Political Transformations and the Practices of Cultural Negation in Contemporary Art Theory

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own work and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation follows the theme of negation, negativity, and "practices of negation", through a selection of writings on art in the post-war period, and, in particular, from the 1960s to the present. Although the term negation is widely used, most prominently with respect to the histories and analyses of art-historical categories like avant-gardism, neo-avant-gardism, modernism, and postmodernism, very little attention has been paid to the concept itself, or to its role within art-historical methodology. The main art-theoretical texts which I select for examination are characterised by a suspicion of figures of identity, plenitude, or affirmation. I explore the borderlands between dialectical and nihilistic methodologies which these suspicions seem to provoke, and I argue that the attention to negativity has a particular importance for considerations of art because of its implications for the question of representation.

Chapter 1 outlines the key accounts on avant-gardism and modernism, and looks at the impact of the Left Hegelian tradition on recent art theory. I argue that the claims that negativity has become compromised or ineffectual, lead, in fact, to a reassertion of negativity. The second section of this chapter tracks some of the methodological implications through a case study of the writings of T.J. Clark, and develops the question of negation as a fundamental problem of representation. Chapter 2 analyses the writings of the Italian architectural theorists/historians Manfredo Tafuri and Massimo Cacciari. These authors elaborate their arguments from German critical theory, and their attention to negativity is tracked into an account of "completed nihilism". Chapter 3 starts from the association - advanced, in particular, by writers associated with the journal *October* - made between modernism/postmodernism and the rhetorical figures of symbol/allegory. I argue that allegorical negativity is not straightforwardly disjunctive, and, by reading it as a degenerative dialectic, the argument returns to representational debates.

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INTRODUCTION

To many people, it seems obvious now, and did so when this project commenced in 1990, that concepts like the avant-garde and modernism had become severely compromised, and, more particularly, that their often cited "practices of negation" had been rendered redundant by the transformations in post-war society - transformations which included factors like expansion of the art market (particularly in the United States and in Germany), changes in the nature of capital accumulation, and the conviction that the "shock of the new" had become the "tradition of the new".[1] As we look back from the far side of postmodernism - a debate still raging in 1990, but itself somewhat outmoded in 1996 - such questions of avant-gardist negation, however much disputed and contended, seem to have settled in the dust and to hover on the verge of the arcane. My point here is stronger than the long-habitual claims that resistance has become appropriable, indeed marketable, by capitalist society (late capitalist, post-industrial, post-Fordist, post-etc...). We seem to be presented with an inversion of Walter Benjamin's reclamations of the past for the present, the traces of the long-gone for now-time, and instead face the prospect of the just-gone receding rapidly into the far past. This prospect makes Benjamin's point the more forceful rather than redundant, and we

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1.   See, for example, Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Verso, 1991, p.49 (the original essay, of the same title, appeared in *New Left Review* 146, July/August 1984, pp.53-92). The notion of the "tradition of the new" can be found in Harold Rosenberg, "The Tradition of the New" (1962), *The Tradition of the New*, Paladin, 1970, pp.23-26: "the famous 'modern break with tradition' has lasted long enough to have produced its own tradition. Exactly one hundred years have passed since Baudelaire invited fugitives from the too-small world of memory to come aboard for his voyage in search of the new", ibid., p.23. The idea of "shock" in modernity is deep-seated, and has been most popularised by Walter Benjamin in *Charles Baudelaire. A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, Verso, 1983, and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), *Illuminations*, Fontana, 1973, pp.219-53. Benjamin draws on: Sigmund Freud's "theory of shock", "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1914), *Sigmund Freud. On Metapsychology: the Theory of Psychoanalysis*, Penguin, 1984, pp.269-338, especially p.303; Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), *On Individuality and Social Forms*, The University of Chicago Press, 1981, pp.324-39. The phrase "shock of the new" became the title of the television series and book on the avant-garde by Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change*, Thames & Hudson, 1980.

might require such interventions into our own yesterday.[2] As much as the modernisms it initially sought to challenge, today postmodernism has been championed, attacked, categorised, analysed, marketed and curated - note the category of "early postmodernism" which has recently found its way into print.[3] Not so long ago, people didn't know postmodernism was coming. This thesis concentrates on the not so long ago, before the whole matter seemed done and dusted, and before the narratival *telos* had become an *idée fixe*.

Even so, the concept of negation does not present itself for interrogation with any less difficulty, but rather with more, as tends to be the case when the argument is still open. What the object of my thesis actually *is* remains a significant problem. The concept of negation is most explicitly, and infamously, associated with what has been termed the "negative avant-gardes": Futurism and Dada, with their self-consciously provocative statements, manifestos, exhibitions and cabarets.[4] Marinetti called for revolt and "the destructive gesture" of war. Among the targets for the act of negation were "museums, libraries, academies of every kind... moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice".[5]

> Come on! set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums!... Take up your pickaxes, your axes and hammers and wreck, wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly![6]

Among the more abhorrent aspects of this urge to, and ecstasy in, destruction one often

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2.   The "material bases" for this surge into the future are frequently commented on, and there has been much attention to the effects of new technologies. Nevertheless, such escalations and retractions of temporality may be more a matter of the mind-sets of critical theory. One must beware of getting carried away with these effects, be suspicious of the energetic effusings, and wonder to what extent critical theory finds itself replicating or exacerbating the phenomena that it describes and analyses.

3.   Paul A. Bove, *Early Postmodernism: Foundational Essays*, Duke University Press, 1995

4.   The terms "negative" and "positive" avant-gardes come from Renato Poggioli, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Harvard University Press, 1968. Eckart Von Sydow saw Decadence as a "culture of negation" (cited p.76), and Andre Gide described Dada as "a negating operation" (cited p.63).

5.   Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism" (1909), in *Art in Theory 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, Blackwell, 1992, p.147.

6.   Ibid. , p.148.

finds some absurd and comical images: "Oh, the joy of seeing the glorious old canvases bobbing adrift on those waters, discoloured and shredded!...".[7] One year later, Boccioni, working these principles into the question of modern painting, declared Futurism against "all forms of imitation", "the nude in painting", and urged its supporters - after all these were dangerous times - to stand firm against both "flat" and "bituminous tints".[8] A few years later, and with a fair bit of pitiless wrecking well in progress, Hugo Ball announced Dada as "a harlequinade made of nothingness";[9] and Tristan Tzara wrote: "Let each man proclaim: there is a great negative work of destruction to be accomplished".[10] Included in Tzara's list of phenomena to be negated are: the family, "comfortable compromise and good manners", logic, social hierarchy and values, memory, archaeology, prophets, and the future.[11] Hülsenbeck, adopting explicitly Nietzschean phraseology, wrote:

> ... to be a Dadaist means to let oneself be thrown by things, to oppose all sedimentation; to sit in a chair for a single moment is to risk one's life.... you say yes to a life that strives upwards by negation. Affirmation - negation: the gigantic hocuspocus of existence fires the nerves of the true Dadaist.... Blast the aesthetic-ethical attitude! Blast the bloodless abstraction of expresssionism! Blast the literary hollowheads and their theories for improving the world! For Dadaism in word and image, for all the Dadaist things that go on in the world! To be against this manifesto is to be a Dadaist! [12]

Such statements against convention and tradition - and with all their internal contradictions - are the loci classici of avant-gardist practices of negation. Yet Tzara, just to make it difficult to pin down Dada, declared: "I am against action; for continuous contradiction, for affirmation too, I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate common sense".[13]

By the same token it is not difficult to identify practices of negation for the so-called

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7. Ibid., p.148.
8. Umberto Boccioni et al., "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto" (1910), in ibid., p.152.
9. Hugo Ball, "Dada Fragments" (1916-7), in ibid., p.246.
10. Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto 1918" (1918), in ibid., p.252.
11. Ibid., p.253.
12. Richard Hülsenbeck, "First Dada Manifesto" (1918-20), in ibid., p.255.
13. Tzara, op. cit., p. 249.

"positive", or "constructive", avant-gardes like de Stijl or Constructivism: their rejection of pictorial arts and the turn to photography or design; Mayakovsky's meditations in *Pro Eto* on, and his distress in, the difficulty of negating his own pre-revolutionary I. Neither were negatory gestures and tactics unknown outside, and often in opposition to, the avant-garde - we can find them, for example, in Proletkult's attempt to destroy all the art of the bourgeois and aristocratic past. Neither is it difficult to chart negation through modernist art in general: the avoidance of local colour by the Fauves, the dissecting of traditional pictorial space by the Cubists, the subverting of academic conventions, the deliberate display of incompetence; or what T.J. Clark called the "refusal to signify" of Manet's *Olympia*; even the apparent succession of "isms", each rejecting and defining itself against its predecessor, can be presented as a chain of negations.[14] Negation is further celebrated - sometimes through the invocation of Satanic positions - through the works of Baudelaire and the Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse), authors who themselves become subjects of fascination for the avant-garde of the early 20c.[15] Taken in these ways negativity can be seen to be thoroughly embedded in the modern tradition of art and culture. There are different modalities and variable stakes, but it is easy to see why the term "negation" (even when it is absent) has come to indicate the defining feature of modern artistic activity, and why it figures so prominently in the literature on modern art. Negation remains an issue in post-war art practice - whether in the writing of Ad Reinhardt, in Gustav Metzger's manifestos, for example; or maybe it would be better to say not that it "remains" but that it is self-

14.　　See T.J. Clark, "Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of 'Olympia'", *Screen*, vol.21, no.1, pp.18-41. T.J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", *Pollock and After. The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Frascina, Harper & Row, 1985, pp.47-63 (originally in *Critical Inquiry*, September 1982, vol.9, no.1, pp.139-156). The list of practices of negation is given by Clark's footnote. His points are summarised and commented on by Terry Atkinson, "Disaffirmation and Negation", *MUTE 1*, Galleri Prag, Copenhagen, 1988, p.9.

15.　　Charles Baudelaire, "Les Fleurs du Mal" (1861), *Baudelaire. The Complete Verse*, Anvil Press, 1986; Comte de Lautréamont, "Chants de Maldoror" (c.1870), *Maldoror and Poems*, Penguin, 1978. To this list we might add Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature* (1884), Penguin, 1959. Huysmans is probably more concerned with *ennui* with, and denigration of, nature, and an emphasis on artifice.

consciously reworked or rearticulated as a practice.[16]

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However, the question addressed by this thesis focuses not so much on the nature of these senses of negation as claimed by avant-gardists or modernists. It focuses more on the role of negation in the modes of interpretation or theorisation of the avant-garde and modernism - and of neo-avant-gardism and postmodernism - by later historians and critics, particularly in the post-war period. Theories of the avant-garde and the modernism/postmodernism debate provide some key *sites* for encountering the question of negativity, and the avant-garde, etc., frequently provides the *vehicle* for that question. This needs to be specified further, for I do not mean, to take one example already touched on, to pursue an extended analysis of Clark's phrase "refusal to signify" in so far as it pertains to the object of his study (Manet). In this instance, it is easy to distinguish between the mid-19c. historical object and the interpreting subject in the late 20c., but the matter is far more messy.

It has always been difficult to explain what a thesis on the concept of negation and its role in art's histories and theories might be about. Attempts to clarify the matter with some specific examples fail to speak of the issue at hand, somehow skirting it and veering off in another direction. At one level this difficulty is odd, for - as indicated above - once you start looking, negation crops up everywhere, operating as part of a

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16.   See, for example, Ad Reinhardt, "On Negation", *Art-as-Art. The Seleced Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. Barbara Rose, University of California Press, 1991; Gustav Metzger, "Auto-Destructive Art" (1959), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art. A Soucebook of Artists' Writings*, eds. Kritine Stiles and Peter Selz, University of California Press, 1996, p.401. Yve-Alain Bois claims that Reinhardt's work does not refuse to signify, but signifies refusal, and that "His negations are affirmative statements... 'the intellectual power of asserting "not"'". See Yve-Alain Bois, "The Limits of Almost", *Ad Reinhardt*, Rizzoli, 1991, p.11. This account plays with Clark's account of Manet's *Olympia* ("Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of 'Olympia'", op. cit.). See also, Nacy Spector, "Negativity, Purity, and the Clearness of Ambiguity. Ad Reinhardt, Joseph Kosuth, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres", *Art and Design*, vol.9, no.1/2, January-February 1994, pp.6-11.

routine language of art history and analysis, thrown around in conference discussions and in texts. It figures, sometimes by implication, in almost any discussion of "ends", "voids" and "nothingness", discussions which have themselves been writ large across the landscape of post-war art writing.[17] Moreover, negation clearly irritates some people, whether as an implicit bugbear in an anti-theoretical polemic (see, for example, Robert Storr versus Yve -Alain Bois over the question of Robert Ryman),[18] or as the explicit target in a theoretically inspired thesis (Andrew Benjamin versus the *via negativa* over the question of just about everything).[19] To play with our terms a little: when something is being negated, then you can be pretty sure that it exists, albeit by means of a negative definition. But this truism slips into some difficult areas when we recall that the "something" in question is already negation. The brute question becomes: what is it? what is this negation? Answers are not easy to find.

The difficulty, I believe, is due to the nature of my "object". The substantial problem for defining my object comes with that object being a theoretical/philosophical concept, and, moreover, with that concept being negation. I have already remarked on negation's ubiquity and yet simultaneous absence from direct enquiry: many use it, but few know what they mean. This apparent paradoxical quality seems to accompany the concept of negation: negation as a category seems, for instance, to be everywhere and nowhere, and to be completely plural in potential meaning and totally loaded with particular significance. Logically, the meaning of any practice of negation depends on what is being negated in the first place and, as Charles Harrison observes, the term is

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17.　　"Negation" is a key theme in accounts of the work of Gerhard Richter. See, for example, Peter Osborne, "Painting Negation: Gerhard Richter's Negatives", *October* 62, Fall 1992, pp.103-113; Gertrud Koch, "The Open Secret. Gerhard Richter and the Surfaces of Modernity", in Jean-Philippe Antoine, Gertrud Koch, Luc Lang, *Gerhard Richter*, Éditions Dis Voir, 1995, pp.9-27. Koch, concluding her essay, refers to a quotation from Gottfried Boehm: "Negation is at the basis of all pictorial appearance" (cited p.27).
18.　　Robert Storr, "Simple Gifts", *Robert Ryman*, Tate Gallery Publications, 1993; Yve-Alain Bois, "Ryman's Tact" (1981), *Painting as Model*, MIT, 1990, pp.215-226.
19.　　Andrew Benjamin, *Object. Painting*, Academy Editions, 1994.

"promiscuous".[20] Its meaning or locus is potentially limitless. Yet at the same time it is

utterly limited and tied to the object of its denial. This limited quality has frequently been

seen as a major drawback of "practices of negation": they don't seem to have a "life of

their own", or to provide any sustaining force, and even if they succeed in their negating

they seem to take themselves down with what they denied. At best they seem to provide

a catalyst for escape, but in themselves, as Laura Mulvey points out, they cannot escape

their defining ground.[21] What Mulvey has in mind are practices of negation of a radical

or critical kind: cultural politics, art practice with serious political intentions (and there

are, of course, more strictly political variations of this argument). In addition, negation

seems to be heavily loaded and suggestive by way of both its intellectual heritage

(especially Hegelianism and Marxism) and what Harrison refers to as its susceptibility

to investment with "moral purpose".[22] Negation's weight in cultural debate is,

therefore, of a peculiarly double nature - both highly specific (at least in its invocation)

and highly charged on the one hand, and, on the other, loose and fluid, and even, on

occasions, empty.

There might, then, be something fundamentally wrong with any attempt to "fix"

negation as a set of definable "practices", and this is the danger with the formulation of

my title and central concept. Negation - like its most famous representative, the Devil -

is a shifting and sometimes submerged category. But while we might see the particular

pitch of negation as used in any one instance as an entirely movable feast, it is, I

believe, an abdication of thinking to let the matter constantly dissolve into the extremes

of infinite plurality or contingent specificity - extremes which may sound rather grand,

but which allow us to say nothing much at all. These far reaches are, I think,

inescapable gravitational forces, but a discussion of negation which is argued as a

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20.   Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language*, Basil Blackwell, 1991, p.232.
21.   Laura Mulvey, "Changes: Thoughts on Myth, Narrative and Historical Experience", *History Workshop Journal*, no.23, 1987, pp.3-19.
22.   Harrison, op. cit., p.232.

formal logic misses its very "life" and force; so, *pace* Harrison, I would argue that its charge of "moral purpose" is precisely where we must look. For all its infinite variety of determinations, negation does seem repeatedly to suggest the same type of concerns; and for all its particular, finite or local, determinations, there seems to be a constant pitch into wider social questions (sometimes with an underlying ontological resonance). History, social life, politics, the politics of the everyday, etc., are already charged into the arena of negativity - as, so to speak, its life-blood. It is the questions of reification and political change - and, by implication, the question of resistance and emancipation - into which negation seems to be constantly orchestrated.

In fact, the shifting and duplicitous character attributed to the Devil is not so far from all this. Lucifer is explicitly associated with negation and Lucifer's fall from grace is the key narrative of negation's origin. "I am the Spirit of Eternal Negation", Goethe has Mephistopheles say, while the Lord, despite Mephisto's provocations, only affirms: "I have no hate for creatures of your kind".[23] The interpretations of the Faust myth are swollen with plays on the question of negation, or what sense one is to make of "*Ich bin der Geist, der stets verneint!*" or Mephistopheles' "riddle" of self-identity as "A part of that force which, always willing evil, always produces good".[24] The question touches on the insurmountable aporia at the heart of theological accounts of the origin of evil.[25] Christian theology became caught in trying to answer why the self-sufficient Absolute

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23.   J.W. von Goethe, *The Collected Works. Vol.2. Faust 1 and 2*, Princeton University Press, 1994, line 1338, and line 337.

24.   Ibid., line 1335-6; cf. "Ein Teil von jener Kraft, Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft". Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust. Der Tragödie Erste Teil*, Philipp Reclam jun.GmbH & Co., 1986. For some interesting accounts of the Faust myth see: Georg Lukács, *Goethe and His Age* (c. 1930-40, first published 1947), Merlin, 1979; Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Final Scene of *Faust*" (1959), *Notes to Literature. Vol.1*, Columbia University Press, 1991, pp.11-120; Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic. The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez*, Verso, 1996.

25.   See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (written in the early 1920s, first published 1928), Verso, 1985; Lesek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism. Its Origins Growth and Dissolution. Vol.1. The Founders*, (1978), Oxford University Press, 1981; Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, University of Minnesota Press, 1991; Massimo Cacciari, *The Necessary Angel* (1984), State University of New York Press, 1994.

needed, or allowed, evil and the degradation of Being in the Fall: did God encompass negativity as part of His creation, or did negativity exist outside this (in which case, what about God's overarching presence?) For some God creates both good and evil, for others evil is the absence of God's goodness and evil has no reality in itself. The contradiction in the idea of the Absolute Creator forced answers which contantly trod the borders of heresy, tipping over into Gnosticism and Manichaeism.[26] Thomas Mann provides an entertaining account of the variety of positions in his *Dr. Faustus*, where Adrian Leverkühn attends a number of lectures on the question, with each professor arguing for a different account of evil.[27] The terms of arguments on the origin and nature of evil move in similar ways to the previous discussion of negation itself: Christan theology tended on the one hand to treat evil as a necessary part of the cosmos, an approach which, as Kolakowski notes in his discussion of the origin of the dialectic, relativised evil to the point of non-existence; or, on the other hand, treated evil as originating in "the corruption of the will that disobeys the divine commands".[28] The latter tends to be associated with man's Fall, but Massimo Cacciari argues that the matter is most focused on the story of the Fall of Lucifer and the rebel angels, because angels raise the fundamental problem of representation.[29]

A classic treatment of the tale of Lucifer is Milton's *Paradise Lost*.[30] From a modern perspective it is impossible not to sympathise with Lucifer, who wants nothing more than a modest degree of self-determination. Indeed, he wants freedom for a very particular purpose: to give his love to God by his own volition - hardly the stuff of rebellion, but, it seems, regarded by God as the thin end of the wedge, and, in fact, the

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26.   See, for example, Agamben, op. cit.; and Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion. The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, Beacon Press, 1963.
27.   Thomas Mann, *Dr. Faustus. The Life Of The German Composer Adrian Leverkühn As Told By A Friend* (1947), Penguin, 1968.
28.   Kolakowski, op. cit., p.22.
29.   Cacciari, op. cit.
30.   John Milton, *Paradise Lost* , in *Complete English Poems of Education, Areopagitica* (1674), Everyman, 1993, pp.144-441.

very root of sin. God's position in this seems to be totally autocratic and unreasonable. This reading runs counter to Milton's intent, for he was not sympathetic to the rebel angels, although, as William Blake was to comment in the light of Milton's political radicalism, Milton "was of the Devil's party without knowing it".[31] Blake's comment again points to the association of left politics with negation.[32] Where Milton describes the degeneration of Lucifer's beautiful features, Blake, for his part, shows the Angel of Light as beautiful and heroic. As the theme of light suggests, negation and Lucifer are also associated with knowledge. The tale of Lucifer's Fall contains all the appropriate philosophical and political elements: alienation, the division of subject and object, identity/non-identity, the question of knowledge, the scope for criticism and self-reflexivity, the desire for emancipation and the freedom of action, judgement and ethics. The angel/devil provides the motive force of narratives from replays of the *Faust* myth to Pasolini's *Theorem*.

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This thesis works across materials from art history, art or cultural theory, aesthetics, philosophy and critical theory, although it works across none of them exhaustively. The range of materials is extensive and traverses limited aspects of Anglo-American and Italian art history with (largely) German theory and philosophy: the work of Greenberg and Tafuri, to name two, offers a considerable density of material for art historical work; matters under address range across painting, architecture, photography and literature; it is possible to write on the role of negation in just one book of Hegel's, and there is now an industry of literature to read on Adorno and Benjamin. W.J.T. Mitchell has remarked on the "jack of all trades" status of such multidisciplinary work, a sort of

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31. Blake cited in A.L. Morton, *The English Utopia*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1978, p.89.
32. The concepts of Left and Right seem to have derived from the sides of God on which, respectively, the Archangels Lucifer and Michael originally sat.

confinement to amateurism that haunts anyone who ventures out of the academy's division of labour.[33] These remarks cut close to the bone; nevertheless, I remain most impressed and influenced by the work of intellectuals - whatever the attendant weaknesses - who can think across such academic divisions, across the division of general and particular, and who can charge their observations and analyses with politics. It could be said that this taste chose my object, or I could argue the matter the other way, and note that my object - negation - is a category which itself tends to break disciplinary boundaries, or even the bounds of the academic, and which necessarily (and always already) dissolves the neat categories that many academics would prefer to remain fixed (even when they claim a theoretical preference for a lack of fixity).

There is a lot that will be left out or treated rather cursorily. Some of these are matters that are controversial or that have been core debates in the humanities over recent years, and I have tried, where possible and relevant, to indicate some of the scope of the debate in footnotes. However, I wanted to be neither overrun nor overwhelmed by the surface of humanities-based polemical and theoretical battles,[34] and nor did I want to relive some standard presentations of post-war cultural/intellectual history - such as the assumed passage from Marxism to post-Marxism. Not becoming embroiled in these (and many other) debates is a *necessary* weakness - but, I hope, also a strength - of this thesis.

Initially, I was annoyed by the shallow, and often false, senses in which art history used philosophical concepts, and by the atrophied caricatures of certain modes of thinking resorted to by the "new art history". One motivation for looking further at more

33.   W.J.T. Mitchell, "Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture", *The Art Bulletin*, vol. LXXVII, no.4, December 1995, pp.540-544.
34.   This includes intellectual formations such as poststructuralism and psycholanalytic-based accounts, but also what are, for some, less current and fashionable debates such as formalism and realism.

philosophical texts was that I was already distrustful of the versions of them that I found on offer. However, I didn't want the thesis to degenerate into an exposé of art writers' inadequate philosophical grasps - to show, for example, that art historian X has not used philosopher Y's concept accurately. Nor do I wish to operate "like all good revolutionists" who, as Harold Rosenberg put it, try to improve their success in pursuing speculative butterflies "by perfecting the instrument" of capture and weaving "a net with smaller holes".[35] The role of philosophy here has to be treated with caution: philosophical concepts become figures (often shifting ones) in art history, so one can miss the point by trying to judge the art historical usage with recourse to philosophical exactitude.

Rosenberg was being ironic about this "revolutionary event in Aesthetics", in a tone that echoed Marx's comments about Feuerbach and the Young Hegelians and their revolution "in the realm of pure thought".[36] However, this conjunction of the figure of revolution and art/aesthetics is a powerful one. Perry Anderson has criticised the tendency of 20c. "Western Marxism" to drift from active politics into rarefied aesthetic-philosophical contemplation.[37] This same drift also witnesses an insistently social and political loading *to* aesthetic categories - producing the paradox of more politics where there is less.[38] Indeed the heritage of German Idealism - with its terrain which crosses aesthetics, culture and political questions - probably explains the constant transmutations of values in any discussions of negation, and it should not be suprising that negation as a working concept is central to all these tendencies, nor that it has a particulary vivid life

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35.   These are Rosenberg's comments on Susanne Langer's *Feeling and Form*, in the essay "Virtual Revolution", *The Tradition of the New*, op. cit., p.56.
36.   Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology. Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to its Various Prophets* (1845-6), in *Karl Marx Frederick Engels. Collected Works. Vol.5*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1976, pp.23-539. Quotation from p.27.
37.   Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, New Left Books, 1976.
38.   With reference to a very different context, cf. Yve-Alain Bois' remark on American politics being everywhere except in politics. Yve-Alain Bois, "Introduction: Resisting Blackmail", *Painting as Model*, MIT, 1990, p.xx.

in the debates of idealism and materialism. Thus negation, while undoubtedly having an applicability in any area of discussion, has a particularly important life in the writings on art, but one which goes beyond artistic questions while simultaneously being confined to them.

Broadly, we might say that the emphasis in this thesis is at a crossing of, on the one hand, art history and theory, and, on the other, philosophy or critical theory. How to work the relation of these materials becomes a significant problem, for the generality of a philosophy of art seems to be contradicted by the particularity of the empirical work of history. Historically, the discipline of art history has both these modes at its heart, indeed, one is meant to choose between the sweeps of a philosophy of history or the particularities of philology.[39] I confess to liking both, or rather, I like the problem that is suggested by their interrelation, a problem that has been well articulated by T.J. Clark, and which will be discussed later. This question of the general and the particular is recurring one in my thesis. I have already written it into my description of negation's doubleness earlier, but the matter is immanent to the question of negativity itself. In Hegel's account of Sense-Certainty and "the 'This'" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, one is unable to express particularity - "*this* tree", for example - without the generality of language and every other possible "this tree".[40] Hegel argues that what presents itself as immediate, as the truest and richest kind of knowledge - sense-certainty - is, in fact mediated, and "*is* through negation": what was once "This", "Here", and "Now", is now "not-This", "not-Here" and "not-Now".[41] This example is returned to again and

39.   Michael Podro's reference to the "critical historians of art" is useful; as is, in a slightly different register, Clark's admiration for Riegl, Dvorák, and early Panofsky. See Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, Yale University Press, 1992, and T.J. Clark, "The conditions of artistic creation", *Times Literary Supplement*, 24th May 1974, pp.561-2.
40.   G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Oxford University Press, 1977 (this is the A.V. Miller translation).
41.   "'Here' is, e.g., the tree. If I turn round, this truth has vanished and is converted into its opposite: 'No tree is here, but a house instead'. 'Here' itself does not vanish; on the contrary, it abides constant in the vanishing of the house, the tree, etc., and is indifferently house or tree" (ibid., pp.60-1).

again in the texts researched, and it has been commented that the same question - the question of deictic language or what Jakobson called "shifters" - has provided one of the most abiding problems for linguistics.[42] The concept of movement has provided another recurring problem for philosophy, and can also be seen as involving the concept of negation.[43] In other words, next to negation's more colourful faces - all the devilish goings-on - there would seem to be some rather intractable problems.

This brief discussion may give some sense of how easy it would be to write a thesis that rarely touched its home discipline of art history, or the danger of slipping into a discussion of the general and the particular *in the general* - in a way that has no ground. I have aimed to work my theoretical issues out of my materials and tried to avoid allowing the thesis to turn into an exercise of spot-the-sources, as though this somehow exhausts or resolves the issue. Such "sources" - and Hegel is a key one, even if by way of denial - are cues to developing answers; they are means not ends, allowing further twists in the problem. I have tried to work *into* the question of negativity in the accounts of art, and to decribe some of the range of its operation. Much of my working "into the question of negativity" by working "out of the material" has, given the nature of my material, relied on close reading. As I have used this, it is again a way of interrogating the materials, and not a mode of "close reading" which privileges the rhetorical over the real. My position here is that the work must cross the often dichotomised division of the real and representation, must recognise that what it deals with are representations (textual or philosophical), but that these representations may be attempts to gain a conceptual grasp of the real. I am particularly interested in the debates which, rather than dismiss, actually *address*, this problem, even if that means circling in the difficulty; I am bored with "the critique of representation" as it has tended to be discussed - from my

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42.   See Agamben, op. cit., pp.23-5.
43.   See Paul de Man, "The Epistemology of Metaphor", *Critical Inquiry*, vol.5, no.1, Autumn 1978, p.17, for a discussion of the tautologies involved in the attempts to define "motion".

perspective, this is too often a critique which based itself on a much reduced and caricatured understanding of its target.

This *working into* by *working out of* also points to another issue. It is a commonplace of anti-theoretical statements to say that the interpreter has imposed her theoretical framework on the object of study; and it is a commonplace of the pro-theoretical accounts to reveal the anti-theorist as simply unconscious, or wilfully forgetful, of their own theoretical framework, to show them as "naturalisers" of partisan accounts, as "ideologists" in the more modern sense of the term.[44] My account pushes in explicitly theoretical directions. But while the anti-theorist sees the historian-theorist as *externalising* their ideas onto the object of study, my account puts more emphasis on the opposite movement, and locates how the historian may *internalise* aspects attributed to the object of study. This will be a recurring theme, and I have found the transpositions that take place here particularly fascinating.

Most of the writers whose work has become central to this thesis share a suspicion of what might be termed "easy" positions - and all are regarded as "difficult". A consistent theme is an opposition to figures of identity, immediacy and plenitude, although the authors themselves vary in how far they push this. Accordingly, whatever presents itself as the richest form of knowledge and experience will be regarded sceptically, or as the face of oppressive power. Under the scrutiny of the most rigourously negative of these writers, even simple popular pleasures can be rendered near-fascistic. "Do you ever come except to criticize? Is nothing ever right for you on earth?", the Lord asks Mephistopheles, indicating the grounds of the charge of pessimism that will be so frequently encountered through this thesis.[45] For the most part (de Man is the glaring

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44.   Anti-theorists claim, then, that the historian/theorist externalises their account onto the object; my argument is about the former's internalisation, and more the movements of intenalisation/ externalisation.
45.   Goethe, *Faust*, op. cit., "Prologue in Heaven" (lines 294-5).

exception), these writers and thinkers are of the Left, but their rejection of what they might regard as false identities is often as much directed at other representatives of the Left as at the ruling culture. In particular, this has not enamoured them to supporters of the official parties of the Comintern, or to leftists with a bent to populism.

* * *

The three chapters which follow have different takes on negation in relation to art theory. Chapter 1 - "The Pain of the Unattainable Beyond" - operates as an extended introduction, running across some familiar debates in post-war, and primarily post-1960s, debates: theories of the avant-garde and modernism, neo-avant-gardism and postmodernism, the "ends" of art, etc. This chapter focuses on the Left Hegelian tradition: the emphasis on the negative is explored, and the writing of Adorno is particularly central for understanding the key theme of reification and resistance. The final part of the chapter includes a case study of the use of the idea of "practices of negation" in the writings of T.J. Clark. Chapter 2 - "Looking the Negative in the Face" - continues to work across material on the question of the avant-garde and modernism, but takes a further step into negativity's logic - and into the idea of negative thought - by way of working through the accounts of Italian architectural theorists Manfredo Tafuri and Massimo Cacciari. Here the framework is counter-Hegelian in intent, drawing on a strange mixture of workerist politics and the philosophies of Arnold Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. Chapter 3 - "Absolute Dialectical Unrest, or, the Dizziness of a Perpetually Self-Engendered Disorder" - starts from the analogy of postmodern art practice and allegorical disjunction made by writers such as Craig Owens and Douglas Crimp. By exploring the symbol/allegory opposition - primarily through the writing of Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man - this chapter addresses how negation seeps into a more fundamental analytical principle.

Any reader familiar with Hegel's *Phenomenology* will recognise the tone of these chapter titles.[46] There is a perversity on my part in giving a Hegelian framing to what, in some cases, are non-Hegelian projects. I may need to explain this further. The idea of dialectics has fascinated me for a long time, not as a formal "method", but - and this description is very inadequate, although much preferable to any "recipe" of triads - as a thought process, a way of moving, twisting and turning. Stuff such as this was, in academia, the height of unfashionablity; although I have never found the arguments convincing.[47] I found something of the same passion for dialectical modes of thought in an article by T.J. Clark,[48] although - encountering this rather belatedly, some 15 years after its publication, and on the far-side of the impact on the humanities of sub-Althusserian accounts - I have been haunted by the notion of working with "dead dogs". Clark's complaint against the "caricature of Hegel" rang true, although I have interpreted this through Sartre's claim that attacks on the dialectic are, in fact, directed at Marx, and not Hegel.[49] Dead dogs, it seems, are confined to cardboard cut-out status, but, as Fredric Jameson notes, "Hegel translates the static categories of knowledge into profoundly historical and temporary phenomena in movement".[50] Clark, similarly, points to the Hegelian "love and labour of the particular", just as Walter Benjamin advocates pursuing the "life of the detail".[51]

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46. The references come, respectively, from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit., p.131, p.19, pp.124-5.
47. Peter Dews' comments about poststructuralism seem pertinent when he argues that its thought "lacks any sense of the interdependence of identity and non-identity.... [It] takes the repressive self-enclosure of consciousness to be definitive of subjectivity as such, with the consequence that 'emancipation' can only take the form of breaking open of the coercive unity of the subject in order to release the diffuseness and heterogeneity of the repressed.... [This, though] is only achieved through a return to a more primitive form of totalizing coercion... the triumph of a unifying process at the pre-subjective level." (Peter Dews, *The Logics of Disintegration. Post-structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*, Verso, 1987, pp.230-1).
48. Clark, "The conditions of artistic creation", op. cit.
49. Sartre notes that such attacks concern "the refusal of praxis". Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method* (1960), Vintage Books, 1968, p.16.
50. Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language. A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, Princeton University Press, 1972, p.175.
51. Clark, "The condition of artistic creation", op. cit., p.561; Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928), Verso, 1985, p.182.

