

THE CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE OF MARX, HEGEL AND  
FREUD FOR A SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY OF THE SUBJECT

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## ABSTRACT

Marxist social theory is concerned with the dialectic between the transformation of consciousness and the revolutionary transformation of society. Consequently, a material and objective analysis of society is not sufficient; as a philosophy of praxis, Marxism also requires a theory of subjectivity. In the first chapter, the problem of subjectivity is dealt with in relation to major themes in Marx's writings. It is argued that Marx's conception of science is far too restrictive from the point of view of subjectivity, and that his commitment to materialism is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of Hegel. The second chapter considers Hegel's contribution to an understanding of subjectivity. Despite the many problems that are associated with Hegel's thought, it is argued that The Phenomenology of Spirit contains the outlines of a dialectical theory of subjectivity. Particular emphasis is given to Hegel's analysis of language and his theory of desire, two areas in which his understanding of subjectivity surpasses that of Marx. In the third chapter, it is argued that psychoanalysis is capable of providing Marxism with a theory of subjectivity, but only if Freud's doctrine is reformulated in terms of the Hegelian theory of desire. This has been attempted by Jacques Lacan, whose re-reading of Freud is considered in some detail. Finally it is concluded that Lacan's interpretation of Freud lays the basis for the eventual reconciliation of Marxism and psychoanalysis.

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### INTRODUCTION

The history of works that have attempted some sort of synthesis of psychoanalysis and Marxism has not been a happy one. As Russell Jacoby notes in his own contribution to the Marx-Freud debate ("Negative psychoanalysis and Marxism: towards an objective theory of subjectivity" in *Telos*, 1972, 14, 1),

Those seeking to work out the relationship between Marxism and psychoanalysis have not been immune to the intellectual division of labour that severs the life nerve of dialectical thought. The various attempts to interpret Marx and Freud have been plagued by reductionism: the ability to retain the tension between individual and society, psychology and political economy.<sup>1</sup>

That the various attempts to create a Marxist psychoanalysis have resulted in either pseudo-resolution or non-resolution is hardly surprising in view of the many differences between Marx and Freud. Aside from their obvious political differences—Marx was first and foremost a revolutionary, whereas Freud sought to defend the existing order from the negative forces generated within it—there are important philosophical and methodological differences between the two. Marx's materialism was allied to a methodological collectivism; Freud, it must be admitted, was an idealist whose methodology was individualistic in nature.

In the past, these differences have been reconciled by simplifying either psychoanalysis, or Marxism, or both. Herbert Marcuse, for example, approaches psychoanalysis as if the only problem with Freud is his "idealist philosophy of history." This enables Marcuse to read materialist categories into Freud, thereby creating the appearance of a Marxist psychoanalysis. But in unpacking the sociological content of Freud's thought (an important enough task in its own right), Marcuse remains trapped within the Freudian problematic, eventually accepting

the death drive as a transhistorical fact of social and psychic life.

Marcuse is no better in this respect than Wilhelm Reich, whose flat denial of the death drive was tied to a biological essentialism in which genital sexuality was assigned the supreme value. Reich's theory of the orgasm led to an idealization of nature, and to ever more vehement denunciations of culture. Reich took the view that Freud was the Adam Smith of the psyche, and that his work was analogous to Marx's critique of political economy. But his "inversion" of Freud resulted in a culture/nature dualism infinitely cruder than Freud's own, and an anti-intellectualism quite out of keeping with the Marxist enterprise.

All this is not to say that the pioneering efforts of Freud-Marxists such as Reich and Marcuse were in vain. Despite their limitations, both Reich and Marcuse were able to make significant contributions to a Marxist understanding of subjectivity. Reich was particularly strong on the role of repression in the formation of character structure, which he related to the reification and authoritarianism of bourgeois society. Marcuse freed Marxist aesthetics from the strictures of "social realism" through his appropriation of the Freudian theory of sublimation, seeing art as an embodiment of the pleasure principle, the historical negation of the repressive reality principle upon which capitalism is based. Reich and Marcuse both stressed the overcoming of alienation through a new form of emancipatory praxis made possible by the freeing of erotic energy from the fetters imposed by the "surplus repression" of capitalist society. Unlike Erich Fromm, who found Freud's theory of drives impossible to reconcile with his commitment to humanism, Reich and Marcuse insisted that the libido theory was essential to the psychoanalytic critique of "civilization" (redefined as class society). To abandon the theory of drives, in the opinion of these two foremost Freud-Marxists, was to deprive psychoanalysis of its material basis, leading straight to idealism and eventual assimilation by the bourgeois order.

But although there were some instances when Reich and Marcuse managed to combine Marxist and Freudian concepts, there was a general tendency simply to pass on Freudian concepts without examining their theoretical or methodological bases, and then to superimpose Marxist categories in order to give these concepts a sociological content. In this way, two contradictory conceptual schemes were able to co-exist, with explanation at the level of the individual couched in Freudian terms, and explanations at the level of society situated within a Marxist framework. The methodological problem of individualism versus collectivism remained unresolved, as did the problem of Freud's idealism in relation to Marx's materialism. Neither Reich nor Marcuse were able to give a satisfactory account of the relationship between the logic of capitalism and the logic of the psyche. Consequently, the marriage of Marx and Freud has yet to be consummated. Marxism still lacks an objective theory of subjectivity while psychoanalysis continues, in North America at least, to be merely one of many individualistic therapies, promising self-improvement without calling society into question.

The main goal of this thesis is to provide what is most lacking from the previous unsuccessful attempts to interpret Marx and Freud, namely an adequate account of the relation of the epistemological foundations of Marxism and Psychoanalysis. Following Coward and Ellis,<sup>2</sup> we argue that the encounter of the two disciplines must involve a critical analysis of their common problem: *language*. The problem of language is associated with the problem of consciousness in Marx's writing, and in the first chapter we examine Marx's theory of consciousness in relation to that of Hegel. The discussion is focussed on four responses to Hegel, three of them directly attributable to Marx himself, the fourth that of Nietzsche, which deal with the problem of consciousness in relation to (1) practice; (2) science; (3) philosophy; and (4) radical skepticism. We argue that Marx's conception of science places undue emphasis on a material and objective analysis at the expense of an adequate understanding of consciousness

and subjectivity, and conclude that his failure to come to terms with Hegelian philosophy compels us to return to the profounder Hegel.

The second chapter considers the relation of self-consciousness to human nature, to desire, and to language, as presented by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Despite the many problems that are associated with Hegel's thought, we argue that the *Phenomenology* contains the outlines of a dialectical theory of subjectivity. But while Hegel's understanding of subjectivity and consciousness is in many ways superior to that of Marx's, it remains an essentially abstract understanding which still requires a concrete theoretical content in order to become practically meaningful.

In the third chapter, we argue that psychoanalysis is capable of providing a dialectical theory of subjectivity, but only if Freud's positivist conception is replaced by a hermeneutic approach to psychoanalytic theory. We examine Jacques Lacan's attempt to reformulate Freud's doctrine in terms of language and desire, themes that have been developed by us in our discussion of Hegel in Chapter Two. Finally, we bring Marxism and psychoanalysis together, arguing that language is the essential mediation between the operation of ideology, the formation of the subject, and the creation of unconscious desire. Our synthesis of Marx and Freud depends explicitly upon a re-interpretation of the Hegelian theory of desire, and also upon the modern theory of structural linguistics, as developed by Saussure, Jakobson and others.

We conclude that Lacan's interpretation is compatible with a Marxist analysis of social relations, especially the Marxist theory of ideology, which is directly concerned with the central problem of psychoanalysis: the demystification of "practical needs," and the subversion of a "dominant" form of consciousness which conceals contradictions from the historical subject. In the case of social conflict, this dominant form of consciousness is *ideology*; in the case of the individual subject, it is the false unity of the *ego*. The connection between ideology and the ego is dealt with at two levels, both of which

are essential for an objective theory of subjectivity: on the one hand, ideology corresponds to a structure which is responsible for the *form* of the relationship between the subject and the ego; on the other hand, ideology regulates the specific *contents* of the ego in the practical relationship between human subjects and the world.

NOTES--INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>As given.

<sup>2</sup>R. Coward and J. Ellis, *Language and Materialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1978) .

## CHAPTER ONE

### I. INTRODUCTION

The continuing importance of philosophy for an understanding of human history and society follows from the basic premise of all the social sciences, which is that *objective knowledge of man is also self-knowledge for man*. The social sciences are distinguished from natural science by virtue of the consciousness, the subjective meaning or "intentionality" of their subject matter (i.e. human beings). Because of this, the social sciences' need for philosophy is greater than that of the natural sciences, although this does not mean that natural scientists are unable to derive self-knowledge from their studies, nor that a philosophy of nature would have nothing to say about human subjects. Philosophy enables the objective knowledge obtained by means of natural scientific observation, experimentation, etc. to be related to human subjectivity, together with the increased power over the world which this knowledge makes possible. All sciences are *human activities* which require philosophic *elucidation* in order to make sense of their scientific *explanations*.

Among the social sciences it is *sociology* whose relationship to philosophy is of special importance. Like philosophy, sociology deals essentially with the general in which the particular is subsumed—not just particular human individuals within their social life, but also the various social sciences which deal with one or another aspect of social life in relative isolation from all the others. The generalized self-knowledge of philosophy and the generalized objective knowledge of sociology cannot be held separate—they presuppose one another—and their continuing estrangement within bourgeois academic culture can only be taken as a further indication of the moral and political crisis facing modern man. Social philosophy (or the philosophy of society) constitutes a meeting place where the many fragmented social sciences can rediscover their common ground.

When Marx declared that "the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it,"<sup>1</sup> he was not so much repudiating the study of philosophy as an appropriate endeavour for political radicals as affirming that philosophy must be directly connected to the transformation of objective reality. Although Marx eventually "settled accounts" with the "philosophical conscience" of his youth, the *Theses on Feuerbach* do not entail the rejection of philosophy; in fact, they presuppose a mode of knowledge corresponding to philosophical self-understanding as a necessary accompaniment to self-transforming practice. As Karl Korsch comments, the *Theses on Feuerbach* assert the unity (and not the opposition) of philosophy and the transformation of objective reality *in practice*:

It [Thesis XI] only expresses a categorical rejection of all theory, philosophical or scientific, that is not at the same time practice—real, terrestrial, immanent, human and sensuous practice.... Theoretical criticism and the practical overthrow are here inseparable activities, not in any abstract sense but as a concrete and real alteration of the concrete and real world of bourgeois society.<sup>2</sup>

We identify ourselves with the Marxian project of a conscious history (i.e. an end to man's prehistory). We are not content to interpret the world, and insist that whatever understanding we gain of the transformation of objective reality is simultaneously an understanding of our own self-transformation. This places us beyond Hegel, who makes the meaning of all reality depend on its historical completion, and who therefore rules out the possibility of a conscious history. Our approach aims at revealing the meaning of reality as it constitutes itself into the historical process, which is a process without an end. History has neither a goal of its own nor some final point at which it comes to rest, as long as human beings continue to assert their independence vis-a-vis a given human or natural state of affairs.

In this chapter, we attempt to ascertain what it is in Hegel that is problematic from the point of view of historical consciousness. In order to do this we must ask ourselves:

- (1) whether the problem is essentially that of philosophy's relation to practice;
- (2) whether it is primarily a question of philosophy versus science;
- (3) whether it is a problem of one type of philosophy which must be replaced by another;
- (4) whether this "problem" is inherent in all historical thought.

In the remainder of this chapter, we shall consider these four possible "interpretations" of history both separately and in relation to one another. The outcome of the discussion will not only determine our relationship to the Hegelian dialectic and its understanding of the relation of subject and object, but will help to establish an appropriate method with which to approach our subject matter.

## II. PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE

Marx gave prominence to the relation of philosophy to practice in his early writings. In his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction*,<sup>3</sup> Marx first of all redefined the object of philosophy, which in Germany had been excessively preoccupied with religious criticism. While acknowledging such criticism to be the "precondition of all critique,"<sup>4</sup> Marx went on to argue that philosophy must criticize not *religion* but the *real world*, of which religion is but the "spiritual aroma."<sup>5</sup> Thus, "the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics."<sup>6</sup>

Marx adopts the position that it is not critical thought but the revolutionary transformation of society which will emancipate mankind. For it is only the revolutionary transformation of society which is capable of meeting the radical demand of critical thought for human freedom. This demand is deduced by Marx from the philosophical critique of religious "self-estrangement":

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up the condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.<sup>7</sup>

But if only social revolution is capable of *realizing* philosophy, then it is necessary to identify the conditions which make social revolution a possibility. According to Marx, it is the emergence of the *proletariat* which makes possible the realization of philosophy in practice; the "positive possibility" or material basis of social revolution is discovered to exist in

the formation of a class with radical chains, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, a class which is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere which has a universal character because of its universal suffering and which lays claim to no particular right because the wrong it suffers is not a particular wrong but wrong in general.<sup>8</sup>

The proletariat is therefore *in actuality* the universal class which Hegel had imagined the bureaucracy to be.

Having identified the proletariat as that force which was capable of realizing philosophy, Marx reformulated the relation of philosophy to practice in the following manner:

Just as philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy ...the head of emancipation is philosophy, its heart the proletariat. Philosophy cannot realize itself without the transcendence (*Aufhebung*) of the proletariat, and the proletariat cannot transcend itself without the realization (*Verwirklichung*) of philosophy.<sup>9</sup>

Philosophy was therefore caught up in the whole movement of history of which the proletariat was the negative product. By turning the "criticism of heaven" into the "criticism of earth," Marx had demonstrated the necessity of overcoming the conditions which gave rise to religious self-estrangement, which in turn required of philosophy that it abandon its separate and contemplative attitude towards reality. Criticism was no longer to be thought of as an end in itself: as consciousness of the

struggle against existing conditions, criticism was simply a means to an end. Insofar as this struggle was the struggle of real human beings in their everyday lives, philosophy was no longer concerned solely with philosophical issues such as "truth," but had to address itself to human needs and desires. These needs and desires constituted the starting point for criticism and (through their satisfaction) its goal, *man* (and not Spirit) was the alpha and omega of philosophy.

The realization of philosophy coincides with its destruction. The inversion carried out by Marx did not consist (as Stalin thought) of putting the materialist development of productive forces in the place of the Hegelian Spirit, moving towards its encounter with itself in time, its historical wounds leaving no scars. Such a conception is essentially no less contemplative than its Hegelian counterpart. The history of man, history become real, no longer has an *end*—such a fiction could only be introduced from outside history.

Critical thought originates in the succession of struggles which make up history. As we have seen, Hegel's political philosophy concerned itself merely with the *results* of the bourgeois revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries, effectively seeking a *reconciliation* with them. As Karl Korsch notes in his *Theses on Hegel and Revolution*,

Even as a philosophy of the bourgeois revolution, it does not express the entire process of this revolution, but only its final conclusion. In this sense, it is not a philosophy of the revolution, but of the restoration.<sup>10</sup>

Doing for the last time the work of the philosopher, Hegel had managed to preserve the external position of thought in relation to history. Marx, however, completely ruined Hegel's position as separate from what happens; philosophy could no longer be contemplation by a supreme external agent. From now on, theory had to know what its thinker *wanted* and *how he got it*.

The realization of philosophy entailed an entirely new approach to "truth." In the second thesis on Feuerbach, written within two years of the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx summarized his epistemological position:

The question of whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question.<sup>11</sup>

This is essentially no different to the position Marx took in the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, where, following his statement that "theory becomes a material force once it has gripped the masses,"<sup>12</sup> Marx tries to show how radical theory (as opposed to, say, religious fervour) realizes itself in practice:

Theory is capable of gripping the masses when it demonstrates *ad hominem*, and it demonstrates *ad hominem* when it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp things by the root. But for man the root is man himself.<sup>13</sup>

Slightly further on, Marx makes the crucial observation that, "Theory is realized in a people only insofar as it is a realization of the people's needs,"<sup>14</sup> which prompts the question,

Will theoretical needs be directly practical needs? *It is not enough that thought should strive to realize itself; reality itself must strive towards thought.*<sup>15</sup>

The non-identity of thought and reality is seen by Marx as the difference between theoretical needs and practical needs; the gap that separates the two constitutes "the negative in general" which Hegel had subsumed in the philosophic conception of Spirit. Hegel's resolution of the contradiction between thought and reality preserved the negativity of their interrelationship but only insofar as this negativity existed for thought (as Spirit). Marx redefined this negativity in terms of the practical activity of human subjects. Human needs could not be established by philosophy that was isolated from practice. Such philosophy might be capable of understanding the nature of "the thought which strives to realize itself" but could not acquire more than an abstract understanding of "the reality which strives towards thought."

Hegel's one-sidedness consisted not so much in the denial of a reality which moves in the direction of thought as in the abstract way

in which reality was characterized. Both Hegel and Marx conceived of reality as the living subject positing itself through the production and reproduction of its own existence, but Marx understood this subject to be man rather than Spirit. If Hegel had equated man with self-consciousness, Marx reversed the terms and equated self-consciousness with man. Human activity replaces philosophical thought as the mediation between thought and reality which is capable of realizing both theoretical and practical needs. The gap between thought and reality could only be bridged in practice; practice was therefore the only tribunal where the judgement of truth could be disclosed.

All this is not to say that Hegel had been exposed by Marx as an "idealist" philosopher. Hegel's error lay in his failure to recognize the significance of practice other than the practice of philosophy—which, strictly speaking, isn't practice at all. Hegel was a philosophical realist who never progressed beyond a philosophical conception of reality, and although he stressed the importance of objective reality and its "concrete-form" his understanding of it was regrettably abstract.

The distinction between "philosophical" or "abstract" realism and straightforward idealism may strike one as being rather tenuous, but it is crucial for an understanding of the relation of Marxian theory to Hegelian method. The essential difference between Hegel and Fichte was that the latter maintained that the object of knowledge was "posited" (*setzt*) by the subject, whereas Hegel merely asserted that this object could be "known" (*kennt*). Fichte's position is that of an idealist who regards the object as the product of the mental activity of a subject. It might be argued that Hegel makes essentially the same claim for Spirit as Fichte does for the subject, but this argument does not stand up for the simple reason that Spirit is not just subject but also substance—that is, a synthesis of knowledge and the real. Spirit is meaningful only insofar as the subject finds the object outside itself, while the process (or "system") of its becoming does not take place solely within the subject, but is the result of an interaction between subject and object.

The problem is that this interaction is between a philosophical subject (i.e. Hegel) and a ready-made object (the totality of recorded history leading up to Napoleon's conquest of Europe). So although Hegel's philosophy and epistemology may be quite correct, they are only developed within a philosophical context—which Marx shows to be inadequate. "Man" is more than the self-consciousness of a knowing subject, a fact which Hegel realizes when analyzing the *Bildungsprozess* through which human beings create the world as an objective reality, but which he fails to apply in a critical way to himself. Consequently, Hegel falls short of an understanding of history from the point of view those who make it. For although he reveals himself to be superior to all previous philosophy by virtue of his understanding of history, Hegel's understanding of history is restricted precisely insofar as it is philosophical in character.

Although Hegel insisted that it was not the world as such but its *transformation* which concerned philosophy, what this amounted to in Marx's view was merely the philosophical completion of philosophy. By only *interpreting* the transformation, Hegel placed himself *outside* history. From his starting point as a philosopher, through to his conclusion that man's *Bildungsprozess* was complete, Hegel remained separate from history, unable to comprehend the relationship of past to present except insofar as past historical achievements (such as the French Revolution, "The Rights of Man," science, Napoleon, the Prussian state) coincided with present thought.

It is precisely the undialectical part of Hegel's search for a circular system which explains the reactionary character of his later political philosophy. For in order to close the gap which he knew existed between knowledge and truth Hegel was forced to posit an absolute gap between the past and the present, with practice always in the past and consciousness lagging behind in the present. This meant that it was futile to attempt to change the world; consciousness always came too late to be of any assistance. From the point of view of consciousness, the world was forever beyond its grasp, for there could only be knowledge if history had at some point stopped.

Hegel was successful in bringing the whole of spatio-temporal reality into his philosophy, including the active labour of men within society. But because the appropriation of human labour (and activity in general) took place in pure thought, Hegel was ultimately led to define the universal essence of human reality at the expense of the real forms of existence. Hegel's understanding of man as self-consciousness, as action that negates the given, was characterized by a universality that was quite indifferent to the actual forms of self-consciousness and action in society. We have argued that this was a consequence of philosophical isolation from the real content of human practice, which inevitably led to an abstract conception of reality, and have acknowledged Marx's efforts to make real, living men the premise, subject matter and criterion of historical philosophy. Marx's great achievement was to situate man at the centre of his system—living, suffering, labouring man replaced the absolute Idea as the true subject of history. Philosophical indifference gave way to political partisanship as the universal categories of thought were given a real content or "material basis."

### *III. SCIENCE AND IDEOLOGY*

Marx took the historical dimension of Hegel's thought to its limit, and transformed all aspects of "social" man into historical problems (and not just those which become "known" to philosophers such as Hegel). Thus, as Lukacs points out in his seminal essay "What is Orthodox Marxism": "the dialectic method of Marx is the continuation of that which Hegel sought but did not attain."<sup>16</sup> Lukacs' argument is based on the claim that it is the dialectical method of Hegel which constitutes the core of Marxist thought. According to this view, it is a revolutionary standpoint in relation to present society which constitutes the essential difference between Marx (who adopts this position) and Hegel—and not, as many have supposed, a difference of epistemology or philosophical method.

The trouble with Lukacs' version of the dialectic is that it does not coincide with Marx's own assessment of his epistemology and method in relation to that of Hegel. In his widely quoted 1873 Afterword to the second edition of *Capital*, Marx makes the following statement:

My dialectical method is fundamentally not only different from the Hegelian but is its direct antithesis. To Hegel, the thinking process, which, under the name of the Idea he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurge of the real world, which only forms its external phenomenon. With me, on the contrary, the Ideal is nothing else than the material world transposed and translated in the human mind. The mystifying side of the Hegelian dialectic I criticized nearly 30 years ago, at a time when it was still the fashion.<sup>17</sup>

Now, what Marx says in this passage clearly contradicts the tentative conclusions reached by us in our discussion of the problem of the relation of philosophy to practice. We have suggested that Hegel's epistemology is based on a realist metaphysics; Marx makes the contrary assertion that Hegel conceives of "the real world" as the "external phenomenon" of "the Idea" which has been "transform[ed] into an independent subject." We have suggested that Marx's theory is inseparable from the Hegelian method, which Marx appropriates and "radicalizes," rooting it in human activity rather than philosophical contemplation; Marx, on the other hand, claims that his method "is fundamentally not only different from the Hegelian but is its direct antithesis." Marx judges the success of his method by its ability to "transpose and translate" the material world into "the Ideal" which exists "in the human mind," leaving no doubt in our minds that he considers his method to be grounded in a *materialist* epistemology and the observation of empirical reality. Hegel, on the other hand, is (for all his importance) to be seen as just another *idealist* philosopher.

