pervasive were the basic aims of the whole enterprise. Perhaps the most important thing to bear in mind is this: these people knew each other, often intimately, and they were completely immersed in a competitive game they had been playing since their school days, often in the same school—the *Lycee Louis-le-Grand*, perhaps, or the *Lycée Henri-IV* in preparation for the *École Normale Supérieure* (where they were paid as civil servants), and from there, hopefully, on to fame as a master thinker with a following in the popular press and a chair at the *Collège de France*.[2] I read at least one biography of each of these thinkers by a French author and was struck by how they focused, with an almost parental pride, on their subject's academic performance going back to grammar school (see, e.g., Didier Eribon's biography of Foucault (1992, chap. 1). The significance of the French educational system—the curricular uniformity, the ruthless rankings—was taken for granted by almost everyone involved, no matter how programmatically opposed to conventions and institutions they might have been. Members of the *Académie Française* (established in 1635, by Cardinal Richelieu), known as "the forty immortals," adorn the summit of a system that invests like no other in "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu [1979] 1984)). Prestige, above all.

So, a comprehensive insight to be stressed at the outset: the intensity and ingenuity these thinkers brought to this intellectual contest in the 1960s verged on the manic. Niilo Kauppi aptly called it an "arms race" of "theoretical radicalization" (2010, 8). Stylistic pyrotechnics were inevitable.

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[2] Alan Schrift's *Twentieth Century French Philosophy* (2006) is an invaluable resource here (see especially Appendix 1). He describes the educational institutions and their roles in some detail. He emphasizes in particular how narrow is the path to the top and how grueling the competition.

9.1   Roland Barthes (1915–1980)

We can speak about intertextuality with respect to literature, but not of intersubjectivity. (Roland Barthes in Dosse 1997, 57)

Once again, the essential reminder—this time with respect to "intertextuality," one of the most potent of the innovations of *La pensée 68*, promulgated here in the register of a decree, by Roland Barthes, one of the most potent of the Parisian arbiters of intellectual fashion in the late 1960s. And it couldn't be clearer, couldn't be more candidly stated: here, as so often, the main point of the theoretical innovation was to avoid subject talk.

Francois Dosse and Niilo Kauppi both insist upon the influence of Roland Barthes on the Parisian intellectual scene after he assumed the directorship of the Sixth Section at the EPHE in 1962 (Kauppi 1994, 118–119; Dosse 1997, 56–59). This legendary setting had hosted Alexandre Kojeve's groundbreaking lectures on Hegel in the 1930s (see above, Introduction to Part IV), and, in that position, Barthes was able to play a role within the academy that complemented the role Philippe Sollers played at the *Tel Quel* collective. Not only did Barthes author influential papers of his own during that period (some published in *Tel Quel*), but he acted as a promoter of certain personalities and a synthesizer of certain ideas, all of them tending to displace Classical Structuralism by what we have been calling ultra-structuralism. He often addressed his audience during those years from the position of "We," as in the line cited above. There, he is sanctioning in the name of some "we" the replacement of the subject in critical discourse by Kristeva's intertextual gadget, the one she had just introduced at his EPHE seminar. His papers during this period are liberally sprinkled with expressions like "Today, we no longer speak of X but rather question Y" and, after a while, one realizes that this is not so much the royal we it seemed at first to be but more like a report on latest trends delivered by the doyen of an exclusive in-group for the edification of an admiring throng determined to be part of the conversation.

His own theoretical commitments were as provisional as they were intensive, so it fell to him, in that position, to preside over the conventional wisdom of the radicals from moment to moment during a decade in which one moment succeeded another before it had been completely expressed. Barthes was perfectly suited to this task. Except for occasional political outbursts that seem to me to ring hollow on account of their uncharacteristic vehemence, Barthes was as well-mannered in writing as he was in

person. His innate courtesy helped make him one of the great readers of his time—and he knew it and took pride in it. So he was more inclined to use his perch at EPHE to assemble points of agreement among those he discussed or addressed than he was to admonish them for committing some theoretical *faux pas*. This accounts for why he was so open to the influence of others, particularly to Kristeva and Derrida (Dosse 1997, 56–59). He liked to accompany wilder spirits on their theoretical flights and then channel them down to earth, down to cases, down to particular texts or genres. This may explain why his popularity in the United States extended well beyond the circle of postmodernism's true believers to include more independent thinkers like Susan Sontag and Philip Roth.

Whatever the case may be in terms of character, one of the sources of Barthes' critical flexibility is a simple matter of personal history. For decades, he had to make a living as a writer and adjusting to trends was for him a professional necessity. To be sure, there were core convictions to which he held fast throughout his career—but that career took him from a Classical modernist stance as a critic, through a structuralist phase and then a poststructuralist phase, and, finally, to a phase in which he renounced all systems, theoretical and political, in favor of simple "pleasures of the text" he had once judged inferior to the "bliss" of a radically unconventional work that forces the reader to become the writer in order to follow it at all. The career of Roland Barthes tracks the development of dominant paradigms in French thought from the early 1950s to the late 1970s. Not coincidently, perhaps, he became acutely aware of the way such trends worked—experientially aware of their effects in his own mind and life and work. For these reasons, Chap. 9 begins with an overview of Roland Barthes' career. It will not only identify some of his substantive contributions to the formation of French theory but also serve as ground and context for a more intensive focus on the works of some of his peers, to be discussed in the rest of the chapter.

9.1.1   Barthes 1.0: Structuralism and the "Anguish of the Schema"

("Anguish," from the Latin: "angustus," (narrow) "angustia" (tight))

> The development of publicity, a national press, radio, illustrated news, not to speak of the survival of myriad rites of communication which rule social appearances makes the development of a semiological science more urgent

than ever. In a single day, how many really non-signifying fields do we cross? Very few, sometimes none. *Here I am, before the sea; it is true that it bears no message*. But on the beach, what material for semiology! Flags, slogans, signals, signboards, clothes. ("Myth Today" in *Mythologies* [1957] 1972, 112; italics mine)

In 1957, as a modernist attending to form, Barthes experimented with Structuralism in one of his most famous essays, "Myth Today." He took it for granted that the sea, in its givenness, is just there—prior to all "messages," prior to culture and language (compare Levi-Strauss on the biological givens of kinship). For a reader with a sense of what lies in store, that casual assumption is remarkable—a perfect illustration of how *doxa* passes for natural, the focus of this very essay.[3] But at this stage of the game, Barthes' notion of *doxa* had not yet expanded to include natural things; it aims at culture, especially ideology.[4] Of which, more anon.

First, a note on Barthes' first book: *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) was also essentially modernist—but conservatively so, one might say—no Structuralism yet, no "science" of language and culture. Of course, it promoted form over content, this time in a critique of Sartre for his nineteenth-century ideas of "representational" literature wedded, in his case, to an ideological imperative—obliged, that is, to expose capitalist machinations and inspire resistance by confronting the reader with his [sic] freedom and forcing him to choose how to live in this world. For Sartre, that overriding aim determined the answer to the question his book had asked: *What is Literature?* ([1948] 2001). He was concerned with prose only—not poetry or painting or music. Because it dealt with ideas, prose literature was essentially communication, which meant that it *represented* the world and necessarily conveyed a message about it along with the depiction. That left the writer with a special responsibility. To qualify as worthy in Sartre's eyes, literature had to be committed to social and political ideals. Traditional bourgeois literature, though communicative and representational,

[3] "*Doxa*" is Greek for "appear" or "seem"—it refers to commonsense beliefs and perceptions, implying that they are mistaken. Critique of *Doxa* was a constant in Barthes' work, through all the phases ([1975b] 1977, 44, 59, 85, 130).

[4] Years later, looking back on his career, he recalled a subsequent stage: "the *Doxa* crushes origin and truth together, in order to make them into a single proof. … In order to thwart origin, *he [meaning Barthes himself] first acculturates nature thoroughly: nothing natural anywhere, nothing but the historical*" ([1975b] 1977, 139; italics mine).

obviously fell short. But so did the modernist *avant-garde*, which was willfully refusing to represent the world in favor of attending to form, to writing itself, an utterly futile gesture of mere rebellion in Sartre's view.[5] An apparently intractable problem for the writers of his time was the consequence of this stand-off. Though he remained personally committed, no matter what, Sartre painted a bleak picture of the overall situation. "We have fallen outside of history," he said of writers in general, and we are "speaking in the desert" ([1948] 2001, 205).

But it was at precisely this juncture that Barthes discerned an alternative. "Writing," understood as a *form*, became an artifact unmoored from convention, something an author could make creative decisions about. It opened up a path of maximum resistance to Literature with a capital "L" and, by extension, to conventionality itself. At that time, Barthes believed, the form of writing that best exemplified that resistance was to be found in the work of Albert Camus (*The Stranger* 1942) and, later, in Robbe-Grillet (*Jealousy* 1957) and other practitioners of the "*nouveau roman*." The hallmark? Impersonal description of objects and actions that eschewed conventions of character and plot and reached for utter neutrality, a total absence of style and value, transparent, colorless; in other words, *Writing Degree Zero* (see Allen 2003, 14–31). A blanket rejection of subjectivity—understood as the personal, the expressive—was the aim, a rejection that implicated both characters and authors. T.S. Eliot would have approved.

So already, in 1953, "écriture" was a term of art for Barthes and would remain so, under permutation, throughout his career. And Barthes stressed another perennial theme in his first book as well. No innovation of form in the arts could expect its subversive effects to last long, including writing degree zero ([1953] 1984, 65–75). Inevitably it would congeal into a convention of its own, into commodified *doxa*—such was the power of the system to appropriate novelty. So Barthes' political vision, like that of many in his cohort, was darker than Sartre's, reminiscent in its way of Adorno's pessimism (see above, Chap. 6)—and certainly too harsh for many anglophone practitioners of theory who adopted its tropes and gestures in a more optimistic register (see below, sections on Judith Butler and Cultural Studies in Chap. 9).

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[5] "For the engaged writer, language is essentially instrumental. … They are transparent signs quickly passed over in favor of the represented object or transmitted idea. Style must pass unnoticed: 'since words are transparent and since the gaze looks through them, it would be absurd to slip in among them some panes of rough glass' (Sartre's words). In reducing language to an instrument and discarding style as excess, committed writer fails to take language seriously" (Marx-Scouras 1996, 26).

In substance, Barthes was anticipating *Tel Quel's* "new wave" program of 1960 as well as certain later developments of it, developments in which he played a substantial part. So his relatively tame position in 1953 qualified as *avant-garde* in that context, which goes to reinforce our sense that prewar modernism was, in effect, being rediscovered in France in the 1950s, after the excruciating strains of postwar self-assessment eased (Who resisted? Who collaborated? How much?) (see Judt 2011)).

In "Myth Today", the essay that assumed that the sea itself "bears no message", Barthes offered a justly famous analysis of a photograph on the cover of *Paris Match* showing a black African soldier in French uniform respectfully saluting the tricolor. That essay in particular shows that the transition to Structuralism as a prospective "science of signs" was seamless for him, precisely because of his original commitment to form. He managed, prophetically, to put his charts and formulas to work in service of orthodox Marxist commitments (*de rigueur* at the time), even as he took an anthropological turn, shifting his focus from canonical works to the productions of popular culture. The analysis itself is quite brilliant, but a question arises, especially in hindsight: is his appropriation of Saussurean formalism responsible for the brilliance?

That question raises a fundamental issue that must be addressed if the origins of French theory are to be understood. As the French structuralists turned from linguistics to semiology, they began to expand the original concept of the sign. On Barthes' account, as we shall see, one could call Diderot's *Encyclopedie* a "sign" of the Enlightenment and be implicating, not just the *concept* of the Enlightenment, but its historical reality as well. This dizzying "inflation of the sign", as Derrida called it, conditioned the emergence of "poststructuralist" French theory because it undermined the essential distinction between *langue* (the grammar, the abstract synchronic code) and *parole* (speech behavior, in all its psychological and historical complexity).[6] In effect, the erosion of that distinction allowed partisans of the "new science" of Structuralism to refuse or otherwise elude the formal constraints, the abstract structures that had justified their claim to scientific status in the first place. That was the essence of ultra-structuralism. But, as politically committed French intellectuals, they had little choice in the long run; they had to take on events in the material world eventually; it was the only way home.

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[6] See above for Kristeva, inspired by Emile Benveniste and Mikhail Bakhtin, making that expansion programmatic at Barthes seminar at EPHE (spelling?) in 1966 (date?).

In 1975, looking back on his work as a structuralist in the late 1950s and early 1960s in his autobiography *RB by RB*, Barthes had a bit of fun at his own expense thinking about his new-found freedom from all such constraints this way:

> Temptation of the alphabet: to adopt the succession of letters in order to link fragments is to fall back on what constitutes the glory of language (and Saussure's despair): an unmotivated order… The alphabet is euphoric: *no more anguish of "schema,"* no more rhetoric of "development," no more twisted logic, no more dissertations! An Idea per fragment, a fragment per idea, and as for the succession of these atoms, nothing but the age-old and irrational order of French letters. ([1975b] 1977, 147; italics mine)[7]

Barthes' analysis of the *Paris Match* cover exemplifies the "anguish" he would come to associate with impositions of rational schemas on the flux of historical contingency to which he finally, gratefully, surrendered. As so often with Barthes, the word "anguish" (Latin for "narrow" and "tight") was purposefully chosen. But, prior to the anguish, the analysis itself simply described how this particular piece of photographic mythology worked, how the actuality of what the picture pictured got sucked up into a "myth" of "French Imperiality." It seems that the "long story" of "the Negro" [sic], one which entails "a whole system of values: a history, a geography, a morality" and "postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions," was subjected to a process that "puts all this richness at a distance" in order to "free the picture, and prepare it to receive" its mythical signified ("*The French Empire? It's just a fact: look at this good Negro who salutes like one of our own boys*"). Pictures in which "a nun hands a cup of tea to a bed-ridden Arab" or "a white schoolmaster teaches attentive piccaninnies" send the same myth-message and all depend on keeping the actually pictured reality in view and at a distance—*at the same time.* That is what "buttonholes" the average citizen, relaxing in his barber's chair, leafing through a magazine, that is what makes him believe—no, not even that—makes him *see* that *this* is real ([1957] 1972, 117–118, 127).

[7] Barthes was not simply rhapsodizing here. He adds: "I can remember, as a child of ten or so, during a winter of solitude in a strange town, becoming obsessed with the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. And not least among the pleasures of that text were the surprises that attended the order (anti-order, parody of order, Dada order) the alphabet imposed. The marvelous semantic shifts" ([1975b] 1977, 147).

Completely convincing, most would agree. Barthes was being sarcastic, of course, debunking a pernicious ideological "myth." But a neo-liberal French patriot who believed that France was actually becoming, after struggles and setbacks, the cradle of universal humanism it had aspired to be since the Revolution might take Barthes' gloss at face value. Such an interpreter, that is, could agree with him at the conceptual level and refuse the evaluative tone. A neat piece of work, then, with a claim to a kind of objectivity and, once grasped, a fruitful paradigm with no end to possible applications for ideology analysis. But, in 1957, in service of the science of Structuralism, Barthes had to do more. He had to create something like a formal theory of modern mythology.

Even in this early period, however, Barthes was, perhaps only half-consciously, resisting the imperative to schematize to which he nonetheless submitted. He resorted to what looks like a bit of chicanery, some terminological sleight of hand, in order to exceed the formalism he had erected while, at the same time, identifying himself as one of the fashionable gang of structuralists.[8] He had begun the essay by hailing Saussure's vision of a general science of signs, a semiology that would include but go way beyond linguistics proper, and then he summarized Saussure's seminal definition of linguistic signs that would make it all possible (see above, Chap. 4.2). Barthes accurately describes that definition as distinguishing, on "the plane of analysis," between a signifier, which is the (sound) image, and a signified, which is the concept—and "the relation between the concept and image" as the sign per se, a "concrete entity," an "associative total" (113). Then, on page 114, he again refers to the "the associative total of the concept and the image" as constitutive of the sign. *But never again in the essay do we encounter the concept as the signified of first order signs*, that is of signs prior to their transformation into second-order mythic signs. And even on these introductory pages, his example of a first-order sign—a bunch of roses "to signify my passion"—masks a crucial bit of slippage as it manages to sneak out of the purely linguistic realm. This sign constitutes, on the "plane of experience," a concrete entity he dubs "passionified roses." Only on the plane of analysis do the elements of that sign "allow themselves to be decomposed" into "a signifier and a signified, the roses and my passion" (113).

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[8] Compare Derrida's soon abandoned scientific pretensions in *Of Grammatology*, or the shameless way Deleuze absconded with the "Structuralism" label. Perhaps even Foucault was only pretending to believe in the reality of the synchronic code he called an "episteme"?.

Not the *concept* of his passion, but the passion itself.

It is as if Barthes is so deeply disinclined to confer upon the plane of analysis (*langue*, grammar, code, schema) the privilege it actually holds in Saussurean linguistics that the example he offers *of a Saussurean sign*, inscribed now in general semiology, cannot resist the *experience* of passion as it takes the place of the concept of passion in the cultural code.

In the supposedly more complex case of the photograph as an instance of his general theory of modern myth, Barthes more or less simulated (how consciously, it's hard to tell, but see his recollections below, Chap. 9.1.3) an elaborate technical terminology. He was supposedly specifying relations between boxes in the chart he created that would allow a first-order sign to be "stolen and restored" by a second-order sign, a mytho-logical sign—but restored so that it "is no longer quite that which was stolen." We are told that myth accomplishes this "brief act of larceny," thanks to the "duplicity of its signifier, which is at once meaning and form" ([1957] 1972, 124–125).

"Meaning" and "form" label the same box in the chart, the box of the first-order sign as a whole. Considered in itself the first-order sign is called "meaning." But considered as the victim of myth, the first-order sign, the photograph itself, is called "form"—registering its transformation into the second-order sign, what myth makes of the photograph. The first-order sign as a whole is glossed *at the beginning of Barthes' account* as "a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolor. All this is the *meaning* of the picture" (116; italics his). No mention of concepts. "Form" refers to that same sign now functioning as the signifier for the second-order sign, the mythic sign, and making pres-ent its signified—which *is* called a "concept"—in this case "a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness" (116). The myth has thus absconded with the first-order sign in the manner just described, by imposing the mythical concept on the unwary consumer, sitting in his barber chair, leaf-ing through a magazine. But not before Barthes has performed an even more radical makeover of the notion of "meaning" as defined at the begin-ning of the analysis, when it was beginning to lose the status of concept.

We have already encountered the result of that makeover: "meaning" becomes a "long story" of "the Negro" [sic], which entails "a whole sys-tem of values: a history, a geography, a morality" and which "postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions" (118). In effect, meaning becomes *anything and everything in nature and history that conditions the situation of the saluting subject of the*

photograph—and *that* is what myth is displacing. We see immediately how this "structuralist" ideology critique, at any rate, could be made to serve the Marxist project after all.

But Barthes proceeded to this happy outcome by degrees. Over the course of four pages or so, he entertained tangential possibilities and oddly chosen examples—as if to clutter up the chasm of difference between his Structuralism and Saussure's with a series of incremental steps. Right after he presents the master diagram, before he gets the *Paris Match* cover, he pretends to clarify his account with an example that pretends to be simpler. It involves a sentence from a Latin grammar book, borrowed from some classic fable: "because my name is lion" (115). The sentence is being used in the grammar book to show subject/predicate agreement—that is its "mythical" function, as it were, and with just that much said it can seem clarifying. But Barthes goes on to describe the first-order "meaning" as the "simple meaning" (again, *not* the concepts) of the words "because my name is lion." Then, because it is being used as a "grammatical example," we are told that "I am even forced to realize that the sentence is in no way *signifies* its meaning to me, that it tries very little to tell me something about the lion" (116). Then we learn that the "something" the sentence isn't concerned with is that the lion "lives in a certain country" (in the fable?) and has "just been hunting" and won't share its prey (that *is* in the fable). Which suggests, Barthes tells us, that "a zoology" is involved (in the fable?) and "a literature" which, as part of a "total of linguistic signs" (the whole fable? Fables in general? The whole language in which the fable is told?) *would or could be* the "meaning" of the sentence if the sentence (as a "form") weren't being used as a grammatical example (117). Imprecise language at this crucial juncture cannot be accidental. It has the effect of blurring the distinction between what is in the fable or fables or the language of the fable or fables and what is in reality, in nature and history. The supposedly simpler example of the fable in a grammar book has been used to provide cover for Barthes as he slips away from the formal code of concepts and returns to the indefinable complexity of actuality—the very complexity Saussure was abstracting himself out of in the first place by creating the distinction between *langue* and *parole*).

The assessment I am offering of "Myth Today" only enhances the admiration I feel for Roland Barthes when he came, in the end, to account for himself in the language of honest recollection and simple testimony.

Here is one example (there will be others)—but this one bears directly on his experiments with Structuralism—of the candor he would bring to that task in his 1975 autobiography *RB by RB* (see below, 9.1.3):

> He has never worked out real algorithms; there was a moment when he fell back on less arduous formulations … simple equations, schemas, tables … such figures, in fact, are of no use whatever; they are simple toys. … One plays at science, one puts it in the picture—like a piece in a collage. ([1975b] 1977, 99–100)

But Barthes' work in his structuralist period—however disingenuous, however playful—can be usefully viewed as a whole and, from that point of view, it stands as a pretty complement to Levi-Strauss' project—a prototype, in fact, of binary opposition in the totalizing manner of high Structuralism: Levi-Strauss fashioned a structuralist anthropology offering an affirmative, virtually Romantic, view of tribal myth and ritual as a radical and omnivorous mental exercise that, in effect, "culturalized nature." *The Savage Mind* (1966), portrayed in Levi-Strauss' formulas and schemas, was fulfilling itself through, and in a codification of plants, animals, minerals, weather, the firmament above and human settlements below, a codification that made of the cosmos one coherent field of meaning, a living assembly of mutually signifying signs that deserved the appellation "Science of the Concrete" (1966). Barthes, on the other hand, offered a devastating critique of modern myth as "naturalized culture," a commodified field of ideologically saturated signs that made historically constructed social arrangements seem natural—thus anchoring the *doxa* of modern subjects. Barthes was much taken with Levi-Strauss' work and between them (along with Lacan and Althusser) they launched the structuralist program, the new "human sciences"—those developments of Saussure's semiology that were supposed to overcome humanism and bring about the "end of Man" at last. It would be hard to overstate the rhetorical power in the 1960s of the sheer idea of these "human sciences," an idea the materialist ultra-structuralists—the theorists of writing and texts, of bodies and temporality—continued to promote.

But during his structuralist phase there was another kind of schema to which Barthes felt obliged to submit, obliged again by the prevailing climate of opinion to which he was even more susceptible than others in his cohort. The Barthes who wrote "Myth Today" saw myth at work in every domain of modern social and cultural activity—except one:

There is therefore one language which is not mythical, it is the language of man as a producer … revolutionary language proper cannot be mythical … its language, all of it, is functionally absorbed in this making. It is because it generates speech which is fully, that is to say initially and finally, political, and not, like myth, speech which is initially political and finally natural, that Revolution excludes myth. ([1957] 1972, 146)

Barthes goes on for pages, justifying this exception in terms so unconvincing—especially for anyone who has spent time with working people, not to mention revolutionaries—that the wonder is that he seems to have convinced himself, at least for a while. But, once again, in recollection, he became aware of the anguish involved. In *RB by RB* Barthes will celebrate his liberation from all systems—Marxism, no less than Structuralism. His case especially calls for some serious consideration of the recurring appeal of such systems. As this book reaches its conclusion and begins to imagine what an authentic humanism might look like, it will have to reckon with the apparently inexhaustible strength of that appeal. It seems obvious, just for starters, that if something like a "religious impulse" is built into the human condition, secular intellectuals are as inclined to indulge it as anybody else.

Barthes' focus in later years, as he affiliated with the *Tel Quel* textualists and moved on to ultra-structuralism, would remain on the original opponent—the modern subject and its false clear concepts, instruments of domination and exclusion. That continuity, and its overriding importance for creators of French theory, explains why Structuralism and poststructuralism were not as sharply distinguished in France as they were in the USA. The shift away from formal schemas to writing and textuality loomed larger in the anglophone academy because, in that setting, intellectually credible Marxists had been inspired by the Frankfurt School; the phenomenological-existentialist/humanist Marxism of Kojeve and Sartre was barely on the radar.

9.1.2   Roland Barthes 2.0: Textuality, Intertextuality

To give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text … a final signification, to close the writing. This conception perfectly suits criticism, which can then take as its major task the discovery of the author (or his hypostases: society, history, the psyche, freedom) … The critic has conquered. … [But] … the space of writing is to be traversed not penetrated: writing ceaselessly posits meaning but always in order to evaporate it. … Thus literature (it would be better henceforth to say writing) … liberates an activity which we

might call counter-theological, properly revolutionary, for to refuse to arrest meaning is finally to refuse God and his hypostases, reason, science, the law. (Roland Barthes "The Death of the Author" [1968] 1977, 147)

Here is Barthes, as usual, riding high upon the next new thing and, as so often happened, framing it in terms that everyone who was anyone would soon adopt. "Death of the Author" was a doubly compelling phrase because it played upon the enduring aim of all the French thinkers who took the linguistic turn while introducing the up and coming notion of "writing." Barthes read everything and tolerated almost as much and that allowed him to internalize interesting ideas, methods, and vocabularies with astonishing facility. And, as we have seen, he was happy to experiment with them for as long as that seemed desirable. Like Dosse, I see certain character traits at work here, but Barthes himself, going back to his earliest work in *Writing Degree Zero*, understood his own willingness to drop a style and adopt a new one in a more substantive way: it was rooted in a conviction that, no matter how radical a provocation a cultural innovation might provide for a moment, it would inevitably congeal into a conventional gesture—that being the nature of what Adorno called the "culture industry," operating now, in Barthes' view, at the level of high culture.[9]

There can be no doubt that Barthes' commitment to the discourse of writing and intertextuality was primarily due to the influence of Kristeva and the gadget she presented at his seminar at EPHE in the winter of 1965–1966. Along with Derrida's account of writing as opposed to speech, the idea of intertextuality as a functional substitute for references to subjectivity eroded what remained of Barthes' commitment to Structuralism in particular and the objectifying modernist stance in general:

with Kristeva's presentation, a bell tolled for the scientistic ambitions so carefully laid out in *Elements of Semiology* (1964) and in *Criticism and Truth* (1966). This was a major turning point. … Not only did he consider this structuralist ambition overblown, but he also considered Structuralism to be tainted with a questionable perspective because … [it] … led to the negation of differences between texts … the new concern [was] to make difference the goal rather than the means of the analysis as it was being used in phonological binarism. (Dosse 1997, 57)

[9] Compare Thomas Frank's *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (1997).

As will become clear in subsequent discussions of Deleuze and Derrida, making "difference the goal rather than the means" was yet another way of conceiving the temporalization of static structures (grammars, codes) without referring to subjects—precisely the task performed by "intertextuality." Indeed, it is only a slight exaggeration to say that learning to see how that task is being performed by various theoretical vocabularies *just is* learning to understand the seminal texts of postmodernism. That subject was the main target, always. Thinking back on his career in 1975, Barthes himself identified the underlying constant in all his work—going back to his modernist defense of the *nouveau roman:* "He wants to side with any writing whose principle is that *the subject is merely an effect of language*" (1977; italics in the original). No surprise then, to find him organizing his work during his intertextual phase around a theme he would use as the title for his most influential piece of writing in that period—"The Death of the Author." And no surprise to find him assessing the difference between his view of "Mythology Today" as an ultra-structuralist in 1971 from his assessment of it as a structuralist back in 1957: "Initially we sought the destruction of the (ideological) signified; now we seek the destruction of the sign" (in *The Rustle of Language* 1971, 67).

Barthes staged the drama of returning language to temporality as a critic, concerned with authors and readers and the whole process that went (mostly undetected) under the conventional name of "Literature." The key word being, of course, "process" and the substitutions Barthes recommended—of "writing" for "literature," of "scriptor" for "author"—were meant to highlight the open-ended mobility of that process:

> the text he wrote announcing the "death of the author," which was the literary equivalent of Foucault's "death of man" in philosophy, made a considerable impact. An author would be nothing more than a recent notion born at the end of the Middle Ages thanks to capitalist ideology … this mythical figure was on the verge of dissolving. … Surrealism had begun to jolt the myth … but linguistics would finish it off. … In its place came the 'scriptor,' a sort of being outside of time and space, set within the infinity of the signifier's unfolding. … Barthes joyfully celebrated the birth of the reader on the ashes of the still smoldering body of the Author. (Dosse 1997, 85)

When Dosse mentions the role "capitalist ideology" played in creating this mythical Author, he is stressing the importance of the "countertheological" and "properly revolutionary" intentions that motivated Barthes'

attack. For Barthes was refusing, not just the Author of books or the Author of nature (God), but Law and Science as well. Revolution indeed—and we are reminded that this essay was written a year before the events of '68, a period when Barthes was intensely involved with *Tel Quel* and determined to show himself as ready as the next fellow for the destruction revolution would bring. The image Dosse provides of Barthes celebrating the birth of the reader on the "ashes of the still smoldering body of the Author" is aptly chosen. It captures the mood of the moment and it is all too easy to forget the underlying rage that drove the creators of theory to their conceptual extremes. When Roland Barthes sided with all writing that shows that "*the subject is merely an effect of language*" (1975a, 79), he was not just arguing philosophy in the mode of, say, Hume or Wittgenstein or even Nietzsche. Barthes saw his critique of the Author as fulfilling "the intellectual's (or the writer's) historical function today," which was "to maintain and to emphasize the *decomposition* of bourgeois consciousness." And Barthes characterizes the intellectual's function by means of this comparison: "*decomposition* is here contrary to *destruction:* in order to destroy bourgeois consciousness we should have to absent ourselves from it … and such exteriority is possible only in a revolutionary situation: in China, today, class consciousness is in the process of destruction, not decomposition" (1975a, 79, 63; italics in the original).

Once again, the same obsession, the same mission. Barthes even managed, in this passage, to sound a bit wistful—as if he were longing to be in such a situation, actually destroying people. I am inclined to suspect him of affecting a ferocity he didn't really feel in order to be part of what was happening, but, either way, it serves to make the point at hand.[10] Because he and his colleagues at *Tel Quel* were abandoning Marxist orthodoxy to practice "cultural politics," they had not only to convince themselves, by way of "writing" and "textuality," that they were still materialists, but they had to convince themselves that their revolutionary fervor burned as brightly as the Bolsheviks' in the fall of 1917.

Barthes' "death of the author," which he wrote as he was abandoning Structuralism in favor of more postmodern positions, can be revealingly

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[10] On the other hand, I think we can take expressions of alienation cast in less political terms at face value: "Like many of us, I profoundly reject my civilization, to the point of nausea. This book [*Empire of Signs*, about his experience of Japan] expresses my absolute demand for a total alterity, which is becoming a necessity for me" (Roland Barthes in Dosse 1997, 61).

compared with the "intentional fallacy," the principle of modernist "new criticism" that excluded by fiat the author's personal feelings and aims from interpretive consideration of a work (see Chap. 3). In his essay, Barthes was not just saying—as Wimsatt and Beardsley had—that the author's intentions were *irrelevant* to the self-sufficient significance of a text. As Dosse suggests with his reference to the "birth of the reader," Barthes' claim was much more radical than that: his claim was that the reader was, in a very real sense, actually the author, that "the true locus of writing is reading" ([1968] 1977, 6).

> In this way is revealed the whole being of writing: a text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other … there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author … but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, *without any being lost*, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination; *but this destination can no longer be personal*: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted. ([1968] 1977, 6; italics mine)

With that, Barthes promoted a view of textuality, of writing, that converged with Derrida's notions of dissemination, iterability, and *differAnce*. This impersonal reader without biography upon whom no citation is lost corresponds to Derrida's "all *possible* referents" (see below, Chap. 9.2.4). Barthes' particular formulation, perhaps because it was so accessible compared to Derrida's, was a principal source for reader response theory in the anglophone academy—and a specific influence on various other developments of post-structuralism as well. But the immediate consequence among French intellectuals was that it lent momentum to the notion that "infinite writing," with its various ways of dissolving the "work," the "book," would also precipitate the dissolution of the subject—a far more radical (and implausible) aim. To see how that could even seem possible, Barthes' view of the newly empowered "reader"[11] has to be set beside his view of what has become of the dead author, now newly designated as "scriptor":

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[11] And the displacement underway is given political significance, reminiscent of the early days of the Internet and Blogging when citizen opinion and reporting were cheered on as the established media platforms lost control of the public conversation.

> The Author, when we believe in him, is always conceived as the past of his own book … he maintains with his work the same relation of antecedents a father maintains with his child … the modern writer (scriptor) is born simultaneously with his text … every text is eternally written here and now. This is because to write can no longer designate an operation of recording, of observing, of representing. … The modern writer … can therefore no longer believe … that his hand is too slow for his thought … for him, on the contrary, his hand, detached from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression) traces a field without origin or at least has no other origin then language itself … we know the text … a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture. … The writer's … only power is to combine the different kinds of writing. ([1968] 1977, 145)

Barthes' "scriptor" enjoyed the same impersonal anonymity as the modernist creator (see above Chap. 3), but, as so often happened in transition to postmodernism, the original gesture has been intensified. In the case of the reader, the distinction between the personal/historical ego and the transcendental ego has been pushed to the limit of conceivability—and beyond. When T.S. Eliot identified the creator/poet with the whole of his language and culture, or Kandinsky claimed to be accessing supra-personal feelings, one could at least imagine, in Eliot's case, that it was all somehow stored in the poet's brain or, in Kandinsky's case, that a simple if mystical belief in another plane of being was at work. And we can imagine Barthes' writer along similar lines. The fact that "he" (or his "hand") can combine the "different kinds of writing" implies that he (or his hand, presumably via his unconscious, as in Surrealism's automatic writing) has *some kind of access* to what is being combined. But the impersonal existence of Barthes' reader (or co-author) refuses to be imagined in that way—or in *any* way, on Barthes' account. What do we make of "the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, *without any being lost*, all the citations a writing consists of" coupled with the claim that the reader has no history or psychology or biography?

There is, I think, a way to understand this, but it involves reconceiving of the whole process in Derridean terms and it seems best to postpone the discussion until they have been introduced. Suffice to say, for now, that Barthes was at the time of this writing very much under Derrida's influence. He attended the landmark Johns Hopkins conference with him the same year he wrote *The Death of the Author* and, as already noted, that essay converges in striking ways with Derrida's more elaborately developed ideas. He even accepts, in passing, the crucial Derridean decision to

think of the whole historical and natural world as "text" and that will prove to be an essential first step toward understanding how the creators of theory could ever have imagined that their "cultural politics" might actually effect a transformation of modern subjectivity.[12]

As for Barthes, it remains to be stressed how, in "The Death of the Author" and other works of this period, he insisted on the act of writing as a bodily act. Besides the rote rejection of "representation" and "expression" in literature, there is a particular emphasis on "the hand" of the scriptor as agent—it does the inscribing, out of nowhere, in the eternal now. There is an allusion here to the automatic writing of the Surrealists, but, more immediately, it reflects Barthes' general determination to treat subjects as effects, not as agents. The commitment of the *Tel Quel* team to materialize everything cultural was also being satisfied by talk of "the body that writes" (compare Kristeva's semiotic).

9.1.3   Barthes 3.0: Bourgeois Charms

He had always, up to now, worked under the aegis of a great system (Marx, Sartre, Brecht, semiology, the Text). Today, it seems to him that he writes more openly, more unprotectedly. … He says this … in order to account to himself for the feeling of insecurity which possesses him today and, still more perhaps, the vague torment of a *recession* toward the minor thing. (in *Roland Barthes* 1977, 102)

Roland Barthes by Roland Barthe*s* (1977), a personal/intellectual reminiscence written late in Barthes' career, offers a unique perspective on the structuralist "dream" of a human science he once entertained—but also a bridge to the ultra-structuralist Barthes, the Barthes of intertextuality, who left that dream behind. It also provides an introduction to the Barthes of this reminiscence who had abandoned all the protections "a great system" once provided. If I had to recommend one book by a French author on "French theory," this would be it. Of the hard-core structuralists (Foucault

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[12] "History itself is less and less conceived as a monolithic series of determinations; we know, more and more, that it is, just as is language, a play of structures, whose respective interdependence can be pushed far further then one had thought; *history is also a writing*. … What is at stake is to increase the rupture of the symbolic system in which the modern West has lived and will continue to live. … To decenter it, withdraw its thousand-year-old privileges, such that a new writing (and not a new style) can appear, a practice founded in theory is necessary" (Barthes in "The Division of the Assembly" in *The Tel Quel Reader* (1998, 22)).

was entitled to count himself out, I believe), only Barthes turned definitively to poststructuralist textualism—before abandoning even that[13] in order to "transgress the transgression" that theory was supposed to be by indulging in pleasures of the text as an ordinary reader. Graham Allen describes Barthes' ultimate move this way:

> In order to avoid the Doxa of radical left-wing discourse, Barthes allows into his writing themes and tones (here, love and sentimentality) which are precisely barred by the orthodoxies of that discourse. Barthes' desire, therefore, is to protect writing (*ecriture*) from solidifying into Doxa … in his later work [he] is … taking up apparently unfashionable positions as a writer, in particular the position of a personalized, individual, pleasure seeking subject. (Allen 2003, 101).

An invaluable resource, then—unique in its accessibility among all the works of the creators of theory. As an "autobiography," it suggested betrayal of theory's whole enterprise right from the start—hence, my scare quotes and his use of the third person. But, in effect, the book put quotes around the scare quotes and dissolved them. Apparently exhausted, admittedly ambivalent, a bit embarrassed, above all, relieved, Barthes turned to descriptions of himself and others as everyday subjects, engaged in their doings, moved by their feelings, responding to the events of the day.[14] His main concession to the strictures of theory was the format—a collection of paragraphs, loosely organized around themes, skipping back and forth over time, eschewing any narrative that reached beyond anecdote. Otherwise, he was indulging himself in this book, doing what he coyly admits he had always dreamt of doing for socialism: namely, "importing certain *charms* (not *values*) of the bourgeois art of living" into precincts from which they have been banished ([1975b] 1977, 60).

With its lack of structure and its traditional intent—to represent, to communicate—*RB by RB* virtually invites us to sample. I am accepting that invitation. Here, in no particular order, as Barthes would surely have wished it, are some especially charming/insightful/revealing vignettes/aphorisms/confessions:

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[13] As time goes by, talk of text "tends to degenerate into prattle. Where to go next? That is where I am now" (71).

[14] In fact—I suddenly realize—Barthes chose to "break the ban on subject talk," just as I have been doing in this study, but for more personal reasons.

The first one fleshes out his notion of the "temptation of the alphabet". This little recollection was enough on its own to convince me that Barthes' taste for a certain anti-order was not an intellectual affectation:

> I can remember, as a child of ten or so, during a winter of solitude in a strange town, becoming obsessed with the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. And not least among the pleasures of that text were the surprises that attended the order (anti-order, parody of order, Dada order) the alphabet imposed. The marvelous semantic shifts. ([1975b] 1977, 147)

As it happens, as I child, I was prey to that very obsession for some months and I remember *precisely* the pleasure of those semantic shifts. But it wasn't until I read that little snippet from Barthes that I understood what it was teaching me about Dada.

Similarly, for this: I remember how weirdly intriguing this little game was to me as a child, but when Barthes uses it to anchor the ultra-structuralist disdain for origins I find that I understand both the childhood game and the ultra-structuralist disdain much better. Early on, Barthes recalls his enjoyment of this game:

> As in "prisoner's base," language upon infinity, to infinity … whence other images: that of choosing up hand over hand (The third hand returns, it is no longer the first one). … No last word. (5)

But later on, with more intellectual concerns on the table, in a little section called "The Abandonment of Origins," he offers this:

> By an abusive interest, the *Doxa* crushes origin and truth together, in order to make them into a single proof. … In order to thwart origin, *he first acculturates nature thoroughly: nothing natural anywhere, nothing but the historical* … then this culture is restored to the infinite movement of various discourses, set up one against the other (and not engendered) as in hand-over-hand choosing.

Derrida provided more elaborate reasons for abandoning origins to *diffArence*, but it would be hard to imagine a more incisive defense of that classic move upon which so much of deconstruction's program depends. The aphoristic language—coupled with the reference to the child's game, already fondly recalled—lends a charming air to a description of what was actually a fierce commitment. Actual people, Barthes

himself, were determined to "*thwart origins*" because of the way convention "*crushes*" them together with truth in order to sanctify its reign. If you let phrases like that set the tone, you realize that, yes, this was a real contest, a battle for conceptual control, a war over language, a culture war. And Foucault's power/knowledge suddenly makes more sense—dare I say, even common sense? Donald Trump and his supporters certainly grasped the essence of it, in any case, when they appropriated a phrase like "fake news" and deployed it so relentlessly, hand-over-hand, that nothing was left of its original meaning and it became a sheer assertion of their power to believe whatever they wanted to.