Dialetics in a narrow sense, however, does not exhaust the objects of study which also cover nihilism and deconstruction (in the de Manian form). In fact, I have focused on authors whose position vis-à-vis "dialectics" - however we might define it - might be controversial. Whether Adorno, Clark, Tafuri, Cacciari, de Man, or Benjamin are, strictly, dialectical thinkers is not my main concern. Dialectical thinking seems to be something on which people have "positions", and these positions tend to operate as *a priori*; and judgements as to whether this or that writer is a dialectical thinker seem to be reached in similar fashion, as a pre-existing and external position. Apart from some formal philosophical texts, there seem to be few who bother to delve into it. For the moment, I want to let this question - whether we can even call these thinkers "dialectical" - ride, in order that the question can be explored rather than asserted from the outset. Dealing with *negation*, however, while it plays into these matters, always threatens to dissolve the dialectic itself, and to lose the movement to which Jameson alludes. What is being explored is a strange hinterland *beyond* a more orthodox and tempered dialectic and *between* a "negative dialectic" - for some this is a contradiction in terms - and nihilism. This thesis approaches this dangerous land of dissolution.

Chapter 1

THE PAIN OF THE UNATTAINABLE BEYOND

It is as ridiculous to yearn for a return to that original fullness as it is to believe that with this complete emptiness history has come to a standstill. The bourgeois viewpoint has never advanced beyond this antithesis between itself and this romantic viewpoint, and therefore the latter will accompany it as legitimate antithesis up to its blessed end.
(Karl Marx)[1]

It is in the debates on the avant-garde and modernism that negation has been explicitly called into question. It may be as well, then, to start with this seeming crisis of negation, for the view of the avant-garde - and, in particular, the post-war "neo-avant-garde" - as "socially reconciled" is very common. Abigail Solomon-Godeau deals with this question in relation to the European avant-gardes in the inter-war period, charting how "armed vision" became "disarmed", or how "weapon" became "style". In particular, she has an eye on the increasing application of "radical formalism" in photographic practices to the realm of advertising, a social reconciliation which is symbolised by the move to Chicago of artists like Moholy-Nagy.[2] Benjamin Buchloh, addressing the camera work of the Soviet avant-garde, locates the moment of reconciliation in the move "from faktura to factography", with, in other words, the rise of propaganda and Stalinist suppression.[3] Both of these essays have to be situated

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1.　　Karl Marx, *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* (1857/8) Penguin, 1973, p.162.
2.　　See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Armed Vision Disarmed: Radical Formalism from Weapon to Style", *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices*, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, pp.52-84 (originally published in *Afterimage*, vol.11, no.6, January 1983). She sees a second aspect to radical formalism's death in Stalinist suppression, and notes that the German avant-garde's appropriation of Russian techniques as the first phase of the depoliticisation of radical formalism.
3.　　See Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography", *October* 30, 1984, pp.82-119. Cf. Ute Eskildsen, "Photography and the Neue Sachlichkeit Movement", *Germany: the New Photography 1927-33*, ed. David Mellor, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978, pp. 101-112; Herbert Molderings, "Urbanism and Technological Utopianism. Thoughts on the Photography of Neue Sachlichkeit and the

within a questioning of US-based modernism or formalism.[4] Solomon-Godeau's terms, for instance, note how American formalism emphasised continuity in contrast to the ruptures and breaks of formalism in its radical mode. A similar theme emerges in an essay by Yve-Alain Bois, although his concern is more with the art theorists and critics than the practices. Bois compares European with American formalism, identifying tensions and life in the former, but noting their loss in the latter. Here Panofsky functions as Moholy-Nagy does for Solomon-Godeau; his passage across the Atlantic is seen to be accompanied by a loss of dialectical complexity in his work and an increasing codification of his approach to the analysis of art. T.J. Clark makes the same point in his 1974 essay, specifically wielding the terms "renunciation" and "negation" as qualities lost in the later work of Panofsky.[5] In this paragraph, then, we have already covered a range of grounds for something which might be called negation: from an initial discussion concerning the avant-garde's reconciliation, depoliticisation or disarming, we have ended up in debates on method and the dialectic.

Bauhaus", ibid., pp.87-94; Klaus Honnef, "The Dilemma of the Avant-Garde: the New Photography of the 1920s", *Photography in Russia 1840-1940*, ed. David Elliott, Ars Nicolai, 1992, pp.73-78.

4.   Some of the canonical essays can be found in the anthology *Pollock and After. The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Frascina, Harper & Row, 1985. The status of photography became particularly important in these challenges, as can be seen by the work published in journals such as *Afterimage* and *October* in the United States. See, for example, Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation" (1978), *Photography Against the Grain. Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983*, The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984, pp.53-75; Martha Rosler, "in, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography" (1981), *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton, MIT, 1989, pp.303-340. Also see, for example, Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, MIT, 1986 - especially "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1978), pp.276-90, "Photography's Discursive Spaces" (1982), pp.131-50, and "The Originality of the Avant-Garde" (1981), pp.151-70. In Britain, the journals *Screen* and, from 1979 *Block*, provided a particular focus for debates. See, for example, Victor Burgin, "Modernism in the *Work* of Art" (1976), *The End of Art Theory. Criticism and Postmodernity*, Macmillan, 1986, pp.1-28, and "The End of Art Theory", pp.140-204; Mary Kelly, "Re-viewing Modernist Criticism", *Screen*, vol.22, no.3, 1981, pp.41-62; The Open University's third level course, A315, "Modern Art and Modernism: Manet to Pollock" (1982); the anthology *Modernism. Criticism. Realism. Alternative Contexts for Art*, eds. Charles Harrison and Fred Orton, Harper & Row, 1984.

5.   See T.J. Clark, "The conditions of artistic creation", op. cit., p.561; Yve-Alain Bois, "Introduction: Resisting Blackmail", *Painting as Model*, MIT, 1990, pp. xi-xxx. Also cf. Christopher S. Wood, "Introduction", to Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Zone, 1991, pp.7-24. Wood is more circumspect, and also notes a similar closing down on problems in German academia.

What Harold Rosenberg refers to, in the early '70s, as "vanguardism as an idea" is specifically a rhetoric of negation which, as Hans Magnus Enzensberger had noted a decade earlier, had become the "coin of the realm".[6] Rosenberg argues that the avant-garde had become socially reconciled, merely living out its "myth of rebellion" in a "demilitarized zone" or "buffer area" between a growing mass culture and its own avant-gardist past.[7] From the mid-/late '70s the question of the "neo-avant-garde" started to be

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6. See Harold Rosenberg, "D.M.Z. Vanguardism", *The De-Definition of Art*, University of Chicago Press, 1972, p.218; and Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "The aporias of the avant-garde" (1962), *The Consciousness Industry. On Literature, Politics and the Media*, The Seabury Press, 1974, p.31. We might also compare Enzensberger's comment: "The figure of speech preserves what its users have forgotten; analysis merely brings to light what presuppositions it drags along. The concept of the avant-garde is, like the word itself, a composite" (p.22). Rosenberg, commenting *pace* Renato Poggioli, notes:

> Though the social and psychological negations essential to the formation of vanguards are no longer operative, vanguardism as an idea exerts a greater force in the creation and dissemination of art than ever before. It regulates the sponsorship of artists and modes of art by museums, galleries, international exhibitions, critics, and collectors; it stimulates the feverish search by young artists for new materials and extreme gestures; it determines the attention paid to works in the popular press. (Rosenburg, "D.M.Z. Vanguardism", pp.218-9).
> In the aesthetic D.M.Z., all art is avant-garde, and all avant-gardisms, the ideas, attitudes, and tastes of a century of experiments and revolts, have been blended into a single tradition. (p.219).

Andreas Huyssen also notes how the contemporary art of '60s and '70s, particularly that which gained the tag "neo-avant-garde", formed a sort of marketable counterpart to the surge of international exhibitions on the work of the historical avant-garde. See Andreas Huyssen, "The Search for Tradition: Avant-Garde and Postmodernism in the 1970s", *New German Critique* 22, Winter 1981, p.23. This has become commonplace of criticism, often appearing right at the heart of the formations it criticises. See, for example, Jeffrey Deitch, "The Art Industry", *Metropolis*, International Art Exhibition Berlin 1991 (held at the Martin Gropius Bau, 20 April - 21 July 1991), eds. Christos M. Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal, Rizzoli, NY, 1991, pp39-45.

7. Rosenberg, "D.M.Z. Vanguardism", op. cit., p.217. Enzensberger, who is critical of the avant-garde per se, notes that the avant-garde's rhetoric of revolution and rebellion amounted to thin or stupid categories of "freedom" (Enzensberger, op. cit., p.30). Although he disputes the argument that contemporary avant-gardism has been "delivered" to charlatans, he believes that the post-war avant-garde is specifically characterised by "bad faith"; by a tendency to evade responsibility for its own gestures, immunising such gestures as mere "experiments" (p.40); and by a subsumption into the "consciousness industry". "Every avant-garde of today spells repetition, deception, or self-deception.... Conspiring in the name of the arts is only possible where they are being suppressed. An avant-garde that suffers itself to be furthered by the state has forfeited its rights" (p.40). Peter Bürger, with specifically Sartrean overtones, also refers to bad faith in response to a suggestion that contemporary artists might, by working with the "surface of marketability" of commodity aesthetics, be engaged in a strategy of rebellion. See Isabelle Graw, "Interview with Peter Bürger", *Flash Art* 144, January/February 1989, p.65. See also Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974, revised 1980), University of Minnesota Press, 1984. Bürger sees post-war art as lacking a radical impulse, and as having become an empty shell of its former self. Its "gesture of protest... becomes inauthentic" (p.53), he argues, "an instrument of emancipation... becomes one of subjection"; and all that results is "commodity aesthetics" (p.54): "the neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the *avant-garde as art* and thus negates genuinely avant-gardist intentions.... Neo-avant-gardiste art is autonomous in the full sense of the term, which means that it

displaced by, or to overlap with, the question of "postmodernism".[8] The emphasis

shifts from the idea of a depoliticised avant-garde to an account of changed social and

historical circumstances. Andreas Huyssen, although critical of postmodernism,

provides a typical summary:

> The earlier avant-garde was confronted with the culture industry in its stage of
> inception while postmodernism had to face a technologically and economically
> fully developed media culture which had mastered the high art of integrating,
> diffusing, and marketing even the most serious challenges. This factor,
> combined with the altered constitution of audiences, accounts for the fact that,
> compared with the earlier 20th Century, the shock of the new was much harder,
> perhaps even impossible, to sustain.[9]

The avant-garde - as a radical force, as "a genuinely critical and adversary culture" - is

"no longer viable", Huyssen argues, because it has become depoliticised *and* because its

context has been overtaken by a "massive technological, social, and political change".[10]

If the 1960s had seen a revival of the conditions favourable to the development of an

avant-garde (social turmoil, questioning of the future, challenging of tradition, efforts to

bridge gaps between art and life), by the '70s, he continues, confidence in social

transformation had been shaken, and the emergence of postmodernism in the US

represented "the endgame" and "the colorful death mask of the classical avant-garde".[11]

Despite "all the radical rhetoric of rupture, discontinuity and epistemological breaks",

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negates the avant-gardiste intention of returning art to the praxis of life" (p.58). He notes: "This is true
independently of the consciousness artists have of their activity, a consciousness that may perfectly well
be avant-gardiste" (p.58).

8.   Hadjinicolaou locates a particular surge of attention to the idea of the avant-garde from c.1977,
marking, he suggests, a crisis in the very ideology of avant-gardism and possibly the end of the avant-
garde itself. See Nicos Hadjinicolaou, "Sur l'idéologie de l'avant-gardisme", *Histoire et Critique d'Arts*,
vol. 2, 1976, pp.49-76. Likewise, we may see the self-consciousness about critical terms, definitions
and categories as indexed to these phenomena. Two television series may function as convenient and
popular markers for the shift that emerged, one addressing the historical, the other the contemporary
avant-garde: Robert Hughes' *Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change*, Thames & Hudson,
1980 and Sandy Nairne's *State of the Art: Ideas & Images in the 1980s*, Chatto & Windus, 1987.

9.   See Huyssen, "The Search for Tradition", op. cit., p.32.

10.   Ibid., p.34, p.36, p.33.

11.   Ibid., p.31. Huyssen and Hal Foster have argued for a critical, rather than affirmative, form of
postmodernism. See Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface" (1983), *Postmodern Culture*, Pluto Press,
1985, pp.vii-xiv; Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern" (earlier versions from 1983), *New
German Critique*, no.33, Fall 1984, pp.5-52. In the same issue Foster qualifies his arguments in Hal
Foster, "(Post)Modern Polemics", pp.67-78 (reprinted in *Recodings. Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*,
Bay Press, 1985, pp.121-37).

postmodernism, Huyssen claims - returning to the theme of depoliticisation - has been

"in danger of becoming affirmative culture right from the start".[12]

In fact, Huyssen goes further, suggesting that this affirmative relation to capitalism was

the case for the avant-garde itself, a view shared by Hal Foster who also argues that the

avant-garde was in "complicity with capital".[13] As Foster explains:

> ... the real radicality is always capital's, for it not only effects the new symbolic
> forms by which we live but also destroys the old. More than any avant-garde,
> capital is the agent of transgression and shock - which is one reason why such
> strategies in art now seem as redundant as resistance seems futile.[14]

The theme of complicity between negativity and capital will be addressed more

substantively in Chapter 2.[15] Crucial here, though, is the act of "bourgeois divestiture" -

where the dominant class abandoned their own culture and ideology, and sought instead

to appropriate or recuperate the cultural practices of others. The argument is not specific

to critical postmodernists, like Foster, but has had a long life since Marx's "The

Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte".[16] But Foster's conclusions about this

divestiture are particularly striking and sweeping: divestiture has problematised, he

insists, any assertion of difference; indeed, difference is "often fabricated in the interests

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12.   Huyssen, "The Search for Tradition", op. cit., p.32, p.33. Bürger also objects to postmodernist art's tendency to quote and copy, and to their denial of the concept of authenticity. He want to retain at least a sense of "the pathos of authenticity", for "to abandon the notion of authenticity also means to abandon the notion of experience". See "Interview with Peter Bürger", op. cit., p.65.

13.   See Hal Foster, "For a Concept of the Political in Contemporary Art" (drafted 1984), *Recodings*, op. cit., p.148.

14.   Ibid., p.147.

15.   According to Huyssen, the avant-garde shared modernity's "project", which he describes as its universalising tendencies and its sense of progress. The terms of reference here are loaded.

16.   See Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", *Marx/Engels Selected Works in one volume*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1968, pp.96-179. See also, for example: Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, op. cit., p.106; Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", *Clement Greenberg. The Collected Essays and Criticism. Volume 1. Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944*, ed. John O'Brian, The University of Chicago Press,1988, pp.5-22; T.J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", op. cit.. The list could be extended, for it is tied into an account - almost a commonsense to Marxists of the Second and Third Internationals - which suggests that, after 1848 (or, for some, 1871), the bourgeoisie no longer wanted to advance its revolution. This moment is seen as one where the bourgeoisie is seen to become historically reactionary.

of social control" and "if difference can be fabricated, so too can resistance".[17]

These ideas often echo the debates about the collapse of Marxism, but what may be more intriguing is that they also have a prominent place within the traditions of Western Marxism where theories of art and aesthetics have had a prominent place. At a number of conferences in the early '80s there was an attempt to retain the radical force of negativity, although the participants themselves adopted some of these same premises. In 1981, at the Vancouver conference "Modernism and Modernity" - including, inter alia, Guilbaut, Buchloh, Crow, Clark (and also Greenberg and Lefebvre) - a defence of modernism's radical edge in the face of attacks by postmodernism was a central theme.[18] Guilbaut, introducing the publication of papers from the conference, notes that contributions and discussion drifted from an initial emphasis on definitions of modernism and modernity to one on the theme of negativity as resistance:

> ... we concentrated on one area which seemed to be the keystone of any modernist procedure: its critical/subversive stance, the negative side of a new culture which based its realizations on a coefficient of resistance to the prevailing system.[19]

"This element of negativity has been present in modern art since the nineteenth century", he wrote, an "art of combat", modernism's "living, critical core" with which postmodernism dispenses too hastily.[20]

Similar themes were addressed at "The Politics of Interpretation" (Chicago, 1981), sponsored by the journal *Critical Inquiry*, and at "Marxism and the Interpretation of

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17. Hal Foster, "Readings in Cultural Resistance", *Recodings*, op. cit., p.167, p.171.
18. The papers are collected in *Modernism and Modernity*, eds. Benjamin Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut, David Solkin, The Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983.
19. Serge Guilbaut, "The Relevance of Modernism", in *Modernism and Modernity*, op. cit., pp.IX-XV. The citation is from XI.
20. Ibid., p.XI, p.XII, p.XIII.

Culture" (Chicago, 1983).[21] In their introduction to the publication of papers from "Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture", Grossberg and Nelson note both "a renaissance of activity and a crisis of definition" as Marxists were confronted with the need to deal with, as they put it, a disjunction of historical reality and our theoretical categories.[22] Marxism, they claim, has "reappropriated the critical power of Marx's interpretive practice".[23] Other conference participants - including Perry Anderson, Franco Moretti, and, most explicitly, Fredric Jameson - were less convinced that this "reappropriation" was remotely Marxist.[24] Nevertheless, the emphasis on problems of interpretation and method, and the sense that there was some sort of crisis impinged on many discussions and agendas.

The crisis of negation - and I have treated it very schematically - points to some subtle but substantial shifts across these accounts: from the depoliticisation of artistic activity in the post-war period, through arguments about the changed nature of the artist's social environment in the same period, through accounts which question the very politicisation of the (original) avant-garde, to one which suggests that the essence of capitalist modernity (since divestiture) is recuperation. Did capitalism, or the media industry, become all-powerful, swallowing all in its path, including all practices of negation? Has the tactic of negativity become obsolete? Has negation been "recuperated"? Has negativity become complicit with the dominant powers? Is it now the life-blood of the powers that it "opposes", the driving force of capitalist competition, novelty as the cutting-edge of the market? These are the questions that surround the concept of

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21. See *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988; *Critical Inquiry*, vol.9, no.1, September 1982; and *The Politics of Interpretation*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, The University of Chicago Press, 1983.
22. Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson, "Introduction: The Territory of Marxism", *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, op. cit., pp.1-13. The citation is from p.12.
23. Ibid., p.11.
24. See Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution", ibid., pp.317-338; Franco Moretti, "The Spell of Indecision", pp.339-346; Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping", pp.347-360, (these page references include the post-presentation discussion).

negation in relation to debates on the avant-garde and modernism. The arguments and accounts which raise such questions will be addressed over the next two chapters in particular, although I do not propose to seek any simple answers. Rather my concern is to trace some of the recurrent theoretical nexuses around which discussions of negation occurs.

This, then, sketches some of the main grounds of the debates on negation and affirmation. Whether or not the proponents are favourably disposed to postmodernism, most of the accounts to be addressed from recent art history and criticism claim an emancipatory strain, often with activistic rhetoric worthy of any avant-garde. Despite the contradictions that, on closer inspection, emerge between different accounts of the crisis - and the place of negation within it - the combined forces add up to a powerful rhetoric, and one which starts to make claims beyond the question of the avant-garde per se. These claims are crucial to the cultural and political force of the abstract term "negation", and centre on, I believe, two key strands: one which articulates a striving for emancipation and freedom; another which presents a tendency towards the affirmation of an increasingly monolithic power. The first part of this chapter will explore what I take to be the key modalities of negation in art theory: the question of political openness and closure (both in history and in philosophical concepts); and the question of, on the one hand, alienation and reification, and, on the other, and strategies of de-alienation. It is, I believe, important to separate out these different aspects in order to understand some of the complex stakes invested in negation, but, as will become apparent, there are many overlaps between these positions. These overlaps are substantive rather than accidental or marginal, and turn on some potent issues. Indeed, the slippage between the political, social, economic, aesthetic, ethical, epistemological, and even ontological aspects of the claims ought not to be evaded or regretted but should be taken as the core of the question. The ambiguities of the term negation - or its slippages - are already here: there are arguments which present negation as something which was once there but has

since been lost, others which present negation as the force which enacts that disappearance; and these, as we shall see, far from exhaust the options. Further to this level of ambiguity, negation, to reiterate a point made in the introduction, is not just the object of analytical endeavour, one which can be discussed as if it were "out there" or under a microscope. As a methodological tool, it plays its role as, and within, the act of analysis. For reasons which will become apparent, issues pertinent to this role will be introduced in the first part of the chapter, although it is in the latter part - and in the remaining chapters - where I shall specifically consider the play of negation within the process of analysis. This is the proper object of my thesis.

SECTION ONE: NEGATION, AVANT-GARDISM & MODERNISM

I. Capitalism's Gravediggers & Permanent Negation

One account of "practices of negation" in art is based on the understanding of some sort of alliance between artists and the rise of radical social movements through the 19c. and 20c. The forms of this account often suffer from generality and vague homology,[25] the view that the inter-war avant-gardes represented progressive social forces has been criticised, and the association of avant-garde art practice with political radicalism may, as Hadjinicolaou argues, be itself an ideology.[26] Nevertheless, the assumption remains

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25. See, for example, John Willett, *The New Sobriety. Art and Politics in the Weimar Period 1917-1933*, Thames & Hudson, 1978.

26. Hadjinicolaou, op. cit., argues that the failure to interrogate the term "avant-garde" has amounted to a fundamental ideology of art. He disputes the connection of 19c. "avant-gardism" with leftist politics, and disputes the existence of an artistic avant-garde prior to the 20c. According to Hadjinicolaou, 20c. artists adopted the designation "avant-garde" from its 19c. political usage, and, in the process, appropriated the term for more right-wing tendencies. This difference leads Hadjinicolaou to pose the question of *avant-gardist ideology* - an ideology which he considers to have stymied, and deluded, leftwing currents. If in its political sense, the term "avant-garde" was more frequently (although not exclusively) used by the left (in, he suggests, a ratio of approximately 4:1 with rightists), for the artistic avant-gardes, he argues, the rightwing current (including both counterrevolutionary and apolitical tendencies) was always the more powerful. In Hadjinicolaou's account, then, the rhetoric of struggle and

prevalent, even in accounts which seek to criticise the avant-garde. For instance, it is noticeable that this association is one which has served to compromise the avant-gardes *by way of* the recent reappraisals of revolution in general, and of 1917 in particular; or which, to take another example, by way of the association of Italian Futurism with Fascism - and thus tainting, by association, other avant-garde - the criticism has effectively argued for liberalisation, but one where the content is that of bourgeois liberalism and which is anathema to any version of "extremes", extremism, revolution and negation.

But leaving aside these more controversial issues, it is noticeable that the matter of practices of negation (as avant-gardist radicalism) tends to present itself as one of definitions. Nearly every account of the avant-garde and modernism - and, indeed, postmodernism - opens with the problem of definitions. There is, from the early 1960s, a detectable anxiety in the literature about the imprecision of the definition, and yet ubiquity of use, of the term "avant-garde". Renato Poggioli sought to replace anecdotal and eclectic accounts with what he called an historical or scientific one; Enzensberger criticised the term's unreflexive use by both its supporters and detractors;[27] and the worries continue right up to the onset of the modern/postmodern debates. Despite Poggioli's claims, his account is considered by Jochen Schulte-Sasse to be "historically and theoretically too unspecific" in contrast to Peter Bürger's "historically concrete and theoretically exact" account.[28] This judgement has not been shared by many of Bürger's

sacrifice serves to reconcile the artist with the social order.
27.   See Poggioli, op. cit. Enzensberger's terms are especially provocative given the themes of this thesis: "The minds that it separates from one another have a way of lapsing into a permanent debate whose beginnings are lost in a mist and whose end can he held off ad libitum" (Enzensberger, op. cit., p.16).
28.   Jochen Schulte-Sasse, "Foreword: Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde", in Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, op. cit., p.x.

other commentators, and his categories have been accused of being "bloodless".[29] But while this question of definition provides a way into negation, I do not propose to clarify definitions. Mindful of Adorno's comment that "Whoever wants to make the concept more precise easily destroys what he aims for", the aim is rather to note some of the aspects of, and complexities in, identifying the *operation* of "negation", a concept that comes to the fore in such accounts.[30]

The very term "avant-garde", which derives from military use, took on wider socio-political and artistic resonances, first among the Utopian Socialists movements, and later among political radicals of 1848 and 1871.[31] For the Utopian Socialists, avant-gardism signified advanced, progressive social and political practice to which art contributed: according to Henri de Saint-Simon, art per se might make this contribution, alongside similar contributions from industry and science; for the Fourierist Gabriel-Desiré Laverdant, the contribution was only provided by the best, by those practices expressing "the most advanced social tendencies".[32] However, this is generally seen as

29.   Witness Bürger's own Postscript to the Second German Edition of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, pp.vii-xlvii, which notes the book of essays in response. See also Daglind Sonolet, "Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*", *Telos* 61, Fall 1984; and Tony Pinkney, "Editor's Introduction: Modernism and Cultural Theory", in Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, Verso, 1989, pp.1-29. The charge of "bloodless" categories is made by Pinkney.

30.   See Theodor Adorno, "Progress" (1962), in *Benjamin. Philosophy, Aesthetics, History*, ed. Gary Smith, The University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp.84-101. I do, however, disagree with Adorno's example: "progress". Citation from p.84.

31.   Baudelaire's reference to "les litterateurs d'avant-garde", in his personal notebooks of 1862-64, is widely taken - for example, by Poggioli and Hadjinicolaou - to be a jibe at militaristic metaphors, and those artists who saw themselves as members of the social avant-garde.

32.   It should be noted that these accounts are overwhelmingly affirmative in tone. Saint-Simon (1825) ventriloquises the artist in his imaginary society: "It is we artists who will serve you as avant-garde... the power of the arts is in fact most immediate and most rapid: when we wish to spread new ideas among men, we inscribe them on marble or on canvas.... What a magnificent destiny for the arts is that of exercising a positive power over society, a true priestly function, and of marching forcefully in the van of all the intellectual faculties...." (cited Linda Nochlin, "The Invention of the Avant-Garde: France, 1830-80", *The Politics of Vision. Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society*, Thames and Hudson, 1991, p.2). Laverdant, in his *De la mission de l'art et du role des artistes* of 1845, wrote: "Art, the expression of society, manifests, in its highest soaring, the most advanced social tendencies: it is the forerunner and the revealer. Therefore, to know whether art worthily fulfils its proper mission as initiator, whether the artist is truly of the avant-garde, one must know where Humanity is going, know what the destiny of the human race is...." (cited Poggioli, op. cit., p.9)

insufficient to constitute an artistic avant-garde. Linda Nochlin, for instance, distinguishes radical commitment and artistic content from the emergence of radical form. Accordingly, it was only with Courbet that such radical social content (the negation of bourgeois society) became allied with radical form (the negation of existing artistic and academic conventions). Nevertheless, she further narrows the definition of avant-gardism by adding alienation to the established criteria, a quality which she argues was present not in Courbet but in Manet. For Poggioli, in contrast, "authentic" avant-gardism requires historical self-consciousness, "when art began to contemplate itself from a historical viewpoint".[33] The crucial period centred, he argues, on the period of the Paris Commune when this authentic artistic avant-garde *coincided* with a political avant-garde.[34] Although Poggioli disputes the continuation of the association of left-wing politics and avant-garde art beyond this period, he notes that this "historical viewpoint" instilled the belief in "the necessity of liquidating the art of the past, once and for all, liquidating traditions".[35]

We can find, for instance, a similar articulation in "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (1847-8), written by Marx and Engels during the previous period of radical upsurge in Europe, and also in Marx's "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" (1851-2), a text which charts its defeat. Negation - as the liquidating of traditions - is attributed to the revolutionary activities of the bourgeoisie in their overthrowing of feudalism:

> The bourgeoisie... has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties.... It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine

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33.   Bontempelli, cited ibid., p.14.
34.   Poggioli highlights publications like Bakunin's 1878 anarchist journal *L'Avant-garde* (ibid., p.15). However, *La revue independente* of 1880 represents, he argues, the last gasp of this brief alliance, and thereafter the term avant-garde is associated with a political vanguardism against which artists made their distance: a sort of negative relation between avant-garde art and progressive politics. Disillusioned with leftist politics (both anarchist and socialist), artists thenceforth preferred to see themselves as "decadents". According to Poggioli, this separation remains the fundamental condition, despite attempts to reestablish alliances in the early 20c. - attempts which he sees as partial, equivocal, ambiguous, insubstantial, rhetorical, and as riddled with contradictions.
35.   Ibid., p.13.

sentimentalism.... has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured.... has torn away from the family its sentimental veil.[36]

It is also the very condition of the bourgeoisie's own social order:

> Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned....[37]

The provocative conjunctions of opposite characteristics - such as "uninterrupted" and "disturbance" - transfigure the static nature attributed to the pre-bourgeois era by transforming that static quality into an adjective for the qualities of change in the bourgeois period, thereby exacerbating the movements of overthrow and impermanency by making *them* permanent. This is a theme which has been repeated in the debates on negativity and which, as we saw with Foster, has been used to question the possibilities of resistance. For Marx and Engels, however, there were limitations to capitalism's revolutionary upheavals: not only the limits reached when a revolution consolidates its power, as Marx discusses in the opening passages of the "Brumaire", but also those inherent in its own mode of production, a mode which constantly throws up contradictions between the extension of productive forces and the social relations of that society. As a consequence, they wrote, capital also produces its own "antagonism" - that is, a different modality of negation - "its own gravediggers", who "have nothing to lose but their chains", and, as Marx noted of this force three years later, it "cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future".[38]

The association of negation with these themes in Marx and Engels has to be surmised

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36.   Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (1847-8), *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Selected Works in One Volume*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1968, p.38.
37.   Ibid.
38.   Ibid., p.46, p.63, p.98.

for they do not use the term explicitly in these contexts.[39] Nevertheless, this conclusion is not far-fetched, for it was part of the philosophical language of their intellectual milieu. The political weighting of the philosophical concept of negation is particularly focused in the writing of a generation of Hegel's students in the 1840s, of which Marx and Engels were part. For these "Left" or "Young Hegelians", a crucial element in their master's work was negation. This was not purely a philosophical choice, but one wrapped up in the politics of German academia, its relation to the Prussian state, and the ongoing debates regarding the French Revolution. Largely bourgeois republican in their leanings, a few of these Young Hegelians went on to become the founders of German socialism and communism. Although their ideas and debates are now considered matters of purely historical - even arcane - interest, from the perspective of negation they remain seminal. Readings of Hegel are notoriously controversial, and, for the purposes of this section, I propose to introduce Hegel via the readings of the Left Hegelians, since these have produced the canonical critique from the Left, and their terms remain central to 20c. critical theory.

Hegel's earlier support for the radical and democratic impulses of the French Revolution

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39.   Marx's position in relation to tradition is much more complex than the points that will be made here. The *Brumaire* charts the continuity of social forces and ideologies under the sway of revised social conditions (see, for example, his analysis of the *idées napoléoniennes*. For fuller account see Stanley Mitchell, "'The 18th Brumaire' and the Construction of a Marxist Aesthetics" in *1848: the Sociology of Literature*, ed. Francis Barker, et al., University of Essex, 1978, pp.22-6. See also V.I. Lenin's criticisms of Proletkult, "On Proletarian Culture" (1920), *Lenin on Literature and Art*, Progress, 1967, pp.167-169; Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (1922/3), RedWords, 1991. The emphasis on a tendency in Marx which liquidates tradition has been best articulated by Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, Verso, 1983, criticised by Perry Anderson at the 1983 conference in Chicago, "Modernity and Revolution", published in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, op. cit. See also Berman's reply: "The Signs in the Street: a response to Perry Anderson", *New Left Review*, no.144, March/April 1984, pp.114-23. A comparison is often made between Marx's account and Baudelaire's motif of art as transient and eternal, contingent and immutable, in "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863), in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, Da Capo, 1986, p.13. For an account which weaves these together see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Blackwell, 1989, especially the chapter entitled "Modernity and modernism". For a discussion of the notion of "poetry of the future", see Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*, Verso, 1981, pp.162-170. The conjunction of Benjamin, Baudelaire and Marx has become a standard feature of the literature on modernity.

was seen to have given way to a conservatism, philosophically akin to what Marx described, with reference to the French Revolution itself, as a passing from the codings of Republic to those of Empire.[40] Hegel himself was considered to have reconciled his philosophy of history and his dialectic with the *status quo*, placing the Prussian state as the highest form of development, or the realisation of spirit.[41] The movement of the dialectic - a movement driven by the force of the negative moment (the second moment in the infamous "triadic" structure of affirmation, negation, and the negation of the negation) -was seen to have come to a halt with a final reconciliation, negation of the negation, sublation, or *Aufhebung*. For the Young Hegelians, then, Hegel's dialectical movement had ceased to be a constant and ongoing procedure - each *Aufhebung* containing the supersession and preservation of the contradiction, *and* the beginnings of a new dynamic - but had, so to speak, resolved and reconciled itself. In other words, the power of the negative - its *force-movement*: the power to change, to instil movement and dynamic - was seen to have been stilled and neutralised, and, moreover, to have done so in collaboration with an oppressive and reactionary social power. In the *Manuscripts* Marx criticised Hegel, but applauded his "dialectic of negativity as the moving and producing principle",[42] and, much later, he commented on how: "In its mystified form, dialectic become the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and to glorify the existing state of things".[43] These transactions between a philosophical concept and highly charged political commitments are important for the

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40. See Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", op. cit. The degree of Hegel's culpability has remained keenly debated, initiating the debate about Hegel's "exoteric" and "esoteric" views. See Leszek Kolakowski, op. cit.; David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, Macmillan, 1968; *The Young Hegelians. An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence S. Stepelevich. Cambridge University Press, 1983. The major account of the radical Hegel is Georg Lukács' *The Young Hegel. Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics*, Merlin, 1975.
41. Or as Adorno was later to echo, Hegel's system was reduced to seeing "world history being perfected in the Prussian state". See Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (1966), Routledge, 1990, p.27. This, for Adorno, was just the most blatant aspect of Hegel's "dialectics cut short" (p.334).
42. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), *Karl Marx Early Writings*, Penguin, 1975, p.386.
43. Karl Marx, "Afterword to the Second German Edition" (1873). *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy.Volume One*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1954, p.29.

loading of the life of negation, not only for 20c. critical theory, but also for its place in

art/cultural analysis; attitudes to the fate of 1789 and stakes within 1848, for instance -

attitudes to social and political emancipation, freedom, revolution - are crucial to an

understanding of negation.[44]

Many of Hegel's younger followers, then, sought to salvage negativity as the radical,

but lost, impulse of the dialectic. The group believed that they were the fulfilment of the

true Hegel, a Hegel who had instigated "atheism, revolution and republicanism".[45] Of

the dialectic, Arnold Ruge wrote: "In its true method it is criticism, the dissolution of all

contradictions and fixed ideas".[46] Marx, of course, echoing these views in the 1860s -

by which time Hegel was, apparently, treated as a "dead dog" - continued to claim to be

seeking the dialectic's demystified, rational form, a form which recognises "the

negation" of the state of things, and:

> ... regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and
> therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary
> existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and
> revolutionary.[47]

Engels wrote:

> For it nothing is final, absolute, sacred. It reveals the transitory character of
> everything and in everything;... It has, of course, also a conservative side: it

44.   Derrida finds Hegel "the thinker of irreducible difference". See *Of Grammatology* (1967), The
Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, p.26. Nevertheless, Derrida also worries extensively about
Hegel's *Aufhebung*, what he calls the Hegelian *relève* of idealism's traditional binaries, "a resolution of
contradiction into a third term that comes in order to *aufheben*, to deny while raising up, while
idealising, while sublimating into an anamnesic interiority, while interning difference in a self-
presence". See *Positions* (1972), Athlone Press, 1981, p.43. Dialectics, he goes on, are totalising,
"however far off" the "horizon" (p.45). His "undecidables" or "non-concepts" are used to try to hold back
from the sins of immediate identity, binarism and dialectical synthesis, and: "inhabit philosophical
opposition, resisting and disorganising it, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of
speculative dialectics" (p.43). The Young Hegelian debate on Hegel's esoteric and exoteric views finds
certain echoes in Derrida's distinction of Hegel's "general" and "restricted economy". Ironically, Derrida
uses the concept of contradiction to exceed Hegel's restricted economy, although he is anxious to use
"the necessary critical precautions" to clarify "its relationship or non-relationship to Hegel's logic"
(p.76).
45.   Cited McLellan, op. cit., p.55.
46.   Cited ibid., p.20.
47.   Marx, "Afterword to the Second German Edition", *Capital*, op. cit., p.29.

recognises that definite stages of knowledge and society are justified for their time and circumstances; but only so far. The conservatism of this mode of outlook is relative; its revolutionary character is absolute - only the absolute dialectical philosophy admits.[48]

In a hoax critique of the dialectic, Bruno Bauer argued that it was full of "devilish energy", giving rise to "hellish discharge", and bent on "the Abomination of Desolation within the Holy Kingdom".[49] These "more dangerous points of the dialectic" - "the negative dialectic",[50] he called it - had been repressed by the older Hegelians, but lay clearly exposed in the work of the younger ones. Indeed:

> The philosophers are truly of a singular danger, for they are the most consistent and unrestrained revolutionaries.... [Hegel's] *theory* is *praxis*, and for that very reason most dangerous, far-reaching and destructive. It is the revolution itself.... Hegel not only is set against the state, the Church and religion, but opposes everything firm and established, for - as he asserts - the philosophical principle has in recent times become general, all encompassing and without limit.[51]

The pitch towards praxis in Young Hegelian thought was advanced by Cieszkowski in 1838. He argued that Hegel, although representing the culmination of philosophy, had failed to make the transition from interpretative thought to active criticism and practical action, and was, therefore, guilty of disregarding the future. Transforming Hegel's philosophy of spirit into a philosophy of action, he sought to erase the difference between practice and philosophy through the mediating term of "praxis", although Marx was to note that the Young Hegelians concept of praxis was merely the *philosophy* of action.[52]

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48.   Frederick Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy" (1886), in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Selected Works in One Volume*, op. cit., p.588. Engels outlines his view of the dialectic in Frederick Engels, *Dialectics of Nature* (1878-82), Progress Publishers, 1934. He describes its "three laws": "The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa; The law of the interpenetration of opposites; The law of the negation of the negation" (p.62).