If we have remained faithful to the argument presented in the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and the *Theses on Feuerbach* in our discussion of the relation of philosophy to practice, then it would appear that Marx's philosophical position underwent a considerable transformation between 1843 and 1873. Of course, there is nothing new in the discovery of a discontinuity in Marx's

work; Louis Althusser was the first to direct attention towards the "epistemological break" separating the philosophical method of the "Young Marx" from the self-consciously scientific approach of his later works. Althusser cites numerous instances where Marx himself repudiates not only the Hegelian dialectic but the philosophical character of his earlier criticisms of capitalist society; one such instance is the Afterword to the second edition of *Capital*, quoted from earlier. Althusser invokes those denunciations and disavowals in order to substantiate his claim that Marx was forced to reject the method of philosophical critique found in his early writings in the course of his efforts to found "the science of history." Althusser proposes the term Theory ("with a capital T") to distinguish Marxist "philosophy" (Dialectical Materialism as expounded by Engels and Lenin) from "ideological philosophies" such as Hegel's, and states that

This terminology, distinguishing between (ideological) philosophy and Theory (or Marxist philosophy constituted in rupture with philosophical ideology) is authorized in several passages from the works of Marx and Engels. In *The German Ideology* etc. etc.<sup>18</sup>

If we were to summarize Althusser's position with respect to the difference between Marx's "youthful" and "mature" philosophical positions, we might do so in the following manner:

- (a) Althusser stresses the discontinuity between Marx and Hegel rather than their unity;
- (b) This discontinuity is constituted by a rupture with the *ideological* aspects of Marx's early writings which enables his thought to become *scientific*;
- (c) This implies an important distinction between "ideological" philosophy and "scientific" Theory corresponding to the distinction between idealist and materialist philosophy;
- (d) An important qualification is that materialist philosophy is not really philosophy at all (if philosophy is understood to be ideological by definition) but is *knowledge of an object*—i.e. science.

Althusser's position therefore combines two of the four possible "interpretations" with which we opened our discussion: although Althusser considers "Dialectical Materialism" to be a different philosophical project to Hegel's "Absolute Idealism" (interpretation no. 2), the importance of their difference is that the latter is necessarily "ideological" whereas the former allows the possibility of totally non-ideological "science" (interpretation no. 3).

We are prepared to grant that Althusser is essentially correct in his interpretation of the later writings of Marx, and in his explication of the latter's method and philosophy. Furthermore, we are prepared to accept that Friedrich Engels remains more or less faithful to the method and philosophy of Marx in his various philosophical writings—such as *Anti-Dühring*, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, and *The Dialectics of Nature*—and did not falsify or vulgarize Marx's thought, as has often been argued. Where we oppose Althusser is in his understanding of the relation of philosophy to practice. Insofar as the position which we shall be criticizing is a consequence of Althusser's interpretation of the scientific aspect of Marx's "mature" thought, an interpretation which we have acknowledged to be correct in its essentials, we shall be arguing against Marx's own position as stated in the Afterword to the second edition of *Capital* and elsewhere. In short, we shall take the side of the "Young Marx" who tried to supersede Hegel by exposing the truth which the latter's thought contained against the "mature Marx" who substituted materialist science for idealist philosophy. Our aim is to show that scientific thinking which is isolated from practice is no more able to attain objective truth than philosophy is, and that "the dispute over the reality or non-reality" of scientific thinking "is a purely scholastic question" (Second Thesis on Feuerbach).

In our discussion of the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* we saw how Marx was able to reformulate the relation of philosophy to practice on the basis of his recognition of the proletariat as the force in society which was capable of "realizing" philosophy. This in turn required that philosophy address itself to the practical needs of the proletariat insofar as these practical needs

were, from the philosophical standpoint, theoretical needs also. The practical needs of the proletariat were defined as the "reality" towards which "radical" thought must "strive." A superficial reading of Althusser suggests that this is identical to Althusser's own position regarding the relation of theory and practice. In his article "On the Materialist Dialectic" (to which we have already made reference), Althusser states that,

what has to be expressed in the form of a theoretical problem and its solution *already exists in Marxist practice*.... So to pose and resolve our theoretical problem ultimately means to express theoretically the "*solution*" existing in the practical state, that Marxist practice has found for a real difficulty it has encountered in its development, whose existence it has noted, and, according to its own submission, settled.<sup>19</sup>

Theory and practice are therefore indissolubly linked. Theory is no more than the expression of the truth which resides within "Marxist practice." *Thought strives towards reality.*

But what exactly is "Marxist practice" and how does it come to embody the truth which later finds theoretical expression? According to Althusser, the articulation of theory is "a specific form of practice" found in relation to other practices:

Theoretical practice falls within the general definition of practice. It works on a raw material (representations, concepts, facts) which it is given by other practices.... In its most general form theoretical practice does not only include *scientific* theoretical practice, but also *prescientific* theoretical practice, that is, "ideological" theoretical practice.<sup>20</sup>

Theoretical practice is seen by Althusser as a form of labour which produces knowledge and destroys illusions in one movement. Theory therefore has a real existence which culminates in knowledge. In this sense, then, *reality strives towards thought.*

The problem is that the redefinition of theorizing as a form of practice does not resolve the fundamental problem of the relation between theoretical practice and "practical" practice, which is presumably what Althusser means by "Marxist practice." It is all very well to say that theoretical practice produces knowledge which can then figure

as a means towards an end whose existence is exterior to theory as such —Marx says very much the same thing (only the term he uses is "Criticism"). But where then do the ends, the goals of practice (and hence theory) come from? Althusser's answer to this question is revealing:

The means depend on the ends. Any theoretical practice uses among other means knowledges which intervene as procedures: either knowledges borrowed from outside, from existing sciences, or knowledges produced by the technical practice itself in pursuance of its ends. In every case, the relation between technique and knowledge is an *external*, unreflected relation, radically different from the internal, reflected relation between a science and its knowledges. It is this exteriority which justifies Lenin's thesis of the necessity to *import* Marxist theory into the spontaneous political practice of the working class. Left to itself, a spontaneous (technical) practice produces only the "theory" it needs as a means to produce the ends assigned to it: this "theory" is never more than the reflection of this end, uncriticized, unknown, in its means of realization.<sup>21</sup>

Althusser characterizes the relation between "technique" and "knowledge" as being "an external, unreflected relation." Spontaneous (technical) practice can therefore never know more than the end which has been assigned to it in a more or less arbitrary fashion. Theory which originates in spontaneous practice is therefore mere reflection of an end which remains "uncriticized [and] unknown in its means of realization." It is this which justifies the Leninist dictum that it is necessary "to import Marxist theory into the spontaneous political practice of the working class." According to this view, revolutionary theory is not simply a *means* to an end but is *the theoretical expression of revolutionary ends*. Without a clear understanding of the ends which revolutionary practice sought to achieve, there could be no revolutionary practice at all, only spontaneous, "technical" practice. Only "scientific theoretical practice," which manifests an "internal, reflected relation" between itself and its "knowledge," could possibly provide such an understanding.

The trouble with the Leninist view, which Althusser adheres to more or less faithfully, is that the implied distinction between "technical practice" and "Marxist practice" simply does not hold water.

Marxist practice is a form of technical practice which insists that the people who engage in it know *what* they are doing and *why*. In other words, it is a practice which aims to be conscious of the ends which it has adopted and the means by which it proposes to achieve them. But like any technical practice which understands itself to be historical, its truth is relative to the ends and means which characterize any given stage of the historical process. When Althusser states that "what has to be expressed in the form of a theoretical problem and its solution already exists in Marxist practice," either he is saying that Marxist practice is historical and therefore unable to establish absolute truth (= scientific knowledge) except by abstracting from the historical process and positing the existence of supra-historical knowledge, or he is saying that Marxist practice is itself supra-historical, which is how it becomes possible to have supra-historical knowledge without having to abstract from practice.

Actually, Althusser says both of these things. With regard to the historicity of Marxist practice, he argues for the necessity of a supra-historical agency—namely the Leninist vanguard party—which claims the right to bring historical consciousness to the proletariat in the same way that Prometheus brought fire to mankind. This leads him to posit the existence of supra-historical knowledge (i.e. scientific Theory). In order to account for the existence of supra-historical knowledge, he is compelled to come up with a form of supra-historical practice. This is what the Leninist vanguard is *in theory*. The circle is finally closed with the redefinition of theory as "theoretical practice," which *in reality* is the only form of practice which is not truly historical, but is the product of abstraction from the historical process. Thus, theoretical practice is concerned only with filling the gap between theory and practice by means of a theoretical expression; the practical realization of its "truth" is, in effect, "none of its business":

The problem posed exists [and has existed] in the form of a difficulty signalled by Marxist practice. Its solution exists in Marxist practice. So we only have to express it theoretically.<sup>22</sup>

And since this solution has been said by Althusser to "already exist in Marxist practice," a point which he goes out of his way to emphasize, there is essentially nothing to distinguish Althusser's characterization of theoretical practice from Hegel's celebrated remarks on the inherent limitation of philosophy:

As the thought of the World, philosophy appears in time only after the objective-reality completes its *Bildungsprozess* and has been attained.... When philosophy paints its gloomy picture, a concrete-form of life has already grown old and cannot be rejuvenated by this gloomy picture, but merely known (*erkennen*): The owl of Minerva is able to spread her wings only at the coming of dusk.<sup>23</sup>

What *does* distinguish Hegel from Althusser is that the former acknowledges the limitation of philosophy as a *limitation*, while the latter insists on the "truth" of his philosophy in a more or less dogmatic fashion. But the "truth" of Althusser's Theory depends entirely on the "truth" of Marxist practice, which "theoretical practice" appropriates in a completely uncritical way in order to account for its existence. Not only does this reinforce the chronic division of mental and manual labour which characterizes the entire Leninist project, it says in effect "The party can do no wrong, which is why its theoreticians can establish 'true' knowledge."

Althusser's belief that science is capable of establishing the truth of Marxist practice is analogous to Hegel's faith in "absolute Idealism." Both "theoretical practice" and "absolute Idealism" are predicated on the supposed ability of the philosopher (or Theorist) to determine the truth of a process in which he has not participated. This process (whether it is the *Bildungsprozess* or the unfolding of Marxist practice) is held to contain the *rationality* to which the philosopher gives expression. In both cases, the world known by philosophy is seen to support philosophy, making philosophy (redefined by Althusser as theoretical practice) the highest or most complete form of humanity. The philosopher's self-consciousness is deemed superior to all other forms of consciousness because it stands outside history.

In order to account for and justify the philosophical conclusion that reality has become rational, Hegel declares that history has ended with the enunciation of the universal principles of the French Revolution. Althusser solves the same problem by grounding his extra-historical science in the practice of the Leninist party, which *imports* Marxist theory and practice into history. Marxist practice therefore becomes the equivalent of Spirit—understood only by an intellectual elite whose claim to understand the mysterious movement of history is founded on a philosophical abstraction from history. The party replaces the proletariat as the force capable of realizing philosophy; the end result is that the party becomes the universal class in society just as Hegel had said it would. "The dictatorship of the proletariat" becomes the slogan for the bureaucracy which the party (as the profession of the absolute management of society) inevitably becomes. The doctrine of the external direction of the proletariat leads directly to "the dictatorship of the most knowledgeable," as Bakunin foresaw only too clearly.<sup>24</sup>

The fact that Marx was reduced to defending revolutionary theory by means of scientific justification must be understood in the context of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat during his lifetime. It was the failure of the revolutions of '48 which led Marx to embark on his quest for a proletarian critique of the fundamental science of bourgeois society, political economy. Whatever weaknesses may be found to exist in the deterministic-scientific facet of Marx's thought are therefore directly attributable to the weaknesses of the proletariat in its practical struggle against existing conditions. That revolutionary theory had been unable to achieve its realization in practice was proof of a *practical* as well as a *theoretical* deficiency. Yet it was precisely the problem of revolutionary practice which was obscured once the main task became the diligent study of economic development. Revolutionary practice was pushed out of the field of theoretical vision with the discovery that, according to the science of revolution, consciousness always comes too soon. Class consciousness no longer came from practice but had to be taught. In this way, the scientific thought of Marx, which had originated in a rational understanding of the forces

which operate in society, became an obstacle to proletarian consciousness at a later stage.

In a letter of December 7, 1867, Marx clearly disclosed the limits of his own science:

The subjective tendency of the author (which was perhaps imposed on him by his political position and his past), namely the manner in which he views and presents to others the ultimate results of the real movement, the real social process, has no relation to his own actual analysis.<sup>25</sup>

The distinction between "the subjective tendency" of the author of *Capital* and the objective character of "his own actual analysis" is an important one, for it provides the methodological key to the fusion of the two aspects. Marx indicates, with an ironic "perhaps," that his participation in the real social process has "imposed" certain extra-scientific choices on him which determined "the way in which he views and presents to others the results of the real movement." Thus, Marx's theory preserves scientific thought only by cancelling it: it is the relation of science to past, present and future practice which constitutes the whole. What is in question is an understanding of struggle rather than law—one attempted to understand scientific laws in order to overcome them. Not the scientific management of the economy but its *Aufhebung* as the determining factor in history was the ultimate aim of revolutionary science.

Althusser's doctrinaire but essentially correct reading of the "mature" Marx who authored *Capital* must be credited with bringing all the hidden weaknesses of the objective, scientific, deterministic side of Marx's thought to the surface. Even if Marx had been able to maintain a unitary position in his thought (as his letter of December 7 would seem to indicate), his theory inevitably fell victim to the mode of exposition of scientific thought. As scientific Marxism gained ascendancy within the International, the inherent limits of scientific thought (which in effect sought to *prove* what ultimately had to be *seized*) were forgotten. For all its importance, and despite the coherence of its analysis, *Capital* may well have done more to inhibit the

practice of revolutionary theory than it actually contributed. *Capital* is quite useless if the secret of its use and its criterion of truth—namely, the revolutionary practice of the proletariat—is lost. Scientific thought implies abstraction from history, regardless of its materialist world outlook; once this abstraction is effected, it is no easy business to re-establish the unity of thought and history, for the simple reason that science appears to embody precisely this unity. The subject of history is lost in the object—which is to say that it loses itself in the scientific contemplation of its objective movement.

This is not to say that objective knowledge is impossible; the point is that objective knowledge is always self-knowledge as far as history is concerned. It is only in his early writings that Marx pays serious attention to the subjective dimension of historical knowledge. In his later works, the problem of subjectivity all but disappears; Marx still understands practice as "sensuous, human activity," but he doesn't examine it *as such*, as *subjective activity*. We maintain that this is a direct consequence of a scientific approach to revolutionary theory, which necessarily obscures its own relationship not only to history but (therefore) also to practice. The loss of the dialectic of subject and object ultimately has disastrous consequences for the practice of revolutionary theory, which is fundamentally beyond scientific thought on account of its complete reliance on human subjectivity, without which there can be no practical "truth."

#### IV. IDEALISM AND MATERIALISM

We have suggested that the objective, scientific method of Marx's later writings obscured the relationship of the subject to history, in marked contrast to Hegel, who rendered the relation of the (philosophical) subject to the (historical) object quite explicit. In effect, the Marxian understanding of subjectivity never developed beyond that of Hegel; both conceptions remained philosophical and thoroughly abstract, viewing the subject of knowledge as a knowing subject who lost himself

in the object of knowledge. In the case of Hegel, it was a philosophical understanding of history which produced an abstract understanding; in the case of Marx, a "scientific" understanding of practice. Neither Hegel nor Marx ever succeeded in defining human subjectivity in terms that were simultaneously concrete and historical: Hegel's understanding of subjectivity is historical but abstract, while Marx's concrete understanding of human "nature" is unhistorical to the extent that these needs are externally conditioned and are simply "given" within any particular mode of production. Furthermore, the unhistorical aspect of Marx's theory of human nature veers off into abstraction when Marx addresses the problem of the historical and social development of human needs.

In his "Editor's Introduction" to Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Allan Bloom comments:

It is precisely Marx's failure to think through the meaning of his own historical thought that proves his philosophical inadequacy and compels us to turn to the profounder Hegel.<sup>26</sup>

We propose to follow this advice, but only after noting several qualifications. First of all, our criticism of Marx's understanding of history is concerned mainly with his understanding of subjectivity and practice. Although the underdevelopment of these two concerns has repercussions which extend throughout Marx's entire thought, we are anxious to preserve Marx's important contribution to critical theory, especially in the areas of economic theory, economic history, and the critique of ideology. Secondly, we have already acknowledged the correctness of Marx's criticism of thinking that is isolated from practice, even to the extent of criticizing Marx himself in the same way that he criticized Hegel. Thirdly, as a consequence of what has just been said, our return to Hegel is essentially a return to an abstract and philosophical starting point that must be vacated no sooner than it is reached.

But before we return to the Hegelian analysis of subjectivity, we must justify our preference for Hegel's abstract (but still historical) account of the same problem. Our affirmation of Hegel's epistemological

realism is an important part of our defence of the dialectical *method* of Hegel, and is directly related to our argument that it is Hegel's *philosophical* application of this method to past history which is responsible for the various difficulties that exist in his philosophy. Our critique of Marx has so far dealt only with the later, "scientific" writings in which the problem of subjectivity all but disappears; we have yet to consider the early writings in which Marx deals explicitly with the dialectic of human subjectivity and objective social reality. If we can demonstrate that Marx's understanding of subjectivity (including self-consciousness) is unhistorical, and is based on a misunderstanding of Hegel's philosophy, we shall have substantiated our argument in favour of a return to Hegel.

It is with this in mind that we turn now to Marx's "Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and General Philosophy" contained in the *1844 Manuscripts*.<sup>27</sup> Marx's position in this Manuscript represents a development of the argument presented in his first critique of Hegel, in which Marx criticized the inherent limitations of a purely philosophical approach. Only the revolutionary practice of the proletariat was capable of realizing philosophy, which meant that philosophy had to address itself to the practical needs of the proletariat. An understanding of the real needs of the most oppressed class in society therefore constituted a revolutionary theory of subjectivity—a theory of the "heart" of the revolution, without which its "head" (philosophy) would be quite useless. In the words of Kojève, it was necessary to see "something else in Man besides a *knowing* subject"<sup>28</sup> in order to understand why the need to change the world was a material possibility and not a utopian dream.

The argument which Marx develops in the "Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and General Philosophy" corresponds closely to interpretation no. 2 which we gave at the beginning of our discussion. Hegel's errors are attributed to his alleged philosophical idealism, which Feuerbach is credited with "conquering"; this means that philosophical idealism must give way to "real science" based on a totally different philosophical outlook—"true materialism."<sup>29</sup> The basic principle of "mater-

ialist science" is the social relation of 'man to man', which Feuerbach had opposed to the Hegelian understanding. Hegel had viewed social relationships in terms of Spirit's self-opposition; that is, as divisions within an all-encompassing Spirit. Because of the essentially abstract character of this approach, Marx claims that "Hegel has merely discovered the *abstract, logical, speculative* expression of the movement of history. This movement of history is not yet the *real* history of man as a given subject."<sup>30</sup> This recalls Marx's statement in the *Contribution* of 1843 that the "root" of radical theory is man himself. Hegel, on the other hand, starts from the notion of "Spirit," which Marx identifies as the self-consciousness of the philosopher. Regarding such consciousness, Marx makes it clear that the *universal* position it adopts in relation to history leads it to overlook the reality of its own *partial* existence:

philosophy is nothing more than religion brought into thought and developed in thought, and is to be condemned equally as another form and mode of existence of the estrangement of man's nature.<sup>31</sup>

Marx's criticisms of religion presented in the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* must therefore be applied to philosophy as well.

Thus, Hegel is criticized by Marx for setting himself up as "the yardstick of the estranged world,"<sup>32</sup> and for viewing alienation in terms of "pure, i.e. abstract, philosophical thought":<sup>33</sup>

The entire history of alienation and the entire retraction of this alienation is therefore nothing more than the history of production of abstract, i.e. absolute, thought, of logical, speculative thought.... It is not the fact that the human essence objectifies itself in an inhuman way, in opposition to itself, but that it objectifies itself in distinction from and in opposition to abstract thought.<sup>34</sup>

The vanity of Hegel's claim to represent mankind's transcendence of alienation by virtue of expressing this alienation philosophically is now apparent. Because Hegel had equated philosophical alienation with alienation *per se*, he was able to conclude that the self-consciousness of the philosopher—which was equated with all human self-consciousness

—was sufficient to redeem the whole of humanity.

It is at this point that Marx runs into difficulties. Instead of restricting his criticism of Hegel to the latter's equation of philosophical self-consciousness with self-consciousness *tout court*, Marx goes on to challenge Hegel's equation of Man with self-consciousness. In doing so, Marx commits a fundamental error. It is one thing to criticize a philosopher for imagining *his* self-consciousness to be identical with that of all humanity; it is quite another to say that this philosopher is wrong in equating self-consciousness *in general* with humanity. Yet this is exactly what Marx does in the *1844 Manuscripts*. There are two reasons for this:

- (1) the failure to oppose human Being to natural Being except with reference to the hopelessly abstract Feuerbachian notion of species being, which leads Marx to reduce self-consciousness to the level of (human) nature; and
- (2) Marx's identification of Hegel as an idealist, and not as a realist, philosopher.

These two reasons for Marx's misunderstanding are directly related to one another not just in their consequences but also in their common ancestry—both criticisms of Hegel are derived from Feuerbach's celebrated inversion of the subject and predicate. This inversion concerned the relation of Thought and Being: according to Feuerbach, Hegel's idealism consisted in making Thought the subject and Being the predicate in his system. Materialism reversed the terms of this relationship so that Being was the subject and Thought the predicate.

Marx reiterates Feuerbach's critique of Hegel in the following passage:

Just as the entity, the object, appears as a thought-entity, so the subject is always consciousness or self-consciousness; or rather, the object appears only as abstract consciousness and man as self-consciousness.<sup>35</sup>

According to Marx, the main point of the final chapter of the *Phenomenology* is that there is no object independent of and external to the

subject of consciousness.