In a more confessional vein, Barthes tells little stories like these:

> When I was a child, we lived in a neighborhood … full of houses being built … huge holes had been dug. … One day when we were playing in one of these all the children climbed out except me. I couldn't make it. From the brink up above, they teased me: Lost! Alone! Spied on! Excluded! (to be excluded is not to be outside, it is to be alone in the hole, imprisoned under the open sky: *precluded*). … Then I saw my mother running up; she pulled me out of there and took me far away from the children—against them. (121–122)

Or, recalling a recent experience, so excruciatingly similar in essence, though totally different in detail:

> Walking through the church of Saint-Sulpice and happening to witness the end of a wedding, he has a feeling of exclusion. Now, why this faltering, produced under the effect of the silliest spectacles: ceremonial, religious, conjugal, and petit bourgeois. … Chance had produced that rare moment in which the whole symbolic accumulates and forces the body to yield. He had received in a single gust all the divisions of which he was the object, as if, suddenly, it was the very *being* of exclusion with which he had been bludgeoned. (85–86)

The text provides, discreetly, some details concerning Barthes' marginality but it was little stories like these that were, I have no doubt, making straight white male readers "check their privileges" long before that phrase was coined. Barthes' language also illustrates how habitually he had come to think of the symbolic as material, as having force ("gust," "bludgeoned"), thanks to his ultra-structuralist investment in all things bodily. And we also appreciate more deeply why challenging the *doxa* and the proud autonomous subjects to whom it catered was always Barthes' aim, even as he moved away from radical politics and, with this very book,

challenged a new *doxa* he had himself helped to create. But, clearly, he was proud of his constancy in opposition as well as the nuances he brought to it. As this passage I think makes clear, that constancy *and* the nuances helped him cope with, and even rise above, a lot of suffering over the years—and he never renounced the stance that made that quasi-immunity possible:

> The illusion of the natural is … the alibi paraded by a social majority: the natural is a legality. … We might see the origin of such a critique in the minority situation of RB himself … who does not feel how natural it is, in France, to be Catholic, married, and properly accredited with the right degrees? … against this natural, I can rebel in two ways: by arguing … or by wrecking the majority's law by a transgressive avant-garde action. But he seems to remain strangely at the intersection of these two rejections … it is possible to enjoy the codes even while nostalgically imagining that someday they will be abolished: like an intermittent outsider, I can enter into or emerge from the burdensome sociality, depending on my mood. (130–131)

Finally, a couple of revealing comments on a more purely intellectual plane, though, once again—as throughout this book—there is no doubt at all that Roland Barthes took the positions he took as critic and a creator of French theory because of certain feelings he had about certain things. In a section called "Limpness of important words," he writes:

> In what he writes there are two kinds of important words. Some are … vague, insistent, they serve to take the place of several signifieds ("determinism," "history," "nature"). I feel the limpness of these important words, limp as Dali's watches. The others ("writing," "style") are remodeled according to a personal project. … He's not very good at getting to the heart of things. … A word, a figure … fastens upon him for several years, he repeats it, uses it everywhere … but he makes no effort to reflect further as to what he means … you cannot get to the heart of a refrain; you can only substitute another one for it. And this, after all is what fashion does. In other words, he has his internal, his personal fashions. (125–130)

The art of the humble-brag as practiced by Roland Barthes (as if there were really a "heart of things"!) reminds me of Proust at Combray, pretending to think that he didn't have the stuff to be a great writer because he wasn't good at abstract thought; it seems that the poor fellow was so sensitive to the ever-morphing array of sensations he was experiencing, so overwhelmed by them, that he just couldn't ascend to philosophical

heights (Proust [1913] 1998, 252). Poor Roland was similarly afflicted with respect to language: "I have a disease: I *see* language. What I should simply hear, a strange pulsion—perverse in that in it desire mistakes its object, reveals it to me as a vision (all allowances made) like the one Scipio had in his dream of the musical spheres," and so on.

A little vanity—so easy to forgive; in fact, Roland Barthes did have a remarkable feel for language in so many various venues, high and low, and a remarkable talent for evoking in others the experiences that guided his writing. Of all the creators of French theory, he was the most comprehensible precisely because he regarded the concepts he developed and the language he used as "personal fashions"—and he never lost touch with the real RB, the one who finally wrote *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes.*

The ultra-structuralist Barthes and his colleagues at *Tel Quel*, including Jacques Derrida, represented the best efforts of the so-called *textualistes* to undermine the modern subject and camouflage their abandonment of Marx. But Derrida's contributions to this end were, if anything, even less convincingly materialist than Barthes' and so very much more obscure that it is possible to suspect Derrida of intentional deception flavored with mockery. Where Barthes appears to have succumbed to peer pressure, as it were, and fallen into innocent conformity with the trends of the day, we suspect sometimes that Derrida might have been playing a more devious, perhaps more enjoyable game.

9.2   Jacques Derrida (1930–2004)

I am profoundly convinced, against Wittgenstein … that, what we cannot speak about we must (not) pass over in silence. (Derrida in Peeters 2013, 162)

For the anglophone reader familiar with the logical positivist rejection of "nonsense," watching Jacques Derrida position himself so explicitly in opposition to Wittgenstein on this pivotal issue ought to be enough in itself to adjust whatever conventional expectations he or she might bring to the reading of a "philosophical" text. Michel Foucault undoubtedly had more influence on actual research anglophone academics did under the influence of the French theorists, but Derrida was as well known—and the most controversial. John Searle famously said that he "gave bullshit a bad name" and, in general, he was the center of attention for critics excoriating the jargon of theory. So more extended explicative attention will be

given here to his work. Let it be an acid test. I am trying in general to show that the ban on subject talk and a subliminal loyalty requirement to the absent Marx—or at least, to materialism—conditioned the language game of theory and pushed it, *with intent to confound*, to the limits of intelligibility. If I can bring that insight to bear on some of Derrida's key texts and on his project in general—and bring clarity along for the ride, my immediate aim will have been accomplished. And, hopefully, a path forward for the humanities, built on understanding rather than repression and recrimination, will be that much more accessible.

Rhetoric, staging, and biography (informed especially by Edward Baring's *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy* (2011) and Benoit Peeters' *Derrida* (2013)) will still play a substantial role in this discussion. But a substantive analysis of the inaugural act of deconstruction in *Speech and Phenomena* (1973 [1967]) and of papers associated with the dispute between Derrida and John Searle over Austin's speech act theory (*Limited Inc.* 1988) will be undertaken as well. In the 1967 work, Derrida took on Husserl's version of the sign and dismantled Structuralism and the subject together. This "double gesture" motivated theory in general, as we have seen, but the point to be stressed with deconstruction in particular is that Derrida was working *within* the phenomenological tradition.[15] Just as the signifier in silent monologue turned out to be indicating, not immediately expressing, the signified, so subjectivity turned out to *be* other than itself and both foundational forms of presence were undone at once. Deconstruction's applications were various, but it never wavered from that path of undoing—facilitated by an understanding of the possibilities inherent in language allowed by, say, *Finnegans Wake* (1939) rather than by recursive rules in a synchronic grammar.[16]

When Structuralism reigned supreme in France, Derrida issued an ingenious challenge. He transformed "phenomenology" by replacing the subject of experience (Kant's transcendental subject, Hegel's Absolute Mind,

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[15] This discussion relies especially on Peter Gordon's "Hammer Without a Master" (2007) and the "Afterword" to *Limited Inc.* (1988), in which Derrida, guided by carefully constructed questions from Gerald Graff, concentrates with unprecedented simplicity on explaining himself to an anglophone audience.

[16] Of special significance, then: Derrida's lifelong engagement with writers like Mallarme, Artaud, and Joyce. Francois Dosse claims that Derrida was actually after for a new genre of "creative writing" (1997, vol 2, 20–21), with *Glas* as his principal example. Derrida's biographer describes a man who spent his whole working life poised, and torn, between philosophy and literature (Peeters 2013, 27–34, 101, 134, 267–270, 309–312).

Husserl's transcendental ego, Heidegger's *Dasein*) with "language." "Phenomenology" is in scare quotes because the very idea of phenomenology depends on a subject in or to whom phenomena appear. "Language" is in scare quotes because, in appropriating the life-world of phenomenology for his linguistic turn, Derrida reconceived, not just language, but experience as "text" (textile). With counter-intuitive violence, he treated speech in particular as a kind of "writing."[17] This vast text, of which human subjects were effects, extended indefinitely into past and future, consisting of all arrangements of significant things that ever existed or ever will and all *possible* significant arrangements of them as well:

> the concept of the text I propose is limited neither to the graphic, nor to the book, nor even to discourse. … What I call "text" implies all the structures called "real," "economic," "historical" socio-institutional, in short: all *possible* referents. (1988, 148)

Derrida has also used the term "general text" to convey the same notion (1982, 125–126). The infamous "there is nothing outside the text" belongs here—and the reading that takes "text" to mean written texts in the ordinary sense will be treated in what follows as emblematic of the gulf that separated Derrida's actual argument from its anglophone reception.[18]

What was to be gained from this sweeping re-description? In Derrida's *milieu*, as we have seen, returning the abstract (idealized) "sign" of Structuralism (*langue*) to temporality and performance (*parole*) without readmitting the subject was the order of the day. Derrida's various formulations (differAnce, trace, iteration, dissemination, etc.) of "archewriting" gained the most traction and propelled him to the forefront, at first in France and later abroad. At ENS in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Derrida had been close to Althusser when he was at his zenith—his merger of Structuralism with Marxism was shaping every debate. Derrida felt compelled to materialize his account of language if he wanted to be heard at all (Peeters

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[17] The vision: in spite of the evanescence of voice, units of speech (phonemes, words, phrases, sentences) are cycled and recycled (iterated) through spoken discourse ad infinitum, in and out of changing contexts in changing combinations, woven together, an ephemeral textile composed of "chains of signification."

[18] Derrida did not, however, step in as forcefully as he might have to correct them. Most of his specific deconstructions dealt with literal texts and he had a valuable audience to cultivate, especially among American literary critics—for whom literal "texts" had an obvious priority.

[2013](#), 150–156). So the metaphor of "writing" and "text" was a godsend for him, but also for other thinkers—especially those associated with *Tel Quel*. Like everyone else caught up in this moment, they were shifting their attention to culture, to signification, and away from economic realities—but insisting at the same time on writing and texts to retain the appearance of some kind of Marxism, thanks to the materiality of those media. Derrida was then closely associated with *Tel Quel* but it is unlikely that he ever subscribed wholeheartedly to its program; he used whatever vocabulary allowed him to make his philosophical points and still be heard. So, for example, his breakout book *Of Grammatology* (1968) appeared to be proposing a new science, based on a new linguistic unit—the materialist "gram," which was helping Derrida conceive of speech as a kind of writing. But after the storms of 1968 subsided, when true believers Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta pressed Derrida in an interview to commit to "historical materialism," he dodged every question—and concluded by deconstructing materialism, in its ab-solute (unmixed) form, as an expression of idealism (since only ideas can be ab-solutely pure)! The skepticism *Tel Quel*'s interviewers came in with was amply confirmed (see *Positions* ([1972] 1981)). Derrida and *Tel Quel* parted ways soon after.

9.2.1   *The Linguification of Everything*

There is nothing outside the text. (Jacques Derrida)[19]

Plucking a blanket pronouncement like this from the work of an important thinker is usually a risky business, but justified in this case because, as already noted, this one has served as a veritable slogan, a sound-bite representation of the movement of thought associated with Derrida's work—and, taken literally, a sound-bite *mis*representation that was widely and often maliciously used against him. Rightly understood, however, the "textualization" of everything was to some currents of postmodernism what the notion of "sense data" was to certain modernist epistemologies—a controlling metaphor, a "new way of seeing."[20] In this section,

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[19] *Of Grammatology* ([1967] 1976, 163).
[20] *Philosophical Investigations* (1953, 400). Wittgenstein used this expression to evoke Cartesian solipsism. It shows how everything can be transformed, even though nothing actually changes, at the margin of a language game.

under the banner of this slogan, I will try to recreate deconstruction's inaugural moment—Derrida's undoing of Structuralism's foundational concept in *Speech and Phenomena* (1973 [1967]). I hope, in this way, to re-present the essence of the whole project and I will refer freely to subjective experience whenever it seems called for in service of that aim.

Glossed as "everything is text," the slogan just means that every significant thing means something else, that everything has to be "read." There are no pure "foundations," no pure starting points of the kind modernists were obsessed with discovering or defining, as emphasized in Chap. 3, precisely in order to bring out this contrast at this juncture. Of course, one can *stipulate* a starting point as an abstraction, but only by suppressing whatever actual sequence of events led to the stipulation. Saying there are no "transcendental signifieds," as Derrida so often did, made the same point whether, like Saussure, you meant concepts or, like Benveniste and Bahktin, you meant concrete contexts and referential fields. The same effect was served by saying there are no "origins"[21]—and no ends, no closure, no first word, no last word. Such expressions all aim at the same outcome: to get us to stop looking for a *basis* for thought outside the "play" of language—another characteristic expression which signals that we are dealing now with *post*-structuralism, with discourse and *parole*, very emphatically *not* Saussure's *langue* or grammar or code. There is no "play" of language in the frozen synchronic.

9.2.2   Presence

In his early work, Jacques Derrida took up a position in the phenomenological tradition. Most immediately, he was inspired by Heidegger, who was out to undermine Western ontology since Plato, especially Cartesian dualism, and to rescue "the question of Being" from a "forgetting" brought about by philosophical systems and associated forms of life in the western history. In Derrida's view, Heidegger was still captive to the metaphysics he sought to overcome because his teacher, Edmund Husserl, had bequeathed to him a dream, the dream upon which phenomenology, like all of traditional ontology, was based—the dream of presence.

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[21] Why is no absolute origin conceivable? Consider a footprint in the sand. It is the trace of a foot, which is its origin. But the foot only becomes an origin, thanks to the trace. Hence the chain of signifiers, without beginning or end.

Subsequent descriptions of his enterprise cannot disguise the fact that Derrida began his deconstructing work practicing phenomenology. Deconstruction was originally *better* phenomenology.[22] It wasn't a wrecking machine from nowhere, peddling incomprehensible neologisms to fad-hungry Francophiles out to overturn the canon by any means necessary. It appealed to evidence adduced from experience according to established methods based on introspection or intuition. The disciplined cultivation of that sort of evidence *is* phenomenology.[23]

The consequences of Derrida's analysis of "presence" were complex, but the basic insight was not. For those who felt its full impact, it was as if Derrida had been lurking in the wings while we had been philosophizing, waiting to intervene at the crucial moment—the moment when it *all comes down to something*. For epistemology, it is the moment when one says "*This* is what it means to *know* something." For some epistemologists, that moment comes in the form of a simple sensation, for others with grasping a concept, for others in pointing to an object. But these paradigm moments have this in common: that which is known is transparently and immediately present to the knower. "Presence" thus stands for foundational moments in *all* the traditions of Western philosophy (Idealism, Empiricism, etc.).[24]

When it all comes down to *this*, Derrida plucks at one's philosophical sleeve and says, "Hold on there, I know you're full of metaphysical excitement, but are you really, fully, in the anchoring presence of the concept 'triangle,' or 'green patch here now,' or a dog named 'Fido'"? If you introspect a bit on the moment, don't you find that it is corrupted in various ways? Isn't it more like you are gesturing toward what it *would* be like to experience presence? But have you ever actually experienced its abiding specificity? Or are these moments as you actually live them more diffuse and flickering than you pretend when you ground your systems on them?

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[22] In *Modern French Philosophy* (1979), Vincent Descombes—a native of this world, though not a partisan—states what to him is obvious: Derrida was engaged in "the radicalization of phenomenology" (136).

[23] An advocate of more rigorous public standards for philosophical justification is entitled to demur at this point, of course. But that demurral will apply as much to William James and the later Wittgenstein as to early Derrida.

[24] Compare Wilfred Sellars' "Myth of the Given" ([1956] 1997), "What might the Given be? … Sellars observes, 'Many things have been said to be 'Given': sense contents, material objects, universals, propositions, real connections, first principles, even Givenness itself.' Intuitively, it would be something that is self-evident or certain or indubitable" (Maher 2012, 52).

This is not difficult. Anyone can test it. When you gaze at something or think of something, how much attentional/intentional flickering goes on? How much of what a thing or a word or a concept *is* to you actually includes what it isn't—it's context and background, various associations and contrasts, recollections and projections? Isn't anything you attend to constantly disturbed by traces of these absent "others?" Most fundamentally, when you *mean* something, isn't your experience of your intention actually constituted by a reaching-toward and a leaving-behind of the moment of "touching" what you mean, a moment that never quite occurs? That is "differAnce," with an "a," an amalgam of the French words for differ (as in Structuralism) and defer—which tells us that the sign has been activated, that meaning is now an event).

Derrida's notion of "writing" will develop this theme, offered in this distilled form now just to give a sense of direction. And, once again, one could ask—if this describes what Derrida basically means when he deconstructs presence, why didn't he just say so? And, once again, the answer is that I resorted to ordinary subject talk ("you gaze" and "you attend") while he was committed to a way of writing that would evoke an anonymous process of signification upon which subjects, mere effects of that process, impose their false clarities.

9.2.2.1 Talking to Yourself in Your Head

Derrida began his critique of presence by subjecting basic principles of Structuralism to phenomenological analysis. As described in Chap. 5, Structuralism was a paradigmatic modernist enterprise (abstract, self-contained, ahistorical), but it anticipated—even invited—post-structuralism insofar as it posited grammar as a *system of differences.* The very phrase suggests an immanent tension.

What Derrida did was historicize the concept of the sign by engaging with it, not as it was *defined* by Saussure—but as it was *used* in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* ([1913] 2000). In the context of phenomenology, the question of *how signs are actually experienced* could not be ruled off limits as it had been by the *langue/parole* distinction.

Technical issues multiply, but the basic point is once again quite simple. Derrida jumped on the moment when Husserl blithely supposed that we don't "indicate" anything when we talk to ourselves, we just "express" it. To Husserl, it seemed obvious that we already know what we mean when we say something because, after all, we say it. There is no moment of interpretation distinct from production. The union of the signifier and signified

is absolute. Husserl assumed this because, in this respect, he was indeed still Cartesian through and through. He assumed the unity of the *cogito;* for each of us, there is one mental I, and I am "present" to I. The mother of all "presence," as it were—at least for modern thought.

That is why Derrida's deconstruction of Husserl's sign was also a deconstruction of modern subjectivity.

For Husserl, as for Saussure, signifiers had conceptual meaning, apart from reference. "Cat," meant "domesticated feline" quite apart from any actual cats at issue. Now, another person *could* interpret my utterance of "cat" to mean something else: it might mean "feline" to them, for example, and include lions and tigers. The signifier therefore *indicates* (or fails to) a concept to *another* person, as well as expressing it (see the graphic introducing the Saussure discussion in Chap. 5). But when I talk to myself I don't "send out" at all. The meanings of my own expressions are what expressions express. What is Present is an "ideal object," a concept or definition, with no physicality outside the expressed signifier. The ideal meaning inhabits the expression, no matter how context might vary.[25] Hence, expressions used in "solitary mental life" instantiate Presence for Husserl, argued Derrida.

9.2.2.2 Phonologocentrism

Another reason internal expressions provided that instance for Husserl involved the phenomenology of the voice as a form of "auto-affection." Auto-affection means sensing yourself, touching yourself, looking at yourself, and so forth. Talking to yourself silently, "hearing" your own voice in your mind, is auto-affection too, said Derrida, but it has special phenomenological characteristics.

Speaking to yourself "in your head" is an entirely *internal* form of auto-affection. If you look at or touch yourself you have to go "through" the outside of yourself to get to yourself. But not when you talk to yourself—the proximity of stimulator to stimulated is absolute. And not only that, voice is immaterial and invisible, the most non-physical of sensual media. So it is the most akin, phenomenologically, to ideal entities—reason, meanings, concepts, the *logos*. The voice is also transitory and vibrant and ephemeral—alive, like soul or spirit. In sum, the voice is the medium

[25] For Derrida (and Deleuze), this "inhabiting" of a material sound (image) by an immaterial concept is immediately attributed to the persistence of Platonic metaphysics. The assimilation of modern subjective idealism to Platonism, if too easily carried out, risks papering over how radical in their own right the abstractions of modernity actually were.

most suited to what Western metaphysics has been about; in modern metaphysics—the purely mental *cogito*, present to itself.

Hence, according to Derrida, the privileged position of speech, as opposed to writing, is in the annals of Western thought about language. From Socrates to Rousseau to Saussure and Levi-Strauss—the primordial status of speech has been stressed as against the secondary, even fallen, nature of writing.[26]

For all these reasons, expressions used in talking to ourselves provided, not just an example, but the archetype of Presence for Husserl. To appreciate the power of this interpretation, one must allow the several aspects of the phenomenon to hang together. They constitute the pivotal notion of "phono-logo-centrism."

This could all be wrong, of course, but it is quite intelligible. And it provided deconstruction with its principal foil. On this basis, Derrida would destabilize the *cogito* and cast it back into the spatio-temporal and material flow of events in a world constituted entirely by "signs," now understood in a radically new way—as "text," as "writing."

9.2.2.3   Do I Always Mean What I Say to Myself?

Most of us know how it can feel if one *discovers* ideas when writing—as opposed to just transcribing ideas one already has. Derrida argued that something like that holds for what we say to ourselves in solitary mental life as well. This is pivotal. The strange concept of "archewriting" and the derivative notions of trace and supplement and *differance* all depend on this claim.

If it turned out that you *do* indicate meanings to yourself in something like the way you indicate them to another, then the unity of the *cogito* would obviously be threatened. Some "sending out" would be going on when you talk to yourself. This is the heart of Derrida's dispute with Husserl—the point at which they just plain disagree about the phenomenology of talking to yourself "in your head." The point is not that talking to yourself is *the same* as talking to someone else—just that it is more like talking to someone else than the *cogito* model of consciousness led Husserl to believe. Just ask: when I get a new idea and I announce it to myself in my own mind, does it take a bit of time to understand? I don't know what

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[26] On the face of it, this claim is hard to reconcile with the exalted status of literacy and the veneration of literature in so much of the Western tradition. That problem, so far as I know, was never satisfactorily addressed.

the idea is before I announce it, surely? Otherwise why would I be surprised or grateful, which I often am? Even more significantly—do I know what the idea is *as* I make the announcement? That dawning feeling and the few images that *accompany* the announcement aren't actually the idea, fully understood, not yet. Isn't it a lot like when someone else explains a good idea to me, and it begins to dawn on me, what the other person is saying? Most compelling: don't I sometimes get the dawning feeling as I announce the idea to myself, and then it turns out not to be the idea I felt it was—not the solution to the problem, not the way back to the hotel after all. When that happens, this process is almost indistinguishable from assessing a communication from someone else.

There are many examples that show that talking to yourself is not free of indication. Wittgenstein has some lovely ones.[27] In effect, they all suggest that when you talk to yourself the sender and the receiver are somehow separate, distinct, different. And that constitutes a fissure in the unity of the *cogito*, a disturbance of self-presence, a step toward an exorcism of the ghost from the machine.

The upshot so far is this: not only is the subject not self-present in the way Descartes (and Husserl) supposed, it is not unified either—at a minimum, the subject that speaks to itself and the subject that listens to itself do not coincide. At the same time, the meaning of an expression is not fixed by the intention of the speaker. Unlike the creator of a formal grammar, a real speaker in real time cannot *stipulate* the meaning of her utterances *even if she is addressing herself in her head*. Another meaning is always possible and frequently occurs. You can, and often do, take what you said to yourself in your head and interpret it in some way that differs from what you originally intended. Therefore, there is a gap, a slippage—the presence of absent possibilities—between signifier and signified. Finally, no signified can be discerned that is not also a signifier, no concept or object that does not signify other concepts and objects *in the actual play of language (parole) as it actually unfolds.* That was implicit in Derrida's denial of "transcendental signifieds", and the "inflation of the sign" found its

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[27] There is remarkable, apparently coincidental, overlap between the early Derrida and the later Wittgenstein. See especially the critique of private sensations and private language in the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). The common aim was to neutralize the *cogito* before it gets off the ground, but convergences of detail are striking. See Preface to *Speech and Phenomena* (1973, xiii–xxii). See also H. Rapaport *The Theory Mess* (2001, 8, 9); N. Garver and S. Lee *Derrida and Wittgenstein* (1994); H. Staten *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (1986). Richard Rorty makes the same point in "Wittgenstein, Heidegger and the reification of language" (1991).

ultimate expression in deconstruction precisely because there were no original or final (transcendental) signifieds.

With the essence of Derrida's project as I see it serving as a platform, I will next attempt a survey of some of the consequences—the refinements and enhancements and the overall effect, the what-we-are-left-with.

9.2.3   Traces of Absolute Mind

One of the most revealing encounters that (all agree) didn't really take place between the analytic tradition and French theory famously didn't take place at great length, in fits of high dudgeon, between John Searle and Jacques Derrida in the 1970s. Searle (author of *Speech Acts: an Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, 1969) had been a student of J.L. Austin, founder of the field. Austin's pragmatics was perhaps the only topic in Anglo-American philosophy that the French took any real interest in (besides Chomsky, whose "generative grammar" they typically misunderstood, taking it to mean active production, "genesis," rather than formal descriptive adequacy) (see Dosse 1997, 48–50). But with Austin's "ordinary language philosophy," analytic philosophers were at last addressing something concrete, something more historical than their abstract codes. So Austin's speech act theory got a reading in France—including one from Derrida, with results so disastrous they serve in hindsight as an object lesson in how high a price we pay when academics, motivated by politics writ large and small, jettison the principle of charity in conversation (see Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (1974)).

> It would be a mistake, I think, to regard Derrida's discussion of Austin as a confrontation between two prominent philosophical traditions … he has misunderstood and misstated Austin's theory of language at several crucial points … and thus the confrontation never quite takes place. (John Searle 1977)

The subsequent confrontation that never quite took place, between Searle himself and Derrida, began with Searle's "Reiterating the Differences: a Reply to Derrida" (1977) in which he took on Derrida's "Signature Event Context" ([1972] 1977; republished in *Limited Inc*. 1988). "Signature Event Context" (hereafter, Sec) contained a critique of Austin to which Searle strenuously objected. The whole brouhaha was representative of the culture wars in the academy during that period and

that—the politics behind those wars—is the underlying reason the opportunity was missed, I believe. Certainly, the particular rage the parties brought to this dispute makes that explanation plausible. But the immediate reason for the missed opportunity can be found in specific misunderstandings that occurred at the time—and I hope to show here how easy (and anti-climactic) it is (and could have been) to bring clarity to this confrontation that never quite took place.[28] I also hope to show that Derrida's basic notions (with one crucial exception) correspond quite closely to positions taken by leading anglophone philosophers, most notably the later Wittgenstein, but also Wilfrid Sellars and the Pittsburgh School, Quine, Davidson, and others. With those aims achieved, the in-principle possibility of—not reconciliation, exactly—but amicable coexistence and occasional correspondence between the analytic and continental traditions becomes more plausible. In practice, however—don't bet the ranch.

Responsibility for the failure to engage in good faith seems to rest more or less equally with both parties. If one applies the time-honored principle for adjudicating disputes between children and asks "who hit whom first?" then Searle must bear the onus. In Sec, a 24-page paper presented at a conference on "Communication" hosted by the *Congrès International des Sociétés de Philosophie de Langue Française* in Montreal in August of 1971, Derrida relied most on the notion "iterability" as he questioned Austin's project (and *so* much more). Searle's 10-page "Reply" assumed that "iterability" just meant "repetition," which made it obvious that he had not read Derrida's paper at all closely, let alone other relevant work. Derrida was sometimes obscure, sometimes suspiciously so—but this was not one of those times; what he meant by "iterability" was clear, and clearly meant to undermine the idea of simple "repetition," insisting, as it did, upon an essential alteration in every instance. On the other hand, the near hysterical pitch of mockery Derrida tried to sustain in his painfully labored attempt to

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[28] Searle declined to engage after Derrida's reply to his reply (*Limited Inc*. 1988). He turned instead (six years later) to a withering review of a book on deconstruction by Jonathan Culler, a Derrida defender (Searle 1983). His "Reply" to Derrida was not mentioned in that review. Nor would Searle allow it to be included in *Limited Inc*. (1988), a book conceived as a collection of all the documents relevant to the dispute, along with commentary in hindsight. Only Derrida would contribute.

eviscerate Sarl's "Reply"[29] got Searle off the hook.[30] He was able to take advantage of Derrida's outburst, refuse to participate further, and sidestep the task of explaining his initial misreading. Before a discussion of what might have been had common courtesy prevailed, some essential background:

9.2.3.1 The Issue of Abstraction

This method, one of constructing idealized models, is analogous to the sort of theory construction that goes on in most sciences. … Without abstraction and idealization there is no systemization. (Searle 1969 cited in Derrida 1988, 68)

what is at stake above all is the structural impossibility and illegitimacy of such "idealization," even one which is methodological and provisional. (Derrida 1988, 67)

These two quotes, juxtaposed, present the basic issue in a nutshell, and they do it so clearly that the only wonder is that those involved (not only the principals) in this classic academic tempest in a teapot never managed to sort out what was really at stake. Obviously, Derrida's critique of Austin was only incidentally about Austin. Not fully realizing that, Searle read into the critique a shocking ignorance of basic rational procedures when in fact it was those procedures that were its target. A profound difference in attitude toward abstraction and systemization, entrenched in the traditions Searle and Derrida represented, shaped their taken-for-granted assumptions about what it means to do philosophy and was ultimately responsible for the specific ways they failed to engage.

In Chap. 3, I argued for an expanded concept of modernism, one that would include founding figures in several academic disciplines as well the usual suspects in the arts and literature. I tried to show that a certain gesture

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[29] A footnote appended to the name "Derrida" in the title of Searle's "Reply" thanked H. Dreyfus and D. Searle for "discussion of these matters." In his blistering 85-page response to that ten-page paper (*Limited Inc.* 1988), Derrida pretended that a certain "Sarl" (French acronym for "Society of Limited Responsibility") was the author of Searle's "Reply."

[30] Years later, explaining the game he was playing in his reply to Searle's "Reply," Derrida describes it as "dual writing," an effort to show and say things about speech acts simultaneously. He was taunting Searle, saying "try to interpret *this* text too with your categories and to you, as well as the reader, I say: enjoy!" For example, with the role of "speaker intentions" at issue, Derrida's first words are "I could have *pretended* to begin with a *false* beginning."

of "abstraction" was common to these innovators, a gesture motivated by the conviction that—in effect—Nietzsche, and not Hegel (or Comte or Spencer), had been right: history had no direction, nature had no plan, and the only meaning to be found in this un-authored world would have to be authored by human creators in human works. In analytic philosophy, abstraction was to begin with and most typically realized in what Wittgenstein would one day call the "purest crystal" of formal logic in various "ideal language" projects like his own *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) and the work of the Vienna Circle. Synchronic systems of well-defined elements and rules for their combination that applied to—governed, pictured, generated, accounted for—some domain of facts just *were* explanations of those facts. They were "theories" properly so called, expressions of Reason's highest purpose, exemplified most compellingly in modern physics. But long after formal semantics was supplemented or superseded by "analytic" enterprises dealing with more elusive matters, like mental states and intentional actions, logical rigor kept watch at the gates of the philosophic enterprise in this tradition and enjoined its practitioners to live up to its example insofar as the subject matter at hand would permit.

So, when "ordinary language philosophy" got underway, and in spite of an explicit renunciation of the "ideal language" program, that standard remained in force. When he wanted to explain *How To Do Things With Words* ([1962] 1971), J.L. Austin automatically conceived his project as "speech act *theory*"—that is, as an effort to classify, to codify, in the most explicit terms possible *what kinds of speech acts* (besides the assertion of propositions) might be abstracted from the historical morass of actual human behavior along with specifications of what *conditions* (if not truth conditions) those acts would have to satisfy in order to count as being such acts. And while his student, John Searle, developed ideas and projects all his own, he never doubted that producing theories of that kind was what genuine philosophers did.[31] Broadly speaking, then, when analytic philosophers turned away from formal semantics and took on temporality and performance, they took the procedures of abstraction, of idealization and systematization, with them. So this encounter/confrontation could and should have been a discussion between a classic representative of high modernist philosophizing (science as the model) and a postmodern critic

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[31] If anything, Searle stepped back from the casual manner Austin adopted, as if to emphasize the modesty of his program. Searle took a more aggressively formal approach, aiming to contribute ultimately to a scientific psychology.

of that kind of philosophy in favor of another enterprise (Nietzschean "artwork" as the model).

In Sec, Derrida praised Austin for breaking with ideal language philosophy and structural linguistics, but criticized him for naively expanding the scope of formal abstraction to include performance instead of confronting the fundamental philosophical problems idealization entails. According to Derrida, Austin's project was an attempt to codify speech acts in terms of contexts "*exhaustively* determined, in theory or *teleologically*" (1988, 13–14, 19; italics mine, discussion to follow). At the very beginning of the paper, Derrida asked, "are the conditions of a context ever absolutely determinable?" and declared, "this is, fundamentally, the most general question that I shall endeavor to elaborate." And he announced immediately what that elaborated question would yield—namely, that "a context is never absolutely determinable" and that its indeterminacy would "mark the theoretical inadequacy of the current concept of context as it is accepted in numerous domains of research," implicating Austin but not mentioning him yet. Then he added what was, on the face of it, a baffling non sequitur—namely, that this "theoretical inadequacy of the current concept of context" would somehow "necessitate a certain generalization and a certain displacement of the concept of writing" (1988, 2–3). With that typically theatrical gesture, Derrida put the most controversial of his many neologisms on the table and launched into a boilerplate exposition of the basics of deconstruction that went on for 11 pages before he turned to Austin's work.

In that exposition, Derrida made clear that iterability was, for him, caught up in the indeterminacy of context and it would emerge that Austin's project was impossible because, as context is indeterminable, so iterability is open-ended, nothing is ever repeated purely, some alteration necessarily occurs. When he introduced the term on page seven, he said, "such iterability (*iter* again, probably comes from *itara, other* in Sanskrit, and everything that follows can be read as working out the logic that ties repetition to alterity)." "Alterity," a ubiquitous term in French theory, might elude an anglophone reader if it stood unexplained in a parenthetical sentence, but, in addition to other passing mentions of the necessary connection between repetition and change, Derrida made it categorical a few pages later. After describing three traits of writing in the usual sense of the term (subsistence over time, occurrence in various contexts, "spacing" into units) in order to justify the claims he was about to make about "writing" as he would define it, he said:

Are these three predicates, together with the entire system they entail, limited … to "written" communication in the narrow sense of this word? Are they not to be found in all language, in spoken language for instance, and *ultimately in the totality of "experience"* insofar as it is inseparable from this field of the mark [meaning whatever has significance], which is to say, from the network of effacement and of difference, of units of iterability, which are separable from their internal and external context and *also from themselves, inasmuch as the very iterability which constituted their identity does not permit them ever to be a unity that is identical to itself*. (1988, 10; italics mine)

In his "Reply," Searle cited a paragraph on the *preceding* page that introduced the three traits. In that paragraph the range of application was described as "all orders of signs and for all languages in general but, moreover, beyond semio-linguistic communication, for the entire field of what philosophy would call experience" (in Searle 1977, 199). Searle never took on the claim about experience, because "Derrida's argument to show that all elements of language (much less experience) are really graphemes is without any force" (1977, 201). That is, Searle was content to counter the lesser of the two absurdities and may not have noticed (certainly did not mention) the radical and all-encompassing claim—cited above from p. 10 in *Limited inc.*, but not appearing on p. 9—namely, that iterability cannot constitute *any* "unity that is identical to itself."

With that Derrida was saying that repetition, *pure* repetition, *absolute* repetition of anything at all—including the appearance of this self-same hand before my eyes at successive instants, including the first and second time I write the word "very"—is, strictly speaking, in the flow of actual events, impossible.[32] And there, in the flow of actual events, lies the rub.

Having missed this point, Searle decided that Derrida was making a foolish effort to erase the distinction between writing and speech because he somehow couldn't see the difference between "permanence" (writing only) and "iterability-as-repetition" (speech too)—which is a measure, in itself, of how low his estimation of Derrida already was, or quickly became. What did Searle make of the claim about the impossibility of self-identity over time on p. 10? Was he already so convinced that this was mostly nonsense that he felt justified in skipping what he couldn't immediately interpret? It seems likely, in any case, that he wasn't very interested in the

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[32] Quite apart from the value of this claim, it is not hard to understand. It amounts to conventional Platonism, the kind students encounter in oft-cited passages about why one should not attribute "Being" to ever-changing sensible/material things.

exposition that preceded the critique of Austin; he just had to extract something from it, since it purported to be the basis for that critique. But, as we shall see, when Searle imposed the standard dictionary definition of "iterate" onto what was a term of art for Derrida, he blocked himself off from any possibility of understanding what his interlocutor was saying about Austin in particular and idealization and systematization in general.[33] Derrida's grand style and even grander goals aided and abetted the whole fiasco, to be sure.

Major continental philosophers since Hegel, more profoundly influenced by Romanticism than they knew, have insisted upon the historical nature of truth. The abstract was constantly opposed in their thinking to concrete actuality and the evaluation was always the same. At best, as with Hegel, an abstract moment might serve, by way of its distance from the truth, to make the return to the concrete more complete, more conscious of itself as truth. At worst, as with Nietzsche, abstraction was an expression of life-denying decadence or, as with Adorno, a positivist technique of domination for a way of thought so in thrall to technology that it sought to turn itself into an algorithm. In what follows, Derrida's innovations—the apparatus of "semi-concepts" he deployed in service of his "ontology" of writing—will be shown to reflect the vocabularies of his time and place as well as a more fundamental belief (also classic; compare Kant) that what ultimately *is* cannot be represented to the mind (*vorstellung*) at all. But he was serving a cause common to continental thinkers as otherwise opposed as Hegel and Nietzsche or Sartre and Foucault. He sought what truth could be had, not by way of abstract depictions lodged in theoretical entities and rules, but in the flux of events as they are, the only place truth can really be. If we are to recover what was lost with this missed opportunity, we must arrive at the specific difference in Searle and Derrida's understanding of "iterability" by way of this overall difference in attitude toward abstraction.

9.2.3.2 *The Issue of the Subject*

For the original modernists in the analytic tradition the subject's mental states and intentions were ruled out of bounds because they were, in addition to being elusive, irrelevant to logical inquiry. It doesn't matter what

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[33] "I should say at the outset that I did not find his [Derrida's] arguments very clear and it is possible that I may have misinterpreted him as profoundly as I believe he has misinterpreted Austin" (Searle 1977, 198). This represents Searle's best moment in the whole exchange.

happens to "go through your head" as you apprehend the necessity of "If A > B and B > C then A > C." During the same period, in another discipline, the text of a poem on a page was taken to say what the language says regardless of what the poet happened to be thinking and feeling when he wrote it. The term "intentional fallacy" excluded from the precincts of the New Criticism benighted Romantics who still thought poems were "expressing" poets as opposed to language. The term might apply as well to benighted philosophers who lapsed into "psychologism," the *bête noir* of all who saw the light shining from within crystalline logic. In general, then, excluding the subject from modernist formalism was a practical matter, part of the cleansing gesture (a loaded term for Derrida) of abstraction.

But for French "theory," successor to phenomenology, the issue of the subject was central—and charged with political passion as well. French theorists were determined to abandon abstraction and return to history and performance but that had to happen, as we have seen, without returning to the subject and its intentions, and not just for methodological reasons. The subject had to be demolished—deconstructed, decentered, destabilized—for a mix of philosophical and ideological reasons already discussed. Paradoxes of subjectivity that were (apparently) treated like little puzzles by Wittgenstein (do you know what you are going to say before you say it?) were, for the ultra-structuralists, concrete evidence of subjectivity's inherent otherness that heralded the longed-for end of the autonomous Cartesian agent *as an actual historical development*, as a dismantling of "bourgeois consciousness" and its Stalinist reflection. To allow that subject to return to its central place on the stage of meaning would have been, in effect, to betray a political left already in crisis.

So when Austin, taking procedures of abstraction for granted, found himself referring to subjective intentions as well as objective circumstantial factors in his theory of speech acts, it was not anything like the metaphysical and ethico-political disaster for him that it was for Derrida. He would have preferred not to do it, to limit himself to public contextual criteria, but sometimes there seemed to be no other recourse if progress was to be made at all. As Searle patiently explained, prioritizing "standard cases" of speech acts like promising rather than "parasitical cases" like promising in a play or under duress was a methodological decision for Austin. Exasperated by Derrida's moralistic attitude, Searle thought he was pleading for the obvious when he said: "Such parasitism is a relation of logical dependence; it does not imply any moral judgment and certainly not that the parasite is somehow immorally sponging off the host (Does one really have to point this out?)" (1977, 205).

9.2.3.3 *The Issue of Standard Cases*

But for Jacques Derrida "standard cases," with their standardized circumstances and intentions, were idealizations that immediately returned him to Heidegger's critique of "metaphysics" and its lethic influence on Western thought going back to Plato and very much including the subjective idealism of Cartesian/Kantian philosophy.[34] Flimsy assertions by individual thinkers claiming that their intentions are methodological could not possibly hold up against the semantic momentum of centuries of thought and practice built into the language they could not help but deploy. For Derrida, "standard cases" in speech act theory immediately raised the issue of "standards" per se.[35] His moral tone, so baffling to Searle, was prompted by the fact that standards *necessarily* exclude and marginalize, that being the whole point of normativity, the whole point of convention—and that was, in Derrida's view, the really important issue raised by Austin's account of speech acts (compare Wittgenstein on "agreement in a form of life" as the basis for language games (1953, 241)). As Austin himself had acknowledged in *How to do Things with Words*, the conventionality that made his theory of speech acts possible embraced language and custom at once. In Sec, Derrida praised Austin for that acknowledgment, because it (should have) entailed a recognition that "the totality of all conventional acts," including speech acts, is "exposed to failure" a priori and that this risk is "in some sense, a necessary risk."

So, for example, explaining how speech acts can "misfire" (instead of being false), Austin says:

> One could say that I "went through a form of" naming the vessel [christening a ship] but that my "action" was "void" or "without effect," because I was not a proper person, had not the "capacity," to perform it: but one might also and alternatively say that … there is no accepted conventional procedure; it is a mockery, like a marriage with a monkey. Or again one could say that part of the procedure is getting oneself appointed. … *I do not think that these uncertainties [the latter two] matter in theory*, though it is pleasant to investigate them and in practice convenient to be ready, as jurists are, with a terminology to cope with them. (1962, 23–24; italics mine)

[34] Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut were underestimating the reach of "style" when they said "Derrida = Heidegger + le style de Derrida," but as a sound-bite description of Derrida's basic mission, it's fair enough (in Gutting 2013, 57).

[35] If anything like "sponging" was going on, Derrida's accusatory finger was pointed at the standard cases, not the parasites. His argument was always that standard cases depend on marginal ones, as an intrinsic condition of their possibility.

To Derrida, this shows that Austin was *fully* aware of the impossibility of "capturing" in "theory" the complexity of events as they really are. The idea that "part of the procedure" (the "convention" that Derrida believes is what *ought* to be at issue here) *might* include "getting oneself appointed" to the priesthood in order to perform a marriage ceremony successfully is especially revealing. Imagine asking Austin, as Derrida is in effect doing when he claims that context is indeterminable, "well, how about the historical process of establishing the priesthood itself—isn't that also 'part of the procedure'?" Austin—a jolly chap, it seems—would, in congenial circumstances, most likely say, "Well, my dear boy (for only an excitable youth who had fallen in with some mad German on holiday would ask such a question), you can draw the line wherever you like, of course, but given my heavy teaching schedule, I choose to draw it narrowly enough so that I can actually finish a book on 'speech act theory'—ha, ha-hah!"[36] That's what Austin means when he says that these kinds of infelicities don't matter *in theory*—because the latter two infelicities point to eventualities that his theory was not designed to cover. The whole appeal of theory, for Austin—a classic modernist—was that it was *formally* limited. Its elements and rules were defined by theorists to explain (generate, cover, account for) whatever domain of idealized facts the theory itself had abstracted from the morass of ongoing actuality. In the case of speech act theory, that domain consisted of certain speech acts (promising, ordering, apologizing etc.) defined by the theorist and taking place under normal circumstances, as "seriously intended" and so forth—that is, "standard cases." Obviously, only a lunatic would try to codify *actuality in its ongoing open-endedness*—which is, of course, why Derrida was suspicious of codification in the first place.