49.   See Bruno Bauer, *The Trumpet of the Last Judgement over Hegel* (1841), in *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, op. cit., pp. 178.

50.   Ibid., p.180.

51.   Ibid., p.182, p.183, p.185.

52.   See Count August Cieszkowski, *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie* (1838), in *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, op. cit., pp.57-89. In his account of praxis, the main agent for change was no longer thought but will (McLellan, op. cit., p.10); future history was to be one of acts, and future philosophy was "to become a practical philosophy or rather a philosophy of practical activity, of

The Young Hegelians, then, emphasised historical transience, "opening up" the dialectic

again to the negative - an opening associated with emancipatory forces and with an

orientation towards the future. Such tendencies described the dialectic as a process of

constant self-annihilation, where any historical moment provided the basis for its own

destruction. With the radicalisation of the group in the early 1840s, these emphases

became more generalised, and with this political intensification came an intensification

of the philosophy.[53] Ruge favoured "absolute negation",[54] and in his article, "A

Self-Critique of Liberalism" (1843), he asked: "is it not the concept of critique that it

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'praxis', exercising a direct influence on social life and developing the future in the realm of concrete activity" (cited p.10). Or as he put it:

> Active activity... will first develop itself in the future
> (a) Subjectivity, through the adequate formulation of the will;
> (b) Objectivity, through the adequate formation of political life of the state;
> (c) absolutely, through the attainment of the substantial and highest identity of being and thought which is absolute action.
> ... absolute action must bear witness to its teleological character *par excellence*, since it is essentially process. It has struggle constantly with itself, continuously goes through obstacles and constantly achieves victory. Thus the struggling and the still synthesis passes into the creating one. (*The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, op. cit., p.74)

The degree of emphasis placed upon negation, praxis and the future - the conjunction is probably important - by the Young Hegelians does take the logic away from the Hegelian mode. They took issue with Hegel's anti-utopianism, his insistence on not using his method to predict future trends, but only to grasp past development via the present, or via a phenomenon's highest stage of development. Cieszkowski also tried to Hegelianise Hegel further by replacing the four stages of history with three - characterised as Antiquity, Christianity, and, significantly, Future. The sense of activist politics links back, often quite directly, to the Utopian Socialists. The terms of the critique of Hegel (from philosophical interpretation to action) are, of course, echoed in Marx's critique of Feuerbach - in fact, such terms were the main form of critique employed by Young Hegelians against one another, and not just against Hegel. See Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845, published 1888), *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Selected Works in One Volume*, op. cit., pp.28-30.

53.   The "radicalisation" - which saw many of the group move towards communism and anarchism - was prompted by the dashing of their republican hopes (hitherto invested in the new king, Friedrich Wilhelm IV) and the repeal of the short-lived liberalised publishing laws in 1843. Initially the power of this recovered negation was to be directed at extreme reactionary views, with a "proper" dialectic reserved for more routine democratic intervention.

54.   Cited McLellan, op. cit., p.18.

only splits, never binds, that it only dissolves, never concentrates?".[55] This approach, in contrast to Hegel, emphasised a *disjunction* between thought and the empirical world, and rejected the mediating - or reconciling - role of Reason; indeed, mediation, per se, became anathema and associated with political compromise.[56] Rejecting any attempt

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55.   *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, op. cit., p.239. See also Karl Löwith, "The Historical Background of European Nihilism" (1943), *Nature, History, and Existentialism and Other Essays in the Philosophy of History*, ed. Arnold Levison, Northwestern University Press, 1966, pp.3-16. Löwith notes that Hegel's pupils made the "negation of the existing order the basis of their thinking" (p.12) and thought that "their dissatisfaction with the present contains the strength of the future" (p.6). Kolakowski describes the Young Hegelians as adopting "the principle of permanent negation" and "universal negativism" (Kolakowski, op. cit., p.83, p.81). For the on-going life of this emphasis, and the slippage between political and conceptual stakes, cf. Adorno, where he notes that "dialectics will drive men beyond bourgeois society" (*Negative Dialectics*, op. cit., p.337), and that negative dialectics "is suspicious of all identity. Its logic is one of disintegration" (p.145). Also cf. Jean-Paul Sartre's *Search for a Method* (1960), Vintage Books, 1968. Sartre argued that "living Marxism" must have "open concepts" (p.25, p.27), but that the dialectic had become "arrested" (p.91, footnote 3) in the hands of the official Communist Parties, which also treated negativity as an absolute (p.33, footnote 9).
    Here, the analogy between permanent negation and "permanent revolution" is particularly suggestive. Permanent revolution was an idea current among revolutionists in Germany in 1848. For Marx revolutionary socialism is "*the declaration of the permanence of the revolution*". See "The Class Struggles in France: 1848 to 1850" (published in parts over 1850), *Surveys from Exile*, Penguin, 1973, p.123. The question concerns the communists' attitude to the bourgeois revolutions, to alliances with various classes/class factions, and whether the working class should lay down its arms. "While the democratic petty bourgeois want to bring the revolution to an end as quickly as possible... it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power..." (Marx and Engels, "Address of the Central Committee" (March 1850), *The Revolutions of 1848*, Penguin, 1973, pp.323-4). In the 20c., the argument is most associated with Leon Trotsky's *The Permanent Revolution* (1928), in *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, New Park, 1962. Initially articulated in Trotsky's 1906 *Results and Prospects*, it was adopted by Lenin - in a reorientation of Bolshevik policy - in the "April Theses" of 1917, in "The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution. *Draft Platform for the Proletarian Party*", *Lenin Selected Works Volume 2*, Progress Publishers, 1963, pp.37-65. Apparently, the phrase was also used by Thomas Jefferson, although, as Fredric Jameson notes, Jefferson's was a different sense to Trotsky's. See Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form. Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*, Princeton University Press, 1971, p.268.
56.   See McLellan, op. cit., p.18; Kolakowski, op. cit., p.93. McLellan also refers to Bruno Bauer's "idea of a two-term dialectic and the rejection of all mediation"(McLellan, op. cit., p.151). Moses Hess saw mediation as a dangerous compromise between private property and communism.
    The role of negation for Marx is contentious. Although commentators within Marxism have found it necessary to emphasise the positive orientation of Marx's account in response to more nihilistic interpretations, it is important not to lose sight of negation. For Mészáros, negation is central to Marx in order to combat Feuerbach's one-sided "positivity". See István Mészáros' entry "Negation" in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, second revised edition, ed. Tom Bottomore, Blackwell, 1991, p.400. Both McLellan and Kolakowski point out that Marx adopts aspects of a theory of permanent negation - an emphasis on historical transience, evolution through stages via contradictions, praxis, and a dialectic extended to the future: "interpreting the present in terms of its own dissolution" (Kolakowski, op. cit, p.320). Kolakowski argues that Hegel's "disjunction of concepts" (p.322) is developed by Marx as objective, historical contradictions, independent of consciousness; in other words, Marx's sense of contradiction is neither a matter of logic, and nor should it be reduced to the question of social conflict.
    In the light of the previous footnote, it should be noted that Adorno and Sartre have quite

even to recover the aims of the French Revolution, Edgar Bauer wrote:

> ... only extremism can assume and carry through a principle in its purity; only extremism has the power to create. A principle never mediates; it only destroys, and its inner strength is proportionate to its destructive power.[57]

He claimed that "anarchy... is the beginning of all good things".[58]

> ... nothing old, nothing settled, may be the goal of our efforts.... What exists will always place itself above the freedom of the spirit - and with perfect right, for freedom is dangerous to it.[59]

Moreover, he insisted, "our philosophy exists only for the purpose of clearing away the traditional ideas of belief from human heads", a clearing of "the old weeds"; "our time... is only critical and destructive", and our response "is negative".[60]

This self-consciousness of liquidating tradition - and many of the associated developments -seem to echo Poggioli's "authentic avant-garde"; and we would seem, too, to be not that far from Marx's advocation of the poetry of the future.[61] "[I]t is not

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different emphases on the question of mediation. Adorno tends to a more rarefied strain of the Young Hegelian argument, while Sartre treats mediation as a life project.

57.   Cited McLellan, op. cit., p.83.

58.   See Edgar Bauer, "The Struggle of Critique with Church and State" (1844), in *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, op. cit., p.267, where he wrote: "there is nothing of value in political freedom or in the exalted constitutional and republican forms of the state" (p.269). He described the call of bourgeois republicanism as "nothing but a reaction" (p.265), and he blamed the Revolution's failure to deliver "rational freedom" on its faith in "constitutional mediation" (p.266). Drawing on a figure which sees, in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, the onset of the master/slave dialectic, Edgar Bauer wrote: "It is therefore clear that there can never be anything but struggle, specifically, the life-and-death struggle through which those laws will be destroyed. But supposing that freedom begins this devastating struggle, will it itself contradict itself and will it consecrate new laws? Or will it finally tear down everything completely?" (p.270). On the master/slave dialectic - strictly, "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage", *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft* - and the "life-and-death struggle" see Hegel, *Phenomenology*, op. cit., pp.111-119.

59.   "The Struggle of Critique with Church and State", op. cit., p.268, pp.268-9.

60.   Ibid., p.270, p.271.

61.   Indeed, the question of the avant-garde and its orientation towards the future may be a more complex affair. For Enzensberger, "the aporias of the avant-garde" derive from the paradoxes of the concept, its being *en avant*: "The *avant* of the avant-garde contains its own contradiction: it can be marked out only a posteriori" (Enzensberger, op. cit., p.28), "this future has not only always begun; it is also... always already past" (p.25). It deals in a future that does not belong to it" (p.41), he writes, and "its afterlife is immediately cashed in on and cashiered; indeed, it is transmogrified, by way of publicity, into a forelife, which the work inherits before it even appears on the scene. Its afterlife is factory-made" (p.25).

our business to construct", wrote Edgar Bauer, "history will write its affirmation".[62]

Avant-garde artists were, however, perhaps less inclined to hand over all possibility of

affirmative practice to the forces of "history", and even in their most "negative"

moments they made their art. Nietzsche has become a seminal reference-point for such

art; in order to *create* one must be immoral, he argued, one must be a "destroyer *par*

excellence".[63] However, writing in the journal of the Young Hegelians much earlier in

1842, Bakunin explicitly ascribed a creative force to negation:[64]

> ... the positive is opposed by the negative and the negative by the positive... the
> negative is only justified in its absolute form.... the joy of destruction is also a
> creative joy.[65]

My point can be no more than speculative, but while Nietzsche's work - and specifically

Thus Spoke Zarathustra - was undoubtedly central to the intellectual life of many avant-

garde artists at the beginning of the 20c., it might be argued that the Bakuninite

expression had a wider and more powerful cultural resonance via the European anarchist

movements. This might not be a question of displacing Nietzsche for Bakunin so much

as locating a leftist and emancipatory strain to the articulation of negation - one which

plays directly into the debates of the First International, and which brings us into contact

with some heightened arguments articulated through negation.[66]

The question of the relation between the negative, destructive moment and subsequent

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62.   Edgar Bauer, in *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*, op. cit., p.271.
63.   Cited Löwith, op. cit., p.15.
64.   Reviewing Bruno Bauer's *Posaune* in 1841, Max Stirner wrote: "Only the German and he alone demonstrates the mission of radicalism in the history of the world; he alone is radical and he alone is authentically so. No one is so inexorable and inconsiderate as he; he overturns not only the existing world in order to remain upright himself, he overturns himself, too. Where the German pulls down, a God must fall and a world perish. With the Germans destroying is creating and the destruction of the transient is his eternity" (cited p.15)
65.   Cited McLellan, op. cit., p.18.
66.   Nietzsche's work will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 2. I will also return to the borderline of dialectic and antinomy, touching on it throughout the thesis, and most explicitly in the Conclusion.

construction and affirmation is a problematic terrain.[67] The history of the avant-garde itself is discussed in terms of a movement from negative to positive (from Dada to Surrealism; from Futurism to Constructivism), as is - by analogy - revolution (from revolutionary act to the pragmatics of building of a new society).[68] In some accounts, though, this transition threatens the negative, subsuming affirmation, and returning, so to speak, the Young Hegelian project to its beginning. It is to this last point that we shall now turn.

II. Negation As Alienation & As De-Alienation

As was pointed out earlier, Nochlin defines avant-gardism by the condition of alienation: what Manet had, that Courbet didn't, she suggests, was a "psychic, social, ontological" alienation; or to put it another way, Manet lacked a "unified and unselfconscious", "direct and unambiguous" relation to his art and his society.[69] Here Nochlin implies that there was a fundamental shift in the nature of artistic and political consciousness.

> For Manet and for the avant-garde, as opposed to the men of 1848, the relation of the artist to society was a phenomenological rather than a social fact.[70]

Similarly, Poggioli insists on alienation - social, psychological, cultural or economic - as the condition of the modern artist, a condition which produces, as a "general phenomenon" of avant-garde art, a "culture of negation".[71] As Poggioli puts it, the relation between artist and society is "a purely negative function", "a negative cultural

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67.   It is constantly misunderstood (by writers who would see history as a plenitudinous unfolding) and taken as destruction pure and simple.
68.   See Sheila Fitzpatrick's character sketch of "revolution" in her Introduction to *The Russian Revolution*, Oxford University Press, 1984.
69.   Nochlin, op. cit., p.12, p.17.
70.   Ibid., p.14. Moreover, Nochlin writes, Manet's response to alienation was to adopt the "dandyish coolness toward immediate experience, mitigated either by art or by irony" (p.16). This characteristic of *blagues*, a mode of ironic put-on, was described by the Goncourt brothers as a "poisoner of faith, killer of respect" (cited p.14).
71.   Poggioli, op. cit., pp.107-8.

relation", of which the avant-garde is both a product and a participant.[72] So, if negativity has so far been considered as a related political and philosophical commitment, here negation is located with the contradictions which, for Marx and Engels, had produced such commitments. Negation, then, can also be characterised as the grounding social relation of modern capitalist existence; *as alienation* negativity figures as a negative social relation. This negative relation consists in the assumption of a move from a relation of identity to non-identity, as in the theological idea of a loss of oneness and grace (the Fall), or as suggested by the German compounds *fremd* and *äusser* which are often used in connection with alienation. Theology tends to treat the matter as an unrelenting loss, as a problematic and unpleasant relation - a sense of alienation adopted by many liberal accounts of "alienation". For Hegel, Marx and Adorno, for instance - albeit, as we shall see, in distinct ways - the matter of "other-ing" or "externalising" is altogether more complex.

Peter Bürger, in contrast, defines his concept of "the historical avant-garde" - by which

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72.   Ibid., p.118. Avant-gardism, he continues, represents not an "abstract negation", but the negation of official society, the negation of the general culture by a particular one. This incorporates: the negation of mass culture and its "cult of cliche", both in its bourgeois and proletarian forms (pp.123-4); a negation of bourgeois taste and style, a taste which in its plurality, eclecticism and mechanicity is itself the negation of genuine style (p.120, p.125); and the attempt to negate the tendency to quantification in all aspects of social life, with its eradication of genuine value (p.125). Poggioli sub-divides the avant-garde into four categories, which also make a fairly good character sketch of negation: Activism, Antagonism, Nihilism, Agonism. Activism embraces both an initial sense of social activism by artists, and the subsequent, and more common, sense of gratuitous movement, gestures for the sake of gestures. Antagonism - described as an antagonism to both tradition and public - is seen as a response to alienation. This response has both plebeian and aristocratic elements, and may take form as the "struggle" between artist and artifact (or the "tensions" beloved of theory!) Poggioli argues that Activism and Antagonism are immanent to the concept of movement, and have a rational logic grounded therein. In contrast, Nihilism and Agonism represent more irrational tendencies, which emerges with the transcendence of the concept of movement. Nihilism pushes Antagonism beyond its denials of tradition and public, and beyond Activism's "inebriation of movement"(p.26), to a moment of gratuitous and sadistic destructiveness, "attaining nonaction by acting" (p.61). Nihilism is best rendered in the "denigrating image", a description drawn from Jose Ortega y Gasset, and characterised by "calumniating the object to which it is applied", "a secretion of bile", "an attack of spleen or hypochondria" (p.183). Agonism turns this destructiveness upon itself, in masochistic self-sacrifice. This desperation finds its form in the "hyperbolic image", an exaggeration whereby man seeks to transcend his condition (of nature and immediacy) into the poetic, a megalomaniacal overreaching for the spiritual. Poggioli cites Trotsky: "The hyperbolic image reflects, up to a point, the fury of our times" (cited p.183).

he means the avant-gardist movements spanning the period from just before World War

One until c.1930 - precisely in opposition to this "distancing" from society;

nevertheless, it is the distancing which remains determining. He charts an increasing

tendency towards the autonomy of art in bourgeois society during the 19c.,[73] an

institutionalised tendency, which produced so attenuated a relation to life that counter

tendencies - in the form of the historical avant-garde - emerged in the early 20c. This

autonomy is itself seen as a social product, and is described as a rejection of modern

social, economic and cultural life culminating in Aestheticism. According to Bürger,

Aestheticism had sought to negate "the means-ends rationality of the bourgeois

everyday", and had turned into its very content the "apartness" or the "disjunction" from

"the praxis of life" that had characterised the condition of all art in bourgeois society.[74]

Bürger presents his historical avant-garde as a force which negated the institution of art

and its claim to autonomy and distance from life praxis.

> The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status
> of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style)
> but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men.[75]

The avant-garde, he writes, did not seek to reintegrate or "sublate" art with the everyday

of *bourgeois* life praxis, but to use the contents of art to raise the conditions of life, they

73. This tendency towards the autonomy of different spheres - the cognitive, the ethical/political and the aesthetic - has been described since Kant's three *Critiques* (the true, the good and the beautiful) and furthered by Weber. For a seminal articulation of this see Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity - An Incomplete Project" (1980), published as "Modernity versus Postmodernity" in *New German Critique* 22, Winter 1981, pp.3-14, and under its original title in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, op. cit., pp.3-15. For a more popular, and slightly irreverent, version, see Terry Eagleton, "From the *Polis* to Postmodernism", *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Blackwell, 1990, p. 366; and for a systematic criticism of the post-Kantian separation, see J.M. Bernstein, *The Fate of Art. Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno*, Polity Press, 1992.
74. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, op. cit., p.49, p.51. Cf. Clement Greenberg's "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", op. cit., which argues the case for autonomy as a space beyond political or commercial utilitarianism. We will return to Greenberg's (and to Adorno's) sense of autonomy later. Hadjinicolaou, op. cit., also presents the 19c. as a period of increasing artistic isolation and non-integration, resulting from the artist's new found social and economic status under capitalism: the new social framework for artistic production and consumption. This condition of freedom from the strictures of patronage, yet new found dependence on the more amorphous open market, echoes Marx's and Engels' comments on wage labour. See, for example, Karl Marx, "Wage Labour and Capital" (1847, published 1849), *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Selected Works in One Volume*, op. cit., pp.71-93.
75. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, op. cit., p.49.

"attempt to organize a new life praxis from a basis in art".[76] Here, then, the avant-garde

is presented explicitly as a "negation of the negation": it attempted to negate the negative

relation of art and life praxis, a move which included repercussion for art's function in

society and the categories of individual production and reception.[77] In this sense,

Bürger's historical avant-garde represents, in its practices of negation, a move of de-

alienation, an attempt to alienate us from the conditions of social alienation.

The tactic of de-alienation became central to left avant-gardist practice in the 20c. Brecht,

for one, mounted a theatre of "estrangement" or "alienation effects", which - like the

Russian Formalists' category of *ostranenie*, or "making-strange" - were designed to

retrieve human consciousness from the common-sense habituation of the bourgeois

everyday, to estrange us from our worldly estrangement.[78] This same distinction might

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76.   Ibid.
77.   Ibid., p.51.
78.   Already, in Laverdant, there was a call for art to expose the nature of society: "Along with the hymn to happiness, the dolorous and despairing ode.... To lay bare with a brutal brush all the brutalities, all the filth, which are at the base of our society" (Laverdant, cited Poggioli, op. cit., 9). The use of *ostranenie* moves between explicitly political and more purely artistic ambitions. Shklovsky's early use of the term - and the associated "art as a device" - serves more to elevate artistic consciousness against the humdrum banality of the everyday than to overthrow that reality. Later, though, Russian Formalist theory crosses over into leftist practices, and is central to the debates about the nature of realism. These are usually described as the modernist/Marxist or formalist/realist debates, with Lukács providing the most sophisticated case for realism. I think that it is better to see the contenders as all trying to articulate some "claim" - in their theory of representation - on the real. The debate, of course, turns on whether or not alienation effects compound social alienation or help us gain distance from it (and the question might return were we to consider Yve-Alain Bois' description of Ad Reinhardt's practice as an "agonistic struggle against agon", see "The Limits of Almost", op. cit., p.14). It should be noted that this alienation to the second power comes close to a wilful sinking into it. On this tendency see M.M. Bakhtin/P.M. Medvedev, "The Nihilistic Slant of Formalism", *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship. A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (published in 1928 under the authorship of Pavel M. Medvedev), Harvard University Press, 1985, pp.59-61, in which he argues that formalism nihilistically destroyed meanings without ever putting anything in their place. Also cf. the discussion of Tafuri and Cacciari in Chapter 2.

On *ostranenie* see Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique" (1917), Russian Formalist Criticism. Four Essays, eds. Lee T. Lemon & Marion J. Reis, University of Nebraska Press, 1965, pp.3-24. For commentary see, for example, Simon Watney, "Making Strange: The Shattered Mirror", *Thinking Photography*, ed. Victor Burgin, Macmillan, 1982, pp.154-176; Fredric Jameson , *The Prison-House of Language. A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, Princeton University Press, 1972. Lukács' arguments can be found in, for example, *Essays on Realism* (1931-40), MIT, 1981. For a discussion of the debates between Brecht and Lukács, see Terry Lovell, *Pictures of Reality. Aesthetics, Politics, Pleasure*, British Film Institute, 1980; Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism. An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno*, Verso 1985; Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, op. cit.; and

be made for Brecht's*Verfremdungseffekt.*[79] The charging of the sense of negativity

tends to oscillate between alienation (as a social fact) and de-alienation (as a conscious

counter-practice) - the latter, as a conscious political practice of resistance, also overlays

the values addressed in the previous section.

The concept of alienation - although much misunderstood - is central to Marx's

philosophy: to the sense of process in his thinking, to his sense of praxis or sensuous

practical activity, and to his understanding of the role of the negative. The similarities

and differences from Hegel are crucial. Marx's main argument in the 1844 *Manuscripts*,

the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* is concentrated on political economy, and is specifically

concerned with the tendency of its representatives to treat categories as static and given.

(As such they tended to treat "exchange" as a fact of human ontology, and likewise the

division of labour under capitalism, private property, etc.) Hegel's philosophy, in

contrast, was valued for its sense of movement and process - of activity as the mediator

of subject and object - and gave ontological priority to activity over its forms of

externalisation or manifestation. Marx, noting the importance of negation, also pointed

to Hegel's significance for conceiving:

> ... the self-creation of man as a process, objectification as loss of object
> [*Entgegenständlichung*], as alienation and as supersession of this alienation; that
> he [Hegel] therefore grasps the nature of *labour* and conceives objective man -
> true, because real man - as the result of his *own labour*.[80]

for some of the original texts, the edited collection of Ernst Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, Verso,
1980. The left modernist position, drawing from the early avant-garde, notably Eisenstein, Kuleshov,
Brecht, and Heartfield, and the revival of the tactic of alienation effects, can be found in the writings of
Screen throughout this period. See, for example, Colin MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on
Some Brechtian Theses" *Screen*, vol.15, no.2, 1974, pp.7-27; Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and
Narrative Cinema", *Screen*, vol.16, no.3, 1975, pp.6-18. Recent reflections on this period - and the
success, or otherwise, of attempts to estrange us from accepted narrative and representational codes - can
be found in Laura Mulvey, "Changes: Thoughts on Myth, Narrative and Historical Experience", op.
cit.; and in Jeff Wall interview with Arielle Pelenc, *Jeff Wall*, eds. Thierry de Duve, et al., Phaidon
Press, 1996, especially pp.10-11.

79.   See, for example, Bertolt Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" (probably written in
1936), *Brecht on Theatre* , ed. John Willett, Hill & Wang, 1964, pp.91-99; "Alienation Effects in the
Narrative Pictures of the Elder Brueghel" (believed to have been written in 1934), pp.157-9; "A Short
Organum for the Theatre" (written 1948), pp.179-205.

80.   Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, op. cit., p.386.

Categories such as objectification and estrangement or alienation in Marx's *Manuscripts* emphasise processes and movements akin to self-splitting, re-positioning and expression via self-othering. The emphasis is very much on process - on the "moving and producing principle" - and activity or praxis.

Nevertheless, Marx distances himself from Hegel's failure to distinguish objectification from alienation: between the necessary fact of human activity (that it objectifies itself in an act of self-estranging) and the alienation specific to capitalism.[81] Objectification carries a neutral value; it has both positive and negative aspects: it "affords a free man the possibility of contemplating himself in a world of his own making",[82] the human self-mediation with nature, and it transposes man's activity and work into something alien to himself. All human labour, then, because it *objectifies*, is subject to objectification; this is its inescapable condition. In contrast, alienation - in Marx's sense of the term - is not inescapable. Marx describes "estranged labour" - alienation - as a process which commodifies, instrumentalises, devalues, enslaves, bestialises, dehumanises, denatures, and removes man from his reality and self. Emphasising the processes through which man's own labour and social activity become externalised and return back to him as alien and aggressive things, he presents "estranged labour" or alienation as a four-fold process: the estrangement of man to his product of labour; to his own activity of labour and production; to his species-being; and to other men.

For Hegel, moreover, such activity and self-estrangements are those of thought: labour is, for Hegel, the labour of thought, activity's mediation is merely that of thought-

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81.   Marx is regarded as the first to make this distinction, and similarly distinguishes between *Lebensäusserung* and *Lebensentäusserung*, or between labour as manifestation of life and labour as alienation of life. See István Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (1970), Merlin, 1972, p.91. Objectification is usually rendered from *Vergegenständlichung* (the process of becoming opposite). *Entäusserung* is usually translated as alienation, but carries a broader sense of externalisation. *Entfremdung* is the stronger term for alienation (containing *Fremd*, or alien/other).
82.   Gregor Benton, "Glossary of Key Terms", *Karl Marx Early Writings*, op. cit., p.431.

entities, the object is "alienated subject". But while Marx criticises this idealism extensively he does, in fact, argue something more. For Hegel - unable to distinguish between objectification and alienation - the process of mediation, the *Aufhebung*, must nullify the active condition (the activity of objectification and externalisation), collapsing subject and object into an identity, and effectively positing a ideal unity (a nostalgic past one-ness which can only be recollected via remembrance, *Erinnerung* - Er-*innerung*).[83] Marx's distinction between objectification and alienation means that he could posit the possibility of overcoming alienation without simultaneously positing a collapse into the total identity of subject and object.

III. Negation As Critical Distance Under "Total Reification"

The question of dealienation, however, becomes somewhat compromised on the basis of a variation of the theory of alienation advanced by Western Marxism. The key account is Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944),[84] and, in

83. In the *Manuscripts*, private property (and, with it, alienation) seems to *follow from* the (transhistorical) estrangement of labour. But in *The German Ideology* Marx clearly formulates that it is private property and the division of labour which *produce* alienation. See *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works*, vol.5, Lawrence & Wishart, 1976. However, even if we just concentrate on *The German Ideology*, it could be argued, there is a big difference between alienation based on the division of labour and one based on private property. Marx comments that communism will be, with the abolition of capitalist private property, "the abolition of the alien attitude [*Fremdheit*]" (p.48), but he also locates alienation with the division of mental and material labour (p.45), an alienation which substantially predates capitalism. Here, alienation can refer to the gap between man's deeds and their effects (p.47, p.87, p.93). This "cleavage", as Marx calls it, also applies to that between particular and common, or state, interest (p.47), or to the economic interests of different aspects of the international division of labour (p.51) - his ideas and their effects (p.23). In fact, Marx also describes the gap or division, prior to the division of labour, that must occur between the human animal and nature if consciousness is to begin (p.44). Within this early work there is a range of pitches of negation, and this range is adopted by 20c. critical theorists.

   Some specificity may be needed here. *The German Ideology* was written with Engels between November 1845 and August 1846; first published (as a complete text) in German in 1932 (I have no details on partial publications before this date); and first published in English in 1969. *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* were written April-August 1844, and were not intended for publication, although published in German in 1932, and in English c.1973-4. The dates, and the gap, between German and English language availability, are important for grasping the availability of these texts to 20c. audiences and critical theorists.

84. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Verso, 1986.

particular, its reworking of Georg Lukács' essay "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", and - because this is central to Lukács' essay - also of Marx's account of "commodity fetishism" from *Capital*.[85] The shift made by Adorno and Horkheimer marks the beginning of Critical Theory proper. The themes have been central to both Critical Theory (specifically the Frankfurt School) and in critical theory more widely (although perhaps less so the work of poststructuralists). The terrain of discussion crosses between the debates of revolutionary praxis by revolutionary activists, art activists, and academic social and aesthetic theorists.[86] For Adorno and Horkheimer, "liberal capitalism" - based on free commodity exchange, the liberal state and patriarchal bourgeois family - had been displaced by "administered capitalism". Liberal capitalism, they argued, posed both the possibility and desire for freedom, and with these the scope for the development and exercise of a rebellious personality. But by the mid-19c., with the emergence of the tendency to administered capitalism, human nature, needs and desires became increasingly subjected to standardisation and commodification, and every pore of life became inflected by what had previously been an "economic" matter: "bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence",[87] they argued, working the theme of equivalence into the psychic and everyday with their concept of the rising "culture industry". Later Adorno referred to capitalism's "increasingly integrative trend, the fact that its elements entwine into a more and more total concept of functions".[88] The individual was no longer formed through a struggle with the social, they argued, but was directly incorporated into the structures of dominant power, subsumed within its

85.   See Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Merlin, 1971.
86.   The term "Western Marxism" was coined by Perry Anderson to describe the generation who made this shift from revolutionary practice to philosophical and aesthetic theory. See Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, New Left Books, 1976.
87.   Adorno and Horkheimer, op. cit., p.7.
88.   See *Negative Dialectics*, op. cit., p.166. Horkheimer wrote that: "Today the individual ego has been absorbed by the pseudo-ego of totalitarian planning. Even those who hatch the totalitarian plan, despite and because of the huge amount of capital over which they dispose, have as little autonomy as those they control" (cited Seyla Benhabib, "Modernity and the Aporias of Critical Theory", *Telos* 49, 1981, p.41).

"instrumentalisation" and "rationalisation".[89]

This theory of modern society had repercussions for the methodology of Adorno and Horkheimer. We have, contained in the approach of these writers, a theory *of* modern society and its phenomena, *and* a theory of theory, or, a theory of *how* to address this object. Negativity is at stake in both these cases. "Instrumental reason" - which proceeds, they argued, through "identity thinking" - tends to equate the real with rational concepts, privileging categories of formal identity over those of non-identity, and elevating continuity over discontinuity. Drawing on Marx's distinction of the qualitative and quantitative aspects of value (use-value and exchange-value respectively), Adorno and Horkheimer (treating these categories as, respectively non-identity and identity) emphasised that "Bourgeois society... makes the dissimilar comparable by reducing it to

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89.   No longer mediated by the ego, social reproduction was no longer constituted through the self's "dialectic of struggle and submission" - again a reference to Hegel's master/slave dialectic. See Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, Verso, 1987, p.225.

A different account of alienation can be found in Sartre, one which holds to the importance of praxis in defining human activity. This account specifically resists any sense of total subsumption in a reified world. This is worked from Marx's statement "men make their own history" in the *Brumaire*; or as Sartre put it: "man is characterized above all by his going beyond a situation" (Sartre, op. cit., p.91); "Man defines himself by his project. This material being perpetually goes beyond the condition which is made for him" (p.150). Particular alienated beings struggle against their alienation (p.133), Sartre insists, they work upon external objects and upon themselves, "the agent never undertakes anything which is not the negation of alienation and which does not fall back into an alienated world" (p.99, footnote). This can be compared to Hegel's account of praxis for the slave in the master/slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology*, op. cit. The approach is also related to Heidegger"s *vorhanden* (the simply there, inert) and *zuhanden* (latent action, tools ready to hand). Jameson notes that Heidegger and Sartre give ontological priority to the latter (*Marxism and Form*, op. cit., p.234). The project, for Sartre, is based on negativity (Sartre, op. cit., p.171); or "Every man is defined negatively by the sum total of possibles which are impossible for him; that is, by a future more or less blocked off" (p.95). Warnock says that Sartre's emphasis on praxis is particular to his later writing, but in *Being and Nothingness* he treats the origin of action as nothingness in the heart of pure being, an ontological act and its overcoming become the means to define being. See Mary Warnock, Introduction to Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Routledge, 1989. The shift from Sartre's early to later writing consists more in working the categories as socio-historical rather than as ontological ones, although Sartre seems not to abandon the latter. Jameson puts it this way: "He makes himself an object in order to work on objects, he makes himself inertia in order to overcome inertia... Thus initially man's ultimate possibility of being alienated or dehumanized is given in the first basic structure of his relationship; to matter"(*Marxism and Form*, op. cit., p.237).