The main point is that the object of consciousness is nothing else but self-consciousness, or that the object is only objectified self-consciousness, self-consciousness as an object. (The positing of man = self-consciousness.)<sup>36</sup>

What Marx fails to note in his criticism is the important distinction within Spirit between, on the one hand, the opposition of consciousness to self-consciousness, and, on the other, the opposition of the Concept to Reality. This distinction is alluded to by Hegel in the introduction to Chapter IV of the *Phenomenology* ("Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage"), where he says that:

For self-consciousness, then, otherness is a fact, it does exist as a distinct moment; but the unity of itself with this difference is also a fact for self-consciousness, and is a second distinct moment. With that first moment, self-consciousness occupies the position of consciousness, and the whole expanse of the world of sense is conserved as its object, but at the same time only as related to the second moment, the unity of self-consciousness with itself. *And, consequently, the sensible world is regarded by self-consciousness as having a subsistence which is, however, only appearance, or forms a distinction from self-consciousness that per se has no being.* [my emphasis]<sup>37</sup>

This distinction leads Hegel to posit a *twofold* object for consciousness (*qua* self-consciousness)—the one "immediate, the object of sense-certainty and perception," the second, "viz. itself, which is found in the first instance only in the opposition of the first object to it."<sup>38</sup> Self-consciousness strives to overcome this opposition, to incorporate it within Spirit, but the *real* difference between itself and the object of sense-certainty and perception is never abolished.

Marx's criticism of Hegel deals only with the relation of consciousness to self-consciousness, and does not recognize that this relationship is meaningful for Hegel only because it presupposes otherness, a real object independent of self-consciousness *per se* that enters consciousness through perception and sense-certainty. Marx's approach is therefore one-sided, and leads him to make several quite erroneous statements about Hegel. Most of these concern Hegel's alleged failure

to acknowledge the existence of a real objective world in which man lives as an objective being. According to Marx, Hegel equates objectivity (*Dingheit*) with the alienation of self-consciousness and therefore overlooks the fact that man is directly a natural being. Marx elaborates on this at great length:

As a natural being and as a living natural being [man] is on the one hand equipped with natural powers, with vital powers, he is an active natural being; these powers exist in him as dispositions and capacities, as drives (*Triebe*). On the other hand, as a natural, corporeal, sensuous and objective being he is a suffering, conditioned and limited being, like animals and plants. That is to say, the objects of his drives exist outside him as objects independent of him; but these objects are objects of his need, essential objects, indispensable, etc. etc.<sup>39</sup>

Marx seems to believe that the mere fact of man's corporeality is sufficient to refute Hegel; but then Hegel had never denied that man was limited by nature. Everything that Marx says about man's natural existence is no more true of man than of other animals, falling short of an understanding of specifically human existence.

Marx's fundamental error consists of reducing self-consciousness to the level of (human) nature:

Man is self. His eyes, ears, etc. have the quality of self. But therefore it is quite wrong to say that self-consciousness has eyes, ears, essential powers. Self-consciousness is rather a quality of human nature, of the human eye, etc.; human nature is not a quality of self-consciousness.<sup>40</sup>

Self-consciousness is therefore totally conditioned by human nature. In saying this, Marx follows the argument of Feuerbach to its conclusion. By reducing self-consciousness to the level of a mere "predicate" of human being, Marx denies the historical character of consciousness altogether: consciousness is now seen as a mere aspect of man's given being. It is for this reason that Marx, like Feuerbach, is compelled to introduce the abstract notion of "species-being" in order to rescue the notion of human autonomy in relation to a world which conditions every aspect of human nature, including human self-consciousness (plus human language, culture, and so on):

But man is not only a natural being; he is a *human* natural being; i.e. he is a being for himself and hence a species-being, as which he must confirm himself both in his being and his knowing.<sup>41</sup>

It is not immediately obvious why man is the *only* species-being; it would be quite tautological to state that any being which comprised a species was therefore a species-being. After a reiteration of the objective character of man's relation to the world, which is now acknowledged to contain *human* in addition to natural objects, Marx states that "as everything natural must come into being, so man has his process of origin in history."<sup>42</sup> But what is it that distinguishes the history of man from that of other animals? To this question there can only be one answer:

But for [man] history is a conscious process, and hence one which constantly supersedes itself. History is the true natural history of man.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, man is a species-being because he is conscious of his history. But isn't this exactly what Hegel said when he equated man with self-consciousness? Of course, conscious history has been redefined as the history of species-being, but it is quite clear that there could be no species-being for man without there first being self-consciousness. This abstract notion must have its *own* history; Marx, however, presents it in a thoroughly unhistorical manner, as if man's species-being had existed for all eternity.

Marx's failure to supersede Hegel's understanding of subjectivity is a consequence of the equating of *objectivity as such* with nature. Man's objective existence as a historical being who transcends the limitations of nature by virtue of his ability to *think* and *speak* disappears in the naturalistic and anti-historical "problematic" of Marx in the *1844 Manuscripts*. Although radical in the sense that man (and not philosophy) is seen as the "bearer" of the historical process, the analysis presented in the *Manuscripts* is incapable of accounting for the *self-consciousness* of the bearer or subject of history. It is not so much that the *1844 Manuscripts* have "a meaning which is still philosoph-

ical in the same sense as that to which Marx later linked an absolute condemnation,"<sup>44</sup> which is what Althusser considers to be their fundamental weakness. Given the seriousness of Marx's misunderstanding of the historical dimension of Hegel's thought as it relates to the question of self-consciousness and subjectivity, it is highly debatable whether science alone could rectify the philosophical difficulties associated with the inversion of Thought and Being on the Feuerbachian pattern. Indeed, the patent inadequacy of the Feuerbachian inversion of Hegel calls the whole notion of materialism (whether scientific, historical or dialectical) into question. If materialism is understood as meaning that everything is object, or nature, then materialism and idealism coincide; the assertion that everything is "matter" is no less empty of meaning than the assertion that everything is "idea." And in any case, we have determined that one cannot equate the Hegelian conception of "Spirit" with idealism in the usual sense of the term, for Spirit is a synthesis of consciousness of knowledge and reality which transcends space by becoming conscious of its existence in time.

Where Marx is correct in his analysis is in his acknowledgement of the enormous profundity of Hegel's insight into the historical process:

The importance of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and its final result—the dialectic of negativity as the moving and producing principle—lies in the fact that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, objectification as loss of object, as alienated and as supersession of this alienation; that he therefore grasps the nature of labour and conceives of objective man—true, because real man—as the result of his own labour.<sup>45</sup>

Marx is right to criticize the abstract way in which Hegel characterizes the labour process; he is right to insist that man in society be seen as the root of all critical philosophy. But species-being is no substitute for Spirit—it is a thoroughly ideological notion, and does more to mystify the historical reality of self-consciousness than Hegel's "concealed and mystifying criticism."

Not species-being, but man as he really exists in historically evolving society, must become the subject matter of philosophy. As Marx argues in the sixth thesis on Feuerbach,

Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in every single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.<sup>46</sup>

Just as Spirit is seen by Hegel as a synthesis of knowledge and the real, man must be understood as the unity of consciousness and action, theory and practice. In arriving at this position, Marx in effect passes judgment on the deficiency of his earlier appropriation of Feuerbachian materialism. The chief defect of this materialism, says Marx, is that "the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively."<sup>47</sup> As a consequence of this, the "active side" of human practice is "forgotten":

The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself.<sup>48</sup>

The abstract notion of species-being or human essence does not provide an adequate understanding of subjectivity; species-being is merely that which "naturally unites the many individuals" in society. There is no opposition between natural being and human being, and hence no possibility of grasping the significance of "practical-critical activity" which enables man to transcend nature and existing society, in time, as the living subject of his own history.

#### V. CONCLUSION

We have now considered the first three "interpretations" with which we opened our discussion. In the section on "Philosophy and Practice," we found ourselves in agreement with the position of Marx in the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, where he formulates the problem of historical thought in terms of its realization. The necessity of a practice criterion of truth is restated in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, particularly in the second and eleventh theses (in which Marx opposes philosophy as "scholasticism" which is capable

only of "interpreting" the world). We concluded that it was Marx's interest in consciously transforming the world which accounted for the radical epistemology of the *Theses on Feuerbach*. This means that interpretation no. 1 is considered by us to be correct.

In the following two sections, we addressed ourselves to interpretations nos. 2 and 3, and eventually found both wanting. Marx's commitment to a scientific approach in his later writings was seen to obscure the importance of subjectivity and practice. This was not the fault of Marx himself, but of the mode of exposition of scientific thought. *Capital* limits itself to the analysis of capitalist social relations in their objective aspect, leaving undeveloped the subjective side of social development. Marx does not "forget" the subjective dimension of practice, but its absence from his actual analysis leads straight to the position of Lenin and Althusser. Marx's early writings were seen to be irremediably scarred by the influence of Feuerbach and the misguided inversion of the subject and predicate. The *1844 Manuscripts*, for all their social, political and economic significance, are fundamentally flawed in their basic philosophical premise—namely, that Hegel's idealism had to be replaced by materialism (naturalism and humanism).

This brings us to interpretation no. 4, which states that all historical thought is inherently limited. This point of view is implicit in interpretation no. 1 and the insistence that the sole criterion of truth is human practice. Marx's "philosophy of praxis" represented an advance on Hegel's epistemology, which had baulked at the prospect of historical knowledge prior to the end of history. Marx showed that it was the *non-intervention* of the philosopher in history which explained why philosophy was only able to *interpret* the world. The philosophy of practice (*praxis*) replaced the mere practice of philosophy, which in turn required that the subjective aspect of human activity be taken into account. But Marx never addressed the problem of subjectivity in his writings in any systematic fashion, and to this day Marxism lacks an adequate understanding of human subjectivity.

Consequently, we must look elsewhere for a historical analysis of subjectivity. The logical starting-point for such an account is Hegel's

*The Phenomenology of Spirit*; but, as we pointed out in the preceding section, the return to Hegel is a return to an abstract conception of historical reality. In short, we must develop the dialectical analysis of human subjectivity to account for all human self-consciousness, and not just that of a particular German philosopher. Thus, our restatement of Hegel's analysis will be linked to the concrete, "material" analysis of subjectivity found in the work of Freud. Our aim is to provide a dialectical theory of subjectivity and consciousness; Hegel will give us the "dialectic," while Freud will be responsible for our "theory."

Regarding interpretation no. 4, which we have yet to discuss in any detail, we are inevitably led to a confrontation between Hegel and Nietzsche. Nietzsche's philosophy is characterized by a profound aversion to the categories of reason (cause and effect, subject and object, theory and fact, etc.), which are held to prove no more than their usefulness as a particular *interpretation*, never their *truth*.

Against positivism, which halts at phenomena—"There are only facts"—I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. "Everything is subjective," you say, but even this is an interpretation. The "subject" is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is.... It is our needs that interpret the world, our drives and their for and against.<sup>49</sup>

Nietzsche's refusal of both positivism and subjectivism foreshadows the epistemological position of the structuralists, particularly that of Michel Foucault.<sup>50</sup> Like Foucault, Nietzsche argues that "Knowledge works as a tool of power"<sup>51</sup> which means that any particular interpretation of the world inevitably reflects the distribution and modality of power. It is this which accounts for Nietzsche's postulation of the "Will to Power" as the criterion of truth (such as it may be said to exist). His overall approach to knowledge is best characterized as a radical form of relativism or "perspectivism" (which is Nietzsche's own term) which repudiates all absolutizing belief—belief in science, belief in morality, belief in reason, belief in the social instinct ("the herd"), belief in thinking, belief in God, and belief in history:

There exists neither "Spirit," nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor "soul," nor will, nor truth: all are fictions that are of no use. There is no question of subject and object, etc.<sup>52</sup>

Nietzsche is a radical thinker for two reasons: first, he is radical in that he pursues his criticism of religion and morality further than anyone else has, either before or since, to the point where *all* society's values come into question; second, he is radical in the same sense that Marx used this word in his first critique of Hegel, which means that he seeks to grasp things by their root. Nietzsche commences his search for the "root" of human practice with a radical critique of religious values ("the precondition of all critique"), but instead of arriving at the conception of the proletariat as the force which would abolish religion and realize philosophy in one fell swoop, Nietzsche postulates the "will to power" as the key to the revaluation of all values.

We must defer a full discussion of the will to power until our final chapter, but may comment in the meantime on its epistemological basis. First of all, power is conceived by Nietzsche in a narrow biological and anthropocentric sense:

In order for a particular species to maintain itself and increase its power, its conception of reality must comprehend enough of the calculable and constant for it to base a scheme of behaviour on it. The utility of preservation—and not some abstract-theoretical need not to be deceived—stands as the motive behind the development of the organs of knowledge.... In other words: the measure of the desire for knowledge depends upon the measure to which the will to power grows in a species: a species grasps a certain amount of reality in order to become master of it, in order to press it into service.<sup>53</sup>

Knowledge is therefore a means to an end that is biological—namely, the maintenance and increase in power of a species. Like Marx, Nietzsche opposes the notion that human beings are equipped with organs of consciousness and knowledge for the sole purpose of abstracting from reality—but for Nietzsche, the belief in a species-life is not meant in the idealist-anthropological sense of Feuerbachian species-being. Rather, it is the natural (i.e. biological) life of the species which

underlies all knowledge, and not an abstraction from this life such as "species-being."

Nietzsche's emphasis on the biological determinants of knowledge might appear to be somewhat exaggerated, but it is based on the important insight that

Belief in the body is more important than belief in the soul: the latter arose from unscientific reflection on the agonies of the body (something that leaves it. Belief in the truth of dreams—).<sup>54</sup>

For Nietzsche, then, belief in the categories of reason, logic, etc. proves only their usefulness in terms of biological value. Biological utility is experienced immediately, entering consciousness only in a highly mediated, interpreted, arranged, schematized, simplified way. This leads directly to the conclusion that consciousness is merely a superficial manifestation of a process whose operation is entirely unseen: "That which becomes conscious is involved in causal relations which are entirely withheld from us."<sup>55</sup> These causal relations are part biological, part psychological, according to Nietzsche: human beings project a psychological entity (the subject or ego) onto the biological unity that is the body, creating an opposition between psychological interpretations of reality and the biological reality which strives to follow its own course of action according to the will to power.

Thus, Nietzsche posits a subject who is divided between his real biological existence ("belief in the body") and a conscious ego or cogito which projects a unity which is believed to underlie different impulses ("belief in the soul"):

The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general....

*My hypotheses:* The subject as multiplicity.

The effect always "unconscious": the inferred and imagined cause is projected, *follows* in time.<sup>56</sup>

In developing his "Critique of the Highest Values Hitherto," Nietzsche advances various hypotheses possessing a prophetic quality that can only

be appreciated in retrospect. In the passage quoted above, Nietzsche clearly anticipates the discoveries of psychoanalysis; however, we must again defer full discussion of these and other related insights until the appropriate time.

Indeed, at this stage all we can do is note the complete refusal of all epistemological thinking by Nietzsche on the grounds that it is an abstraction from an abstraction—i.e. the thinking, speaking subject's thought about thought, separate from biological needs. Just as Freud would himself declare decades later, Nietzsche asserts that "The fundamental false observation is that I believe it is *I* who do something, suffer something, have something, etc."<sup>57</sup> Descartes had supposed that because there was thinking, there must also be *something* that was able to think; for Nietzsche, however,

Thinking, as the epistemologists conceive it, simply doesn't occur: it is a quite arbitrary fiction arrived at by selecting one element from the process and eliminating all the rest, an artificial arrangement for the purpose of intelligibility.<sup>58</sup>

Not only does this apply to the individual subject of psychoanalysis, as we shall soon see, it has implications for a historical understanding of human society. According to Nietzsche, there are only *interpretations* of history which more or less falsify the natural aspect of historical development. In other words, Nietzsche's sceptical and relativistic epistemology is linked to an increased emphasis on the natural as opposed to the rational aspects of the historical process. We are presented with a radical historicism which rejects reason in the name of a set of biological imperatives which find philosophical expression as the will to power.

This rather sketchy account of Nietzsche's epistemological position concludes our discussion of historical thought. Although Nietzsche's historical scepticism is important, leading us to question and re-evaluate the various categories which we apply to historical movement, we do not propose to abandon our project of a conscious history. Nietzsche's own awareness of the limitations of the various categories of reason, epistemology, logic, philosophy, etc. did not stop him from

using them for his own purposes; regarding history, we close this chapter with a statement from the Preface of *The Will to Power*, which reveals Nietzsche's own commitment to historical thought:

What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: *The advent of nihilism*. This history can be related even now; for necessity is at work here. The future speaks even now with a hundred signs, this destiny announces itself everywhere; for this music of the future all ears are cocked even now. For some time now, our whole European culture has been moving as toward a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade: restlessly, violently, headlong, like a river that wants to reach the end, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect.<sup>59</sup>

Nietzsche's willingness to "reflect" on the real movement of history, without recourse to philosophical abstraction which refuses to account for itself, is precisely the spirit of enquiry which we propose to adopt in the remainder of this thesis.

## NOTES—CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup>Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974).

<sup>2</sup>Korsch was one of a whole generation of revolutionary intellectuals who sought to rediscover the Hegelian roots of Marxism in an effort to progress beyond the impasse of vulgar and economic Marxism. The philosophical and often anti-scientific emphasis in the writings of the various individuals who together made up the 20th century tradition of "Western Marxism" represented a deep-seated opposition to the entrenchment of scientism within the "Orthodox Marxism" of the Second and Third Internationals.

The roots of scientism lie in Marx's own theory of capitalist society, which became precise only in the form of a critique of the fundamental science of bourgeois society, political economy. The critique of political economy may have been the most important theoretical development of the class struggles of the 19th century, but its limitations must also be borne in mind. First of all, political economy remains a specialized study of the economic relationships obtaining in society which, even in its Marxian formulation, cannot provide a complete understanding of society. An inevitable consequence of trying to explain everything with reference to political economy—e.g. "the political economy of sex," "the political economy of religion," etc.—is that complex social processes are reduced to the level of economic relationships. Secondly, the exposition of Marx's theory was carried out on the terrain of the dominant scientific thought of the 19th century. Marx's appropriation of science is simultaneously an appropriation of its ideological component (namely, the *belief* that science equals *truth*). Thirdly, Marx's rejection of philosophy in favour of positivist science inhibited the capacity of Marxists after Marx to engage in self-criticism that did not fall within the bounds of a scientific approach to society.

Much of the debate within Western Marxism has been concerned with the traditional problem of "the philosophers"—i.e. how to interpret the world. At the same time, however, Western Marxism has placed a much greater emphasis on the relationship between self-knowledge and self-transformation *in practice* compared to Orthodox Marxism, and even compared to Marx himself. Marx's passion for changing the world often exceeded his capacity for understanding the various obstacles to the practice of revolutionary theory. Many of these obstacles cannot be understood through the simple observation of objective processes; they are *internal*. It is for precisely this reason that intentionality and subjective meaning are important practical issues.

Within sociology, the emphasis on subjective meaning is held to originate in Max Weber. Weber also exerted a considerable influence on Western Marxism, especially in the case of Lukacs, as did the various historical idealists of the 19th century—Gramsci was profoundly affected by his reading of Croce, particularly the latter's critique of scientific explanation, while Lukacs was influenced by thinkers such as

Dilthey and Rickert.

The Western Marxists' encounter with idealism did not imply that their commitment to historical materialism was necessarily weakened. To understand matter without also understanding its relation to human subjectivity is itself a form of idealism; and though it is true that a concrete understanding of society constantly threatens to dissolve in the rarefied atmosphere of philosophical speculation, this danger at least forces theory to be critical of its *practical* value. Marx's understanding of this formed the basis of his early critiques of Hegel, whose historical thought was far and away the greatest influence on Lukacs, Gramsci, Korsch, et al. Recognizing that Marx's own thought had developed out of a critical confrontation with Hegelian philosophy, these thinkers returned to Hegel in order to regain the dialectical and historical heritage that had been systematically eroded away within "Orthodox Marxism."

<sup>3</sup>In *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, pp. 243-57.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 244-45.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>10</sup>Karl Korsch, *Theses on Hegel and Revolution*.

<sup>11</sup>Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach."

<sup>12</sup>Karl Marx, *A Contribution in Karl Marx: Early Writings*, p. 251.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>16</sup>In *History and Class Consciousness*, (London: Merlin Press, 1971).

<sup>17</sup>Karl Marx, *Capital*, 2nd Ed. (1873).

<sup>18</sup>Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 162 (in the article entitled "On the Materialist Dialectic").

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 171n.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>23</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, quoted by Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), p. 163.

<sup>24</sup>cf. *The Anarchist Reader*, ed. G. Woodcock (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977), pp. 140-143.

<sup>25</sup>Quoted by G. Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1970), p. 89.

<sup>26</sup>Alexandre Kojève, p. xi.

<sup>27</sup>In *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, pp. 379-400.

<sup>28</sup>Alexandre Kojève, p. 157n.

<sup>29</sup>*Karl Marx: Early Writings*, p. 381.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 382.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 381.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 384.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 384.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 384.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 385.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 386.

<sup>37</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology*, pp. 219-20.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>39</sup>Karl Marx: *Early Writings*, op. cit., p. 389.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 387.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>44</sup>Louis Althusser, *For Marx* ("The 1844 Manuscripts of Karl Marx"), p. 158.

<sup>45</sup>Karl Marx: *Early Writings*, pp. 385-6.

<sup>46</sup>Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach."

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, tr. W. Kaufman & R.J. Collingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), paragraph 481.

<sup>50</sup>cf. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, tr. A. Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977), p. 27:

Power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or applying it because it is useful); power and knowledge directly imply one another, [for] there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.

<sup>51</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, paragraph 480.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., paragraph 480.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., paragraph 480.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., paragraph 491.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., paragraph 424.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., paragraph 490.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., paragraph 549.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., paragraph 477.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., paragraph 2.

## CHAPTER TWO

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter, we criticized Marx for denying the active mediating role played by language and consciousness in social life. By making consciousness a predicate of being, and by equating the alienation of self-consciousness (*Entäusserung*) with the objectification experienced by all natural beings, Marx arrived at a one-sided understanding of human subjectivity. Self-consciousness was seen as a quality of human nature, while human nature was seen as the product of objective conditions, and it was only with reference to "species-being" that human beings could hope to transcend their historically determined existence.