For Derrida the act of codification, of abstraction, of idealization—of "theory" in the analytic sense—is itself, at best, a powerfully consequential practice determined by a certain tradition of rational inquiry we cannot do without (the sciences) *and also*, at worst, an act of violence committed upon actuality in its ongoing open-endedness, sometimes with political and social consequences (compare the Frankfurt School on Enlightenment reason). If Derrida had political commitments (as opposed to political positions he affiliated himself with in order to fit in at various junctures in his career), they derived directly from his appreciation of the danger of

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[36] This is intended to be more than amusing. Derrida's pivotal chapter in *Of Grammatology* (1967c) is called "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing." It concerns the socio-political artificiality, the *conventionality* of the "book"—illusion of containment and completion.

absolute idealization, even, perhaps especially, if the idealized absolute was "materialism" (see above, Introduction to Chap. 9.2). From the mid-1990s on, however, as political pressures enforcing conformity eased, Derrida allowed himself to articulate his real political position, such as it was. "Democracy *a venir*" was the notion that dominated his later works, those explicitly concerned with ethics and politics (*Spectres of Marx* (1993), *The Politics of Friendship* (1994), *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (2004)) (see Daniel Mathews http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/04/16/the-democracy-to-come-notes-on-the-thought-of-jacques-derrida/). These ruminations deserve to be called his real political position, I think, simply because they mirror so faithfully what he had been saying about the role of ideal concepts ever since he first addressed Husserl's account of geometry at the beginning of his career (see below, Chap. 9.2.4.1). They are, almost by definition, unrealizable—and hence necessarily violent when politically applied by fanatics. On the other hand, we can't do without them, at least not at this moment in our history—and they can be managed if we act politically in the light of ideals whose fulfillment we, at the same time, perpetually defer.

Very reasonable—and at the end of the day we are justified, I think, in recognizing something like a run-of-the-mill American liberal as the author of the dazzling and confounding display that was the discourse of Jacques Derrida.

In any case, the irony here is that a view of idealized concepts that counseled caution in political application inspired the boldest interventions in philosophizing. Unlike Searle, Derrida wanted philosophy to concern itself, directly and immediately, with ongoing actuality and our (dis)place(ment) in it.[37] So, from Derrida's point of view, it was all the more egregious of Austin, in light of his recognition of how so many actual conditions on speech acts inevitably escape theoretical containment, to blithely proceed with "standard cases" as if those that fell short of that standard were "external" or "accidental" when, in actuality, they just were the way actual speech acts actually work! (1988, 15).

In summary, then, Derrida was in general obsessed with a Nietzschean "violence" inherent in language and impossible to avoid, a gesture of exclusion built into the very nature of categories and concepts—philosophical ones being especially consequential for the culture as a whole. Systematic thinkers who took "standard cases" as given for the purposes of specific explanatory projects were complicit in the institutionalization of

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[37] My apologies, but just had to coin at least one of those little parentheses gizmos of my own.

those conventional conceptual foundations, including especially the subject/object distinction, but also being/becoming, intelligible/sensible, nature/culture, and other value-laden conceptual "binaries" that shaped Western discourses. They were, in Derrida's view, abandoning the primary duty of thought—to critically examine just those categories and turn the mind toward the living world. Hence, the moral tone.

Overwrought, out of proportion—a bit sophomoric? That's as may be. But it is quite intelligible and brings us to the crux of the matter as far as Derrida was concerned. As he put it years later,

> It is impossible or illegitimate to form a philosophical concept outside this logic of all or nothing. But one can (and it is what I try to do elsewhere) think or deconstruct the concept of concept otherwise … of which I say—as of other analogous motifs, iterability for example, about which there will be much to re-discuss—that they are not entirely words or concepts. (1988, 117)

And the question to ask of Derrida at the end of the day becomes: to what extent *can* one really do that? If the procedure of deconstruction was meant to haunt the scene of traditional ontology,[38] finding ways to "belong without belonging to the class of concepts of which it must render an accounting, to the theoretical space that it organizes in a (as I often say) 'quasi' transcendental manner" (1988, 127). What value was added by this ghost?

9.2.4   Derrida's "Ontology"

For the educated anglophone reader committed to giving Derrida in particular and French theory in general a fair reading, this passing remark in a letter Derrida wrote to a friend should be attached like a *mezuzah* to the portal that leads to their work; I repeat it here: "I am profoundly convinced, against Wittgenstein … that, what we cannot speak about we must (not) pass over in silence" (see, once again, Gutting's *Thinking the Impossible*). That's why explaining Derrida in conventional prose leads inevitably to a confetti of scare quotes—beginning with the title of this section. In fact, his whole enterprise is aptly introduced simply by noticing that. Making us suspicious of philosophical concepts was his basic aim and—once again, not for the first or last time—he shared that aim with the

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[38] Derrida's term "hauntology" might have been used instead of scare quotes in the title of the next section—but I decided against it because, for many people, annoying puns are one of the most off-putting of all the stylistic conceits in his repertoire.

later Wittgenstein.[39] Wittgenstein's strategy and style may have been more effective than Derrida's (I think so), but both were coping with the same moment in the history of philosophy's linguistic turn as it was realized in their different traditions—the moment when language confronts its limits. That is why it would be wrong to speak of a Derridean ontology in the traditional sense; it cannot "say" anything to describe the unrepresentable. Instead, it contrives to participate in it, to evoke it. In place of Wittgenstein's early silence and his later riddles, Derrida offers a torrent of fluidly related "semi-concepts" that are supposed to accomplish this feat.

The question of the value of a philosophy that relies on semi-concepts and their elusive effects remains open, of course—a separate question. The point here is that Derrida was quite candid about his program. There were no middle-range issues for him. Every text, every artwork was immediately revealed as subject to (or disruptive of) classic metaphysical categories and deconstruction was the way to (partial) emancipation in each case. One by one, case by case—the metaphysical oppressor was what Derrida always found and, like Arnold Schwarzenegger's terminator, gunning for it was all he did. J.L. Austin's modest undertaking was but one in a long line of metaphysically dominated projects he solicited in the name of shaking up the whole.[40]

– Derrida's dream

Deep down, my desire to write is the desire for an exhaustive chronicle … the thing I'd like to have written is just that: a "total" diary. (Derrida in Peeters 2013, 290)

According to his biographer, Jacques Derrida had fantasized since his teens about an "absolute" autobiography. It "had first given him his hankering to write" and lay behind his lifelong habit, a nightmare for his archivists, of keeping everything he ever wrote, every scrap of paper. Derrida himself referred to this "wild desire to preserve everything," saying he was "obsessed with the structure of survival of each of these bits of paper, these traces" (Derrida in Peeters 2013, 2–4). Given the unrelenting efforts of French theory to dismantle the subject, this autobiographical

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[39] "A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (Wittgenstein 1953, 115).

[40] In the originary essay "DifferAnce" ([1967e] 2001), Derrida invoked the names of Freud, Nietzsche, and Levinas as representative of an "epoch" determined to make the traditional ontology of Being and beings "shake all over" (1973, 153).

longing in Derrida can come as a surprise. But the key to understanding lies in the impossibility of satisfying that longing—and in the aura of those "traces." In fact, thinking about traces in this way, on the level of ordinary experience, including the furniture of one's everyday life (this old paperback I had in college, that knick-knack from the shore), takes us to the motivating heart of Derrida's "quasi-transcendental" project. One need only (but vastly) expand the scope to get a sense of Derrida's updated (linguified) version of continental philosophy, his "ontology" of "writing," and the role of iterability in it.

9.2.4.1 *"Writing" and Possibility*
After declaring that "all possible referents" were included in his newly constructed concept of "text" (See above, introduction to Chap. 9.2), Derrida went on to say,

> That does not mean that all referents are suspended, denied, or enclosed in a book, as people have … accused me of believing. But it does mean that every referent, all reality, has the structure of a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this "real" except in an interpretive experience. The latter neither yields meaning nor assumes it except in a *movement* of differential referring. (1988, 148; italics mine)

This "ontology" should be accessible (if not acceptable) to any informed anglophone reader willing to exercise a little imagination. The notions "text" and "trace," expanded to encompass all interpretable reality, might be too capacious to be of much use, but it is as understandable, in its way, as the idea of the set of all possible propositions describing all possible states of affairs in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. A bit baggier, to be sure, since it is not confined to factual assertions but includes all possible "interpretive experience," which is not as well-defined a notion as "assertion" seems to be ("seems" because Wittgenstein could not give an example of a simple object and its name and so could not give an example of an atomic proposition either). The upshot is that, in the absence of pure givens (presence, transcendental signified, etc.), everything we experience is already interpreted in terms of something *else*. That "else" is the destination, so to speak, of all interpretive acts (which "take time"), and that is what Derrida means by the "movement of differential referring."

And that movement is what matters most if we are to glean an understanding of Derrida's quasi-ontology from his dispute with Searle. Movement is built into the semi-concept "writing-as-trace." On the subject

talk level, it's like this: the words you are reading are traces of my thoughts and actions. That's step one. Now zoom in to your actual experience of reading them and/or my writing them. Those processes involve, in compressed form, specific motions of their own from trace (trace of the immediately preceding "from," trace of preceding appearance of "trace," trace of the anticipated appearance of "trace") to trace (trace of the preceding "trace," as these parentheses are a trace of the preceding parentheses). And so on.[41]

Derrida himself could not stoop to such examples of the "structure of the differential trace" for reasons already established—he was committed to construing the subjective aspects (you and me, consciousness) of the processes just described as "effects" of the materials involved (effects of "writing," of the gram, of the mark, of the trace, etc.) and, just as important, committed to the literary/philosophical challenge of crafting his own writing so as to reflect that "ontological" situation. But you can be sure he did the phenomenology I've just recreated and then erased the subject from his account of it. That is how to read Derrida. Note, by way of confirmation and a harbinger of our eventual return to the notion "iterability," that no appearance of the word "trace" in the last two paragraphs was really (experientially or literally) the *same* as any other.

Derrida launched his career with a critique of static (present) "ideality" in Husserl's *Origins of Geometry* ([1962] 1989), aiming to undo the atemporal abstractionist tendencies of early phenomenology. Heidegger won him over by showing that time was the meaning of Being and *Dasein* the perpetual becoming of that meaning. Heidegger's basal insight on Derrida's reading of him was this: like (or as) consciousness itself—meaning, significance, has to *happen*. Meaningful distinctions are not mere differences, as in an abstract code, as in Saussure's grammar—they have to *occur*. They are *events*—possibilities made real, *realized*, and then, with time or *as* time, undone and deferred, "effaced" forever, never to be purely repeated but only iterated in significations to come.[42] For Derrida, any philosophy that will not deal with that eventfulness has turned away from

[41] It seems that the French word translated as "trace" carries immediate connotations of tracking, of spoor.

[42] The intensity of the poststructuralist commitment to temporality was, as already noted, pungently expressed by Julia Kristeva when she described how "writing" targets what she called the "necrophiliac" stasis of Structuralism's elements and rules and Structuralism's "imperial thinkers" who believe "that by codifying" the "remains of a process" we "can possess them" (in Kristeva 2002, 27–31).

truth and any philosophy that deals authentically with eventfulness will never *arrive* at truth.[43] This ontology of "writing" was only the latest in a long line of proposals by continental philosophers out to capture or (for postmoderns) to evoke ongoing eventfulness. It is Derrida's dream of the absolute diary projected onto a level that transcends individual subjects, a level on which all actual *and possible* subjects appear as effects, or potential effects, of the play of a "writing" coextensive with the "entire field of what philosophy would call experience" (this is a linguistic version of what Husserl's eidetic study of the personal-historical ego's experience produced on the transcendental level). Searle may be forgiven for not getting all that out of Derrida's little critique of Austin, even if he read it carefully—but that is its basis.

Now, consider this:

> Imagine a writing whose code would be … known, as secret cipher, by only two "subjects." Could we maintain that, following the death of the receiver, or even of both partners, the mark left by one of them is still writing? Yes, to the extent that, organized by a code, even an unknown and *nonlinguistic one* [the "general text" again] … the possibility of repeating and thus of identifying the marks is implicit … making it … communicable, transmittable, decipherable, iterable for a third, and hence for *every possible user in general.* To be what it is, all writing must, therefore, be capable of functioning in the *radical absence of every empirically determined receiver in general.* (Derrida [1977] 1988, 7; italics mine)

Searle launched his "Reply to Derrida" by quoting this passage. He read it, correctly, as an attack on the use of "intended meaning" in a theory of speech acts, but didn't seem to realize that it was also an attack on the very idea of such a theory. Perhaps for that reason, he chose to mention only the absence of "empirically determinable receivers" and ignored the affirmative claim about "every possible user." But that affirmative assertion makes for an "ontology" *in which possibility is as constitutive of significance* as the "writing" in which significance is lodged.[44] Above all, it

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[43] "Intentionality [in Husserl's sense] cannot and should not attain the plenitude toward which it nonetheless inevitably tends. Plenitude is its telos … [but] if it is attained, it, as well as intention both disappear, are paralyzed, immobilized, or die" (1988, 129).

[44] Compare Heidegger's account of the possibilities lodged in tools, settings, and projects in *Being and Time* (1927). Appropriated by many American pragmatists, that account resonates with Wittgenstein's emphasis on the use of words in concert with customary activities, and in the unrealized possibilities implicit in those language games described in the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953).

is the *essentially unrealized* nature of possibilities that is violated by any attempt to *contain* them in a formal theory—or, indeed, in any system of well-defined concepts that gets entrenched in discursive practices. At the same time, it is obvious that, being the creatures we are, we cannot do without such practices and, for us in particular, without the architectonic of the Western tradition. Hence, Derrida's oft-repeated insistence that he wasn't out to do away with standard "metaphysical" binaries like subject/object, being/becoming, intelligible/sensible, nature/culture. He could only "disturb" them so as to afford intimations of the ongoing actualities they mask in their attempt to depict.[45]

It may help to bring the core difference between Searle and Derrida into focus if we come at it from this angle: Derrida's detractors were especially exasperated by his—call it, slipperiness. No matter what turn a conversation took, no matter what the facts turned out to be, Derrida could find a way to make it work for him. We are now in a position to understand why, *in some cases*, a certain slipperiness in his argumentation could proceed justifiably from his "ontology" of writing and possibility (definitely *not* in other cases). Take, for example, the way Derrida introduced the claim that alteration is built into iterability with that nifty reference to *iter's* purported roots in Sanskrit. In his outraged reply to Searle's "Reply," Derrida revisited that quote, citing it again in its entirety:

> Such iterability—(iter, again, probably comes from itara, other in Sanskrit, and everything that follows can be read as the working out of the logic that ties repetition to alterity) structures the mark of writing itself, no matter what particular type of writing is involved.

But this time he immediately added:

> This etymology, of course, has no value qua proof and were it to be false, the very shift in meaning would confirm the law here indicated: the time and place of the other time already at work, altering from the start the start itself. (1988, 62)

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[45] "Thus we are obliged to think in opposition to the truisms which we believed—which we still cannot not believe—to be the very ether of our thought and language. … And it is a question not only of thinking the opposite which is still in complicity with the classical alternatives, but of liberating thought and its language for the encounter occurring beyond these alternatives" (1967f, 118).

Had some Sanskrit expert during Q&A put the "iter = other" etymology into question and had Derrida given the expert the response he gives here to himself, it would have seemed slippery indeed. But here he actually was discussing the many ways in which *mis*understandings of an expression are a constant possibility and a frequent actuality and how they can, in turn, become understandings of another kind, and so, at worst, we might suspect him of setting up a justification for future slipperiness or slipperiness in general, which indeed he was. And so the question becomes: is this a valid justification and for what slipperiness, exactly?

How many readers of this essay have mourned, as I have, the passing of that exquisite expression "begging the question"? How many have felt, as I have, a certain muted despair watching and listening while this subtle figure is reduced to a synonym for "invites the question" by the talking heads under the klieg lights? That is, of course, just a particularly piquant example of a ubiquitous process. Nero Wolfe would not countenance using "contact" as a verb, but I contact people all the time without even noticing. On the other hand, I cringe when things "impact" people—and get almost nauseous when I hear how "impactful" something is. But there is nothing to be done about all this. anglophone researchers in historical linguistics call it "semantic drift"—a perfectly intelligible notion. French theorists called it the "play of the signifier." It is Derrida's "writing" over time and, yes, it happens with speech too. Some people in my Bronx neighborhood play "pick-a-boo" (not "peek") with their babies and when I moved as a very young child from England to New England we went from "ashes, ashes" to "ahchoo-achoo" before we all fell down. This process is constantly underway at the micro-level of dialect and slang (no one could possibly "list" instances or formulate rules for the process) and we only notice the ones that catch on—which means get iterated more generally.

So Derrida's remark was a justification for his insistence on the slipperiness of language—but, ultimately, it was a claim that this "slipperiness" is essential to language, as something like its very life. That is to say, events of meaning, actual significations, occurring out of possibilities given somehow by "text" and context (and by grammar and intentions as well, to be sure). Such events and contexts are more and less customary—some utterly routine, others less so, and yet others (Dada performance art) radically less so. But all are events of actualization and so must be admitted first as possibilities. These possibilities in turn must be conceived as somehow "built into" or at least "allowed by" all the significant entities and

processes that bear upon and constitute the moment when *these* possibilities are actualized and *those* are not with (or as) the passing of time in the actual process of history, with all its specificity and concreteness and, most especially, all its accidents—source of the new.

Now compare Searle's idea of possibility. It seemed pretty vast to him and he seemed to think (at first at least) that it took us to the level of events:

> The performances of actual speech acts … are indeed events, datable singular events in particular historical contexts. But as events they have some very peculiar properties. They are capable of communicating from speakers to hearers an infinite number of different contents. … Furthermore, hearers are able to understand this infinite number of possible communications … what is it that gives their speech acts this limitless capacity for communication? The answer is that the speaker and hearers are masters of the rules of language, and these rules are recursive. They allow for the repeated application of the same rule. … Iterability—both as exemplified by the repeated use of the same word type and as exemplified by the recursive character of syntactical rules—is not as Derrida seems to think something in conflict with the intentionality of linguistic acts, spoken or written, it is the necessary presupposition of the forms which that intentionality takes. (1977, 208)

Searle thought he was talking about real (though "peculiar") events here, but from Derrida's point of view he was only talking about events *insofar as they can be contained in a formal explanation before they occur.* Searle's events can mean only what his theory will allow them to mean. They are anticipated by the system. They are what might be called "domesticated events" and, for Derrida, Searle's very wording—"masters of the rules of language"—gives the game away and invites a Nietzschean unmasking. The "infinite number of possible communications" that are allowed by the "rules of language" aren't singular events in their actuality at all; they are "standard cases," already purified, already abstracted from history by an imperial subject.

Now we see why Derrida spoke always of "dissemination" rather than "polysemy" when he dealt with possible interpretations of speech or writing. Polysemy gets you to "Visiting relatives can be boring," to Chomskyean ambiguities the rules of the grammar allow—the way the shuffle function on an iPod allows pre-pared accidents to happen. Dissemination gets you to the mistaken etymology of "iter," to "pick-a-boo," and a new meaning for "begging the question" *and to all their possible but un-actualized kin-*

dred—again, that vast expansion of the "field of the mark" that "every possible user in general" entailed by the lead quote for this section—the phrase Searle overlooked. Derrida's "ontology" of writing and possibility is Hegel's Absolute Mind fallen into pieces, into all actual and all possible significant events individually. Just as the phenomenology of the "trace" recreated above was typically presented by Derrida in terms that erased the subject experiencing the traces, so in his "ontology" of writing Derrida simply erased Hegel's Absolute Mind—eliminating, as it were, the absolute author and absolute reader of the general text. What remains of subjectivity are but ephemeral effects of an infinitely tiny slice of that general text that happen to be, for the nonce, you and me—sites of events of signification.

To repeat, by way of setting up a conclusion, what was said by way of introduction to this whole discussion of Derrida—for him, a philosophically adequate account of "possibility" in language would admit the achievements of James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* (1939) rather than being bound by the rules, however recursive, and word types of a formal grammar.[46] With this fundamental difference in their understanding of the notion "meaningful event" brought to light, we arrive at the point where Derrida and Searle could have met, come to clarity, and agreed to disagree. Ironically, the theme of "iterability" would have provided the perfect starting point.

9.2.4.2 *Type-Token Versus Iterability*

> any linguistic element written or spoken, indeed any rule governed element in any system of representation at all must be repeatable, otherwise the rules would have no scope of application. To say this is just to say that the logician's type-token distinction must apply generally to all rule-governed elements of a language in order that the rules can be applied to the new occurrences of the phenomena specified by the rules. (Searle 1977, 199)

However botched his reading of Derrida, when Searle built his "Reply" around the type-token distinction he describes here, he chose wisely. It encapsulates the dependence of his (and Austin's) project on abstraction and offers a concentrated image of the target of Derrida's critique at the same time—a perfect object for some concluding reflections. Presumably,

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[46] "in *The Post Card* (1987), referring to Joyce's influence on the formation of his theories, he goes further, confessing that he has 'never imitated anyone so irresistibly' as he has imitated Joyce; and interestingly, Derrida formally remarks in the 1984 Joyce symposium that 'without Joyce,' 'Deconstruction could not have been possible'" (Zangouei 2012, 31).

when Searle gave Derrida his for-beginners tour of the type/token distinction, he did not realize that Derrida had to be familiar with it. Husserl had used it in the *Logical Investigations* (with which Derrida was thoroughly familiar) and of course it corresponds closely to Saussure's broader abstraction of *langue* (grammar) from *parole* (speech), common currency for French intellectuals of the period. More consequentially, Searle did not understand as he wrote that "iterability" actually *did the same work* in Derrida's "ontology" of writing that the type/token distinction did for abstractionist philosophizing—without resorting to codification, without idealizing. That's why it was called "post-structuralism." And "post-structuralism" was "postmodern" precisely because it was committed to undoing that gesture of abstraction. A "type" abstracts an ideal singularity out of "token" instances that, given the way things actually go on in the world, can never be absolutely identical and so makes it possible for us to recognize "instances" as instances of the "same thing," in both theory and practice. Now this from Derrida, and we have our hands around the issue between them:

> the unique character of this structure of iterability … lies in the fact that, comprising identity *and* difference, repetition *and* alteration, etc., it renders the *project* of idealization possible without lending "*itself*" to any pure, simple, and idealizable conceptualization. No process or project of idealization is possible without iterability and yet iterability *itself* cannot be idealized. (Derrida 1988, 71)

"Itself" is in italics in the last sentence because it refers to eventful actualities, the *process* of iteration (which *is*, phenomenologically, temporality—time itself) that somehow makes idealization possible and necessary. On Derrida's account the fictions that are concepts and categories are made possible and become necessary because nothing in this eventful world is purely repeated, nothing is absolutely identical to itself from moment to moment. Again, there is nothing unfamiliar about this idea. I would refer the reader once again to, for example, Nietzsche's "Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" (1873) or, in a less dramatic register—the instrumentalism of John Dewey. Or, as already noted, just go back to Plato (as Derrida does) to reprise his basic argument: "Being" cannot rightly be attributed to sensible physical things—only to intelligible ideas, concepts that cannot change and still be what they are.

But accessible as all this should be for an open-minded anglophone reader, we have now arrived at a critical juncture for Derrida—the point at which Searle might have authentically "confronted" him and pressed for answers he would have felt obligated to provide. For Derrida now finds himself in a trap of sorts—and it is of his own making. If some kind of "trick" lies at the heart of deconstruction, this is it: Derrida has to admit that there is *also* a "concept" of iterability:

> The concept [of anything, concepts in general], which we metaphysically need, is intrinsically all or nothing. Even the concept "difference of degree" is, qua concept, all or nothing … all conceptual production appeals to idealization. Even the "concept" of iterability, which plays an organizing role in "Limited Inc.," supposes such idealization. But it has a strange status. Like that of "differance" and several others, it is an aconceptual concept or another kind of concept, heterogeneous to the philosophical concept of the concept, a "concept" that marks both the possibility and the limit of all idealization and hence of all conceptualization. (117–118)

For a fair-minded reader, the viability of Derrida's project now hinges on the validity of this claim to a "strange status" *for just these "aconceptual concepts" upon which his whole "quasi-transcendental ontology" relies.* Notice first that this passage echoes remarkably the "peculiar properties" of speech act events as Searle described them when he was celebrating the infinite reach of his recursive rules and word types. An accident, no doubt, but a fortuitous one because the phrases mark critical points in both contexts: the point at which the author, bent on victory, permits himself to indulge in subterfuge, on the one hand, and resort to sheer force on the other—while his conscience exacts a minimal concession with words like "peculiar" and "strange." Searle, pretending to attend to "singular events," smuggles an infinity of idealized "standard cases" past us (and perhaps himself). Derrida, his whole project riding on the viability of his semi-concepts as somehow "heterogeneous" to concepts per se, must concede that *they are also concepts* per se—but, as far as I can tell, he is relying on sheer assertion to persuade us of their intrinsic semi-ness.

Suppose, instead of "iterability" we consider, say—"dogs." They can be and have been classified, conceptualized, idealized, named by an abstract common noun. But actual dogs aren't transformed into concepts in the process. How is that importantly different from the way the process of iteration "itself" cannot be conceptualized? The question becomes all the

more pointed if we consider the extent to which one might be tempted to believe that the *meaning* of the word "dog" and the essence of the animal "itself" were the *same thing*. Which is, of course, precisely what Plato and Aristotle believed—a measure of how ambitious the claims of metaphysics once were.[47] Or—if concrete objects make the point too obviously—consider some ordinary action like "running" or a dispositional property like "elasticity" or a mental process like "musing." How is the impossibility of "idealizing" or "conceptualizing" running *itself*, elasticity *itself*, or musing *itself* different from the impossibility of doing so for iterability *itself*?

I do not know how Derrida would have dealt with that question, but it is an example of how a genuine dialogue might have begun had the parties to this academic dust-up been more intent on understanding and less intent on winning.

But even that imagined dialogue could only go so far. It is hard to envisage an extended collaboration—though (but for politics) amicable coexistence ought to be possible and some meta-philosophical issues might be profitably discussed.[48] These enterprises both call themselves "philosophy" but they are profoundly different. The contrast between the two concepts of "iterability" has distilled that overall difference between them into something that can pass—at least rhetorically, in this context—for an essence. The two concepts are so intimately related, so implicitly dependent upon one another, yet so radically opposed. From the vantage point of that contrast we can see at a glance how incommensurably divergent these philosophical practices are. They collided in what Searle rightly called a "confrontation that never quite took place," though not

[47] I cannot in this space describe how often I am overwhelmed by the suspicion that Western thought is driven most deeply by the desire to put *things into words* in some way.

[48] For example, in the "Afterword" to *Limited Inc.*, Gerald Graff asks Derrida if he hasn't created something of a straw man for himself by attributing to abstract philosophizing in general and Austin in particular, an insistence on absolute conceptual purity and complete containment of facts by theory. Derrida admits that Austin's *personal* affect and attitude don't reflect that insistence—that he is tentative and provisional and happy to admit exceptions and imperfections in his work. But for Derrida, following Heidegger in this, Austin's personal intentions (the very topic at issue!) are beside the point. It is the *telos* of Western metaphysics he is addressing and that, he believes, is relentlessly at work underneath all specific manifestations—abstracting, purifying, containing, controlling. That is a topic both camps might discuss. In a nutshell, it comes down to this: to what extent is abstract reason, at work in the sciences and philosophy, *necessarily* complicit with social and economic systems of domination and exploitation? Noam Chomsky, for example, would not admit any such necessity—but compare the Frankfurt School.

for the reasons Searle supplied. Confronted with the idea that "possibilities" in language are best exemplified by that carnival of free associations Joyce staged in *Finnegans Wake*, Searle and Austin would say, "But that's no use, you can't create a formal theory to explain all that!" To which Derrida would reply, "Exactly! That's my point!" At bottom, and quite apart from the personal shortcomings of the parties involved, this confrontation never quite took place because these two ways of doing philosophy are *so* different that arguments over which is the "right way" can now be seen for what they are: as misguided as an argument over whether painting or sculpture is the "right way" to make art.[49]

We have now seen how the most prominent of the *textualistes* among creators of French theory went about overcoming the modern, especially by way of dismantling the modern subject. In the next section, Deleuze will represent the *desirants*, those who appealed directly, in the manner of Nietzsche, to unrepresentable drives and forces to accomplish the same end.

9.3   GILLES DELEUZE (1925–1995)

9.3.1   Introduction

Of all the major contributors to *la pensée 68*, Gilles Deleuze was the most obvious outlier—a declared opponent of the linguistic/textual emphasis that persisted in the work of the "poststructuralist" creators of French theory whom Francois Dosse calls the "ultra-structuralists."[50] That is why, like his friend Foucault, he survived the decline of all that and continues to shape ongoing enterprises—in Deleuze's case, most especially in the arts and academic departments associated with them. As with Derrida, but

[49] Nor can either side claim to better represent Western Reason. The analytics, like the scientists they emulate, can rightly say they have been true to the rigor of it, to the logic, the method; they tackle problems they can solve. But Derrida and the tradition that shaped him could claim to have better served philosophy's original aim: wisdom, not knowledge—the wisdom of fallible mortals whom Socrates originally represented and addressed.

[50] Deleuze's engagement with Structuralism/post-structuralism was tactically contrived to keep him in the conversation—bordering on downright disingenuous, if you attend closely to his argument in "How Do We Recognize Structuralism" ([1967] 2004). He wasn't swept up in the French "linguistic turn"—and he came right out and said so later on, when the pressures of fashion were dissipating. That is one reason many admirers position him as an opponent of postmodernism. If you think of postmodernism as an extension of Structuralism/post-structuralism, however disruptive, and take Derrida as the prototype that makes perfect sense.

not Foucault, his works are notorious for a particular kind of obscurity that derives from a certain wildness in his thought, a wildness he was happy to flaunt to the delight of his acolytes, the bafflement of other readers, and the annoyance of so many critics. He was the most prominently featured target of Alan Sokal's and Jean Bricmont's widely cited book *Fashionable Nonsense* (1998), a favorite source for left-wing opponents of academic postmodernism. In that book, Deleuze's "abuse" of scientific terms was excoriated as if he had been engaged in their explication. But he wasn't. He was possessed by a sensuous and intuitive vision for a new metaphysics. It took the form of an art project on a cosmic scale, one that would evoke "what it is like to be"—not a mere bat[51]—but "what is it like to be the whole of reality," with modern science serving as inspiration. Said Deleuze: "I feel myself to be a pure metaphysician. … Bergson says that modern science hasn't found its metaphysics, the metaphysics it would need. It is this metaphysics that interests me" (in Bogue 2007, 42).

I call this metaphysics a "vision" to play upon the word "see," the way it blends visual encounter and conceptual understanding—as when "I see" means "I get it." I call it sensuous and intuitive because not only sight (of either kind) was enlisted in this venture. All the senses, all sensations, all prearticulate feelings were summoned to the cause of escaping from the prison house of language and the formal theories that codified it. It was an attempt to ascend to the threshold of new kind of thinking, a thinking that opened out to the inconceivable, to the real.[52]

I want this notion (and the term "notion") available because I want to show that the works of Gilles Deleuze are best understood as installments in this philosophical art project that encourages willing participants to acquire a special kind of sensitivity, one that yields a "sense" of the way things really are, a sense of perpetual becoming at every level of order and disorder in the universe, a sense that arises from certain notions when they are well-deployed and dissipates when those notions are forced into the confines of a conventional conceptuality that presumes to represent reality and express subjectivity. Once again, the basic adjustment anglophone

[51] "What is it Like to Be a Bat" was a 1974 paper by Thomas Nagle, an analytically oriented philosopher of mind who argued that consciousness is a reality unto itself, irreducible to physical processes correlated with it.

[52] Frederic Jameson, author of *The Prison House of Language* (1972) and an influential critique of Structuralism in particular and formalism more generally, was no fan of most "theory." But he was lavish in his praise of Deleuze because he was the one who explicitly and consistently sought to escape that prison and engage with reality.

readers need to make to understand French theory is to treat this *kind* of philosophy as art, precisely because it aspires to something that exceeds conceptuality. So we have in mind not just any art, but modern art, precisely because it refused the concept's standard function—namely, to represent and express. This injunction applies to the creators of French theory across the board but, as we shall see, it applies in spades to Gilles Deleuze who invested most heavily in this quest to think the impossible—and, as a consequence, his work presents the most difficult challenge by far to the willing interpreter. In this section, in an extended treatment, I will do my level best to meet it.

But first, a look at Deleuze's beginnings—and, with the recommended adjustment highlighted, it will be no surprise to find how profound a role he attributed to imagination right from the start.

9.3.2   First Lines of Flight

9.3.2.1 Suffocating Interiors

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do. (Philip Larkin)

As we shall see, Gilles Deleuze—like Philip Larkin—had intensely personal reasons for loathing the Oedipal nuclear family he would one day eviscerate in the *Anti-Oedipus* (1972). And, as we shall also see, a lot of that probably had to do with certain persistent sensitivities and vulnerabilities that shaped his character. He was right, I believe, to call himself the "most naïve" of the thinkers in his cohort, and Derrida and Foucault agreed with that assessment (Patton and Protevi 2003, 6). But his videotaped interviews with Claire Parnet (*Deleuze from A to Z* 2012) show him to be rather self-consciously innocent, as it were, a bit of an actor. Compared to the elaborate flamboyance of Derrida and Foucault, Deleuze's affectations seem parochial, the conceits of small town schoolmaster (I can't stand cheese, it's like flesh; its cannibalism). But "naïve," yes, he was entitled to call himself that—in the important sense that, at an early age, he took on the original aspirations of Western metaphysics in spite of Kantian critique and all its limiting consequences. And he never looked back. Gilles Deleuze was a precocious adolescent to the end of his days.

In his biography of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Intersecting Lives*, Francois Dosse ([2007] 2010) provides some vivid glimpses of Deleuze's unhappy childhood. His health was always poor and his anti-Semitic, snobbish, bourgeois parents doted on his glamorous older brother—all the more so after he joined the resistance and died in captivity, en route to a concentration camp. They fashioned a "veritable cult" around his memory and treated little Gilles with something like disdain. Deleuze's closest friend, Michel Tournier, told Dosse that Deleuze "rejected family life very early on as a result of his parents' attitude" and Dosse seems to trace the fact that, for the rest of his life, "Deleuze tirelessly denounced family life and the stultifying world of the bourgeoisie" in general to that formative experience (88, 89).

Just as formative, in another way, was his first exposure to the life of the mind—and that hackneyed phrase will take on a precise and enduring significance for Deleuze. Philosophy provided him a lifesaving "line of flight". With Parnet, Deleuze recalled the crucial moment: "From the very first philosophy classes, I knew that was what I would do"—and he attributed his original excitement to the particular way in which philosophy first struck him (and "struck," too, will prove apt): "When I learned there were such things as concepts, the effect on me was something like the effect of fictional characters on others. They seemed just as alive and lively" (*Deleuze from A to Z:* C is for Concepts, 2012). That way of experiencing concepts gave Deleuze special access to the philosophical "field": it became a theatrical landscape in which a cast of conceptual characters contended for dominance as he constructed plotlines. From the very beginning, it was imagination that served Deleuze best and the pay-off was immediate.

While still in high school, he made a deep impression on his friend Michel Tournier, who recalled that, "when Deleuze started studying philosophy he was already head and shoulders above the rest of us … we fired off words like cotton or rubber balls, and he shot them back, hardened and heavy, like lead or steel cannon balls." When Tournier and his teacher, who also recognized Deleuze's extraordinary gifts, brought him into the circle of elite intellectuals gathered around Marie-Madeleine Davy at Rozay-en Brie and the soirees at Marcel More's Paris apartment, he was just as well received. Dosse sums up: "When still a high school senior … he was at ease discussing Nietzsche with Pierre Klossowski" and "observers whispered, 'he'll be a new Sartre'" ([2007] 2010, 91–93). A heady brew for young Gilles, so accustomed to parental disdain—but, above all, an

escape and a validation that would equip him with the self-confidence he would need to take the lonely philosophical path he chose.

Sartre was Deleuze's first philosophical hero. *Being and Nothingness* was published in 1943, during the darkest days of the German occupation, and Tournier reports that Deleuze devoured that 722-page book in a week. Along with most of the *cognoscenti* in Paris, they attended Sartre's lecture, "Existentialism is a Humanism," at *Club Maintenant* in Paris, on 29 October 1945. It marked a decisive break.[53] Tournier later reported: "We were floored. So our master had had to dig through the trash to unearth this worn-out mixture reeking of sweat and the inner life of humanism" (in Dosse [2007] 2010, 95). Deleuze was already committed to a critique of the "idea of interiority" and of the various modern humanisms associated with it. In an early publication, a 1946 article called "From Christ to the Bourgeoisie" (dedicated to his patroness, Mlle Davy), he described the "unbroken historical link between Christianity and capitalism, which are both trapped in the same delusional cult of interiority" (92).

Young Deleuze was not alone in longing for a philosophical "outside"—with the "inside" originally understood in terms of the Kantian "subjective idealism" that still dominated the French academy after the war. His teacher, Jean Hyppolite, was trying to situate Marx and Marxism in relation to Hegel (see *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* 1947), a relation of intense interest to many. And, of course, that project immediately implicated an "outside" of thought, that being the basic point of Marxist materialism. Even Husserl, in his later work, pursued a "genetic phenomenology," seeking access to the social/historical conditions that determined the emergence of thought (Joe Hughes in *Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: A Reader's Guide* 2009, 6–10, 79) (For an overview, see John Heckman's "Hyppolite and the Hegel Revival in France" in *Telos* (Summer 1973, 128–145)).

Of course Deleuze had to find his own idiosyncratic route to that "outside" so many were seeking. He had only flirted with phenomenology and his Marxism was more assumed than expounded—an accessory essential to his station but not of much interest in his work. He boasted of avoiding the "three H's" (Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger) who commanded the atten-

[53] This lecture elicited from Heidegger the landmark "Letter on Humanism" in 1946 (Heidegger 1977), at the behest of Jean Beaufret. That "letter" marked the onset of decline for existentialism and humanism, which led to the critique of phenomenology itself that attended the linguistic turn in France, the rise of Structuralism—with all its consequences for French theory.

tion of his teachers and peers and turned instead to an H of his own—to David Hume. And in him, of all people, he discovered what would become his metaphysics: "transcendental empiricism" (jargon item #1). Hume had approached this paradoxical construct without realizing it and Deleuze would always relish wrenching an unintended conundrum from the depths of an admirable philosophy.

So Deleuze had the gall to pronounce Hume's empiricism "transcendental"—an outcome from which Hume would have recoiled in horror or (good-humored fellow that he was) embraced as a parody of metaphysical reason's overreach. Inspired, I suspect, by Nietzsche's call for "effective history" that served contemporary life-affirming purposes, Deleuze liked to compare his method to "buggering," to taking the man whose work was the object of his study from behind and, in a species of immaculate conception, engendering a monster that would serve Deleuze's purposes (see, e.g., *Deleuze and History* 2009, 208). Hard to say how Hume would have felt about that image—perhaps it would depend on whether it was presented to him at home in Edinburgh or in one of the Parisian salons that made him so welcome.

9.3.2.2 *Revelations of Transcendental Empiricism: David Hume*

> We start with atomic parts [that] have transitions, passages, tendencies. …
> These tendencies give rise to habits. Isn't this the answer to the question
> "what are we?" We are habits, nothing but habits—*the habit of saying* "*I.*"
> *Perhaps, there is no more striking answer to the problem of the Self.* (Deleuze,
> Preface to *Empiricism and Subjectivity* [1953] 1991; italics mine)

"Transcendental critique of the subject [is] at the core of transcendental empiricism" says Anne Sauvagnargues, one of the most respected French authorities on Gilles Deleuze (cited in Williams 2012, 42)—and the way Deleuze himself here describes his "striking answer to the problem of the self" supports her judgment. My reading of him hinges on the validity of that claim. Outlier though he was in many ways, he was at one with the rest of the creators of French theory in his determination to have done with modern subjectivity. We find that commitment already taking shape in his study of David Hume (*Empiricism and Subjectivity* [1953] 1991). One other theme from that work needs highlighting—namely, the importance Deleuze attached to the role of the imagination in Hume's psychology. It was not so much a faculty; it was a "factory." There, Hume's "principles of association" (resemblance, contiguity, causality) did their work, generating "human nature" as defined in Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* ([1740] 2003). That nature, arising in utter contingency during its "history," was

simply the coherence of human experience once it fell under the sway of custom and produced that creature of habit, including the habit of saying "I," that is the human subject. Said Constantin Boundas, the translator of *Empiricism and Subjectivity:*

> empiricism is not a philosophy of the senses but a philosophy of the imagination and the statement that "all ideas are derived from impressions" is not meant to enshrine representationalism but is rather a regulative principle. … From a host of differential impressions, *a subject is born inside the given.* ([1953] 1991, 7–8; italics mine)

An account of the birth of the subject from "inside the given," of the subject as a contingent *effect* of other entities and forces—that was Hume's most profound contribution to modern philosophy. But Deleuze, from his perch of procreation as philosophical buggerer, noticed a transcendent something at the nativity scene that *le bon David* had missed:

> How can the mind become a subject? … Deleuze-Hume's answer is that the mind becomes a subject … as the result of the … the principles of association contiguity, resemblance and causality [that] form habit, establish belief and constitute the subject *as an entity that anticipates.* (Boundas 1991, 15; my italics)

Anticipates what? Anticipates what the imagination offers up as coming next and—within the nexus of social custom—as coming next if the subject desires it, or even just allows it, falling back on regularities of causality and habits that regularly secured it in the past.[54] And so it went: human nature-in-history, with Nietzsche waiting down the road to take on the same vision—with a shift in tone, a shift that Deleuze, growing angrier as he grew more alienated, would embrace and embellish as the 1960s unfolded.

Now we catch a glimpse of the "transcendent" aspect of this conceptual concoction called "transcendental empiricism." Instead of the transcendental subject Kant would introduce like a *deux ex machina* into a contingent Humean landscape in order to subdue it to reason a priori, we have a contingent landscape *that transcends the subject that issues from it.* In this scenario, the principles of association that midwife the birth are operating in a fully functioning socio-linguistic context. "How-do-grunting-hominids-invent-language-and-prohibit-incest" questions are not on the table. From our point of view, as evaluators of arguments, there is no mys-

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[54] So much is owed here to Heidegger, it goes on and on—but let it pass.

tery. The "given" is the social and natural environment into which neuro-psychological flesh packets we call "babies" are born *biologically*. But, from the point of view (if there were one) of those little flesh packets, there is indeed a mystery—for they are not (yet) subjects. From *that* point of view the question becomes: "given" to what?

Gilles Deleuze would spend the rest of his working life experimenting with answers to that question—imagining answers to that question.