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abstract quantities".[90] *Ideologiekritik* - where immanent critique[91] defetishises the ideological claims of the dominant class - was no longer appropriate. With the one-dimensional relation - strictly, a non-relation or immediate identity - of ideology and reality in bourgeois society, "ideology" in its classic sense, had ceased to exist. Criticism could no longer prise apart truth from untruth, because ideology had become totally reified. So prevalent were the forces of rationalisation that even critical modes of thought become tainted, as the epistemological grounds for critique were compromised by the very theory of modernity.[92]

The literature on the Frankfurt School makes clear some of the problems introduced by the account of Adorno and Horkheimer, problems which are sidestepped by the use of

90.   Adorno and Horkheimer, op. cit., p.7. Under these new circumstances, which are seen to reach full development in the early 20c., the distance that had hitherto existed between bourgeois reality and bourgeois ideology was seen to have disappeared. Things had become "one-dimensional", producing the submissive personality whose super ego had been subject to "automatisation". Marcuse also wrote extensively on this one-dimensionality. See, for example, Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man. The Ideology of Industrial Society* (1964), Sphere, 1968.

"Instrumental reason" far from being an externally imposed form of thought is, for Adorno and Horkheimer, a form of subjective reason turned against itself, and thereby appearing to be objective (cf. alienation). Emphasising the general, the abstract and the universal, identity thinking tries to eliminate otherness (which is associated with the particular and the concrete); and in this sense it is a "commodified" form of thought, subject to the rule of equivalence. Or as Dews describes it, instrumental reason becomes "a world-historical process of reification" (Dews, op. cit., p.150). Instrumental reason and identity thinking, then, signify, as Susan Buck-Morss puts it, "a pseudo-reconciliation" of subject and object, consciousness and society: it was the product not of a classless society but of "mass society". See Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of the Negative Dialectic. Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute*, The Free Press, 1977, p.173.
91.   See Peter Dews and Peter Osborne, "The Frankfurt School and the Problem of Critique: A Reply to McCarney", *Radical Philosophy* 45, Spring 1987, pp.2-11. As "a transfigurative transcription of social reality" (p.4), "ideology", for the Frankfurt School theorists, was not the false to be counterposed to the truth (reality), but itself contained moments of both truth and falsehood. Immanent critique was a mode of critique which works from within its object of critique and does not rely on challenging that object externally. It is associated with Hegel's critique of natural right, where he argued that the criteria for right are a posteriori rather than a priori. Adorno's project was to use immanent critique to make idealist philosophy - all philosophy being a mediated form of social contradictions - implode under its own contradictions. This sounds like deconstruction, but, as Buck-Morss points out, Adornian immanent critique was "a means of discovering the truth" (Buck-Morss, op. cit., p.66).
92.   As Hohendahl puts it: "critical thought... cannot formulate truth because it is already contaminated by the logic of instrumental reason". See Peter U. Hohendahl, "The Dialectic of Enlightenment Revisited: Habermas' Critique of the Frankfurt School", *New German Critique* 35, Spring/Summer 1985, p.8. This aporia of Critical Theory was not unrecognised by Adorno, and it was as a strategy against total reification that Adorno devised his "negative dialectics".

their thesis in more recent art and cultural writing.[93] These problems have a particular bearing on the account of negativity. Adorno and Horkheimer's account sets modern society on track for total reification, for a world dominated by the quantification of exchange value. This argument is based on Lukács' essay, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", where the author generalises the sway of reification from Marx's account of commodity fetishism. Lukács charts the dialectic of quality and quantity through different aspects of social existence, and highlights its "potentiation": from the experience of time, through the structures of law, to the movements of philosophy, to name a few examples. However, whereas Lukács maintains a link between the most esoteric elements of his account (such as philosophy's categories of thought) and Marx's law of value, Adorno and Horkheimer tend to dissociate reification from capitalist development, thereby reifying reification. For Lukács, however potentiated reification became, it was always under the threat of interruption and collapse due the periodic nature of capitalist economic crises which exposes the totality.[94] Adorno's and Horkheimer's dissociation (a sort of negative condition) of reification (another negative condition) is not, however, a "negation of the negation", but a spiralling of negation into itself.[95] Here, then, reification is extrapolated into a generalised philosophy of modernity, on the one hand, and into an account of the

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93.   See, for example, Paul Piccone, "General Introduction", *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, Basil Blackwell, 1978, pp.xi-xxii; Jürgen Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno", *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Twelve Lectures*, Polity Press, 1990, pp.106-130 (the original essay appeared as "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment*", *New German Critique* 26, Spring/Summer 1982, pp.13-30); Hohendahl, op. cit.; Benhabib, op. cit.

94.   Hohendahl also remarks that Lukács had "epistemological as well as social limits to the reification of reason" (Hohendahl, op. cit., p.10).

95.   A similar point could be made about their dialectic. Following Adorno's dialectical-accounts-on-the-verge-of-breakdown can be fascinating, but they are seen to be premised on some very undialectical assessments. In a sense the two tendencies here are connected: on the one hand a complete lack of dialectical analysis, on the other a dialectics that is so potentiated, and restricted, that its author is forced constantly to have to outwit it with further dialectical manoeuvres.

human condition, on the other.[96] Marked as it is by a loss of agency for change, and devised through a period of defeat by intellectuals rather than activists, this account has dominated not only Western Marxism, but also, more generally, critical theory and the accounts of modernity. From where might the negative force of "resistance" come when: (i) revolution seemed to have been defeated; (ii) alienation was now so total that dealienation could scarcely be thought, let alone acted on? The parallels with the developments within Left Heglianism are interesting: both tendencies are conceived in a climate dominated by a feeling of politically ineffectivity: the Young Hegelians in the face of retrenchments of the Prussian state, the Frankfurt School theorists in that of the rise of Fascism (and also in what they saw as the one-dimensionality of the American culture industry).[97] However, for the Frankfurt School thinkers the consequences were to be a maintenance of the distance from political activity, whereas for some of the Young Hegelians 1848 soon came onto the horizon. If the Young Hegelians generalised negation to the point of reinscribing antinomy, Adorno and Horkheimer generalised reification to the point of instituting one dimensionality, and, therefore, required antinomy to break it.

A further look at the account of the totally administered society reveals that it is based on a misreading - or explicit revision - of Marx's *Capital* which proposes the total overrunning of use-value by exchange-value. As early as 1935 Adorno is most explicit on this point: "The commodity is, on the one hand, an alienated object in which use-

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96.   As Seyla Benhabib puts it: "The discourse of rationalization shifts from a socially specific to a global-anthropological level. The critique of the *instrumental rationalization of society* is thereby transformed into a critique of the *structure of Western reason*" (p.43). "Whereas Lukács emphasizes the phantom objectivity of the social world, which is nonetheless a product of the praxis of socialized individuals, the Frankfurt School theorists emphasize the totalizing anonymity of domination, which thereby ceases to appear as domination" (p.42). Piccone notes Adorno's dehistoricisation of the dialectic, a move which allowed him to present all of society and culture as caught under "the domination of the concept" (Piccone, op. cit., p.xviii). This account, Piccone continues, "ended up losing... precisely that nonidentity which it sought to preserve" (p.xix), culminating in the totally administered society and one-dimensionality.
97.   See the account of the culture industry: Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception", *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, op. cit., pp .120-67.

value perishes, and on the other, an alien survivor that outlives its own immediacy".[98]

The point is developed a few years later:

> The appearance of immediacy is as strong as the compulsion of exchange-value is inexorable. The social compact harmonizes the contradiction. The appearance of immediacy takes possession of the mediated, exchange-value itself. If the commodity in general combines exchange-value and use-value, then the pure use-value, whose illusion the cultural goods must preserve in completely capitalist society, must be replaced by pure exchange-value, which precisely in its capacity as exchange-value deceptively takes over the function of use-value.[99]

And in *Aesthetic Theory* we find Adorno arguing that exchange-value in monopoly capitalism should be compared to "abstractness, which always leaves in doubt what they [art works] are and what they are for, becomes a cipher of the essence of the works themselves".[100]

Adorno's account here runs counter to Marx's sense of the "dual nature" of the commodity which is so central to the first chapter of *Capital*. It is possible - in countering Adorno - to argue that use-values remain what are used, and remain what we exchange: the market exchanges on the basis of quantitative equivalences (measured as abstract human labour), but it does not exchange non-use-values; without use-value, there is nothing to exchange; use-value is a necessary ground for commodity exchange. Interminable arguments could be had on each of these assertions; the point I want to make, however, has a different (and more theoretical) emphasis. Marx's argument was with political economists and not Critical Theorists, and so his reason for emphasising the dual nature of the commodity does not directly answer the latter's points; instead the

98.   Theodor Adorno, Letter to Walter Benjamin, 2nd August 1935, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, op. cit., p.113.
99.   Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" (1938), in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, op. cit., p.279. Lambert Zuidervaart remarks that Adorno introduces a "shift" in the understanding of the commodity, distinguishing earlier from later forms of capitalism. In the latter form exchange-value is no longer the means to realising use-values, but replaces use-value with exchange-value, which is in turn treated with the immediacy, and enjoyment, that would pertain to a use-value. See Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory. The Redemption of Illusion*, MIT, 1993, pp.77-9.
100.   Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (c.1968), Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984, p.32.

onus is on the reader to pay close attention to Marx's argument. For Marx, the rule of equivalence *does* displace the centrality of use-value and useful, concrete labour, for the economy of capitalism, but - and this is the crucial point - this displacement itself *remains functional*. To say that use-value is the vehicle for exchange-value means, I think, something very specific, and is advanced by Marx subsequent to his argument for understanding the commodity as having a dual character. The crucial passage occurs not in the infamous section on commodity fetishism in section 4, but in section 1, on the elementary (accidental) form of value:

> The opposition or contrast existing internally in each commodity between use-value and value, is, therefore, made evident externally by two commodities being placed in such relation to each other, that the commodity whose value it is sought to express, figures directly as a mere use-value, while the commodity in which that value is to be expressed, figures directly as mere exchange-value.[101]

This is, I believe, one of those points where some sensitivity to the Hegelian-type movements of Marx's text is required, for what Marx presents are movements akin to self-splitting and self-othering, where a complex of qualities takes form in reduced and one-sided ways. The whole point about equivalence and abstraction, and their insidious effects, can be found here, and this grounds the logical unfolding of Marx's account of the commodity through the remaining sections. The dual nature of a *commodity* is only realised once it has been put into an exchange relation with another commodity, but, once done, its dual nature is rendered externally visible by attributing its two "natures" - use-value and exchange-value - to, respectively, itself and the commodity with which it is to be exchanged. For its part, the *use-value of the latter commodity* (the one in the equivalent form) becomes the pure expression of the *exchange-value of the first commodity*. It is from this argument that Marx derives some of the most powerful social forms of equivalence - the universal equivalent, the money-form and the argument about commodity fetishism. The point about the universal equivalent is that it is a commodity whose use-value is to be the pure expression of exchange-value; and to do this, there

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101.   Marx, *Capital*, op. cit., p. 67.

must also be present a commodity (in the relative form) which expresses its value *in* the universal equivalent. Equivalence is rendered a nonsense (or reduced to an ideology) without the relation (conceived dynamically) through which this figuring of self-splitting takes place, albeit a "self" that is, in fact, no "self" outside of an exchange relation.[102] Without a grasp on this passage, the very force of the fetishism of commodities for Marx is itself rendered one-dimensional; rather than - as in the accounts of critical theorists - one-dimensionality being the logical outcome of commodity fetishism.[103] Indeed, the very force of the theory of reification - so central to later critical theorists - is, on my reading, completely undermined by the idea of the "loss" - or mere fictional appearance - of use-value. Nevertheless, many accounts of art and cultural theory are dominated by this idea.

Buchloh, for example, referring to avant-gardist montage, writes that the objects "ultimately function exclusively as producers of exchange value";[104] and when Huyssen argues that the avant-garde was deeply "implicated in the western tradition of growth and progress... the universalizing, totalizing and centralizing impetus inherent in the very concept of avant-garde" and that there was a "secret bond between avant-garde and official culture", he is drawing on a set of assumptions based on the Frankfurt School

102.   I deliberately personify the commodity here, not only to echo Marx's comic personification of the commodities at the end of the section on commodity fetishism (ibid., p.87), but also to reference the relations of mutual dependency which, in Hegel, provides the grounding for any sense of self at all in Hegel: the necessity of an other, animate or inanimate, in order that the self can gain even its most primal consciousness. The necessity here of what we might call "lack" in the dialectic of desire (and recognition) has been much used, especially in the French Hegelian tradition. See for example: Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (original lectures 1933-9), Cornell University Press, 1980; Jean Hyppolite, "Self-Consciousness and Life: The Independence of Self-Consciousness" (1946), in *Hegel's Dialectic of Desire and Recognition. Texts and Commentary*, ed. John O'Neill, State University of New York Press, 1996, pp.67-86. These ideas have subsequently been adapted by, for example, Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* (from original seminar 1964), Penguin, 1994 and, more recently, Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Verso, 1989.
103.   In addition to speaking about the commodity having argued the commodity out of existence, the concept of money as the universal equivalent (its *use-value*) must also be erased, as must, in due course, the account of crisis.
104.   Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art", *Artforum*, vol.21, no.1, September 1982, p.44.

account.[105] His presentation of the post-war period, as one of obsolescence of the avant-garde in the face of a culture industry, describes the loss of the distance or gap across which critical art practice might be effective (the loss of negativity), and the slip into categorial complicity with the dominant power.[106] For Fredric Jameson, critical distance (including negativity, opposition, subversion), like distance in general, "has very precisely been abolished in the new space of postmodernism". Nevertheless, disjunctions, gaps and rifts have opened wider than ever, as the human body is dislocated in its hyperspace and internally fragmented.[107] He continues:

> We are submerged in its henceforth filled and suffused volumes to the point where our now postmodern bodies are bereft of spatial coordinates and practically (let alone theoretically) incapable of distantiation; meanwhile,... the prodigious new expansion of multinational capital ends up penetrating and colonizing those very precapitalist enclaves (Nature and the Unconscious) which offered extraterritorial and Archimedean footholds for critical effectivity.[108]

The "cultural dominant" of postmodernism and multinational capital produces "a new depthlessness", flatness and superficiality, which calls into doubt any traditional "depth model".[109] Similarly, Hal Foster, describing the compromised conditions of contemporary radical art practice writes: "Appropriation is so efficacious because it proceeds by abstraction", for it operates through the recognition of otherness and by reducing otherness to sameness.[110] Here, then, the analogy is quickly made between the reign of exchange-value (Foster's concept of abstraction), the potential of radical art, and, by implication, the potential of any radical act. With "the hegemonic culture", and the "all-but-global reach of capital", "there may be no natural limit to transgress",[111] and there can be no exposing of ideology, no *Ideologiekritik*, where "the commodity is its

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105. Huyssen, "The Search for Tradition", op. cit., p.22, p.36.
106. Indeed, although like many post-Adornian theorists he likes to mark a distance from Adorno's account, Huyssen, it could be argued, goes much further than Adorno: a whole array of terms find themselves collapsed into a "secret bond" with an oppressive power.
107. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*, op. cit., p.30, p.44. Jameson builds this account out of Heidegger.
108. Ibid., pp.48-9.
109. Ibid., p.6, p.9, p.12.
110. Foster, "Readings in Cultural Resistance", op. cit., p.168, p.166.
111. Foster, "For a Concept of the Political in Contemporary Art", op. cit., p.152.

own ideology".[112] We must, he goes on, move from Adorno's "negative commitment" to a Gramscian "strategy of interference" if we are to retain "a practice of resistance".[113] Avant-gardism, then, must give up on transgressive practices[114] - its "aesthetic negations" - for "a practice of resistance or interference".[115]

A similar conclusion, albeit from a position critical of postmodernism and trying to defend radical modernism, is presented by Guilbaut. According to Guilbaut, "today modern culture is being killed from the inside, through the very structure of post-industrial society".[116] "In fact", he continues, "it seems as though resistance to dominant culture must come, if it does at all, either from the fringes of high culture, or, better still, from outside, as Tom Crow has argued..., through short disruption".[117] Here, we find ideas from Situationism as much as from the Frankfurt School. Debord's theory of spectacle - which has also been widely adopted in such accounts of art - follows a similar direction to Adorno, and again on the basis of a reading of Lukács.[118]

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112.   Foster, "Introduction", *Recodings*, op. cit., p.5.
113.   See Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface", *Postmodern Culture* (1983 under a different title), Pluto Press, 1985, p.xiv. This is a very particular reading of Gramsci, who argued for a difference between "war of manoeuvre" and "war of position", that is, between, respectively, the outright class confrontation of insurrection and the on-going skirmishes of the non-revolutionary situation. Whereas for Gramsci a war of position was conducted as a holding operation, awaiting that of manoeuvre, his argument has subsequently been reduced to a reformist (anti-revolutionary) account by the communist parties. What Foster is voicing is a left edge of this, but overwritten with the arguments of, what he calls, "a postmodernism of resistance" (p.x). See Antonio Gramsci, *Selection from Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1971, especially the section of "State and Civil Society", pp.229-9. In the context of post-war developments, what Foster articulates is somewhere between a radical postmodernism (what he intends) and the "historical compromise" of the Italian Communist Party (implicit in his logic, despite the rhetoric of activism). Foster's adoption of Gramsci here has some ironic consequences (an observation for which I must thank Steve Edwards): Adorno's position is effectively presented as the war of manoeuvre, or as a revolutionary offensive! When Adorno is put in the position of Lenin, alarms should ring.
114.   Foster, "Introduction", *Recodings*, op. cit., p.7.
115.   Foster, "For a Concept of the Political in Contemporary Art", op. cit., p.148, p.149.
116.   Guilbaut, "The Relevence of Modernism", op. cit., p.XV. A similar crisis to the one noted by Clement Greenberg in the 1940s was now current; but, Guilbaut argues, the danger had been "clearly visible" and came "from the outside" for Greenberg.
117.   Ibid.
118.   See Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Black & Red, 1983, unpaginated, all references are given by thesis number.

Arguing that while exchange-value arose on the back of use-value, Debord asserts that exchange-value came to "autonomous domination", and that use-value has a "tendency... to fall". The spectacle (like Adorno's commodity) becomes "the servant of *pseudo-use*", "exchange value has ended up by *directing* use":[119]

> In the inverted reality of the spectacle, use value (which was implicitly contained in exchange value) must now be explicitly proclaimed precisely because its factual reality is eroded by the overdeveloped commodity economy and because counterfeit life requires pseudo-justification.[120]

Debord, however, pulls short of Adorno's conclusions, and seems to find some critical distance within theory, staying closer to Lukács for his conclusions about the prospects for practice.[121] It is, he argues (and maintaining some scope for *Ideologiekritik*), the task of critical/dialectical theory to break open the false reconciliations presented by the spectacle and to disrupt the language of domination with the language of contradiction and negation.[122]

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119.   The spectacle is a version of commodity fetishism which emphasises the image-form that this takes: "not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (ibid., thesis 4); or capital so accumulated that it becomes an image (thesis 34). Debord explicitly establishes the spectacle as similar to "a concrete manufacture of alienation" (thesis 32). It is, he suggests, a "negation of life" which appears as "affirmation", but an affirmation of mere appearance or "false reconciliation" (theses 10 & 29).

120.   Ibid., theses 46-9.

121.   Debord wants such theory to move into practice; and not to stay within the remit of cultural negation, but to become a real negation (ibid., theses 210-211). Jameson pulls Debord more in direction of Baudrillard (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, op. cit., p.18). The conflation of Baudrillard's "simulacrum" with Debord's "spectacle" is common, but mistaken. The accounts of Debord and Baudrillard were distinguished in Johanna Drucker, "Simulation/Spectacle: Beyond the Boundaries of the Old Avant-Garde and Exhausted Modernism", paper presented at the Association of Art Historians Annual Conference, Leeds, April 1992. See Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production* (1973), Telos Press, 1975. Baudrillard, without any of the dialectical moves of Adorno or Debord, also disputes the existence of use-value, which, he says, is treated as "a realm beyond political economy" (p.23), an entity which retains "concrete positivity" (p.24), and which acts as an antecedent to the emergence of exchange-value. According to Baudrillard, it is use-value which is "*produced by the play of exchange value*": "Such is the twist by which exchange value retrospectively originates and logically terminates in use value. In other words, the signified 'use value' here is still a code effect, the final precipitate of the law of value" (p.25). The same argument - which supports his rejection of the referent as an objective reality, and his advocation of a world of self-referential signs, one of the favoured themes of contemporary art theory - is made for the role of concrete labour.

122.   Dialectical theory, he argues, following a long tradition, rediscovers the fluidity and transience of concepts that have become frozen; it displays its own "negative spirit", both a consciousness of movement and the display of the traces marks of this movement (Debord, op. cit., theses 204-206).

IV. Autonomy As A Practice Of Negation Or Affirmation

The phrase "practice of negation" is also used specifically to describe Adorno's strategy *against* total reification. [123] This might be regarded as a sub-set of negation as resistance to capitalism, but it is one of a very particular kind, predicated on the moves of the dialectic of enlightenment (and, therefore, on arguments which have already compromised negation). The category of autonomy as a practice of negation, for Adorno, has to be regarded as an outcome of the approaches already discussed. With the force of critical reflection now in retreat, it must, for Adorno operate as a sort of tacking movement towards, rather than as a revealer of, truth; or, as Hohendahl describes Adorno's position, critical reflection "can only hint at the truth". [124] In as much as critical thought (another practice of negativity) can be maintained in the face of increasing one-dimensionality or total reification, it lies within autonomous art. [125] Adorno is quite definite on this point, and claims that only *autonomou*s art - and not all autonomous art at that - can maintain this site for resistance. Only autonomous art is a non-instrumentalised practice; "art denounces repression", he argues, and is a "negation" of society. [126] This argument has to carefully handled, for, as Adorno puts it, art has a "dual essence": it is both "social fact" and "autonomy".

> Art, however, is not social only because it is brought about in such a way that it embodies the dialectic of forces and relations of production. Nor is art social only because it derives its material content from society. Rather, it is social primarily because it stands opposed to society.... This social deviance of art is the determinate negation of a determinate society.... Art will live on only as long as it has the power to resist society. If it refuses to objectify itself, it becomes a commodity. What it contributes to society is not some directly communicable content but something more mediate, i.e. resistance. [127]

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123. See Jochen Schulte-Sasse, op. cit.
124. Hohendahl, op. cit., p.8.
125. If the Young Hegelians emphasised negation as active critical thought, there is, in Adorno, a move back, with action becoming more and   more remote, and even critical thought at risk.
126. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p.72. Not all autonomous art succeeds in maintaining this resistance, and, for Adorno, autonomous art is in a constant tension on the edge of losing this mimetic element. Even those practices which he approves of - such as Schönberg's - are subjected to forceful criticism. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music* (1948), Sheed & Ward, 1987.
127. *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p.321; cf. pp.358-9.

"Autonomous works of art... firmly negate empirical reality, destroy the destroyer, that which merely exists..."[128] - they are, to reiterate, "the determinate negation of a determinate society". "The imagination of the artist is not a creation *ex nihilo* ; only dilettanti and aesthetes believe it to be so", rather art works "react against empirical reality" and obey its forces; and abstraction in art - Adorno has Beckett in mind - "is a reflex response to the abstraction of the law which objectively dominates society".[129] To put it another way, Adorno values "the distance between the work of art and real life", and rejects the "false immediacy" of commercialisation and kitsch.[130] Adorno was especially critical of Brecht's practice on this point. For Adorno, Brecht's plays, in trying to move closer to a social reality, "had to move farther and farther away".[131] And in response to the debate on committed versus autonomous literature, Adorno argues: "Once the life of the mind renounces the duty and liberty of its own objectification, it has abdicated. Thereafter, works of art merely assimilate themselves to the brute existence against which they protest".[132] The mind, he concludes, "must go where it need not degrade itself": "This is not a time for political art, but politics has migrated into autonomous art, and nowhere more so than where it seems to be politically dead".[133]

In Adorno's account, then, the loss of the power of radical negativity at the wider social level of the totally administered world - the demise of its emancipatory force - is paralleled by its increased importance at the centre of the aesthetic and of advanced modern (autonomous) art practice. Even here problems continue to mount, and become more and more exacerbated. Of Schönberg, for instance, Adorno remarks: "The material

128.   Theodor Adorno, "Commitment" (1965), in *Aesthetics and Politics*, op. cit., p.190.
129.   Ibid.
130.   *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p.359.
131.   Ibid., p.322.
132.   "Commitment", op. cit., pp.177-8.
133.   Ibid., p.194.

transformation of those elements responsible for expression in music... has today become so radical that the possibility of expression itself comes into question".[134]

This displacement of the force of negativity may seem to represent a loss - the scope or range of effectivity seem somewhat marginal next to the emancipatory ideals of the *Manifesto* of Marx and Engels - but, for Adorno, facing his totally administered world, this *was* the only locus of hope: art's modernity, he noted, "lies in its mimetic relation to a petrified and alienated reality".[135] The impact of this is considerable. As Jameson puts it:

> No theory of cultural politics current on the left today has been able to do without one notion or another of a certain minimal aesthetic distance, of the possibility of the positioning of the cultural act outside the massive Being of capital, from which to assault this last.[136]

Hal Foster goes even further, arguing that even *this* moment of negation in Adorno's autonomous art has passed: "this aesthetic space too is eclipsed", he warns, and any remaining "criticality is now largely illusory (and so instrumental)".[137]

Adorno's emphasis on autonomy was shared with Clement Greenberg - who is foregrounded more in art history and criticism - although the social loading of Greenberg's category has been disputed.[138] The later Greenberg is often contrasted to the earlier one: social readings, commitments to socialism, and dialectical formulations,

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134.   Adorno, *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, op. cit., p.19.

135.   *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p.31. It is important to recognise that negativity has not moved from the "social" to the "aesthetic", for the latter is itself rendered a social category by Adorno, and as such it takes on a significance of immense proportions. Commentators such as Schulte-Sasse tend to emphasise - not without justification - the pessimistic caste in Adorno's aesthetics. In Adorno's totally administered world, resistance must hibernate in autonomous art; that is, art is the negation of society, and negation must hold out in the moment of mimesis. The danger with these views is that they tend to collapse what Adorno says into an account of art as *absolutely* asocial. Adorno, however, has a more complex picture of negations.

136.   Jameson, *Postmodernism*, op. cit., p.48.

137.   Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface", op. cit., p.xiii.

138.   See Peter Osborne, "Modernism, Abstraction and the Return of Painting", *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics*, eds. Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne, Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1991, pp.59-79; Steve Edwards, "Kitsch and Avant-Garde", Open University A316, *Modern Art: Practices and Debates*, Radiovision Broadcast 7, Radio 5, 1993.

giving way to narrower schema in support of Cold War US ideology; from the cultural

pessimism of "Eliotic Trotskyism" to the optimism based on the rising post-war

cultural, middle-class elite.[139] Greenberg's trajectory is, on such political points, more

extreme than Adorno's infamous criticisms of the student unrest of '68; his philosophy

is less programmatic; and his work, as a critic, pitches more into the particularities of art

works. Moreover, and in contrast to Adorno, Greenberg would seem to have produced

an affirmative account of art: "Aesthetic judgments are given and contained in the

immediate experience of art" as he wrote in "Complaints of an Art Critic" in 1967.[140]

Nevertheless, it is possible to identify dialectical figures - and, indeed, negation - in his

approach.

Serge Guilbaut, for instance, notes Greenberg's insistence on "the need for modernist

resistance to and negation of the integrating positivism of consumerist society" in the

1940s.[141] In one of those infamous passages - this one from 1949 - edited out of *Art

and Culture* in 1961, Greenberg puts forward the concept of "dialectical conversion":

> The process by which cubism, in pushing naturalism to its ultimate limits and
> over-emphasizing modeling - which is perhaps the most important means of
> naturalism in painting - arrived at the antithesis of naturalism, flat abstract art,

139.   See, for example: Donald Kuspit, *Clement Greenberg: Art Critic*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1979; Serge Guilbaut, "New Adventures of the Avant-Garde in America. Greenberg, Pollock, or from Trotskyism to the New Liberalism of the 'Vital Center'", in *Pollock and After*, op. cit., pp.153-166; Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, "Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed", *Art History*, vol.4, no.3, September 1981, pp.305-327; T.J. Clark, "More on the Differences Between Comrade Greenberg and Ourselves" (1981), in *Modernism and Modernity*, op. cit. pp.169-87, a later version of this can be found as "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", in *Pollock and After*, op. cit., pp.47-63; Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*, University of Chicago Press, 1983; John O'Brian, ed., "Introduction", *Clement Greenberg. The Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol.1: Perceptions and Judgments*, 1939-1944, University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp.xvii-xxv. and "Introduction", *Clement Greenberg. The Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol.3: Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-56*, University of Chicago Press, 1993. For a perspective which celebrates the later work of Greenberg, see Thierry de Duve, *Clement Greenberg Between the Lines*, Dis Voir, 1996.
140.   Clement Greenberg, "Complaints of an Art Critic" (1967), *Clement Greenberg. Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol. 4: Modernism with a Vengeance*, 1957-1969, The University of Chicago Press, 1993, p.265.
141.   Guilbaut, "The Relevance of Modernism", op. cit., p.XIII.

might be considered a case of "dialectical conversion".[142]

And in 1946 he explicitly states that "it is one of the functions of art to keep contradictions in suspension, unresolved".[143] This contrasts with later statements, this one from 1964: "Contradictory impulses are at work, and the triumph of art lies - as always - in their reconciliation".[144] The shift from an account which privileges open dialectical tension - or negative moment - to a culturally affirmative one would seem, at first sight, to be sustained in the classic work of late Greenberg. "Nothing could be further from the authentic art of our time than the idea of a rupture of continuity", he wrote in the early '60s, disputing the idea that Modernism was a break with tradition;[145] "Modernist art would be impossible" without the continuity with the past and its standards.[146] Modernism proceeded, he argued, through immanent criticism, self-criticism and reflection on its own foundations; a tendency which has been subject to "intensification" and "exacerbation", and which has sought "to entrench it [the discipline] more firmly in its area of competence", to the point where each art's "proper area of competence" displayed what was "unique and irreducible", and was "more conscious of itself".[147] The drive to autonomy, then, served to preserve quality in art, a

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142.   Clement Greenberg, "The Role of Nature in Modern Painting" (1949), *Clement Greenberg. Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol.2: Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949*, The University of Chicago Press, 1986, p.273. This idea of "dialectical conversion" may be compared to Engels' second law of dialectics: "the interpenetration of opposites". See Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, op. cit., p.62.
143.   Clement Greenberg, "The Impressionists and Proust: Review of *Proust and Painting* by Morris Chernowitz" (1946), *Clement Greenberg. Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol.2: Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949*, op. cit., p.96.
144.   "David Smith's New Sculpture" (1964), *Clement Greenberg. Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol.4*, op. cit., p.191. These points are raised by Kuspit. Kuspit insists that Greenbergian autonomy treats art's connection with society as indirect and mediated, rather than as direct and immediate (Kuspit, op. cit., p.39). He writes that Greenberg presents a tension between the disunity (or discontinuity) of life - its atomisation, chaos and irrationality - and aesthetic unity (or fiction of unity). "As unity becomes harder to realize in practice, it becomes more crucial to comprehend and imagine in theory, for it remains essential to life" (p.39). Accordingly, art can "displace the problem of the reconciliation of opposites from the realm of life to that of the medium" (p.42) - but whereas life, or politics, must address such questions directly, art can only work at a distance, as autonomous.
145.   Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (1960), *Clement Greenberg. Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol.4*, op. cit., p.93.
146.   This is the phrase used in the 1965 version, reprinted in *Art in Theory*, op. cit., p.760. In the 1960 version this reads: "Modernist art would lack both substance and justification". See *Clement Greenberg. Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol.4*, op. cit.
147.   Ibid., pp.85-89.

quality which Greenberg considered to be under threat.

This approach, however, is not unilaterally affirmative. In "Complaints of an Art Critic", Greenberg supports the necessity of the violation of the ideas so long as quality is maintained. Furthermore, the status of the self-critical tendency is questionable, and can be read as a process of internal self-negation.[148] Moreover, the point, in "Modernist Painting", about the self-critical process reaching "almost" the point of "exacerbation" is interesting.[149] Greenberg insists on the importance of a "dialectical tension" - or at least he does in the 1965 version[150] -between the picture as illusion and the "integrity of the picture plane"[151] - a tension which he presents as the condition of art in general, including Modernism, where the terms are not eradicated but reverse their priority. Abstraction, he insists, is not the result of purging painting of representation per se, but of the purging of the three-dimensional, sculptural illusion that it traditionally suggests.[152] Attention to the picture plane, then, does not result in "absolute flatness" - an impossibility once the first mark of charcoal or paint invades and destroys its "literal or utter flatness" - but in the supplanting of sculptural illusion with optical illusion.[153] If

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148.   Greenberg associates immanent criticism with Kant, and many commentators have followed this line of thought. The Enlightenment introduced such criticism, Greenberg argues, but it proceeded from the outside, whereas Modernism's criticism came from inside, "through the procedures themselves of that which is being criticized" (ibid., p.85). Nicolas Calas, however, suggested that Greenberg was less Kantian than Hegelian, and that the self-critical process paralleled Hegel's passages on self-consciousness (see Kuspit, op. cit., p.18). See also Stephen Melville, "Aspects", *Reconsidering the Object of Art 1965-75*, MIT, 1996, pp.228-245. It is difficult to judge this, for in 1944, in "Abstract Art", Greenberg presented specialisation as counter to Hegelian "world systems". See *Clement Greenberg. Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol. 1*, op. cit., p.201.

149.   A sense of some sort of crisis is intimated in his worries about the designation "formalist", in "Complaints of an Art Critic" (although his terms run close to advocating the ineffability of art): "It assumes that "form" and "content" in art can be adequately distinguished for the purposes of discourse. This implies in turn that discursive thought has solved just those problems of art upon whose imperviousness to discursive thinking the very possibility of art depends." See *Clement Greenberg. Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol.4*, op. cit., p.269.

150.   See *Art in Theory*, op. cit., p.756.

151.   *Clement Greenberg. Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol.4*, op. cit., p.87.

152.   However, in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" he equates abstraction with the "non-representational". See *Clement Greenberg. Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol.1*, op. cit., p.9.