In fairness to Marx, it should be pointed out that he makes no further reference to species-being after the *1844 Manuscripts*. By the time Marx and Engels came to write *The German Ideology*, the abstract and unhistorical character of Feuerbach's materialism had been replaced by a materialist method that claimed to be both scientific and historical. This did not mean, however, that Marx was completely free of Feuerbach's influence. On the contrary, the theory of consciousness presented in *The German Ideology* retains the mark of the Feuerbachian inversion of the subject and the predicate, even if it is now *social* being that determines consciousness. This is evident in the various terms which are employed by Marx and Engels to describe consciousness, such as "ideological reflexes and echoes," "phantoms" and "sublimates," all of which denote the essentially passive character of consciousness in relation to "the material life process."

But consciousness is not simply passive or secondary in relation to human practice, it plays an active part in social development, as Marx himself implies in the first thesis on Feuerbach. Furthermore, the ability to express ideas in language introduces a necessary alienation into social relationships. Language mediates between

consciousness and objective reality: it transforms both in the process, and cannot be reduced to either, for it is a constitutive activity, a practice in its own right.

The problem of *Entausserung* therefore ceases to be a purely philosophical concern; from now on, an adequate theory of social alienation must be grounded in an analysis of necessary alienation in language. The need for an understanding of necessary alienation is our rationale for returning to Hegel, who analyses the relationship between language, desire and self-consciousness in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. In our account, we rely heavily on the interpretation of Alexandre Kojève, whose *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* has brought the notion of discursive truth, together with the theory of desire, to the forefront of Hegel scholarship.

## II. SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND HUMAN NATURE

According to Hegel, self-consciousness includes both the consciousness of an object and consciousness of itself, "consciousness of what to it is true, and consciousness of its knowledge of that truth" (*The Phenomenology of Spirit*).<sup>1</sup> This distinction, which presupposes a real difference between consciousness in general and a non-conscious reality, is decisive for understanding Hegel, as Kojève has shown.<sup>2</sup> Arguing that Hegel's "absolute Idealism" has little or nothing to do with what is normally called idealism, Kojève cites various Hegelian texts in support of his claim that Hegel's epistemology is actually a new form of "realism."<sup>3</sup>

"For Hegel," writes Kojève, "the dialectic of the Subject and the Object, which is effected inside the Subject and is described in the *Phenomenology*, is meaningful only if one supposes the existence of an Object properly so-called—that is, an Object external to and independent of the Subject."<sup>4</sup> The necessity of a realist metaphysics is reiterated

by Hegel as the *Phenomenology* draws to a close and Spirit finds itself in a relation of immediate identity with itself. According to Hegel,

This alienation-or-externalization (*Entäusserung*) is as yet imperfect. This process expresses the relation of the [subjective] certainty of self to the Object, an Object which, precisely because it is found in the relation [to the Subject], has not yet attained its full freedom-or-autonomy (*Freiheit*).<sup>5</sup>

In other words, Absolute Knowledge (or "Spirit knowing itself as Spirit") must allow the object "its full freedom-or-autonomy," in spite of the fact that knowledge is only possible in the context of a (dialectical) relation of subject and object. Knowledge conditions and is conditioned by its object, but at no point during its process of becoming does knowledge completely assimilate its object—this is only possible when the process of becoming is complete (i.e. when history has ended).

The process of the "becoming of knowledge" described in the *Phenomenology* is in fact a repeated dialectic of the confrontation of self and other. The non-identity of these two terms constitutes "the negative in general,"<sup>6</sup> which Spirit progressively incorporates into itself as it humanizes the world through the *Bildungsprozess*. Self-formation presupposes the acceptance of "necessary alienation" (*Entäusserung*) or "externalization" by the subject, who must preserve and maintain himself within pure otherness (i.e. outside of and separate from himself) in order to gain both objective- and self-knowledge. By dwelling within otherness, actively transforming it through his action, the subject becomes aware of the independence of objective reality, while at the same time coming to experience the world as his own creation. "Necessary alienation" is therefore the pre-condition of both self-formation and self-consciousness, although these do not develop together harmoniously, but exist in a state of mutual opposition, discovering their unity through a splitting and a separation.

Hegel subsumes all alienation under the term *Entäusserung*—in other words, he equates alienation with "externalization" or "objectification." While it is true that objectification necessarily involves self-alienation, it is quite misleading to equate this "necessary

alienation" with alienation that originates in a particular form of social organization. Such alienation is, strictly speaking, not necessary, and must be distinguished from alienation which is unavoidable. Marx makes this distinction in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, where objectification (*Entäusserung*) is contrasted with the hostile alienation (*Entfremdung*) arising from a particular mode of socio-economic organization.

Marx's theory of human nature may be summarized as follows. As man humanizes the world through the mediation of labour, his relation to the world assumes a double form: on the one hand as a *natural*, and on the other as a *social* relationship. It is through the socialization of animal and external nature that human nature comes into existence. Considered objectively, human nature is the product of man's historical creation through social production. Productive activity conditions the producers directly in their labour, and indirectly as their labour transforms their world.

But there is also a subjective aspect to this process, which exists for consciousness and finds expression in language, namely the needs and wants of social individuals. Human beings differ from animals in their ability to conceive and give expression to their needs in language; this in turn produces a distinction between an actual need and the articulation of a particular "version" of this need to others in language. Marx does not distinguish between human *needs*, which are conditioned by external natural and social forces, and human *desire*, which appears in the rift between the experience of a need and its articulation in the form of a *demand*. Consequently, Marx fails to acknowledge the extent to which needs are conditioned by language.

Although Marx is successful in comprehending man as a concrete historical being who produces his own existence, his exclusive emphasis on the objective aspect of the transformation of nature results in a one-sided understanding of human subjectivity. As we saw in Chapter I, Marx equates *Entäusserung* with the natural alienation experienced by all natural beings, thereby denying the active mediation of consciousness in the relationship between man and nature. While it is true that human

consciousness and language are conditioned by the natural and social relationships in which men are obliged to participate, these objective relationships are likewise conditioned by consciousness and language. To equate *Entäußerung* with natural alienation is to reduce all natural relationships to their objective, non-conscious aspect. Consciousness is only allowed insofar as it is conditioned by non-natural (i.e. social) relationships, which exist objectively before entering consciousness. *Human* nature, the product of the socialization of natural needs, is only understood by Marx in its determinate form—not as a dialectical unity which contains (in the form of language and consciousness) the seeds of its own supersession.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels write that "language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men."<sup>7</sup> This does not distinguish human language from the language of other social animals, such as chimpanzees. Where Marx and Engels are wrong is in their implicit belief that human beings are already "men" before they learn to communicate. It is one thing to say that language is bound up with the changing forms of self-creation by any species of animal, quite another to suggest a two-stage temporal development ("first labour, then speech"). The vital question, "when does natural language become distinctly human?" cannot be answered within the terms laid down in the *German Ideology*; human language is seen only as the conditioned response to a material need, viz. the needs of social production.

As a historical being, endowed with the power to conceive and give expression to his thoughts, man is always free with respect to the natural and social forces which condition him. That is, it is his ability to *transcend* given being (including given *needs*) which defines man as a specifically human being. This does not mean that we have forsaken the life processes of "real, active men" as the correct starting point of sociological enquiry. It is still man's world shaping function as an historical being that forms the empirical content of social existence, and hence too of sociology. Where we part company with Marx and

Engels is on the important questions of consciousness, language and subjectivity. These are not mere derivatives of the labour process, however much they might be influenced, even completely transformed, by it. The point is that historical creation is a process which is derived from man's ability to create objects in which he realizes his *subjectivity*. This total process has a material basis which is given expression within discourse; but, by the same token, material practice is rooted in a set of discursive relations which form a unity underlying material existence. When we say that discourse "gives expression" to a material practice, we do so to connote the *active* nature of language, which is in marked contrast to the *passive* connotation of the word "reflection." Language is a constitutive activity, a form of practice in its own right which organizes material reality in a particular way for consciousness.

Our presentation of "human nature" corresponds with that of the existentialist philosophers. In *L'Être et le Néant*, Sartre writes:

Liberty is the concrete mode of being of the lack of being.  
... Man is fundamentally desire of being...[since] desire is  
a lack.<sup>8</sup>

According to this view, with which we are in basic agreement, human desire denotes a lack, a negativity, above and beyond materially conditioned needs, which moves the subject to action which negates (i.e. transforms by humanizing) the given. Needs also move the subject to action, but only *reproduce* a given state of affairs, unlike desire which leads to the transcendence of the given. Later in this chapter, we shall examine the Hegelian "dialectic of desire," from which the Sartrean notion of desire is a "lack of being" (*manque d'être*) or "nothingness" is derived. We shall also examine Hegel's theory of language, which situates speech in the gap between the particularity of individual experience and its universal existence for others, and which forms the basis of all intersubjectivity in society. Sartre's preoccupation with the problems faced by the free and historical individual leads him to neglect the social dimension of intersubjectivity; our emphasis on

language (which is by definition a social activity) should free us from this difficulty.

Before moving on, however, we should make it quite clear that in opposing Marx's conception of natural alienation, we have not just reverted to Hegel's equation of alienation and objectification. We wish to preserve this distinction, since failure to do so would imply that the overcoming of alienation is simultaneously the suppression of all objectivity. In Chapter I, we noted that Hegel's *external* position in relation to the historical process allowed him to conclude that history had ended, that rationality coincided with reality, and that absolute knowledge was therefore possible. Although we acknowledge the existence of necessary alienation, originating in the fact that the object presents itself to consciousness as something disappearing, we do not suppose that consciousness is ever able to "surmount" the object of consciousness. This can only take place in the philosopher's imagination (or in everyday fantasy—fantasy is always a retreat from history, as we shall see in our discussion of psychoanalysis). Hegel's belief in the ultimate unity of subject and object, as expressed in this passage from the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, could almost be characterized as "wish fulfilment":

When the negative thus appears at first as the non-identity of the ego and its object, it is just as much the non-identity of the substance with itself. What seems to happen outside it, as an activity directed against it, is its own doing; and thus the substance shows that it is essentially subject. When it has shown this completely, the Spirit has made its existence equal to its essence; it becomes an object for itself as it is, and the abstract element of immediacy and of the separation of knowledge and truth is overcome.<sup>9</sup>

Hegel is far more equivocal with respect to the limitations of knowledge in Chapter VIII, where he states that

Knowledge knows (*kennt*) not only itself, but also its Negative, its limit (*Grenze*). To know-or-understand (*wissen*) its limit means: to know how to sacrifice itself. This sacrifice is the alienation-or-externalization (*Entäusserung*) in which Spirit represents its becoming Spirit in the form of a free contingent process, by intuitively contemplating its pure Self (*Selbst*) as Time outside of itself, and likewise its Given-Being (*Sein*) as Space.<sup>10</sup>

In the first place, knowledge only "knows" its limit—it does not "posit" it, as had been the case in Fichte's subjective idealism. Secondly, this knowledge exists for the subject "as Time outside of itself, and likewise its Given-Being as Space." In other words, all knowledge is predicated on an abstraction from the "Given-Being," the substance which contains its historical subject. Ontological dualism, the basis of all forms of realism, is retained by Hegel; but where Hegel differs from all previous philosophers is in dividing the totality into *Time* (the realm of the subject, knowledge, thought, etc.) and *Space* (which corresponds to substance, matter, etc.).

If Hegel is correct in dividing reality into Time and Space, History and Nature, then "Realism" in social philosophy can mean nothing other than "Historicism." While social man is limited insofar as he is dependent on Nature, and therefore conditioned by it, the capacity to overcome given, *natural* being defines him as a *human* being with a history. As Kojève points out, this has two major consequences for social theory:

One must oppose *natural* Being to *human* Being.... In other words, one must find something else in Man beside a *knowing* subject; and one must oppose Man to the (natural) World precisely to the extent that he is this other thing (i.e. not history but merely natural Being).<sup>11</sup>

Failure to follow both of these imperatives leads either to *mechanistic materialism* (which views man as more than a knowing subject, but does not oppose him—as a conscious, historical being—to natural, given being) or to *idealist historicism* (which does exactly the reverse). This is no more than what Marx said in the first thesis on Feuerbach:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism...is that the thing, reality, sensuousness is conceived only in the form of the object of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism—which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such.<sup>12</sup>

Marx, however, neglects the active, subjective side of practice in his analysis of human nature. It is this "defect" in revolutionary social

theory which we have undertaken to rectify. Our method coincides with the position of Marx in *Theses on Feuerbach*, and also with Kojève's "historicism," both of which are derived from the dialectical method of Hegel.

### III. SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND DESIRE

Hegel's critique of the *cogito* of the Cartesian and Kantian tradition in Western philosophy is formulated in terms of the dialectic of desire (*Begierde*). In the first instance, desire is a direct consequence of man's natural existence. The desire to eat, for example, is the subjective manifestation of a particular relationship between man and nature: the being that eats, creates and preserves its own existence by transforming a reality existing outside itself. Desire (such as the desire to eat) forces the passive "knowing subject" out of his contemplation, moving him to action in which he both transforms and is transformed by the object of desire. If desire is directed towards a natural object, the transformation and assimilation of the object by the subject of desire reproduces the subject as a natural being who is conditioned by his world.

Natural desire must be distinguished from human desire, which for Hegel is the desire for recognition. According to Hegel,

Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or "recognized."<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to natural desire, which is directed towards and conditioned by a natural object, human desire must be directed toward another desire. Desire is defined by its object, for it is the object which gives desire its positive content. Human desire preserves the *negativity* of natural desire but in relation to a non-natural object. The desire for recognition may involve an actual object, albeit one which is desired for its "recognized" value—e.g. a prize, a university degree, or a military medal. Strictly speaking, though, human desire has no object other than

the "recognition" of an "other."

For self-consciousness to exist, human desire must overcome natural desire. Natural desire is a necessary precondition of all social existence, since human beings can only develop their full (human) potential within their biological existence, but it is not sufficient to generate self-consciousness. For although the experience of a natural desire, such as the desire to eat, leads to an awareness or sentiment (*Gefühl*) of self, the self that is revealed by natural desire is "filled" only with a natural content. Therefore, the self is aware of itself only in relation to given, natural Being, which is the opposite of consciousness, its negative. To desire natural being is to become dependent upon it, whereas to desire human being qua desire is, in the words of Kojève, "to liberate oneself from Being, to realize one's autonomy, one's Freedom."<sup>14</sup>

In his Romantic youth, Hegel believed that it was *Love* which first enabled two human beings to transcend the particularity of their natural existence.<sup>15</sup> In the relationship between man and woman, for example, the natural desire of one for the other is mediated by the human desire for recognition. Hence Love is a specifically human phenomenon, for in Love one desires not just the body but the desire of an other. That is to say, the lover wishes to be loved by the other, and not simply treated as an object for sexual gratification. The mutual recognition in Love creates a (partial) synthesis of the particular and universal: on the one hand, one loves another for their unique, individual qualities; while on the other, Love is a shared value which takes precedence over the values of either individual.

By the time Hegel came to write the *Phenomenology*, he no longer considered Love to be that which defines man as specifically human and hence different from other animals. Love and the desire for love have been replaced by a life-and-death struggle between two pre-human subjects who desire nothing other than "pure prestige"—i.e. to be acknowledged as victorious over the vanquished. This of course presupposes that both parties remain alive after the struggle, with one party submitting to

the other and recognizing him as Master, thereby becoming his Slave. From then on the Master receives the recognition of the Slave as a (specifically human) power over nature, in addition to the work which the Slave performs as the living instrument of his Master's humanity.

There are at least three reasons for Hegel's rejection of Love in favour of Fighting and Work as the means by which the revelation of human (as opposed to animal) reality first takes place. They are:

- (1) the private and essentially limited recognition which characterizes Love;
- (2) the limited possibilities for the development of an objective reality out of mutual recognition in Love;
- (3) the absence of risk of life in the encounter between two sexual "desires."

We now discuss each of these points in turn.

The private character of Love is in marked contrast to the universal recognition which the Master receives from his Slave(s). This becomes apparent in Hegel's discussion of the Family and the State in Chapter VI of the *Phenomenology*.<sup>16</sup> Whereas it is in the Family that the individual is recognized for his *particular* qualities, it is only in the life of the State that an individual citizen can be *universally* recognized. One can only be loved by very few persons, perhaps only one, whereas there is no limit to the Master's capacity for recognition—until the point when the Master is dialectically overcome and the universal homogeneous State is established.

The possibilities for the development of an objective-reality from mutual recognition in Love are likewise limited. Lovers may establish a communal life within a family; they may engage in sexual intercourse; and they may produce children. All of these practices undergo modification throughout history, owing their specificity to the mediating influence of culture and society. But at the same time it would appear the primary purpose of each of these practices is to reproduce human nature, in any given social formation, without playing a major role in

the active transcendence of that nature. Even allowing for its thoroughly mediated character, the objective reality of Love is essentially conservative in relation to human history, particularly with respect to its natural foundations.

This is obvious in the case of childbirth, which will continue to require of women that they give up nine months of their *natural* lives in order to bear children, for the foreseeable future at least. The development of birth control, abortion, artificial insemination, etc., while creating a greater interdependence between reproduction and socio-economic conditions, does not result in the supplanting of the natural teleology of reproduction. The sexual act undergoes a much greater transformation during the evolution of human society, but retains its natural function (i.e. its instinctual component) to the extent that it cannot take place without the "co-operation" of nature, so to speak.

Although the family originally occupied a central position in the *Bildungsprozess*, providing a natural basis for the organization of productive activity, the end of feudalism signalled the decline of the family as an institution of social production. With the development of capitalist production relations, the limitations of family based production were overcome, resulting in a huge growth in the forces of production. As production came increasingly to take place outside the domestic sphere, the family became the place where human beings reproduce themselves as natural beings—it became the locus of their re-creation. By re-creation, we refer to the various activities necessary (in varying degrees) to the preservation of animal life—eating, drinking, sleeping, taking exercise, making love, etc. Although each activity receives a specifically human content—as in the use of makeup by women, "vegetarianism," the fetish of personal fitness, and so on—all are secondary in relation to the active development of humanity as transcendence of natural being. The freedom that exists outside self-transforming *praxis* is illusory—it has no substance. It really makes no difference at all what one does with one's "free time," whereas that which *does* make a difference, namely one's "work," is unfree, since in capitalist society

one must sell the power over one's own labour along with one's labour power.

The family gradually becomes detached from the *Bildungsprozess*, becoming a place of refuge from the ravages of capitalist wage labour. But by the same token, the detachment of the family from the process of man's formation (*Bildung*) deprives it of genuine human meaning—the isolation of family life is hostile to the development of humanity beyond a certain point, as the feminists have realized only too well. Socialist feminism posits the ultimate reconciliation of productive and reproductive spheres, based on the socialization of production. According to this view, it is the involvement of women in the *Bildungsprozess* (i.e. wage-labour) which will eventually lead to the recognition of women as full human beings, equal to men with respect to their humanity rather than their labour value, and not the sharing of domestic chores, child-rearing, etc. (which makes little or no impact on the *Bildungsprozess*).

In addition to the private character of love, and the severely limited possibilities for its "realization," there is what Kojève describes as the problem of Love's "lack of seriousness."<sup>17</sup> Whereas the Master-Slave dialectic commences with a life-and-death struggle for recognition, Love does not involve a risk to the supreme value of animal life, that of self-preservation. At least, this seems to be the case in Hegel's account, although it is fascinating to speculate whether or not a woman was involved in the first fight for pure recognition, possibly as a prize for the victor. Or maybe the fight took place in order to be recognized by a female—this sort of thing happens in nature all the time, and would simply require the natural desire for a female of the species to be formulated in terms of human recognition (e.g. "I fought him because I love you"). But of course this sort of speculation does not help us to determine why Hegel abandoned Love in favour of Work and Fighting; Hegel's discussion of the "beautiful soul" (*die schöne Seele*), however, acts as a perfect illustration of the inability of the desire for Love to overcome its immediate relation to existence, and hence its

"lack of seriousness" or inconsequentiality.

The *schöne Seele* which Hegel condemns in the *Phenomenology* corresponds to the Romantic notion of pure subjectivity, as found in the poetry of Novalis (as well as in countless movements within popular and high culture dating from the 18th century). The *schöne Seele* desires absolute recognition of his subjectivity; but he refuses alienation through otherness, seeking to protect the unsullied purity of his being from the corrupting influence of the world. Thus, the *schöne Seele* does not engage in action; rather,

We see self-consciousness withdraw into the inmost retreats of its being, with all externality, as such, gone and vanished from it—returned into the intuition of ego as altogether identical with ego, an intuition where this ego is all that is essential, all that exists.<sup>18</sup>

Withdrawing from the world into a state of hyperconscious subjectivity, the *schöne Seele* severs all connection with the active *Bildungsprozess* in the belief that the truth of his self-consciousness resides in the intuition of ego which is taken to be identical with ego. This recalls Fichte's *Ich bin Ich*<sup>19</sup> and makes it quite plain that the desire for Love, if pursued to its absolute limit, does not presuppose action, but may instead lead to a retreat into itself. From this it follows that the desire for recognition must be accompanied by an acceptance of the fact of necessary alienation and action if development towards humanity (i.e. self-consciousness) is to be attained. The transcendence of necessary alienation can only take place if one passes through its defiles—in other words, if one accepts the fact of personal alienation while working towards the ultimate realization of the *Bildungsprozess* in social practice.

This has important consequences for a sociological theory of subjectivity. We must not make the same mistake as the *schöne Seele* and equate subjectivity with the intuitive consciousness of self—for this involves an abstraction of the individual from social life, and hence from history. Nevertheless, we must ground our theory in the actual experience of human subjects, finding room for some conception

of internal reflection. These were major themes in Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel, which is the individualistic counterpart of Marx's critique of political economy. As Karl Löwith observes, Marx and Kierkegaard form one antithesis to the speculative philosophy of Hegel—Marx on the grounds that external practice does not conform to the notion of a universal, all-encompassing Spirit, Kierkegaard because the supra-individual notion of Spirit leaves no room for the self-knowledge of human individuals.<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard opposed the Hegelian notion of a systematic and universal world history, rightly seeing that the notion of Spirit has little to do with the individual bearers (*Träger*) of the historical process. But like the *schöne Seele*, Kierkegaard opposes all forms of social existence as levelling, anti-individual forces, so much external superficiality that only served to interfere with man's relationship to God. The valuable parts of his philosophy—the emphasis on the individual as a real creature rather than an abstraction from Spirit, the importance of subjectivity for truth, and the crucial significance of internal reflection—are lost as a result of Kierkegaard's own resort to abstractions, primarily the abstraction of the individual from historical society.