In his last essay, "Immanence: a Life" (2001), Deleuze looked back on the founding gesture from the point of view of subsequent experiments and imaginings:

> what is a transcendental field? … *a pure stream of a-subjective consciousness, a pre-reflexive impersonal consciousness, a qualitative duration of consciousness without a self.* … There is something wild and powerful in this transcendental empiricism. (25; italics mine)

Wild and powerful. For Deleuze, no other kinds of ideas had value. Trying to understand him means reaching for experiences of that "pre-reflexive impersonal consciousness"—however unlikely the prospect. Deleuze gave us some sense of what he meant when he referred to delirium as an example of experience without a subject. Think also of certain moments between sleeping and waking—of multiple overlapping sensations and image fragments that exist more or less on their own—or as given to various "larval selves."

Deleuze ransacked the works of thinkers he admired, looking for the "tools" he needed to realize this unlikely prospect.

> though obviously indebted to Spinoza, Leibniz and Bergson, Deleuze appropriates [them] by pushing them to their "differential" limit. … Deleuze's historical monographs … are preliminary sketches for the great canvas of *Difference and Repetition*. (D. W. Smith "The Doctrine of Univocity: Deleuze's Ontology of Immanence" 2001, 38)

But among the philosophers he consulted, it was Nietzsche that Deleuze acknowledged as his master. So it was fitting that he foisted upon him the most outrageous of all his distortions of original intent:

> Dionysus is a player. The real player makes chance an object of affirmation. … We now see what this third figure is; the play of eternal return. This return is precisely the being of becoming, the one of multiplicity, the neces-

sity of chance—*we must not make of the eternal return a return of the same.* (Deleuze [1995] 2001, 86–87; italics mine)

Deleuze claimed that Nietzsche's madness prevented him from getting to the "third moment" of eternal return—the one that would have been what Deleuze wanted it to be:

> The third moment remains absent. … We know that Nietzsche did not have time to write this projected part. … Nietzsche gave us only the past condition and the present metamorphosis, but not the unconditioned which was to have resulted as the "future." (1994, 92)

Deleuze admitted that Nietzsche described eternal return as it is usually described, as eternal return of *the same* (*Cambridge Companion to Deleuze* 2012, 89), a reading that posits the thought of eternal return as an existential challenge, a goad to ensure that one lives every moment *as if* one were fated to repeat it forever. But Deleuze breezed by all that and shaped the notion to suit his purpose—and, upon reflection, it stands up pretty well. I can imagine Nietzsche approving of the "being of becoming" as the "same" that always returns; it captures something essential in his thought. And Deleuze's Nietzsche, the one he introduced in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* ([1962] 1983), the one for whom the perpetual becoming of sheer difference in natural and social history was the only "constant"— that Nietzsche proved to be what that Parisian moment called for. In that book, Deleuze supplied much of the rhetoric, the attitude, and sheer gumption that enabled creators of French theory to breach the closure implicit in Hegel's phenomenology and its descendants—and also to abandon all theoretical orientations that sought closure, including Structuralism. Since no formal system could contain the historical world as Nietzsche described it, Deleuze's instantly influential book marked a turning point on the road to ultra-structuralism.

Dan Smith's reference to the "great canvas" of *Difference and Repetition* was an allusion to Deleuze's comparison of himself with Van Gogh—the great colorist—who hesitated to commit to color because his sensitivity to it was so great that it amounted to a kind of fear. Van Gogh practiced with his dim-lit portraits for years before making the leap into the vivid expressionist landscapes that fulfilled his promise. And Deleuze practiced with his "portraits," his studies of individual philosophers, before he gathered it all up and packed it into an explosion of his own thought—*Difference and Repetition*. (See *Deleuze from A to Z*: C is for Color and H is for History of Philosophy, 2012.)

9.3.3   Toward a New Image of Thought: No Image at All

When I took up the challenge of trying to understand French "theory" as a fair-minded reader, I assumed Derrida would be the toughest nut to crack. But, as already noted, Deleuze gave me the most trouble by far. With Derrida, thanks to some insightful secondary sources, I was able (or so I believe) to identify an essential moment, an "origin" (oh no!) that brought coherence to the development of his thought. But in spite of brilliant rays of illumination provided by Dan Smith, in particular, and Joe Hughes, Brian Massumi, John Protevi, Leonard Lawlor, Claire Colebrook, and others, I found no comparable "starting point" for Deleuze. I was reduced to scrutinizing entries in the 337-page-long *Deleuze Dictionary* (2010) in a futile effort to integrate his ideas into a manageable whole.

It proved to be a fortuitous exercise for that reason. I learned the hard way how committed Deleuze was to thwarting efforts to make a "manageable whole" of his work—his own efforts included. That made the process of reading the *Dictionary* a Deleuzean process, a series of event/encounters. There is an echo here of Barthes' claim to favor the alphabet as an organizing principle, which may have been literally true (one imagines him as a precocious ten -year-old, passing lonely hours reading an encyclopedia). But, in *RB by RB*, that preference reads as a gentle put-down of system-building structuralists, including himself. For Deleuze, the repudiation of system entailed a massive investment of time and energy, a full-bore quest for a new way to think.

One chain of event/encounters to illustrate: the dictionary itself introduced me to the "rhizome" (jargon item #2: structured like a rabbit warren, not a tree, so it doesn't matter where you start and there is no real "end" [as in, "conclusion"]). In the same moment, I met the "monad" (jargon item #3: a singular individual determined at any moment by the unique configuration of its relations) and, because both notions arose together, I met the idea of conceptuality as an experienced "multiplicity" (jargon item #4: as applied to the concept of "concept": a collection of signification-and-action tendencies ongoingly making connections and modifications up to some imperceptible point of "becoming other" or dissipating). In fact (I just noticed this now, as I write) the "monad" that was a concept in one of the settings in which it depended on relations in *that* setting became a "multiplicity" as I tracked its itinerary through other settings and outlined prospectively the settings it *could* have (virtually had) a place in.

And so on, indefinitely. And that also happens to capture what is meant by *Difference and Repetition*. There is no such thing as pure repetition. There is always difference, no matter what is repeated, no matter how many times (compare Derrida above, Chap. 9.2.3.1). Pure identity is an illusion of Idealism—along with other tropes of closure like analogy, resemblance, and opposition. Deleuze called these relations "the four iron collars of representation" because, especially in Hegel—but throughout the history of Western thought—they refused difference the ontological standing it deserves. *Some* difference is obviously at work in three of the relations: "A" can only resemble or be analogous to or oppose "B" if there is some difference between them—but this is a dependent, subordinate difference, not the wild motor of change that endows Becoming with its Nietzschean claim over Being. The case of identity is trickier; it is not so obvious how difference enters into self-identity. That is why it commands the nexus of representation. But *if identity is conceived as a relation*, some difference is implicated and even eternally self-identical Platonic ideas, with no physical aspect for change to get a handle on, seem somehow to be in relation to themselves *if they are represented*.

Since Deleuze's conceptual multiplicities are always ready for further encounters in ever-changing contexts, it fell to me, a finite reader/writer with promises to keep, to decide when to stop. So I could finish the section. So I could finish the book. Of course, with each decision, I foreclosed on further encounters—which meant, with every decision, I risked not having some encounter that would have qualified as a genuine "event" (jargon item #5: everything that happens is, strictly speaking, an "event" insofar as it is uniquely determined—but the term typically makes honorific reference to especially fruitful happenings, as in the "events of '68" or the "events of 9/11"; *at the same time*, in its a metaphysical aspect, the "pure event" refers to the "eternal structure" of becoming: just happened, about to happen, never is[55]). I could only hope that, in each case, I had

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[55] This obviously mirrors Husserl on pro- and re-tention and Heidegger on "having been" and "not yet." It bears repeating: the debt Deleuze and other creators of "theory" owed to phenomenology is incalculable. They were as determined to escape the bubbles of its "life-worlds" as they were to escape the epistemological prison of the cogito. Indeed, for them, it often came down to the same thing. But inevitably, given their uniform educations and entrenched habits of thought, that "escape" entailed a reworking of phenomenological notions—efforts to open them up to some "outside" (compare today's "speculative realism").

more or less exhausted the potential of a particular conceptual multiplicity (the feeling of "Ok, enough of this already") or that, if indeed an eventful encounter were being foreclosed, I would be blessed by the rhizome and encounter it eventually, from some other direction (the feeling of "If it's really important, it will come up again").

The key entries in the Dictionary proved to be "reflections" in some way of others. They seemed to participate with each other, not systematically, not categorically—but overlapping and supplementing, sometimes contrasting—above all, in motion constantly, shifting meanings as they traverse a landscape of variously meaningful contexts. Not, in a word, "arborescent" (jargon item #6: tree structure, see above for contrasting term, "rhizome"). So, for example, as I wrote this sentence I was trying to think of something (some kind of bush?) that has a stem with branches, that in turn have branches but *also* roots that produce other stems so I could illustrate how "arborescent" and "rhizomic" can overlap. I hit an "impasse," a "blockage" (more jargon items). I could only hope that the "event" of this impasse would open up a "line-of-flight" (jargon item #7: a break in habituality that opens a way to the new; compare "deterritorialized") that would take me to *another* example to show *contrasting* Deleuzean multiplicities *also* overlapping and supplementing and, lo and behold, this sentence itself is identifying what I was looking for. A genuine "event" must earn the honorific bestowed on its eternal form through its productivity on the plane of actuality—it doesn't get to be a genuine event without opening up significant lines of flight. So "lines of flight" and "events" implicate each other. They overlap and supplement as well as contrast.

But some of these "semi-concepts" (Deleuze used that term, though not as often as Derrida) also changed in more categorical ways over time in various (not always convincing) ways. It was as if the same notion appears in a different costume to fulfill the requirements of a new task undertaken in a different setting[56]. None of these notions can be used to organize the others into a theory in the Classical sense. There is no representational claim being made of the sort that might be validated by putting a coherent set of propositions next to states of affairs in the world and

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[56] Is this sloppy conceptualizing, irresponsible and undisciplined improvising, immediate evidence of a lack of rigor—or do we take Deleuze at his word when he calls himself a pragmatist above all, dedicated to solving problems, to making something happen? If concepts are tools adapting to the task at hand, then declining to specify each shift in meaning forces the reader to attend to those tasks first of all as a matter of implicit protocol for reading Deleuze? Or is that just an excuse?

determining whether or not they "match." *Difference and Repetition* was written to break down the Classical "image of thought" as representational in that way so that, in the absence of a controlling image of thought, language and mind might live in freedom.

More on that pipe dream anon. For the moment, this summary: philosophy as art is taking up the position of Spinoza's God, the point of view of pure immanence, and creating an intangible sculpture of tropes to convey a "sense" of what the universe is like according modern science since Einstein, since quantum mechanics. That means going beyond what can be said or thought in intuitive Kantian/Newtonian terms. For twentieth-century intellectuals generally, after all, that had been the stunning lesson of the new physics: thanks to mathematics and certain experimental procedures, its theories could be confirmed. But they could not be perceived or conceived, in the ordinary sense of those terms. Schrödinger's cat was impossible—but it stood for something real. Deleuze's metaphysics set out to think the impossible in this specific sense.

Though not perhaps as willing as I am to call Deleuzean metaphysics an art project, serious students of his work understand this basic point about his use of science and math. When Joe Hughes, with Deleuze's reliance on outdated sources in mind, says that he was not "concerned with biology as such but simply found in it an inspirational metaphor" (2009, 55), he points to a more general consensus (see, e.g., James Williams' description of Deleuzean mashups as "the glossing and transformation of scientific and mathematical ideas, and the borrowing from all the arts" (2012, 45)).

Deleuze himself put it this way:

> Science fiction in yet another sense, one in which the weaknesses become manifest. How else can one write but of those things which one doesn't know, or knows badly? It is precisely there that we imagine having something to say. … We are therefore well aware, unfortunately, that we have spoken about science in a manner which was not scientific. (1994, xxi)

So there is really is no excuse for a critique of Deleuzean "fashionable nonsense" that ignores this context. Defenders of disciplinary orthodoxy can make a telling case against this kind of intellectual license without resorting to reading in bad faith. If notorious passages suffused with science and math references in, say, *A Thousand Plateaus*, actually make no sense but were, at the same time, accepted at face value by newly minted Deleuzeans *who themselves showed no awareness of their "science fictional"*

provenance—that would actually make for a *more* compelling and insightful critique of theory and its reception in the US than the essentially clerical task of "correcting errors" ever could.[57] But it would also involve serious and sympathetic research into what theory actually was—not something polemicists are inclined to do.

As to the liberties taken with the philosophers Deleuze appropriated, they should likewise be taken in context—suggested by this quote:

> The time is coming when it will hardly be possible to write a book of philosophy as it has been done for so long: 'Ah! the old style …'. The search for new means of philosophical expression was begun by Nietzsche and must be pursued today in relation to the renewal of certain other arts. … One imagines a *philosophically* bearded Hegel, a *philosophically* clean-shaven Marx, in the same way as a moustached Mona Lisa. (1994, xxi)

And, once again, defenders of canonical disciplines are entitled to react against such irreverent abuses—in much the same way as, say, Nixon supporters reacted to the grooming habits of "dirty hippies," and for much the same reason. This *was* the 1960s, and social conventions of all kinds were under attack. There is no doubt that Deleuze, always sympathetic to transgression, saw that inclination intensify into an all-out assault on social constraints as the events of 1968 unfolded, as he assumed his position at the experimental university at Vincennes—and, above all, as the collaborations with Guattari came to dominate his thinking.

Miguel De Beistegui attributes Deleuze's opposition to the Classical image of thought in Western philosophy to the influence of modern and pop art (2012, 79). I think that underestimates the influence of Nietzsche, but Beistegui and others are certainly justified in placing as much weight as they do on this little gnomic utterance from Deleuze: "The theory of thought is like painting: it needs that revolution which took art from representation to abstraction" (in 1994, 276).

That doesn't mean that philosophy needs a revolution as radical *in its own way*, it means as radical *in the same way;* that is, it should move away from representation to something less depictive, more abstract—more about itself. If that seems inconsistent with the ultra-structuralist critique

[57] I am every bit as serious about critique of theory, of which this is a small example, as I am about my effort to explicate it fairly. If this book gives less space and time to the task of critique, it is only because I believe that a really significant critique depends, first and foremost, on a fair reading of its object—and that is the principal aim of this book.

of formalism, note that, in this context, the focus is on self-reference rather than detachment from the living world.[58] The comparison endows abstract art with the freedom of a signifier released from its signified; it invites us to think of abstract art works as life forms.

Which is close to what philosophizing would become if it gave up representing and focused on *producing*, on producing expressions with force and influence manifested unpredictably, in settings in which they happen to erupt, and then move on, morphing as they go, into other circumstances—and so on.[59] This is why Beistegui connects Deleuze's "reversal of Platonism" to modern art. In jettisoning representation, Deleuze would free natural reality from the status of mere copy and free, at the same time, reason in general and philosophy in particular from its supposedly exalted aim of making the best copies of the Ideas (or, later, Facts). Philosophy could have its own being, its own becoming, just like other life forms.

In his landmark paper "The Concept of the Simulacrum: Deleuze and the Overturning of Platonism" (*Continental Philosophy Review* 2005, 89–120), Dan Smith gives a brilliant account of how Plato was forced by circumstances to conceive of his Ideas in the first place. In a nutshell, Plato found he could only distinguish "genuine copies" from mere simulacra (and, not incidentally, Socrates from the sophists) if he anchored "resemblance," not in mere physical similarity, but in some "inner" (or invisible) Ideational affiliation between copy and model. Then some random youth who accidently resembles a man not his father (simulacrum) more than the actual son (genuine copy) could be rejected. The idea that thought/language is "true" by virtue of faithfully re-presenting what it copies thus took hold of the idea of reason and persisted through descendent forms of Western rationality, including the natural sciences—thus constituting the "image of thought" Deleuze was out to dismantle in *Difference and*

[58] More overlap with Adorno; note that abstraction, usually the villain on the scene, is a good thing in this case. That is because Deleuze's idea of thinking (line of flight, affirmative difference, novelty, open-ended, never "settled") could be described as "abstract" in its self-referential orientation compared to representation, the font of all banality and conformity.

[59] There is nothing obscure, by the way, about the idea of the "force" of language: think of your body responding to a sudden cry of pain or the literally uplifting effect of anthems for the faithful (singing *La Marseillaise* in Rick's Café in *Casablanca*). Passages in Walter Ong's study of oral cultures, *The Presence of the Word* (1967), might also serve to remind the skeptical of what it means to speak of language having force. See also Deleuze on writing "for" animals.

Repetition.[60] Smith also shows how Deleuze's promotion of the simulacrum neutralizes all claims of "privileged position" and "hierarchy" in thought (the political implications were clear). Nietzsche's cosmos is all there is and, although there is much in it that exists, as it were, "potentially," we will find that, thanks to Spinoza's univocity,[61] virtual existence has neither more nor less being than what exists actually.

That will be Deleuze's metaphysical vision and anyone willing to think loosely (because, what the hell, why not? There will be no quiz) might get a sense from it that Schrodinger's impossible cat has found a home away from home in this notional place.

9.3.4   Spinoza's God Does Phenomenology in a Nietzschean Cosmos

9.3.4.1   Philosophy as Art

Transforming language-as-representation into language-as-productive force is an essential part of the process of appropriation through which Deleuze assembled his cosmic artwork. One consequence was that, in writing about it, I caught myself (as in writing about Derrida, but more so) compulsively putting scare quotes around every other word, or so it seemed. But that's what one would expect if the mind really has the capacity to "get" access to whatever there is that cannot be conceived (said) in ordinary ways—namely, a continuing sense that ordinary language isn't up to the task.[62]

An example of how Deleuze saw this issue: *apropos* of von Hofmannsthal's *Lord Chandos Letter* ([1902] 2005), he remarked, "the writer … sees the animal as the only population before which he is responsible." The writer

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[60] Once again, Heidegger's influence is apparent: see the discussion of "assertion" in *Being and Time*.

[61] Spinoza's univocity is an ontological monism that says that every particular happening/entity is a mode of the one Sub-stance—so all being "is" in the same way: if a possibility "is" then it "is" as much as an actuality "is."

[62] Compare George Steiner's "lacking word" reading of high modernism in Chap. 3. Like all his *confreres*, Deleuze was deeply invested in the work of the radical modernists in the arts and literature—but, once again, even more so. He wrote more books and papers about the arts than all his colleagues combined. "More" is a word that readily attaches to Deleuze. But the most significant source of Deleuze's view of language is Nietzsche's early essay "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense." A half hour with that little essay provides a key for decoding the Deleuzean discourse.

pushes "to the limit that separates language from animality, that separates language from the cry, that separates language from song. … One has to be on this limit, that's what I think. Even when one does philosophy. One has to be on the limit between thought and non-thought" (Deleuze and Parnet 2012: "A is for animal"). Alain Beaulieu nails it when he says: "Deleuze seems to imply that animals intuitively have this capacity to express an impersonal life with its network of affects … the task of writers and philosophers consists of tuning into the forces of an impersonal life similar to the actions and reactions of an animal and its environment" (Beaulieu 2011).[63]

No surprise to find that, in her introduction to the *Deleuze Dictionary* (2010), Claire Colebrook worries that the very idea "might seem a particularly craven, disrespectful, literal minded and reactive project" because the *Dictionary* entailed the risk that "in systematizing Deleuze's thought" we "reduce an event and untimely provocation to one more *doxa*" (pp. 1–2). Similarly, Joe Hughes, in his invaluable *Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: A Reader's Guide* (2009) wonders if the "idea of a reader's guide which attempts to bring the vibrations, rotations and whirlings of difference and repetition into the dubious clarity of everyday language is in fact a fundamental betrayal of Dells aesthetic project" (23). And, tasked with introducing *The Cambridge Companion to Deleuze* (2012), Henry Somers-Hall devoted ten pages to the difficulties involved in reading him: "Deleuze introduces a certain obscurity into his language, a stuttering or in his own words a *deterritorialization* of language that prevents reliance on ready-made categories of thought" that enable us to "think that which is outside of the intellect" (5).

"Stuttering" was especially interesting to Deleuze—an everyday example of the "schizophrenic" poetic creations of Antonin Artaud with which he was well-nigh obsessed. One needs to reflect upon the phenomenon as concretely as possible to see why. The near-spastic tensions and suspenses that constitute a severe case of stuttering testifies to (as Deleuze would put it) collisions of hidden forces in the depths of bodies that determine experienced actuality. When you watch and listen to someone stutter, it's like watching a schizophrenic make

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[63] Certain feminist critics rightly discerned a boyish "masculinity" in Deleuze's fascination with animals—wolf packs in particular seemed to appeal to a lingering Mowgli/Tarzan fantasy at work in his thinking. And later, fully invested a kind of panpsychism, he saw the "origins" of art in the territorial markings of animals and was as comfortable with that continuity as any nineteenth-century evolutionist would have been.

art—conflicting impulses are visibly uprooting lines of habituality and intentionality. What I will be calling "the anguish of actualization" is here on dramatic display.[64]

Notice how closely this tracks with Adorno looking to the emancipatory potential of modern art—but the idea of a philosophy that *itself* "stutters" like Artaud is way more radical than anything Adorno did in his own work, which was conventionally framed and executed. Like the classic modernist he was, Adorno *practiced* what he preached in a separate compartment (see his corpus of experimental musical compositions). But in Deleuze, and especially in Deleuze and Guattari, there is a full-blown, essentially postmodern, effort to violate compartments and experiment—artistically, in the texts—with philosophical and scientific language, and always to the same end: in effect, to evoke that field of "a-subjective consciousness" that Deleuze found implicated in Hume's transcendental empiricism, to make visible (to "see") the play of forces that operate within and between bodies and contexts, the differential fields of stimuli and impulses, the ongoing momentum of habit, and, especially, the constant interruptions of chance—the breaks and impasses that result unexpectedly in new series of thoughts or feelings or actions (this way lies their "vision" of the political as well).

As with Derrida especially, this exposition will deploy ordinary subject talk as needed to clarify what is obscure in Deleuze's work—though, in his case, it is not so much a matter of breaking a ban because Deleuze's strategy was not so much to destabilize (deconstruct, etc.) as to attack head on, to smash. But I will be arguing that, hanging around the wreckage was a poetically resurrected subject so magnificently idealized as to escape notice as such: Spinoza's God.

The attacks on the subject that were Deleuze's focus in his early work eventually evolved into an attack on identities of all kinds. It was as if he wanted to "disguise" his original project when he undertook to undo self-sufficiency and autonomy in any entity whatsoever, which was what his "scientifically" updated Spinoza-Nietzschean ontology did. But when we looked at the origins of this ludicrously (from ludic, pertaining to play) ambitious undertaking, we saw very clearly what the original target was. I don't mean to suggest that Deleuze *intentionally* hid his loathing for the

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[64] Deleuze himself said: "A creator who is not grabbed around the throat by a set of impossibilities is not a creator. … Without a set of impossibilities, you won't have a line of flight, the exit that is creation." Imagine a stutterer improvising a language of gesture at the height of his frustration: an example of a creative "line of flight."

modern subject under his all-embracing takedown of "substances." I just want to make sure we don't lose sight of the original target of his weirdly cheerful fury (Nietzsche would have approved of "cheerful fury," surely).

But perhaps it wasn't a disguise in the usual sense, so much as a growth, an extension of the original undoing that became so elaborate and omnivorous that it might later seem to some readers of Deleuze and Guattari that their ultimate creation, their "schizo" subject, was only one manifestation of "schizo" (rhizomic) processes of nature at every level, from the astronomical to the nuclear. The sheer scope of this metaphysical aspiration makes it seem both practical and ironical to propose an "image of thought" suited specifically to Deleuze's work. So will propose one that I believe it does justice to his enterprise and might even have met with his approval—though he insisted that, unlike his philosophical ancestors, the only "image of thought" he subscribed to was no image at all. I suggest that the most persistent and potent themes in Deleuze's thought, in his new metaphysics, are all oriented by the unasked but controlling question—"What would it be like to be Spinoza's God doing Phenomenology in a Nietzschean Cosmos?"

In accordance with Deleuze's rules for critical reading, it is incumbent upon me to provide an account of the genesis of this new image of thought—which means identifying the problem the new image is supposed to solve and the method of its solution. The problem, in Deleuze's case, is providing modern science—post-Einstein, quantum theory—with a suitable metaphysics. That meant talking about what Somers-Hall described as "that which is outside the intellect." And to what do moderns turn when they want to do *that*?

To art. It's so conventional!

Just how closely affiliated Deleuze thought philosophy and the arts should be was perhaps most evident in his videotaped conversations with Parnet (*Deleuze from A to Z* 2012). In that casual setting, bantering with his charming interlocutor, it was obvious that Deleuze was not simply having difficulty maintaining the distinction between the two—he didn't want to. He manifestly longed to be an artist. So, for example, after rehearsing for Parnet his boilerplate lines about painters inventing "percepts" and writers inventing "affects" while philosophers invent "concepts," Deleuze admits that "actually all of these elements are involved in both art and philosophy, so for example, the great philosophers like Spinoza and Nietzsche hurl off powerful affects" ("I is for Idea"). In the work of the great thinkers, "philosophical concepts are like personalities" and Nietzsche "creating the concept of the priest" reminds us of how "another *kind of artist* would

create a painting of the priest" ("J is for Joy"; italics mine; see his memory of first encountering philosophical concepts above, 9.3.2.1). And finally, just as great painters produce "percepts at the edge of the bearable," so philosophers should create "concepts at the edge of the thinkable … and between the creation of a great character and the creation of a concept, so many links exist that one can see it as constituting somewhat the same enterprise" ("L is for literature").

But, at the end of the day, Deleuze never came right out and said his metaphysics was a work of art—period. I therefore propose to bugger him as he buggered philosophers he admired and foist upon him this claim: his new method to address his new problem was essentially artistic, even by his own definition.

Yes, Deleuze created concepts (or semi-concepts)—with such abandon, so profusely—and that super-abundance alone is suggestive. But they were most effective, most Deleuzean, when they in turn "hurled off" affects and percepts that caused people who fell under his spell to see and feel differently, just as Van Gogh and Proust and Bacon did. Perhaps more devotedly than any other philosopher, Deleuze responded to Nietzsche when he called upon his followers to make philosophy like art, not math and science.

Perhaps we should not be surprised to find that the world disclosed to Deleuze when he assumed the position of Spinoza's God *was already expressing itself*—as if to welcome him home, to the heart of immanence. Which makes this the right moment to ask why *Spinoza's* God specifically?

9.3.4.2 Expression, Event, Effect

The world does not exist outside of its expressions. (Deleuze and Guattari in Massumi 2002, 1)

A specifically philosophical concept of immanence brings with it a specifically philosophical "danger": pantheism or immanence. … It at once gives back to nature its own specific depth and renders man capable of penetrating into this depth. *It makes man commensurate with God*. (Deleuze *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* 2005, 322; italics mine)

There is no ambiguity about these two quotes, although Deleuze's phrasing in the second one seems to suggest a real (though scare-quoted) danger and he does not explicitly take on the role he is flirting with.

Elizabeth Grosz, in an essay on Bergson's influence on Deleuze, made a similar point from a more detached standpoint:

> Bergson understands analysis, which science most commonly utilizes as its method, as what decomposes an object into what is already known. … Intuition by contrast is that mode of (internal) transport into the heart of a thing. … *It is an attuned empiricism that does not reduce its components and parts but expands them to connect this object to the very universe itself.* (Grosz 2005, 8; italics mine)

Clearly, only a God existing in peculiar intimacy with His creation could enjoy an empiricism that comprehensive and finely attuned. Such an attunement, cast into a description, would amount to a phenomenology *as if* performed by God—by Spinoza's God in particular—because Spinoza's God was coextensive with, indeed identical to, all nature, existence itself. That was his atheism, for which he suffered sanctions in his day.[65]

So the cosmic art project is laying a claim *of some kind* to the point of view of Spinoza's God—that is the "point of view" that everything that exists would have of itself and everything else (debt to Leibniz' monads noted) at every level of its organization. Ten pages after mentioning the danger of pantheism that expressionism brings with it, this time referencing Spinoza specifically and admiringly, Deleuze spells out the consequences of this awesome affirmation in language that leaves little doubt as to his inclinations:

> Spinoza accepts the truly philosophical danger of immanence and pantheism implicit in the notion of expression. Indeed he throws in his lot with that danger. In Spinoza the whole theory of expression supports univocity; and its whole import is to free univocal being … to make it the object of pure affirmation … realized in expressive pantheism or immanence. (in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* 2005, 333)

But why a Nietzschean cosmos? Much as Deleuze admired Spinoza for his daring, his naturalism, and his ethics of joy over sadness—a universe

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[65] A quick reminder of how radical a view this was in its context: for the posthumously published Dutch version of de Spinoza's *Ethics: Including the Improvement of the Understanding* ([1677] 1989), Spinoza's friends arranged to leave out the clause "or Nature" as it appears in the Latin version, thusly: "That eternal and infinite being we call God, or Nature, acts from the same necessity from which he exists" (Part IV, Preface).

identified with God's being as it was understood in the seventeenth century was too stable to be credible for a twentieth-century ontologist. Nietzsche was the decisive influence on Deleuze—and, of course, Spinoza anticipated him in many ways. But the Nietzsche of difference, the Nietzsche of forces, the Nietzsche of flux, the Nietzsche of philosophy-as-art—that was a vision Spinoza couldn't possibly anticipate.

> – "The World is an Egg"[66]
>
> 'The world is an egg' (Deleuze 1994, 216) in that the world is a dynamic process of metamorphosis. … Hence, if the world is a city, it is also an egg, not a static collection of edifices but a living entity in formation. … Each locus looks out on a different city in formation, *and there is no single originary ovum over from which the city-organism arises.* (Bogue 2007, 57; italics mine)

Bogue's decision to feature the mythical Dogon egg as a way of evoking world-making processes of autonomous morphogenesis was inspired. The analogy with a city is a bit shakier, a bit too dependent on subjective perspective, though the essential point about the absence of a "single originary ovum" gets made. But perhaps it would be wiser to *begin* with something like an "originary ovum" and review, in biological terms, why it doesn't hold up as an account of the actualization of an organism. A well-educated person's average understanding of genes and their "expression" in phenotypes—that is, in living organisms—is sufficient to sustain an account of some essential, if preliminary, aspects of this issue (pun intended). The complicating factors might then be situated more securely.

I have no idea whether Deleuze was alluding to this standard biological usage when he deployed the term "expression"; it seems unlikely, given the context of his Spinoza studies—although he did read a lot of (mostly outdated) Romantic biology. In any case, the terms of art we need if we are to imagine the "point of view of pure immanence" in relation to the natural-historical world can be roughly arranged around that usage: these

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[66] "readers may recall from *A Thousand Plateaus* the image of the cosmic egg from the Dogon mythology, complete with the distribution of intensities running across the surface of the egg. According to the ancient myth, seven vibrations criss-crossed the egg in spiraling zig-zag lines, morphing its shape into a helix before it birthed the world" (see Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, "The Dogon" in *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*, by Daryll Forde (Oxford University Press 1954: 84–85)).

include, most importantly, differential field, intensity, event, effect, sense, molecular versus molar, virtual versus actual.[67]

If organisms developed from eggs or seeds in strict accordance with the set of instructions encoded in the genotype, we would have a perfect example of how Deleuze thinks of the "plane of immanence," of "virtuality," as the modern metaphysical equivalent of Platonic Ideas. He used the term "Ideas" for virtual structures in his early psychologically oriented work, when he was channeling Bergson and latching onto Proust's description of involuntary memories as "real but not actual, ideal but not abstract."[68] But a moment's reflection on the difference between the *information* encoded by sequences of nucleotides on a strand of DNA and the physical molecules themselves shows why that information might stand as a perfectly intelligible modern iteration of the Platonic Idea. After all, the same information could be coded (represented physically) by something other than nucleotide molecules—as indeed it is nowadays in computer models. So the *pure* (that word again) information itself, the *meaning* of the sequences of nucleotides, the *messages* they are sending to proteins that will differentiate into organs during morphogenesis—that meaning, that message, could quite intelligibly be called nature's "Ideas" of physical organs that have yet to become.

In fact, later, working with Guattari, and with impudent intent to confound an easy reading, they chose to retain the term "Ideas" to name virtuality in general. They wanted to underscore the claim that, yes, as Nietzsche himself had proclaimed, the "business of modern philosophy is to invert Plato," but if the term "invert" is taken seriously then *essential elements of Platonism will be retained even as they are displaced into physis*, into what Plato thought of as the fallen world of the mere copy—the sensible physical world beset by chance and change.

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[67] In what follows I will be calling rather freely on imagery that dates to *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the umbrella title for *Anti-Oedipus* (1972, trans. 1977) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980, trans. 1987). So credit (or blame) for this phase of the cosmic art project goes to Felix Guattari as well as Deleuze.

[68] "Deleuze invokes Bergson's theory of pure memory … Bergson believes that pure memory stores every conscious event in its particularity and detail. The perceptions of actual existence are duplicated in a virtual existence as images with the potential for becoming conscious, actual ones. Thus every lived moment is both actual and virtual, with perception on one side and memory on the other; an ever-growing mass of recollections" (Stagoll "Memory" in *The Deleuze Dictionary*; italics mine).

But we are brought up short along this line of speculation by the fact that genes of organisms *don't* really dictate their phenotypical actualization in detail due to a host of complex interactions that arise during morphogenesis, during the organism's development. Analogously, a Deleuzean "concept" is called a "multiplicity" because it is *not* a fixed definition; it is a mobile grouping of thoughts, of thinking and speaking processes, and associated activities (writing, teaching) that happen among people involved in a conversation (perhaps a long one, over months and years) and roughly governed by something like a Kantian "regulative idea" (i.e., a necessary fiction) and is only to that extent coherent (let alone the same!). In this case, the concept being released into this conversation can be roughly stated thusly: suppose we think, not only of the information encoded in the genes of a given organism at conception, but of *all* the contingencies that will affect the morphogenetic process in each and all cases, suppose we think of all that as the "information" that really and truly conditions the emergence of life forms in every detail—suppose we think of all that as a kind of "SuperGenome."

The actual process of morphogenesis, like all natural processes, is constantly subject to random impingements from internal and external environments seething with other entities and forces, from cosmic rays to maternal diet, from traffic noise to antibodies—there is no "isolating" the event of actualizing an organism. From overall physiognomy to the tiniest details of skin lesion or stem striation, what *actually* eventuates in all cases—and at each moment—is a product of a vast and various convergence and divergence of entities and forces. The SuperGenome "behind" every organism.

Since the aim is a metaphysics for the twentieth century's scientific age—not the practice of any particular science—what emerges from that realization is precisely the "meta-" that was sought. But one more step remains to be taken (brace yourself). The imagination must now move beyond the issue of morphogenesis in organisms and, in one massive and propulsive leap, conceive of the entirety of events in the universe—past, present, and future—as "emerging" from and in that universe, and the totality of circumstances that specify all *possible* events in it and, by way of specific conjunctions of entities and forces in particular circumstances, produces all *actual* events. The open-ended totality of those conjunctions and possible conjunctions just is the "virtuality" that immanently contains those actualizations and possible actualizations. That is what "plane of immanence" and "virtuality" came to mean in later works. Call it the SuperDuperGenome.

Of course, if we perform this final extension, we can't define any phenomenon with anything like the specificity that science requires if it is to conduct its inquiries—that is precisely the abstraction requirement poor Searle was trying, hopelessly, to get Derrida to submit to, the one that Durkheim and Moore and Saussure so successfully embraced. But Deleuze wasn't trying to practice this or that normal science inquiry; he was trying to produce in us a "sense" of what science as a whole is about, to provide a "metaphysics," properly so called, of the physical world the sciences were exploring. And this puts him precisely in the "discordant" realm of the Kantian "sublime" where only art may venture.

– The Anguish of Actualization

> In *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the egg is associated with the body-without-organs … [when] Deleuze and Guattari discuss the difficulty associated with the organization of the human body … they state that the human *suffers* from being organized this way, in not being organized differently, or in not having an organization at all. (Robert Leston 2015, 372)

Roland Barthes introduced us to the "anguish of the schema" into which he had to squeeze his ideas during his structuralist phase—and "anguish" stood in contrast to the ease of writing and thinking "naturally," no matter if that also meant "conventionally." Robert Leston here reports that Deleuze and Guattari appear to deepen that notion in a judgment rendered against *organization of any kind*. At the portal where virtuality actualizes, whatever is becoming-actual must struggle against alternatives immanent in the virtual—which means the configuration (mix) of contending entities and forces constituting the *already* actual. It is as if whatever actualizes has to squeeze itself through the portal as if emerging from a packed subway car, as if a specific anguish attaches to *being a particular anything* in the flux of becoming. That anguish has replaced Spinoza's serene *conatus*, thanks to the contention that reigns in the Nietzschean cosmos.

Why this actualization and not that one, from among the "possibilities?"[69] Consider a favorite Deleuzean example of an event of actualization: a bolt

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[69] Deleuze refused to talk about virtuality as a set of possibilities—though he doesn't give a satisfactory explanation. My guess is that, if he had, a deflating realization would have followed: his notion of "virtuality" is very close to Heidegger's "possibility" with Spinoza's God in the place of *Dasein* and the works of nature in the place of "equipment."

of lightning. Consider it in all its particularity and ask why *this* bolt of lightning and not some other, perhaps brighter or sharper or longer-lasting, bolt of lightning? And the answer is, of course, because a particular arrangement of entities and relative charges and forces happened to obtain at the moment of actualization and not some other, slightly different but possible, such arrangement.

If Spinoza really were the presiding spirit here, that would simply mean that *only* the bolt of lightning that actually happened was ever really possible. Indebted to Nietzsche more than Spinoza, Deleuze could not tolerate that. An ancient materialist, the imperturbable Lucretius, had provided him with just what he needed to meet the case. Lucretius described his atoms as subject to random "swerves"—and, on that basis, Nietzsche's ever-colliding wills to power were restored to their commanding positions in this meta-physics of a modern science that relied, after all, on quantum mechanics. Chance is king in a Nietzschean cosmos and contention is its *métier*.

Whatever else one might make of this SuperDuperGenome notion, it must be admitted that *it* is what actualities "express." It is likewise what an actuality exists in "virtually" (immanently) until the "event" of its "actual-ization." So, unlike Platonic Ideas, Deleuzean Virtuality does not exist apart from actuality—it just is that actuality insofar as that actuality is con-stantly in the process of producing its own next moment. If the actuality in question is a bubbling stream, fast moving water over pebbles and rocks and fallen branches, then (from our point of view) it is easy to see actualiza-tions emerging from already actual configuration of entities and forces, easy to see how virtuality exists in the already actual. If the actuality in question is a mountain range hundreds of millions of year in the making through the shifts and submersions of tectonic plates the size of continents, then—not so easy.[70] But, for Spinoza's God, there is no essential difference. All is becoming and all becoming is actualization of the virtual. By the same token, each actualization alters the virtual, shifts ever so slightly (or not so

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[70]At a time when I was immersing myself in Deleuze's art project while working on this book, I happened to be hiking on Mt. Katahdin in Maine when it occurred to me to "touch the mountain." Not the slab of rock next to me (though that was all I could physically touch), but the whole mountain. And something happened; I could "feel" the mountain's ephemerality as well as its massive solidity (no illicit substances were involved). Or, better, I got a "sense" of its ephemerality on time scales accessible to Spinoza's God but not usually to me (see discussion of "sense,"). That's all. Not a conversion experience, it didn't make me a Deleuzean—but an experience nevertheless. Cezanne's' paintings of the mountains of Provence have a similar effect.

slightly: a section of the stream's bank suddenly gives way) the configuration of entities and forces that will condition subsequent actualizations.

Finally, it is not possible (or necessary) to assign a definite locale to an actualization.[71] How far away in time and space would one have to go to take note of every condition on the actualization of that lightning bolt? Perhaps it flashed out just to the east of the Mississippi, just north of Baton Rouge, but the fast moving mass of air that was its proximate cause took shape in the Arctic. Spinoza's God would know and we can't—but it doesn't matter. All we want is to get a sense of the *way* things happen and then to allow that sense to condition the *way* we happen—philosophically, artistically, personally, politically.

From the point(s) of view of Spinoza's God, there is no practical need to organize reality into manageable categories when the whole of what happened, happens, and will happen is right there. Not even "there." Here. For Spinoza's God *is* all of it, the virtual and the actual, the molecular and the molar at every level and space/time location in the Universe. Spinoza's God doesn't have to imagine it. But Deleuzean philosopher/artists, emulating that imagined God, do have to. They linger perpetually at the portal between the virtual and the actual, participant/observers in the ontological event of becoming.[72]

Let's look at it from another angle:

> Deleuze constructs a concept of the ontologically primitive event—the event which ontologically depends on no underlying substance, but on which all substantial things ontologically depend. (Bowden 2011, 262)

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[71] Expression is "non-local, belonging directly to the dynamic relation between a myriad of charged particles. The flash of lightning *expresses* this nonlocal relation. Expression is always fundamentally of a relation, not a subject. In the expression product and process are one" (Massumi 2002, 18).

[72] I came eventually to understand the never-ending (and never-beginning) quality of the commentaries by the Deleuzeans—D.W. Smith and Joe Hughes, John Protevi and Brian Massumi, Leonard Lawlor and Claire Colebrook, and the rest. Over years of lingering at the virtual/actual portal, after many arrests and lessons learned and paroles undertaken, they sustained a continuous quest for moments of "getting" the Deleuzean vision, a "sense" of what only Spinoza's God could really "know." They produced an improvisational catechism that settles around their thought and prose like the aura of a reputation earned, an aura visible only to those who have attempted the journey themselves—or find themselves immediately committed to it as if *this*, yes, and only *this* deserves the title "life of the mind." I think that's how they feel and the hippie in me applauds them.

An interesting juxtaposition: this categorical claim from Bowden and Deleuze's just cited assertion that "the world does not exist apart from its expressions." Does this mean that expressions and events are *the same thing/concept?* Are they somehow different but both, separately, ontologically fundamental? Just for fun, we could throw in Zizek's claim that Deleuze is "the philosopher of the virtual" and follow its implications to the conclusion that "virtuality" is ontologically prior (Zizek 2012). Sources too numerous to need naming are also constantly insisting on the ontological priority of "difference"—understood as a process of differentiating, as growing seeds "differentiate" into plant parts—in Deleuzean metaphysics.