153.   In the 1965 version of "Modernist Painting", there is an interesting shift in phraseology, and an interesting duplicity in the performance of the word "utter": "absolute flatness" becomes "utter flatness", and "literal and utter flatness" becomes "virtual flatness". See *Art in Theory*, op. cit., p.90.

"flatness" is central to the Greenbergian account, it must, nevertheless, maintain some resistance unless it is to lapse into decoration.[154] Similarly, while Greenberg sees the increasing self-consciousness of art as an increasing attention to norms and conventions - rather than as a release or, as he puts it in 1965, a "liberation" from them -[155] Modernist art, he insists with Mondrian in mind, walks the line between "the danger of arbitrariness", in the absence of a model in nature", and the danger of becoming "too disciplined".[156]

V. Atrophy & Ends

Accounts of autonomy in both Greenberg and Adorno are seen to lead into atrophy or aporia, or, at least, their accounts are seen to hover on the verge of this. Bürger, remarking on Adorno's aesthetics of radical autonomy, refers to "the danger of semantic atrophy".[157] This danger, for Adorno, was precisely the point, and he too warns of it,

154.   Elsewhere he writes of sharpening "the problem by increasing the tension between decorative means and nondecorative ends". See "Milton Avery", *Clement Greenberg. Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol.4*, op. cit., p.43. Modern art, in this sense, puts more emphasis on tension than pictorial unity, a tension produced by, as Kuspit puts it, "a compulsion to wholeness which conceives of it but cannot experience it" (Kuspit, op. cit., pp.44-5). He further argues that Greenberg's notion of "purity" is a historical tendency of the modern period, but an unattainable one (p.46) - a process of tension, not its resolution (p.49). To collapse the distance between art and life would threaten the "particular experience of life's disequilibrium" and the "personal experience of a particular medium" (p.81). The loss of this distance results, for Greenberg, in kitsch or baroque. Abstraction is not, then, the telos of art in general, but the best of "the general end of art" in the modern world (p.97). If art follows the line of Platonic unity and form, it risks conventionalism and becoming design; if it allows itself to sink into irrationality, it risks destroying its roots and becoming arbitrary and chaotic (pp.109-110). Further to this - and suggesting more of that exacerbation - Kuspit argues, there is a constant danger that: "A mechanical tension replaces a dialectical one. The art acquires a Platonic intelligibility; its unity is no longer lived, but has become the dead letter of an idea of unity.... As such, it becomes meaningless as art, i.e., as a dialectical transformation of a resistant life content... It becomes an ornamental excrescence rather than an articulate tension... decadent" (pp.68-9).
155.   *Art in Theory*, op. cit., p.758.
156.   *Clement Greenberg. Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol.4*, op. cit., p.65. In the 1965 version, Greenberg adds: "the danger of of arbitrariness in the absence of a model in nature" (*Art in Theory*, op. cit., p.758). A similar point is made in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch": the "aesthetic validity" of abstraction, Greenberg argues, "cannot be arbitrary or accidental, but must stem from obedience to some worthy constraint or original". *Clement Greenberg. Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol.1*, op. cit., p.9.
157.   Peter Bürger, "The Significance of the Avant-Garde for Contemporary Aesthetics: A Reply to Jürgen Habermas", *New German Critique* 22, Winter 1981, p.21.

but suggested that there was no way out of facing the risk without at the same time becoming complacent to the situation that had generated the need for autonomy in the first place. Working at the edge of this tension, always hovering on the verge of total irrelevance or meaningless, was, for Adorno the modus operandi of the best modern art. Even the best could fail, cutting short this extremely exacerbated dialectic, or finding its attenuated dynamic extracted and itself reduced to "dialectics at a standstill".[158]

Similarly, critiques of Greenbergian Modernism argue that his account, in "Modernist Painting", however triumphant, posits a logic which suggests a reduction or purification that might reach some end, or some moment so emptied of "extraneous" material, so attentive to its own specificity, that it dissolves in solipsistic vacuity. Greenberg himself always resisted this account which seemed to "stop" with the blank or the monochrome canvas, and denied any a priori logic in his work which might produce it (except for, perhaps, the demand for quality). Nevertheless it has been an emphasis suggested by Clark, and charted by de Duve and Bois, for example.[159] In addition, arguments for an end of modernism have been posited on the need to leap out of this logic. These arguments were bound up with the emergence (and success) of practices which fail to fit the criteria of Greenbergian painting, and which, in some cases, explicitly pitched back into social and political issues.[160] As John O'Brian has remarked, the codification and popularisation of Greenberg's own position occurred at the very moment that its validity seemed to dissolve - whether by its own hand, or by external activity is a matter for

158.   See, for example Adorno's comments on Schönberg, in Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, op. cit., pp.123-4. The figure of "dialecics at a standstill", as we will see in Chapter 3, is also prominent in the work of Walter Benjamin.
159.   See, for example, T.J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", op. cit.; Thierry de Duve, "The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas" in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris and Montreal 1945-64*, ed. Serge Guilbaut, MIT, 1990, pp.244-310; Yve-Alain Bois, "Ryman's Tact", op. cit.
160.   Cf. Bürger's comment that Adorno's account of modernist aporia at the limits of advanced material "fell apart and was replaced by a broad and many-faceted spectrum of possible materials". See Isabelle Graw, "Interview with Peter Bürger", op. cit., p.65.

some debate.[161]

The idea of the "end of art" has a further range of readings, embracing not only high

Modernist painting, but also the avant-gardist type practices of which Greenberg and

Adorno were always sceptical.[162] As we have seen, the end of avant-gardism is usually

based on an argument about the loss of the power of negativity (as resistance) in the

(post)modern world. However, other accounts of this process can be made. Matei

Calinescu (1977) remarks that "art itself" was "the first victim" of "artistic negativism" -

"universal and hysterical negation".[163] Hugo Ball had said that the Dadaist "suffers

from dissonances to the point of self-destruction".[164] Somewhat reminiscent of the

Dadaist theme of negation all the way to self-destruction, Rosenberg observed of the

avant-garde that "having cancelled or submerged traditional modes of art, the new has

reached the point of cancelling itself".[165] Poggioli indexes the matter somewhat

differently, and describes the relation between artists and society - the "purely negative

function" of alienation - as "reciprocally destructive", and in "a continual process of

disintegration".[166] Paraphrasing Marx, Poggioli identifies a dialectic shaped by "social

161.   John O'Brian, "Introduction", *Clement Greenberg. The Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol.3. Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956*, University of Chicago Press, 1995, p.xix.
162.   The source of the idea of the "end of art" is in G.W.F. Hegel, *Aestheics. Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford University Press, 1975. Hegel describes "the culmination of the romantic" form of art where "art annuls itself" (p.529). For a commentary, see Lucian Krukowski, "Hegel, 'Progress', and the End of the Avant-Garde", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol.44, Spring 1986, pp.279-90.
163.   Cited Huyssen, "The Search for Tradition", op. cit., p.26.
164.   See Ball, in *Art in Theory*, op. cit., p.246. See also Hülsenbeck: "Dada foresees its end and laughs. Death is a thoroughly Dadaist business, in that it signifies nothing at all. Dada has the right to dissolve itself and will exert this right when the time comes" (Hülsenbeck, in ibid., p.259).
165.   Harold Rosenberg, "Keeping Up", *The De-Definition of Art*, op. cit., p.223.
166.   Poggioli, op. cit., p.118. Poggioli's fourth and last sub-section of avant-gardism, Agonism, is typified by self-immolation. He sees this as a continuation of the romantic cult of death and agony, but taking a more exacerbated form: sinking from tragedy to pathos, placing creativity into permanent crisis and under the threat of constant failure: "... sacrifice and consecration: an hyperbolic passion, a bow bent toward the impossible, a paradoxical and positive form of spiritual defeatism" (p.66). Poggioli describes a still more pathos-ridden and passive form of Agonism with a Dionysian edge - "Decadence" - which is highly conscious of itself as "last" and "resigns itself to awaiting... [the future] passively, with anguished fatality and inert anxiety" (p.75).

degeneration, an ineluctable crisis of society at once unable to die or to renew itself".167

Similarly, Debord refers to an "ever more individualized art of negation perpetually

renewing itself to the point of the fragmentation and complete negation of the artistic

sphere".168

However, far from being the negation of avant-gardism in general, Poggioli insists that

the crisis is the negation of particular avant-gardes by another. It is, he argues, a

"mutation, not a negation" of the avant-garde itself, a process whereby the avant-garde

"transforms itself... into its own opposite".169 What appears to us as its "crisis" or

"overcoming" of the avant-garde is, for Poggioli, the moment of its generalisation, its

transformation from "the epidemic stage into the endemic and chronic"; "a defeat in the

letter and a victory in the spirit of avant-gardism".170 Bürger also presents the "failure"

of the historical avant-garde as a matter of success through the generalisation of its

resources. He claims that the avant-garde marked the emergence of consciousness, and

a moment of generalisation of the categories of artistic modernism. Thus categories like

estrangement, defamiliarisation, allegorisation and montage become available as

languages and resources of expression; and the consciousness that art could be more

than its reified self is raised, and:171 "the claim formulated by avant-garde movements to

abolish the separation of art and life, although it failed, continues as before to define the

situation of today's art".172 In contrast to Poggioli, who emphasises that this situation is

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167.   Ibid., p.109. He also cites Caudwell on the dissolution of social values under capitalism, reducing activity to private phantasy, and entrapping the artwork between commercial vulgarisation and hypostatisation (p.64).
168.   Debord, op. cit., thesis 189.
169.   Poggioli, op. cit., p.223.
170.   Ibid., p.224, p.223. Cf. Rosenberg, who, casting a sceptical eye over the crisis, remarked: "Painting divided by zero has, however, proved to equal infinity: art might be coming to an end but there has been no end to anti-art". Harold Rosenberg, "Confrontation", *The De-Definition of Art*, op. cit., pp.203-4.
171.   Of montage, Bürger notes (after Adorno) that it was "the negation of synthesis as a negation of meaning"; but he adds the rider that "even the withholding of meaning is a positing of it". See *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, op. cit., p.79.
172.   Peter Bürger, "The Decline of the Modern Age", *Telos* 62, Winter 1984/5, p.130.

"not a negation", the process of generalisation can be seen as negation's work, or as the

work of, what we might call, a "vanishing mediator".[173]

However, Bürger also points to some crises at the heart of the crisis. It is, he argues,

"the end of art" if the gap between art and life praxis remains (the prospects of atrophy,

etc.), but it is also the end of art if that gap is erased.[174]

> ... the avant-gardiste's attempt to reintegrate art into the life process is itself a
> profoundly contradictory endeavour. For the (relative) freedom of art vis-à-vis
> the praxis of life is at the same time the condition that must be fulfilled if there is
> to be a critical cognition of reality. An art no longer distinct from the praxis of
> life but wholly absorbed in it will lose the capacity to criticize it, along with its
> distance.[175]

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173.   See Slavoj Zizek, "Why Should a Dialectician Learn to Count to Four", *Radical Philosophy*, no.58., Summer 1991, pp.3-9. The vanishing mediator is, prior to its vanishing, a concrete historical entity whose very success and universalisation effectively transforms it into pure content, allowing it to lose its form. Subsequently the whole episode of its existence is seen as one of excess, an aberration on the face of history. The classic example is the Jacobins, who, according to this argument, are seen not as utopian-terrorists who naively tried to enforce democratic ideals on those who would prefer more gradualist methods, but as an absolutely necessary force - in the passage from *ancien regime* to bourgeois life - who "vanished not because of their weakness but because of their very success" (p.8); we are, Zizek notes, "Jacobins without Jacobinical form". The argument is specifically articulated around the role of negation. Zizek notes that there are two readings - (i) the dialectical triad and its excess; (ii) a four-stage dialectical movement - and that, he insists, what is at stake is "the very status of social antagonism viz. negativity" (p.8): "Is the emergence of negativity in the social space a mere intermediary in the passage from one to another form of positivity, the "exception" that characterises the transition from one to another "normalcy", or is this very "normalcy" nothing but the aftermath, the "gentrification" of a forgotten excess of negativity?" (p.8). According to Zizek's reading of Hegel, the moment of negation in the dialectic can be seen as double:
> ... as soon as we add to the immediate its negation [self-relating, inner negativity], this negation retroactively changes the meaning of immediacy, so we must count to three, although what we effectively have are just two elements. Or, if we envisage the complete cycle of the dialectical process, there are just three "positive" moments to count over (the immediacy, its mediation and the final return to the mediated immediacy). What we lose is the unfathomable surplus of the pure difference which "counts for nothing" although it makes the entire process go, this "void of the substance" which is at the same time the "receptacle (*Rezeptakulum*) for all and everything", as Hegel put it. (p.4)
On vanishing mediators see also Fredric Jameson, "The Vanishing Mediator; or, Max Weber as Storyteller", *The Ideologies of Theory. Essays 1971-1986. Volume 2: Syntax of History*, Routledge, 1988, pp.3-34; Slavoj Zizek, "The Subject as "Vanishing Mediator"", *Tarrying with the Negative. Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*, Duke University Press, 1993, pp.33-5. For a similar figure of excess, although conceived as trying to outmanoeuvre the Hegelian dialectic and its figures, see Jacques Derrida's *différance*. As Alan Bass notes it is "the excess of the trace *Aufhebung* itself - that is precisely what the *Aufhebung* can never *aufheben*: lift up, conserve, and negate" (translator's note in Derrida's *Margins of Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, 1982, p.20).

174.   Bürger, "The Decline of the Modern Age", op. cit., p.130.

175.   *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, op. cit., p.50.

This "critical distance" draws attention to a non-identity that allows critical reflection across the gap separating thought from being, and returns us to earlier points raised by Adorno. This, in turn, is presented as a capacity to make a social critique, to be able to turn back on the conditions of reification and take a stand against them.[176] In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno argues a point that goes beyond the relatively local claims concerning 20c. modernist art:

> The so-called crisis of art, which seems to be a completely new quality of very recent origin, is in fact as old as the concept of art itself.... Art cannot live up to its concept.[177]

In Adorno's thought, this crisis has been immanent to *art* since its first moment, since the emergence of the distinction of subject and object, and the opening of "the dialectics of mimesis and rationality that is intrinsic to art".[178] The subject/object distinction is usually seen as a split which represents the fall from grace, a loss of one-ness or harmony with God, or "alienation" in its pre-Marxist sense.[179] For Adorno, however, this is not so much a "loss" - a Fall - as the gain of the first moment of humanity, the moment of humanity's very consciousness of its separation from nature, "the process of man's emancipation from his fear of the omnipotent oneness and homogeneity of nature" and "immediate existence".[180] This is, then, a necessary "alienation", a separation or gap or split through which human consciousness can emerge as consciousness of itself. This moment, for Adorno - which sees the onset of the dialectic

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176. Adorno describes a related problem this way: "Each of the two alternatives [committed and autonomous art] negates itself with the other. Committed art, necessarily detached as art from reality, cancels the distance between the two. 'Art for art's sake' denies by its absolute claims that ineradicable connection with reality which is the polemical a priori of the attempt to make art autonomous from the real. Between these two poles the tension in which art has lived in every age till now is dissolved". See "Commitment", op. cit., p.178.

177. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p.80.

178. Ibid.

179. This recalls the discussion of identity and non-identity earlier, and that of objectification, although Adorno is describing a fundamental philosophical point, rather than - as Marx did - the objectification of labour - Adorno's account of art as objectified process seems to be the nearest he gets (see ibid., p.250-1), but again the criteria of the discussion are different. In the end, Adorno's argument does not distinguish alienation from objectification, but charts an on-going dialectic of reification and necessary non-identity at play ever since the moment of subject/object distinction.

180. Ibid., p.76.

of mimesis and rationality - provides art not just with the crisis of its concept but also, as we encountered earlier, with the potential to resist the reified world.[181]

Hohendahl notes that Adorno's concept of autonomy "can only hint at the truth in the form of mimesis".[182] This mimetic element intimates the centrality of the role of art for Adorno, although art and aesthetics do not exhaust mimesis' range of functions. Mimesis, it should be noted, is described by Adorno as "the non-conceptual affinity of a subjective creation with its objective and unposited other" - it is itself based on negativity and is "a paradigm of non-identity".[183] Mimetic activity, in its Adornian sense, is an active transformation of its object.[184] Mimesis, then, is at the root of the

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181.   Originating in primitive magic and its imitations of nature, mimesis survived the rise of rationality, "the organizing and unity-constitutive moment" (ibid., p.81). Rationality, for Adorno, ushers in the human subject's "nascent sense of freedom" (p.70) from myth, nature, and "archaic unfreedom" (p.98). Rationality demystifies the enchantment represented by the archaic, and maintained in the mimetic faculty, and also ushers the technologicisation of the world. However, this increasing rationalisation and instrumentality (which escalate in the modern era) fail to realise the freedom they promised: "rationality has yet to become rational" (p.95). Indeed, for Adorno, enlightenment unrealised tends to myth, reason tends to unreason, and so rationality tends to hypostatisation: "...modern art seeks to obviate the magical commodity fetishism of the disenchanted world by means of its own magical moment, which is blackness" (p.86). Adorno distinguishes this dialectic from, what he considers to be, Benjamin's tendency to dichotomise in the latter's treatment of auratic and mass produced art (pp.82-3). "Art is a refuge for mimetic behaviour" (p.79) yet simultaneously shares in rationality and the denial of mimesis, for it is a constant, and irreconcilable, dialectic of mimesis and rationality. Thus art is neither nature nor intellect; and while it must neither relapse back into magic, nor surrender to the world's increasing rationalisation, it is nevertheless caught within these possibilities.

What mimetic behaviour responds to is the *telos* of cognition, which it simultaneously hinders through its categories. Art expands cognition into an area where it was said to be non-existent. In doing so, art undermines its uniqueness and univocality vis-à-vis knowledge. Since magic, which is being secularized by art, refuses in effect to go along, whereas the magic essence in the framework of secularization deteriorates into a mythological residue called superstition, art is threatened with destruction (p.80).

182.   Hohendahl, op. cit., p.8.
183.   Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p.80. Martin Jay describes mimesis as "a human ability to respond affirmatively to form" (Martin Jay, *Adorno*, Fontana, 1984, p.157). We must be careful to understand this well; Adorno argues that "... in their antithetical opposition man and nature are dependent on each other: nature on the experience of a mediated and objectified world, art on nature which is the mediated plenipotentiary of immediacy". See *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p.91.
184.   As Buck-Morss puts it, mimesis is where: "The subject yielded to the objects, yet it did not leave them unchanged. Instead of being merely duplicated in thought, they were transformed within a verbal representation" (Buck-Morss, op. cit., pp.86-7). Mimesis, then, is not reducible to imitation, unless one understands that as an activity of identification across the gap of non-identity (Peter Bürger, "Aporias of Modern Aesthetics", in *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics*, op. cit.). Cf. Adorno: "Art's separation from nature can be undone, but only in virtue of this separation" (*Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p.80). Adorno notes that "even the rejection of mimesis... is mimetic". See Theodor Adorno,

tension of identity and non-identity, and of Adorno's argument that art is both social and yet also irreducible to the social. So although Adorno sees "natural beauty" as an ideological presentation of "mediateness in the guise of immediacy",[185] he insists that:

> The image of nature survives because its complete negation by artefacts would necessarily involve closing one's eyes to the possibility of a sphere beyond bourgeois work and commodity relations. In spite of its social mediateness, the beautiful in nature remains an allegory of that beyond.[186]

Debord captures something of the same dialectical tension, and a similar focus on a "beyond". Charting an "art of negation" - an art for "a world which [since the baroque] has lost its centre" - he claims that:

> As a negative movement which seeks the supersession of art in a historical society where history is not yet lived, art in the epoch of its dissolution is simultaneously an art of change and the pure expression of impossible change. The more grandiose its reach, the more its true realization is beyond it. This art is perforce *avant-garde*, and it *is not*. Its avant-garde is its disappearance.[187]

Of Adorno and Horkheimer, Benhabib remarks:

> The flight of critique from the immanent emancipatory ideals of socially and historically situated agents to the esoteric heights of absolute spirit means nothing less than that the fate of modernity can only be overcome by its transfiguration. If social rationalization destroys the possibility of exercising freedom and if cultural rationalization destroys the desire for freedom, then no less than an apocalyptic reversal of the fate of the moderns and a break in the continuum of history can initiate the emancipatory dynamic. Critical theory becomes the messenger of the apocalypse.[188]

This need for "an apocalyptic reversal", with its quasi messianic tones, is produced as a necessity out of their dialectic of enlightenment. Having virtually written-off negation, it now returns with a vengeance: the demise of "practices of negativity" (as political radicalism, critical distance, dealienation, non-identity thinking) having held out in a

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Minima Moralia. Reflections from Damaged Life (1951), New Left Books/Verso, 1974, p.145.

185.   Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., p.101. Cf. idealism's view, which Adorno characterises as "an act of usurpation by a subject reducing unconstrained, qualitatively different entities to mere materials and indeterminate potentials in order to dispose of them, whereas a truly dialectical concept would retain them" (p.92). Cf. Benjamin position on the neo-Kantians, to be discussed in Chapter 3. Incidentally, given that his coding of this ideological presentation echoes that for use-value, it is regrettable that Adorno didn't make the same dialectical twist for his sense of the commodity.

186.   Ibid., p.102.

187.   Debord, op. cit., thesis 190.

188.   See Benhabib, op. cit., p.45.

very attenuated "practice of negation" (certain forms of autonomous art, in one aspect of the mimetic faculty), we must now find another "practice of negation" (the apocalyptic reversal, eschatology). We come, in this logic - the logic of the dialectic of enlightenment and total reification - full circle, to something akin to the avant-gardists' own demand for a radical break or leap. A similar strain can be heard in Guilbaut's Vancouver conclusion:

> Nor should we expect any form of viable resistance or negation to emerge from art practice as we generally know it today. If our culture is dying of implosion, only explosion offers any real potential for change.... This is the age of the guerilla.[189]

SECTION TWO: T.J. CLARK'S PRACTICES OF NEGATION

If the first section of this chapter tends to keep negation as the object of analysis, and at a distance from the interpretations and debates, the second section no longer allows that distance to be quite so secure. This emphasis on method - and on tracking the role, work and play of negation therein - remains a theme of the remaining chapters.

I subscribe to the view that it is impossible to talk about method in isolation from the matters over which that method operates. However, having said this, I need to qualify this statement, for this is not something that I would say about every text. Too often "theory" is an "application" like a coat of paint. In such cases, methodological analysis is more like decoding, which at its worst becomes an exercise of spot-the-theory. Apart from the challenges provided by the encounter with a new set of concepts, this decoding

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189.   Guilbaut, "The Relevence of Modernism", op. cit., p.XV. In these comments, Guilbaut is responding to Baudrillard's account of "implosion". See, for example, Jean Baudrillard, "The Beaubourg-Effect: Implosion and Deterrence", *October* 20, Spring 1982, pp.3-13.

is, I think, quite an easy game to play. However, it doesn't sustain my interest, and its object usually seems to be reduced to an appendage or an afterthought, and the object just doesn't seem able to carry the burden that the theory proffers. The work that *does* interest me is more difficult to characterise, and is not necessarily immune to the points just made, but can be said to be of a dialectical orientation. To define this bent presents a major difficulty because this *is* a method which I think has to be articulated through its materials. However, since this may sound quasi-mystical or you-know-it-when-you-see-it, I feel obliged to say a little more. What makes this quality is self-reflexivity and a self-consciousness about one's method, the sort of self-reflexivity which worries or struggles or - to opt for less "tormented" descriptions - constantly reworks its object and its own grasp thereof. To put this another way, in such work one may see some transitions occurring between object of analysis/interpretation and the analysing/interpreting subject. This is the point being made in the opening paragraph to this section. Because I want to draw these points out of my material, because I want to probe the method through its materials, the interrogation of the concept of negation that follows will take the form of an extended case-study. This already overinvests and overburdens the texts and materials that follow. In a sense they chose themselves for this study by the amount of effort that I expended on them, but I have (perhaps as a consequence) used them as a way to follow negation through some art historical applications - and, here, I mean "application" in the sense of "turning" one's tools or materials to a task at hand, as in the phrase "to apply oneself". The way that I have orchestrated this material may make its authors sound more conscious and calculating than perhaps they ever were. This is a function of my work rather than theirs; in reality, their processes were probably far more ad hoc. This said, neither does my own activity of "orchestration" live out some master plan but emerged along the way.

This is perhaps the moment to address Hegel's account of negation, from which some of the points regarding the dialectic can be drawn. In *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel

notes that "thinking exercises a negative activity".[190] However, the classic discussion of

negation occurs in the preface to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* where the essentials

of Hegel's position on the dialectical method are laid out, and the central terms negation,

becoming, mediation - set forth. What superficial thinking lacks, he contends, is "the

seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative";[191] it takes

(what it takes to be) the immediate (in itself), and fails to work for the mediate (for

itself); it takes the beginning - or the "first immediately enunciated" - as the Absolute

instead of the result of the process of mediation or "a becoming-other that has to be

taken back".[192] Hegel makes this point against forms of philosophy or mysticism which

operate around abstract universals, or against those modes of thought which emphasise

(what is assumed as) the concrete: what they take to be the simple immediate must,

Hegel argues, be mediated and put through the pain of the negative.[193]

Negation is raised in the context of a discussion of the True and the Absolute -

specifically in that of the relation of Substance (that which is) to Subject (that which

thinks): "everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as Substance,

but equally as Subject".[194] The emphasis in the discussion, then, is upon the movement

of living Substance, its becoming actual - "it is the movement of positing itself, or is the

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190. See G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic. Part I of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, (third edition of 1830), Hackett Publishing Company, 1991, p.96; "thinking the empirical world essentially means altering its empirical form, and transforming it into something-universal; so thinking exercises a negative activity..." (p.96).

191. *Phenomenology*, op. cit., p.10.

192. Ibid., p.11.

193. Initially, his argument is explicitly with a superficial form of thinking which claims to grasp God or the Absolute "intuitively"; but the same moves are made against formalism's empty abstractions (ibid., p.29). The argument is also mounted against the sensuous immediacy privileged by common sense and by empiricism, and against "material thinking" and "picture thinking", unable to abstract themselves from "material stuff" (p.35).

194. Ibid., p.10. According to Hegel, philosophy has tended to separate these elements when, in fact, they are one: Subject is living Substance, it is actualised Substance, or Substance in and for itself (see p.14). The Absolute has both essence and form, and both are actualised/realised through the process of movement and development, or self-consummation (see p.11). In Hegel's account, the labour of the negative - or the self-movement of form - actualises the Absolute/divine essence, and "form is as essential to the essence as the essence is to itself" (p.11).

mediation of its self-othering with itself".[195] Initially, in this process of "doubling",

"bifurcation", self-alienation, or self-negation, Substance as Subject becomes "simple

negativity"; and as an "indifferent diversity" it is an antithesis of "immediate simplicity".

In turn, this indifferent diversity is negated (the negation is itself negated); the

movement of self-alienation turns into a movement of self-return and self-restoration.

Crucially, however, this is not a return to immediate simplicity, but a mediated

immediacy; a reconciliation of becoming and result; a mediation of self-negation and the

negation of this negation.[196] This is the infamous Hegelian *Aufhebung*.[197]

For Hegel, this strenuous effort of the negative must be distinguished from some false

friends or erroneous conceptions of the negative and its role: the negative as merely

negative, the negative as false, and the negative as an external, alien force. Firstly,

negation must not be understood as mere denial, but as *determinate* negation: abstract

immediate unity must be destroyed for a determinate mediated unity, Hegel argues.[198]

Thus determinate negation has not just a negative but also a "positive content".[199]

Secondly, true and false tend, Hegel says, to be treated as fixed, ready made, mutually

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195. Ibid., p.10. If, Hegel argues, the ancients put their effort into challenging natural consciousness in order to establish the idea of the universal, the moderns have inherited fixed forms of the universal, and have the task of restoring the fluidity to notions and ideas (pp.19-20). Thinking in terms of the Notion demands, Hegel writes, "strenuous effort" (p.35); true cognition is "only won through the labour of the Notion" (p.43). Cf. the section on "Sense Certainty" and the discussion of the "not-This".

196. The True, or Absolute, in other words, "is the process of its own becoming" (ibid., p.10), the "becoming of itself" (p.11), the "reflection in otherness within itself" (p.10) - a mediated not an immediate unity: "only by being worked out to its end, is it actual" (p.10), Hegel writes. "*Mediation* is nothing beyond self-moving selfsameness, or is reflection into self, the movement of the 'I' which is for itself pure negativity or, when reduced to its pure abstraction, *simple becoming*" (p.11)

197. "Aufheben has in the German language a double meaning in that it signifies conserving, *preserving* and at the same time also making cease, *making an end*. Even conserving includes the negative aspect that something is taken out of its immediacy and thus out of an existence that is open to external influence, to be preserved" (Hegel cited in McLellan, op. cit., p.52).

198. *Phenomenology*, op. cit., pp.18-19. The concept of determinate negation is traditionally attributed to Spinoza's dictum "*omnis determinatio est negatio*" (see, for example, István Mészáros, "Negation", *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, second edition, Blackwell, 1991, p.400).

199. *Phenomenology*, op. cit., p.36: "The negative belongs to the content itself, and is the *positive*, both as the *immanent* movement and determination of the content, and as the whole of the process".

external notions, with positive and negative allocated respectively. Yet, while true and false should not be collapsed (such as in the idea that all truths contain some falsehoods), the True itself still has the negative "directly present" within.[200] And finally, because the negative presents itself as a disparity between Subject and Substance (between "I" and its object), there has been a tendency to mistake that disparity or gap as something externally imposed, whereas the truth is that the negative is its own self-alienation. The ancients, Hegel notes, correctly recognised "the *void* as the principle of motion... the moving principle as the negative" - the motion of subject to object and object to subject - but what they failed to see was that "the negative is the self".[201]

I. Practices Of Negation

Reflecting on the attempts to produce a revolutionary art in France between 1848 and 1851, but saying just as much about the situation in 1981, Clark writes: "Bourgeois society is efficient at making all art its own".[202] In this new 1981 preface to *The Absolute Bourgeois* and *Image of the People*, he ponders his own books' relation to the fall-out, and retreat from politics post-1968; what he regards as the misinterpretation of this work by both Left and Right; and - just as significant - expresses a self-consciousness of his own part in the academic "recuperation".[203] It is the conjunction of these concerns - in short, the question of politics, the question of method (or a politics of method), and the question of the interpreter's own role therein - which returns us to the concerns already addressed, and which makes this body of work particularly

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200.   Ibid., p.23: "disparity, rather, as the negative, the self, is itself still directly present in the True as such".
201.   Ibid., p.21.
202.   T.J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois. Artists and Politics in France 1848-1851* (1973), Thames & Hudson, 1982, p.6.
203.   T.J. Clark, *Image of the People. Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (1973), Thames & Hudson, 1982.

interesting; not least, because Clark centres a concern with negativity and mediation. I shall argue that this concern produces some fascinating problems.

Responding to Clark's Vancouver paper (re-presented at the *Critical Inquiry* symposium in Chicago), Fried argued that Clark's critique of, and alternative to, Greenberg's theory of art was especially ill-equipped to deal with abstraction, invoking, among other works, Jackson Pollock's painting *Lavender Mist*.[204] Clark responded with a paragraph outlining how his argument - an argument which centred on the concept of "negation" - was essential if you were to understand what he calls the "delectable impasse" reached by Pollock's paintings in the late 1940s.

The phrase "practices of negation" had been introduced by Clark to try "to recast [Greenberg's] sketch of modernism's formal logic", and to open that logic back onto, or into, "history" and "the social".[205] The modernist account of art, as Clark characterises

204.   T.J. Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", op. cit.; Michael Fried, "How Modernism Works: A Response to T.J. Clark", *Pollock and After*, op. cit., pp.65-79 (originally published in *Critical Inquiry*, vol.9, no.1, September 1982, pp.217-234); T.J. Clark, "Arguments about Modernism: A Reply to Michael Fried", *Pollock and After*, op. cit., pp.81-88 (originally published in *The Politics of Interpretation*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell, The University of Chicago Press, 1983, pp.239-248.)
205.   "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", op. cit., p.55. The idea however goes back much further. Clark had remarked that art history shrinks from "gestures of renunciation", such as those in Courbet, Rimbaud and Lautréamont. See T.J. Clark, "A bourgeois Dance of Death: Max Buchon on Courbet - 1", *The Burlington Magazine*, April 1969, pp.208-213 (the quotation is from p.208). The issue crops up, most famously, in the 1980 article in *Screen*. See Timothy J. Clark, "Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of 'Olympia' in 1865", *Screen*, vol.21, no.1, Spring 1980, pp.18-41. Here Clark distinguishes between his claim that Olympia "failed to signify in 1865" (p.25) -or "refuses to signify" (p.39) - and *Screen*'s own fascination with "dis-identificatory practices" (MacCabe cited p.37). Manet's painting:

> ...erodes the *terms* in which the normal recognitions are enacted, but it leaves the structure itself intact.... To escape that structure what would be needed would be, exactly, another set of terms - terms which would be discovered, doubtless, in the act of unsettling the old codes and conventions, but which would have themselves to be *settled*, consistent, forming a finished sentence (p.39).
> ... any critique of the established, dominant systems of meaning will degenerate into a mere refusal to signify unless it seeks to found its meanings - discover its contrary meaning - not in some magic re-presentation, on the other side of negation and refusal, but in signs which are already present, fighting for room - meanings rooted in actual forms of life; repressed meanings, the meanings of the dominated (p.40).

These comments provoked Wollen to reply. *Screen* had been central in the revival of attention to Benjamin, Brecht and LEF, and favoured what might be called a Godardian approach to artistic and

it in his reply to Fried, describes a sequence of "triumphant openings on to fullness and

positivity".[206] Bringing the concept of negation into the foreground, Clark couches

Greenberg's logic more in terms of difficulty and desperation than in terms of

purification: "All the way to the Black Square" sums up a painful process - albeit a

productive one. Clark explains in an author's note (added to the paper for its

republication in 1984):

> By "practices of negation" I meant some form of decisive innovation, in method
> or materials or imagery, whereby a previously established set of skills or frame
> of reference - skills and references which up till then had been taken as essential
> to art making of any seriousness - are deliberately avoided or travestied, in such
> a way as to imply that only *by* such incompetence or obscurity will genuine
> picturing get done.[207]

But, whatever Clark claims he meant to mean, the identity of negation does not present

itself so easily. Initially, everything seems in order: practices of negation are primarily

enactments on, or of, medium, and yet are also a metaphorical articulation of

negationary values at the social level.[208] Firstly negation is cast as "of medium", as

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cultural engagement. In this context, then, Clark's comments were seen as a re-run of the
Realism/Modernism debates of German Marxists in the '30s, or of the Russians in the '20s. The issue
might also be seen as a conflict between two senses of negation: internal and external - although it tends
to figure for Clark, here, as "dis-identificatory practices". See Peter Wollen, "Manet: Modernism and
Avant-Garde", *Screen*, vol.21, no.2, Summer 1980, pp. 15-25; and for further comment on the
Clark/Wollen exchange, Charles Harrison, Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden, "Manet's 'Olympia' and
Contradiction", *Block*, no.5, 1981, pp.34-43. The material on Olympia is reworked for the chapter
"Olympia's Choice" in T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life. Paris in the Art of Manet and his
Followers*, Princeton University Press, 1984, pp.79-146.