In the next chapter, we shall outline a theory of subjectivity that incorporates both internal reflection and an analysis of external practice—the two elements in Kierkegaard and Marx respectively which point towards a better understanding of the human subject. So far we have been primarily concerned to establish our philosophical and epistemological foundations, drawing on Hegel's analysis of the desire for recognition in the *Phenomenology*, comparing two concrete modes of recognition—Love and Fighting—in order to reach an understanding of the relation of particular and general with regard to individual human subjects. We shall return to many of the Hegelian themes which we have touched upon in our brief account in order to explicate the mediating role of language between individual desire and social life. For it is Hegel's analysis of this dialectic which constitutes his continuing relevance for a psychoanalytic understanding of subjectivity in modern society.

#### IV. SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND LANGUAGE

According to Charles Taylor, the origins of Hegel's theory of the human subject are found in the *expressivism* of Herder.<sup>21</sup> Herder was a radical anti-dualist who developed the conception of human life as an *expressive unity*, analogous to a work of art, which found its highest level of articulation in the realm of culture. His social theory was essentially conservative in relation to the social transformation that accompanied the birth of capitalism, stressing life in the community, communion with nature, and the importance of self-expression. Herder's social philosophy runs counter to the mainstream Enlightenment viewpoint, which regarded man as the subject of egoistic desires, an autonomous individual who could be understood in terms of an atomistic, analytic, scientific and objectifying social theory. Where Kant posited the separation of freedom and desire, morality and nature, individual and society, and subject and object, Herder insisted on undifferentiated unity.

Hegel, however, wished to preserve the antinomies of Enlightenment thought, while at the same time realizing the Romantic goal (expressed by Herder and countless others) of expressive unity in every sphere of life. Rather than returning to a primitive unity, Hegel's subject willingly alienated himself in the historical process, obtaining a unified existence only at the end of history. Thus,

The true is the whole, but the whole is only the essence perfecting itself through its development. Of the absolute it should be said that it is essentially result, that it is only in the end that it is in truth; and precisely in this consists its nature: to be actual, subject, or that which becomes itself.<sup>22</sup>

For Hegel, then, the subject was not an original unity as such, a kind of natural immediacy which the Romantics had aspired towards, but a highly mediated whole which became complete only in the course of its historical evolution. During the process of its becoming, the subject had to accept self-alienation so that it might later rediscover its lost unity. Of course, Hegel was wrong in supposing that the return of the

subject into itself would somehow abolish all separation, but his theory of the subject nonetheless delivered a devastating blow to the Kantian conception of a "knowing subject" standing outside reality. Through "necessary alienation," subject was able to take the various oppositions which formed the basis of Kantian dualism into himself, thereby establishing a negative unity with the objective world. Thus, Hegel develops the conception of an indissoluble link between the individual and culture into a theory that is simultaneously *rationalist* and *expressivist*, positing a distinction between the subject and objective reality while acknowledging their underlying unity.

Herder attached great importance to the role of language in establishing a unity of individual and society, arguing that man was originally set apart from animals by virtue of his participation in a speech community. Hegel reformulates this notion in terms of *Entäusserung* so that language is now seen as an important mediation between the individual and the totality. For Hegel, it is only in language that the identity of the particular and the universal is conceivable, as he makes clear in Chapter I of the *Phenomenology*. In the following passage from that chapter, Hegel criticizes the various idealisms and realisms of his day for failing to distinguish the perception of the *hic et nunc* from their representation in language:

[These philosophers] speak of the "existence" of external objects, which can be more precisely characterized as actual, wholly personal, individual things, each of them not like anything or anyone else; this is the existence which they say has absolute certainty and truth. They "mean" this bit of paper I am writing on, or rather *have* written on: but they do not say what they "mean." If they really wanted to *say* this bit of paper which they "mean," and they wanted to *say* so, that is impossible, because the This of sense, which is "meant," cannot be reached by language, which belongs to consciousness, i.e. to what is inherently universal.... Consequently, what is called unspeakable is nothing else than what is untrue, irrational, something barely and simply "meant."<sup>23</sup>

What Hegel says here is directly opposed to the static truth of the Cartesian and Kantian tradition in philosophy. For even if one says "this thing here," the particularity of the thing disappears in the

universal form in which it is expressed. The particular, the "thing-in-itself," is certainly "meant" by whoever speaks of it, but speech inverts the particularity of what is "meant" into a universal form that is quite indifferent to its content. Everything expressed in language takes the form of a universal, says Hegel, which negates the particularity, the actual "existence," of what is meant.

This is no less a criticism of the transcendental idealism of Kant as of the naive realism (or "naturalism") of Marx. Regarding the latter, Hegel makes the following comment by way of anticipation:

We may be permitted here, in this appeal to universal experience, to anticipate with a reference to the practical sphere. In this connection we may answer those who thus insist on the truth and certainty of objects of sense, by saying that they had better be sent back to the most elementary schools of wisdom, the ancient Eleusinian mysteries of Ceres and Bacchus; they have not yet learnt the inner secret of the eating of bread and the drinking of wine.... Even animals are not shut off from this wisdom, but show they are deeply initiated into it. For they do not stand still before the things of sense as if these were things *per se*, with being in themselves: they despair of this reality altogether, and in complete assurance of the nothingness of things they fall to without more ado and eat them up. And all nature proclaims, as animals do, these open secrets, these mysteries revealed to all, which teach what the truth of things of sense is.<sup>24</sup>

With heavy irony, Hegel turns naive realism back on itself by reducing the wisdom of "naturalism" to the level of the animal existence described by it. As we have seen, philosophical naiveté led Marx to postulate an unhistorical "species-being," in order to account for language, culture, etc., as a direct consequence of his naturalism. We may now replace the abstract conception of species-being with a concrete and historical understanding of language. Language is a universal mediation which is able to detach "meaning" from reality only because spatial reality is also temporal. If empirical existence were eternally the same, the meaning of a word would not be distinguishable from the actuality which it signifies—the *hic* would always be here, the *nunc* would become an eternal present, and this piece of paper would be the only piece properly so-called. Conversely, if language did not possess a universality that endured over time, preserved in the form of *discourses* existing outside

men, universal experience would not be possible.

What Hegel says about the *hic et nunc* with regard to the dialectic of particular and universal applies also to the human individual (or "self") in relation to others. Hegel posits an essential bipolarity within subjectivity corresponding to the distinction between the words "I" and "me." According to Hegel, it is in speech that the self-existent singleness of self-consciousness comes into existence, "so that its particular individuality is something for others."<sup>25</sup> Whereas it is desire (in the broad sense) which creates the human subject as a subject, language is what makes possible the recognition of the subject as a human subject, conscious of itself as self. Without language, there is no ego as such, for it is "absorbed in some concrete actuality,"<sup>26</sup> losing itself in the object of desire. Speech, however,

contains this ego in its purity; it alone expresses I, I itself. Its existence in this case is, qua existence, a form of objectivity which has in it its true nature. Ego is this particular ego, but at the same time universal; its appearance is *ipso facto* and at once the alienation and disappearance of this particular ego, and in consequence its remaining all the while universal.<sup>27</sup>

The subject is only able to overcome his particular existence as a "me" (constituted by desire) by alienating himself in language as "I." By taking the universal form "I" the subject "loses himself" as an object, an "other." But by making himself "other" to his own particularity ("me"), it becomes possible for him to recognize himself in the subjectivity of an "other."

According to Kojève, whose reading of Hegel has brought the notion of "discursive truth" to the forefront of Hegel scholarship, language is an irreducible premise of the *Phenomenology*.<sup>28</sup> It is language which actively mediates the confrontations between self and other, which recur at different levels of the Spirit's progressive development through Time. As we have seen, the struggle for recognition described by Hegel in the *Phenomenology* is based on the notion that one attains consciousness of self by recognizing, and being recognized by, an other. But for intersubjective recognition to take place, each individual subject must

reveal or *signify* itself as *desire*.

Language transforms desire, giving it a universal form that enables it to exist for others. According to Hegel, this transformation is accomplished without adversely affecting the subject, who willingly renounces the particularity of his desire in order to become actual (i.e. so he may exist for others). Failure to accept the necessary alienation of desire in language ultimately leads to the predicament of the *schöne Seele*, whose sense of self is out of all proportion to his capacity to present himself to (and therefore be recognized by) others. To truly exist, the self must be recognized, which means that it must pass through the mediation of language.

In the next chapter, we shall examine the relationship between language and desire from the standpoint of psychoanalytic theory. We are particularly interested in the role of necessary alienation in the formation of the human "personality." As Anthony Wilden has remarked, "the *Phenomenology* remains one of the truly profound psychological works of the nineteenth century,"<sup>29</sup> notwithstanding the undialectical equation of objectification and alienation, and the final transcendence and reconciliation which marks the end of Spirit's journey through history. In our analysis, we shall return constantly to the theme of language as necessary alienation, for it is our contention that the "personality" is in large measure a product of linguistic alienation. The meaning of this statement will become clear as we pursue the dialectic of desire in relation to the needs of the individual human subject, for it is precisely language which mediates this relationship.

## NOTES—CHAPTER TWO

<sup>1</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Tr. J.B. Baillie (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 142-43.

<sup>2</sup>cf. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Tr. J.H. Nichols, ed. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1969), see especially Chapter VI.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>5</sup>*The Phenomenology*, p. 806.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>7</sup>K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C.J. Arthur (New York: International, 1970), p. 51.

<sup>8</sup>J.P. Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 652.

<sup>9</sup>*The Phenomenology*, p. 97.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 806-07.

<sup>11</sup>Alexandre Kojève, n.p. 157.

<sup>12</sup>In *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 421.

<sup>13</sup>*The Phenomenology*, p. 229.

<sup>14</sup>Alexandre Kojève, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 243-44; Kojève quotes from *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* ed. Nohl (Tübingen, 1907), in which Hegel puts forward the argument that "Love tends to overcome dialectically" all distinctions.

<sup>16</sup>*The Phenomenology*, pp. 466-84.

<sup>17</sup>Alexandre Kojève, n.p. 244.

<sup>18</sup>*The Phenomenology*, p. 665.

<sup>19</sup>cf. Hegel's criticisms in *The Phenomenology*, p. 273.

<sup>20</sup>cf. K. Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, tr. D.E. Green (New York: 1964).

<sup>21</sup>cf. C. Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge, England: CUP, 1978).

<sup>22</sup>*The Phenomenology*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 159-60.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 158-59.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 530.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>Alexandre Kojève, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup>Anthony Wilden, "Lacan and the Discourse of the Other," in J. Lacan, *The Language of the Self*, tr. A. Wilden (New York: Delta, 1968), p. 286.

## CHAPTER THREE

## I. INTRODUCTION

There is a ruse in the history of psychoanalysis which has resulted in the following paradox: the most significant—i.e. both meaningful and important—advances in psychoanalytic theory over the past twenty-five years have been made possible only by a return to the original Freudian texts. More than half a century of revisionism and ideological falsification has made the reading of Freud (preferably in the original German) a prerequisite for anyone who wishes to understand the meaning of psychoanalytic concepts, most of which originate in Freud. But the meaning of the return to Freud is not simply a return to the meaning of Freud, a meaning which in America has long since succumbed to a combination of professional imperatives and ideological prejudices. The recent "return to Freud" which has revolutionized French psychoanalysis represents more than just an attempt to rescue psychoanalytic theory from the corrupting influence of cultural ahistoricism, positivism, individualism, and the American medical profession. Nevertheless, the first task of any re-reading of Freud is to delineate the major lines of Freud's problematic. Only then is it possible to take one's distance from Freud's own formulations and move from a re-reading to a re-interpretation of that problematic, a re-interpretation which restores to psychoanalytic theory its most radical elements.

The importance of the recent "return to Freud" in France is acknowledged by Louis Althusser in an article entitled "Freud and Lacan." Althusser credits Freud with having founded a new "science," based on an irreducible theoretical object (the unconscious), and comprising a *practice* (the analytic cure), a *technique* (the method of the cure), and, most important of all in Althusser's eyes, "a *theory* which has a relation with the practice and the technique."<sup>1</sup> But as Althusser readily admits, there are enormous problems associated with

Freud's doctrine, many of which have been compounded by revisionism and ideological falsification. Althusser's prefatory note to "Freud and Lacan" contains the following caveat:

Let us admit, without prevarication: anyone today who merely wants to understand Freud's revolutionary discovery, who wants to know what it means as well as just recognizing its existence, has to make a great theoretical and critical effort in order to cross the vast space of ideological prejudice that divides us from Freud. For not only has Freud's discovery been reduced, as we shall see, to disciplines which are essentially foreign to it (biology, psychology, sociology, philosophy); not only have many psychoanalysts (notably in the American school) become accomplices to this revisionism; but, more important, this revisionism has itself objectively assisted the fantastic ideological exploitation whose object and victim psychoanalysis has been.<sup>2</sup>

According to Althusser, Marxist critics of psychoanalysis have also become victims of the ideological exploitation of psychoanalysis, confusing the image of psychoanalysis imposed by ideological reaction with "Freud's revolutionary discovery."<sup>3</sup> Existentialist critics such as Sartre<sup>4</sup> and Binswanger<sup>5</sup> fall into a similar trap, seeing in psychoanalysis only the positivism and conformism emphasized by the revisionists.

In order to distinguish those criticisms of psychoanalysis which are based on distortions and misunderstandings of Freud from those which may assist in developing the full potential of "Freud's revolutionary discovery," we propose to approach psychoanalysis in the following way. The first section of this chapter addresses the problem of science and ideology in Freudian theory, and deals explicitly with the various scientific criticisms directed toward psychoanalysis by the defenders of scientific, medical, and psychological orthodoxy. The importance of this exercise stems from Freud's own scientific pretensions, which have greatly influenced the mode of exposition of psychoanalytic theory and the subsequent reaction to it. In the second section, we consider Lacan's re-interpretation of Freud, which emphasizes the much neglected hermeneutic dimension of psychoanalytic

theory, and rejects out of hand any notion of psychoanalysis that presents it as a positive science on the model of physics. Lacan's account develops themes introduced by us in the preceding chapter; Lacan's reading of Freud explores the relationship between language and unconscious desire in psychoanalysis, paying particular attention to the epistemological implications of the Freudian unconscious. The results are impressive, not just in terms of Lacan's own contribution to psychoanalytic theory, but also in the sense that Lacan is (as he never fails to inform us) simply elaborating a meaning that is already to be found in Freud's own writings. In the third and final section, we address the question of the latent social meaning of psychoanalysis, in order to determine the precise relationship between the psychoanalytic theory of the subject and the Marxist theory of ideology.

By this time, we hope to have distinguished the "true" meaning of Freud from the ideological confusion that has so far prevented any adequate reconciliation of psychoanalysis and Marxism. This is why the Marxist criticisms of psychoanalysis are held in abeyance until the final section of the chapter. Our rationale for this approach is derived from the ambiguity of many of Freud's concepts, which has given rise to two distinct interpretations of psychoanalysis. The first of these, which views psychoanalysis as a scientific discipline that attempts to provide deductive explanations of psychological "mechanisms," is in many ways Freud's own. But in addition to what we might call the *scientific paradigm*, there is a second interpretation, in which the emphasis is shifted away from "mechanism" toward "meaning." This approach, which we shall designate as the *hermeneutic paradigm*, is also to be found in Freud, as can be seen from the list of disciplines named by Freud for an ideal Faculty of Psychoanalysis. Besides psychiatry and sexology, we find "the history of civilization, mythology, the psychology of religions, literary history, and literary criticism."<sup>6</sup>

In the discussion that follows, psychoanalysis is considered in relation to each of these two diametrically opposed interpretations.

The inadequacy of the scientific paradigm, which is demonstrated by the failure of scientific criticism to appreciate the metaphysical and epistemological subtleties of Freud's thought, leads us to reject it in favour of the hermeneutic paradigm. Thus, the Marxist critique of psychoanalysis presented in the final section of the chapter is addressed to the hermeneutic dimension in Freud's thought, as interpreted by Jacques Lacan. We maintain that psychoanalysis is a hermeneutic discipline whose theory of the subject is primarily a theory of meaning. It is therefore at the level of discursive relations that psychoanalysis may or may not be integrated into a historical materialist theory of society.

## II. FREUD, SCIENCE, AND IDEOLOGY

"Every new theory," wrote Engels, "has first to link itself on to the intellectual material which lies ready to its hand, however deep its roots lie in (empirical) facts."<sup>7</sup> As the founding father of psychoanalysis, Freud had no recourse to theoretical precedents, but had to borrow intuitively from existing disciplines in order to give theoretical expression to the phenomena he encountered in clinical practice. Many of the terms employed by Freud were taken from natural science—e.g. *libidinal energy*, *defence mechanism*, *psychical apparatus*, and of course *sublimation*. As is well known, the evolutionary anthropology of Charles Darwin exerted a considerable influence on Freud's thought; in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud developed Darwin's hypothesis of the "primal horde" into a theory of group psychology based on the notion of the killing of the "primal father."<sup>8</sup> Freud also borrowed extensively from the mythology of ancient Greece, as was the case with the theory of narcissism and the Oedipus complex.

Freud's appropriation of scientific terminology was consistent with his belief that psychoanalysis would one day be recognized as an authentically constituted science. The rejection of psychoanalysis by the scientific establishment must have come as a bitter disappointment

to a man who had studied biology, physiology and anatomy while at university, and who had spent six years in the physiological laboratory studying the central nervous system before turning to medicine, although it was only to be expected. Recent philosophers of science have drawn attention to the gap that separates "the logic of scientific discovery" from the actual practice of science, arguing that the imposition of scientific "standards" upon scientific practice does not lead to a better understanding of that practice, merely to a new form of Platonism.<sup>9</sup> At the time that Freud was writing, however, the gap between the abstract demands of the philosophy of science and the reality of psychoanalytic practice signified the deficiency of the latter. Although he developed the corpus of psychoanalytic theory as a practicing analyst, and was therefore in a position to observe the extent to which the official philosophy of science diverged from his own practice, Freud seems to have subscribed to the same philosophical position as those who criticized psychoanalysis on the grounds of its scientific inadequacy. In this sense, Freud may be said to have been the victim of his own illusions.

The scientific criticisms of psychoanalysis fall into two broad categories: *theoretical* criticisms, which are concerned with the logical status of psychoanalytic explanation; and *methodological* criticisms, which deal with problems of establishing and validating data in the analytic context. The best known theoretical criticism of psychoanalysis is that it is *irrefutable* because of the indeterminacy of psychoanalytic concepts. Lack of theoretical rigour, it has been argued, permitted the introduction of *ad hoc* hypotheses by Freud in order to account for deviations which would otherwise have led to the "falsification" of psychoanalytic theory.

The concept of resistance, which is defined by Freud as "whatever interrupts the progress of analytic work,"<sup>10</sup> and covers everything in the words and actions of the analysand that obstructs his gaining access to his unconscious, would appear to be an example of this sort of hypothesis. Not only does the concept of resistance offer a con-

venient explanation of therapeutic failure, attaching all blame to the patient rather than to the analyst or the structure of the analytic situation, it also reinforces the authoritarian character of the relationship between analyst and analysand. As Michel Foucault has pointed out, the symbolic absence of the analyst, his silence in the presence of the analysand, acts as a subtle form of coercion which derives its strength from its invisibility.<sup>11</sup> The fact that resistance is frequently expressed by the breaking of the "fundamental rule" of free association need not be interpreted as a defence against the uncensored communication which the imposition of this rule was intended to facilitate; it might also represent a legitimate challenge to the power of the analyst. In addition, there is the problem of the analyst's own unconscious reactions to the individual patient, known in psychoanalysis as the counter-transference; as a result of the counter-transference, the analyst projects his own resistances onto the patient. Consequently, what appears to the analyst to be resistance on the part of the patient may in fact be the result, either imaginary or real, of his own unconscious resistances.

The problems associated with resistance in analysis are considerable, and have led Jacques Lacan to re-structure the analytic situation, most notably by abolishing the fixed time-frame of the analytic session.<sup>12</sup> As for the claim that the concept of resistance must be rejected because it represents an *ad hoc* addition to psychoanalytic theory, we must seriously ask ourselves whether there is any difference between the introduction of *ad hoc* hypotheses and legitimate theory modification. We must also remember to distinguish between the theoretical expression and practical application of the concept of resistance, for we may find that the "irrefutability" of this concept does not originate in psychoanalytic theory as such, but is the consequence of a less than rigorous application of that theory.

In fact, Freud was well aware of the difficulties created by resistance and transference in analytic practice. As Laplanche and Pontalis observe, Freud believed that all progress made in analytic

technique could be summed up as "the increasingly accurate evaluation of the resistance—that is, of the clinical fact that conveying the meaning of his symptoms to the patient does not suffice to eliminate the repression."<sup>13</sup> Although he was never really able to provide a full explanation of the resistance phenomenon, Freud recognized the importance of dealing correctly with the problem of resistance in the analytic situation. Indeed, it was because of problems such as resistance and transference that Freud required that all analysts submit to a personal analysis before entering psychoanalytic practice. The purpose of this was to uncover the analyst's own complexes and internal resistances in anticipation of their emergence in the counter-transference.

If Freud was rigorous in his approach to resistance in clinical practice, his extension of the concept of resistance to encompass all opposition to psychoanalysis was downright rhetorical. Freud spoke of "resistance to psychoanalysis" when referring to a hostile attitude to his discoveries in so far as the revelation of unconscious desires proved burdensome for his critical audience and the public at large. It is common knowledge that "the truth hurts," and Freud may have been partially correct in blaming irrational factors in the psychological make-up of his critics for their rejection of psychoanalysis. But the use of the concept of resistance in order to "explain" the various scientific criticisms of psychoanalysis was rightly seen as an *ad hominem* argument which represented a deliberate attempt to evade legitimate criticism; it was also seen as further proof of psychoanalysis' irrefutability. The notion of "resistance to psychoanalysis" did little to enhance its scientific reputation; it also served to illustrate the dangers of applying psychoanalytic concepts beyond the bounds of clinical practice.