No wonder the weary positivists lose patience—and if they just quit and moved on to something more congenial, no harm done. More venturesome inquirers will get into the spirit of the thing. We are in the Rhizome—it's art, it's play, it's an experiment, loosen up. For those who join in the fun, what will eventually emerge is that these notions are *perspectives* on (effects of) one colossal event of becoming-actual, the *expression* of the universe, which *is* the universe. Foucault got it right away:

> a bolt of lightning that will be named Deleuze: a new way of thinking is possible. … It does not lie in the future. … *It is here in Deleuze's texts, springing forth, dancing before us, in our midst; genital thought, intensive thought, affirmative thought, acategorical thought.* (Foucault, reviewing *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* in *Critique* 1970, 885–908; italics mine)

Foucault was not just hailing his friend with the customary hyperbole when he called him a bolt of lightning—he was also deploying that favorite example of an "event." Foucault was also, I think, genuinely excited. Deleuze had produced a pair of profoundly original Nietzschean books. The scope and verve of the affirmation they announced moved Foucault to declare, in the same review, that the twentieth century might one day be known as the "Deleuzian century"—after the manner of certain historians who once thought it apt to talk about "The Age of Voltaire." That such a possibility even occurred to him speaks volumes, not only about how high his opinion of Deleuze's achievement was, but also how high the high drama of their time had become for Foucault at the beginning of the 1970s. Gilles Deleuze was accomplishing what they were all aiming for. He had found a new way to think, a way to "think the impossible", to break out of the "iron collar" of representation, the legacy of a linguistic *doxa* that had imprisoned philosophy and common sense alike since

Plato and Aristotle. Which meant he had invented a vocabulary capable of evoking dynamic realities so singular they could not be categorized, yet so universal that, once their necessity was "felt" (no other word will do), they could not be denied either—and their influence, once felt, would inevitably change trajectories of thought and action.

How far can that lightning example of an event go to clarify, not only what is meant by event, but other notions on our list of terms essential to this cosmic art project? Beginning with the lightning itself: each bolt is unique (a *singularity*) both as to its *molar* configuration and the *molecular* mix of bodies and contending forces that cause it to be this particular bolt of lightning—where "molar" means something like the level at which we perceive relatively separate and stable entities in our everyday experience and "molecular" means the inaccessible entities and processes that—by chance in every instance—constitute the molar entities. Each bolt of lightning *actualizes* what existed *virtually* among the mixes of bodies and forces that obtained "locally" on the occasion of the flash. We could also speak of those forces and associated bodies as a *differential field* of *intensities*[73] that, at a given moment, produce the bolt of lightning as an effect (as in "cause and effect") of a particular mix of intensities, of forces. We could also say, returning to our initial position, that the bolt of lightning *expresses* that particular mix:

> "force" means any capacity to produce a change or "becoming." … All of reality is an expression and consequence of interactions between forces, with each interaction revealed as an "event." (Stagoll "Force" in *The Deleuze Dictionary* 2010)

But expression in this natural/historical context will not be quite the same thing as an event. Rather, it is an aspect of an event, a perspective on it, the natural/historical "physical" aspect, often implicitly coinciding with the molar ("revealed as")—though it goes deeper and includes the molecular entities and forces at work in their singular way. But the event also reaches "beyond" or "above" its physical aspect to include what Deleuze—borrowing this time from the Stoics—calls "effects," or even "surface effects." Leonard Lawlor describes it this way:

[73] In contrast to an extensive property, which changes when size changes (mass, volume, length), an intensive property doesn't change if part of the sample is removed—color, hardness, pressure, charge, temperature, density, for example. Qualities and forces, not geometrical dimensions.

The event is paradoxical, it is two-sided; it is always both incorporeal and corporeal, ideal and factual. … Despite the doubleness what, first and foremost, defines the event … is singularity … what makes something be a singularity lies in its being caused, effectuated, or realized by mixtures of bodies … there can be no event that does not begin as an accident. (2012, 114)

The "incorporeal" and "ideal" aspect of this two-sided event is what Deleuze (now buggering traditional linguists) calls "sense"—as in the "sense" of a proposition or what is usually called meaning or the thought the proposition expresses.[74] But sense, for Deleuze, is something more:

Sense is both the expressible or the expressed of the proposition, and the attribute of the state of affairs. It turns one side toward things, and another side toward propositions. … It is *exactly the boundary between propositions and things*. ([1969] 1990, 22; italics mine)

And, to nail down what I want to stress, he also says this:

It is the characteristic of events to be expressed or *expressible*, uttered or a utterable, in *propositions which are at least possible*. ([1969] 1990, 12; italics mine)

If "express*ible*" wasn't enough, then "propositions which are at least *possible*" leaves no wiggle room. The anchor term for Deleuze's linguistics—"sense"—is not just a boundary between propositions and things but a boundary between things and *possible* propositions. Deleuze wants to stimulate in us a "sense" of what "sense" is *without addressing subjective experience as ordinarily understood*. That is why Foucault, in that rave review, suggested that "*The Logic of Sense* could have as a subtitle: What Is Thinking?" and he felt justified in that because, to his mind, the way Deleuze evoked "sense" meant that "*we arrive here for the first time at a theory of thought that is entirely disburdened of the subject and the object*" (1970, 9; italics mine).

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[74] Foucault felt entitled to assimilate the event almost entirely to its sense-effect and celebrate the event per se as "incorporeal" ("Theatrum Philosophicum" in *Critique* (1970, 885–908)). He seemed delighted to be able to talk about processes usually consigned to the mental without renouncing his commitment to materialism; Deleuzean metaphysics had disclosed what he took the liberty of calling "incorporeal materiality." That phrase is typical of the paradoxical lengths to which interpreters have had to go to cope with *The Logic of Sense*.

As we are now in a position to understand, no higher praise for a thinker in this *milieu* could be imagined. Thought without a thinker—Deleuze's dream, and Foucault's as well. With Deleuze's notion of "sense," it seemed, "pre-reflexive impersonal consciousness" had finally been realized. To my mind, it is the relation to *possible* propositions that guarantees that impersonality, but Deleuze does not lean heavily on that aspect of the matter for some reason (Compare Derrida above, 9.2.4.1).

Beyond that observation, I can't make head or tail of "sense." And I was struck by how discussions of sense by Deleuzeans upon whom I relied for substantial guidance were unusually confusing as well. The closest they came to clarity was by way of examples. Claire Colebrook offers a very evocative one (in a video interview I can't relocate) when she asks us to imagine what it is like to arrive as a guest for dinner at a couple's house and to realize—to get a "sense"—that they have been fighting (more contention). We immediately know what she means because she is using subject talk. But what light does that example shed on the claim that "sense" is a "boundary" between propositions and things? I try to make it work: there's the surface mix of the body mannerisms of the couple—the pacing of gestures, inflections of voice, smiles a bit too wide. But all the *possible* propositions that might occur (to me?), just how is *that* at work in this prosaic—though vivid—example? A frequently used example is that of the "battle" which, as a sense, is said to "soar over" the mix of bodies and weapons on the battlefield. As with Colebrook's example, I understand roughly what that means, but, again, I cannot grasp how this *sense* of "battle" is an aspect of both the mix of bodies and weapons and all possible propositions about the event of *any* battle—where "propositions" includes novels about war that Deleuze mentions in this context (1990, 100). I just don't know what *that* means.

What is clear is that Deleuze wants sense to do the same work, from the standpoint of genesis, that Wittgenstein did, from the standpoint of stipulation, when he maintained in the *Tractatus* that propositions and states of affairs must, in some way, share some "form" that enables the former to picture the latter. That is, he wants "sense" to account for how language can relate to the world at all. I used the phrase "relate to" rather than "represent" because Deleuze is certainly not enshrining representation at the center of his theory of language. We know that, first of all, because representing is an inferior function but, more importantly, because sense is accounting for the *genesis* of language and his cardinal principle is that the ground must not resemble what it grounds. It comes down to this for

me: understanding how "sense" can be the boundary between proposi-
tions and the event-causing mix of bodies is so difficult because, with
speaking subjects *and* representation/resemblance banned from the scene,
there is no way in my mind to account for the "incorporeal" aspect of
sense. This impasse may also explain why *The Logic of Sense*, though "writ-
ten in the same period as *Difference and Repetition* … is idiosyncratic in a
number of ways, and its central claims play out at significant distance from
many of Deleuze's other works … and the true Deleuzean philosophy."
No wonder it has "been for so long neglected in the secondary literature"
(Roffe 2012, 106; Bowden 2011, 262).

Nevertheless, this account of sense *does* accomplish this much for me: it
somehow makes it easier to grasp how human consciousness (perceiving,
thinking) could plausibly be understood as a "surface effect" of an event
with much profounder and more extensive aspects from the point of view
of Spinoza's God.[75] Say you are in some room looking at some interesting
piece of furniture—a roll top desk, say. Yes, the desk is a "molar" entity
and so is your body sitting in its chair. "Molecular" entities and forces
constitute the desk just as they constitute you, your eyeball, retina, rods
and cones and neural connections to your upper cortex, likewise consti-
tuted. If you're stuck in a conventional subject/object bubble, you won't
automatically think of the whole "your-body-molecules-processing-light-
waves-bouncing-of-desk-molecules" as an indissoluble and univocal
whole. But it can be done. Then that whole is one event, the expression of
the mix of bodies and forces that constitutes both your body and the desk
simultaneously. But your consciousness itself has not been forgotten, its
existence is not being denied. It goes on—it's a "surface effect" of the
whole event, an aspect. It is purely reactive, however, at least insofar as it
"represents" the event.

The upshot is this: if you could assume the point(s) of view of Spinoza's
God, then the boundaries around entities and events that we as embodied
beings with taken-for-granted perceptual and linguistic categories would
evaporate into utter arbitrariness. But your passing awareness is not denied;

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[75] This account of "surface effects" bears an inescapable similarity to Galileo's dogmatically
mechanical world-picture described above (see pp. 19–21). And it calls to mind an accidental
connotation—the way "surface effect" seems to echo cinematic "special effects"—and that's
apt because this is an effort to relegate the subject's experience to a transient periphery of the
universe where it belongs. Galileo's decision to call heat (and color and sound) "secondary
properties" as compared to "primary properties" that really exist—also makes it apt to say of
Deleuze and Guattari's usage: it was immanent in Galileo's.

it is simply reconceived as a "surface effect" of those profounder and more extensive aspects of the total event/situation. That would seem perfectly reasonable from the point of view of Spinoza's God and that was always the point of view Deleuze and Guattari aspired to. They liked putting "man" in his place—like all of that cohort; they were convinced he deserved it and took righteous satisfaction in delivering the verdict: "In truth, there are only inhumanities, humans are made exclusively of inhumanities, but very different ones, of very different natures and speeds" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 190).

You could call this a "phenomenology" of a sort. But the subject pole (to use Husserlian terms) is only initially, as it were, occupied by the ego of a human consciousness that finds itself rooted in the "thesis of the natural standpoint" of everyday life. That's a necessary starting point, since even Felix Guattari—explaining *A Thousand Plateaus* to Patti Smith in his room at The Chelsea Hotel while they shared the last joint in her Navaho bag—was confined as a mortal embodied being to that room at that moment. It was his imagination that roamed beyond the "territorialized couplings" of prosaic binaries (like mental/physical, here/there, now/then) and let, say, the new idea of "chaos theory" propel him into Being-as-one-can-imagine-it, given such stimulations. This was the 1960s and that should never be forgotten by anyone trying to understand what these people were up to. The metaphysics of Deleuze and Guattari ought therefore be reckoned a phenomenology with imagination instead of perception dominating the subject pole. And, again, the yield is philosophy as art with the subject position of Spinoza's God as the destination of human creativity in philosophical work. Did they get there? Of course not. But—still crazy after all those years—they tried.

9.3.4.3 Capitalism and Schizophrenia

> We don't claim to have written a madman's book, just a book in which one no longer knows … who exactly is speaking, a doctor, a patient … if we have tried to go beyond this traditional duality, it's precisely because we were writing together. … The process is what we call a flux … a notion that we wanted to remain ordinary and undefined … it goes beyond all dualities. We dreamed of this book as a flux-book. (Guattari 2009, 73)

And there it is again, this time from the point of view of a consciously crafted writing process as Guattari recalled it years later: disrupt the autonomous subject and release the flows! And what flows they were.

Chapter 1 of *Anti-Oedipus* is called "Desiring-Production" and the first lines reads: "It is at work everywhere, functioning smoothly at times, and other times in fits and starts. It breeds, it heats, it eats. It shits and fucks." A few pages later Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* is quoted: "I love everything that flows, even the menstrual flow that carries away the seed unfecund" and "my guts spilled out in a grand schizophrenic rush, an evacuation that leaves me face to face with the absolute" ([1972] 2009, 5).

So, right away, you know this is something else. You know you are not reading another study of Spinoza. You are being welcomed to the Carnival of Schizo Pulsions. And you have been hit with an example of a theme Deleuze and Guattari will hammer you with throughout the book: language can have force, it can produce force, and it can produce more force—and not merely represent. But the most basic substantive claim is being introduced as well. On the first page, right after "shits and fucks," the next line says: "What a mistake to have ever said *the* Id."

And with that *Anti-Oedipus* (read: anti-unity, anti-stability, anti-being—pro-becoming, pro-difference), the most sensational of all the works of French theory, was launched.

Vincent Descombes hit the nail on the head when he said:

> If in 1972, Deleuze succeeded with the Freudo-Marxist synthesis where everyone else tried in vain, it was because *he adopted an irreverent style* which meant, in the end, that his synthesis was neither Marxist nor Freudian. … The vocabulary of the *Anti-Oedipus* is sometimes Marxist, sometimes Freudian, but the critical strand is Nietzschean from start to finish. ([1979] 1980, 173; italics mine)

And that irreverence, which marked Deleuze's attitude from the beginning of his career, was without question essential to the book's success—how could it not be, given the frequency with which *Anti-Oedipus* is celebrated or denigrated as *the* book that captured the spirit of 1968, when irreverence was the order of the day. And on this point especially, Felix Guattari was the perfect collaborator. As a student of Lacan's, he was prepared to innovate outlandishly in whatever settings he found himself, clinical or political. But his taste for irreverence extended beyond texts and lectures, however performative; he was an activist above all. Charismatic, aggressive, sexually provocative—he dominated their relationship from the beginning. The force of his example drove Deleuze to extremes of

thought and proposals for practice that the shy and sickly author of *Difference and Repetition* could not have countenanced.

Lacan was in fact Guattari's training analyst and before he teamed up with Deleuze to critique the Oedipal—the lynchpin of Lacanian theory—he was widely regarded as the chosen heir. But when Lacan caught wind of the traitorous project, he banished his protégé and replaced him with his son-in-law, Jacques-Alain Miller. The world of the *French Intellectual Nobility* (Kauppi 1996) did indeed resemble a village, but it was a rarified one, especially given the veneration in which its inhabitants were held.[76] Yet another reason why the language of theory was so often obscure: like teenagers in a clique, sharing an evolving slang, the creators of theory could take a lot for granted.

When Felix Guattari came to confer with Deleuze in his study about their book, he brought with him a sensational resonance, residual emanations of the turbulence that had flowed so recently through the streets of Paris in the schizoid rush of revolution. Both he and Deleuze insisted that their books were "expressions" or "effects" of the "events" of May 1968, but only Guattari had actually participated. Deleuze just thought about it. But his thought had always been Nietzschean—the play of forces and their consequences had always obsessed him. With Guattari, he was discovering what he had meant all along and was inspired to go for broke.[77]

But the original target of the ultra-structuralists remained the focus, in spite of the mind-boggling reach of the discourse they would concoct. Of all the ways the major French theorists found to decenter, deconstruct, and demote the modern subject, in philosophy and action, their approach was the most transparent. It was a frontal assault. Whether we look at Guattari's early efforts, instituted at the Le Borde clinic, to create "social subjects" that could replace the interpellated subjectivities of the suffering patients and the professional staff or at Deleuze's straightforward denials of the *significance* of consciousness, that hapless shuttlecock of molecular determinations, we are struck by the same directness—especially in comparison to the tactics employed by other practitioners of theory. For

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[76] In 1960, when Sartre was in a terrorism-supporting phase of his career, regularly exhorting French troops in Algeria to desert, de Gaulle was asked why he took no action against the philosopher. He replied, "One does not arrest Voltaire."

[77] Deleuze himself, alluding to Kant, once said that Felix had awakened him from "dogmatic slumbers." He called Felix the "diamond miner" and relegated himself to the role of "polisher." Others, for example, Slavoj Zizek, saw in that influence the corruption of a great philosopher (in Zizek 2012).

Deleuze and Guattari, the subject did not have to be seduced into recognition of the "other" in itself or tricked into unraveling in "writing." One simply, in accordance with the will to power and the priority of action, *forced* the issue, in both senses of the word "issue."

– *The Oedipal Trap and the Revolutionary Assemblage*

> From a rational point of view, one would expect the pauperized masses of workers to develop a sharp consciousness of their social situation, to develop a will to eliminate their social misery … [but] … it was exactly the pauperized masses who carried fascism, the ultimate in political reaction, to power. (Wilhelm Reich *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* 1946, 7)

With this formulation, Wilhelm Reich, a renegade psychoanalyst in his own right, gained a lot of traction among French intellectuals in the context of the political recuperation of traditional authority after 1968. It became *the* problem that had to be addressed. And his claim that the nuclear family with its regime of sexual repression was the "germ cell" of that longing for fascist authority inspired two of them in particular. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari collaborated not merely to address Reich on an intellectual level, but also to incite people to undertake new practices in their lives, practices that would bust them out of society's Oedipal prison, thanks to the release of desires not constituted by a Lacanian tragic lack—but by an entirely affirmative and multiplicative Nietzschean will-to-power. As we saw with Kristeva, the "philosophers of desire" felt authorized by desire itself to *force* temporality, with all its disrupting effects, into the structures—both intellectual and political—that had been defined by the modern subject and imposed upon the world it so defined.

In this work, Deleuze and Felix Guattari deployed a battery of novel concepts that make what sense they make in service of this insistent aim: a fundamentally impossible Freudo-Marxian synthesis that would shatter the structure of modern subjectivity and disrupt the tyranny of Saussure's "despotic signifier" in the name of sheer desire. Freudian "free association" was the ancestral "rhizomic" process—the prototype of a thinking that refuses to be channeled by concepts or presuppositions or conclusions. Surrealism again. The energetic uncontainable of that thinking,[78]

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[78] The jargon of cognitive gerunds—as in "thinking the limits of the body" or "theorizing the post-soul aesthetic"—belongs in this environment. The message: fluid, open, unfixable, not dominating, not dominated—not "about" a separate "object."

now joined to action, is what the "schizophrenia" image supplies, opposed as it was in the jargon of the day to the "paranoia" of system building in theory or in society, capitalist or communist. As Michel Foucault pointed out in the introduction to the English language edition, the book's true adversary was not so much capitalism as the "fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us." The creators of French theory understood that "fascism" as the direct descendent of the *cogito* whose project Descartes had so prophetically described when he called upon moderns to become "lords and masters" of nature. When Deleuze and Guattari proclaimed that there "is only desire and the social and nothing else," they were declaring war upon the modern subject—and their book was their "war machine."

There are a *lot* of "machines" in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.[79] They are all "desiring machines"; that is, they are all, no matter how unlikely or temporary the configuration, fueled by a plethora of forces, impulses—"pulsions" is a well-chosen word. The ubiquity of this image serves the same purpose, over and over again: it calls our attention away from the conventional molar machines we are accustomed to—typewriters, cars—and focuses us instead on some "assemblage." The basic aim here is to create an alternative to the closure effects of Hegel's remorseless totalities—but, of course, all the other versions of linguistically fabricated entities are being targeted as well. The assemblages that really matter are ever-morphing grand historical constructions—markets, armies, states. But for illustrative purposes simple examples serve: a man riding a bicycle is an assemblage: there is the force of his pedaling legs, obviously—but also the resistance of the pedals and the crunch of clutch and brake, the tire's traction, the texture of the road's surface, on and on. A campsite for recreational vehicles at a state park as evening descends is an assemblage—the electrical outlets, the fires and stoves and coolers, the paths leading to the toilets and the docks, and the living bodies in action along all those conduits and junctures.

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[79] It is worth remembering that the idea of human beings and groups as "machines" itself goes back, somewhat ironically, to Descartes (see, e.g., in the Enlightenment, La Mettrie's *Man the Machine*, and a slew of other works leading up to the mechanism still evident in Comte and even Durkheim). Cartesian dualism had a materialist aspect that many French thinkers, including Descartes himself, sometimes found irresistible.

Such constructions play a key role in the art project: at every historical moment, they are treated as the agents of whatever process of becoming is in focus—up to the point where even speech, in all its manifestations, is conceived as a product of "collective assemblages of enunciation" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 7). The world of the *Anti-Oedipus*, like the fantastic landscape that houses *A Thousand Plateaus*, is swarming with these newly discovered creatures (though they've been there all along); one creature alone has passed from the scene. There are no individual people doing and saying things. Parts of the assemblage that we used to think of as people moving their limbs in various ways and uttering various noises are admitted, but they are merely parts, like the tents and the canoes. It is "the assemblage that enunciates"—which means that, if you descended to the molecular level with Spinoza's god at the moment that George asks Martha if she wants mustard on her hot dog you would realize that the sound waves that really constitute those words are products of the open-ended molecular totality of the chance-saturated circumstances at that moment and what George and Martha think is going on is a surface effect of all that.

Why think of the infant's mouth and the breast as a "desiring machine"? Because, taken as a unit, it traverses the classic subject-object boundary, violating the unity of the *monadic* subject and liberating a *nomadic* subject of organs without a body, thus evoking the multiplicity and machinic implacability of desires, and—once the bottle is substituted for the breast—tying this dismembered self to a bottle-making factory under the regime of late capital—the ultimate schizo Deathstar machine now undoing itself in spite of itself, caught up as it is in a frenetic and fragmented connectivity that has taken on an unstoppable life of its own.

Anti-Oedipus aimed to merge the "private theater" of the Freudian psyche with the political reality of "desiring-production," where Marx supposedly held sway. But the operations of forces in flux in the book as written proved to be, in accordance with the schizo imperative itself, too promiscuous to be contained by any recognizable form of Marxist theory or action. And action was very much the point. "It is not enough to say 'Long Live the Multiple!'" proclaimed Deleuze, with Hegel's Dialectic in his sights, "you must do and make the multiple" (in Bogue 2007, 84).

Felix Guattari, for his part, was always doing that—always organizing, always motivating. He was a leader of the "Institutional Therapy" movement in France (see Thomas Szas in the USA and R.D. Laing in Great Britain for parallels). At the La Borde clinic in particular, he and his cohort devised various practices designed to dismantle systems of authority and

exclusion of the kind Foucault described in his genealogies of discursive practices. Much light can be shed on the riot of novel notions in *Anti-Oedipus* simply by looking to Guattari's application of them at La Borde—and, in 1968, beyond the clinic's walls as well, for he regularly led staff and patients on expeditions into the center of Paris so they could experience directly the larger machines to which clinics and schools and the like were subordinated. But it was on the level of daily practice that his innovations foreshadowed the conceptual innovations of *Anti-Oedipus.* So, for example, patients, staff, and doctors at his clinic would exchange roles on a regular basis and then meet to discuss what they had come to understand as a result of these "displacements." The ubiquitous expression "traversing" in *Anti-Oedipus* basically means "moving across" institutionalized structures and discourses and seeing what happens—allowing things to develop (schizophrenically, rhizomically) in all directions, in whatever way they do, while learning collectively, as a "social subject," from what happens and then going on to do more of the same (for an especially insightful assessment, see Bourg 2007, 141–143). In essence, *Anti-Oedipus* was a recipe for and a reflection on community experiments as a way of life—*praxis* fused with theory, a paradigm for the wave of such experiments that were launched in the spring of 1968 and lasted into the early 1970s.

Jean-Luc Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy* ([1974] 1993) was another fruitful resource for the "philosophy of desire" wing of the ultrastructuralist radicals in the early 1970s.[80] The phrases "institutional therapy" and "libidinal economy" perfectly express the aspiration for political/psychological synthesis that inspired the 1968ers—witness the moment when, at the height the events of May, they christened a Sorbonne auditorium *L'Amphithéâtre Che Guevara-Freud.* The coinage in its context captured a widely shared view of Freud and Marx—namely, that they had both discovered an "unconscious" that determined events, the one at the individual level, the other at the social. But it would come to stand for the hope that a politics that privileged culture or mentality in some way could still be real *politics.* That would become the essential point—we saw it taking shape in the pages of *Tel Quel* (see above, Chap. 8.2). But it was really later, after the 1960s movements had fallen short, that the question of a cultural politics became most salient, especially in anglophone settings. Up and coming intellectuals with 1960s roots,

[80] Lyotard later repudiated *Libidinal Economy*, calling it his "evil book" and claiming he needed to explode himself out of Marxist habits of thought by writing it. Along with Foucault, he was one of the few to disavow Marxism categorically.

taking positions of responsibility in various institutions, needing to believe they were not selling out, needing to believe that they were continuing the struggle, welcomed formulations that affirmed that cultural struggles were really political struggles—as Foucault's concept of "discursive practices" did so effectively. For Deleuzeans who kept the faith, especially those engaging with the schizoid assemblage that was the Internet in its early years, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* read like some prophetic glossary of essential terms.[81]

But, for all its political ambition, I think that *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* remains, at bottom, a phase in the development of Deleuze's cosmic art project—indeed, its culminating phase. When Deleuze allowed Guattari to goad/inspire him into taking nuanced psycho-biological notions from *Difference and Repetition* and explode their scope of application, scattering them across their newly forged universal history made up of more or less random fragments drawn from the anthropological archive and subsuming them willy-nilly into a taxonomy of nomadic and barbaric stages of social development—and so on, and on, like some parody of the great evolutionist schemes of the nineteenth century—when he committed to that, he experienced the ride of his life, the wild and the powerful bore him away at last. But the result cannot be taken seriously as an empirically based, responsibly thought-through, account of human history. And the fact that they didn't hesitate to extend that account beyond human history to subsume the becoming of the very universe *in the same terms* only reinforces the impression that the ghost of some nineteenth-century Romantic evolutionist—perhaps Lamarck—had absconded with their discourse:

> *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* … will bring to the fore naturalist tendencies that are only implicitly present in the still-Kantian framework of *Difference and Repetition* … the "of" in the phrase "the experience of this concretely existing individual here and now" is … the experience by human subjects of this individual object in front of it, and it is the experience enjoyed by the concretely existing individual itself, even when that individual is non-human *or even non-living*. (Smith and Protevi "Gilles Deleuze" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy;* Italics mine)

So the pantheism that Deleuze flirted with in his Spinoza studies was transformed in his work with Guattari into a doctrinal panpsychism that he

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[81] This helps to explain why identity politics activists in the USA gave so much attention to regulating language, especially in educational institutions. To shape language *was* to shape institutions—that was the conviction behind the forces of "political correctness."

embraced without a murmur, as if it were an inevitable development. And perhaps it was. Many artists experience conscious life as a shareholding:

> The everlasting universe of things
> Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
> Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
> Now lending splendor, where from secret springs
> The source of human thought its tribute brings
> Of waters,—with a sound but half its own. (P.B. Shelley "Mont Blanc" 1817)

Of course, thanks to the *doxa* of genres, we are conditioned to accept the expression of such sentiments in the work of a Romantic poet, but when they appear before us dressed up as anthropology and history, some are inclined to look askance. That is why I keep emphasizing the art project theme. A fair-minded anglophone positivist needs to approach the works of Deleuze and Guattari as if they were attending a reading of a new-fangled epic poem in an off-Broadway experimental theater and then see what, if any, value they bring.

Of course, true believers didn't need to shift categories to embrace panpsychism. Radical environmentalists of various stripes found it immediately appealing and welcomed the "notion of the nonhuman, inhuman, or posthuman … as the defining trait of nomadic ethical subjectivity" (Braidotti 2012, 172). Now they could conceive of the "enunciating assemblage" as inclusive of the whole environment, not just the human context. Now when they "spoke for" the planet it wasn't a metaphor—Gaia hypothesis or not.[82] So Deleuze and Guattari were already anticipating a posthuman moment that would become ever more baffling as it became ever more salient with the development and convergence of bio- and digital technologies (see Chap. 12, below).

Consider, for the sake of enrichment, a specific example of how Deleuze's original concepts were extended and elaborated in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. In what follows, I rely heavily on a lecture by Manuel DeLanda called "Intensive and Topological Thinking" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wW2l-nBIDg). This is one of several DeLanda

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[82] See also "Deleuze is in my bones" in an interview with Bruno Latour, where it becomes clear that the whole "agency of things" trope in "Actor Network Theory" echoes Deleuze's metaphysics: http://figureground.org/interview-with-bruno-latour/.

lectures available on YouTube, all of which vividly convey the spirit of the Deleuzean enterprise.

The key term "singularity" began life with Deleuze as a reference to something like the sense-certainty moment in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, a moment when the subject, emerging from the given of the transcendental field, is absorbed in the immediate object/content of an intuition; it was later expanded to include multiple "sensitive points" in the transcendental field, a multiplication that seemed somehow to put more "experience" into the impossible notion of pre-subjective experience. By the time of the Guattari collaborations, it had taken on a topological, quasi-scientific significance—referencing threshold effects and changes of state in dynamic systems (e.g., water's boiling point as a function of variable intensities like pressure and temperature).

The motivating intention at that juncture was the hope that singularities understood in this way might also apply, at least in principle, to societies as dynamic systems. Could "revolution points" be identified as singularities on a Riemann topological graph if the right variables were chosen along the N-axes—with this all-important amendment: it might be practically impossible to identify the relevant variables, let alone "measure" them for values, but the metaphysics of univocity (Spinoza's monism), fusing with a metaphysics of becoming across all levels of order and disorder in the universe, would be vividly evoked along with the *in-principle* possibility of scientific describability for revolutions in human history that testifies to a completely naturalist ontology.

I am arguing, in effect, that the idea of that topological graph, with its many thousands of axes referencing social/economic/political trends, is essentially an artwork—one of many in a vast installation called *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. It evokes, on the one hand, the uncontainable complexity of human historical circumstances and happenings while at the same time assimilating human history *in principle* to the same theoretical apparatus that applies in fluid dynamics. Feel free to indulge in a love of science fiction by imagining a day when the Internet-of-Things, measuring actual values for the relevant variables, converges with advances in network theory and computer modeling to actually produce something like the graph in question. Such imaginings will be constrained *to some extent* by concepts drawn from science and math, with the extent being determined by how much you happen to know about the science and math. *But ultimately the extent and accuracy of such knowledge is beside the point.* This is art. Deleuze's whole metaphysical vision, like Delanda's topological graph, should be understood as art—philosophy-as-art.

From the points of view of Spinoza's God, virtuality can be conceived as a collection of all the conditioning factors in the actualization of anything (represented on the N-axes of the topological graph) that go into making whatever temporarily presents itself as "being." Calling that a SuperDuperGenome means looking at all actualizations as if they were instances of very complicated biological morphogenesis, no doubt too complicated for us ever to know all the force factors in actuality, but nevertheless a process *of the same kind* as in the development of an organism—wouldn't that just be the metaphysics of modern science Deleuze seeks? And doesn't it make sense that he would eventually find himself accommodating a certain animism, even panpsychism. It's not contributing anything to science itself, but it is saying that we know that *in principle everything that develops (not just life) develops in this way*. It is an account of the *genesis* of actual experience, not a *representation* of possible experience—and that was the goal Deleuze set for himself way back when he buggered Kant after his own, affirmative reading of Hume.

So—stepping back from Deleuze and recalling the whole story of postmodernism as it is being told here—what is the significance of going beyond Kantian conditions on the possibility to engage with the genesis of the actual? It brings history (*parole*, performance) back into the picture, first of all. It welcomes processes of actuality that modernists had banished from their disciplinary compartments with their gestures of abstraction—the mess that Saussure and Durkheim, Moore and Richards were determined to define out of consideration in their truly scientific objects of study. But, with Deleuze and Guattari specifically in mind, it really comes down to this: they alone, at that time and place, had the postmodern-ist nerve to take it all on again. They were as ambitious as the nineteenth-century evolutionists (see above, Chap. 2.4), laboring to get modernity back on track after the two revolutions had dashed Enlightenment hopes, before the modernists decided to carve up reality into manageable slices. This postmodern return to messy actuality did *not* result in a successful science of everything either. But that was not a genuine "failure" just insofar as Deleuze's project was not science—but metaphysics and art. The modernist compartmental disciplines, especially in the harder sciences, worked. Abstraction was successful. The formalized linguistics of Chomsky and Searle *explains* language better than any vision of "intertextuality" or "archewriting" or "logic of sense." All this must be acknowledged. Then the postmodern moment can be given its due—as something else entirely.

It must also be acknowledged that when it comes to politics as evoked in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, we enter very problematic terrain. The basic "political strategy" seems to have been to intensify the schizophrenia of dispersed desire that capitalism fosters and push it to some limit the monster itself could not endure. No wonder the poor old Communist Party looked so stodgy. But, while not a recognizably serious political proposal, that prescription has a prophetic ring to it, especially given the dominance now enjoyed by that ultimate schizoid/rhizomic mechanism: the Internet, augmented by its own special kind of "surface effects," the so-called social media. The manifest consequence—politics as a field of self-expression—seems to confirm, with ghastly accuracy, Deleuze and Guattari's overall vision of Western capitalism careening in every direction toward its own demise. Schizophrenic flows of desire are multiplying and ramifying, colliding and converging across a space of relentless representation and misrepresentation at such velocities and volumes that it can seem futile to even try to disentangle reality itself from the Great Reality TV Show our public life has become. Is there a positive side to all of this? During the 1990s, a slew of techno "visionaries" imagined they were realizing 1960s values in a global cyber-village of emancipated and empowered individuals perpetually creating and recreating community. But—as many of those visionaries, sobering up at last, have lately been acknowledging—things didn't work out that way. A case in point: the nomad future for 1968 "guerillas" that Deleuze and Guattari specifically envisioned, even as the system was recuperating in an ascendant neo-liberalism, looks like another pipe dream now:

> Could it be that at the moment the war machine ceases to exist, conquered by the State, it displays to the utmost its irreducibility, that it scatters into thinking, loving, dying, or creating machines that have at their disposal vital or revolutionary powers capable of challenging the conquering State? (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 356)

Well, if they meant the powers of Amazon, Twitter, and Facebook, maybe so. Or perhaps Wikileaks, Bitcoin, Alt-Right 4Chan, and Russian troll farms would fill the bill? Or perhaps the collective commitment of autocratic populists and their followers to believe whatever suits their purposes at any given moment? These are indeed "revolutionary powers" and they are, as of this writing, proving quite capable of challenging the State.

Coda: Becoming-sensation

I *become* in sensation, and something *happens* through sensation, one through the other and one in the other. (Gilles Deleuze)

For Gilles Deleuze, at the end of the day, becoming was what mattered and becoming-sensation was its purest form, for that led most surely to the beyond-self.[83] Becoming just is life—for people, for the ocean, for the mountain, for the planet. If there is no discernible political program to be found in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, it is because the whole idea of a "program" was antithetical to becoming. That priority, which ultimately makes it futile to try to found a politics on Deleuzean metaphysics, was made perfectly clear by the man himself in an interview with Parnet (*Deleuze from A to Z* 2012) that took place under the rubric "G is for Gauche (Left)": after mocking the new philosophers and various historians who whine about revolutions not turning out well, he distinguishes between "becoming-revolutionary" and whatever actually happens as a result. He said that "'68 was a becoming-revolutionary without a revolutionary future. People can always make fun of it after the fact, but there were phenomena of pure becoming that took hold of people" and his face is aglow at the thought of it all. "Precocious adolescent to the end of his days"—that's how I described him at the beginning of this account and I think it holds up well. There he is in that interview, illness visibly upon him, his every gesture radiating innocence of all responsibility—not "responsibility for this or that" but responsibility itself, the very idea of it. The future of history is always up for grabs in a Nietzschean cosmos and its artist/philosopher was not about to cower under a political program for protection from its elements.

So look to Deleuze, as you would to any artist, for inspiration as a private being and look elsewhere for your politics, serious business of another order (but compare Rorty 1989, chap. 4, 73–95). Politics is like parenthood in a lot of ways, not least in this: responsibility cannot be avoided. On

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[83] It must have seemed to Deleuze that in becoming-sensation he was healing the breach created by Kant's self-alienating "I think" (the first "difference" that fascinated him) just insofar has he managed to be aware of becoming-sensation without really thinking about it. With this, Deleuze thinks he is getting outside of "representations" through encounters with "the being of the sensible." All of which suggests that there is a practice associated with this art project, just as there is with phenomenology or meditation. This practice doesn't consist of habits but of openness to all that isn't habitual. To Artaud and to Bacon, to surges and flows of intensities in general—as opposed to the objects we are conditioned to attend to. In other words, to be a Deleuzean means cultivating a faculty for "thinking the impossible."

the other hand, as long as we are considering sensible advice from Rorty, we are also obliged to make a space for experiments in our quest for a vocabulary that works for our time—so why not this one? Create it and see if it works. John Dewey welcomed that test. And this much must be said for Deleuze and Guattari: they felt Nietzsche's arrow pointing straight at them and they responded with everything they had. So what if the fruit of their collaboration turned out to be something more like one of Raymond Roussel's novels than a work of serious philosophy or a platform for a new politics. Surely there is room in the Amazon warehouse for both?

So we turn to another leading light among the *desirants*, known (unlike Deleuze) for his political activism; perhaps he can supply what was wanting in his friend's efforts.

9.4   Michel Foucault (1926–1984)

Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir. (Nietzsche [1886] 1966, 6)

One of the delightful ironies willy-nilly realized in the writing of this book is anticipated here, in Nietzsche's provocative observation. We have it, that is, directly from their patron saint: the cohort of thinkers who strained their intellectual powers to the breaking point in an effort to dismantle or displace subjectivity—their own included—actually provides ideal exemplars of Nietzsche's claim. That holds, above all, for Michel Foucault. And—for reasons to be discussed below—that circumstance also helps to explain why, of all the significant figures associated with French theory, Foucault had the most enduring influence on anglophone academics. His Nietzschean vision of history remains the most viable alternative to Marxism among intellectuals still committed to a materialist and activist agenda. This is most obviously true wherever projects concerned with identity politics and intersectionality are pursued, but his influence is also apparent in recent work that has been more broadly influential— Samuel Moyn's *The Last Utopia* (Harvard 2012), for example, and the journal *History of the Present* founded by Joan Scott. Other representative examples include Timothy Mitchell's *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (UC 2002), Anne Stoler's *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (UC 2010), and Wendy Brown's *Undoing the Demos* (Zone Books 2015).

This section aims to shed some light on the reasons for his abiding influence, but the kind of interpretive scrutiny given to Deleuze and Derrida will not be necessary. Foucault presents no comparable challenge to our understanding. Instead, this section will try to recover something of the evocative force of his example, the drama of his life and work. He serves as an epitome.[84]

9.4.1   *A Miserable Self*

In *RB by RB*, Roland Barthes admitted the obvious in passing when he noted the impact on his work of his life experience as the subject of multiple societal exclusions. And Derrida, in personal rumination, pointed to a source (in the usual sense) for his quasi-ontology of archewriting in a description of his adolescent dream of a writing (in the usual sense) that would evoke the "field of the mark" in its entirety, that would evoke all possible meaningful experiences in their particularity in a "tracing" of all the actual experiences of the author of that writing (a linguified version of phenomenology's claim that the life-worlds of de facto egos were captured, in their essence, by the transcendental ego. But, by general consensus of his biographers and friends, no partisan of the postmodern vendetta against the modern subject was as obviously motivated by personal experience as Michel Foucault. He himself once described his books as "fragments of an autobiography" (Smart 1994, 239) and his most reliable biographer reports that "When *The History of Madness* came out, everyone who knew him saw immediately that it was connected to his personal history" (Eribon 1992, 27–29; see also Gutting 2013, 75–78). And Foucault himself told Duccio Trombadori in a 1978 interview that "there is not a single book I have written that does not grow, at least in part, out of a direct personal experience" (in James Miller 1994, 31) and he insisted that "the idea of the limit experience that routes the subject from himself, that's what was important to me in my reading of Nietzsche, of Bataille, of Blanchot, so that no matter how boring or erudite my books, I was always considering them as direct experiences aimed at routing me from myself, at preventing me from the remaining the same" (in Santini 2002, 3).

Many radical artists and thinkers who shaped Western high culture since the latter part of the nineteenth century were misfits from childhood—no

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[84] "When Foucault died [in 1984], so did the incarnation of the political hopes and theoretical ambitions of an entire generation. He was neither the head of a school nor the guardian of any disciplinary boundaries, but he was far more, the brilliant embodiment of his period" (Dosse 1997, 388).

surprise there, when you think about it, for many of them were fortunately placed in society by birth, yet moved somehow to profound opposition. And the authors of French theory were no exception, although little "Jackie" Derrida seems to have been relatively content—plenty of friends, loved his soccer and cinema, cared deeply for his father, tensions with his mother eventually resolved (Peeters [2010] 2013, 22–34). And, indeed, it is notable that the particular flavor of a bitterness rooted in personal pain is largely missing from his work. But the rest of them did not have an easy time of it, growing up—although Foucault was in a class all his own, utterly wretched. He was tormented until near the end by a "self" he spent his life looking for ways to escape. Like the others, he found consolation in the exercise of his native intelligence in environments where academic performance and status were universally respected. But even in those environments Foucault suffered terribly.

After describing an "almost insane tension" at the *École Normale Superieure* where "everyone felt he was risking his social and intellectual existence" in the race "to be brilliant, to stand out … to play the part of the exceptional individual, to strike a pose for future fame," Didier Eribon places Foucault specifically:

> [He] soon withdrew to his solitude. … He subjected those he particularly disliked to constant putdowns and laughing scorn. He gave them insulting nicknames. … He was soon almost universally detested. His fellows thought him half mad and passed around stories about his odd behavior. … One day someone teaching at the ENS found him lying on the floor of the room where he had just sliced up his chest with a razor. And when he attempted suicide in in 1948, for most of his schoolmates the gesture simply confirmed their belief that his psychological balance was, to say the least, fragile. In the opinion of someone who knew him very well during this period, "all his life he verged on madness." (Eribon 1992, 26)

We get a vivid picture of a particular kind of unpopular boy—a brilliant mind, a cutting wit, a mercurial temperament—utterly friendless. But all his pride would permit him, by way of adapting, was to mask his lonely soul in ever more elaborate displays of arrogance that only provoked more loathing and rejection. After the cutting incident, he was placed in a room of his own in the ENS infirmary—a confinement he welcomed and wished to extend. In effect, he voluntarily incarcerated himself within a school that already seemed like a prison long before he was first committed to a mental institution in 1949. He was destined to make more (apparent?) attempts on his

own life as a young man and was obsessed as well with self-mutilation (Macey 1995, 27–28). Psychiatric evaluations attributed all this to his compulsive and conflicted sexual behavior—hooking up with strangers in the gay underground at a time when the social taboo against "homosexuals" was virulent, plus his indulgence in drugs, and other self-destructive activities (Macey 1995, 30; Miller 1994, 55–56). For Michel Foucault, there was nothing abstract about "transgression," which is why Elisabeth Roudinesco called him "The philosopher of the pathways of the night" (2010, 93).