   Clark's position continues in many ways that adopted by the English Section of the
Situationist International in 1967 in what was an unpublished pamphlet entitled *The Revolution of
Modern Art and the Modern Art of Revolution*, Chronos Publications, London, 1994. "Negation" is not
as prominent as it is in Debord, but occurs briefly in this formulation: "The project of art - for Blake,
for Nietzsche - became the transvaluation of all values and the destruction of all that prevents it. Art
became negation: in Goya, in Beethoven, or in Géricault one can see the change from celebrant to
subversive within the space of a lifetime" (p.4). Like Debord, the position is a refusal of the comforts
of "illusory revolts" of contemporary avant-gardism, which, the authors argue, come in two forms:
"reformism and nihilism" (p.15). There is a sense that aesthetic negations must be fulfilled by practical
revolution: "Life and revolution will be invented together or not at all" (p.26). The concept of
revolutionary praxis as ludic, however, and the argument in favour of delinquency, petty crime and "the
new lumpen", may not meet most of the Left's sense of the revolution and its agent.

206. "Arguments about Modernism: A Reply to Michael Fried", op. cit., p.82.

207. "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", op. cit., p.55.

208. "This phrase in my essay ['practices of negation'] seems to have given rise to some
misunderstanding, among those who approved of it as much as those who thought it a dreadful slur"
(ibid., p.55).

something primarily to do with the medium and processes of art, as affirmed in the author's note, and in statements like: "the medium has appeared most characteristically as the site of negation and estrangement", and "practices of negation... seem to me the very form of the practices of purity (the recognitions and enactments of medium) which Greenberg extols".[209] Practices of negation, then, are presented not as a process of controlled self-cleansing, or a dialectic of plenitude, but as "a whole strategy of release, exacerbation, emptying, and self-splitting".[210] Clark states his admiration for the struggles of "casting off ", "the ruthlessness of negation". Yet this positive evaluation is matched by a more negative one:[211]

> [Modernist] practice... is extraordinary and desperate: it presents itself as a work of interminable and absolute decomposition, a work which is always pushing "medium" to its limits - to its ending - to the point where it breaks or evaporates or turns back into mere unworked material. That is the form in which medium is retrieved or reinvented: the fact of Art, in modernism, *is* the fact of negation.[212]

By contrast, when we consider the qualities "of outside of the medium" we have "the external", "the social" - the world of history and politics - the "context" that bears on this instance. Here we find that the primary identification of negation is different. This is written about by Clark in two ways: (i) as an active social/political engagement by the artists; and (ii) as concerning their social basis. First there are what we might call, for want of a less clumsy phrase, the social values of resistance:

> [T]he avant-garde... has regularly and rightly seen an advantage for art in the particular conditions of "ideological confusion and violence" under capital; it wished to take part in the general untidy work of negation and has seen no necessary contradiction (rather the contrary) between doing so and coming to terms once again with its "medium".[213]

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209. Ibid., p.58, p.55.
210. "Arguments about Modernism: A Reply to Michael Fried", op. cit., p.83.
211. This idea of negation, as the expending of superfluous conventions, would seem to be more in tune with Greenberg's logic than with the Hegel's. Clark's analysis might, however, best be compared with Adorno's analysis of modernism. While Greenberg's descriptions seem to be closely paralleled by Adorno's, the latter's categories retain a social loading of frequently weighty proportions - which pose serious art with no (historical) option but to run, via a series of increasingly exacerbated crises, to its desperate "end". For Greenberg, by contrast, art's disengagement allows it to "get on" with the job at hand, that is, to dispense with the expendable.
212. "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", op. cit., p.59.
213. Ibid., p.52.

On the other hand, negation is also identified primarily as a question of the loss and absence of a solid social basis, with practices of negation being predicated on a condition of lack:

> And surely that dance of negation has to do with the social facts... the decline of ruling class elites, the absence of a "social base" for artistic production, the paradox involved in making bourgeois art in the absence of a bourgeoisie.[214]

And, as he goes on:

> Negation is the sign inside art of this wider decomposition: it is an attempt to *capture* the lack of consistent and repeatable meanings in the culture - to capture the lack and make it over into form.[215]

In a sense, these two aspects of contextual "location" echo the two aspects of "casting off" mentioned above, indeed, they might be seen to provide some sort of explanation for them.[216] But can you have negation as the product of active social engagement *and* a sort of socially enforced isolation (Clark's recasting of what Greenberg has as an active disengagement)? This problem might be grasped as coherent when it is seen in terms of two points in a process of historical change - as a "beginning" and "end" - turning on the moment of the Paris Commune. "A strategy of negation and refusal is not an unreasonable response to bourgeois civilization since 1871",[217] writes Clark, suggesting a loss of revolutionary fervour in the aftermath, a defeat of historical proportion, confirming and exacerbating the absenting of artists' social base. This leaves negation, as far as the subsequent periods are concerned, as the paradox of being non-bourgeois/bourgeois art (making bourgeois art without the bourgeoisie), a paradox provoking a drift into a void of signification - presumably because it does not find it possible to predicate its values on, say, the opposition to the bourgeoisie.

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214.   Ibid., p.59.
215.   Ibid.
216.   The matter had been addressed in *The Absolute Bourgeois*, where Clark had written of Courbet: "A bourgeois artist is shown to fail to make his art 'revolutionary', but his failure is in its way exemplary and at least serious... it suggests the way in which a struggle against dominant discursive conventions in a culture is bound up with attempts to break or circumvent the social forms in which those conventions are embedded". *The Absolute Bourgeois*, op. cit., p.7.
217.   "Arguments about Modernism: A Reply to Michael Fried", op. cit., p.82.

This is quite different, of course, to that more familiar life and times of practices of negation where the concept is synonymous with radical, socially-engaged cultural activities. But, then, Clark lets us have this too with "the negation of empty negation", an attempt at re-engagement, and a challenge to that atrophy of meaning:

> There is a way - and this again is something which happens *within* modernism or at its limits - in which that empty negation is in turn negated.... For there is an art - a modernist art - which has challenged the notion that art stands only to suffer from the fact that now all meanings are disputable... Brecht's is only the most doctrinaire example.... Art wants to address someone, it wants something precise and extended to do; it wants *resistance*, it needs criteria; it will take risks in order to find them, including the risk of its own dissolution.[218]

It should not be surprising, then, that the phrase "practices of negation" led to "some misunderstanding". The phrase itself is soon dropped by Clark, (initially, it seems, because of Fried's assumption that it signified nihilism), and replaced by "practices of resistance and refusal" - a phrase which survives into the paper on Pollock.[219] In "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", negation is, so to speak, set loose from a category of practices (of whatever type or aspect), and allowed a more performative function as, and within, the dynamics of ongoing processes of analysis. The consequences of this are what I want to explore.

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218.   "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", op. cit., p.60.
219.   T.J. Clark, "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", *Reconstructing Modernism*, op. cit., pp.172-238; see also the discussion on pp.239-243. A quick glance through the critical writings on art over the past decade reveals the ubiquity of "practices of negation", especially where the question of the modern/postmodern and avant-gardism has been at issue. As Charles Harrison has put it: "'Practices of negation' are now the stuff of artistic and intellectual fashion" (Harrison, op. cit., p. 231). We all get the gist of "negation" in these writings - roughly, a set of emancipatory claims made in the realm of art practice, of a more or less political nature. The dominant issue has been the recuperation problem: whether society has gone through a qualitative change which makes resistance recuperable, and negation impossible; whether negation was, in any case, simply the motor of the capitalist market (and thereby perhaps complicit with the dominant powers at a deep level); and what strategies might be adopted for circumnavigating any or all of these problems. While Clark *is* drawn to comment briefly on Baudrillard, and he does touch on "the bad dream of modernism", his discussion does not really have the same focus. In a characteristic twist, he notes: "And the test in *all* cases is not, it seems to me, the cogency or adequacy of the discursive claims, but whether the claims have led to production-whether the claims, for all their muddle and doublethink, have been associated with some real complexity and vehemence in the work of representation" ("Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", op. cit., p.220).

II. Searching For A Method

The internalisation of negation in the procedures of analysis may not be entirely novel.
In his 1974 article, "The conditions of artistic creation", Clark argues for a dialectical
view which, he claims, has been lost in art history: its absence has led to a stultification
of art-historical categories, and the field has become "incapable of renovation". What
Clark wants to resuscitate is the Hegelian "habit of mind" or "kind of thinking", with, as
he puts it, "its power to open up a field of inquiry, to enable certain questions to be
asked". In his work of the early 'Eighties, Clark considers how Greenberg conceives
the values of art as becoming self-contained and self-legitimating. This, he says, reflects
a "ceasing of the dialectic" in Greenberg's understanding of the relation between the
values of art and other social values. In contrast, Clark argues for "active interplays",
for relations that make for living distinctions rather than atrophied oppositions.[220]
Dialectics seems to offer a way out of a set of frozen antinomies or metaphorical
oppositions: background and foreground, inside and outside, and form and content. In
Image of the People Clark describes his own project with these words:

> If the social history of art has a specific field of study, it is exactly this - the
> processes of conversion and relation which so much art history takes for
> granted. I want to discover what concrete transactions are hidden behind the

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220. See "The conditions of artistic creation", op. cit., p.561. Cf. Sartre in *Search for a Method*
(1960), op. cit. - although we should note that Sartre is pitching his comments in a different political
direction. Sartre accuses the Marxism of the official communist parties of adopting a priori models,
forcing matters into "prefabricated molds" (p.37), and of making its reductions too quickly (p.39); in
other words, he charges contemporary Marxists of being "poor dialecticians" and "mechanical
materialists" (p.17, footnote 2). The "charge" of this can be seen here: "They [their concepts] are no
longer keys, interpretive schemata; they are posited for themselves as an already totalized knowledge....
The totalizing investigation has given way to a Scholasticism of the totality. The heuristic principle -
'to search for the whole in the parts' - has become the terroristic practice of 'liquidating the
particularity'" (pp.27-28) Existentialism - which Sartre would like to be a complement to Marxism - aims,
he argues, "to discover a supple, patient dialectic which espouses movements as they really are and
which refuses to consider a priori that all lived conflicts pose contradictions or even contraries" (p.126).
Instead of charting the mediations, official Marxism historicises via a "system of correspondences
between abstract universals" (p.53). The last point invokes comments made by Marx in his
"Introduction" (1857) to the *Grundrisse*, op. cit., pp.83-111; see, in particular, the section entitled "The
Method of Political Economy", pp.100-108. Sartre's argument is with a dialectics based in Engels'
account, and with its orthodoxy for the communist parties - the "anæmia" of a Marxism based on
"dogmatic metaphysics (a dialectic of Nature)" (*Search for a Method*, op. cit., p.181).

mechanical image of "reflection", to know how "background" becomes "foreground"; instead of analogy between form and content, to discover the network of real, complex relations between the two.[221]

The point of Clark's social history of art, then, at least as he defines it here, is to deal with the *relation between*, or processes of mediation.[222] He is, he writes, "for a history of mediation": "How, in a particular case, a content of experience becomes a form, an event becomes an image, boredom becomes its representation, despair becomes *spleen*: these are the problems".[223] In 1986, these same concerns are rearticulated in "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction". This time though, the project is spoken through the language of Mikhail Bakhtin - the terms "text" and "context" replace those of "form" and "content", "background" and "foreground":

> [T]he so-called context of a work of art is therefore not a mere surrounding, separable from form; it is what the speaker or maker has most concretely to work with; context *is* text; the context is the medium.... All utterances anticipate *answers*, provoking them, eluding them, orientating themselves towards an imagined future in which something is said or done in reply; and works of art, being specially elaborate, pondered cases of utterance, are most of all shot through with such directedness.[224]

Just how *do* you mediate between Pollock's art and the social world, Clark wonders, apart from asserting the "brute fact" of an artist's social and historical belonging: that they live and produce in a specific time and place, and from a certain social position:[225]

221.   *Image of the People*, op. cit., p.12.
222.   Clark also describes these as "the actual complex links which bind together art and politics" (ibid., p.10), or "the connecting links" (p.12).
223.   Ibid., p.13.
224.   "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", op. cit., p.177. Cf. V.N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929), Harvard University Press, 1973, and M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" (1934-5), *The Dialogical Imagination. Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, University of Texas Press, 1981, pp.259-422.
225.   Apparently after attending a lecture on Pollock given by Serge Guilbaut, a student had objected that Pollock had been found "*guilty by association*" with Cecil Beaton's photos for *Vogue*, in which fashion models posed in front of *Autumn Rhythm*, *Lavender Mist*, *No.28* & *No.27*. This prompted Clark into some thoughts about the "before" and "after" life of abstract paintings, about the problems of recuperation of radical practice, about the fears of becoming merely decorative wallpaper rather than serious art - what he calls "the bad dream of modernism". See "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", op. cit, p.178. Cf. Kurt W. Forster, "Critical History of Art, or Transfiguration of Values?", *New Literary History*, vol.3, 1972, pp.459-70. Forster argues against the isolation of history from accounts of art, or the use of *analogy* to make parallels between the two, usually introduced to account for moments of change and rupture in the narrative.

Nobody wants to write a history of Pollock's painting which works by "*vague association*", whether it end up proving the artist guilty or innocent of his class; nobody wants the social history of art to be, "an external activity - the wiping-off of some drops of rain or specks of dust from the [artistic] fruit... one which erects an intricate scaffolding of the dead elements of their outward existence - the language, the historical circumstances, and so on"; but to do otherwise is difficult, especially with fruit of this kind.226

These words cited by Clark belong, of course, to Hegel.227 By "fruits of this kind" Clark claims not to imply anything mythic about Pollock, but, as he puts it, simply the painting's perfectly "ordinary, entirely representative distance from the world it is part of".228 Clark's version of the social history of art, therefore, can be seen as the desire to elucidate those "processes of conversion and relation", the "hows" of the "concrete transactions", or (to use the openly Hegelian language of "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction"), to show the processes of "ingestion", "becoming", "interiorization" and "internalization".229

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226.   "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", op. cit., p.181, my emphasis.
227.   The citation is from the *Phenomenology*, op. cit., pp.455-6. Cf. *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, where Hegel warns about approaches where an "external art" tends to find, or produce, contradictions in determinate concepts; dialectical analysis must, instead, be conducted as an "*immanent* transcending" (*The Encyclopaedia Logic*, op. cit., p.128). The artistic metaphor is pursued where Hegel discusses what he knows as formalism: "The instrument of this monotonous formalism is no more   difficult to handle than a painter's palette having only two colours, say red and green, the one for colouring the surface when a historical scene is wanted, the other for landscapes. It would be hard to decide which is greater in all this, the casual ease with which everything in heaven and on earth and under the earth is coated with this broth of colour, or the conceit regarding the excellence of this universal recipe: each supports the other" (Phenomenology, op. cit., pp.30-1). Criticising the schematic method, he continues, this is a "way of thinking... a style of painting that is absolutely monochromatic;... from which pure identity, formless whiteness, is produced" (p.31). "Monochromatic formalism" is also discussed, most famously, in connection with "the night in which... all cows are black" (p.9).
228.   "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", op. cit., p.181.
229.   Ironically, Clark has been subjected to such dichotomy, and has been characterised as both an "internalist" *and* an "externalist", though not usually with these designations. The latter is largely a charge from the more "traditional" wings of the discipline (the accusation that he "reduces" everything to the social, or that he "makes the evidence fit" his thesis). In contrast, the charge of "internalist" largely emanates from the "radical" end of art/cultural history/theory, from where he has been accused, variously, of sticking to the canonical works, of paying too much attention to the art object, and of being caught up in Modernist categories. See, for example, Nicholas Green and Frank Mort, "Visual Representation and Cultural Politics", *Block* 7, 1982, pp.59-68; Adrian Rifkin, "Marx' Clarkism", *Art History*, vol.8, no.4, December 1985, pp.488-95; Frank Mort and Nick Green, "Is There Anyone Here From Education (Again)? Radical Art and Education for the 1990s", *Block* 12, 1987-88, pp.20-7; Griselda Pollock, "Vision, Voice and Power: Feminist Art Histories and Marxism", *Vision and Difference. Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, Routledge, 1988, pp.18-49, and, in the same collection, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity", pp.50-90. It is the self-reflexive focus on this problem which marks the distance between Clark's project and what, for some, comes to mind with

The argument is consistent. In *The Absolute Bourgeois*, Clark is suspicious of forms of the social history of art which establish "confident equations between techniques and patrons, between political liberty and artistic health".[230] Bad social history of art fails to interrogate its key categories - experience, for example - but leans on them to shore up the lack of work of mediation. This too - like traditional art history - produces a history that is "painless and absurd" and "dares not name those structures which mediate and determine the nature of that contact - ideology, class, the conflict of classes, the contradictions within any ideological view of the world".[231]

The question of ideology had provided a terrain for debate about the social history of art - and there was a particular concern with ideology's mediating role. The argument pursued the problem of the general and particular, and the problematic encounter of

the phrase "the social history of art". The distance does not lie so much between "vulgar reductivism" and other, purportedly "non-reductive", strategies, as it is usually conceived. Rather than the self-image, adhered to by parts of the discipline, that "reductivism" is some long ago abandoned monster, it ought to be recognised that all interpretive frameworks by their nature must "reduce" if they are to *interpret*. This issue does not dissolve according to (or at the level of) one's framework, politics, revisions, priorities, or whatever one calls them, but rather according to the work that is done to try to mediate.

    Clark's argument has a double articulation. What the "Guilbaut challenge" raises very *directly*, - that the polemical edge of the "Fried challenge" tends not to do - is the need to put those mediations in place; it highlights a need to articulate, or make present, in language. Writing about Jackson Pollock, it would seem, provides Clark with an opportunity to address "The Most Difficult Task Yet Faced By The Social History Of Art". It is important to realise that what is at stake here might be Clark's intellectual project. That "ordinary distance" which he mentions itself comes to represent the very inadequacies of the social history of art - and the gap that its interpretive framework must, and yet seems unable to, cross. It appears that Clark does not believe his project has yet been realised in even its most basic defining sense. Indeed, it is this "most basic sense" which is so elusive. What is continually registered in Clark's text is the *difficulty of speaking* those mediations: the difficulty of saying *what* these processes of becoming and internalisation actually are; the difficulty of speaking beyond "brute facts", "vague associations", and "external activities". The strategy, Clark tells us, is to confront the difficulties and make them "into the *motor* of the argument" (ibid., p.181).

230.   *The Absolute Bourgeois*, op. cit., p.57.

231.   T.J. Clark, "Preliminary Arguments: Work of Art and Ideology", College Arts Association, session on Marxism and Art History, Chicago, January 1976, unpublished, thesis VIII.

these emphases.[232] Clark argues that there is a need to bring wider categories like "ideology" or "contradiction" into the material, concrete particulars of historical practices, "the politics of the particular", not just the "more general concerns"[233] - in, it would seem, the spirit of Sartre's comments on Valéry.[234] Ideology, Clark had said, "takes as its material the real substance, the constraints and contradictions, of a given historical situation.... But it generalises the repressions, it imagined the contradictions solved".[235] Moreover, he writes, art history tends to erase the "discontinuity in the object" and to produce a "fiction of a *consistent* and *Real* entity, recoverable in discourse".[236] The point, then, was to recover and emphasise the fissures, gaps, contradictions, inconsistencies, and the "figures of discontinuity" which wreck art history's "assumption of coherence and linearity" - the same call as was made against

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232.   Werckmeister counterposes philosophy (abstraction) to history (concrete), and he identifies two contradictory tendencies in Marx's approach to art: an idealist and a deterministic one. This contradiction, he argues, has been compounded by political resignation and attention to aesthetics as the locus of revolutionary potential; and it has led to an emphasis on abstract philosophy or aesthetics rather than the concrete specificity of history and ideology critique. See O.K. Werckmeister, "Marx on Ideology and Art", *New Literary History*, vol.4, Spring 1973, pp.501-19. See also O.K. Werckmeister, "From Marxist to Critical Art History", College Arts Association, session on Marxism and Art History, Chicago, January 1976, unpublished, where the author argues against "ideological generalization" of academic art history, in contrast to "critical art history". The former is itself caught up in institutional ideology which accommodates "in an ideological medium both affirmative and critical responses to society" and sustains "the mental disconnection" between contemporary political realities and art history. In terms which anticipate some of the concerns of Chapter 3, Kurt Forster - arguing against Ackerman's distinction of art and history - distinguishes a traditional art history (as Ackerman sets it up) from a social history of art. The former, Forster argues, relies on abstract universals, philosophy and a history of ideas to establish art as a matter of "direct experience" and "spontaneous access"; the latter concerns itself with material production, ideology critique, the concrete and the particular, and is seen by the former to be incapable of experiencing the art work. See Kurt Forster, op. cit.

233.   *Image of the People*, op. cit., p.17.

234.   He may have been a petit-bourgeois intellectual, Sartre argued, but not every petit-bourgeois intellectual was Valéry (Sartre, *Search for a Method*, op. cit., p.56).

235.   "Preliminary Arguments: Work of Art and Ideology", op. cit., thesis I.

236.   T.J. Clark, "Courbet the Communist and the Temple Bar Magazine", *Block* 4, 1981, pp.32-38 (the citations are from p.35, p.38). Cf. "A bourgeois Dance of Death: Max Buchon on Courbet - 2", *The Burlington Magazine*, May 1969, pp.286-290, where Clark comments that myths are "in a state of constant self-development and self-contradiction" (p.289). The bourgeoisie, he argues, eliminated the "middle terms of this process, the unstable categories... in which bourgeois identity is gradually and painfully assembled" (*Image of the People*, op. cit., p.151). Also cf. Werckmeister's argument, with reference to Marx, that ideology "projects harmony between two social positions that were actually antagonistic, and in whose continuing conflict it was meant to serve as a diversion". See O.K. Werckmeister, "The Political Ideology of the Bayeux Tapestry", *Studi Medievali*, third series, vol. XVII, no.2, 1976, p.589.

Greenberg and Fried under the name of negation.[237]

Clark's discussion of practices of negation, then, can be seen through the structures of *Ideologiekritik*. In fact, this might make less dichotomous the analytical distinctions I have been making between "of medium" and "of outside of the medium".[238] The Greenbergian claim - that the values of art are self-sufficient, and self-legitimating - are, Clark seems to imply, precisely how things appear; that, if you like, such critics *correctly* transcribed what was happening in art. But these critics recognised only the appearance, and missed, or mistook, the substance of what was happening - a substance which lay outside the confines of the material itself. Of course, such comparisons might reek of absurd overinvestment, ascribing far too much premeditation, too much control, too much consciousness to Clark's strategies. Yet at another level it makes sense, and reopens to fresh scrutiny those issues which are immanent to his project. It is not an alien pattern for Clark to adopt. It is, to put it bluntly, what is at stake in his method of "recasting", or in the disagreement that is "small but definite" - the substance of the twist on Greenberg's home ground.[239] For instance, we find that Clark does not dispute the notion of "autonomy" as such (by counterposing, say, an anti-autonomy thesis), but instead challenges "the grounds on which that autonomy is secured" in Greenberg's

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237.   "Courbet the Communist and the Temple Bar Magazine", op. cit., p.37.

238.   In the dynamics of *Ideologiekritik* a distinction and relation is made between moments of truth and falsehood. In bourgeois thought, an accurate (mimetic) transcription of reality nevertheless fails adequately to explain or understand, since it is premise upon an abstraction of form from content. See Peter Dews and Peter Osborne, "The Frankfurt School & the Problem of Critique: A Reply to McCarney", op. cit. The movements of *Ideologiekritik* are taken from Marx's renowned section, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret thereof", from *Capital*:

> To the [producers], therefore, the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, *but as what they really are*, material relations between persons and social relations between things. (K. Marx, *Capital*, op. cit., p.78, my emphasis)

Appearing "as what they really are", these relations nevertheless deflect any recognition of their own social substance. The terms here parallel those of the more advanced forms of the debates on Realism, and are also the basis for Brecht's advocation of alienation effects in the face of photographs of the AEG or Krupp. See Brecht cited in Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography" (1931), *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Verso, 1985, p.255.

239.   "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", op. cit., p.59.

theory - the way it is spoken, thought and understood.[240] It is similar with negation, the name of which openly acknowledges the language of the tradition to which *Ideologiekritik* belongs. So, Clark writes:

> Negation is inscribed in the very practice of modernism, as the form in which *art appears to itself* as a value.[241]

The split, as it were, between the "moment of truth" and the "moment of falsehood" - the "reification" of the practices as described by Greenberg - has to be effected, in the context of Clark's theory, through a metaphorical process.[242] In other words, it is through mediation and metaphor - through the *mediation of metaphor* - that the values of art can take the form of, and appear as, self-sufficient.

III. The Mediation Of Metaphor

Metaphor, then, is the key term through which Clark argues that the values of art *are* social, are in fact *other* to medium-itself. It is this term which functions as the point of mediation, the bridge *between* text and context. So, as we can see from "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", Clark describes the Modernist category of flatness as emerging from a metaphorical articulation of a variety of values current in Parisian life in the late 19c.: an analogy for the modern, an equivalent with posters, the work-like, et cetera:

> Flatness in its heyday *was* these various meanings and valuation; they were its substance, so to speak; they were what it was seen as. Their particularity was

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240.   See the discussion between Clark and Greenberg, published in Buchloh, *Modernism and Modernity*, op. cit., p.192. Also cf. the editors' introduction, "Introduction: Modernism, Explanation and Knowledge" in Charles Harrison and Fred Orton (eds.), *Modernism, Criticism, Realism*, op. cit.
241.   "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", op. cit., p.59, my emphasis.
242.   Peter Dews and Peter Osborne have argued, vis-à-vis Adorno's conception of ideology, that *Ideologiekritik* not only involves the elucidation of the moments of truth and falsity in consciousness' *transcription* of social reality, but also that a similar distinction needs to be made with respect to a simultaneous process of *transfiguration*. See "The Frankfurt School & the Problem of Critique: A Reply to McCarney", op. cit. This can be compared to the discussion of mimesis in Part One of this chapter. See also Joseph McCarney, "What Makes Critical Theory 'Critical'?", *Radical Philosophy* no.42, Winter/Spring 1986, pp.11-22.

what made it vivid - made it a matter to be painted over again. Flatness was therefore in play - as an irreducible technical "fact" of painting - with all these totalizations, all of these attempts to make it a metaphor.[243]

The point to note here is not so much that Clark "gives flatness a kind of sociological meaning"[244] - left in this formulation, the social sounds too external, and such meanings read as too imposed - but that he makes a twist on the home-ground of Modernist theory itself. Modernist art practice, he claims, has an important and defining component: it attempts to *negate* its metaphorical status - Pollock's is a "work against metaphor". Here Clark describes Pollock's attempts to seek the "origin" of the sign, the "first moment" of the "first" metaphor: "Painting had now to find its way back to the ground of representation, to the moment when marks first stood for things other than themselves".[245] To find "what it is that stands in the way of likeness", Pollock's marks seek "ways of circling *around* likeness, ways of looking for likeness on the other side of resemblance. And not finding it".[246] For the Modernist *critics*, Clark argues, these very actions *against* metaphor are seen as the triumph of medium (for instance, paint and canvas addressed to eyesight alone) against meaning, against metaphor and, on a more restricted level, against likeness.[247] For Clark, those same actions are proof of the priority of the metaphorical relation itself:

> Of course in a sense [modernist painting] resisted the metaphors, and the painters we most admire insisted also on it as an awkward empirical quiddity; but the "also" is the key word here: there was no fact without the metaphor, no medium without its being the vehicle of a complex act of meaning.[248]

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243.   "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", op. cit., p.58.
244.   Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language*, op. cit., p.228.
245.   "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", op. cit., p.197.
246.   Ibid., p.218.
247.   This seems to echo - albeit by negation, by the "work against" - the distinction made by Art & Language between the work of representing and resembling. See, for example, Art & Language, "Portrait of V.I. Lenin" (1980), in *Modernism. Criticism. Realism*, op. cit., pp.145-169; Michael Baldwin, Charles Harrison, and Mel Ramsden, "Art History, Art Criticism and Explanation" (1981), *Pollock and After*, op. cit., pp.191-296; and Charles Harrison, "Introduction: Modernism, Problems and Methods", A315, *Modern Art and Modernism: Manet to Pollock, Introduction (units 1-2)*, The Open University Press, 1984, pp.28-31.
248.   "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", op. cit., p.58.

What is here implicit becomes explicit in "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction":

> In order to represent at all, I suppose, a series of marks in a picture have to be seen as standing for something beside themselves; they have to be construed metaphorically.... Metaphor is inescapable, and what in any case would an exit from it be like?[249]

Metaphor, then, is now foregrounded as the very *condition* of representation. The processes of representation, it would seem, necessarily emerge *from* the state of metaphor. Without metaphor we cannot think representation; without the mediation of metaphor the text-context opposition itself cannot even be conceived. Having set out to find the processes of conversion and relation, what stands in-between background and foreground, text and context, Clark shows that the key moment of mediation, namely metaphor, is in fact the first, or logically prior moment of the whole process of text-context articulation.[250] The self-sufficient status of the text in Modernist accounts is revealed as illusory, as nothing but the product of its very social belonging. Similarly, one must conclude that the attempts to reintegrate or prioritise context, despite their

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249.   "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", op. cit., p.199.
250.   Clark's approach stands out, but there are problems, not least with his tendency to mesh together the above distinctions; this seems to be inadvertent, yet it is consistent with his concern to link the microcosmic and macrocosmic. If we accept Hayden White's tropological typology, Clark's method may well rely on the organicism of synecdoche, which is, for White, a typically Hegelian strategy. However, this is also an oversimplification, for White describes a number of tropic strategies in Hegel that are "held" by synecdoche only in the final analysis. (Note how this mirrors the debates on Hegel's method and its result). See Hayden White, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973, p.34. In the light of this, it might be useful to reconsider Clark's mesh - though it would be a mistake simply to map on the pattern White sees in Hegel - let alone from "Hegel's whole philosophy of history" to the social history of art.

> In the end... it can be seen that Hegel's whole philosophy of history led *from* an original Metaphorical characterization of the world-process *through* a Metonymic reduction and Synecdochic inflation of the process in which its various possible modes of relationship are explicated, *to* an Ironic comprehension of the ambiguity of the "meaning" of the process - until it came to rest, finally, in the more general Synecdochic identification of the whole process as a Drama of essentially Comic significance. (p.122)

Nevertheless, it is synecdoche which seems to best sum up Clark's initial attempts to bridge the "text" and "context" divide with metaphor: "With Synecdoche... a phenomenon can be characterized by using the part to symbolize some *quality* presumed to inhere in the totality... " (p.34) What we have are different kinds of "reductions or integrations" to the matter of Jackson Pollock's abstraction. Adrian Rifkin, "Marx' Clarkism", *Art History*, vol.8, no.4, December 1985, pp.488-495, argues that Clark's dependence on the trope of synecdoche "leads him ineluctably to a syncretic exegisis of the meaning of works of art" (p.491).

oppositional stance towards Modernism, must be seen as following from some acceptance of this logic. Seen in this light, Pollock's strivings to resist metaphor become exercises of impossibility - and rather grand ones at that. Metaphoricity cannot be eradicated when it is the condition of one's activity. Paradoxically, Pollock's work against metaphor can only be achieved by multiplying the metaphors - a multiplication generated, Clark suggests, between two metaphoric poles: "figures of totality" and "figures of dissonance".

Now it is clear that, treated without caution, these very metaphoric poles could be opened onto a narrow formal interpretation, and reassimilated into a Modernist account for instance, in terms of the extent of the unifying or shattering of the pictorial field. The point, however, is not that any picture by Pollock *is* total, or *is* dissonant - it is not the "truth of Pollock's practice", Clark tells us - but rather that, within the paintings, there are functions of the *metaphors* of totality and dissonance.[251] In other words, however apt the descriptions are on a formal level (and you don't have to be particularly well trained in Modernist categories to "see" them), they cannot be contained there. As simply formal characteristics they are insufficient, and meanings are generated "beyond" and "outside":

> Pollock's project, as I see it, is exactly *not* to allow the figures of dissonance to hold sway, any more than the figures of totality. His painting is a work *against* metaphor - against any one of his pictures settling down inside a single
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> metaphorical frame of reference. He wishes to cross metaphors, to block connotation by multiplying it. He intends so to accelerate the business of signifying that any one frame of reference will not fit. Figures of dissonance cancel out figures of totality; no metaphor will get hold of this picture's standing for a world, though we think the picture does somehow stand for one: it has the requisite density.[252]

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251.   Clark avoids making a direct analogy between social contradiction and the metaphors of totality and dissonance. Instead these metaphoric poles are interpreted into the problems of language and the categories of thought - and Pollock's struggling with the "grounds of representation". See "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", op. cit.

252.   Ibid., p.201.

While the distinction from the Modernist account can be maintained, there still remains scope for confusion, or, rather, slippage, in the Pollock essay. For instance, the word "figure" drifts between a number of distinct meanings and functions: from the purely optical or formal (as in "figure and ground"), through a substitute for "metaphor" (as in "figural"), to signifying the iconic (as in "figurative"). The latter two prove problematic, particularly where Clark makes, but seems not to sustain, a distinction between the "work against metaphor" and the "work against likeness" - one which, he says, charts his difference from Modernist accounts:[253]

> A painting could be freed of all traces and afterimages of likeness, and still not do the... work against metaphor.... We could have - no doubt we do have - a strictly "optical", non-figurative abstract painting that nonetheless stood in a *confirming* relation to a world we might recognize - an inert relation - a relation to "Nature", say, in which nothing of that dismal category was in the least negated.[254]

The work against likeness has a limited power: we can easily envisage such work being done, and, moreover, being achieved - and it is work that has been well established in the histories of modernism. The work against metaphor is, by contrast, more complex - we cannot imagine its "completion". The work of denying metaphor seems to be something that can only be partial, temporary or a product of some wilful tunnel-vision, or intellectual "bracketing off" (of everything but the putative immediacy of opticality, say). The (would-be non-metaphoric) sign will always find itself reinvested (or, will always reinvest itself). This is all the more so once we take on board the all-encompassing notion that representation is necessarily metaphoric, essentially a stand-in - be it for social values, iconic resemblance, the index of artistic presence, or whatever. From this perspective the work against likeness is just one part, just one kind, of the work against metaphor; but where the one is a finite project, the other

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253. The grounds of this distinction suggest some interesting parallels with that made between transcription and transfiguration earlier in the discussion of *Ideologiekritik*. As representations, both categories mark a gap with that which they seek to represent, but transfiguration suggests a substantial action upon the material. Similarly, we should recall the essential non-identity in Adorno's category of mimesis.
254. Ibid.

is interminable.