In addition to the various *ad hoc* hypotheses which allegedly enabled Freud to account for deviations and avoid the falsification of psychoanalytic theory, scientific critics took exception to the many speculative hypotheses advanced by Freud, such as the theory of

the death drive, on the grounds that they were metaphysical—i.e. fundamentally beyond the empirical world of sense-experience—and therefore *unverifiable*. This is the most serious criticism that can be made of a discipline which claims scientific status; it says in effect that psychoanalysis, like astrology, is an elaborate myth whose explanatory and therapeutic power is derived, in the first instance, from a shared system of beliefs. Because there is no direct connection between psychoanalytic theory and psychological reality, so the argument goes, it is impossible to make predictions which would allow for the confirmation or refutation of psychoanalytic theory within a deductive structure of explanation.

Yet according to Carl Hempel, one of the main proponents of the hypothetico-deductive model of scientific inquiry, it is "the fictitious concepts rather than those fully definable by observation" that stimulate prediction and new observation.<sup>14</sup> As we noted earlier, Freud was forced to borrow from other disciplines in order to construct a conceptual framework in which to situate his discovery. The speculative nature of Freud's metapsychology must be understood in view of the severe theoretical limitations which Freud had to overcome in order to construct a psychology "that leads behind consciousness." Throughout his life Freud continued to modify the ensemble of conceptual models, more or less far-removed from empirical reality, which constituted the metapsychology of psychoanalysis. Subsequent inquirers, notably Herbert Marcuse, were able to present a more fully developed and plausible metapsychology as the framework of psychoanalysis.

Metapsychology may be denounced as "metaphysical" by people who are unwilling to seek to comprehend the metaphysical choices they themselves have made, including the metaphysical choice to avoid "metaphysics," but it remains an indispensable part of psychoanalytic theory. Freud's various speculative hypotheses often create the impression of a relapse into mythology—as in the case of Eros, re-defined as the life instincts, for instance—yet the fact remains that every science needs a "metatheory." In the natural sciences, a

certain amount of what Popper calls "theoreticism" constitutes a legitimate aspect of scientific endeavour; among the social sciences, we have assigned the task of formulating a "general theory of man" to sociology. A large part of Freudian metapsychology is actually misplaced sociology; this is why the sociologist, by developing the latent social meaning of psychoanalysis, can improve our understanding of man in society while contributing to psychoanalysis' understanding of itself, particularly in relation to the other social sciences.

That Freud chose to articulate his theoretical concepts within a scientific mode of discourse tells us more about the ideological world into which psychoanalysis was born than it does about psychoanalysis itself. Freud's choice of a scientific mode of exposition reflects his commitment to 19th century positivism; as Charles Axelrod has commented, "science, for Freud, is a metaphor for authenticity."<sup>15</sup> By presenting his discoveries in a scientific manner, Freud clearly hoped to overcome the "resistance to psychoanalysis" that had emerged as early as 1896.<sup>16</sup>

But psychoanalysis never acquired the aura of respectability which scientific recognition, always so important to Freud, might have conferred upon it. Deprived of the protection of scientific status, the victim of persecution, exclusion, condemnation and insult, Freud held to his belief in the scientific character of psychoanalysis with tenacity. Throughout his life he insisted that natural science would one day succeed in explaining the physiological basis of the Libido (the energy postulated by Freud as underlying the sexual drive). According to Freud, the study of the *sources* of drives "lies outside the scope of psychology,"<sup>17</sup> which is concerned primarily with transformation of a drive with respect to its *aim* (e.g. sublimation), and with respect to the *object* through which the drive sought to attain its aim.<sup>18</sup>

This raises an important point concerning the psychoanalytic theory of instincts, which is widely regarded as providing evidence of Freud's "biologism." As we have just seen, Freud was careful to

distinguish between the (hypothetical) source of a drive and those aspects which he considered to be germane to psychoanalytic theory. Psychoanalysis is less concerned with the biological dimension of drives than with the various modifications which the drive exhibits as a result of familial and cultural influences. Misconceptions surrounding the role of biological speculation in psychoanalysis have been compounded by the use of the word instinct to translate two different German words, *Instinkt* and *Trieb*, into English. As Jean Laplanche observes, Freud makes use of both terms "in order to introduce a slight difference of meaning, which is occasionally barely perceptible, but will at times be accentuated to the point of constituting a veritable opposition."<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, it has not been sufficiently noted that these two terms are used in quite different senses by Freud; as a result, the unique aspects of Freud's approach, which tends to overturn the traditional conception of instinct, have been blurred.

Freud introduced the term *Trieb* in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. The *Three Essays* begin with a description of the "popular" conception of sexuality:

The fact of the existence of sexual needs in human beings and animals is expressed in biology by the assumption of a "sexual drive," on the analogy of the instinct of nutrition, that is, of hunger. Everyday language possesses no counterpart to the word "hunger," but science makes use of the word "libido" for that purpose.

Popular opinion has quite definite ideas about the nature and characteristics of this sexual drive. It is generally understood to be absent in childhood, to set in at the time of puberty in connection with the process of coming to maturity and to be revealed in the manifestations of an irresistible attraction exercised by one sex upon the other; while its aim is presumed to be sexual union, or at all events actions leading in that direction.<sup>20</sup>

This "popular" conception, which Freud summarizes here in order to subsequently submit it to criticism, assigns to the sexual drive a specific aim and object, and localizes it in the excitation and opera-

tion of the genital apparatus. But while sexuality, in a "normal" adult, gives the appearance of an instinct, Freud shows that "genital sexuality" is the end result of a complex evolution which biological maturation alone does not guarantee. Contrary to the popular view, Freud argues that the object of the sexual *Trieb* is variable and is only chosen in consequence of the vicissitudes of the subject's history. This history involves the displacement and internalization of the object of the sexual *Trieb*, the metamorphosis of its aim, and ultimately the concentration of its source on the erotogenic zone.

It is not Freud, therefore, but "popular opinion" that is responsible for "biologizing" human sexuality. Popular opinion conceives of the sexual *Trieb* on the model of an instinct, a response to a natural need whose paradigm is hunger; Freud, on the other hand, develops a conception of sexuality which undermines the notion of a biological norm. Although the sexual *Trieb* is ultimately derived from a biological source, its specific characteristics are determined by the vicissitudes of the subject's history. Under the influence of family and culture, the "polymorphous perversity" of infantile sexuality gives way to the organization and concentration of "component *Triebe*" under the primacy of the genital zones. By showing how extensive the field of the sexual perversions is, Freud demolishes any notion of a pre-determined aim or object for human sexuality. So-called normal sexuality is no longer seen as the "natural" result of the process of physical maturation; according to Freud, "the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact."<sup>21</sup>

Whenever Freud uses the word *Instinkt* in his work, it is in the classical sense. He speaks of *Instinkt* in animals confronted with danger and of the "instinctive recognition of dangers."<sup>22</sup> As Laplanche notes, "*Instinkt*, in Freud's language, is a performed behavioural pattern, whose arrangement is determined hereditarily and which is repeated according to modalities relatively adapted to a certain type of object."<sup>23</sup> In other words, Freud uses the term *Instinkt* to designate something

entirely different from what is described elsewhere as sexuality. Although he allows for the existence of a "hereditary, genetically acquired factor in mental life,"<sup>24</sup> it is with reference to "primal fantasies" rather than *Triebe* that Freud accounts for the phylogenetically transmitted inheritance of mankind.

In the 1920 preface to the fourth edition of the *Three Essays*, Freud responds to another theoretical criticism of psychoanalysis which at first appears to be no more than a restatement of the charge of "biologism":

It must also be remembered, however, that some of what this book contains—its insistence upon the importance of sexuality in all human achievements and the attempt that it makes at enlarging the concept of sexuality—has from the first provided the strongest motives for the resistance against psychoanalysis. People have gone so far in their search for high-sounding catchwords as to talk of the "pan-sexualism" of psychoanalysis and to raise the senseless charge against it of explaining "everything" by sex.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, Freud does not explain "everything" by sex, any more than Marx explains "everything" by economics or "class struggle," although his "insistence upon the importance of sexuality" indicates that he by no means claims not to be a "pan-sexualist." But as Freud makes clear a few lines further on, the "pan-sexualism" of psychoanalysis does not simply consist of interpreting all human activities in sexual terms—in so far as the term sexuality is only understood *in the narrow biological sense*:

And as for the "stretching" of the concept of sexuality which has been necessitated by the analysis of children and what are called perverts, anyone who looks down with contempt upon psychoanalysis from a superior vantage-point should remember how closely the enlarged sexuality of psychoanalysis coincides with the Eros of the divine Plato.<sup>26</sup>

If Freud does see sexuality in "everything," it is certainly not sexuality as understood by "popular opinion." The extraordinary broadening of the notion of sexuality occasioned by psychoanalysis coincides with the destruction of the "popular"—but also biologizing—image of sexuality.

Seen in this light, the charges of "biologism" and "pan-sexualism" turn out to be mutually exclusive: on the one hand, Freud is said to have *reduced* human activity to the level of animal instincts, particularly the sexual instinct, while on the other hand, he is accused of having *extended* the concept of sexuality beyond its strictly biological meaning. Both propositions ultimately rest on the *ad hominem* argument which has formed the basis of ideological opposition to psychoanalysis: "Freud gave excessive attention to the question of sexuality."

Ultimately, Freud's response to his scientific critics took the form of a counterattack. Freud invoked the notion of resistance to analysis when confronted with the argument that he had exaggerated the importance of sexuality, arguing that the ferocity of the reaction to the psychoanalytic theory of sexuality was an index of his critics own repressed sexuality. However, the truth contained in the Freudian notion of resistance to psychoanalysis was vitiated by the arrant psychologism of applying the concept of resistance outside the clinical setting. As Marxist psychoanalysts would later realize, what was needed was a theoretical understanding of the relationship between the dominant ideology in society and the psychic structure of each individual, together with an understanding of the various cultural institutions—notably the family, school and church—which mediate this relationship within the social totality.

Freud's failure to formulate a coherent critique of the ideological reaction to psychoanalysis undoubtedly assisted in the development of psychoanalytic revisionism. Although this revisionism presented the appearance of a progressive and critical response to the "reactionary" nature of Freud's theories, it soon became apparent that the main goal was a *rapprochement* with the forces of ideological reaction at whatever cost. This was achieved by jettisoning those aspects of Freudian theory which had given the most offence to "popular opinion" (and, one suspects, to many of the revisionists themselves): first the death drive, then the libido theory, and finally, in the North American cultural and interpersonal schools, the theory

of infantile sexuality. In America, a combination of individualism, pragmatism, and the prospect of considerable financial reward for "successful" analysts, contributed to the development of so-called ego psychology, directed toward an active adaptation of the patient to reality. Therapeutic success became the sole criterion for judging psychoanalytic theory; as a result, Freud's speculative hypotheses, which had never contributed directly to the analytic cure, were dropped.

The subordination of psychoanalytic theory to the problem of therapeutic success led to a version of psychoanalysis that was considerably more conformist than Freud's own. In Freud's theory, the conflict between sexuality and a repressive civilization could not be resolved by the therapeutic adjustment of individuals to the "everyday unhappiness" which is the usual lot of mankind.<sup>27</sup> Freud fully realized that psychoanalytic therapy could never completely "cure" the sick individual, for the simple reason that the sickness of the individual was ultimately caused and sustained by the social institutions of a repressive civilization. "The recognition of our therapeutic limitations," wrote Freud, "reinforces our determination to change other social factors so that men and women shall no longer be forced into hopeless situations."<sup>28</sup> The existence of a dialectical tension between theory and therapy in psychoanalysis was axiomatic to Freud; the revisionists, however, obliterated the discrepancy between theory and therapy by promising that self-improvement was possible without calling society into question.

As Herbert Marcuse notes in his "Critique of Neo-Freudian Revisionism," North American ego psychology either discarded those psychoanalytic concepts not subject to clinical verification, or re-defined them in such a way that their wider sociological implications was obscured."<sup>29</sup> This resulted in a lessening of the critical impact of psychoanalytic theory, particularly in relation to the "depth dimension" of the conflict between the individual and society. The main theme of *Civilization and its Discontents* is that the "sense of

guilt" in modern man is the expression of an unresolved antagonism between the demands of *Triebe* in the individual and the restrictions imposed by "civilization."<sup>30</sup> The basic notion of conflict between sexuality and society appears elsewhere in Freud's writings: in the *Three Essays*, Freud speaks of the "inverse relation holding between civilization and the free development of sexuality;"<sup>31</sup> while, in "*Civilized*" *Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness*, Freud asserts that "our civilization is, generally speaking, founded on the suppression of *Triebe*."<sup>32</sup> The weakening of the theory of sexuality in North American ego psychology inevitably led to a weakening of the notion of conflict between the individual and his society, for the simple reason that one of the terms in this relationship of opposition—sexuality—had been effectively removed from psychoanalytic theory.

By equating the problem of validation of psychoanalytic hypotheses with the problem of therapeutic success, revisionist psychoanalysis came closer to satisfying the criteria stipulated by philosophers of science. As one representative of the "received" view in the philosophy of science has commented,

Since psychoanalysis does claim to function as a therapy, its clinical successes and failures seem to me to be highly relevant in evaluating the truth of its theories. If it has no clinical successes and if it is unconfirmed by experimental findings, then it has no more scientific standing than any other consistent mythology.<sup>33</sup>

As well as removing the stigma of "irrefutability" from psychoanalysis, the emphasis on therapeutic success managed to allay the *methodological* criticisms of psychoanalysis. Although the analytic experience, constituted between two subjects in the form of a dialogue, was obviously incapable of generating "experimental findings" in the strict sense, the therapeutic goal of the adjustment of the individual to social norms (internalized as the "reality principle") provided a definite criterion against which to measure the accuracy and predictive power of psychoanalytic hypotheses. According to this line of thought, those hypotheses which proved most useful in terms of their therapeutic

value would be recognized as such, thus leading to theoretical development that was firmly grounded in the observation of empirical reality.

What may have been a great victory for the scientific method turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory for psychoanalytic revisionism. As Robert Bocock points out, "Therapeutic practice cannot itself be used to verify the claims of psychoanalytic theories, as is often claimed by analysts. This is because the research which has been done has shown that nearly two out of three neurotic patients recover over time, without any therapy at all."<sup>34</sup> This makes it virtually impossible to tell whether the recovery of a patient was due to the therapy, or would have happened anyway without the use of any particular therapeutic technique. Furthermore, the acceptance of the therapeutic criterion by psychoanalysis restricts its field of generalization to those members of society exhibiting recognizable symptoms of neurosis or psychosis; this not only reinforces the artificial distinction between the normal and the pathological (which Freud, to his credit, had called into question), it reduces psychoanalysis to the level of a medical specialization.

In America, the 1927 decision by the American Psychoanalytic Association to limit analytic practice to medical doctors prepared the ground for therapeutic reductionism. Today, American psychoanalysis may be paying the price for the early loss of independence from medicine. As Sherry Turkle observes, "There is a lack of intellectual dynamism [in contemporary American psychoanalysis], a marked decline in the volume of analytic practice. In competition with the plethora of other therapies, few analysts can fill their practices with analytic patients."<sup>35</sup>

This contrasts sharply with the picture that emerges from France, where psychoanalysis currently enjoys a certain hegemony in the nation's cultural life. According to Sherry Turkle,

Freudian structuralism is a central theme in French intellectual life in fields as diverse as literary criticism, mathematics, economics and philosophy. And the change has gone far beyond the intelligentsia: psychoanalysis has emerged as a social phenomenon.

A small and insignificant French psychoanalytic movement has become a French psychoanalytic culture, deeply and broadly involved in politics and society. The number of French analysts has shot up dramatically, and public interest in psychoanalysis has climbed to new heights.<sup>36</sup>

There is no simple explanation for the current success of French psychoanalysis. Initial resistance to psychoanalysis in France had been particularly strong. Only the surrealists, who adapted Freud's theories to their own taste, showed any real interest in psychoanalysis. French philosophers and scientists, the medical profession, and of course the Catholic Church, all came out strongly against Freud.<sup>37</sup> There was no French psychoanalytic association until 1926, and for nearly a quarter of a century it remained inconsequential.

It was not until after World War II that a small but highly committed group of psychiatrists, psychologists, and literary scholars began what is now referred to as the "return to Freud." We shall concentrate on the work of Jacques Lacan, whose re-reading of Freud (particularly the early Freud of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*) has re-orientated psychoanalytic theory around the notion of desire.

But before moving on to a detailed consideration of Lacan's contribution to our understanding of Freud, we conclude our discussion of Freud and his critics with some highly relevant remarks from a rather unexpected source. Louis Althusser, in a 1964 article entitled "Freud and Lacan," acknowledges the importance of the contemporary "return to Freud" in France; what is more, he expresses the belief that psychoanalysis is capable of reaching the level of a mature science.<sup>38</sup> We have already indicated our dissatisfaction with the Althusserian conception of science, and do not propose to dwell upon this question. Throughout our discussion, we have treated the question of "scientificity" as an ideological one, used as a weapon either for or against psychoanalysis, but always revealing more about the ideological prejudices of those who invoke the notion of science than about psychoanalysis. This is just as true of Freud as it is of his critics, and of psycho-

analytic revisionism. With this in mind, we turn to Althusser's remarks on the "return to Freud." According to Althusser, a return to Freud demands:

1. Not only that we reject the ideological layers of the reactionary exploitation of Freud as a crude mystification;
2. but also that we avoid the more subtle ambiguities of psychoanalytic revisionism, sustained as they are by the prestige of more or less scientific disciplines;
3. and finally that we commit ourselves to a serious effort to historico-theoretical criticism in order to identify and define, in the concepts Freud had to use, the true *epistemological relation* between these concepts and their thought content.<sup>39</sup>

This "triple labour of ideological criticism (1, 2) and epistemological elucidation (3)," continues Althusser, "has been initiated in practice by Lacan."<sup>40</sup> Lacan's reading of Freud is at once *literal*, *critical*, and *interpretative*. It is literal in the sense that Lacan remains faithful to the meaning of Freud, critical in so far as he addresses the ambiguities and contradictions in Freud's thought without seeking any simple resolution of theoretical problems (such as the revisionists had attempted). Above all else, Lacan's reading of Freud is interpretative; it is an attempt to return to the spirit of the text in a modern sense, rather than an exegesis in a historical sense. Lacan's understanding of Freud is mediated by a close acquaintance with Hegelian dialectics, existential philosophy, and structural linguistics. Not surprisingly, the reaction to Lacan in America has been less than enthusiastic. But while American ego psychology currently thrives on its ignorance of Lacanian psychoanalysis, other disciplines are beginning to show signs of interest in Lacan, including literary criticism, philosophy and sociology. One senses that American psychoanalysis will not be able to escape the full force of Lacan's critique of ego psychology for much longer—although one can only speculate as to whether the revolution in psychoanalytic *thought* created by Lacan can be translated into *practice* as successfully in America as it has in France. The relationship of psychoanalysis to

culture is very complex and changes over time, with long periods of development punctuated by sudden reversals, but the kind of reversal which full scale acceptance of Lacan in America would represent is hardly conceivable—at the present time.

We shall return to the theme of the sociological position of psychoanalysis in the final section of this chapter, where we examine the relationship of psychoanalysis to Marxism and sociology. But first, we consider the work of Lacan as it relates to language and desire, which, as we saw in Chapter Two, are central themes in Hegel's account of human subjectivity.

### III. LANGUAGE AND DESIRE IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

Lacan's reformulation of psychoanalytic theory depends explicitly upon his theory of language—that is to say, upon his theory of truth. "It is from somewhere other than the Reality that it concerns that Truth derives its guarantee," writes Lacan, "it is from Speech."<sup>41</sup> For Lacan, as for Freud, *psychical* reality is a particular form of existence not to be confused with *material* reality;<sup>42</sup> for Lacan, however, psychical reality is primarily the intersubjective world of language. Language is understood by Lacan in the sense developed by Saussure and Jakobson: as an autonomous system of differential elements which acquire meaning only in their mutual relations. But whereas linguists tend to view speech as essentially static, Lacan views speech as a movement toward something, an attempt to overcome the separation which characterizes the subject's relationship to his world. Speech therefore implies the existence of *desire*—the experience of a lack corresponding to the non-identity of subject and object.

Lacan's psychoanalytical epistemology, which attempts to construct a "logic of the signifier"<sup>43</sup> on the basis of the child's earliest relation to objects, is by far the most interesting development of a tradition whose most influential exponent was Hegel. According to Hegel,

Self-consciousness is the state of *Desire* in general. Consciousness has, *qua* self consciousness, henceforth a twofold object—the one immediate, the object of sense-certainty and of perception, which, however, is here found to be marked by the character of negation; the second, viz. itself, which is the true essence, and is found in the first instance only in the opposition of the first object to it. Self-consciousness presents itself here as the process in which this opposition is removed, and oneness or identity with itself established.<sup>44</sup>

It is desire which relates the Hegelian "absolute subject" to the object of knowledge, and hence to knowledge itself. In the first instance, the object of desire is found in opposition to self-consciousness; desire is fundamentally consciousness of an object that makes itself known through its absence. The experience of desire guarantees that self-consciousness is also consciousness of an object; and while self-consciousness is able to exist on its own account "only by sublation of the object," self-consciousness "is unable by its negative relation to the object to abolish it."<sup>45</sup> Instead, self-consciousness finds through experience that the object desired is, in fact, something other than self-consciousness. Only when self-consciousness has as its object another self-consciousness does it first "come to have the unity of itself in its otherness."<sup>46</sup> That is to say, it is only when desire is directed toward another desire that the "opposition" between self-consciousness and the object of desire is overcome, "and oneness or identity with itself established."

In the Hegelian view, human desire is essentially the desire for recognition. In order for mutual recognition to take place, however, each individual subject must signify itself to the other as *desire* before being recognized as such. This presupposes the existence of language, which Hegel defines as follows:

Language is self-consciousness existing *for others*; it is self-consciousness which as such is there immediately present, and in which its particularity is universal. Language is self separating itself from itself, which as the pure ego identical with ego becomes an object to itself, which at once maintains itself in this objective form as *this* actual self, and at the

same time fuses directly with other's and is their self-consciousness. The self perceives itself at the same time that it is perceived by others: and this perceiving is just existence which has become a self.<sup>47</sup>

The goal of intersubjective unity is not achieved, therefore, without creating a radical division within the subject between "this actual self" and the self that exists "for others" in language.