9.4.2 Transgression, Salvation

for us, discontinuous beings that we are, death means continuity of being … reproduction and death … both of these concepts are equally fascinating and this fascination is the dominant element in eroticism … [as] individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, we yearn for our lost continuity. … This nostalgia … is responsible for the three forms of eroticism in man … physical, emotional and religious … with all of them, the concern is to substitute for the individual isolated discontinuity a feeling of profound continuity. (Georges Bataille [1962] 1986, 13–15)

From his early assault on Jeremy Bentham's "Panopticon" as a design for prisons, factories, and schools to his concluding critique of Freudian psychoanalysis (the Priest's confessional becomes the Analyst's couch), Foucault cherished the forbidden—and reading Bataille would only confirm what he already knew from personal experience: erotic transgression was as close to the sacred as one could get in a world without God. But Bataille—inspired, like Foucault, by Nietzsche[85]—would also explain what this experienced fact implied for transgression itself, as an ethical form.

Foucault was never a phenomenologist or existentialist or a genuine structuralist or even a committed Marxist, but he was bound in principle, on the basis of his commitment to transgression, to the overarching aim of the creators of theory:

Foucault paid homage to Blanchot in 1966 as the writer of an impersonal literature with which he completely identified, along with the current of structuralist thinking that defended literariness. "The breakthrough in the

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[85] Bataille was indebted to many for inspiration and he acknowledged them frequently, but he insisted that Nietzsche had the "decisive" impact upon him (Surya 2002, 52). And his friend, Pierre Klossowski, also passed on to the creators of French theory a version of Nietzsche that invited appropriation—especially in *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* (1997).

direction of a language in which the subject is excluded … is an experiment that is taking place today in a number of different cultural sites." (Dosse, citing Foucault 1997, 207)

And—once again, as with the others—that core commitment was shaped by early encounters with the artistic experiments of the radical modernists. An intense affair with Jean Barraqué, the serialist composer, in 1952–1953 first inspired in him an interest in the *avant-garde* arts that would go way beyond his lover's musical experiments.[86] Foucault was rereading Nietzsche during this crucial period as well. He was also researching the Heideggerian psychoanalyst, Ludwig Binswanger, and his patient—the famously articulate Ellen West and her obsession with suicide. Didier Eribon locates the "genesis" of Foucault's life's work in that research (1992, 47). Binswanger saw West's suicidal mission in Nietzschean terms: "Only in her decision for death did she find herself and choose herself. The festival of death [a reference to a private celebration she held on the night she killed herself] was the festival of the birth of her existence. But where the existence can exist only by relinquishing life, there the existence is a tragic existence." Foucault himself saw West as "caught between the wish to fly, to float in an ethereal jubilation" by committing suicide, which would mean that "a totally free existence could arise—if only for a moment—one that would no longer know the weight of living but only that transparency where love is totalized in the eternity of an instant" (in Miller 1994, 75).

Of lasting importance, still early in his career, was Foucault's engagement with Raymond Roussel (1877–1933). He delighted in the story of how it came about; William Clark tells it this way:

In 1957, the young Michel Foucault noticed some faded yellow books in José Corti's famous Parisian book store and tentatively asked the grand old man 'who was Raymond Roussel?' Wearied by Foucault's ignorance, Corti looked at him with a 'generous sort of pity' and feeling a sense of loss sighed: 'But after all, Roussel …' What Corti told him and what he found in the pages he raced through mesmerized Foucault into paying for an expensive copy of 'La Vue' and (in two months) he wrote the darkly Romantic *Death and the Labyrinth* on Roussel's world. (Foucault cited in Clark's "A Lovely Curiosity," 2002)

A lovely little scene—also undeniably Romantic?

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[86] Which appealed to Foucault because "his music … tears apart the knowledge of the subject by rendering it foreign to itself" (Santini 2002).

Roussel was a "dandy" who measured up to Baudelaire's high expectations for that role and that appealed to Foucault as well: "dandyism is not even an excessive delight in clothes and material elegance … dandyism in certain respects comes close to spirituality and to stoicism … [it] appears especially … when democracy has not yet become all-powerful, and when aristocracy is only partially weakened. … Dandyism is the last flicker of heroism in decadent ages. … Dandyism is a setting sun; like the declining star, it is magnificent, without heat and full of melancholy" (from "The Painter of Modern Life" [1863] 1964). This irresistible (and, again, essentially Romantic) image of the dandy would return to Foucault decades later, when his attention turned to "techniques" of self-construction—but what made the most significant impression on him at the time was Roussel's writing "procedure," described posthumously in *How I Wrote Certain of my Books* ([1935] 1975). Perhaps most oft-cited are stories that begin and end with sentences that carry different meanings but differ by only a single letter. One begins with "the white letters on the cushions of the old billiard table" and ends with "the white man's letters about the hordes of the old plunderer"—which, in French, are distinguishable only by the "B" in "billiard" and the "P" in "pillard" (plunderer). But that was just one of many constraints Roussel imposed upon his work. No plausible narrative of the conventional sort, involving recognizable characters and their doings, could emerge from such techniques. And neither could anything like an author's "voice" expressing the author's ideas and feelings—and that was, of course, what most intrigued Foucault about the whole enterprise.

No surprise to discover that Foucault was also an admirer of Georges Perec's *A Void* (1969), a novel in which the letter "e" never appears.[87]

Foucault's *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel* was published in 1963, and translated into English in 1986. Foucault described it as "by far the book I wrote most easily, with the greatest pleasure" ("An Interview with Michel Foucault by Charles Ruas" 2004, 186) and he claimed to be glad that it was largely ignored, calling his relationship with Roussel a "secret affair" and Roussel himself "my love for several summers" (in Gutting 2013, 7–10). Gutting understands the significance of

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[87] Perec was acting on behalf of a "potential literature," the cause of "The Oulipo Society"—an entity within the "College de Pataphysics." The writers and mathematicians who devoted real time and energy to such exercises were both very serious and over-the-top playful (see the term "ludicrous," and its affinity with "ludic"). It's hard to imagine "serious" American intellectuals indulging in such shenanigans. Once again, we are confronted with cultural difference that complicated the reception of French "theory" in anglophone contexts.

all this and goes to the heart of the matter when he foregrounds Roussel's strangely staged suicide (Hence, "death" in the book's title) and Foucault's fascination with that staging.[88] Gutting sums up: "We have no way of knowing whether this focus on death—which continues throughout Foucault's writings—led, as Miller encourages us to speculate, to Foucault deliberately putting himself and others at risk from AIDS. But there is no doubt that his work shows a fascination with the loss of self brought both by death and by its mirror in the linguistic formalism of writing such as Roussel's."

Finally, and—with just that theme in mind—most importantly, there was Georges Bataille. He is the most proximate and perhaps the most scandalous representative of the artistic guild known as *Poetes Maudits*, and for good reason. In prewar Paris, he had brought to life the legendary violations of Lautreamont, Verlaine, and Rimbaud. In the 1950s, he still walked among awe-struck artists and intellectuals of postwar Paris, a more detached and philosophical expositor of doctrines he had once tried to realize, back in the day, a day that still lived in the memories of friends and associates, who were willing to tell tales (how tall?) of his—and their—forbidden doings. His personal charisma had, if anything, grown more charged, though he always spoke gently and carried himself with a clerical gravity perfectly suited to his reputation as the high priest of transgression and reminiscent as well of the orthodox piety of his youth. But Georges Bataille also reflected in writing on the ideas that drove him. Those reflections perpetuated his glamor and left a legacy that lived on in the work of others, in the work of Michel Foucault in particular:

> Perhaps the importance of sexuality in our culture derives from nothing else than this correspondence which connects it to the death of God. … By denying us the limit of the Limitless, the death of God leads to an experience in which nothing may again announce the exteriority of being, and consequently to an experience which is interior and sovereign … such an experience … discloses … the limitless range of the Limit, and the emptiness of those excesses in which it spends itself and where it is found wanting …

[88] Says James Faubion in the Introduction to *Death and the Labyrinth* (XX): "Foucault's relationship to Roussel is noticeably protective … its most telling gesture is that of a hand—or pen—raised against any and all of those roving psychologists who would … treat (and so invalidate) his oeuvre as a mere catalogue of symptoms … [in his book] Foucault proposes that Roussel's suicide in Palermo is … a corporal demonstration of the imperative that the oeuvre "must be set free from the person who wrote it" (156).

the inner experience is throughout an experience of the impossible. (Foucault "Preface to Transgression" 1977, 31–32)[89]

The emptiness of excesses when there was nothing (else) to exceed meant that (impossible) transgression of the self became the only sacred gesture left to modernity. Yes, George Bataille ruminated obsessively about "inner experience" but, unlike the phenomenologists and existentialists, his interest in that inner experience was shaped by his desire to escape it. What Bataille was looking for, when he looked inward, was (here we go again) an "impersonal" inner experience ([1962] 1986, 29–35) and this quest became Foucault's as well.

Bataille taught Foucault that the death of God ended our experience of the limitless exterior and made all experience subjective. And that meant that we now live in, and with, that limit and no excess can really get past it—hence, the experienced impossible, as Foucault puts it, lies in in the impossible effort to breach just *that* limit. Impossible, yes but the whole thrust of Bataille's thought and practice tells us that he couldn't live without trying to get there. And neither could Foucault. But the truly pious Bataille was the one for whom all those genitalia and anuses and wounds were genuinely horrifying, as they were for the bourgeoisie he was repudiating and escaping—and that's why he was so fascinating to the mavens of theory. They couldn't actually feel that horror anymore, not really. For them, sexuality was at least partly naturalized, as Foucault basically admits in the first paragraph of his essay on Bataille and transgression. Does that mean that Bataille, through transgressive acts, came closer to genuinely impersonal experience than others could? Than Deleuze in delirium? Than Guattari on mescaline? There is no answering that question. But it was the case that those he inspired *believed* that Bataille knew the way, if anybody did, to the "outside" of thought (see Foucault on Blanchot [1984] 1987).

How many times over the course of these explications have we encountered the lure of the "outside," of "impersonal" experience in one form or another? "Exteriority," the "unthought," the "aconceptual"—under whatever rubric—the ubiquity and force of this imperative has all sorts of implications, and we have considered some of them. But at the end of the day it all comes down to an apparently desperate desire to be free of the

[89] It says a lot about Foucault's reputation after the publication of his *History of Madness* in 1961 that this *homage* to Bataille was published in an issue of *Critique*, the journal he founded immediately after WWII.

self. One of the lasting puzzles, as already noted, that remains to be resolved about the anglophone reception of French theory is this: how was this desire to be free of the self so readily transmuted, in the discourse of identity politics and intersectionality, to a quest for self, even a celebration of self?

The upshot: according to Bataille, authentic modern transgression could only be transgression against the self and not as Breton and the rival surrealists of the Rue Fontaine believed—the elevation or enhancement of self. In Bataille's view, Breton's was an idealist, even moralistic, movement; it turned surrealism into a cause and policed the ideology of its members like a religious sect. Worst of all, it paraded an affinity with de Sade, a mere libertine engaged in essentially bourgeois accumulations of pleasure. Breton and his followers would never understand the sacrificial (hence, sacred) nature of true debauchery, "the will to loss, to waste and ruin." They could not see that "the spirit of subversion is justified by nothing but itself." They served the "marvelous," while Bataille was in pursuit of the "monstrous" (Surya 2002, 75, 112, 121–127). Essential to Bataille's position were its roots in an orthodox piety to which he was attached in his youth for nine intense years—attending seminary and seriously considering the priesthood. That meant that, for him, transgression (yes, against himself) entailed an inversion of that piety—a new manifestation of the sacred—that he felt more intensely and genuinely than anyone else involved in these experiments with limits. And everyone knew it.

That was why he was the leader at *Acephale*—a secret society, closely associated (at least at times) with his more public project, *The College of Sociology*, an association which, more than any other, accounted for his reputation:

> Bataille's final letter … noted, "the sacred, in my opinion, first and foremost counters utility and those passions whose object conforms to reason … we always find some prohibition forbidding behavior that is convulsive, foreign to selfish calculation, and that originates in the animal world." But this debate inevitably hearkens back to the late 1930s, when Bataille was launching his secret society, *Acephale*, driven by the project of human sacrifice.… [M]ore or less coextensive with the *College of Sociology*, *Acephale* (whose metaphorical name, "headless," had in mind both Nietzsche's death of God and "the headless crowd") anarchically attacked any kind of hierarchical system) … recent publication of *Acephale's* internal documents illuminate the group's decision to go underground. … In 1974, Caillois further explained, "Bataille believed that accomplishing a human sacrifice would be an irreversible point. … It came close to happening. The victim had been

found, it was the sacrificer who was missing. Bataille offered me the role. Because I had written a panegyric about Saint-Just while still in high school, he probably supposed that I had the latter's inexorable character. Things didn't get beyond that. (Claudine Frank in *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader* 2003, 27–30)

So Foucault's relationship to the *avant-garde* was unique. No one would want to call the other contributors to French theory conventional or normal—as we have seen—but Foucault was in a category all his own. His quest for the dissolution of the subject went way beyond theory and even politics, way beyond experiments with a-conceptual language and essays on the death of the author. He sought dissolution in action, in his life, and we sense that—of all those who sang the praises of Bataille—it was Foucault who really felt the slippery slope of transgressive temptation under his own feet.

The play of arbitrary constraints was what appealed most to Foucault in the *avant-garde* arts, the more arbitrary the better—an echo of the pleasures of Sadomasochism, perhaps.[90] In any case, a special kind of purity and rigor attached to the theme of language under such conditions, a purity and rigor that was not formal in the modernist, structuralist sense, not a synchronic system of elements and rules that "explained" the given, the ordinary, the regularities of language and culture. This was a performative formality—lived out in a *parole* of the extraordinary. It was as if breaching the constraints of normality in this way exposed those normal constraints for what they were—ultimately just as arbitrary, but "naturalized" by habit. It bears repeating: Foucault's interest in language was not like that of the structuralists, he was not hearing the siren song of "grammar." The promise of dissolution of subjectivity on the level of theory was what appealed to him and it mirrored his personal quest for dissolution in his life. For him, philosophy's phenomenological subject encountered its own limit experience in language.[91] Foucault, speaking here for the whole postmodern cohort, describes the origin of their enterprise:

[90] James Miller may have gone too far in *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (1994). But we need not agree with his reading completely to recognize *some* resonance of his sex life in his work. A devotee of sado-masochism doesn't just happen to name a book *Discipline and Punish*—and, yes, "passion" in the title carries a Christ-on-the-cross connotation.

[91] Gary Gutting stressed the importance of this aspect of language for Foucault (2013, 5–18). If it weren't for its subject obliterating effects (and the requirements of fashion), it is not clear that Foucault would have engaged much with language, even in his "structuralist" phase.

the problem of language appeared, and it was clear that phenomenology was no match for structural analysis … in which the subject (in the phenomenological sense) did not intervene to confer meaning. … Psychoanalysis—in large part under the influence of Lacan—also raised a problem. … For the unconscious could not feature in any discussion of a phenomenological kind. (Foucault 1988, 21)[92]

9.4.3   The Works

This brings us to the works for which Foucault is known. A brief summary of the principal stages in his development and the arguments that marked them will suffice for present purposes. What is wanted is enough to establish the depth and extent of his influence in his own time and also to account for the persistence of that influence in the anglophone academy:

I would really like to have slipped imperceptibly into this lecture … to be enveloped in words, borne way beyond all possible beginnings. At the moment of speaking, I would like to have perceived a nameless voice, long preceding me, leaving me merely to enmesh myself in it, taking up its cadence, and to lodge myself, when no one was looking, in its interstices … speech would proceed from me, while I stood in its path—a slender gap— the point of it's possible disappearance. Behind me, I should like to have heard … the voice of Molloy: "I must go on; I can't go on; I must go on; I must say words as long as there are words, … until they say me." (Foucault "The Discourse on Language" [inaugural address upon his appointment to the *College de France* in 1970]; in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 1971, 215)

Sex is "not even the individual's fundamental or primitive desire; the very texture of its processes exists prior to the individuals. … If we wish to know what we are, we must abandon what we imagine about our individuality, our ego, our position as subject." (Foucault, letter to Pierre Guyot in Macey [1970] 1995, 255–56)

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[92] Compare this with a more moderately framed dispute between anglophone philosophers: "Searle's central question [is] … 'how do we get from the bits of paper to dollar bills?' Now, this really is a question about ontology—about what it is for something to be money, not just about what the intentional content of our mental states is when we interact with or have thoughts about or use money. So it *might seem* obvious, as Searle suggests, that the phenomenologists have no way of grappling with or even understanding this question" (Kelly 2004, 9; italics mine). Kelly goes on to argue that it isn't obvious!

From a 1963 *homage* to Georges Bataille, to a defense of the *succès de scandale* of 1970 (*Eden, Eden, Eden* by Pierre Guyot) to his inaugural lecture at the *College de France* that same year—it could not be plainer: no matter the venue, no matter the topic—it might be sexual violation or plain old sex or the death of God or language in general, Foucault returned again and again to the same old song, the song of a self that could not abide the self it was doomed to be. Lee Braver argues cogently that the "main target" of his genealogies and their "dismantling of realism" was actually the subject (2007, 382). And that focus was what allowed Foucault to adapt his discourse so deftly to the demands of the moment without appearing *too* flagrantly attentive to fashion. Because it was true: whether he was presuming, in 1961, to "speak for" madmen in confinement in the eighteenth century or, in 1984, for an aesthetics of self-cultivation in ancient Greece, Foucault always only really cared about one thing: alternative ways of being a self, of being a person. So it seems that, because that theme really was a constant in his work, Foucault actually did succeed in speaking for others, for the generation that created and developed postmodern theory—in France, first of all, but eventually in so very many other places as well. Wherever this form of modern self-loathing took hold, not neccesarily categorically but more insidiously, like what Americans know as "liberal guilt"; he was the ideal representative of that loathing and the projects it inspired. As Foucault himself recalled in an interview a few years before his death: "We wanted a world and a society that were not only different but that would be an alternate version of ourselves: we wanted to be completely other in a completely different world" (in Gutting 2013, 33).

Hence, Foucault's reputation as a trendsetter. It has been widely remarked—sometimes admired, sometimes mocked (Dosse 1997, 389–390). After his "aesthetic phase," when he wrote about Roussel and Bataille, there was a well-timed structuralist phase, dating from *Madness and Civilization* ([1961] 1964) to *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). That earned him his place in the famous 1967 cartoon by Maurice Henry that showed him addressing his fellow structuralists, Lacan, Levi-Strauss, and Barthes—all of them in "native" garb, grass skirts, totemic adornments. During that period, Foucault's work pivoted around notions of the "episteme" or "discursive formation," a set of unconscious conceptual constraints on uses of language derived from the historical context *but internal to language in its essential operations.* Hence, the structuralist label—and it was, to that limited extent and for that limited period, deserved—though Foucault repeatedly and justifiably resisted inclusion in the category. As

has been noted, even during this structuralist phase, it was the trans-subjective aspect of the episteme that most interested Foucault. Like Deleuze, he never showed a real interest in the explanatory formalisms that preoccupied Levi-Strauss, Lacan, Kristeva and Sollers, Genette, and the early Barthes and he went out of his way, as soon as circumstances allowed, to distance himself from the "priority of the signifier" (see O'Conner in Silverman 1997). This made it possible for Foucault to shift his emphasis, more or less seamlessly, to overtly materialist and historical processes without giving up his focus on discourse. With *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault consolidated the decisive power/knowledge phase of his work, explicitly post-Marxist but also definitively poststructuralist, with its emphasis on Nietzschean genealogies (no *telos*, only contending forces) of discursive practices and the governance of human bodies in institutional settings as the focus.[93]

But it was a much earlier book, *The Order of Things* (1966), written when Structuralism was ascendant, in which Foucault gave the essential anti-humanism of theory its most influential expression. He there announced that the concept of "man," constituted at a particular historical moment, as the anchor for a particular episteme, was now in dissolution, thanks to Structuralism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. With a flourish, he concluded that book by proclaiming that "man is in the process of perishing as the being of language continues to shine ever brighter upon our horizon" and may eventually be "erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (1966, 385–387).[94] But it was not really the generic "man" that Foucault

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[93] Foucault was criticized for moving away from Marx as early as 1966 in *The Order of Things*, and he was in a later context heard to say to a reporter who asked him about Marx during a street demonstration, "I don't want to hear that name any more." But, in spite of such rejections, the grip of conventional commitments was strong. As late as 1972, in conversation with Deleuze in a journal of the American new left, Foucault concluded (with Deleuze shamelessly agreeing) by reassuring his audience that "Women, prisoners, conscripted soldiers, hospital patients, and homosexuals" who "have now begun a specific struggle ... naturally enter as allies of the proletariat. ... They genuinely serve the cause of the proletariat by fighting in those places they find themselves oppressed" (Deleuze and Foucault 1973, *Telos* 16). Identity politics instead of socialism? Not to worry.

[94] Recognizing yet another barb, Sartre responded by calling Foucault "a positivist in despair." For Sartre, a superficial "objectivity" was the only conceivable alternative to the philosophy of the subject in history. He never really understood the abstractions of Structuralism—just as he couldn't countenance the modernist retreat from lived experience in general (See above on Barthes' *Writing Degree Zero* [1953] 1984). Foucault had, rather cruelly, identified the problem when he described the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960)

was confronting as he wrote that sentence, so obviously relishing the image—nor were his many readers so deeply moved at the simple prospect of changing the subject from "man" to "language." No, it was as vindicated witnesses that they greeted the moment of pride-about-to-fall, it was that moment of comeuppance they relished. They identified in that moment with generations of victims of the arrogance of the capitalist West, with all the people it had marginalized and exploited, with immiserated millions in a world it had conquered, with the very world itself, plundered and despoiled. He wrote, and they read, as agents of vengeance. That is why, in Vincent Descombes' words, "The end of man" became "the slogan of the '60s" ([1979] 1980, 31).

But Foucault's reputation reached its apogee in 1975 with *Discipline and Punish* when he was hailed as a "new Marx" whose Nietzschean theory of power would enable radical resistance to continue without outmoded universal notions of humanity and agency that had been as essential to the cause of liberalism as to the existential Marxism of Kojeve and Sartre. Foucault's dedication to the prisoners' movement, in particular, showed that the struggle could go on without the support of bogus "master narratives" (Lyotard [1979] 1984) that had once seemed so essential to modern political activism (Bourg 2007, 79–100). *Discipline and Punish* was no longer just concerned with the "systematicity of discursive practices"; the focus had shifted to "power relations which govern *nondiscursive* practices" as well (see Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 258). And that shift was what brought his influence so powerfully to bear on a whole range of political movements that were proliferating in the wake of the collapse of those narratives, movements that did not have that much in common with each other positively but whose partisans could all recognize themselves as victims of institutionalized practices that excluded or exploited them. "Power/knowledge," and its descendent concept "biopower," applied as obviously to the circumstances within which defenders of animal rights took up their cause as it did for those who persisted in struggles to organize labor—or seek access to public facilities for the disabled or promote marriage equality. Activists for all these causes *identified* with them at just the historical juncture when the notion of identity

as "a nineteenth-century man's magnificent and pathetic attempt to think the 20th century" (in Bourg 2007, 48). A perfect illustration of what Kojevian Marxism looked like to French Nietzscheans of the 1960s. It was marred, above all, by the persistence of nineteenth-century evolutionism's *telos*.

(hence, subjectivity) rose to prominence. There was no end to the utility of Foucault's gloss on Nietzsche's ontology of "will to power" in that context. If Foucault managed to pop up in the vanguard with every shift in the wind of intellectual fashion, it was thanks to his gut-level understanding of how personal these culture wars, these power struggles, were. You could feel it in his prose and see it in his bearing.

That focus on power may explain why there has not been as much engagement with Foucault's final project, the three volume *History of Sexuality* ([1976] 1978; [1984a] 1985; [1984b] 1986), as there has been with his more militant and materialist genealogies. He was, during the same period, softening his attitude toward Kant and the Enlightenment, recognizing in them something of a precedent for what he was doing in this last project ("What is Enlightenment?" 1984b). He was making his notorious "turn" toward ethics and a controversial "return" to the subject—starting with an appreciation of the Greeks and concluding with a critique of psychoanalysis. Rabinow and Dreyfus describe the arc of emphasis that resulted for his life's work very aptly: "he moves from a genealogy of the modern individual as object to a genealogy of the modern individual as subject" (in Schrift 1995, 49). And Gary Gutting unerringly identifies the motive: "Foucault thinks he can find in the ancient world a model for an ethics of self-creation that will be relatively independent of the power-knowledge structures of our society" (Gutting 2013, 141–147).

Volume III was called *The Care of the Self*, and it *was* caring; the tone of it—or parts of it, the affirmative parts—was new. When he was skewering Christianity for an "idea of the self which one had to renounce because clinging to the self was opposed to God's will" and for covering over "the aesthetics of existence" with the "problem of purity," or when he was lambasting psychoanalysis for turning the self into something that had to be "deciphered," the old Foucauldian outrage still dominated. But when he invoked the Greeks as an example for our post-Christian age, when he celebrated them for the "idea of a self which had to be created as a work of art" and a "choice about existence made by the individual"—this was not the Foucault his followers were accustomed to (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 244–248). The ancient Greeks? The path back to them had been clogged for decades by bourgeois academics in search of models; not exactly an attack on the Western tradition. And individuals making choices? What was that about?

A turn indeed! And the ongoing fusion of Foucault's life and work made it a particularly poignant one. For this was also when Foucault made

public his discovery of friendship—which the Greeks he had studied held in such high esteem. An interview he gave to *Gai Pied* in 1981 was called "Friendship as a Way of Life"—and though it addressed general questions in a reflective manner, it was impossible to miss how personal this topic had become for Foucault. Only a few years before dying of AIDS in 1984, he was realizing that he was loved and appreciated by many, and especially by the few he knew intimately. The fragile, arrogant being who had compulsively repelled all fellowship as a boy had eventually found friends—and now he saw (had he always?) friendship as the most valuable of human relationships.[95] Perhaps there was something a bit too gentle—too hopeful, too forgiving—in this iteration of Foucault? Perhaps he did not, in this new guise, inspire the aggrieved as much as he once had?

There was much controversy about the extent and intent of this turn and return.[96] Gilles Deleuze, for example, broke with his longtime friend and ally over this final phase of his thought—even though he had argued that his later focus on the subject was consistent with his earlier work (Deleuze [1986] 1988). What Deleuze could not abide was the banal notion of "pleasure" (vol. II, *The Use of Pleasure*) being substituted for his own "desire"—which was still too Lacanian for Foucault (see Sylvere Lotringer's "Introduction" to Baudrillard's *Forget Foucault* 2007). But, above all, he could not forgive the political consequences, the compromise with bourgeois notions of ethics that the so-called new philosophers were resurrecting and Foucault was actively supporting.

In general, while Foucault's effort to thread the ethical needle by means of a return (however qualified) to the subject as agent did not secure the kind of influence on activist intellectuals that his earlier, more militantly materialist notions had enjoyed—it was nevertheless consistent with his history of jumping ahead of the bandwagon in his native France. Not only did it converge in interesting ways with what Derrida, his old nemesis, was doing—but it accommodated the rise to dominance of those "new philosophers." Ambitious young pretenders like Andre Glucksmann, Bernard-

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[95] Foucault had not relinquished his critical stance entirely. The friendship he focused on (though not exclusively) was friendship between gay men—an especially promising prospect precisely because it had to be cultivated outside conventional parameters. A free creation, then—just like the "techniques of the self" the Greeks had enjoyed.

[96] See, for example, Jurgen Habermas "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present" in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, Oxford 1986; Christopher Norris "What is enlightenment?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, Cambridge 1994; Paul Rabinow *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, The New Press 1997.

Henri Levy, and Christian Jambet—originally inspired by the revelations of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* (1973)—followed up by affiliating themselves with growing resistance among Eastern Europeans to Soviet communism in the name of "human rights." Like the generation they sought to replace, once launched, they went all the way as fast as they could. They ecstatically renounced their own recent ties to Marxism and Maoism and repudiated the whole mindset of '68, intellectual and political. They looked instead to various forms of traditional humanism and even, in some cases, to religion (see Bourg 2007, for the definitive account of this development, which marked the abrupt decline of theory in France in the early 1970s).

Deleuze was not the only one to recoil from this spectacle. Regis Debray, Jean Baudrillard, Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Badiou and other heirs of Althusser were likewise adamant. But Foucault was determined to change course again, for the last time. An ironic end to his life's work: the thinker of power and the "End of Man" was still opposing "power" as he used to think of it—but now he was acting in the name of another kind of power, the power of a certain subject, a subject dedicated to the aesthetics of its life regarded as a work of art (Nietzsche still, always Nietzsche [see Thomas Mann quote, above Chap. 6.3]). And as it turned out, this was a subject perfectly suited to an emerging age of options for self-construction that was then on the horizon, long before the first Facebook page entered the digital ether. Looking back, it looks as if, once again, Foucault was ahead of the curve.

9.4.4   Derrida Contra Foucault: The Metaphysics of Madness

In this section, substantive arguments involving Foucault will get more attention than they have so far, not because of their difficulty but because of the light they shed on some basic themes—to wit: (1) disputes in this village of the *French Intellectual Nobility*, like disputes in any village, cut deep and lasted long, (2) this dispute between Derrida and Foucault captures the essential difference between the "post-structuralism" of the *textualistes* and the *desirants*, the two main wings of the French theory movement, and (3) that movement was nevertheless united around its relentless opposition to the modern subject.

Derrida and Foucault came to grief early on over certain passages of Descartes' *Meditations* which allude briefly to madness and were used by Foucault in *Madness and Civilization* ([1961] 1965) to buttress a larger

point about Classical reason's exclusion of its "other." The dynamics of the dispute are revealing on several levels. Derrida, a rising star and former student of Foucault's, in a paper delivered to an audience *that included Foucault* ("Cogito and the History of Madness" [1967d] 2001), not only showed that his master had badly misread the passage in question but that he had done so because the book as a whole was sinning against the irreducible otherness of madness by presuming to speak for it and/or assuming it could speak—that is, by construing it as "rational" and therefore reducing it to "the same" and so forth. A cardinal sin. Foucault remained silent at the time but, in 1972 (nine years later), in the second edition of the book, without explicitly making the connection, he conceded Derrida's main point while, at the same time, launching a counterattack on a superficially related and less readily decidable topic. The grudge between them lasted for decades, with Foucault famously trashing Derrida in later years in publications aimed at American audiences for whom they were both competing rather desperately after their hour had passed in France.

Foucault sent Derrida a copy of the second edition accompanied by a note saying "Sorry to have answered you so late." Its appendix contained a ferocious response to Derrida's 1963 paper in which he summed up his view of Derrida's whole project thusly:

> I'm not going to say that there is a metaphysics, the metaphysics or its closure, concealed in this "textualization" of discursive practices. I'm going to go much further. I am going to say that it is a minor pedagogy, one thoroughly historically determined, that manifests itself in a way that is highly visible. This pedagogy teaches the pupil that there is nothing outside the text. … This pedagogy gives the teachers voice that unlimited sovereignty which allows it to repeat the text indefinitely. (Eribon 1992, 121)

Having broken with the "priority of the signifier" as the wheel of fashion came around, Foucault could now advance a meta-response to Derrida that seemed weighty enough to displace the relatively trivial issue of how to interpret a few lines in Descartes' text. In fact, he never satisfactorily addressed Derrida's reading of the relevant passage and no wonder, for Derrida was transparently correct about the place of "madness" in Descartes' argument. That deserves to be emphasized, first of all:

> it can no longer literally be said that the *Cogito* would escape madness because … as Foucault says, "I who think, I cannot be mad"; the *Cogito* escapes madness only because at its own moment, under its own authority

… [it] … is irremediably on a plane with scepticism. Thought no longer fears madness. … The certainty thus attained need not be sheltered from an imprisoned madness, for it is attained and ascertained within madness itself. It is valid even if I am mad. (Derrida 2001, 67)

Elsewhere, Derrida also demonstrates that the dismissive language Descartes used in the *Meditations* was directed, not against madness per se, but against madness *as an example* of the self-certainty of subjective experience. He was allowing that a reader might be more amenable to the argument if it were based on dreams rather than madness—but the philosophical point was the same in both cases (Derrida 2001, 60–61). As any teacher of modern philosophy can testify, most undergraduates are able to grasp the significance of this parallel: insane or dreaming, no matter, I *cannot* doubt that I am having the subjective experience I am having as I have it. So it must have been obvious to any disinterested listener to the original presentation that Foucault had fastened on the dismissive language to make a general point about attitudes toward madness in the Classical age without really considering the argument. That must have been very embarrassing and, all other speculations aside for the moment, it seems a plausible explanation for Foucault's behavior at the time: he said nothing about Derrida's critique, and even wrote him a friendly letter upon the publication of *Writing and Difference* in 1967, in which the paper appeared once again.

But "The Cogito and the History of Madness" did more than expose Foucault's sloppy reading. That didn't really affect the general claim about madness in the Classical age and wasn't worth a whole paper on its own. So Derrida set out to fry some bigger fish on that occasion as well—and what he argued in the rest of the paper was more deeply revealing of Foucault's whole project. Derrida caught Foucault violating the ban of the ultra-structuralists that was reinstated with even more vigor as they tried to jettison the abstractions of Structuralism without lapsing back into phenomenology or common sense. In effect Derrida reminded Foucault that the ban on subject talk also prohibits naive (as opposed to artful/experimental) references to the "pre-discursive" experience of a transcendental subject and identifiable pre-discursive objects of that experience. If the subject had to dissolve into language, if everything had to be always-already interpreted, then there could never be any suggestion that the subject somehow had access to experiences "prior to" (in any sense) conceptualization (Compare Roudinesco 2010, 77).

So, to the extent that Foucault—moved, as always, by his passionate identification with normality's victims—seemed sometimes to be trying to speak *for* madness, to speak of a madness that could make sense of *some kind*, to just that extent he was hypostatizing madness as something "in itself," a "natural" object or state. He was, in effect, treating madness as something that subsisted beyond the language in which it was *expressed* or *represented*. Recall that those terms were taboo because they implicate a subject and the way Foucault was describing or speaking for madness was naïve just to the extent that he did so in straightforward—commonsensical and academic—language. There was no poetic effort, along lines pioneered by Kristeva or Deleuze, to force experimental distortions onto language that might, for that reason, actually get at something like how Antonin Artaud existed in the world when he was in the grips of a psychotic break.

In any case, Foucault was obliged eventually to concede this cardinal point; as he put it later in *The Archeology of Knowledge*,

> Generally speaking, *Madness and Civilization* accorded far too great a place, and a very enigmatic one, to what I called an "experiment," thus showing to what extent one was still close to admitting an anonymous and general subject of experience. (1971, 16)[97]

Oh, "one was," was one?

Sartre had been right. Foucault was indeed a "positivist" at heart, as opposed to an existentialist or phenomenologist, let alone an artist-philosopher. He had followed in the footsteps of a beloved teacher—Georges Canguilhem, a philosopher, medical doctor, and historian of science. Years of experience in asylums and clinics, informed Canguilhem's path-breaking book *The Normal and the Pathological* (1943), had a deep influence on most of the creators of French theory, who were generally inclined to see in the institutional treatment of madness a figure of social oppression more generally. Foucault's work simply consolidated and intensified a long-standing tendency among French intellectuals in this

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[97] Lee Braver argues in *A Thing of this World* (2007) that Foucault believed there was something like true madness that wasn't being expressed by reason, but was nevertheless there. The next section of Braver's book is called "no remainder" and claims that, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault finally gets away from his residual realism (2007, 347–353). It also seems likely that he was simply embarrassed into taking a more categorical position—and, in any case, it didn't last.

regard (see especially Elisabeth Roudinesco's discussion of Canguilhelm in *Philosophy in Turbulent Times* 2010). But, in Foucault's case, this affiliation determined his principal thematic interests and shaped his essentially historical (as opposed to philosophical) approach and that helps to explain why his work found a home in anglophone academic settings. In spite of his baroque style and provocative overstatements, Foucault wanted to be understood. If he was interested in an "outside" to thought, it was an outside to some established discourse—not to thought per se. He was not committed, as Deleuze and Derrida were, to forcing language to the limits of conceptuality itself, to evoking "quasi-concepts" or sheer force in his own writing.[98]

9.4.5   *Coming to America*

> I think that if one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in Western civilization, he has to take into account not only techniques of domination but also techniques of the self … [which] … permit individuals to perform, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in such a way that they transform themselves. (Foucault in Braver 2007, 406)

With this highly charged, though mildly—almost casually—phrased amendment to his own life's work, Foucault introduced a shift in its trajectory that led Lee Braver to this conclusion: "What has changed in the move from genealogy to ethics is that Foucault now sees the potential for participation in the process to be more than merely a sham, so that we might be able to take a *genuine ownership of the self that is constituted*" (2007, 407; italics mine). No phrasing could better capture the most basic reason for Foucault's lasting and broad-based appeal to anglophone academics and activists, especially those invested in identity politics and intersectionality. Foucault made their struggle for self-determination seem both possible and worthwhile, in spite of his Nietzschean refusal to supply any kind of teleological crutch. At the same time, tough-minded activists were not being

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[98] Too biased to be generally reliable, Ferry and Renault can nevertheless be specifically insightful. See, for example, their account of what constituted the "unthought" at the moment the "Classical" human sciences were being conceived according to Foucault in *The Order of Things.* The objects and processes that came to constitute the subject matter of biology, linguistics, and economics were not *unthinkable*, they just hadn't been "thought" (1990, 103–104).

tempted by any kind of idealism—whether *a venir* or otherwise. Foucault's materialism, like Nietzsche's before him, was categorical.

The "miserable self" who had been so genuinely miserable that he was driven to look for succor wherever he could find it and, when a life of transgression that was truly dangerous failed to supply the salvation Bataille had seemed to promise, Foucault eventually settled for "genuine ownership," at least implicitly—a notion that the coming generation representing themselves to themselves in an evermore intensely mediated environment would find congenial, whether or not they were marginalized, whether or not they were politically active. A new kind of self was on offer—one that constructed its own way to freedom from interpellation by the Big Other of social convention.

For reasons to be discussed in Chapter 12, I think this observation affords access to the logic inherent in the whole trajectory of Foucault's life and work, and indeed in the postmodern project as a whole. But, for the moment, let it be enough to notice the appeal of that interpretation to practitioners of identity politics, in the USA especially. "Genuine ownership of the self" through self-construction sums it up perfectly, provided only that we recognize that "self-construction" need not imply a work that starts from scratch, from a blank slate, from a featureless lump of clay. That is only one of several ways in which moderns have conceived of their own becoming, the Classical empiricist/behaviorist way—and it has suffered a loss of credibility in recent decades. No, implicit in the notion of "constituted" that Braver rightly attributes to Foucault, is the possibility and actuality of all sorts of sources and forces converging to shape the individual self, the person. Some may be familial, cultural, others may be biological—even innate: many gay and transgender people want to believe they are becoming what they truly are, for example. What Foucault's "techniques of the self" provided was not absolute sovereignty but, in Braver's well-chosen words, "genuine ownership" and that—as anyone who has ever worked with horses, for example, can tell you—is more a matter of cultivating potential and guiding tendencies than of imposing or implanting an arbitrary form. "Techniques of the self" are ethically and aesthetically demanding precisely because they must take all those sources and forces into account on an ongoing and open-ended basis. The "constituted self" in a relation of genuine self-ownership is as much recognition as creation and the project never ends.

Another factor: anglophone critics of French theory were inclined to make an exception of Foucault. Like John Searle, Noam Chomsky has had

nothing but contempt for the French poststructuralists and for the impenetrable language of the so-called theory they exported to the anglophone academy. He is convinced that the whole thing was a scam and—worse— an excuse for a political passivity. But he was willing to concede a bit to Foucault, reporting that "we even have a several-hour discussion … on real issues, and using language that was perfectly comprehensible" (http://mindfulpleasures.blogspot.com/2011/01/noam-chomsky-on-derrida-foucault-lacan.html). And his response to Foucault's work fell short of blanket dismissal, though it was not exactly positive: "Some of Foucault's particular examples (say, about 18th century techniques of punishment) look interesting, and worth investigating as to their accuracy. … As to 'posturing,' a lot of it is that, in my opinion, though I don't particularly blame Foucault for it: it's such a deeply rooted part of the corrupt intellectual culture of Paris that he fell into it pretty naturally, though to his credit, he distanced himself from it" (see Wolters 2013).

Searle was even more forgiving of Foucault, saying that lumping him in with Derrida was "very unfair to Foucault. He was a different caliber of thinker altogether." Searle's more positive assessment may have had something to do with Foucault providing Searle with a meme-worthy quote accusing Derrida of practicing a "terrorism of obscurantism" (in Searle (Feb 2000)). That was welcome support for Searle in the contretemps described earlier. Finally, and in spite of the extended attention Foucault gave to some of the sciences in his early work, he was not singled out in Sokal and Bricmont's *Fashionable Nonsense*, nor was he typically accused of outright fraud by anglophone critics of French theory.

But there is a more specific reason, still having to do with language, for his enduring influence. And once again, timing was key. Foucault's critique of power/knowledge was also a license for those who were seeking to craft forms of power/knowledge to replace the conventional discourses and institutional practices they were opposing. Foucault seemed to understand that a political discourse that denied the existence of "facts" and "truths" as they had once been naively understood was in danger of undermining itself.

> What I want to do … is … to work out an interpretation, a reading of a certain reality, which might be such that, on the one hand, this interpretation could produce some of the effects of truth; and on the other hand these *effects of truth* could become implements within possible struggles. (*Foucault Live* 1996, 261)

To an anglophone intellectual with broadly realist notions of what it means to think and act responsibly in this precarious world, the very phrase "effects of truth" might suggest a cynicism that—while foreign to Foucault's temperament—would nevertheless be consistent with the Nietzschean nihilism that conditioned that choice of phrase. It suggests more than rhetoric, maybe propaganda or, in another register, Stephen Colbert's "truthiness." That association makes Foucault's tone especially problematic and so especially important to understand. He clearly finds virtue in the phrasing. No doubt, the effects he has in mind were ultimately actions, political actions, resistance. Is he conceding that people need to believe in some "truth" if they are to be moved to act or is he waffling on that? Richard Rorty came very close (here, as so often) to agreement in substance with the more provocatively phrased claims of theory—in this case, by debunking the notion of a "final vocabulary" and urging us to settle for the best we can do under the circumstances. For a pragmatist, truth is what works and what works could be said to have an "effect of truth" and that would explain why certain vocabularies catch on and become established. In any case, postmodernists of all persuasions had to admit the fallibility of language, of knowledge, while at the same time calling upon people to respond to what Foucault called the "intolerable" in society. That is a profound problem for our politics—especially at a time when the master of "effects of truth," at least at the moment of this writing, is a certain Donald Trump.