Clark's notion of metaphor, then, operates as the baseline of representation per se. The casting of Pollock's practice as a work against metaphor, serves to move that practice onto the terrain of aporetic activity - a work built on an unresolvable contradiction - an insecurity, a continual restlessness, as Pollock is caught in the economy of his own metaphoric multiplication. But the problem insinuates itself into Clark's analysis too. Metaphor - both in Clark's description of Pollock and as a key methodological category for his analysis - has to be read as having a *duality*.[255] In Clark's own analysis, then, metaphor can no longer simply function as "the bridge", the "relations between" - nor simply the "precondition" of, or prerequisite ground for - the text-context articulation since at the same time it acts as a reminder (or producer) of some radical disjunction. We are left, therefore, with something of a paradox.[256] While the concept of metaphor provides Clark with the means to mediate text with context, it seems at some deeper level to undermine this very function by effecting an *inversion*. So where Clark starts by asking questions of the relation of art to the social (*how* does background *become* foreground?), he ends up with a moment of non-relation reinstated.[257] Let me put this

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255.   However - and this is where the slippages could again start to multiply: metaphor is itself the trope operating through similarity, "likeness", if you will, but where the likeness is an equivalent of values or qualities rather than simply iconic resemblance. The character of "metaphor", both in Clark's texts and in this chapter, has been a loose, generic, one - its status as "standing between" straying, and being allowed to stray, close to becoming a state of being. For a start, it becomes clear that metaphor, for Hayden White, *does* have a dual operation: "In Metaphor (literally, "transfer")... phenomenon can be characterized in terms of their similarity to, and difference from, one another..." (White, op. cit., 34). More than just a "dual operation", metaphor might be seen as analogous with the dialectical relation of identity and non-identity.

256.   It is possible that "paradox" is not strictly the right word, although it might be, depending on how one assesses the "duality" that I describe in Clark. If, in the end, the two movements of metaphor - of its structure of identity and of non-identity - are comprehended *as* duality, disjunction, etc., then Clark may be working with an antinomy. The issues of disjunction and dialectic will be discussed in Chapter 3. For the moment, though, we might flag the similarities in structure between the dual operation of metaphor in Clark and Adorno's concept of mimesis, or the transcriptive/transfigurative aspects of consciousness in *Ideologiekritik*.

257.   Indeed, if we return to *Image of the People* we find that Clark effectively premises artistic activity on non-identity: there is, he argues, a non-identity between the relation of the artist to aesthetic tradition and to ideology, "there is a gap between the artist's social experience and his activity of formal representation" (*Image of the People*, op. cit., pp.12-13).

more explicitly: we are faced with two aporia, one in Clark's object (what he attributes to Pollock: the negation of metaphor unravels as the multiplication of metaphor), and one in his own methodological project (the search for mediations unravels as the return to disjunction).

IV. The "Permanently Unresolved Dialectic"

In his article "The conditions of artistic creation", Clark, for all his optimism about the possibilities of the Hegelian habit of mind, leaves us feeling that a turn to dialectics will be no simple panacea. What it *can* do, it is suggested, is bring us back into critical dialogue with what he calls "the *fundamental* questions": namely, "the nature of 'representation'" and "the conditions of consciousness".[258] But, we are told, there will be no easy answers: we will be on a "territory beyond ideology" where we will be susceptible to the "old concepts".[259] What Clark seems to index is the problem of our categories of thought. In a discussion following a delivery of the Pollock paper Clark remarked that we will not "ever magically escape" the metaphorical divisions of inside and outside, text and context, before and after, and so forth.[260] In fact, we cannot escape those very divisions which the social history of art had hoped to avoid. The difficulty of *speaking* the mediations, then, is really the difficulty of speaking without recourse to, and without the fossilisation of, those analytical oppositions.

In the Pollock essay the sense of impasse is thoroughly foregrounded. Even "the bad dream of modernism" can be read as impasse at the level of practices of resistance and

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258.   "The condition of artistic creation", op. cit., p.561.
259.   Ibid., p.562.
260.   See the discussion following the presentation of "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction" in *Reconstructing Modernism*, op. cit., p. 243; and cf. the inescapability of metaphor more generally, as discussed in the previous section. This can also be compared to Hegel's famous discussion of the inescapability of abstraction in the *Phenomenology* - specifically the inescapable abstraction of deictic language, a form of language that attempts to deal with particularity. This will be returned to in Chapter 3, although it should be recalled that this question is intimately related to with the question of negation.

refusal (and their assimilation, or administration). Impasse is also the substance of Pollock's practice as described through the contradictions of, among others, metaphorical denial and multiplication, figures of dissonance and totality. But impasse is also foregrounded as a question of history - as a problem of representation within capitalist culture. As Clark puts it:

> Pollock's painting in its best period... is contradictory; it lives on its contradictions, thrives on them, comes to nothing because of them. Its contradictions are the ones that any abstract painting will encounter, as long as it is done within bourgeois society, in a culture that cannot grasp - for all its wish to do so - the social reality of the Sign. That is to say, on the one hand, abstract painting must set itself the task of *cancelling* Nature, ending painting's relation to the world of things. It will make a new order to experience, it will put its faith in the sign, in the medium, it will have painting be a kind of writing at last, and therefore write a script none of us has read before. But on the other hand, painting discovers that none of this is achievable with the means it has.[261]

From this perspective, the "delectable impasse" of Pollock's painting is *itself* a metaphor for the status of representation or language under bourgeois social relations.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that, in "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", Clark draws on Hegel's concept of "the unhappy consciousness".[262] This concept, despite being,

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261.   "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", op. cit., p.221.

262.   The theme of the unhappy consciousness recurs in the literature. Fredric Jameson describes Shklovsky as a historical form of the unhappy consciousness, a description which echoes back on the theories of the avant-garde. With his concept of "baring the device", Jameson argues, Shklovsky treats his own time as "the new", an approach which inevitably leads to the wearing out of this new, and, in short, "to one's own death". See Fredric Jameson, *The Prison House of Language*, op. cit., p.90. He later treats Barthes as the unhappy consciousness "on the stylistic level" (p.209). See also Richard Sennett, *Authority* (1980), Faber & Faber, 1993, where the unhappy consciousness and negation are discussed in relation to emotional and social bonds. Donald Kuspit (1981) describes modernism's drive to "presentism" - he has Greenberg in mind - as its "unhappy consciousness": an unresolved paradox or pseudo-dialectic of, on the one hand, the pure immediacy of material, and, on the other, the claim to an abstract openness to any possibility. See Donald B. Kuspit, "The Unhappy Consciousness of Modernism", *Artforum*, vol.19, January 1981, pp.53-57. "The aura of openness degenerates into a felt void, and material presence fades into matter-of-fact giveness" (p.53). He cites Greenberg as the key example of this "quasi-Marxist" materialism, which treats "art-as-making to an extreme", and dispenses with the unconscious or preconscious elements as a sort of unessential and dispensable ideological-superstructural surface noise (p.53). Here, Kuspit continues, "purity is defined as much by what it negates as by what it affirms, and... its self-certainty or affirmative character rests on a foundation of uncertainty, a shaky negation" (pp.53-4). Moreover, the drive to literal purity results in unhappiness, because modernism "is haunted by the desire to communicate beyond itself"; its inward turn to "the language of art" being met by its awareness of "its uselessness for communication; its antidote (literalness and purity) to the insecurities of the present - "the flux of historical experience and the

for the most part, confined to the footnotes, is no minor player. Indeed, what Hegel has to say on the unhappy consciousness is, for Clark, no less than "*the essential framework* for an understanding of modernism and its *permanently unresolved dialectic*" - it best sums up Pollock's practice.[263] But, perhaps, it is also the essential framework for understanding Clark's approach. It is a question of analysis, perhaps *the* problem of interpretation, which *itself* starts to live out some condition of impasse.

The unhappy consciousness can be loosely defined as "the consciousness of self as a dual-natured, merely contradictory being".[264] But the awareness of that self-contradiction is limited, and the unhappy consciousness "is not as yet explicitly aware that this [duality] is its essential nature, or that it is the unity of both [parts]".[265] This produces a continual striving for reconciliation of one part with its other - a striving to unite with (or destroy) an other that is always already itself. In a sense, the unhappy consciousness is aporia par excellence - antinomy, impasse, difficulty. But it suggests *more*: a persistence, a continual going at, or over, a problem, a circling - and this despite half knowing the impossibility of solution or end (at least, in the terms at its disposal). Seen thus, the dynamics are more far-reaching, more intractable, more *involved* than any "undecidable", and the historian or interpreter cannot extricate her/himself from that circling.

For Clark, the "permanently unresolved dialectic" of modernism is the problem of *bourgeois* society and *its* inability to recognise "the social reality of the Sign".[266] The difficulty comes, though, in thinking through to what a "recognition" of the social

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relativity of meaning and communication" (p.54) - turning, like the *pharmakon*, into an insidious poison, and leading to "the dead end of presentness" (p.55).

263. "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", op. cit., p.234.

264. *Phenomenology*, op. cit., p.126.

265. Ibid.

266. Cf. Sartre: "Our historical task, at the heart of this polyvalent world, is to bring closer the moment when History will have only one meaning, when it will tend to be dissolved in the concrete men who will make it in common". See *Search for a Method*, op. cit., p.90.

reality of the Sign could amount; in what sense might it "reconcile" the sign and the social, text and context? In my reading of Clark, the phrase refers to nothing more than the *inability* to see what *already* exists (returning us to the discussion of *Ideologiekritik*). So, how might some post-bourgeois society have a capacity to speak the mediations that make a Jackson Pollock drip "social" in any more than a brute-fact-ish way? This becomes Clark's problem - not simply one for Pollock, bourgeois society, modernism or Modernist theory. Never mind the bourgeoisie, this problem affects even those who *can* "recognize the social reality of the Sign", or, at least, actively seek it out. Contradictions abound: metaphor's duality emerges, but only half recognised; Clark's focusing upon mediation, and the desire to speak it, seeming to return us, once again, to square one of the interpretive project.[267]

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267.   Indeed, as Clark predicted in 1974, the issues raised by his work do have something of the déjà vu, something perhaps, of those "old concepts". Oddly, perhaps, the conduit for this seems to be Bakhtin. It would seem that Clark's use of Bakhtin facilitates a drift from a performative and dialectical semiology onto this *terrain* of aesthetic work. One important concept derived from Bakhtin's dialogism is "anticipation: the anticipation of a reply to the utterance, the pitching or angling of the utterance into an arena known to be "charged with value" (cited "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", op. cit., p.177). The utterance is therefore made of "contextual" material, "text" is always "already bespoken". Clark's use of Bakhtin, as we have already seen, is to enable a "way of thinking beyond" the conceptual antinomies of inside/outside, before/after, etc. The utterance as anticipation provides Clark with a model for thinking the inside/outside and the before/after of Pollock's paintings. Anticipation, in Pollock's "specially elaborate, pondered" case is an anticipation of the bad dream of Cecil Beaton. It is conceivable that this might generate abstraction's fear of becoming mere decoration, and hence its drive to "seriousness" (the attention to the "grounds of representation"). But, we are left, nevertheless, with a rather grand claim for abstract painting, one that has it in a "dialogue" on a historical scale.

    We are also faced with the question of the *interiorising* of this bad dream - with the question of how anticipation "enters" the painting. What happens, if you like, is that Pollock's paintings are made to "prefigure" history. In the radical aesthetic tradition prefiguration, by its anticipation of the future possibility of subject/object reconciliation, acts as a reminder of its *current* impossibility. Here, the artistic symbol *is* that prefiguration. Clark's anticipation, however, prefigures not some radical or utopian future of a different social order (and thereby mediating such desires in or through art), but only the immediate tomorrow of the *Vogue* photos - a tomorrow of continued unhappy consciousness, of continued inability to recognise the social reality of the sign. Pollock's abstraction is written, by Clark, as a symbol which is a "reconciliation" with "the social" of the existing order, and is thus "falsely reconciled", to use some Adornian terminology, a "false sublation".

    Consequently, there are some odd things going on. Firstly, the dialogic (via "anticipation") is inflated temporally from a process of language between two speakers (conversing simultaneously) to Jackson Pollock, painting *Autumn Rhythm*, and trying to outmanoeuvre Cecil Beaton. Meanwhile, the notion of prefiguration (via "interiorisation") is reduced in its temporal scope. Usually, the dialogic and the aesthetic occupy the opposite temporal modes: dialogic operating in a more limited way, aesthetics claiming to traverse the particular and the general, the now and the future.

The motif of impasse, then, pervades Clark's work in two ways: increasingly as the object of his deliberations, and also as an on-going condition of them - a condition which is more and more foregrounded. This is easily said, of course, but it is not so simple to define the relation between the two. Abstraction, Clark suggests, has become "a little battleground of basic cultural pieties",[268] and paintings act as emblems for competing truth claims. In which case, it would seem abstraction just "lends itself" as a vacant ground for such critical projections - thus, not only running the risk of becoming (non-apocalyptic) wallpaper for *Vogue* models, but also, it seems, of becoming the backdrop for a form of ideological struggle performed by critics. Nevertheless, we are left wondering if maybe there were aspects of abstraction which did confront (in a sort of muddled way) the "fundamental questions" of representation and if maybe we can still be invited to consider the relation of language and consciousness, and, also, how *these* relate to history.

The permanently unresolved dialectic: this is the manner of Clark's final "resolution", or reading, of *The Wooden Horse* as "bourgeois society's inability to recognize the social reality of the Sign".[269] Of the appearance of the wooden head, Clark writes:

> So let the Figure be in the picture on purpose - in the negative, taking the lordly, footling, infantile form that is the best (or worst) that painting can do with it. Let it be there *as* negation, as the sign of antinomy, not dialectic. For the grounds are lacking on which the contraries of bourgeois art - its claim to Nature and its wish for the free play of the signifier - could be dialectically reconciled.[270]

Both sides of the antinomy of bourgeois art - the claim to an identity of sign and reality and the claim to absolute non-identity - are attendant upon, or articulate, the work against metaphor. Clark is no doubt correct to say that these cannot yet be reconciled.

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268.   Ibid., p.224.
269.   This point might also be considered through the question of allegory and symbol. Symbol and allegory in relation to negation is the subject of Chapter 3. See Chris Riding, "Bonjour M. Clark, Bonjour M. Fried, Jackson Speaking", unpublished paper presented at the Association of Art Historians Annual Conference, Leeds, 1992.
270.   "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", op. cit., p.222.

Clark's concern to fully mediate reflects a desire to find the identity of text and context, (which is not, I emphasise, to say that he seeks an *immediate* identity). Nevertheless, the moment of non-identity keeps reasserting itself; and strangely, despite all his concern with negation, resistance, and refusal, and with difficulty and discomfort generally, he seems somewhat reticent - a touch uneasy - with *this* return. As such, having the wooden horse's head figure "as negation, as the sign of antinomy, not dialectic" reads as somewhat compensatory, perhaps as a displacement of some deeper moment of non-identity. This assertion of negation as antinomy might read as the flip-side of the desire (yet impossibility) for full mediation. Here there are echoes of "dialectics at a standstill", with Pollock (for Clark) akin to Schönberg (for Adorno). Both tend to lose the movement, the *motive,* of negation - reducing it to antinomy, hypostatising it, abandoning (or having to abandon) its determinate action and the attendant force movement. The question remains whether the "both" just mentioned are Pollock and Schönberg (and the problems encountered in their practice, correctly described by Clark and Adorno); or whether the "both" are Clark and Adorno, and the problems encountered in their interpretive processes? This is not just a matter of Pollock's abstract paintings at an impasse, but also about a moment of intransigence in interpretation itself - which is where it may be described as Clark's dilemma.

Of course, this could be put in a more obvious fashion: the grappling with the structures of aporia and the unhappy consciousness might be read as the conceptual reflex of social contradictions. But the question concerns the kind of "reductions or integrations" that are made.[271] The explanation of that ever-circling aporia may be pushed further. There

271.   Those contradictions can be, and have been, given historical placing. It is quite possible to read the whole - Pollock's practice *and* Clark's interpretive framework, narrative devices, strategies and struggling - as an allegory of a set of political aspirations and disappointments. However, put thus, it personalises what may be, in different ways, characteristic of various generations of intellectuals: in the fallout post-Popular Front and post-'68 - a fallout panning back and encompassing other lost moments 1923, 1917 and 1871; arguably also 1848. If earlier we encountered the attempts to make art with the "absence" of the bourgeoisie, then here we seem to have a problem concerning the "absence" of the proletariat as agent - which, since the interwar period, and as an absence/presence, has made itself more

might be another weighting to that moment of non-identity which keeps popping up, and this may well be the "fundamental question" that lies at the heart of the intransigence: the non-identity of consciousness and being, thought and reality - what Lukács referred to as "the unbridgeable abyss between concept and reality" and the "'pernicious chasm' of the present" between subject and object .[272] Is this the condition of consciousness, and therefore the condition of our representations, of our thought-appropriation of the world, and of interpretation - of how we figure that world to ourselves? It is here, then, where Clark's dilemma ultimately takes us.

We seem to be presented with a twofold sense of "impossibility": it is both the historical impasse of our time, and that fundamental moment of non-identity which cannot be fully mediated, for all the wish to do so. The articulation of both the present and a distant past, with an eye on a beyond, has already been encountered in Adorno's aesthetic; and that distant past, for Adorno at least, continues as a remote possibility of resistance. I do not wish to push this too far; Clark's account is not reducible to Adorno - his emphasis on mediation is more Sartrean - and it is perhaps better to say that they share certain resources. Susan Buck-Morss has remarked:

> Adorno argued that the autonomous, spontaneous moment of cognition lay in refusing to acquiesce to the resulting fetishization of thought in which subject was split from object, mind from matter. The subject had to get out of

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insistently felt on intellectual questions. The danger with this formulation - as much as it is necessary to say because it remains our inescapable horizon, or what István Mészáros calls "our inescapable historical predicament" - is its susceptibility to triteness. See István Mészáros, "The Cunning of History in Reverse Gear", *Radical Philosophy*, no.42, Winter/Spring 1986, p.9.

272.   See Georg Lukács, *History & Class Consciousness* , op. cit., p.203, p.204. He went on to note (in part of a discussion on the process of Becoming) that "every attempt to overcome the duality dialectically in logic... is doomed to failure". Of course, on this last point, Lukács posed the matter in much stronger terms, for he was talking of "a system of thought stripped of every concrete relation to existence" (p.203). This is not an accusation one would throw in Clark's direction, but we are back at the heart of what it is to interpret, and to the binds on that process. Lukács marshalled Hegel, and an agency, to his strategies for negotiating this abyss, a strategy that, for today's intellectuals, itself adds another dimension to the circling in "impossibility", another ring to consciousness' unhappiness.

subjectivity's box by giving itself over to the object, *entering into it*, as Benjamin had stated in his *Trauerspiel* book.[273]

There is something of this in the ambiguities of negation in Clark's work, although I suspect the transactions between method and object are less programmatic than they were for Adorno. But neither should Clark be turned entirely into a passive/innocent actor in the situation, for he displays a marked self-consciousness about matters of dialectical interpretation in general, and negation in particular.

To repeat the points made earlier, but with different examples: the locus of contradiction in the following comments by Clark is variable. Clark remarks that the texts encountered by the art historian often contradict themselves rather than recognising contradictions in their object of study, and goes on to say that "the facts of discontinuity and contradiction" constitute the object of art history.[274] In addition, he argues that the historian should look for the gaps and hiatuses in such texts (for example, in those of Courbet's critics), and that Courbet exploited the disjunction that existed between bourgeois and feudal popular representations, "images with a dual public, and a double meaning".[275] Similarly, Clark's argument about the concrete and the abstract, explicitly advanced in relation to the method of study, is made, in addition, for the object of Clark's study.[276] My point is not just that Clark favours particular tropes or figures, but

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273.   See Susan Buck-Morss, op. cit., p.85. She continues: "Mimetic transformation can be seen as a reversal of Kantian subjectivity. The creativity of the latter consisted in the subject's projecting onto experience its own *a priori* forms and categories, absorbing the object into itself. But Adorno's subject let the object take the lead; it formed the object only in the sense of *trans*forming it into a new modality" (p.88). Benjamin is contrasting "the view of the object, resolved in the idea" with the empathetic method where the subject projects their subjective state into the work. See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, op. cit., p.42.

274.   "Courbet the Communist and the Temple Bar Magazine", op. cit., pp.34-5.

275.   *Image of the People*, op. cit., p.158.

276.   Of Millet's *Ruth and Boaz*, he writes: "Almost always it involves a move towards the particular, away from the approximate sublime. Often it means putting things in opposition that started off in harmony.... It involves keeping anonymous gestures in tension with actual faces" (*The Absolute Bourgeois*, op. cit., p.97). Of Daumier, he notes: "The old abstractions of Daumier's art - France, Republic, Charter, Constitution - had worked because they were confronted by the details of a real politics, one he knew at first hand. Now that he did not, the abstractions multiplied and the politics became increasingly second-hand; a politics of 'figures' and 'personalities', not a politics of the streets"

that there are movements between subject and object, and that these result from pursuing a dialectical interpretation. This movement is, on the whole, desirable - it makes for more interesting work - and, for all the criticisms that are levelled against the grand totalising schemas of dialectics or the mode of its "reductions and integrations", there is a way in which such work is far less "controlling" of its materials than its critics often are of theirs. This is a debatable point, and, in the end, contentious for a whole range of approaches. Just as contentious are the assessments about how successfully or not Clark's version of this is... or Adorno's... or.... For the moment though I think the obligation is on articulating the general realm of the problem - and this is one of negation. Having said that I find the process described by Buck-Morss desirable, its results are not necessarily satisfactory; indeed, I should add that it is always in danger of self-implosion, always treading a line with incoherence. This is no *incidental* matter. An argument of my thesis is that this danger must be vastly exacerbated when "negation" or "negativity" - key moments or movements of that dialectic - become the object of study.

The power and work of the Understanding, Hegel wrote in paragraph 32 of his *Phenomenology*, is the activity of dissolution, the dissolution of an immediate relation, the breakdown of elements or moments - their acquisition of some freedom from one another. This, he argued, reveals "the tremendous power of the negative". Such is its power, such is the "devastation", that "death" is threatened. Immediate unity is destroyed in order for Understanding to progress, but that moment of devastation risks losing the idea to the unreal. To step back from this risk, however, risks more:

> But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with

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(p.107); or, of the mid-19c. art public, he writes that it became "either too fixed and concrete a presence or too abstract and unreal a concept" (*Image of the People*, op. cit., p.15).

the negative is the magical power that converts it into being.[277]

For Adorno, Hegel's "program of self-yielding" to the object was never realised because "the Hegelian thought finds satisfaction in itself"; and he goes on to argue that "immersion in particularity, that extreme enhancement of dialectical immanence, must also be the freedom to step out of the object, a freedom which the identity claim cuts short".

> If thought really yielded to the object, if its attention were on the object, not its category, the very objects would start talking under the lingering eye.[278]

Nevertheless, the question remains: what happens on this edge, when one decides to look the negative in the face?

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277.   Hegel, *Phenomenology*, op. cit, p.19. We might compare Clark's account of modernism, cited earlier: "it presents itself as a work of interminable and absolute decomposition, a work which is always pushing 'medium' to its limits - to its ending - to the point where it breaks or evaporates or turns back into mere unworked material. That is the form in which medium is retrieved or reinvented" ("Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", op. cit., p.59).

278.   Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, op. cit., pp.27-8. Marx Wartofsky also doubts whether Hegel's own thought realised this. Distinguishing the external approach to dialectic of Socrates to the internal/immanent approach of Plato, Marx and Feuerbach, he remarks that "it is not clear to me that Hegel subjects *himself* to an engagement *in* the dialectic, in his own thought". See Marx W. Wartofsky, *Feuerbach*, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p.9.

Chapter 2

LOOKING THE NEGATIVE IN THE FACE

'What is Bazarov?' Arkady smiled. 'Would you like me to tell you, uncle, what he is exactly?'

'Please do, nephew.'

'He is a nihilist!'

'A what?' asked Nikolai Petrovich, while his brother lifted his knife in the air with a small piece of butter on the tip and remained motionless.

'He is a nihilist,' repeated Arkady.

'A nihilist,' said Nikolai Petrovich. 'That comes from the Latin *nihil - nothing*, I imagine; the term must signify a man who... who recognizes nothing?'

'Say - who respects nothing,' put in Pavel Petrovich, and set to work with the butter again.

'Who looks at everything critically,' observed Arkady.

'Isn't that exactly the same thing?' asked Pavel Petrovich.

'No its not the same thing. A nihilist is a person who does not take any principle for granted, however much that principle may be revered.' ....

'Yes. It used to be Hegelians, and now there are nihilists....'

(Ivan Turgenev)[1]

* * *

The relation between the avant-garde and negation is played out in a very self-conscious

manner in the arguments put forward by the historians and theorists based at Venice's

School of Architecture from the 1960s onwards. Best known in the English speaking

world from translations of their work are Manfredo Tafuri and - to a far lesser extent -

Massimo Cacciari.[2] The work of both is widely regarded as difficult, largely, I believe,

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1.　　Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*, Penguin, 1975, p.94.

2.　　Tafuri was the director of the Instituto di storia from 1968 (from 1976 the Department of Historical and Critical Analysis) at the Instituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia until his death in 1994. Cacciari was appointed in this department in the early '70s, but had been active in factory-based agitations and an editor on leftist journal since 1968. He has subsequently become mayor of Venice and is professor of aesthetics. The School has also been the base for Francesco Dal Cò.

Tafuri has been widely translated into English, and his work has a high profile in architectural studies, enough so that Sherer (see below) can, in his acknowledgements, refer to "an on-going *discorso Tafuriano*". Tafuri's major works include: *Theories and History of Architecture* (1968), Granada, 1980; *Architecture and Utopia. Design and Capitalist Development*, MIT, 1976 (originally published in 1973 in Italy, and based on a 1969 essay for the journal *Contropiano*); *Modern Architecture/1*, and Modern/Architecture/2 (1976), Faber & Faber, 1986, co-authored with Francesco Dal Cò; *The Sphere*

due to the "dialectical" movements that their analyses make.[3] Because of this, and the

relative unfamiliarity of their material outside departments of architecture, I shall spend

more time in exegesis than in the previous chapter, but I also intend that my account

should establish an analytical structure for addressing their work, and, in particular,

their approach to negation. I shall not, for instance, become involved in disputing any of

their claims for architecture or the avant-garde except in so far as this might contribute to

understanding their use of negation; and I shall concentrate especially on the writing on

the avant-garde rather than on specifically architectural concerns.

Tafuri's work in particular *challenged* the ideology of avant-gardism, regarded the

appropriation of avant-gardist rhetoric by radicals with suspicion, and questioned the

avant-garde's own adoption of emancipatory claims.[4] Accordingly, avant-gardist

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and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s (1980), MIT, 1987; *History of Italian Architecture, 1944-1985* (1986), MIT, 1989; *Venice and the Renaissance* (1985), MIT, 1989. There is far less of Cacciari's work in English (although plenty in German, French, and Spanish). *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture*, Yale University Press, 1993, brings together a range essays from the 1970s to the early 1980s and a new epilogue, "Epilogue: On the Architecture of Nihilism". Also in English is "Eupalinos or Architecture", *Oppositions*, 21, 1980, pp.106-17, and *The Necessary Angel* (1984), State University New York Press, 1994.

On the Venice School see the following article by one of the fold: Paolo Morachiello, "The Department of Architectural History. A Detailed Description", *Architectural Design*, 55, 516, 1985, pp.68-71 (Profile 59: "School of Venice"). Probably the best all-round introduction is one which foregrounds the political and intellectual dimensions of Cacciari's project: Patrizia Lombardo, "Introduction: The Philosophy of the City", in Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism*, op. cit., pp.ix-lviii. This is the only piece, to my knowledge, on Cacciari, but also situates the activities of Tafuri. Writings on Tafuri are more frequent, and most frequently critical reviews. See: Yve-Alain Bois, "On Manfredo Tafuri's Théories et histoire de l'architecture, *Oppositions*, 11, Winter 1977, pp.118-123; Roger Scruton, "In and out of history", *Times Literary Supplement*, July 25, 1980, pp.847-848; Adrian D. Rifkin "*Theories and History of Architecture* by Manfredo Tafuri", *Art History*, vol.4, no.3, September 1981, p.349; Tomas Llorens, "Manfredo Tafuri: Neo-Avant-Garde and History", *Architectural Design Profile: On the Methodology of Architectural History*, 1981, pp.83-94; Fredric Jameson, "Architecture and the Critique if Ideology" (1985), *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-86. Vol.2: Syntax of History*, Routledge, 1988, pp.35-60. All these texts - with the exception of Scruton's - seem to be engaged in the debates, somehow wrapped up in the same scene of concerns. Two more recent pieces tend to a more academic address and to intellectual archaeology, and echo a number of academic forumsin North America focused on Tafuri's writing. They are, nevertheless, very valuable: Hélène Lipstadt and Harvey Mendelsohn, "Philosophy, History, and Autobiography: Manfredo Tafuri and the 'Unsurpassed Lesson' of Le Corbusier", *Assemblage* 22, 1994, pp.58-103; Daniel Sherer, "Tafuri's Renaissance: Architecture, Representation, Transgression, *Assemblage* 28, 1996, pp.34-45.

3.   I scare-quote the word "dialectical" for, as we shall see, the application of the term to their work may be contentious - both from their own position, and from that of their critics.

4.   In this sense his position is not too dissimilar to Hadjinicolaou's which has been discussed above.

negation was not a once radical thing which had unfortunately been "appropriated" by capitalism's commercial and political machinery - it was not "armed vision disarmed" nor "weapon" become "style"; and nor was it something which might usefully be reclaimed by historiography for its current disciplinary battles. Rather, the negativity of the avant-garde had, from the outset, been wrapped up with capitalism. Cacciari's emphasis is to map this relation through German cultural, sociological and economic thought, again revealing a sort of coming-to-being of modern capital and its cultural existence. Fredric Jameson introduces Tafuri's account as:

> ... a powerful indictment of... "protopolitical" impulses in high modernism (the "Utopian" substitution of cultural politics for politics proper, the vocation to transform the world by transforming its forms, space, or language). Tafuri is, however, no less harsh in his anatomy of the negative, demystifying, "critical" vocation of the various modernisms... whereby the instrumentalizing and desacralizing tendencies of capital itself are ultimately realized through just such demolition work by the thinkers and artists of the modern movement. Their "anticapitalism" therefore ends up laying the basis for the "total" bureaucratic organization and control of late capitalism....[5]

This, then, was no retrieval exercise, no salvaging of the avant-garde's negative (radical) moment.

But despite Tafuri's and Cacciari's criticism of negation, negation was nevertheless to become very central to their own method and argument. This statement is liable to be misunderstood, for their use of negation does not mean that they said "no" to many things, nor that they successively sought to outmanoeuvre - or to lead - methodological fashions (in the way that people often see the avant-gardes successively overthrowing one another). Without anticipating the chapter's unfolding, it can be said that it rehearses some similar points about subject/object transitions addressed at the end of the previous chapter. As before, these matters are entwined with an emancipatory politics - here, specifically those of that section of the Italian Marxist far-left known as autonomisti or operaista (autonomists or workerists), and, once again, the concept of negation is

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5.   See Jameson, *Postmodernism*, op. cit., pp.60-1.

wrapped up with these. This was a formation which decisively refused to accept reformism or any associated illusions of social democratic intervention. Some of the twists through which this politic, renders itself as nihilism lie at the core of this chapter, twists which I hope to clarify through its part in the analysis of architecture and the avant-garde.[6] The point is that this trajectory, which, at its far end, engages the materials of irrationalism, is here the product of some thinkers who were not oblivious to negativity's dialectic of reason and unreason, nor to its place in the avant-garde heritage.[7]

SECTION ONE: THE METROPOLIS, THE PLAN & THE AVANT-GARDE

I. The Metropolis, Or, "The Intrinsic Negativeness Of The Large City"[8]

The concept of the Metropolis plays a major part in the thought of Tafuri and Cacciari,

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6.   If this sounds like an account of the route from '60s radicalism to some form of postmodernism - as might the critique of the avant-garde and the compromising of negation, or the opposition to Universal History - one should beware, for Tafuri and Cacciari have distanced themselves from the claims of postmodernism. See, for example, *History of Italian Architecture* , op. cit., p.199, and "There is no criticism, only history", *Design Book Review*, vol.9, Spring 1986, pp.8-11. Tafuri's critique of the avant-gardes should not be confused with that emanating from the advocates of postmodernism. Jameson's characterisation of Tafuri as anti-modernist *and* anti-postmodernist comes closer to the truth, although even this has to be handled with care. See Jameson, *Postmodernism*, op. cit., pp.60-62. The approach taken by Tafuri and Cacciari is rooted in a socio-economic analysis which differentiates a base from a superstructure; their perspective on the Enlightenment is more dialectical than condemnatory: postmodernism's appropriation of emancipatory critique falls prey to the myths of substitutionalism which they reject. Tafuri remarks that postmodernism tends to obstruct questioning, and presents matters as resolved, as if "we are already *beyond (post)*" (*History of Italian Architecture*, op. cit., p.199). See also his criticisms of semiotics, rhizomes, and Derridean *différence* in *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.1.

7.   But before thinking that this opposition of rational and irrational is an easy one, or one which presupposes the outcome, one might want to bear in mind what Trotsky said about the question of artistic form: "One must judge [the question of artistic form] not with one's reason, which does not go beyond formal logic, but with one's whole mind, which includes the irrational, insofar as it is alive and vital" (Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, RedWords, 1991, p. 173).

8.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.119.

and is central to their understanding of the avant-gardes. As Tafuri writes, it was the Metropolis "from whose reality the avant-garde drew its very existence, which was the real proving ground for all its proposals".[9] It is Cacciari, in particular, who develops the question of the Metropolis, a discussion which is worked from the late '60s through analyses of German sociological thought. Negation is the central category of this exploration of critical theory, in which the crucial loci are figures such as Nietzsche, Weber, Simmel, and Benjamin.

In his 1973 essay "The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", Cacciari, discussing Simmel's "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), establishes "the Metropolis" as a figure for the "life" of capitalism - its life as the abstract, general form of the rationalisation of social relations.[10] Simmel addressed "the adaptations made by the personality in its adjustment to the forces that lay outside of it", a matter discussed by way of the contrast between metropolitan and small town or rural individuals.[11] Rationalisation, Cacciari says, is "a process that abstracts from the personal and rebuilds upon subjectivity as calculation, reason, and interest".[12] In other words, the Metropolis points to the effects of rationalisation which go beyond the realm of production relations, invading the most intimate pores of daily existence and the psyche.[13]

In the Metropolis the speed of innovation and change grows exponentially:

> Every dynamic extension becomes a preparation not only for a similar extension but rather for a larger one and from every thread which is spun out of it there continue, growing as out of themselves, an endless number of others.[14]

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9.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.110.
10.   Georg Simmel, op. cit. Cacciari's essay is republished in *Architecture and Nihilism*, op. cit., along with "Loos and His Contemporaries" (1975) and "Loos and his Angel" (1981).
11.   Simmel, op. cit., p.325.
12.   "The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., p.4.
13.   This account echoes Adorno and Horkheimer in many ways, although Lukács may provide the better focus, for Simmel - and the debates about rationalisation - were central to his early work, and remain clearly visible in his 1923 essay.
14.   Simmel, op. cit., p.334.