Language is seen by Hegel as a form of necessary alienation (*Entäußerung*) whose acceptance by the subject eventually leads to "absolute knowledge." Lacan, however, argues that the contradiction between subjective meaning and its objectification in discourse cannot be resolved at the level of self-consciousness. In *The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire*, Lacan criticizes Hegel's "deceptive accentuation of the transparency of the *I* in action at the expense of the opacity of the signifier that determines the *I*."<sup>48</sup> As we have seen, it is *desire* that is given the responsibility of preserving the minimum connexion between self-consciousness and otherness upon which the dialectic of the *Phenomenology* depends. But the alienation of self in language is also the alienation of desire. In giving expression to desire, the relationship between self-consciousness and objective knowledge comes to depend upon another relationship, namely the relationship of the subject to language. Modern linguistics has demonstrated that language is not defined by any fixed correlation of signs to the reality which they signify, but that in language signs take on their value from their relationships to each other. A distinction must therefore be made between desire as it is experienced by the subject (corresponding to the original relationship between self-consciousness and otherness) and desire as it is expressed in language (corresponding to a relationship between signifiers).

Although Hegel makes this distinction in the *Phenomenology*, he does not regard the alienation of the experience of desire from its expression in language problematic from the point of view of self-consciousness. "It is here," says Lacan, "that Freud reopens the

junction between truth and knowledge to the mobility out of which revolutions come."<sup>49</sup> Freud's critique of Cartesian *cogito*, like that of Hegel, is formulated in terms of desire. As Norman O. Brown comments, "It is a Freudian axiom that the essence of man consists, not, as Descartes maintained, in thinking, but in desiring."<sup>50</sup> But whereas Hegel conceives of desire as that which constitutes the indissoluble unity of the subject and consciousness, Freud tells us that desire reveals the very opposite: the discontinuity of the subject and consciousness—and the existence of the unconscious. Lacan argues that the Freudian unconscious originates in the margin between the experience of desire and its expression which the child's accession to language opens up. "It is precisely because desire is articulated that it is not articulable,"<sup>51</sup> says Lacan, indicating that the existence of unconscious desire is the perpetual effect of symbolic articulation. In the sense that desire is unconscious, its connexion with the *Knowledge* of Hegel's "absolute subject" is severed. However, the permanent tendency of repressed desire to re-emerge into consciousness, by more or less devious routes, marks the re-entry of *Truth* into the field of experience. Hegel's "cunning of reason" is replaced by the psychoanalytic notion of the "return of the repressed," in which the Truth of desire is experienced without being made conscious—as in slips of the tongue, in dreams, in jokes, and in the symptoms of neurosis and psychosis.

The disjunction of the conscious ego from the "true" subject of the unconscious corresponds to the alienation of the universal from the particular *Selbst* in language. The subject's existence "for others" in language takes place at the level of consciousness; conversely, consciousness depends on the subject's capacity to articulate an idea or a feeling. "A thing becomes conscious," says Freud, "through becoming connected with the word-presentations corresponding to it."<sup>52</sup> The self-consciousness of the subject is therefore bound up with the "word-presentations" corresponding to his signifying presence in discourse.

But whereas Hegel considers the "word-presentation" corresponding to the subject—namely, the *I*—to be more concrete, in its universality, than the real being from which it is abstracted, Freud reveals the *I* to be the verbal nucleus of the pseudo-totality known in bourgeois society as "the individual." The discovery of the unconscious by Freud entailed a radical de-centring of the subject from the axis of the philosophical *cogito*. Just as the Copernican revolution has dislodged man from the position he had occupied at the centre of the universe, the result of Freud's discovery, says Lacan, was that "the very centre of the human being was no longer to be found at the place assigned to it by a whole humanist tradition."<sup>53</sup>

Lacan's own critique of the philosophical *cogito* is expressed in the following terms:

Is the place that I occupy as the subject of a signifier concentric or ex-centric, in relation to the place I occupy as subject of the signified—that is the question.

It is not a question of knowing whether I speak in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather of knowing whether I am the same as that of which I speak.<sup>54</sup>

Lacan sets out from the strictly linguistic definition of the *I* as signifier, in which there is nothing but the personal pronoun or "shifter," which designates the subject as he speaks of himself. According to Lacan, the *I* presupposes the Other to whom the subject's speech is addressed, and the desire for recognition by the Other (which Lacan, following Hegel, regards as the basic premise of intersubjectivity). In *The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, Lacan writes:

What I seek in speech is the response of the other. What constitutes me as subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I utter what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to reply to me.<sup>55</sup>

The Other is therefore the locus of the "subject of the signifier," in so far as the meaning of the subject's speech is constituted by the response of the Other. "Speech always subjectively contains its own reply,"

says Lacan, which means that the category of Other plays its part even when the subject is "talking to himself."

Because the meaning of his speech is constituted in and by his relation to the Other, the "subject of the signifier" is "ex-centric" in relation to the "subject of the signified." According to Lacan, the "subject of the signified" is determined by the "signifying chain" in its totality—in other words, by a whole set of signifiers, of which the "subject of the signifier" is but one. The "subject of the signified" is as much determined by the Other ("the site of the pure subject of the signifier") as by the *I* of the "subject of the signifier," which *designates* the subject in his discourse, but does not *signify* him as such. This distinction is overlooked in conscious discourse, in which there is an "incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier."<sup>57</sup> The consequence of this sliding movement (*glissement*), which represents the passage of the signifier into the signified, is that the "subject of the signifier" identifies the totality of his being with the *content* of his speech.

But as Lacan points out, "the *form* in which language is expressed defines subjectivity."<sup>58</sup> The splitting of the subject, which is primarily the result of its subordination to the signifier, provides the individual with a conscious identity at the level of intersubjectivity. Like Hegel, Lacan defines intersubjectivity in terms of the subject's desire to be recognized by an Other. But whereas Hegel assumes a necessary connexion between consciousness and the desire for recognition, Lacan argues that the subject's concern with the Other in his discourse, which we found at the centre of the problem of the "subject of the signifier," creates unconscious desire in the subject.

In *The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, the unconscious is defined as "that part of the concrete discourse in so far as it is transindividual, which is not at the disposition of the subject to re-establish the continuity of his conscious discourse."<sup>59</sup> In the sense that the conscious "subject of the signifier" is unconscious of the influence of the Other on his discourse, the unconscious is

"the discourse of the Other,"<sup>60</sup> an unconscious discourse in which the unconscious "subject of the signified" seeks to make its (unconscious) desire recognized. The "discourse of the Other" interferes with the conscious discourse, of which it is the negative product; it is responsible for the gaps, distortions, and contradictions in conscious discourse.

"Since Freud," writes Lacan, "the unconscious has been a chain of signifiers that somewhere (on another stage, in another scene, he wrote) is repeated and insists on interfering in the breaks offered it by the effective discourse and the cogitation that it informs."<sup>61</sup> This view of the unconscious is hardly to be found explicitly in Freud, since it depends upon a conception of language of which Freud was unaware. As Althusser comments, "Lacan would be the first to admit that his attempted theorization would have been impossible were it not for the emergence of a new science: *linguistics*."<sup>62</sup> However, Freud's own explicit theory of the relationship between unconscious and conscious thought, in which the crucial mediating role is assigned to "word-presentations," lends support to Lacan's interpretation. "Word-presentations" allow ideas to enter consciousness, says Freud, which means that it is language that is responsible for organizing thought at the level of consciousness. The analytic cure is based on the notion that is by bringing into speech, by means of free association, the unconscious fantasies underlying the subject's symptoms, that the subject becomes conscious of his "truth." The relationship between "word-presentations" and conscious ideas in Freud is analogous to the relationship between "signifier" and "signified" in Saussure; for this reason, it would appear that Lacan's "subject of the signifier" corresponds to Freud's own conception. But for Lacan, the organizing power of language is not restricted to consciousness. Whereas Freud had accounted for the organization of unconscious ideas by the "primary processes" of condensation and displacement, Lacan recognized in these "mechanisms" the two most fundamental linguistic operations, "metaphor" and "metonym." This discovery has enabled Lacan to declare that "the

unconscious is structured like a language,"<sup>63</sup> a formula which he insists "is mine only in the sense that it conforms as closely to Freud's text as to the experience that it opened up."<sup>64</sup>

The Freudian unconscious is first and foremost the consequence of repression: for Freud, the unconscious is synonymous with "the repressed."<sup>65</sup> Once the structure of language has been recognized in the unconscious, it becomes necessary to determine the relationship between this structure and the operation of repression. Given that an idea can only become conscious "through becoming connected with the word-presentations corresponding to it," repression represents an active intervention in discourse which prevents a *signified* (the idea) from becoming associated with its *signifier* (the "word-presentation"). That is to say, repression is a form of censorship, an absolute negation of meaning, which Lacan describes as "a resistance to signification."<sup>66</sup> Repression creates a barrier between the signifier and the signified, a break in the signifying chain, driving the signified out of conscious discourse into the unconscious.

This interpretation corresponds closely to what Freud says in "The Unconscious," where he differentiates between "word-presentations" and the ideas associated with particular objects ("thing-presentations") in order to account for the difference between conscious and unconscious ideas:

The conscious presentation [*Vorstellung*] comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone . . . . Now, too, we are in a position to state precisely what it is that repression denies to the rejected presentation in the transference neuroses: what it denies to the presentation is translation into words which shall remain attached to the object. A presentation which is not put into words, or a psychical act which is not hypercatheted, remains thereafter in the unconscious in a state of repression.<sup>67</sup>

For Freud, the unconscious is discontinuous with language, its "contents" governed by the mechanisms specific to the primary process, especially by condensation and displacement. These processes link the symbolic

content of dreams, symptoms, etc., to their true significance—that is, to a meaning that has been repressed from consciousness. By redefining the original repressed meaning as a *signified* and dream symbols, slips, jokes and symptoms as *signifiers*, Lacan was able to re-establish the continuity of the signifying chain. For although the discontinuity of conscious and unconscious "presentations" is absolute at the level of *conscious* discourse, the essential continuity of the *concrete* discourse is preserved by the "discourse of the Other." The signifiers of this discourse are inextricably bound up with the signifiers of conscious discourse because of their common signified: the "subject of the signified," whose Truth could be realized by the "verifying process" in which the subject recognizes his unconscious as "his history."<sup>68</sup>

In order to illustrate his theory of the subject, Lacan has employed the analogy of the Moebius strip, where the division of conscious and unconscious, on either side of the barrier created by repression, is discovered to be the unity of the concrete discourse in the writing on one continuous side. The signifying chain in its totality constitutes the "subject of the signified," to which the "subject of the signifier" is perpetually opposed. Every signifier in the signifying chain is also a signified of another signifier, being connected either horizontally, according to relations of contiguity, or vertically, according to relations of similarity. In the case of the association of one signifier to another by contiguity, the barrier of repression is not crossed, while in the case of association by similarity, the barrier is crossed. In both cases, a new signification is created: the failure to cross the barrier in relations of contiguity corresponds to the "No" of repression, while the crossing of the barrier corresponds to the twisted signification of the symptom.

It was actually the linguist Roman Jakobson who first suggested that there was a correlation between metonymy and metaphor, the two basic structures of relations between signifiers, and the Freudian processes of displacement and condensation respectively.<sup>69</sup> Lacan develops these

suggestions systematically, assimilating processes conceived by Freud on the model of thermodynamic physics to the two fundamental poles of all language, metonymy and metaphor.

Metonymy represents the combination of signifier to signifier in the signifying chain, in which the signification is transferred from one signifier to another, thereby leaving the original signifier without a signified. Metonymy corresponds to the unconscious *displacement* of the original object of the subject's desire onto something apparently insignificant, which Freud discovered in dreams (where it is particularly noticeable), in obsessional neuroses, and, in a general way, in every unconscious formation. Displacement is an ambiguous phenomenon: on the one hand, displacement is one of the means by which the subject applies censorship; on the other hand, displacement is a means of foiling the censorship.

Metaphor represents the substitution of one signifier for another, and accounts for the passage of the signifier into the signified, that is, for the disappearance of the signifier. Metaphor corresponds to the *condensation* of several elements of meaning into one symptom or dream symbol, resulting in the "over-determination" of the dream or symptom in question. Like displacement, condensation is ambiguous with respect to the censorship; it is both a consequence of the censorship, and a means of avoiding it. For Lacan, the symptom is the metaphor *par excellence*, equivalent in every way to the mechanism involved in the poetic metaphor, where it is what is not said that gives the metaphor its evocative power.

For Lacan, it is not simply a metaphor to say that the symptom is a metaphor, for "the symptom *is* a metaphor, whether it be admitted or not, just as desire *is* a metonymy, even if man mocks the notion that it is so."<sup>70</sup> The notion that the symptoms of madness contain a certain "poetic truth" has fascinated and horrified man for centuries, as its continual recurrence in literature and art testifies, and in this sense Lacan is heir to a long cultural tradition which has discovered meaning in the apparent absurdity of the discourse of fools

and madmen. The "metonymy of desire" is somewhat more difficult to reconcile, although its meaning is perfectly straightforward. In *The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious*, Lacan writes: "It is the connexion between signifier and signifier [in the metonymic structure] that permits the elision in which the signifier installs the lack-of-being [*manque d'être*] in the object relation."<sup>71</sup> Thus, it is the displacement of the object of desire which is constituent of desire itself, this term being understood in the Sartrean sense of "lack-of-being." At the logical or epistemological level, says Lacan, the "lack-of-being" is the gap in the signifying chain which the subject seeks to fill at the level of signifier. In other words, the loss of object creates in the subject a desire for unity, out of which the movement toward identification springs. In the child, the loss of object refers to the mother's breast, which becomes an object of sexual desire through its contiguity (that is, its metonymic relationship) with the natural function of feeding.

Lacan's theory of the "metonymy of desire" leans heavily upon a radical interpretation of the *Fort! Da!* episode, recounted by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which Freud's grandson associated the appearance and disappearances of a toy which he alternatively threw away and drew back again with the vowel sounds of the German words for "gone!" (*Fort!*) and "here!" (*Da!*).<sup>72</sup> The active repetition of this game by the child was interpreted by Freud as an attempt to overcome the passivity of the situation where the child's mother (and, at a more primordial level, the mother's breast) was alternately present and absent. According to Lacan, this involves the displacement of desire from the level of experience to the level of expression, marking the transition from *need* (that is, natural desire experienced in its particularity) and *desire* as such (that is, the specifically human desire for recognition). This desire is unconscious to the extent that the incorporation of presence and absence into his discourse involves the suspension of needs in the subject, becoming conscious only in the form of a *demand* for love—in other words, in a universal

form fundamentally opposed to the particularity of need.

Lacan's "metonymic" theory of desire differs from Hegel's in that human desire, while still the desire for recognition, is regarded by Lacan as the product of language. The subject's desire for unity with the object, which is experienced as a need, is at a different level from his desire for unity with the Other, which is expressed in the form of a demand. Desire appears in the rift which separates need and demand: it is "an effect in the subject of that condition which is imposed on him by the existence of the discourse, to make his need pass through the defiles of the signifier."<sup>73</sup>

Language provides the means of splitting off from one another the original confusion of need and demand in the infant. This confusion stems from the dual character of the child's relation to his mother: on the one hand, the child's mother satisfies various needs with which the child is born, primarily the need for nourishment; on the other hand, the love that the child receives during the very act of feeding creates an erotic relationship between mother and child, which reacts historically on the first, transforming biological need into the sexual drive. According to Lacan, infantile sexuality is created within the "Imaginary Order," which comprises the constellation of images, perceived or imagined, through which the child becomes conscious of his world. The child's relationship to his mother's breast is at once Real and Imaginary: it is Real inasmuch as the milk provided by the breast satisfies a biological need (corresponding to *Instinkt*), and Imaginary in so far as the breast becomes an erotic object through its identification with the mother's love. The loss of the breast is therefore a double loss: it is a Real loss in the sense that the child is deprived of the blissful experiences of suckling at his mother's breast, and an Imaginary loss in the sense that the love relationship between mother and child, which is an Imaginary relationship from the child's point of view, is no longer mediated by an erotic object.

The loss of the mother's breast is the first step of the child's separation from the world. The sexual drive now becomes detached from

the need for taking nourishment, passing into the auto-erotic activity of "sensual sucking." At the same time, the Imaginary relationship of the child to his mother enters a new phase, as Freud observes in the *Three Essays*:

At a time when the first beginnings of sexual satisfaction are still linked with the taking of nourishment, the sexual drive has a sexual object outside the infant's own body in the shape of the mother's breast. It is only later that he loses it, just at the time, perhaps, when he is able to form a total idea of the person to whom the organ that is giving him satisfaction belongs.<sup>74</sup>

Freud's suggestion that the breast is lost at the moment when the "total idea" of the mother as person begins to emerge has been systematically elaborated by Melanie Klein, whose theories about object relations are based on the notion of the "partial object." Lacan has reinterpreted the Kleinian theory of object relations in terms of the desire for the Other, arguing that the child's desire for unity with the partial object is at a different level from his desire for unity with the Other. According to Lacan, the desire for unity with the Other presupposes a second stage of separation, in which the child forms a "total idea" of himself corresponding to that which he has formed of the Other. This second separation, in which the child comes to recognize himself as a unified but separate being, is described by Lacan as the "mirror stage."

The idea of the mirror stage is introduced by Lacan in order to account for "the startling spectacle of the infant in front of the mirror."<sup>75</sup> Confronted with his own reflection in a mirror, the child reacts with jubilation to the form (Gestalt) in which he anticipates his own bodily unity. In other words, the child identifies with this image, which becomes "the source of secondary identifications."<sup>76</sup> The mirror stage is seen by Lacan as a turning point in the pre-history of the human subject, constituting the "symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject."<sup>77</sup> The important

point, as Althusser and others have acknowledged,<sup>78</sup> is that the mirror stage situates the agency of the ego in an Imaginary relationship to the body *prior* to the determining influence of social institutions. The constitution of the subject depends upon his identification with his own alienated image in the mirror stage, creating an Imaginary ego which will always remain irreducible for the individual, "whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as *I* his discordance with his own reality."<sup>79</sup> The imaginary identification of the child with his alienated *imago* creates a notion of self that "symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination."<sup>80</sup> For Lacan, the Imaginary construction of the ego in the mirror stage creates an *alter ego* which constitutes the self as an Other. This identification is paradigmatic for all future identifications, in which the self loses himself in the Other just as he has lost himself in his own alienated image.

Lacan's conception of the mirror stage involves a reversal of the notion of self both in Freud and in contemporary ego psychology. In Freud's interpretation, the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly those springing from the surface of the body. "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego," wrote Freud; "it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself a projection of that surface."<sup>81</sup> The manner in which a person's own body attains its "special position"<sup>82</sup> among other objects in the world of perception is seen by Freud in terms of psycho-physiological processes involving "internal perceptions." For Lacan, perception is certainly primary in generating the sentiment of self, but it is *external* perception that is assigned the crucial mediating role. In *Aggressivity in Psycho-analysis*, Lacan writes:

It is this captation by the *imago* of the human form, rather than an *Einfühlung* the absence of which is made abundantly clear in early infancy, which, between the ages of six months and two and a half years, dominates the entire dialectic of the child's behaviour in the presence of his similars. During the whole of this period, one will record the emotional reactions and the articulated evidences of a normal transitivity. The child who strikes another says that he has been struck; the child who sees another fall, cries.<sup>83</sup>

According to Lacan, the child's "internal perceptions" are so dominated by his identification with his own alienated image that he is unable to distinguish between himself and others at the level of affective *Einfühlung*. Whereas Freud explains the origins of the ego in terms of an experience *within* the individual, Lacan shows that the experience of identity is based on a relationship *between* the individual and an image that alienates him from himself. Although the ego is generated by perception, says Lacan, it is not centred on the "perception-consciousness system," nor is it organized by any "reality principle."

It is clear that from this point of view the subject cannot be equated with the ego, since the latter is an imaginary agency in which the subject tends to become alienated. This is the mistake made by ego psychology, which accounts for the formation of the ego in terms of the determining influence of "external reality," and reduces the ego to the experienced identity of the subject. For Lacan, there is a fundamental distinction to be made between the *ego*, constituted in and by a series of Imaginary identifications stemming back to the mirror stage, and the *subject*, who is situated within the field of language, "in which his place is already inscribed at birth, if only by virtue of his proper name."<sup>84</sup>

In his earlier works, Lacan refers to the ego as the *moi* that is fundamentally opposed to the *je* of the subject's discourse. The *moi* is the subject alienated from himself, first through the loss of the object, then in the misrecognition (*méconnaissance*)<sup>85</sup> of the mirror stage, while the *je* is the subject "restored to himself," so to speak, at the level of intersubjectivity. As we have seen, Lacan views the subject as subordinated to language; intersubjectivity is seen by Lacan as primarily a symbolic relationship, and the "Symbolic Order" is held to be the determining order of the subject. But "it is not in a grammatical conception of the functions in which they appear that one should analyse if and how the *I* (*le je*) and the ego (*le moi*) may be distinguished or overlap in each particular subject,"<sup>86</sup> says Lacan. Rather, the difference between the *I* and the ego is to be understood in

terms of the subject's desire for the Other. The *je* expresses the subject's desire for the Other in an absolute and unconditional form, thereby raising this desire (which is experienced by the *moi* as need) to a second power. The loss of the mother's breast, the formation of a "total idea" of the mother, and the primary narcissism of the mirror stage, have all acted to transform Real biological need into an Imaginary sexual drive. But it is only in language that the child's desire to make its desire recognized can be fulfilled. According to Lacan, this is what Freud discovered in the *Fort! Da!* episode:

These [repetitive utterances of presence and absence] are the acts of occultation which Freud, in a flash of genius, revealed to us so that we might recognize in them that the moment in which desire becomes human is also that in which the child is born into Language.<sup>87</sup>

The child's accession to language in the capacity of a subject frees him from the alienating image of the mirror stage, and enables him to overcome the lack conveyed by the partial object. The child begins to become engaged in the concrete discourse of his environment, establishing his own position in relation to the two poles (*Fort! Da!*) of his existence, attaining mastery over his abandonment. By substituting a Symbolic relationship for his Imaginary relationship to the lack of object, the *je* comes to occupy the place of the *moi* in the subject, just as Freud had said in his famous formulation, "*Wo Es war soll Ich werden.*"<sup>88</sup> In Lacan's interpretation, this statement does not refer to the ego and the id of the second Freudian topography, which are always referred to as *das Ich* and *das Es* respectively. Contrary to the form of the English translation—"Where the id was, there the ego shall be"—which overlooks the subtlety of Freud's appropriation of personal pronouns in his theory, Lacan offers the following, more correct interpretation: "There where it was, it is my duty that I should come into being."<sup>89</sup>

Language makes possible the child's entry to the Symbolic Order, which structures and represents both the Imaginary and the Real. "Man speaks," says Lacan, "but it is because the symbol has made him man."<sup>90</sup>

Language and its structure exist prior to the moment at which the child is born into it, as does the Symbolic universe which language governs. In viewing the subject as subordinated to language, Lacan cuts across the conventional distinction between interpersonal and intrapersonal relations by making the latter a subset of the former, in the signifying chain which links them. As Anthony Wilden comments, "Lacan seeks to rebut the notion of the unconscious as an individual, intrapsychic entity, and to restore it as a function to the collectivity which in fact creates and sustains it."<sup>91</sup> For Lacan, and we suggest also for Freud, the subject is a product of the mediation of signifying practice within the social process. Although the alienation of the mirror stage is pre-social, in the sense that it does not necessarily involve specific family relationships, it is an alienation that necessarily precedes the child's entry to the Symbolic Order. Lacan's use of this concept obviates the need for a "reality principle," since for Lacan the Symbolic is reality (but not the Real, which is a kind of algebraic  $x$  that is lacking in the Symbolic Order). Lacan reinterprets the Oedipus complex in terms of the Symbolic Father (*le-nom-du-père*) and "the signification of the phallus," arguing that it is through becoming identified with the Law—in other words, the various culturally imposed prohibitions relating to incest—that the "name-of-the-Father," symbolized by the phallus, dominates the Imaginary relation of the child to *his* own phallus or *her* lack of it. In other words, the signification of the phallus is determined by its relation to the "name-of-the-Father" which is in turn determined in relation to the Law which the "name-of-the-Father" represents. It is not anatomy, therefore, but the symbolic structure of patriarchal society, that determines destiny.