Foucault's way of transforming the subject into an effect in his genealogies of power/knowledge paralleled Kristeva's "subject in process," but with the emphasis on institutionalization instead of signification it had more obvious political relevance. His depiction of regulatory practices in clinics and prisons resonated immediately with people engaged in struggles for recognition and resources in anglophone universities during the rise of Gender Studies, African-American Studies, Queer Theory, Postcolonial Studies, and so on. The daily experience of aspiring academics with identity and intersectional agendas—in department meetings, at conferences, wine and cheese receptions, on panels and committees—just was power/knowledge at work. Likewise the experience of success, the subtle changes in tone and gesture once tenure is secured, tokens of deference shown to the keynote speaker—and, on a larger scale, the gradual acceptance of "politically correct" language and behavior in much of the culture, in spite of furious (and recently resurgent) resistance. Postmodernism secured an institutional presence in Anglo-American universities (as it did not in

France) and had a broad, if shallower, influence on the whole society. And the questions that arise as we assess the situation now include: has an inherently oppositional postmodern moment been lapsing because its affirmative claims have been so widely admitted, at least in certain quarters, in the bicoastal precincts where cultural "elites" hold sway? Can Queer Theory, for example, survive marriage equality? But, more urgently at the moment of this writing, when so much that has been associated with the postmodern is apparently now serving the interests of identity politics on the right—a hoary old question must again be asked: what is to be done?

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The Anglophone Reception of French Theory: Literary Criticism, Cultural Studies, American Pragmatism, Identity Politics

> this thing from France … for which one created the name and the concept of "theory," yet another purely American word and concept. (Derrida 2001)[1]

As the focus shifts to the reception of postmodern French thought abroad, especially in the USA, it is important to register the implications of Derrida's attribution. What anglophone academics called "theory" was inspired by certain French thinkers, some of whom we have just consulted at some length. But it was a creature of its own designs—especially with respect to its political applications. The underlying issue for this chapter is contained in this question, often remarked but not, so far as I know, satisfactorily resolved: why did academic postmodernism fade away so quickly and completely in France and sustain itself so much longer in other countries, especially the USA? That broad question is closely related to a more specific question, already mentioned: how did the ultra-structuralist attack on or flight from the subject in the French context get transformed into a politicized celebration of or quest for the subject in anglophone contexts?

But first, some kind of framework for the multifarious process of reception.

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[1] See also Barsky on how "French theory may be primarily an American dream" in SubStance #97: 8.

313

The interested reader might profitably spend time Googling around about French "pataphysics" (see Chap. 9, footnote 88, above)—a tradition of Pythonesque mockery of "scientificness" that stretches from Alfred Jarry in the 1890s to Jean Baudrillard in the 1990s. The point being, once again, that French intellectuals had been deeply engaged with *avant-garde* non-sense—with Surrealist and Freudian and, in a word, *anti-conceptual* cultural productions—for a long time. One struggles to imagine admirable, but undeniably stodgy, figures like John Searle and Noam Chomsky loosening up enough to get a belly laugh out of such high-jinks. Sylvere Lotringer may have had his own reasons for emphasizing as strongly as he did the affinities of theory and artistic experiment (2001, 123–162)—but he knew what he was about when he organized his landmark "Schizo-Culture" conference/event/happening at Columbia in 1975 and designed future issues of *SemioTexte* in its wake. He was thinking of John Cage, William Burroughs, and Richard Foreman as suitable American counterparts to Deleuze and Guattari.

That says a lot, right there.

An indignant and bewildered Arthur Danto, who attended that conference, made much of the fact that the three translators often couldn't agree on what the French speakers were saying. He didn't understand that Lotringer's enterprise sought, above all, "the permanent suspension of representation" because of its taken-for-granted function—namely, "to settle, answer, resolve and control the represented—the experiences of the world put in their 'right' place … [or why] … Paul de Man, in agreement with Deleuze over the terror exercised by order words that arrest, on the spot, wayward and errant sense, would have said that the discourse advanced by someone called Arthur Danto manifested the very terror it objected to, even if mixed with erudition and genuine puzzlement" (Lotringer 2001, 3, 5).

And so on—as with Lacan's presentation at MIT, only this time more transparently staged. Didn't Danto wonder why the conference was celebrating something called "schizo-culture"?

So many earnest Americans, at least in the academy, never quite got this aspect of the whole phenomenon of theory. Some on the still youthful "new left" were bound to be more in tune than Danto was—with the spirit of the occasion, at least. And they were most likely Lotringer's target audience. At first, in the late 1960s, they made up a counter-cultural, rock-and-roll, hippie, LSD, Woodstock Left that stood opposed in some ways but blended in other ways with a more recognizably political Berkeley Barb and SDS Left. Ken Kesey's novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962),

and Milos Forman's film (1975) starring Jack Nicholson (who also appeared with Dennis Hopper in *Easy Rider* (1969)) specifically shared the attitude of the "anti-psychiatry" movement with which Foucault and Guattari were affiliated. R.D. Laing's *The Divided Self* (1960) was in many a knapsack in the 1960s, along with Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* and Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd*. Many of these Americans *were* already in the academy, as students. They were the ones at the barricades at Columbia University in 1968, for example, and Kent State in 1970; some among them—the most earnest among them, it must be said—became academics and proponents of postmodernism, of "theory," as they grew older. Which, of course, they did; and in this simple fact lies a lot of explanation: as the 1970s rolled on, agents of the counter-culture, diversifying now into identity groups as women and African-Americans and Gays and Lesbians laid claim to their places at the table, were taking positions of responsibility in "establishment" institutions. Naturally, they set out to remake those institutions in their own image, to the degree possible, especially cultural institutions, especially universities—but also many secondary schools, museums, libraries, publishing.

But even the 1960s people, at least the ones who chose academic careers, even the ones who might have been in on an anarchic joke at a Schizo-Culture conference, even they would eventually feel the heavy hand of academic conformity upon them. Credentials, publications, positions—above all, the manners—became more and more important as time went by and institutional life took hold.

Sum it up this way: if the editors of some *Tel Quel*-like equivalent of *SocialText* got caught publishing Alan Sokal's famous hoax paper, they would have known better than to dilute their claims to revolutionary *panache* by fulminating about violations of collegial trust and "inappropriate" academic behavior—they would have said something like: "of course we knew it wasn't for real, but it was too clever to ignore: 'Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity.' Perfect! Alfred Jarry would have loved it!"

But it didn't happen that way. Over the years, those who learned their "theory" second hand, from English translations of French texts and from leading anglophone followers of the original creators, were bound to lean too hard on jargon and lose the spirit of the original enterprise as the jargon hardened into its own kind of *doxa*, just as Barthes foretold. At the same time, however, they assumed control over substantial educational infrastructure and resources, made fundamental administrative and curricular decisions, and attracted and educated generations of students into seeing

themselves and the world in something like the way they did; a better way. So they were not selling out—they were doing what you had to do if you really wanted change, displacing what Foucault would have called "intolerable discursive practices" with better ones.

The picture just painted, in the broadest brush strokes, does no more than outline an extremely complicated process that looked very different in different places and in different disciplines. What was common across the board was the way in which whatever versions of "theory" were appropriated in those contexts, they all served a "deconstructive" purpose, with that word understood much more broadly now than Derrida intended. It came to mean something like "dismantle or otherwise debunk the categories, aims, methods, and institutional perogatives of established disciplines" by showing how they imposed stabilizing assumptions and categorical constraints upon fluid realities that ought to be dealt with in more open-ended and reflexive ways. That was especially apparent when those constraints excluded whole groups of people from consideration, either as subjects of study on their own terms or as participants in that study—that is, as scholars in their own fields, defining those fields for themselves and their colleagues and students. What had been set had to be unsettled and the authorities who presided over what had been set would themselves, inevitably, be unsettled; they would resist. Sometimes, in some places and disciplines, that resistance frequently prevailed (cognitive psychology, economics). In other places and disciplines, insurgent discourses succeeded in establishing themselves (anthropology, comparative literature).[2] A complex process. We can do no more here than sample some representative instances.

10.1   LITERARY CRITICISM

Let the focus be on the "Yale School," perhaps the most influential center for what was often called "high theory" in American postmodernism, typically by proponents of other forms of theory, usually more overtly political. If fame (or notoriety) were the criterion, Paul de Man would be the obvious choice for detailed consideration—but he (his life and work) would demand the kind of extended treatment already given to Derrida and Deleuze and this chapter cannot spare the space that would require.

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[2] Nothing like this could happen in France, where centralized control of resources and curriculum was absolute—and where the powers that be turned decisively away from the ultra-structuralist program as soon as the winds of fashion shifted in favor of the new philosophers and their new humanism.

Attention will be given instead to J. Hillis Miller, who is in any case more representative of the broad swath of academics in the humanities who were moved to engage with "theory." Some were inspired, others felt obliged, still others were downright afraid of missing the coming wave. Miller very definitely fell into the first category and so acted as a leader/mediator for other, less certain, participants in the theory movement in literary studies. He was very close to Derrida (who followed Miller to Irvine) and his election to the presidency of the *Modern Language Association* in 1986 caused one of those deeply serious, ultimately comic, academic uproars (compare Rorty's election to the same post in the *American Philosophical Association* in 1979). It seemed to many immediately involved to mark the triumph of a "hermeneutical mafia" in the institutionalized humanities, when in fact the postmodern tide was at that moment turning against "high theory" in favor of more broadly conceived and politically vested fields like Cultural Studies, Gender Studies, and so on (see especially H. Rapaport 2001). Opposition from the neo-Marxist left was of course ongoing—perhaps most famously represented by Jurgen Habermas (see *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 1987)—and, of course, as already mentioned, by Fredric Jameson and David Harvey.

Miller began his career under the spell of modernist formalism (see Chap. 3, above), and so, like most of his cohort at Yale and beyond, he saw deconstruction as "a natural extension of the New Criticism" because of its apparent focus on the workings of texts in the usual sense of that word. Derrida, especially, was held responsible and came under attack for this textual formalism from more political postmodern movements, in spite of their shared opposition to closure and concern for "the other" (Rapaport 2001, XVIII, 59–60).[3] Meanwhile, critics of deconstruction on the traditional left were inclined to a complementary gesture that could be just as confusing. Gerald Graff, for example, in his influential critique *Literature Against Itself* (1979), reprised Georg Lukacs' attack on the modernist retreat to form by indicting postmodern theory for fleeing "political reality." Like Christopher Lasch (*The Culture of Narcissism* 1979) and other non-dogmatic Marxists, Graff was often lumped in with critics of

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[3] Does this explain why anglophone practitioners of deconstruction in literary disciplines so often seemed to overlook the significance of Derrida's "general text" of "all possible referents?". That would make them partly accountable for egregious misrepresentations of Derrida more generally. Was their narrow interpretation a lingering effect of the New Criticism? Did Derrida, who spent many months at Yale, allow this misunderstanding to persist for the sake of keeping his followers productive and content? That would not be inconsistent with his history, as we have seen.

postmodernism on the right because of a shared disdain for more popular expressions of rebellion against rational norms (see Thomas DePietro's "The Socialist Imagination: Gerald Graff's Defense of Reason" 1982). Those popular expressions of rebellion (punk rock etc.) became the main affirmative focus of the "Cultural Studies" curriculum as it rose to dominance in the postmodern academy along with closely affiliated identity politics initiatives. For neo-Marxists of all stripes, that whole development amounted to an unthinking acceptance of commodification and capitulation to a globally ascendant neo-liberalism.

Perhaps the most cogent and revealing moment, illustrating what was fundamentally at stake for high theory and literary criticism before the tidal wave of Cultural Studies swept over the academy, came with reactions to Miller's review of M.H. Abrams *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971)—especially in papers given at the 1976 MLA session on "The Limits of Pluralism." One of them, by Abrams himself—representing the establishment authorities—was called "The Deconstructive Angel." It was "the first widely read assault on deconstruction" and it encouraged more critical reaction from various quarters, while Miller's reply to it set the standard for tactics the deconstructionists would use to torment their opponents for years to come (Rapaport 2001, 21–22). The personal animus that so obviously informed Abrams' critique allows us to understand why defenders of traditional humanism felt so threatened by the rise of theory; as people (i.e., subjects) who cared deeply for literature, they felt personally attacked and with good reason. That's the main point to bear in mind, looking back. Theory's subversion of subjectivity as a critical theme was understood, and, correctly so, as an effort to undermine the very being of people who understood themselves in a certain way, who *identified* as modern subjects and took pride in the glories and burdens that attended that form of selfhood.

So, when Miller's "The Critic as Host" was published in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (1979)—a book that functioned (Geoffrey Hartmann's demurral notwithstanding) as the Yale School's manifesto—the riposte he offered Abrams was bound to offend: not only were Abrams and Miller personally beside the point, so were *all* distinctions between people and their productions, between authors and critics, and writers and readers, all, all were effects of language, interchangeably hosts and parasites, links on a chain or ring of ongoing signification with no origin or end. We have already considered the notion of "intertextuality" and its effects in the original formulations—no need to repeat the exposition here. What is wanted now is an appreciation of how, for scholars like Abrams, that vision was simply unbearable. The really interesting question for one who wants

to get the story straight becomes this: why were most traditional humanists able to tolerate, and even embrace, modernist formalism but not deconstruction?

And the answer is this: Hillis Miller was wrong. The account given above of the essential difference between the "intentional fallacy" of modernism and the "death of the author" of postmodernism (see above, Chap. 9.1.2) shows us why. Deconstruction was not a "natural extension" of the New Criticism. It was a radical refusal of formalism, of synchronic abstraction; it was a return to time and history—but a return that, as has been shown, not only maintained but radicalized the ban on the subject. The result was performance with no actor, *parole* with no speaker, meaning with no intention, text with no author—that was the impossible anti-humanism of theory.

And that was the underlying reason, not always explicitly articulated, that modernists in all the humanistic disciplines, however ready they might have been to experiment with form in the spirit of Wimsatt and Beardsley, instinctively resisted deconstruction and its affines. They rightly understood that they were themselves—and not just the canonical texts they cherished—the targets of theory.

To be sure, postmodern jargon could give the appearance of "abstraction" because it was so far removed from the concrete concerns of our everyday lived experience as human subjects—but, if the word "abstraction" applies at all, it does so in a very different way. In fact, as we have seen, French ultra-structuralism, in spite of some lingering structuralist influence on its discourses, grew more and more overtly opposed to the formalism upon which various manifestations of modernism had thrived, Structuralism in particular. Barthes 2.0 looked back on the enterprises of Barthes 1.0 with something approaching embarrassment. Nary a text of Derrida's displays a chart or formula. Levi-Strauss, on the other hand, never made the turn Barthes took, never wavered from the formalist (scientific) path as he oversaw the naturalization of his Structuralism into the 1990s (see Dosse 1997, chap. 37). "High theory" in the humanities was doomed from the outset because of this fundamental misunderstanding and its inevitable demise was hastened by an explosion of interest in another, much more readily accessible, form of postmodernism—one in which the everyday experience of human subjects of (almost) every description was not just recognized but celebrated. From *The Graduate* (1967) to *Thelma and Louise* (1992), from *The Crying Game* (1992) to *Angels in America* (1991), from *Mudbound* (2017) to *Black Panther* (2018) to Everyperson's

Facebook page—the "cultural politics" once envisioned by *Tel Quel* became a monster of mediated representation that would eventually threaten to suck up the whole of the political into its bottomless craw. And "Cultural Studies" was prepared to make the most of that moment.

10.2   Cultural Studies

A complete account of this sprawling movement cannot be attempted here. But the comprehensive point that tells the tale as a whole is this: the term "theory," originally tied to post-structuralism's impact on literary criticism in elite enclaves like Yale, became a promiscuous bit of anglophone academic slang as "Cultural Studies" became a "field" at once impossible to define and pervasively influential. Associated in some settings with media ecology, in other settings with comparative literature, in others with Postcolonial Studies or American Studies—the list of interdisciplinary affiliations could go on indefinitely and the list of international academic enterprises that could be included under its umbrella is even more extensive.

So this section offers just a brief reminder of the underlying thrust of the movement and the reason for the success of its various enterprises. The "discipline" had a venerable genealogy. It was established under that rubric at the *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* at Birmingham in 1964 under the influence of powerful work by British "cultural Marxists" like E.P. Thompson (*The Making of the English Working Class* 1963) and Raymond Williams (*Culture and Society* [1958] 1983). But it was during the stewardship of Stuart Hall, who was inspired by perhaps the most influential of the original cultural Marxists, Antonio Gramsci, that the Centre produced its signature neo-Marxist accounts of cultural struggle during the 1970s. French theory found a home at Birmingham because Hall was committed to "situating Marx" in the context of an emerging identity politics and theory offered just the resources he needed to do that. It is no exaggeration to say that the narrative arc describing the rise and spread of Cultural Studies might best be organized around this theme: Marxists looking to escape the materialist reductions of party orthodoxy found ways to accommodate, and eventually to join forces with, a rising tide of more diverse forms of political activism—that is, of identity politics broadly construed so as to include, not just political action to secure, say, gay rights in workplace and residency, but events like Gay Pride parades and eventually a whole range of popular culture manifestations of resistance to conventional categories, ranging from Madonna to Grandmaster Flash to Ru Paul.

The eventual outcome—the term that marks the necessary compromise in the unfolding of that narrative—was "intersectionality." It may sound odd to an older progressive, for whom economic justice is the principal aim of activism on the left, to hear younger activists—who may still be very concerned with economic justice (Bernie Sanders supporters)—to hear them condemn some remark (say Obama's "cling to their guns and religion") as "classist." But that became a widely used term as the concept of intersectionality gained adherents, and it is pronounced as if on a par with "sexist" and "racist." And the implications are interesting. It suggests that the old Marxist priority placed on class has been undone and class has no more purchase on political history than race or gender. It makes the irrefutable argument that many people subjected to societal disadvantages are subjected simultaneously to more than one and particularly complicated political consequences can follow from that. It is no accident that the Combahee River Collective, one of the earliest and most influential exponents of intersectional politics, was made up of black feminists who offered a powerful account of how, as women, their place in male-dominated black activist organizations was problematic while being black left them marginalized in mainstream white-dominated feminist organizations. Finally, the focus on nuances of identity that inevitably followed had another, more comprehensive, consequence: thanks to the ubiquity of representational politics in this mediated age, "giving offense" became as worthy of our political attention (if not action) as redlining neighborhoods or sabotaging medicaid.[4] At the same time, the most comprehensive of all the conditioning factors made itself felt: what was left of the left's fragile coalition could not afford to leave anybody out and acknowledging the reality of intersectionality as determinants in people's lives expresses that imperative.

After noting this compromise and its inclusive cultural consequences, there is not much more that needs to be said here about Cultural Studies; there are no conceptual difficulties to unpack. The main point of interest for the telling of this tale of theory's influence on the anglophone academy is simply this: Cultural Studies owes its conception to critical theory at the Frankfurt School, but the Frankfurt School was "scarcely acknowledged" at Birmingham because it was "considered to be unduly pessimistic about the prospect of social change" (Rojek 2007, 43). Yet again, that theme: the continental taste for epic visions of humanity's tragic destiny just

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[4] Which is not to say that these suggestions are entirely mistaken. Trump supporters routinely cite excessive political correctness and the disdain of "elites" for "people like me" as motivating factors in their politics.

didn't suit the temperament of anglophone intellectuals otherwise inspired by the subtleties of social/cultural critique that the continentals had consistently cultivated since the days of Rousseau and Herder. And, again, the inevitable split with the economic determinism of orthodox or "vulgar" Marxism was carried out precisely through that emphasis on culture. The story of "History" as told by a supposedly "scientific socialism" before WW1 hadn't met its own test. History itself had strayed from the original script. And it was obvious to those not blinded by dogma that cultural and psychological entities and forces had to be accepted as real political factors with their own kind of leverage on events.

So it is understandable that, unlike more traditional Marxists during the rise of neo-liberalism and the ascent of Reagan and Thatcher, promoters of Cultural Studies were neither daunted nor confused. Socialism remained the goal for Hall and his colleagues and some of their progeny—but they adapted to the times. They argued that the people were not just passive victims of the culture industry but also producers of cultural "resistance." In effect and by way of summary, Cultural Studies articulated an academic and activist program that would discover liberation and empowerment in, say, The Village People's 1978 gay anthem "Y.M.C.A." or Cindy Lauper's "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" on her 1983 *She's So Unusual* album or the rap group PKO's (Pounds, Kilos, Ounces) 1992 hit single "Shoot the Police." The result was an inevitable shift in focus as more or less anything of interest in popular culture became legitimate grist for the Cultural Studies mill. Thus defined— or undefined—Cultural Studies joined forces with various "interdisciplinary" initiatives and maintained a widespread and lasting influence on several generations of post-1960s university graduates who, for the most part, cared less and less for socialism as time went by. But they were, as already mentioned, also moving on to careers in cultural institutions, especially the academy, where postmodernism was establishing itself in bricks and mortar and budgets, with resources and responsibilities to manage. Nothing like that could happen in France, where centralized control of resources and curriculum was absolute—and where the powers that be turned decisively away from the ultra-structuralist program as soon as the winds of fashion shifted in favor of the new philosophers and their new humanism.

Whatever else might be said of the rise of Cultural Studies, one thing is for sure: as a recruitment tool for getting students interested, it was a winner.[5] And the way it converged, almost to the point of unity, with curricular

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[5] Incidentally, my very politically engaged 30-something daughter, a public defender, remembers Cindy Lauper as an early influence on her lifelong concern with social justice. I don't quite get it, but there it is.

strategies devoted to identity, made its ascendancy in the academy all the more inevitable and its susceptibility to appropriation by skillful marketers all the more apparent. Students could always find something to "identify with" in that environment; Hillis Miller and high theory never had a chance.

10.3 AMERICAN PRAGMATISM: RICHARD RORTY (1931–2007)

What I find most striking about my 1965 essay is how seriously I took the phenomenon of the linguistic turn, how portentous it then seemed to me. I am startled, embarrassed, and amused. (Richard Rorty, in the 1992 edition, commenting on his original introduction to *The Linguistic Turn* (1968))

Rorty often taught by example—and the lesson of this little confession from the later edition of *The Linguistic Turn* was one he insisted upon most urgently: guard against enthusiasm, especially in politics, but also in philosophy. That posture made it possible for him to give serious attention to modes and genres of thought that departed in significant ways from the conventional wisdom of his time and place. Just as William James, representing American pragmatism in its original form, found much to value in his correspondence with Edmund Husserl (and vice versa), so Richard Rorty would discover in continental philosophy's latest turn much that would prove useful to him as he designed and executed his postphilosophical project. And, since that project involved more substantial conceptual challenges than most other anglophone enterprises undertaken in the name of postmodernism, this section will give it more extended attention.

10.3.1   *The Pragmatist Shrugs*

Richard Rorty was the most broadly influential American postmodern philosopher for several reasons. First, he had proved himself in the analytic arena in the early stages of his career (when the linguistic turn seemed so portentous to him) and so could not be dismissed out of hand by his colleagues; he could talk the talk, do the math. And he had read and seemed to understand the leading continental writers his anglophone colleagues could not abide. A unique brace of qualifications. Alan Sokal's hoax would never have slipped by Rorty—unless he happened to vet it while half

asleep, which he often seemed to be, so tiresome (said his manner) had the same old analytic back and forth become.[6]

That world-weary air is essential to understanding Rorty's influence. It was a significant aspect of the way he dramatized the moment of moving on, of leaving the "Plato–Kant canon" behind. Deflating quips directed at the pretensions of philosophers were cast in tones suggesting that the war was actually over—the old guard just hadn't realized it yet.

Strong in learning, buttressed by a sturdy New Deal liberalism rooted in childhood experience of Communist cant, Rorty was not threatened by exotic continental formulations in philosophical critique or in politics. He was not driven to blanket dismissal out of provincial rigidity or fear of ideological intoxication. He could spend the night with Heidegger and return to Dewey in the morning, his original commitment intact. The doctrines of pragmatism were like vaccinations against excesses of all kinds and they allowed him to proceed indulgently to an assessment of the works of all his fellows, however alien they might at first appear. His glowing accounts of Derrida, for example, showed no trace of contamination by the jargon.[7] He left that sort of (possibly craven?) mimicry to lesser lights. He was as lucid in discussion of de Man as of Quine, and that weighed heavily at implicit levels of professional reception, where so much jockeying for academic prestige takes place. See—he was saying *sotto voce* as he explained the continentals in plain old American English—that wasn't so hard, was it? Which suggested in turn: what is your problem, what are you afraid of? Could it be the dawning realization that, yes, even linguistic philosophy in the twentieth century is a historical formation, a fallible exercise of our finite powers, bound like all such exercises to fade away when its time is past? (And after all that crowing! See Schlick quote above, Chap. 5.1).

Like Clifford Geertz in anthropology, Rorty managed to frame the debates he took part in, political as well as intellectual, so that people who still believed in Truth or Being or History ("Something Very Large," as he liked to put it) ended up looking immature—at best.

Rorty was cool.

But his impact was hot.[8] He infuriated those to whom he condescended because he proposed their overcoming, not by way of argument, but in an

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[6] See, for example, his video dialogue with Donald Davidson on YouTube.

[7] It was the Derrida of *Glas* and *The PostCard*, the literary experimentalist, whom Rorty claimed to admire—for "doing something different." He found Derrida's earlier work—the work discussed in this book—too transcendental.

[8] As the newly elected president of the American Philosophical Association in 1979, Rorty ruled in favor of the renegade "pluralists" and against the analytic establishment, a betrayal

emerging culture which would simply have no place for their idea of philosophy. That claim was so capacious that it could not be countered by argument either. Rorty's vision suspended internal questions of validity in the very act of turning "philosophy" into an object of anthropological/historical speculation. And the general mood in intellectual circles in the 1980s and 1990s worked very much in Rorty's favor. You didn't have to read Baudrillard to notice what was becoming of world culture and to sense that it did not bode well for the Plato–Kant canon.

Rorty—a small "p" patriot, who took the trouble to write a book designed for the general reader (*Achieving Our Country* 1998)—constantly found ways to stress the "Americanness" of pragmatism, going back to Peirce, James, and especially Dewey. Significantly, that emphasis on Dewey can be maintained thanks to a substantial overlap between pragmatism and phenomenology—the same debt to and rejection of Hegel, the same convergence with Nietzsche and, above all, the determination to philosophize about experience as it actually is, about life as it actually goes on. William James' foundational "stream of consciousness" descriptions were regarded by leaders of the phenomenological movement in Germany as a significant contribution to their research (Gobar 1970).

But, as striking as that common ground in content may be, the contrast in attitude is even more so. There was something very American—down to earth, suspicious of the highfalutin'—about the pragmatists from the beginning (Charles Peirce was perhaps an exception). The way Hegel's influence on Dewey persisted—though shorn of metaphysical pretensions—is mirrored today by Robert Brandom (Rorty's student) in his ongoing efforts to provide a more complete and explicit pragmatist reading of Hegel (see Good 2006). So, given the pivotal role that phenomenology played in shaping French theory, it is not surprising to find that an American pragmatist as broadly educated as Richard Rorty could read through the jargon, tease out the essentials, and, at the same time, elude the humiliation of conversion. That latter saving grace, however, may have been owed as much to his more immediate professional engagements with the philosophical tradition he was abandoning and criticizing. Rorty praised Derrida for "doing something else," but he himself remained largely focused on undoing the canon and discomfiting his analytic rivals—though he eventually ventured into discussions of literature and, especially, politics.

that many never forgave. An epic uproar ensued over which Rorty presided with characteristic imperturbability. The message of his manner was the message of his philosophy: our doings just aren't *that* important. With Rorty especially, staging and rhetoric spoke volumes.

10.3.2   *Intimate Enemies*

Rorty's millennial musings on the fate of philosophy were launched in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979). There he took on the image of mind as an internal "mirror of nature" that twentieth-century philosophers inherited from seventeenth-century epistemology—and from Kant, who positioned that mirror as "ground" for other departments of knowledge and activity. From Rorty's point of view, that image of mind—the very one that was the initial focus of this book—was Descartes' "invention," an artificial "coalescence of beliefs and sensations into Lockean ideas." Rorty professed surprise that Descartes could "convince himself that something which included both pains and mathematical knowledge was 'a complete thing,'" and did so in a way that "captured Europe's imagination" (136, 56, 223).

Actually, the account given in the first chapter of this book suggests an explanation—and does so in precisely the cultural/contextual terms Rorty recommended but did not actually deploy.[9] Take, for example, the correspondence between the situation of the *cogito* and the position of the believing Protestant in relation to God and the world as outlined in Chap. 2.[10] Modern subjectivity would have emerged even if Descartes, a sickly boy during his school days, had passed away in his dormitory at Le Havre. He may have *articulated* that development with inspiring clarity for his fellows in the Republic of Letters (thus "grasping the age in thought"), but he did not invent it. Heidegger and, in his own way, Derrida may be the only significant post-Hegelians who truly believe that the categories of metaphysics determine the categories of the general culture and the way in which history unfolds.

But Rorty, at this point in his career, was too wedded to his intimate enemy to give serious attention to cultural context—though his postphilosophical program would increasingly call for just that. He wasn't really addressing Locke and Kant in their time and place at all; he was using them to argue with his contemporaries about the "privileges" of sense data and propositional correspondence. Because Rorty represents the most credible and enduring "postmodern" position in the anglophone academy, it might

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[9] For a fuller account, see my "The Functional Reduction of Kinship in the Social Thought of John Locke" in *Functionalism Historicized* (1984).

[10] The tutor to the Dauphin and a theologian of some note is reported to have perused *The Meditations* for a few moments before slamming it down on the table, exclaiming, "Bah! Protestantism in metaphysics!"

be helpful to show just how and why he fell short of his own intentions in this inaugural work, conditioned as it was by his close involvement with the academic philosophers with whom he was arguing.

Rorty wanted to expose the *cogito*—the mind as the subjective "mirror" of an objective nature—as a cultural-historical formation, because he wanted to undermine its claims to privileged knowledge in philosophy, a *much* narrower aim than his continental counterparts entertained. He rightly argued that "as soon as it is admitted that empirical considerations (e.g. the discovery that there are spots on the moon, the discovery that the *Etats-General* would not go home) incited but did not require 'conceptual change' (e.g. a different concept of the heavens or of the state), the division of labor between the philosopher and the historian no longer made sense" (272). But he did not take up an extended study of that culture-historical incitement. I am not saying Rorty should have written a different book—but I do want to show how his historically oriented argument against foundational explanation was allowed to escape his larger claim that ideas are justified just insofar as they work. Rorty forgot, or had not yet encountered, a teaching of Nietzsche that the poststructuralists learned so well—if you just invert the binary instead of surpassing it, you actually preserve it.

Rorty began by indicting Locke for confusing explanation and justification in his account of mind, a confusion which led, in ways the book as a whole describes, to philosophy's grandiose claims for foundational epistemology, for absolute and objective "truth." At the same time, Rorty was arguing *in general* that context and outcome is what justifies beliefs and that (short, perhaps, of syllogism) more or less justified (as opposed to "true") is all that knowledge can hope to be. But in ascribing to the view that truth is a compliment we extend to beliefs that pay off in one way or another, Rorty opened himself up to this question: in its context, wasn't the mirror of nature in fact justified as epistemology *precisely because it was "confused" with explanation in a particular way?* How could anyone claiming that the division of labor between historian and philosopher no longer makes sense and that "cultural anthropology (in a large sense which includes intellectual history) is all we need" (381), justify calling other ways of construing the world "confused"—*if* it can be shown that they "pay off"? How could Rorty maintain his postphilosophical commitment to edification and the invention of vocabularies that work *and* condemn the naturalism and psychologism in Locke's philosophy? There can be no doubt that it paid off, for centuries.

If we try to make out what Rorty meant when he granted that empiricists "were doubtless right in commending Galileo for preferring his eyes to his Aristotle, but this epistemological judgment has no particular connection with their theory of perception" (246), the word "particular" jumps out. It carries the whole burden of his argument. He was trying to leave room for the Galilean context as an *incitement* to a philosophical account of perception and belief while closing off the possibility that such a context might *justify* the philosophy in some sense *other than the one to which he himself subscribes*. But why? It *was*, as we have just seen, justified in that sense! But it was not justified in the sense to which his twentieth-century interlocutors subscribe—that is, as the correspondence of transparent propositions to objective reality—and Rorty was actually talking to them.[11]

The case is even clearer when the Locke's "moral science of man" is cast in terms we would recognize as moral today. The whole Lockean project of progressive remedy, of curing natural history, depended on an analysis of how the mind, and the rest of nature, worked. Consider the most fundamental case, in its Lockean origins. The "divine rights" of patriarchal monarchs were *explained* away (like "goblins and sprites") and self-government by free and rational individuals was *justified* by a "science of man" grounded on evidence of divine design in nature, an inbuilt right-way-to-work. As a matter of anthropological cultural-historical fact (Rorty's "all we need"), modern humanity granted itself civil rights on that basis. Modernity discovered, beneath the appearances of inherited station (and later race and sex) the common sense and reason with which each individual is endowed by Nature and the Maker, and so on—the language runs clear from Descartes to Jefferson and Danton to civil rights movements of the twentieth century. Is *Rorty* saying that our beliefs about our rights are not *justified* by those *explanations* of our nature? He is, and rightly so, if "justified" means something like "logically derived from." But he's ignoring how the beliefs were, in fact, justified by those explanations for the looser reason to which he himself subscribes: namely, in the context of modernity's social practices, this vocabulary paid off. Can *Rorty* say, well, you can *pretend* to use, or mistakenly believe that you are using,

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[11] In his interview with Claire Parnet (*Deleuze from A to Z:* H is for the History of Philosophy 2012), Deleuze was only echoing pragmatist principles when he prioritized "the problem" philosophers of the past were facing in their context: "if one cannot identify the problem, one cannot understand the concept and philosophy will remain abstract … to engage in the history of philosophy is to restore these problems."

explanations about how the mind works to justify moral and epistemological beliefs but you *really* aren't justifying them?

The only way Rorty might say such a thing is by dealing with Locke and Descartes as contemporaries—and that is essentially what he did. He would not, I think, have denied that Locke was justified in believing what he did by virtue of explanations of human nature *if those explanations are taken as constituents in just another set of social practices.* But Rorty, in this case only, did not so take them. He took them at face value—as absolute claims to knowledge that satisfy "the urge to see social practices of justification as more than just such practices" (1979, 390). But that urge ought not be ascribed to Locke but to Carnap and Moore. For Locke, it was God's practices that were "more"—not his own.

But when it comes to present-day politics, Rorty's opposition to absolute justification serves him well—and would do the same for all of us if we could cauterize the thrills of righteous indignation that are coursing through our body politic in all directions like Deleuzean schizo pulsions on digital steroids. It may be true, as well as witty, to say that "the problem with pragmatism is that it doesn't work"—and, to my mind at least, Rorty's manifestly well-intentioned *Achieving our Country* (1998) is a case in point. In that book, he tries to persuade his fellow citizens that they are capable of political action without metaphysically secure foundations to convince them of the rightness of their cause. He tries to persuade them that, like certain elite intellectuals—the "liberal ironists" he celebrates in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989)—they can be politically committed without being transcendentally motivated, that they can admit to an inherent fallibility in their perceptions and vocabularies and still march and organize and vote. But what was most noticeably missing from *Achieving our Country,* in spite of its heartfelt appeal, was the one thing that actually, in fact, does motivate people in general to take such action: inspiration (etymologically: "immediate influence of God or a god").

That limitation is regrettable but not unbreachable. There are, in fact, some people—usually highly educated people—who become liberal ironists and can, like Rorty himself, find inspiration in words like these:

> Berlin ended his essay by quoting Joseph Schumpeter, who said, "To realise the relative validity of one's convictions and yet stand for them unflinchingly is what distinguishes a civilized man from a barbarian." Berlin comments, "to demand more than this is perhaps a deep and incurable metaphysical need; but to allow it to determine one's practice is a symptom of an equally deep, and more dangerous, moral and political immaturity." (Rorty 1989, 46)

The question that seems to me most pressing at this historical moment is this: can people come to see the wisdom of these admonitions in sufficient numbers to undertake a transformation of our civic discourse that could catch on and take hold and effect rational political change in the Age of the Tweet and the Selfie?

10.4   IDENTITY POLITICS

French theory was a natural resource for any insurgent academic enterprise organized around "identity." People in all walks of life were putting race, gender, and sexual orientation at the top of the political agenda during this period, of course, but so broad-based were these projects and so various and intersectional their constituencies, that it is difficult to generalize about them, beyond the focus on identity itself. Postmodern undertakings in the academy took account of this larger context, of course, but they were often specifically conditioned by theory and the affiliations and divisions it engendered. To take an outstanding case in point, we consider Gender Studies as theorized and practiced by Judith Butler.

10.4.1   *Gender Studies: Judith Butler (1956–)*

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender … identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results. (Judith Butler *Gender Trouble* [1990] 2008, 34)

Judith Butler's most influential idea has been that gender—including normative heterosexual gender—is not a given state, or a settled construction, but an ongoing performance.[12] Butler flirted at first with theatrical performance, but that implies a subject—someone putting on the show—and as a committed poststructuralist she could not countenance that. But her insistence on subjectless performativity provoked intense opposition from feminist, gay, and transgender activists who saw themselves as struggling for recognition *as* subjects. Speaking as a lesbian, Butler had set out to caution her feminist colleagues against essentialist thinking in the heterosexual context. She wound up producing a founding text for Queer Theory with immediate relevance for Postcolonial Studies and Critical Race Theory as well. Judith Butler's work has been uniquely implicated in vari-

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[12] When I first encountered this claim, I resisted—but memories of adolescence kept intruding. Adopting a certain stance and a walk, certain gestures, how to handle a cigarette—a Dean/Brando model in mind. Had I been in drag all my life?

ous forms of identity politics in the American academy, all of which converged on undermining conventional modern selves and inviting whoever felt moved to become, through performance, something "other" to just go ahead and do it.

Gender Trouble (1990) was a huge success in the academy and in the culture more generally. One reason, so obvious that it can escape notice, is that the book dealt with arcane poststructuralist notions of socially determined identity, yes—but it did so in relation to "sex," perhaps the most engaging of all topics, especially for young people. And besides—since the rise of the women's and gay rights movements in the late 1960s, who wasn't having trouble with gender? But the book also gave Butler an opportunity to exercise her remarkable talent for writing in a register that managed to synthesize the academic and the vernacular. She fluently deployed the latest slang and commented knowingly on goings-on in what had been—and, for some people, still were—"underground" venues, wreathed in the glamor of taboo. You just knew she knew what she was talking about there. At the same time, she imported a battery of notions from yet another glamorous venue, from the haunts of the intellectual *avant-garde* in Paris—and you just knew she knew what she was talking about there too. The result was that young people, struggling to make sense of both French theory and their own sex lives, were doubly rewarded. *Gender Trouble* probably helped more people get at least some sense of how to talk postmodern than all the little Oxford and Routledge introductory paperbacks combined.

One example: because she was never far removed (in *Gender Trouble*) from concrete experiences of sexuality and gender performance, young Americans of a certain class, engaged since grammar school and *Sesame Street* with debunking stereotypes, were quick to catch on to what she meant by the "heterosexual matrix." They readily assimilated it to the familiar idea that "society" imposes categories on you and that you are entitled to object to that. And that's not a bad reading, for starters; it provides enough insight to sustain a term paper on Foucault's discursive practices and, with a little massaging, could take on his idea of power/knowledge as well.[13]

Almost as important to the book's popularity, I think, was the way Butler lightened the burden of hopeless subjection in which the French

[13] Alan Schrift rightly calls *Gender Trouble* "a profoundly Foucauldian enterprise" (2006, 54) and it is reasonable to credit it for a lot of Foucault's staying power in the anglophone academy, where "identity studies" of various kinds became a lasting legacy of French theory.

originators of this discourse on subject formation so often seemed to take perverse delight. In Butler's version, a generous dose of American optimism discovered possibilities for self-emancipation in "subversive performativity." Cultural Studies at Birmingham had steered clear of Adorno's pessimism and Judith Butler chose a similar route through the texts of Lacan and the ultra-structuralists he inspired. The iterability and citationality of Derrida's "unmoored signifiers" showed the way. For Butler, the implication of those elusive quasi-concepts was very concrete: the implication was that, say, people wearing "inappropriate" clothes and displaying norm-defying behavior might be shocking, but with sufficient repetition they could shift social expectations. And people actually practicing forms of identity politics in popular culture caught on right away, of course. From working class fans of Madonna to somewhat more sophisticated fans of k.d. lang and Lady Gaga—and not forgetting pierced and tattooed freaks and thugged-out rappers in the streets and, nowadays, including also everyone on Facebook and Twitter: performed identity became the American way of postmodernism and Judith Butler "theorized" it all, while it was happening. And, of course, with the rise of Trump and his followers, it continues to happen—though the trajectories of inception and reception, in this latter case, have been rather different. But no one who has ever watched a Trump rally can fail to notice that performed identity is the whole point those rallies and, to some undeterminable extent, of the whole Trump phenomenon.

Butler's first book, *Subjects of Desire* (1987), was a study of the legacy of Kojeve's Hegel in France—a pivotal point, as noted above at the beginning of Part IV, in the story of the rise of postmodern theory. In her account of gender, Butler was able to channel major French thinkers whose ideas were shaped by critiques of Kojeve's humanist/existential Marxism for a very simple reason: she had paid her dues and had immersed herself in the history and context that alone makes it possible to get a handle on what French theorists were up to. Foucault's "subject of regulatory practices," especially, is everywhere in evidence and almost as ubiquitous is the Lacanian subject, the false unity of the ego forever *subjected* to the "symbolic order." Kristeva's "subject in process," already evocative of ongoing performance and always embodied, was also at work—although Kristeva's particular formulation came in for sustained criticism from Butler. Some of the specifics of her critique will shed a revealing light on the anglophone reception of French theory more generally.

10.4.2   *Butler's Kristeva*

> Kristeva accepts the assumption that culture is equivalent to the symbolic, but the symbolic is fully subsumed under the "Law of the Father…" the only modes of non-psychotic activity are those which participate in the symbolic. … Her strategic task is not to replace the symbolic with the semiotic nor to establish the semiotic as a rival cultural possibility, but rather to validate those experiences within the symbolic that permit a manifestation of the borders which *divide* the symbolic from the semiotic. (Butler 1989a, 110; italics mine)

Of the many American critics of Kristeva's views on gender, Judith Butler was especially qualified to understand her phenomenologically inflected account of subject formation. Her easy familiarity with the Lacanian topography ("law of the father," etc.) out of which Kristeva carved out her would-be science of "semanalysis" (see above, Chap. 7.3) shows as much. She had immersed herself in continental philosophy going back to her thesis on Hegel, for which she prepared at Heidelberg University, and, as a practitioner of postmodern theory herself, she had a better understanding of what Kristeva took for granted than more traditional liberal or radical feminists in anglophone universities. For Butler, the generally recognized problem of her "essentialism" was better understood as a kind of category mistake in Kristeva's theoretical apparatus. Her basic distinction between the semiotic (the womb, the maternal body, the all-enveloping embrace of sheer sensation, motion, rhythm; the *chora*) and the symbolic (culture, language) led to a lapse from a cardinal rule of the postmodern language game as Butler conceived it: a ban on referencing the pre-discursive. Pre-discursive means "before," as in before the acquisition of language, but it includes anything that falls outside of language—anything that can't be known by a speaking subject, hence the close connection to the ban on subject talk itself[14]:

> It is unclear whether the primary relationship to the maternal body which both Kristeva and Lacan appear to accept is a viable construct and *whether it is even a knowable experience*, according to either of their linguistic theories. The multiple drives that characterize the semiotic *constitute a pre-discursive libidinal economy*. (Butler 1989a, 105; italics mine)

[14] The ban on subject talk, it should be recalled, applies to a style of writing that treats subjects as effects of language rather than as agents of actions, including thinking and speaking. To those implementing the ban, treating subjects as agents seemed to imply that subjects exist outside of the language they *use* as a tool for representing their experience; in other words, "pre-discursive" subjects—Cartesian or even Aristotelian substances.

We have already noted the significant role the idea of the pre-discursive played in the theoretical work of the most difficult of the ultra-structuralists, Deleuze and Derrida. And, yes, Derrida was given to denying the possibility of talking about the pre-discursive—the phrase itself says as much! And, yes, the crimes committed by the metaphysics he was deconstructing were typically carried out in language claiming to refer to the pre-discursive (presence, etc.). But that reading, while valid up to a point, misses the characteristic Derridean ambivalence about the metaphysical project itself—the *aim* of the project was, for him, not the same as its execution in specific terms and that aim was close to his heart, always. It misses, that is, the importance of his "aconceptual concepts" and the "quasi-transcendental ontology" they made possible (see above, Chap. 8.2). A deeper reading of Derrida shows an underlying obsession with finding *some* access to what Butler dismissed out of hand because it wasn't "even a knowable experience." The lead quote for the section on Derrida in this book foregrounds that fact ("I am profoundly convinced, against Wittgenstein … that, what we cannot speak about we must (not) pass over in silence" (see above, Chap. 9.2). And of course Deleuze made no bones about it at all: every important philosophical move he made, from the subjectless "transcendental empiricism" of his Hume studies to becoming-other through sheer sensation in radical art works, was motivated by his desire to escape linguistic containers that (mis)represented the seething molecular as stable molarity.

But that longing for an "outside" that haunted so many of the creators of French theory did not seem to take hold of Butler, at least not during the *Gender Trouble* period. For that reason, I believe, she misread the distinction between Kristeva's semiotic and symbolic—she missed the unrepresentable way in which the "boundary" between them fused as much as separated the respective processes. Pam Morris attributes Butler's misreading to this oversight as well:

> According to Butler, Kristeva inscribes the maternal body with "a set of meanings that are prior to culture itself. … [Kristeva's] naturalistic descriptions of the maternal body effectively reify motherhood. … However, this cogent deconstruction of what Butler takes to be Kristeva's theory reproduces the common tendency to identify her work uncritically with that of Lacan and perceive the relation between the semiotic and the symbolic in terms of stark binary opposition quite absent from Kristeva's own formulation." (Morris 1992, 28)

Morris goes on to recommend a corrective to Butler's imposition in this way:

> The prevailing popular misconceptions of [Kristeva's work] as dependent upon notions of the instinctual and pre-social can best be overcome and its political import brought into clearer focus by a return to her earliest writing. In particular it needs to be re-emphasized that the first influence upon Kristeva was not Lacan and psychoanalysis, but Bakhtin with his insistence upon the subject in history. (29)

Morris then reminds us that Kristeva had also been consulting with Emile Benveniste on subject-transcending discourse theory, looking for a synthesis with Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical account of texts. This was when she was presenting her intertextuality "gadget" at Barthes' seminar at EPHE (see above, Chap. 7.3)—the whole function of the gadget being to neutralize the subject as agent in the writing and reading process and, in so doing, to collapse the distinction itself, to make reading and writing aspects of each other. Yet another category defying merger. Morris flags down a number of other leading notions in Kristeva's work, all of which reflect a consistent effort to blend distinctions into process—and finally, after describing Kristeva's key concept of a "threshold site,"[15] Morris concludes:

> nor as is so often claimed, does [Kristeva] oppose the symbolic with a pre-cultural archaism. For her, all speaking subjects and their discourse, the semiotic disposition as well as the symbolic, are always already implicated in history. … The child enters the world as the site of polymorphous instinctual drives but these are always already implicated with the social; even in the womb the child hears and responds to the mother's voice. (32)

In a nutshell, Butler simply did not contend with a crucial notion Kristeva developed in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), the notion of "*signifiAnce*"—a coinage that rightly brings Derrida's *differAnce* to mind, especially when you consider its function in the discourse:

[15] Based on Bakhtin's account of "carnival," where the "threshold site" is a "boundary site bringing together food and defecation, gluttonous Gargantuan ingestion and obscene expulsion, birth, sex and death, pain and laughter."

> What we call a *signifiance*, then, is precisely this unlimited and unbounded generating process, this unceasing operation of the drives toward, in, and through language; *toward, in, and through the exchange system and its protagonists—the subject and his institutions. This heterogeneous process, neither anarchic, fragmented foundation, nor schizophrenic blockage*, is a structuring and de-structuring practice, a passage to the outer boundaries of the subject and society. Then—and only then—can it be jouissance and revolution. (*The Portable Kristeva* 2002, 31; italics mine)

These are not the "drives" of Freud—not even of Lacan's Freud. As the italicized language makes clear, these are Nietzschean forces as Deleuze and Guattari deployed them in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972). The whole point was to see "desire" as permeating the entire natural and social order, seamlessly implicated in the motions of weather and of machinery in factories and cars on the street—as well as the embraces of maternal fluids and tissues enveloping a spastic, babbling infant. That book, let it be recalled, was a sensation among intellectuals in Paris and it is unthinkable that, in 1974, conceiving her semiotic and her *chora*, that Kristeva could have escaped the influence of this most radical of all visions of "desire," a vision in which *all* stasis melted into process eventually and at some level.

If you pass over Kristeva's persistent efforts to highlight the fusional dimension that process brings to categories in motion, then it is possible to read the distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic the way Butler does. That fusional dimension is itself, admittedly, unintelligible—that is, as it were, the whole point of becoming as opposed to being, the very occasion of the crime against empirical reality that concepts, by their nature, commit (See Kojeve and Nietzsche references throughout this book). But for Butler, who has dismissed the pre-discursive because it isn't "even a knowable experience", Kristeva's reach inevitably falls outside her ken and we are left with the two levels of language—interacting however you like—but distinctly themselves throughout. Kristeva's examples of how, in poetry and baby talk and psychotic discourse, the semiotic can "erupt into" or "disrupt" or otherwise make itself "manifest" at the level of the symbolic—to Butler, such examples all look like interactions (perhaps breaches or incursions) between two terms that remain what they are. Hence, descriptions like this one, cited above: "the only modes of non-psychotic activity are those which *participate in the symbolic to some extent* … [and so] validate those experiences within the symbolic that

permit a manifestation of the borders which *divide* the symbolic from the semiotic" (Italics mine). When, of course, the whole point for Kristeva is that they *don't* simply divide, they blend and fuse.

Imagine a poet engaged in the passionate repetitive chanting of a refrain or a baby and mother engaged in reciprocal and simultaneous cooing of the sweetness-recognizing syllable "Awwww ...." For Kristeva there's a blend, like Russian dressing; for Butler, there's catsup mixed with mayonnaise. I can see it both ways, so why not live and let live?

Politics.

Judith Butler's problem with Kristeva's pre-discursive semiotic had little to do with the organization of the human psyche or the nature of language. She was not that interested in purely intellectual issues. Here is what she really didn't like about Kristeva's pre-discursive:

> By relegating the source of subversion [of the symbolic by the semiotic] to a site outside of culture itself, Kristeva appears to foreclose the possibility of subversion as an effective or realizable cultural practice. (1989a, 112)

And the possibility of that cultural practice trumps all other considerations—for Butler is, first and foremost, an artful polemicist serving a noble cause and she has arrived to spread the good word. We can fix this situation, if we just act (perform) in it:

> on my reading, the repression of the feminine does not require that the agency of repression and the object of repression be ontologically distinct. ... If subversion as possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of the law [i.e. the symbolic], through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself. The culturally constructed body will then be liberated, not to its "natural" past nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities. (1989a, 117)

In spite of her sophisticated grasp of French theory, in the end Butler's path converged with that of Kristeva's more positivist critics: conceptual decisions at the level of theory were driven by the political preferences of a theorist looking, not for truth, but for efficacy. And not only were they so driven, but rightfully so! For what else did we learn from Foucault on "power/knowledge" and "effects of truth," if not that?

10.4.3   *Butler at the Barricades*

But in this book we are interested in actual truth—albeit with a small "t," the kind of truth we expect from friends when important matters are before us. To conclude, then, with an attempt at a just placement of Judith Butler in the theory firmament at this stage in her career: she was on the conservative end of the spectrum, a Foucauldian materialist but not really an ultra-structuralist, not *really* looking to think the impossible or otherwise access or even privilege what lies beyond thought and language. *Conventional* thought and language in the pre-postmodern era—that she was out to transgress and disrupt at every turn. Those were boundaries she was eager to violate but not, like Derrida or Deleuze, the very boundaries of conceptuality per se, of language itself. At that point, Butler shows herself to be a more conventional—even American—philosopher, not a French experimentalist looking for what is truly other to all of us as speaking and thinking beings. She implied as much herself, in her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, which reflected almost ten years of engagement with a host of critics and admirers since its original publication:

> Gender trouble is rooted in "French theory," which is itself a curious American construction. Only in the United States are so many disparate theories joined together as if they form some kind of unity. … I mention this to underscore that the apparent Francocentrism of the text is at a significant distance from France and from the life of theory in France. … Indeed, the intellectual promiscuity of the text marks it precisely as American. ([1999] 2008, x)

Another manifestation of the strength of her political commitment: Judith Butler was always ready to police discourse for violations of an institutionalized postmodernism if they threatened a consensus of which she approved for political reasons. Her critique of Kristeva was a case in point. Similarly, in "Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions" (1989a, b), five years after his death, Butler took the master to task for making the same basic error Derrida had nailed him for 25 years earlier—a variation, in fact, of the one Kristeva had fallen into. It seems Foucault had frequently deployed the metaphor of "inscribing" significant items (postures, clothing, expressions, ill-health) on "bodies" and that his language often implied that "the body" existed "pre-discursively" (i.e., prior

to interpretation in language or culture).[16] And that was, as everyone in Butler's milieu by that time took for granted, a major *faux-pas*. It was nothing less than a lapse into subject/object realism of some kind—whether phenomenological, empirical, or merely commonsensical. But, in any case, a lapse that the ban on subject talk was designed to prevent. But the tone was more telling. Butler brought an official, almost routine, "check-your-papers" tone to this essay. One feels that she was reciting from a list of regulations imposing in-group prohibitions against using categories and distinctions that claim reference to the pre-discursive, to "nature," or indeed anything metaphysically inclusive of particulars—transcendental "single drama" history was another favorite target.

Barthes, with his enduring resistance to *doxa*, no matter what its provenance, looks especially prophetic from this angle (see above, Chap. 9.1).

But, in a recent interview, Butler herself provides a practical example of the linguistic risk-taking she originally advocated as she describes an encounter with a kid in Berkeley who leaned out of the window and asked her whether she was a lesbian. Butler replied in the affirmative, noting that her interlocutory, who clearly meant the question as an insult, was taken aback by her proud appropriation of the term. "It was a very powerful thing to do," she explains: "it wasn't that I authored that term: I received the term and gave it back; I replayed it, reiterated. … It's as if my interrogator were saying, 'hey, what do we do with the word lesbian? Show me how we use it?' And I said, 'yeah, let's use it this way!' Or it's as if the interrogator hanging out the window were saying, 'hey, do you think the word lesbian can only be used in a derogatory way on the street?' And I said 'no, it can be claimed on the street! Come join me!' We were having a negotiation" (in Salih 2002, 114).

That took courage—and Butler has always shown that, modeled that, for all the people to whom and for whom she has spoken over the years.

It was perhaps a by-product, but very useful—a great convenience for opponents of all things bourgeois, for hardened left-wing activists or a

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[16] For example, "the body is … directly involved in a political field; power-relations have an immediate hold on it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" ([1975] 1995, 25). For the image of the body "emitting signs," Foucault is surely indebted to his friend Deleuze.

lifelong Nietzschean elitists or—as with most of the thinkers we have consulted here—a strange combination of both: the ban on subject talk made it possible for many of these radicals to avoid looking too closely at their own motives for abandoning their class destiny and aligning themselves with workers, third-world peasants, and eventually with other exploited and marginalized groups as well. For them, it would never do to speak of anything so sentimental and ideal as "compassion" or "a sense of justice" or "human rights," those conventional sources of inspiration for reform, smugly handing down their help to "those in need" from the center and on high. But in the mid 1970s, the so-called new philosophers (Andre Glucksmann, Bernard Henri-Levy, Christian Jambet, Guy Lardreau et al.), reacting as disillusioned Maoists to Solzhenitsyn's revelations in *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973) and to the heroism of other dissenters in the Communist world, fostered a turn to "ethics" and made concepts like "justice" and "human rights" viable again (see especially Julian Bourg's *From Revolution to Ethics; May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (2007)). It was that turn—happening, once again, with astonishing speed—that principally (along with the centralized French educational system) accounts for the abrupt demise in France of what the anglophone academy would call "theory" and which some would practice diligently for decades to come.

Foucault, with his uncanny ability to catch the next wave, was affiliated with that turn by the early 1980s, as we have seen (it cemented his estrangement from Deleuze, who liked to refer to the new philosophers as "TV buffoons"). So it is worth reflecting a bit on Foucault's earlier preference for the word "intolerable" to explain why he spent precious time and energy organizing on behalf of prisoners or the Iranian revolution or whatever it might be. Like Rorty's "cruelty," the word tries to shift agency over to circumstances that are "intolerable" or "cruel" without quite succeeding in masking the fact that *someone, some human subject, is feeling and judging* the situation and, in common sense (hence forbidden) terms, being moved to action. In any case, and by way of summarizing an obvious but, I think, decisive point—this straight-up observation: one of the best ways to rescue the common sense view of human motivation in ethics and politics is to invoke the example of so many of these radical activists themselves. The straight white men among them were, for the most part, bourgeois intellectuals who chose to deny in theory or ideology motivations they manifestly served in practice. They dedicated great chunks of their lives to causes that did not serve their

material interests—but instead served ideals and values that have been motivating modernizing progressives since the eighteenth century.

Another case of intellectuals caught up in a "great silliness," no doubt; but, as in MacIntyre's case (see above Chap. 3.2.2), with the possibility of a new humanism on the horizon, there is much to be learned from it.

Since the first Romantics set out to vanquish modern subjectivity, it has been like some vampire, reviving again and again no matter how many stakes are driven through its heart. And it managed to do that for the obvious reason that the social-historical world has remained essentially modern through all the intellectual changes and, with subjectivity understood as being-in-the-world, its persistence was inevitable. Nietzsche thought he had bested Cartesian metaphysics in its Kantian guise, but Heidegger showed that he remained in thrall to a vision of individual centrality and agency. Heidegger, in turn, believed he had dismantled subjectivity as substance once and for all—returned it to the world as the very meaning of the world's Being. But Derrida smoked out that self-same subject in Heidegger, caught it gazing into the mirror of presence. And Derrida himself? Like many in his cohort, he took out what looked to be a fail-safe insurance policy, one that implicitly admitted the impossibility of success for his project in his social-historical context. He smothered the subject/ object distinction in a wholesale destabilization of all the binary concepts (ideal/material, culture/nature, internal/external) associated with Western metaphysics while admitting at the same time that one couldn't actually function without those binaries for the foreseeable future, pernicious though they might be. Free at last?

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Before the Annunciation Came the Virtual

Man is the being whose project is to be God. (Sartre 1957)

Sartre here sums up the story of modernity as it has been told in this book and, if only by implication, the argument that followed from it. The gist is this: as modernity took hold of nature and history, the status of Maker fell more and more to those who actually fashioned the settings that constituted people's lives. As we became the self-conscious makers of our being—of our skills, careers, moods, appearance, health, sexual performance, "life-styles"—proprietorial entitlement followed in accordance with modern "natural law." But what now and what next?

Most strikingly, this: the convergence of digital and biotechnologies means that the enterprise of self- and world-making is becoming more literal. Virtual environments, avatars, chimeras, clones, and proliferating prosthetic enhancements of all kinds promise liberation from all categories, including those we are born into. Some apparently qualified people expect liberation from embodiment itself.[1] And the fact that quadriplegics with their brains wired into computers can control the movement of a cursor with their thoughts makes that expectation rational in principle, at least. What that fact says is that the code doesn't care what the platform is

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[1] Ray Kurzweil and Larry Page (co-founder of Google) are only the most prominent figures seriously preparing for a time in the near future when it will be possible to "upload" (or "download"?) a mind/brain onto a computer.

made of—carbon or silicon, it doesn't matter; the message, the information, remains. Brain science, computer science, genetics—they are all code sciences—+/−, on/off, information sciences—and whatever may or may not actually prove feasible in the future, this much is clear: what we have now is just the beginning.

The outline of a thesis emerges: aiming to displace and dissolve the modern subject and its enterprises, postmodern theory actually articulated its fulfillment. In effect, postmodernists embraced the conditions of life in a Nietzschean world that the modernists were forced to accept. In trying to "think the impossible," the most radical among them were attempting a much more comprehensive escape from *The Prison House of Language* than Fredric Jameson had in mind. He just wanted to jettison modernist formalism and the obsessive focus on language and signs and return to clear descriptions of social and political relations and historical events. They were flirting with moving beyond language altogether. But for the discourses of postmodernism that gained traction and held on—Foucault, Rorty, Butler—the effect was closer to what Jameson was hoping for. Returning to the world, to history, from the heights of modernist abstraction, we find modernity's original project on the horizon once again—but in a radically new form. In what follows, I offer an outline for a theory of "theory." This discussion will depart from the protocol followed so far, ignoring authorial intent for the sake of a conclusion.

Three quotes provide a platform. In the first, John Locke, inspired by microscopes and telescopes and prevalent "corpuscular" theories of nature's "substance," wonders if, higher on the great chain of being, angels with adjustable eyeballs can see both the middle-size furniture of human experience *and* the minutest particles, the ones Galileo credited for causing heat. And he goes a tentative step further, musing for just a moment on "how much would that man exceed all others in knowledge … who could so fit his eyes to all sorts of objects, as to see when he pleased the figure and motion of the minute particles in the blood." But he steps back quickly to affirm that "God has no doubt made them [our organs] so as is best for us in our present condition" ([1689] 1996, II, xxiii, 12–13). The pious Locke was not as bold in expressing the aspirations that drove his thinking as Descartes had been—but when he allowed himself to indulge in "extravagant conjecture," the underlying logic was clear.

In effect, Locke imagined cyborgs. More recently, someone undertook to do the same—more systematically and for a very different, fundamentally opposed, purpose—but it led, as if by some necessity, back to modernity's genesis moment. In *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991), Donna Haraway ultimately described her icon of postmodern category violation this way: it was the "apocalyptic *telos* of the West's escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self, untied at last from all dependency, a man in space" (152). In other words, she realized that somehow—at the very limit of what escape from "natural" categories would bring—was the *cogito* moment. And a very particular, not so regularly featured moment of that moment: its sheer inception, as it appeared to Descartes *before* he recovered the external world and consolidated his dualism, the moment when he mused thusly: "if I were independent of all other existence, and were myself the author of my being. … I would lack no perfection; for I should have given myself all those perfections of which I have some idea, and I should thus be God" (Descartes *3rd Meditation* [1641] 1968).

I argue in conclusion that postmodern theorists who insisted upon subjectivity's decentered and fragmented *subjectedness* were actually protesting an ideology that took the modern (bourgeois) simulacrum of liberty for true freedom. In their hearts, they wanted real freedom, embodied and social, not merely subjective—an updated version of Hegel's "positive freedom."[2] What would such freedom look like? Would it not consist, not merely in the right, but in the means to do what you want to do and be what you want to be in a society of the equivalently entitled in a world of our/their own making? Today it is possible to wonder (but how seriously?): could virtual selves in virtual worlds realize the modern project after all? Quite apart from staggering practical questions of actualization—*the logic that entails this possibility seems to hold*. Here is that logic, step by step:

1. It seems that, if all objects of consciousness, of intentionality in the experienced world, are actually "writing-signs," then the *cogito* is dissolved. Mentality has no internal place apart, and mind and world are united as the play of signification—disseminated and dispersed, the subject's autonomous unity undone.

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[2] At the end of *Subjects of Desire* (1987), Judith Butler rightly asks if French theory managed to escape Hegel after all. She echoed Foucault concluding his inaugural address at the *College de France:* "We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us" ("Discourse on Language" 1971, 235). See the last paragraph of this chapter for my own experience of this Hegelian effect.

2. If the *cogito* were primordially constituted by dualism, by the split between mind and world, this would follow. But it was not. There was no dualism at the *cogito's* original moment—and no subjective unity either.

3. Before the announcement, "I think therefore I am" posits a substantive self, I am—like the dreamer or the hallucinator—dispersed in the flow of consciousness, without beginning or end. There is no outside world to unify myself in relation to. If one enters fully into this scene of contingent flow, as Hume did in his critique of the Cartesian subject, one can make a comparison Hume could not: somehow, Descartes imagined virtual reality.[3]

4. Back when Structuralism held sway, the "arbitrary" relation of signifier to signified was axiomatic. But with the collapse of the sign into temporality, the notion "arbitrary" was replaced by notions that foregrounded the liberated signifier in terms like "iterability" and "play" and "writing."

5. Had the concept of arbitrary been retained, its classic venue—the individual will—could have been restored along with the subject's very element, temporality. What post-structuralism calls the "process of signification"—the associations, reiterations, and differences that arise in and around whatever one attends to—all that "play" would then have appeared as the subject's arbitrary choices. No wonder subject talk was banned.

6. Protected by this prohibition, the *cogito* ascended incognito to the godhood it was aiming for all along. Now anything *could* mean "whatever you want"—but that odious expression was, in effect, transmuted into the passive-voiced "whatever occurs to you" as a "site" of forces and discourses. *From the modern vantage point*, it looks like the postmodern subject is exercising its will arbitrarily and calling it the play of the sign to which it is subjected.

The "arbitrariness" of Structuralism's sign may be the most suggestive and productive feature of modernist theories of language. It is essential to all

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[3] "I will suppose … that some malignant demon, who is at once exceedingly potent and deceitful, has employed all his artifice to deceive me; I will suppose that the sky, the air, the earth, colors, figures, sounds, and all external things, are nothing better than the illusions of dreams. … I will consider myself as without hands, eyes, flesh, blood, or any of the senses, and as falsely believing that I am possessed of these" (1975 (1641), 100).

correspondence theories of meaning in the analytic tradition—including Wittgenstein's terminal names in the *Tractatus* (his insistence on "shared form" at the propositional/factual level retains "resemblance"—but only by sheer force, since there are no examples of atomic facts and propositions). A theorist's stipulation was sufficient to guarantee meaning in the abstract synchronic. And, with history no longer a Whig narrative, the early modern idea of stipulation (which featured arbitrariness of the will) lost the transparency it had when a convention of language inventors was posited at the moment of emergence from the state of nature. Now the arbitrariness—if it refers to origins at all—is opaque in principle because the ways meaning actually gets established are so convoluted and obscure that the notion merges with the idea of accident. As every family with its own little slang can tell you, myriad are the ways of language innovation and the role of accident is central. Only a story can account for each case. That fusion would merge with the "accidental" quality of unconscious "creation" ("choices" in a new sense), depth psychology being equally opaque—until new sciences like psychoanalysis and Structuralism come along to "stipulate" in a methodologically transparent way (at a convention of science inventors!) what opaque representations at the level of lived experience "really" are.

A profound philosophical insight was at the root of this substitutional maneuver—though innocent of responsibility for it, as a maneuver. That insight can be found in Wittgenstein and Ryle and Derrida and many others, going back—as so many skeptical insights do—to Hume. It is a genuine clarification of the phenomenology of consciousness, this noticing that we are more patients of our thoughts than agents. And, yes, that does undermine the dualistic *cogito*, in its subsequent unity, over and against the outside world, after God leveraged it out of solipsism, after the *cogito* began to think of itself as the agent of its thoughts just as it was agent of its deeds. But this insight doesn't overcome the *cogito* in its essence; on the contrary, it *is* the *cogito* in its originary state. The arbitrary will of Descartes' *cogito* in its virtual world has, in effect, been reinscribed in theory as the play of signs in a *habitus* that has, as a matter of fact, become more and more virtualized. The closer the world gets to being WorldWorld (compare *SeaWorld*, *DisneyWorld*), the closer a technologically enhanced subject, understood now as Being-in-WorldWorld, comes to realizing its original aim: to be "Lord and Master of Nature" as Descartes put it in the sixth discourse—although, to be sure, a second nature of the *cogito's* own making is now at issue.

The emergence of virtual realities as we know them today, in myriad and hybrid forms, was inarguably the context that conditioned the emergence of postmodernism. The center did not hold—but not because Derrida et al. tricked a bunch of American patsies into joining a pomo "cargo cult" (Lilla 2015). It was new technologies of representation transforming lives into representations of lives that eroded the center—Derrida just articulated the historical moment, as philosophers do. Virtual realities have a particular feel to them which they share with postmodern creations, the prose of theory very much included. It's that *anime* feel, the whoosh and ping, the perpetual motion that seeks what's next before what is can settle or be grasped—the aura, in short, of surface, as in surf.[4] And that aura oozed off the screens into theme parks and malls and oozed out of them into restored and "historic" neighborhoods and towns. A virtual world is a world of representations that represent nothing but themselves and all of them are perpetually soliciting attention, addressing or expressing "me." It seems that Descartes, already credited with so much prophecy, was, in his solipsism, present at this creation as well.

It is tempting to bring this to dialectical closure—to claim that a sublation of Hegelian proportions has been described and that the post-postmodern has announced itself. But here, as so often, I am grateful to Rorty (whom I nevertheless resent for refusing to honor, as Wittgenstein did, the metaphysical impulse). Still, his example serves. Some restraint may be in order. Perhaps the conclusion should be cast in the form of questions? Is the immanent possibility of the virtualization of ex-istence the apotheosis of Heideggerian enframing? Is world history mocking the modern subject's desire to be God by showing that simulacra are all it can create? Or is something else entirely in the offing—some Deleuzean novelty on the nether side of the threshold upon which we now stand?

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[4] Compare Fredric Jameson on "pastiche" and "surface" in *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991).

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Conclusion: Toward a New Humanism

The owl of Minerva spreads its wings at dusk. (Hegel)

With something like posthumanism on the horizon,[1] it makes a certain sense to ask if it might now be possible for humanism to fulfill itself, to approach the universality that was its ideal. This conclusion will challenge the coming generation to rethink the philosophical canon, the cultural-historical record, and the anthropological archive with this possibility in mind. A description of how a truly inclusive humanism might get under way can be found in my "Common Ground" (*Harper's Magazine* 2003), "Ethics and the Limits of Evolutionary Psychology" (*The Hedgehog Review* 2013), and *Towards a New Foundation for Human Rights* (forthcoming from Stanford University Press)—as well as in this book's effort to give a fair account of the works and lives of the people it discussed.

The postmodern moment, for all of its excesses and shortcomings, has been a necessary one—that is the first message of this book. The autonomous modern subject never existed. It was never free from the forms of embodiment it sought to escape or control. And it was never in charge. Since—pick your historical trauma: the French Revolution, WWI?—it has

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[1] Besides speculative ideas about the "coming singularity" (Kurzweil 2005), more serious academic accounts include Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (1999); Francis Fukuyama's *The Posthuman Future* (2005); and Cary Wolfe's *What is Posthumanism?* (2010).

been more like a hapless passenger on a runaway train masquerading as the engineer, pulling levers with shifting linkages, pushing buttons with random functions, barking orders to a spastic crew, suppressing dread with assertions of authority. That subject had to be exposed in its essential dependence, as consciousness, on how life-worlds are arranged and how human ventures unfold in ways only narrative can reveal.

And, finally, modernity's universal humanism was only ever an ideal that all too often functioned as a lie. That lie had to be exposed, and it had to be exposed by people who were excluded or exploited by institutions that claimed to represent that ideal. That has been the practical aspect of this moment's necessity. And if those who flourished in those institutions were discomfited, that too was necessary, no matter how innocent of intentional complicity they may have been personally, no matter how messy the process, no matter what curricular foolishness ensued. A small price to pay for historical change in the direction of justice—as history's bloody record shows.

But even though it often functioned as a lie, the concept and project of universal humanism is as close to truth as we abandoned mortals can hope to get in this indifferent world.[2] That is the second message of this book. I differ from most critics of postmodernism, right and left, in that I acknowledge the ethical necessity of the disruption it brought—from which it follows that only by working with and through the disruption can we hope to revive the cause of human progress, framed in terms more suited to the world we live in now. To those on the right and the left still insisting on the viability of whatever current in the flow of Western thought they still believe in, I say—if your tradition is alive it will produce, not just custodians, but creators.

All of us, all human beings, were thrown into situations we did not choose and came to consciousness in accordance with our circumstances. A few of us have been exposed—by sheer accident, all undeserving—to resources that allow us to have some sense of humanity's situation as a whole, a sense of the place of our species in time and space, a sense of the diversity of peoples and ways of life, and a sense of the contingency and fragility of it all—all this beauty, all this fury, for what? What are we to make of it and how should we live, before we die?

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[2] Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* "All the elements of a solution to the great problems of humanity have, at different times, existed in European thought. But Europeans have not carried out in practice the mission which fell to them" ([1961] 2004, 237). He was giving up on Europe in that book—but he recognized the essential problem nevertheless.

And here those questions are addressed—it must be admitted—to the educated few. It is, *in fact*, up to the educated few to take responsibility for creating the vocabularies that will express anew the values of universal humanism, casting them into idioms adequate to humanity's diversity and to this historical moment. If this looks like a call for reviving Kant's idea of an enlightened vanguard, so be it.[3] But notice this difference: the educated few to whom this call is addressed are to be found today across the globe, in almost every nation, claiming almost every identity, speaking almost every language. That's a big difference. And it is this cohort—and only this cohort—that might commit itself in an effective way to Peter Singer's "expanding circle of moral concern" that now looks like the world's only hope for rising above the provincial madness that has descended upon us all. It remains to be seen if they will accept the responsibility (able-to-respond) for meeting this challenge that, in fact, only they have.

In search of a hopeful conclusion, in the midst of the crazy confusion that reigns in the Age of Trump and his ilk at the time of this writing, we might begin here, with this uncomfortable irony: who now carries the banner of transgression? Who is upending norms? Who is disrupting conventional procedures and expectations? Not what's left of the left.[4] But Hegel was not the only one to discover, in ironic reversals of this sort, the motor of social change. The Frankfurt School may have refused his metaphysics, but dialectic still seemed to them to propel historical developments. So, yes, it now seems apparent that the expressive identity politics of our mediated age has entered a baroque period. When fat acceptance activists can plausibly justify their efforts to put "person of size" alongside "person of color" in the intersectional political matrix because, undeniably, obesity is a physical, material condition and obese people are subjected to discrimination in the workplace, then our concept of "political"

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[3] Some will find this focus on the human misguided, an ethical capitulation—a betrayal of nature and other forms of life. That concern deserves serious consideration (see *Towards a New Foundation for Human Rights*, forthcoming from Stanford University Press). In a nutshell, though, it comes down to this for me: are we willing to accept the special responsibility that evidently attaches to being human? We are writing and reading books like this, not whales. That's just a fact and it holds even if—and I am seriously willing to entertain this possibility—whales are as, or even more, worthy of existence than we.

[4] I remember when I first heard that Trump wasn't taking his daily security brief from the CIA seriously, I caught myself tut-tutting like a stereotypical schoolmarm in a 1940s movie—me, a veteran of the 1960s. A weird situation. I felt the same when I heard Ralph Nader say, after Trump's election, that our only hope lay with the professional bureaucracy continuing to do its job.

needs rethinking. But when more or less everything exists as *representation*, on all sides of our cultural politics, then controversies over oppressive political correctness, condescending journalists, self-righteous celebrities, kneeling football players, *ante-bellum* statuary, micro-aggression, fat shaming, and transgender bathroom access typically loom larger than the material well-being of millions of people for whom physical survival is a daily challenge.

A word at this juncture about what I mean by "loom larger." I don't mean that if you asked identity politics activists what was more important, millions of starving children in distant lands exploited by global capitalism and its local allies or the latest lurid revelations of sexual harassment or police violence closer to home, they would typically say their concerns were more important. I do mean that if we had an ergometer that measured how much time and energy goes into feeling outraged and posting and tweeting and demonstrating about identity politics issues as compared to depredations of global capital the results would—well, they would show what I mean by "loom larger."

Confronted with this spectacle, old-fashioned progressives committed to ideals of economic justice and the welfare of the planet cannot help but be discouraged. When our attention is held hostage to hyper-dramatic but narrowly focused "issues" like police killings or school shootings or sexual harassment, then the dramatic demands of movements anchored to reality performance are served, not only on mainstream news and website platforms, but on cell phone snapshots and videos of participants and witnesses who live their lives on social media. On the other hand, if—as seems possible as of this writing—these identity-driven mass performances should gain sufficient traction in old-fashioned reality to inspire, say, a really significant increase in voter turnout among minority voters and 18-year-olds in years to come in the USA, that would be a hopeful sign indeed. Perhaps Facebook activism and Twitter-driven pop-up demonstrations are merging somehow with organization on the ground and progressives will launch campaigns at, say, the state assembly level where religious fundamentalists and Tea Party activists have been gerrymandering districts for decades. The contours of this hybrid form of public life are, after all, only beginning to take shape and it may be that fears of mass abduction by simulation will prove to be premature. Or perhaps not. The wheel, as the man said, is still in spin.

But it is obvious now that Donald Trump—like Ronald Reagan before him, though in a different register—has been all about identity politics and the intractable allegiance of his "base" will (or did?) last only so long as

he continues (or continued?) to give their grievances public expression. Grievance over what? Over not mattering, over a lack of representation—not "representation" as in legislatures and state houses, but "representation" as in "there I am, on the public screen, for all to attend to, getting my due." And, just as surely, the rise of "autocratic populism" from Hungary to Turkey to India reflects the same identity dynamic. And the Taliban and ISIS, *performing* their atrocities for curated websites—that is identity politics too. So is China's image of itself—much ballyhooed as "resurgent nationalism," but better understood as another carefully curated, ongoing-in-real-time, representation of people to themselves on the ubiquitous screens that constitute *the* political venue in a mediated age (see de Zengotita 2006).

So this is the situation to which serious intellectuals committed to disclosing truth as well as taking a stand must turn their attention. It is their duty. But that means much more than updating McLuhan and Baudrillard and thinking of creative ways to engage the apathetic masses with *more* effective media. It means, on the contrary, stepping way back from this situation. It means trying to place it in historical and anthropological context. It means creating new master narratives, stories that can tell us who we are today, in this context, but also, and at the same time, who we are in general. The human condition itself must be addressed once again if we are to comprehend the mediated fragmentation that is engulfing all of us now.[5] And we would be best served if everyone involved were to suspend for the nonce their entrenched assumptions about how it all works and make a serious effort to start from scratch—to ask anew: who are we? What manner of creature is this?

The moment is right for this revival. The personal testimonies of people invested in identity politics are shot through with references to what remains, in spite of intersectional complexities, the fundamental injustice inherent in stereotypes—namely, the devaluation of the unique human beings subjected to them. A simple sense of fairness, responsive to that injustice, still motivates activism and the young, especially, are ready for an intellectual and political enterprise that embraces difference while reaching for universal understanding of what it is to simply be human—with all the tensions that aspiration entails. Consider this little gem, with its Hegelian echoes, from an

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[5] Husserl thought that *Being and Time*, in rejecting the transcendental ego and focusing on average everydayness, had lapsed into mere anthropology (compare "psychologism" as the modernist philosopher's epithet). And creators of French theory dismissed all phenomenology—indeed, any discourse that privileged the subject and its object world as "anthropology" (Kant, e.g., modern humanism in general). See Gutting (2013, 39–42). The shoe fits, and I wear it comfortably.

account of an "LGBTQIA" student conference on sexual identity at the University of Pennsylvania. Many in that audience surely knew that "humanism" was not to be countenanced, that it names a Eurocentric normative program. But, for a moment, for some reason, they forgot:

> At one point, Santiago, a curly-haired freshman from Colombia, stood before the crowd. … "Why do only certain letters get to be in the full acronym?" he asked. Then he rattled off a list of gender identities. … "We have our lesbians, our gays," he said, before adding, "bisexual, transsexual, queer, homosexual, asexual." He took a breath and continued. "Pansexual. Omnisexual. Trisexual. Agender. Bi-gender. Third gender. Transgender. Transvestite. Intersexual. Two-spirit. Hijra. Polyamorous." By now, the list had turned into free verse. He ended: "Undecided. Questioning. Other. Human."
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> The room burst into applause. (Michael Schulman in *New York Times*, 10 January 2013)

As the list approaches a level of granularity suggesting complete individualization, a condition in which each person's sexual/gender identity might be entitled to its own rubric, Santiago finds himself shifting to the most general descriptors, culminating in "human." A genuinely dialectical moment that reflects a core connection that has been in play from the beginning of the humanist venture: humanity in general and unique individuals are two sides of the same coin. It is this aspect of identity politics, the devolution to the personal, especially as expressed in a media-saturated popular culture inextricably bound up with commercial advertising, that led so many critics on the traditional left to see in it simply a manifestation of an ascendant neo-liberalism.

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Author Index[1]

A

Abrams, M. H., 32, 318

Adorno, Theodor W., 15, 20, 34, 35, 43n21, 92, 92n1, 98n7, 99, 122, 127–135, 132n5, 135n7, 137, 156, 186, 194, 220, 251n58, 254, 332

Allen, Graham, 186, 200

Althaus, Horst, 41

Aristotle, 21, 81, 82, 84, 236, 265, 328

Arnold, Matthew, 2, 84

Aronowitz, Stanley, 135

Arp, Jean, 57

Artaud, Antonin, 141, 158, 173, 205n16, 253, 282n83, 301

Austin, J. L., 205, 214–218, 217n31, 220–224, 220n33, 226, 229, 233, 236n48, 237

B

Bacon, Francis, 256, 282n83

Bahktin, Mikhail, 208

Banfield, Anne, 96n3

Baring, Edward, 205

Barraque, Jean, 286

Barsky, Robert F., 313n1

Barthes, Roland, 88, 99, 141, 152n3, 157, 160n10, 163, 164, 166, 170, 171, 176, 183–204, 185n3, 187n6, 188n7, 196n10, 200n14, 246, 261, 283, 293, 294, 295n94, 315, 319, 339

Barzun, Jacques, 7, 25n8, 59

Bataille, Georges, 28, 110, 138, 141, 158, 283, 285, 286n85, 288–291, 290n89, 293, 303

Baudelaire, Charles, 69, 287

Baudrillard, Jean, 297, 298, 314, 325, 357

Beardsley, Monroe Curtis, 62, 197, 319

Beaulieu, Alain, 253

Beckett, Samuel, 72, 128, 141

Benjamin, Walter, 132n5, 158

Bentham, Jeremy, 38, 285

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.

Subject Index[1]

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.

Existentialism/existential, 69, 93, 140, 150, 151, 241n53, 245, 295, 332

Expression, 5, 6, 23, 24, 42n19, 43n22, 44, 49, 62, 69, 71, 92, 93, 96, 102, 109, 111, 112, 121, 125, 127, 138, 160n10, 164, 166, 172, 183, 196n10, 198, 199, 207, 208, 208n20, 211–214, 217, 220, 231, 250, 251, 256–269, 271, 275, 277, 294, 318, 330, 338, 348, 357

Exteriority, 196, 288, 289

F

Facebook, 164, 280, 298, 320, 332

Fashion, 31–33, 50, 73, 76, 77, 151, 162, 170, 183, 192, 203, 238n50, 240, 292n91, 293, 296, 299, 316n2, 322, 345

Feeling, 17, 31, 32, 40, 43, 49, 50, 58, 61, 62, 65, 77, 79, 87, 95, 131, 138, 197–200, 202, 203, 213, 221, 238, 248, 254, 285–287

Final vocabulary, 305

Finnegans Wake, 72, 205, 233, 237

Forces/noun, 19, 27, 28n9, 39, 40, 45, 50, 57, 70, 81, 88, 98, 99, 118–122, 120n3, 130–132, 140, 154, 158, 167, 169, 172, 184, 202, 235, 237, 243, 249n56, 253, 254, 258, 260–263, 265, 266n73, 268, 271, 273, 274, 277n81, 294, 303, 320, 322, 336, 348

France, 15, 25, 27, 28, 28n9, 36, 41, 44n23, 45, 46n24, 75, 105, 124n7, 131n3, 137, 138, 140n5, 141, 154, 156, 161, 170n19, 171, 175, 176, 187, 189, 193,

203, 205, 206, 214, 241n53, 274, 293, 297–299, 306, 313, 316n2, 322, 332, 338, 340

Frankenstein, 39n13

Frankfurt School, 116, 128–130, 131n3, 137, 193, 223, 237n48, 321, 355

French Communist Party (PCF), 116, 148–150, 158–160, 163n13, 175

French Revolution, 21, 28, 41, 353

Friendship, 115, 297, 298n95

Functionalism, 60, 82

Futurism, 69, 70

G

Gender, 124n8, 165, 174, 305, 317, 321, 330–333, 358

Genealogy, 40, 122, 275, 293, 294, 296, 302, 305, 320

Gene/genome, 22, 258, 260

General text, 152n3, 206, 229, 233, 317n3

Genius, 33, 61, 70, 71, 164

Germany, 34, 47n25, 325

God, 11, 16, 18, 21–25, 29, 38, 41n17, 42, 42n19, 43n22, 44, 48, 57, 59–61, 71, 72, 87, 91, 119, 120, 144n7, 169, 176, 194, 196, 249, 252–282, 285, 288–290, 293, 296, 326, 329, 345–350

Google, 345n1

Grammar, 72, 83, 96, 102, 104–107, 109, 111, 124, 138, 157, 182, 187, 190, 191, 195, 205, 208, 210, 213, 214, 228, 231–234, 291, 331

Greece/Greek, 41, 173, 185n3, 293, 296, 297, 298n95