In the concluding section of this chapter, we relate the Symbolic Order to the problem of ideology in order to determine the position of the subject, as conceived by psychoanalysis, in relation to the class structure of capitalist society. With this, we will have achieved the goal that we set ourselves in the Introduction to this thesis. The

final section of this chapter should therefore be read as a conclusion to the thesis itself, which has been structured in such a way that the encounter of Marxism and psychoanalysis has been postponed until the ground of their common problem, namely language, has been cleared of all obstacles.

#### IV. IDEOLOGY, LANGUAGE, AND THE UNCONSCIOUS

As we noted earlier in this chapter, the history of the relations between Marxism and psychoanalysis has been greatly influenced by the ideological confusion surrounding Freud's discoveries. Lacan has gone as far as to blame the Soviet Union's rejection of psychoanalysis on the fact that the Americans had distorted Freud's doctrine, a view that is echoed by Althusser in his article on "Freud and Lacan."<sup>92</sup> However, it would be too much of an oversimplification to hold the revisionists of the American school responsible for the inability of Marxism to come to terms with psychoanalysis. In the first place, there is the problem of the ideological content of Freud's own thought, especially in his more sociological works, such as *The Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and its Discontents*. In *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud's uncritical acceptance of the Enlightenment ideals of reason and humanity leads him to speculate that a new humanistic rationality, based on "rational, non-coercive renunciation," might possibly come to fill the vacuum created by the decline of Christianity (which is seen as a "collective neurosis").<sup>93</sup> *Civilization and its Discontents* contains both a powerful indictment of Western civilization and a thoroughly ideological defence of the repressive institutions upon which it is based.<sup>94</sup> Secondly, Marxism has exhibited a considerable "resistance to psychoanalysis," basing its opposition to Freud's doctrine on ideological arguments rather than making any serious attempt to account for the historical emergence of psychoanalysis. In the Soviet Union, where ideological resistance to psychoanalysis has been particularly strong, Freud's "irrationalism" is perceived as a threat to Marxism's (i.e. the Party's) claim to represent a monopoly of reason. Similarly, Freud's doctrine of

the essential continuity of normal and pathological is seen to undermine the possibility of a full and healthy life under socialism.

The fact that psychoanalytic theory contradicts the ideology of the Communist Party has led to several attempts to refute psychoanalysis. A recent example of this is found in V.I. Dobrenkov's *Neo-Freudians in Search of "Truth,"* which is published in 1976. According to Dobrenkov, Freud's reactionary social philosophy follows directly from the weaknesses inherent in the initial philosophical and methodological principles of this theory:

Freud's sociological ideas are not simply a side-product of psychoanalytical theory, but the logical outcome of the essential development of that theory, its indispensable ingredient. Stress of the biological, pansexualism, excessive preoccupation with the unconscious, metaphysics, anti-historicism and pessimism form the basis of Freud's social philosophy.<sup>95</sup>

Dobrenkov is correct to point out the essential connection between Freud's sociological ideas and the *development* of psychoanalytic theory. As we noted earlier, Freud's speculative metapsychology provided him with a much-needed conceptual framework in which to situate his theoretical discoveries. From the beginning, Freudian metapsychology contained a latent social meaning, a meaning which Freud was unable to develop fully for want of the appropriate methodological tools. During the first twenty years of its development prior to the First World War, psychoanalysis was able to elaborate its various concepts and theories without rendering this social meaning explicit. Later, when Central and Eastern Europe were in revolutionary upheaval, the social and political implications of psychoanalysis took on a new importance, not only for Freud but also for a growing number of psychoanalysts who were committed to a Marxist analysis of society.<sup>96</sup>

Freud's sociological ideas, as presented in *The Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and its Discontents*, must therefore be understood in relation to the increasing contradictions of class society during the 1920s. But if this is the case, it is no longer possible to account for

the reactionary character of Freud's sociology solely in terms of the development of *theory*. This is where Dobrenkov falls into error: he fails to acknowledge the *contradictory* nature of the evolution of psychoanalytic theory, which develops in relation to changes taking place at all levels of the social totality. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud's idealist philosophy of history, which is essentially derived from bourgeois ideology, comes into contradiction with his theory of the individual. At the level of history and society, Freud presents a *static* conception of human nature, in which human beings are depicted as lazy, irrational and aggressive creatures by nature. At the level of the individual, Freud describes the *transformation* of man's anti-social nature under the influence of culture. There are two different logics at work here, one static, the other dynamic, which can only be reconciled within a Hobbesian paradigm.<sup>97</sup>

Dobrenkov's failure to distinguish between the "reactionary" social philosophy of Freud's late metapsychology, and the philosophical and methodological principles underlying his dialectical theory of the individual, allows him to falsely deduce the former from the latter. The extent to which Dobrenkov is forced to distort and falsify Freud's basic theoretical discoveries in order to maintain this imposture is illustrated by the following passage from *Neo-Freudians in Search of "Truth:"*

Freud's theory is of a distinctly bio-psychological character, centred on instincts. With reference to the theory of immutable innate biological instincts and also to the hypothesis of the eternal irreconcilable conflict between life and death in every organism Freud attempted to find the source of man's mental activity. To him the psyche was biological by nature and did not in any way depend upon the external world, upon social reality. Convinced that man's instinctual make-up determined his behaviour Freud denied categorically that man's environment might influence his mental structure. Modern theoretical and empirical psychological research demonstrates conclusively that the basically metaphysical theory of instincts on which psychoanalysis is based is mystification pure and simple.<sup>98</sup>

It is difficult to know where to begin with this passage; one begins to

wonder whether Dobrenkov has bothered to read Freud. "With reference to the theory of immutable innate biological instincts," it should be noted that this theory has absolutely nothing to do with Freud's own theory of instincts (*Triebe*). As we have seen, the Freudian *Trieb* differs from *Instinkt* in three important respects" First of all, it is not *immutable*, but changes its aim and object under the influence of family and culture. Secondly, it is not *innate*, but originates in the erotic relationship between the child and his mother. Thirdly, it is not *biological*, but is conceived in Imaginary relation to its source (the erotogenic zones).<sup>99</sup> Consequently, the assertion, "to [Freud], the psyche was biological by nature and did not in any way depend upon the external world, upon external reality," is mystification pure and simple. As for the statement, "Freud stated categorically that man's environment might influence his mental structure," it is quite simply untrue.

A more balanced reading of Freud emerges from V.I. Vološinov's *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*, which was published in 1927. Vološinov sets out to prove psychoanalysis "totally unacceptable from an objective-materialistic point of view,"<sup>100</sup> and in so doing anticipates many themes developed subsequently by Lacan. According to Vološinov, there are three necessary conditions of any psychology: a social focus, an objective method, and, most important of all, an analysis of language. Vološinov believed that Freud lacked a theory of language, and that instead of analyzing his essentially verbal data, Freud accepted his patients' utterances at face value. This allegedly enabled Freud to construct a fictitious psyche, of which the patient's verbal utterances were seen as the product:

Freud's whole psychological construct is based fundamentally on human verbal utterances; it is nothing but a special kind of interpretation of utterances. All these utterances are, of course, constructed in the *conscious sphere of the psyche*. To be sure, Freud distrusts the surface motives of consciousness; he tries instead to penetrate to deeper levels of the psychical realm. Nevertheless, Freud does not take utterances in their objective aspect, does not seek out their physiological or social roots; instead he attempts to find the true motives of behaviour in the utterances themselves -- the patient is himself supposed to provide him information above the depths of the "unconscious."<sup>101</sup>

According to Vološinov, the phenomena that were taken by Freud as evidence for the "unconscious," namely human verbal utterances, constituted instead an aspect of consciousness. The Freudian unconscious was therefore a fiction; it was only another form of consciousness, albeit one that deviated ideologically from the rest of consciousness:

The motives of the unconscious that are disclosed at psychoanalytical sessions with the aid of "free association" are just as much *verbal reactions* on the patient's part as are all other, ordinary motives of consciousness. They differ from the latter not in kind of "being," that is, ontologically, but only in terms of content, that is, *ideologically*. In this sense Freud's unconscious can be called the "unofficial conscious" in distinction from the ordinary "official conscious."<sup>102</sup>

Because the "unofficial conscious" was constituted in and by language, argued Vološinov, it was therefore a social phenomenon, since language was social by definition. Thus, Freud's individualism was seen as a consequence of the lack of a theory of language.

Lacan has demonstrated that such a theory *does* exist in Freud. Vološinov's failure to see the linguistic component of psychoanalysis is understandable in the light of Freud's positivism. But the discovery of metaphor and metonymy in the primary psychic processes of condensation and displacement seriously weakens Vološinov's critique of Freud. Once the *structure of language* is recognized in the unconscious, it becomes clear that psychoanalysis is much more than just "a special kind of interpretation of [verbal] utterances."<sup>103</sup> And even if condensation and displacement had not been identified with the linguistic processes of metaphor and metonymy, these two concepts already provided Freud with an *objective method* of analyzing the language he encountered. Thus, Freud did not simply take the contents of his patients' utterances at face value, but was able to distinguish between the latent and manifest content of dreams, symptoms, myths, etc. Finally, the redefinition of the unconscious as "the discourse of the Other" restores it as a function to the collectivity which in fact creates and sustains it, thereby satisfying Vološinov's requirement that psychoanalysis have a *social focus*.

We have now considered two attempted refutations of psychoanalysis by Marxist writers. Dobrenkov's argument was found to be based on a crude mystification of Freud's basic theoretical findings, while Vološinov's more sophisticated approach appears to have been surpassed by Lacan's interpretation of Freud. But we have yet to determine what it is about psychoanalysis that should be of interest to Marxists. In short: Why psychoanalysis? First of all because psychoanalysis contains a dialectical theory of subjectivity. Lacan traces the evolution of the subject from the time of his birth, accounting for the development of consciousness and the unconscious in relation to successive stages of alienation: the loss of the mother's breast, the primary narcissism of the mirror stage, the accession to language and, with the Oedipus Complex, entry into the Symbolic Order. It is at this point that the child resolves his or her relationship to the social authority vested in the (Symbolic) Father, and to the Phallus with which this authority is associated. Psychoanalysis is therefore also a theory of sexism and of patriarchal authority as well as being a theory of alienated sexuality and unconscious desire.

Secondly, because psychoanalysis provides a critique of the autonomous individual. Freud's decentring of the subject is comparable to the earlier de-centrings of Copernicus and Marx. Although individualistic in its methodology, psychoanalysis views the conscious ego as a mirage, a fundamental misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) of the self originating in the mirror stage, which leaves the individual with an Imaginary centre. The "subject of the signifier" creates the impression of unity in his monological utterances, but he is always excentric to himself -- that is, to the unconscious "subject of the signified."

The goal of psychoanalysis is to make the subject conscious of his history. But in order for this to take place, the subject must renounce all belief in the self-sufficiency of his consciousness. His truth is hidden from him, even as it speaks to him in the "discourse of the Other." The subject can only become conscious by recognizing the unconscious subject of desire -- that is, by recognizing in his own radical ex-centricity the gap between the *I* and the *me* in which his desire is to be found.

Psychoanalysis is first and foremost a theory of subjectivity. That Marxism requires a theory of subjectivity in addition to its material and objective analysis of society has been demonstrated by the failure of revolutions when objective conditions seemed ripe. The triumph of fascism in Germany proved that the question of subjectivity can be decisive in a revolutionary situation. This had already been recognized by Rosa Luxemburg, who stressed the importance of the active participation of the masses in revolutionary practice, seeing revolutionary spontaneity as an essential mediation in the dialectic between the transformation of consciousness and the revolutionary transformation of society.<sup>104</sup>

As we noted in Chapter One, Marx formulates the problem of radical subjectivity in terms of the practical needs of the proletariat. "Will theoretical needs be directly practical needs?" Marx asks. "Theory is realized in a people only in so far as it is a realization of the people's needs."<sup>105</sup> But as we discovered in Chapter Two, Marx misunderstands the relationship between language and consciousness. This creates serious problems for the Marxian conception of "practical needs." In the first place, the expression of a particular need in language gives it a universal form, thereby involving the subject in a necessary alienation (*Entausserung*). The subject now stands in opposition to himself, divided between his self-existence and his existence for others. Secondly, the relative autonomy of linguistic relationships from real relationships means that language plays a *constitutive* role in the formation of human needs. As Merleau-Ponty puts it,

Above all, language is not just the counterpart or replica of the affective context, it plays a role in it, introducing other motives, changing the internal meaning, and ultimately is itself a form of existence or a diversion within existence.<sup>106</sup>

There is therefore a second type of linguistic alienation, in which language does not simply *mediate* between the experience of a need and its expression in language, but actually *creates* needs within the context of

intersubjective relationships. Following the example of Marx, we shall designate this second, social alienation by the German term *Entfremdung*.

Obviously the problem of subjectivity is related to the problem of ideology. Althusser's essentially correct formulation of ideology as "an expression of the *lived* relation between men and their world"<sup>107</sup> implies the importance of a theory of subjectivity. But at the same time, a distinction must be made (and is made by Althusser) between (1) ideology as a lived relation, and (2) ideology as a "system of representations."<sup>108</sup> Any theory of subjectivity must therefore relate the *content* of ideology-as-it-is-lived to the various institutional practices which determine the *form* or structure of ideology-as-a-system-of-representations.

Marxism needs a theory of subjectivity — of this there can be no doubt. Not only must theoretical needs become practical needs, practical needs must also become theoretical needs. But before this can take place, there are certain theoretical problems that must be overcome. What is the relationship between needs and consciousness? What effect does language have on needs? How is language related to ideology? What is the relationship between the structure of language and the constitution of the subject? What is the relationship between ideology and the subject? These are some of the questions that a Marxist theory of subjectivity must be able to answer. They go a long way beyond anything Marx was ever able to say, particularly on the subject of language. But they are precisely the questions that Lacan has attempted to answer. In answer to the question, "Why psychoanalysis," it is because the problems that psychoanalysis deals with are the same problems that concern the Marxist theory of subjectivity. They are two sets of problems in search of a common problematic. Lacan therefore appears to have laid the basis for the eventual reconciliation of Marxism and psychoanalysis.

## NOTES—CHAPTER THREE

<sup>1</sup>Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, tr. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 197.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>4</sup>cf. J.-P. Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943).

<sup>5</sup>cf. B. Binswanger, *Being in the World*, ed. J. Needleman (New York: 1963).

<sup>6</sup>S. Freud, "The Question of Lay Analysis," S.E. XX, p. 246.

<sup>7</sup>F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (New York: 1920).

<sup>8</sup>cf. S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* [Hereafter referred to as S.E.] (London 1973-74) XIII, p. 1ff.

<sup>9</sup>cf. P.K. Feyerabend, *Problems of Empiricism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981).

<sup>10</sup>S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, S.E. V, p. 517.

<sup>11</sup>cf. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, tr. R. Howard (New York: Pantheon, 1965), pp. 277-78.

<sup>12</sup>Lacan sees patients for varying amounts of time and sometimes for as little as ten minutes. Freudian orthodoxy insists upon a pre-determined duration for the analytic session, but Lacan believes that nothing should be routine or predictable in analysis, including the duration of the session.

<sup>13</sup>J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, tr. D. Nicholson Smith (London: Hogarth Press, 1973), p. 395.

<sup>14</sup>Original source unknown; quoted by Gail Kennedy in Sidney Hook ed., *Psychoanalysis, Scientific Method, and Philosophy* (New York: NYU, 1959), p. 279.

- <sup>15</sup> C.D. Axelrod, "Freud and Science," in *Theory and Society*.
- <sup>16</sup> cf. Laplanche and Pontalis, p. 396.
- <sup>17</sup> S. Freud, "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," S.E. XIV, p. 123.
- <sup>18</sup> Freud introduces the distinction between *source*, *aim*, and *object* in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, S.E. VII, p. 168.
- <sup>19</sup> J. Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, tr. J. Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1976), p. 9.
- <sup>20</sup> S. Freud, *Three Essays*, p. 135.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144, n.1.
- <sup>22</sup> S. Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, S.E. XX, p. 168.
- <sup>23</sup> J. Laplanche, p. 10.
- <sup>24</sup> S. Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," S.E. XVII, pp. 120-21.
- <sup>25</sup> S. Freud, *Three Essays*, p. 134.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> cf. S. Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (New York: Garden City Publishing, 1943), pp. 397-98.
- <sup>28</sup> Quoted in James Jackson Putnam and *Psychoanalysis: Letters Between Putnam and Freud*, ed. Nathan C. Hale (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971), pp. 90-91.
- <sup>29</sup> In H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), pp. 217-51.
- <sup>30</sup> S. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, S.E. XXI, p. 59ff.
- <sup>31</sup> S. Freud, *Three Essays*, p. 242.

<sup>32</sup>S. Freud, "Civilized" Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness, S.E. IX, p. 179.

<sup>33</sup>Sidney Hook, in Sidney Hook, ed., p. 219.

<sup>34</sup>R. Bocock, *Freud and Modern Society* (London: Nelson, 1976), p. 21.

<sup>35</sup>S. Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 6.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>L. Althusser, p. 190.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>J. Lacan, *Écrits*, tr. A. Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), pp. 305-06.

<sup>42</sup>cf. S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 620.

<sup>43</sup>cf. J. Lacan, *Écrits*, especially *The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious*.

<sup>44</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. J.B. Baillie (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 220.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 660-61.

<sup>48</sup>J. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 307.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>50</sup>N.O. Brown, *Life Against Death* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1959), p. 7.

<sup>51</sup>J. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 302.

<sup>52</sup>S. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, S.E. XIX, p. 20.

<sup>53</sup>J. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 164.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>62</sup>L. Althusser, p. 207.

<sup>63</sup>J. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 298.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 297-98.

<sup>65</sup>S. Freud, "Repression," S.E. XIV, p. 147.

<sup>66</sup>J. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 164.

<sup>67</sup>S. Freud, "The Unconscious," S.E. XIV, pp. 201-02.

<sup>68</sup>J. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 52.

<sup>69</sup>R. Jakobson, *The Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), p. 81.

<sup>70</sup>J. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 175.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>72</sup>cf. S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, S.E. XVIII.

<sup>73</sup>J. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 264.

<sup>74</sup>S. Freud, *Three Essays*, p. 222.

<sup>75</sup>J. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 1.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup>cf. Goldberg and Sekoff, "Ideology and the Question of the Subject," in the *Canadian Journal of Social and Political Thought*, 1980, 4, 2.

<sup>79</sup>J. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup>S. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, S.E. XIX, p. 26.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>83</sup>J. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 19.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>85</sup>There is no English word for *meconnaissance*, which is literally "mis-cognition."

<sup>86</sup>J. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 129.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>88</sup> S. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, S.E. XXII, p. 80.

<sup>89</sup> J. Lacan, *Écrits*, p. 129.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>91</sup> A. Wilden, "Lacan and the Discourse of the Other," in J. Lacan, *The Language of the Self*, tr. A. Wilden (New York: Delta Books, 1968), pp. 264-65.

<sup>92</sup> cf. J. Lacan "Position de l'Inconscient" in the French edition of *Écrits* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, cf. L. Althusser, "Freud and Lacan." p. 190 (1966) p. 833.

<sup>93</sup> S. Freud, *The Future of An Illusion*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1928), p. 71.

<sup>94</sup> cf. S. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontent*, S.E. XXI.

<sup>95</sup> V.I. Dobrenkov *Neo-Freudians in Search of "Truth"*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), p. 21.

<sup>96</sup> cf. *Introduction*.

<sup>97</sup> cf. Donald Cavreth, "Sociology and Psychoanalysis: the Hobbesian problem revisited" in *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 1982, 2, p. 201.

<sup>98</sup> V.I. Dobrenkov, p. 13.

<sup>99</sup> On this third point, we would do well to consider Freud's 1915 definition in "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," S.E. XIV, p. 122:

By an "instinct" is provisionally to be understood the psychical representative of an endosomatic, continuously flowing source of stimulation, as contrasted with a "stimulus" which is set up by *single* excitations coming from *without*. The concept of instinct (*Trieb*) is thus one of those lying on the frontiers between the mental and the psychical.

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V.L. Vološinov, *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*, tr. I.R. Titunit (New York: Academic Press, 1976).

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>104</sup>cf. R. Looker, *Rosa Luxemburg*.

<sup>105</sup>K. Marx, *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, (London: Penguin, 1974)  
p. 252.

<sup>106</sup>M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Position of Speech* tr. J. O'Neill (Evanston,  
Ill.: NUP, 1970), p. 21.

<sup>107</sup>L. Althusser *For Marx* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1969),  
pp. 233-234.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 231.

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