This experience has produced, Simmel argued, "the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli".[15] Mental life takes on an "essentially intellectualistic character"; no longer focusing upon "feelings and emotional relationships" which "are rooted in the unconscious levels of the mind", now reason is located in its "lucid, conscious upper strata".[16] This intellectualist framework is a necessary response - "a protective organ" - Simmel argued, to "the fluctuations and discontinuities" which threaten it;[17] a protection achieved by sublimating the intensification of *Nervenleben* (the life of the nerves) within an intensification of *Verstand* (intellect). Thus in Simmel's Metropolis, Cacciari argues, all becomes analogous to the market's universal equivalent, and everything - all concrete use-value, all qualitative meaning - becomes subsumed under the sway of quantification and exchange. As Simmel put it:

> [The] money economy and the domination of the intellect stand in the closest relationship to one another. They have in common a purely matter-of-fact attitude in the treatment of persons and things in which a formal justice is often combined with an unrelenting hardness.[18]

Individuality and emotion find their equivalent to exchange value: "intellectual relationships deal with persons and numbers; the modern mind characterised - like the capitalist labour process - by "punctuality, calculability, and exactness".[19] This is Cacciari's description:

> The monetary economy formalizes economic relations, just as the intellect formalizes psychic relations and movements. It transcends use value, just as the intellect transcends the immediate stimulus, the quality of an impression.[20]

And, recalling, perhaps, Marx's argument that the character of the commodity is "twofold", that exchange value does not so much *replace* use value, but uses it as its

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15.   Ibid., p.325. This is also translated as "the *intensification of nervous stimulation*" (Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life", *Art in Theory*, op. cit., p.131).
16.   Ibid., p.325
17.   Ibid., p.326.
18.   Ibid.
19.   Ibid., p.326, p. 328.
20.   "The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., p.6.

vehicle, Cacciari writes:[21]

> ... the *Nervenleben* corresponds to the continuous and relentlessly innovated transubstantiation of exchange value into use value - that is, it corresponds to the necessary instance in which exchange value becomes real value. The intellect, the *Verstand*, in turn abstracts from the appearance of use value the substance of exchange value; it extracts *money* from the process and thus correctly reflects upon the commodity as such - that is, it once again produces merchandise.[22]

This Cacciari calls the process of *Vergeistigung*, or the realisation of *Geist*.

> When Geist abandons the simple and direct relations of production, it no longer creates the city but the Metropolis. It is the Geist, not the individual, that *of necessity* inhabits the Metropolis.[23]

Or as Simmel put it: "The development of modern culture is characterised by the predominance of what one can call the objective spirit over the subjective".[24]

The city itself - that is, the city conceived as an organic entity, or *polis* - is likewise destroyed, henceforth figuring only as some nostalgic ideal. The Metropolis, Tafuri argued (following Cacciari), is not just "calculation" and "reason", but is also the site of its "downfall",[25] and is marked by "the loss of a center".[26] At the level of behaviour and attitude, spleen becomes the form of universal equivalence, the response to, what Tafuri calls, "the logic of assassination".[27]

> [The Metropolis] dissolves individuality into the current impressions and reintegrates these, precisely by virtue of their constitution, into the overall process of *Vergeistigung*. In its first stage of evolution, the Metropolis uproots individuality from its conservative fixity; the process begun by this uprooting

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21.   Cacciari, here, seems to hold back from the full-blown subsumption of use-value into exchange-value that characterises much critical theory (for example, Adorno and Horkheimer). His account contains the ambiguity of the accounts of Marx/Lukács/Simmel. For Lukács in "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", conscious control, law and rationalisation at the level of isolated phenomena, is matched by the "relative irrationality" of the whole process (Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, op. cit., p.101ff.). Cacciari's sense of the Metropolis, then, is akin to the "potentiation" of reification described by Lukács, ibid., p.93.

22.   "The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., pp.6-7. The idea that *Verstand* "extracts money from the process" is, perhaps, less satisfying.

23.   Ibid., p.4.

24.   Simmel, op. cit., p.337.

25.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.78.

26.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.100.

27.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.119.

will of necessity lead to the dialectical reasoning that governs, measures, and directs social relations, the interest (inter-esse) of the Metropolis.[28]

This dialectical process of *Vergeistigung* finds a certain completion with the emergence of types such as the *blasé*, for whom "the *intellectualized* multiplicity of stimuli becomes behavior".[29] Blasé behaviour results from the overload of *Nervenleben*, so much so that the nerves and emotions are dulled through overexposure, producing, as Simmel put it, the "incapacity to react to new stimulations with the required amount of energy".[30] The blasé type is utterly attuned to the life of the "money economy": "The essence of the blasé attitude is an indifference toward the distinctions between things":

> ... the meaning and the value of the distinctions between things, and therewith of the things themselves, are experienced as meaningless.... money takes the place of all the manifoldness of things.... it hollows out the core of things.... They all float with the same specific gravity.[31]

This effect on things - "devaluing the entire objective world" - also drags "the personality downward into a feeling of its own valuelessness", affecting the entire pattern of social interaction, now characterised by "indifference", "reserve","aversion" and even "hatred and conflict".[32]

The blasé type, Cacciari goes on, is not unaware of this situation, knowing that he can buy commodities (both goods and people), but that "he cannot get close to the goods, he cannot *name* them, he cannot *love* them".[33] He also grasps that this situation "is beyond repair".[34] This blasé subject, then, rejects any flight into the Goethian city (the symbol of a nostalgia for totality, a plenitude of experience, and an integrity of values).

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28.   "The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., pp.5-6.
29.   Ibid., pp.7-8.
30.   Simmel, op. cit., p.329. This result is the same as Benjamin's concept of "shock". The blasé type can be compared with Baudelaire's and Benjamin's flâneur, and with the blague discussed by Nochlin earlier.
31.   Ibid., pp.329-30.
32.   Ibid., pp.330-1.
33.   "The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., p.8.
34.   Ibid., p.330. Simmel is, in fact, remarking on the levelling effect of money.

II. The Plan, Or, "A Positive Realization Of The Dialectic", "The Negative... Inherent In The System"[35]

The same rejection of the nostalgia for organic wholeness was developed by other social thinkers. Through a discussion of this, Tafuri and Cacciari advance a specific theory of the changes in capitalism's development, one which informs their analysis of artistic developments in the early 20c. In an effort to grasp the developing capitalist epoch - and, some would say, in order to provide an alternative to Marx's analysis of it - capitalism's key thinkers re-conceived reality as a dynamic system of constant rupture. For Mannheim, Keynes and Weber, Tafuri argues, reality was a dynamic of development, within which conflict was inherent, and where that antagonism was transformed into "a rational solution of the conflicts, development".[36]

Past standards and values were abandoned and desacralised. Tradition and its models were usurped by an emphasis on a future. Mannheim, for instance, challenged "conservative thought" with "progressive thought", the former drawing its significance from the past, the latter from a future utopia or abstract norm. Thus Mannheim developed what he described as "a structural vision of the totality that is and is becoming".[37] This "prefiguration of final and universal models" was understood, Tafuri tells us, "in terms of the given reality";[38] defined, in other words, in terms of the present. Similarly, with his concept of *Wahrfreiheit* (truth- or value-free), Weber adopted a disenchanted outlook where value was no longer the basis of judgement. In this challenge to the intellectuals' traditional role (as legitimators of values), ideologists were to be "desacralised" in order that the system could be rationalised unhindered.[39]

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35.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.62, p.61.
36.   Ibid., p.54.
37.   Mannheim cited ibid., p.53.
38.   Ibid., p.53.
39.   Although not the same argument, cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Legitimators and Interpreters: on modernity, post-modernity and intellectuals*, Polity Press, 1987

However, unlike Mannheim's approach, in the work of Weber (and Keynes) the emphasis was less on the *anticipated* utopian model than on the need to realise that model in the present, to realise the future now. Thus, if we take the theme of abandoning past models and values - the classic version of negation - the distinction of Mannheim from Weber and Keynes makes some interesting temporal adjustments. Tafuri suggests that Weber and Keynes wanted the idea of utopia to be put to *work*, to be more than mere ideology, to be productive for the present. The move was, as Tafuri puts it, from "utopia" to "plan" or "project": a move, in other words, from "value" to "action":

> Liberation *from* value in this sense signifies establishing the premises for action in *that* reality, in that field of indeterminant, fluid, and ambiguous forces.[40]

The Plan, then, needed the negation of tradition and value to be free from ethical justification, and to incorporate negativity - the transitory, the temporary, the contingent - into itself. Thus, instead of yearning for a "lost" (probably imaginary) social order, and instead of trying to resolve the crises of capitalism, the emphasis turned to managing the chaos of the modern world and making those crises work (or working with them).[41]

> Development's dynamic and dialectic character having been revealed, a plan was required against the constant danger of internal deflagration.[42]

Intervening within the dynamic, the attempt was to absorb capitalism's contradictions at ever higher levels.[43] Instead of counterposing the ideal of Reason to the anarchy of capitalist production, Reason was imported *into* that anarchy. So, writes Tafuri, "economic models are devised *starting from the crisis* and not abstractly *against* it".[44]

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40.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.56.
41.   The shift from laissez-faire to monopoly capitalism provides the necessary backdrop to these ideas, with, ironically, "the Plan" of monopoly capitalism being a manager of anarchy. The point about the Plan, as described by Tafuri, is that it is not a rigid model.
42.   Ibid., p.60.
43.   Ibid., p.135.
44.   Ibid., p.62.

The key source for Tafuri's argument is an essay by Antonio Negri entitled "Keynes &

the Capitalist Theory of the State post-1929", published in the first issue of *Contropiano*

in 1968.[45] The journal *Contropiano* - meaning "Anti-Plan" - was formed by a number

of Italian leftist intellectuals. The line-up of its first editors is interesting: Mario Tronti,

Antonio Negri, Alberto Asor Rosa and Massimo Cacciari.[46] Some exploration of the

themes and background to the piece by Negri, and the orientation of the journal, will be

of help for understanding the role of negation for the thinkers from the Venice School.

Negri was a leading intellectual figure on Italy's far-left. He is associated with the

autonomisti, and specifically with *Potere Operaio*, formed in opposition to the Italian

Communist Party (PCI) and Italian Socialist Party (PSI), and by the late '60s

commanding a large base of support among industrial workers as well as attracting

significant intellectuals.[47] Negri's argument can be characterised as a "workerist" (or

operaista) one.[48] *Contropiano* was a journal for intellectuals of a "workerist"

45.   Re-published in Toni Negri, *Revolution Retrieved. Selected Writing on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis and New Social Subjects (1967-83)*, Red Notes, 1988, pp.9-42. Both books contain useful introductions addressing the culture of the Italian far-left: the former by John Merrington, "Preface", op. cit., pp.1-4, and "Introduction to Keynes & the Capitalist Theory of the State post-1929", op. cit., pp.5-7; the latter by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, "Communism as Critique", pp.3-21. Patrizia Lombardo's essay, op. cit., is also helpful. Chris Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After*, Bookmarks, 1988, provides a wider context for understanding this section of the Italian Left, as does Tobias Abse, "Judging the PCI", *New Left Review* 153, September/October 1985, pp.5-43.
46.   Cacciari's early essays were published in this journal, including "Sulla genesi del pensiero negativo" in 1969, and "Utopia e socialismo" in 1970; Tafuri published "Austromarxismo e cita: 'Das rote Wien'" in 1971; and Francesco Dal Cò published "Sviluppo e localizzazione industriale" in 1971.
47.   In the late-'70s Negri was arrested and charged in connection with the activities of the Red Brigades and became something of a *cause célèbre*. Some of the bombings - and especially that at Bologna railway station - attributed to the Red Brigades, are now considered to have been the responsibility of the Italian secret service; but more importantly, the charge that Negri was a member of the Red Brigades is widely regarded as trumped-up by the state in order to discredit the left in general and the far-left in particular. Since then, Negri has produced a text in collaboration with Félix Guattari (written in 1983-4), in what might best be characterised as a far-left communist Nietzscheanism, but one where the concepts of the state and labour play important roles - concepts whose centrality sets the work at some distance to most "postmodernist" accounts. See *Communists Like Us. New Spaces of Liberty, New Lines of Alliance*, Semiotext(e), 1990.
48.   The term can carry pejorative inflections, but, it seems, was adopted as a positive description.

persuasion.[49] *Operaista* ideas had been developed through the '60s, prior to the political upheavals that followed 1967 (and also prior to those that occurred in Italy in 1963) by Raniero Panzieri and Mario Tronti.[50] Their thesis, which is also found in Negri's article on Keynes, centres on the working class as the *active* and the *determinant* force of capitalist development; or, to put it another way, its "autonomy". Tronti's "inversion" formula of 1964 states that:

> At the level of a fully socialised capital, capitalist development becomes subordinated to working-class struggles, it follows behind them.[51]

This focus was conceived as a "recovery" of Marx from the orthodox Left - by which was meant the PCI and its arguments for reformism and gradualism - who, the *operaista* argued, had erased any sense of the working class as the key motor and dynamic to development. Negri's Keynes thesis, then, was thus not just a matter of historical dispute, but, more importantly, it was intended as a crucial foundation for their contemporary political strategy. Negri writes that "the only way to understand the specificity of our present state form is to highlight the dramatic impact of the working class on the structures of capitalism".[52] Closely associated with this is a belief that they

49.   However, a number of these intellectuals were, or were to become, members of the PCI: Asor Rosa, it seems, remained a memebr of the PCI, and Cacciari later became one of its representatives. Other sections of workerists - the group *Il Manifesto* being one - started *in* the PCI, but were later expelled, or else resigned. This was clearly a complex period, and, as Llorens notes, after 1969, Tafuri "systematically attacked 'official' marxism from gauchist positions, while actively continuing to be a member of the PCI" (Llorens, op. cit., p.94, footnote 15).

50.   Negri had worked together with Tronti through the '60s on other journals such as *Quaderni Rossi* (1961-63) and *Classe Operaia* (1964-67). Negri's paper had first been aired at a series of research seminars in 1967 at the Institute of Social & Political Science at the University of Padua, a series initiated to commemorate the half centenary of the Russian Revolution. This paper along with others from the seminar series were republished in 1972 in *Operai e Stato*, an anthology which became very significant on the Italian Left, especially those of an *operaista* orientation. Negri's own theses had their early formulation in the writings of Raniero Panzieri (for example, "The Capitalist Use of Machinery", 1961) and Mario Tronti's 1966 collection *Operai e Capitale*.

51.   Mario Tronti cited by John Merrington in *Revolution Retrieved*, op. cit., p.45.

52.   Negri, "Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State post-1929", op. cit., p.30. The "militant research" of *operaista* intellectuals was orientated towards determining the new class composition of mass production: the "mass worker" - the unskilled or semi skilled worker who had displaced the skilled worker through the restructuring of capitalist production. Associated with this displacement was the diminishing of the bargaining power and strategies of the class "aristocracy" (focusing on skills and the hierarchies of grading). The levelling of the working class in the factories had instead focused the struggle against the capitalist organisation of work per se; and the refusal of this characterised class

were recovering *Marx's concept of value* - not to be confused with the values of tradition discussed above - as a *class relation*. They argued that the Left's ideas had stagnated into static, objectivised and economistic categories which inflected both the Left's activities within the capitalist state (such as, the means of trade union struggle adopted) and their idealisation of the "productivist" ideals of Third International "socialism". All this, the *operaista* argued, accepted the framework of capitalism; merely struggling for the control of productive forces, it left, as one commentator puts it, "the objectivity of production and work itself... unquestioned", reducing the working class to "mere labour power", to a mere function.[53] The point, instead, was to conceive that class as "an independent material subject of antagonism".[54] Thus, they argued, the Left was "basically Keynesian".[55] The task was to break from reformist logic and assert class *autonomy*. Negri's analysis of Keynes, then, is an operation to "know thine enemy": to surpass (what was seen as) the more backward looking approaches of the traditional Left and to challenge capitalist science in the form of its most sophisticated exponent.

In his essay Negri charts a periodisation of modern state development which focuses upon class relations. Accordingly 1848-71 is a period of rising class autonomy, 1871-1917 marks a period of political organisation of that autonomy, and the period between the two World Wars marks the rise of a new state form. It is this last period upon which Negri's analysis concentrates. The capitalist state, Negri argues, was forced

autonomy and self-interest. The new theory of the state ("social capital", "capitalist socialism") was, of course, central to this analysis. Negri's article on Keynes was an attempt to flesh out this transition.

Research was backed with political activity. Negri, Paola Meo and Cacciari organised *Capital* reading groups in the petrochemical plants at Porto Marghera, near Venice, in August 1963. (This was simultaneous with the appearance of *Potere Operaio* , or Workers' Power. Initially a supplement to the PSI's regional paper *Il Progresso Veneto*, this was to become, by 1967, the paper of the Porto Marghera petrochemical workers, and the name of Negri's organisation). See Merrington's "A Biographical Note", *Revolution Retrieved* , op. cit., p.270. *Operaista* formed a base through particular struggles and organising around questions of speedup and divisive grading systems (Harman, op. cit., p.203).

53.   Merrington in *Revolution Retrieved*, op. cit., p.44.
54.   Ibid.
55.   Ibid., p.7.

to respond to the events and impact of 1917 in a qualitatively new way: not simply to respond to it as an external threat through military and diplomatic isolation, but, more importantly, to respond to the internal threat that arose - the explosion of new mass trade unions and factory councils across Europe. Capital's reaction to this internal threat took a form that affected its own substantive content. Instead of the brute repression of the immature ruling classes (Negri has Italy in mind), he centres our attention upon capital's most advanced sections and their "technological path of repression" as a means "to undermine the material base" of the working class vanguards.[56] Hence Taylor and Ford, with their "massification of the productive process and deskilling of the labour force", forced a "leap in organic composition in new sectors; assembly line; flow production; scientific organization of work; sub-division/ fragmentation of jobs, etc.".[57]

But for Negri, this social levelling of the working class could only be one element of the strategy of capital. The crucial point was the danger - for capital - of "political recomposition at a higher level of massification and socialisation of the workforce", a danger intensified with the now constant horizon of the Russian Revolution, "a spectre that could not be exorcised".[58] But it was not until after the 1929 crisis that capital's own response manifested itself (to itself). Negri's formulation of this is important: in the wake of 1929, he says, it was 1917 which "manifested itself in a crisis of the entire system".[59] It took 1929 for the ruling class finally to abandon its nostalgia for the liberal constitutional state and to face the loss of values - values that had already been rejected

56.   "Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State post-1929", op. cit., p.11.
57.   Ibid. Cf. Negri's concept of the "social factory" where he advances the idea of "the state of social capital" (ibid., p.26) - where the state is "a prime mover of economic activity" (p.27), and where "society itself is cast in the mould of the factory" (p.28). In this account capital shifts from the "antithesis of despotism in the factory and anarchy in society" to "the *social* organization of that despotism, to diffuse the organization of exploitation throughout society, in the new form of a planning-based state which - in the particular way in which it articulates organization and repression throughout society - directly reproduces the figure of the factory" (p.30).
58.   Ibid., p.11. Both the phrases used - and the emphasis on capital's increasing socialisation realising, simultaneously, the increasing socialisation of its gravediggers - echo the Marx & Engels, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, op. cit.
59.   Ibid., p.12.

and destroyed by the protagonists of 1917.

In this formulation we start to see Negri's emphasis upon capital's internalisation of the threat of the proletariat, its internalisation of negation. "Massification" not only forces capital's urgency to recognise the political autonomy of the working class, it forces a recognition that the proletariat was now "the decisive element and motive power behind any future model of development".[60] For Negri, contrary to other analyses, the post-1929 crisis is not primarily significant for the recourse to state intervention (which had, he tells us, been a growing tendency since 1871); and nor is it characterised by a shift from "liberal" to "totalitarian" state form (which, he says, confuses the regime with the state form). The significance of the crisis is that it provokes "the reconstruction of a state based on the discovery of the inherent antagonism of the working class":[61]

> What was new, and what marks this moment as decisive, was the recognition of the working class and of the ineliminable antagonism it represented within the system as a *necessary feature of the system which state power would have to accommodate.*[62]

> The specific characteristic of the new form of state that emerged from 1929 was rather *the type of class dynamic at work within the framework of state interventionism, on which intervention was premised.*[63]

It was, to emphasise, the strength of the working class - note the phrase "ineliminable antagonism" - that "imposed... disequilibria that constantly required intervention at all levels of the system".[64]

> Paradoxically, capital turned to Marx, or at least learned to read *Das Kapital....* Once the antagonism was recognised, the problem was to make it function in such a way as to prevent one pole of the antagonism breaking free into independent destructive action.[65]

Working class autonomy and antagonism had to be sublimated "into a dynamic element

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60.   "Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State post-1929", op. cit., p.12.
61.   Ibid., p.13.
62.   Ibid.
63.   Ibid., p.22.
64.   Ibid., p.14.
65.   Ibid., p.13.

of the system", its threat absorbed "at ever new levels".[66] Hence the need for the Plan:

> Capital must ensure that the dynamic factors of growth are controlled, in such a way that the balance of power remains the same. The problem, in other words, is never resolved; it is only postponed.[67]

The state becomes simultaneously "planner-state" and "crisis state" - a state which has descended into civil society, and one which "continuously recreate[s] the source of its legitimacy in a process of permanent readjustment of the conditions of equilibrium" - readjustments that necessarily revised the state itself.[68]

> ... the path to stability now seemed to depend on the recognition of this new precarious basis of state power: the dynamic of state planning implied acceptance of a sort of "permanent revolution" as its object - a paradoxical *Aufhebung* of the slogan on the part of capital.[69]

Negri also describes this "acceptance" as a recuperation: through experiences like the New Deal, capital tried "recuperating the notion of 'permanent revolution', for its own self-preservation".[70]

> ... new weapons are forged in order to prevent the [working] class acting outside capital, and to make it act within a framework whose outlines are continually being drawn anew.[71]

This, then, is the nature of "capitalist reformism". Unlike the reformism of social democracy it does not, as Negri puts it, "whine" about the imbalances of the system; rather it asserts its own class interest, and seeks to resolve the difficulties through its own self-reproduction. Accepting bourgeois "disenchantment", it was Keynes who

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66.   Ibid., p.13, p.28.
67.   Ibid., p.28.
68.   Ibid., p.13.
69.   Ibid., p.14. Cf. permanent revolution and negativity as discussed in Chapter 1. Tafuri and Cacciari also draw attention to the writings of Preobrazensky, who provided the Left Opposition's economic theory for the Soviet Union and, as Tafuri puts it, "a theory of the plan based explicitly on dynamic development, on organized disequilibrium, on interventions that presuppose a continual revolution of mass production" (*Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.173). Tafuri cites his argument to Cacciari's essay, "le teorie dello sviluppo", *Contropiano*, no.1, 1971.
70.   "Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State post-1929", op. cit., p.34.
71.   Ibid., pp.28-9.

provided the most advanced capitalist science for the new situation.[72] Keynes' theory of demand, Negri argues, marks the recognition of working class autonomy within capital, and Keynes' attempt to posit "a balance of power between classes in struggle".[73]

While Keynes orientates towards the future, the crisis shook confidence and prompted attempts to establish some guidelines of convention: "the future must be fixed as present".[74] For the planner state "the life of the system no longer depends on the spirit of entrepreneurialism, but on liberation from the fear of the future" and that "the state has to defend the present from the future".[75] Thus, Negri argues, while Keynes destroyed the traditional object of political science, he did so only as a prelude to its reconstruction - a reconstruction of the conditions of economic balance, and "the reaffirmation of the mystified form of general equivalence": "The bourgeois dialectic knows no sublation, it cannot overthrow its object".[76] Keynes' delusion - and his mystification of his science - Negri argues, came from his attempt to have capital without its competition and without its anarchic aspects; even to posit a realm beyond class contradictions; but Keynes never tried to eliminate exploitation. The Keynesian paradox is that it:

> ... is forced to recognize that the working class is the driving motor of development, and that therefore Keynes' statically defined notions of equilibrium can in fact never be attained in static terms.... In effect... the system functions not because the working class is always inside capital, but because it is also capable of stepping outside it...[77]

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72.   Negri's essay follows the emergence of Keynes' analysis into a systematic science in the *General Theory* of 1936. Say's Law (which represented old-style capitalist science) "denied the existence of the working class as the political negation of the system" (ibid., p.19). Challenging Say's Law, Keynes challenged the basis of traditional bourgeois political science, a basis that had now become "naturalised": "the theory of economic equilibrium,... an integrated and functional symbiosis of elements allowing an infinite, free access to the world of wealth" (p.21). Keynes recognised, Negri argues, the tensions of the situation and anticipated problems; seeing the 1929 crisis as the product of an excess of supply, which lacked an equivalent massification of demand (that is, the working class).

73.   Ibid., p.28.

74.   Ibid., p.24.

75.   Ibid., p.25.

76.   Ibid., p.21. Cf. Clark's comments on Pollock's *Wooden Horse in* "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction", op. cit.

77.   Ibid., p.28.

For Keynes, "everything beyond the equilibrium"[78] is the "Party of Catastrophe". The

spectre haunting Keynes - the Party of Catastrophe - is that which Negri hopes to

activate.[79] He concludes:

> The communism of capital can absorb all values within its movement, and can
> represent to the full the general social goal of development; but it can never
> expropriate the particularity of the working class which is its hatred of
> exploitation, its uncontainability at any given level of equilibrium. Because the
> working class is also a project for the destruction of the capitalist mode of
> production.[80]

* * *

For Tafuri and Cacciari, the developments described by Negri negotiated a crisis -

emerging from the 19c. - regarding the role of the intellectual.[81] No longer

"unproductive", intellectuals could now get in on the action, and have a role within the

realisation of the Plan.[82]

> In order to survive, ideology had to negate itself as such, break its own
> crystallised forms, and throw itself entirely into the "construction of the
> future".[83]

Tafuri cites a growing collaboration, or mutual recognition, between the representatives

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78.   Ibid., p.21.
79.   There was a split at the journal after a couple of issues which saw Negri go in a different
direction to the majority. In the second issue, Tronti et al. opposed Negri, regarding, as Merrington puts
it, the question of "class antagonism in Keynesian development and its implications for an independent
class politics" (Merrington, in *Revolution Retrieved*, op. cit., p.45). Negri argued for the complete
political rupture of working class autonomy from the capitalist reform cycle, while Tronti -
accommodating to the PCI - proposed a dual-power model where autonomy could coexist with capitalist
reformism. It is difficult to assess the relevance of this split to the work of Tafuri and Cacciari. The
details of the history of these disputes - and the differences between various factions of the autonomisti -
is complex and probably does not help the argument of this chapter, and certainly did not stop Tafuri
citing Negri's essay on Keynes in 1973.
80.   "Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State post-1929", op. cit., p.36.
81.   The relation of the intellectual to Metropolitan chaos, Tafuri wrote, has been explored by
Nietzsche, Simmel, and Weber - and, in their wake, by Walter Benjamin. See, for example, *Modern
Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.105, and *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., pp.78-88.
82.   The centrality of a technocratic elite in the modern state - here signified by "the Plan" - has
been widely commented upon. For Tafuri, however, it does not seem to be associated with any notion
of the "death of the working class".
83.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.50.

of big capital and the new intellectual-designers (such as in the German Werkbund). In this way, the avant-gardes - assessing their *objective* role in the process (however marginal) - contributed to this changing emphasis of capitalism, the transformation of strategy from utopia to Plan; they were, in other words, part of the Plan, a function of capitalism. Avant-gardist strategies were designed to provoke the public into participation. "Provocation" - that "slap in the face of public taste", that "*épater le bourgeois*", "was only the outer skin of a process in which the bourgeoisie took possession of the technological universe".[84] For Tafuri, the avant-garde helped to acclimatise the public to the shocks of that metropolitan world and helped to teach the acceptance of shock through its own formal and spatial tactics. Metropolitan shock was transformed into technique, Tafuri writes:[85] Eisenstein's montage of attractions, for instance, was concentrated *Nervenleben*; or, in another vein, "since the assembled objects belonged to the real world, the picture became a neutral field on which to project the *experience of the shock* suffered in the city".[86]

The way was cleared for active intervention in the here and now. By "translating art into action", the Futurists and Dadaists began their "reconstruction of the universe".[87] What we witness with the rise of the avant-gardes, Tafuri argues, was not the *negation of history*, but the negation of historicism;[88] in other words, the reconception of history - echoing that described earlier - from a notion of history as a source of values to history

84.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.110. In fact, his assessment is even more damning: "It would be absurd to attribute other political values to movements that flirted with the reality of social struggle only in order to assert the superiority of their own ideological proposal" (p.110).
85.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.105.
86.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.86. And, Tafuri tells us, Moholy-Nagy's description of the Theatre of Totality (in *Painting, Photography, Film*): "relies on the primary means of the various instruments of communication; its intent is to give life to 'a great dynamic rhythmic formal event, which gathers together, in a form reduced to the elementary, the most extensive heap of means, ricocheting off one another'" (*The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.105).
87.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.106. Cf. Fred Orton, "Action, Revolution and Painting", *The Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1991, pp.3-17.
88.   *Theories and History of Architecture*, op. cit., p.60.

as an "event".[89] The anti-historicism of the avant-gardes allowed an "explosion toward the future", and enabled avant-gardists to find a role within the emerging planner-state.[90] They helped to release the "potential energies" of the bourgeoisie, hitherto entrapped in their adherence to past values or unable to recognise the essence of their own creation. If the flâneur - who, in his impressionist and symbolist form, is described by Tafuri as the "pre-avant-garde[91]" - had a "consciousness of participation", in the new reality, it was the avant-garde that advanced this with their "linguistic revolution of contemporary art".[92] With their transformation of visual codes, their involvement of the public, and their reduction of artistic experience to pure object, the avant-garde brought the public into *effective participation*.[93]

The Metropolis, then, was made productive, and the elements available for the construction of a new language emerged from the Metropolis' remains - but only "once it has neutralized the paralyzing anguish that can only contemplate itself".[94] The key problem, for the avant-garde's relation to the Metropolis, Tafuri argues, was to go beyond a response characterised as "tragic anguish":

> ... how to shake off the anxiety provoked by the loss of a center, by the solitude of the individual immersed in revolt, of how to convert that anxiety into action so as not to remain forever dumb in the face of it.[95]

Tafuri describes the "revolt of the objects" - the reference is to Mayakovsky's *The Revolt of the Objects* of 1913 - as "the dominating motif of bourgeois anguish".[96] But

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89.   Ibid., p.63. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life" (1874), *Untimely Meditations*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp.59-123.
90.   Ibid., p.31.
91.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.119.
92.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.84.
93.   Ibid., p.92. This starts to sound as if the avant-garde is being treated as a singular and, moreover, conscious subject. Tafuri does point out, however, that this role is an effect often counter to the intentions of the individuals or groups involved.
94.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.105.
95.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.105.
96.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.131.

while he thinks Russian Futurism sought immersion "in the sea of disordered objects to

attempt the last possible synthesis with them",[97] the Italian Futurists "[broke] with all

vindication of lost objects".[98] Meanwhile, Dada's negation of Expressionism was not

simply a negation in that passage from one avant-garde to another, the continual

revolution of avant-garde movements;[99] instead, its significance was to "annul" that

anguish propagated by the Expressionist movements - in other words, to negate

anguish, anxiety and the tragic consciousness. Drawing the point more widely, he notes

that:

> It was necessary to pass from Munch's *Scream* to El Lissitzky's *Story of Two Squares*: from the anguished discovery of the nullification of values, to the use of a language of pure signs, perceptible by a mass that had completely absorbed the universe without quality of the money economy.[100]

III. The Negation Of Sense & Syntax: Signs Reduced To Zero & "Things Devoid Of Significance"[101]

Tafuri's emphasis upon the avant-gardes' "effective participation" and invocation to

action is one plank of their negation of the tragic and tradition. This has an impact upon

the strategies, and the very sign, of artistic practice, and informs Tafuri's dialectic of the

avant-garde.

> ... with Cézanne as point of departure, Picasso and Braque made the illusory nature of the differences, which Simmel had recognized as typical of metropolitan life, the basis for reflection on the loss of center experienced by the individual.[102]

From *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* through Analytic Cubism, an awareness and display

of fragmentation was evidenced in their work. But, Tafuri argues, this "loss of a

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97.   Ibid., p.100.
98.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.106.
99.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., pp.84-6.
100.   Ibid., p.89.
101.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.110.
102.   Ibid., p.105.

center", really made its way into art with the sensibility of Italian Futurism. With its negation of tradition and old values, Futurism - placing itself at the "head of the anonymous impulse" and the "total revolt of things and mobs" - asserted an intellectual will-to-power.[103] The anxiety over the Metropolis was supplanted with its embrace. And along with the negation of the institutions of tradition, the Futurists advocated the smashing of "the syntactical connections in all the semantic areas".[104] In Futurist cabarets, art mimicked Simmel's Metropolis with the use of "bombarding words liberated of sense and syntax".

> It was the machine that was now determining the modes of communication, and its messages were compounded of pure energy which had no need for syntactical nexuses. The technological language was based on something new: shock, pure signs assaulting the interlocutor all at once.[105]

Similarly, the Dadaists refused to submit to "the anguish that assails anyone who perceives that the signifier - the word - has lost all significance".

> The indifferent objects that float in the flux of the monetary economy become grist to any mill. Reduced to signs, they can be inserted into a process of continuous metamorphoses.... All reality is "ready-made".[106]

From here Tafuri describes "the dialectic of the avant-garde", which he explores through the examples of De Stijl and Dada, and their response to the Metropolis. Where Dada goes for a "violent insertion" into the irrational, and celebration of the formless, De Stijl opts for the control of form, a "silent immersion in the structure of the city by the idealization of its contradictions".[107] But, according to Tafuri, this opposition - of De Stijl's form and Dada's formlessness, of rational and irrational - inverts. Dada's immersion "in the unformed" - its "displaying the void that the end of values... leaves behind it" - *by* its very *representation* of chaos and nullification, affirmed, and sought

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103.   Ibid.
104.   Ibid., p.106.
105.   Ibid.
106.   Ibid., p.108. This, Tafuri insists, and not the aim to scandalise, was Duchamps's "ultimate objective".
107.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.92.

control of, its reality.[108] As Tafuri put it: "a yes given to the real *permits its transformation*, makes it possible in fact to *act* within it".[109] By *giving form* to Nietzsche's death of God, Tafuri argues, by ironising the anarchy of the Metropolis, Dada demonstrated its own constructive face, its own counter-tendency towards the planning and control of that formlessness. Meanwhile, De Stijl's exploration of the elements of form, instead of leading to the control of form - instead of marking a space *against* chaos - contributes to it. Seeking those elements of language and form, de Stijl goes through a process of *decomposing*, but only to find (and participate in) utter *decomposition*, a decomposition which echoes that of the Metropolis. Unable ever to convincingly recombine its elements - as intended - de Stijl can only produce "disarticulated recomposition", echoing the mechanical world "demonstrating that no form can be given to the recovery of totality (of being, as of art) except form derived from the problematic nature of form itself".[110] This inversion, or conversion into opposites - of the rational into the irrational, and of chaos into form, and vice versa - marks, for Tafuri, a new condition which clearly echoes the transformation of social theory discussed earlier: "from now on form is not sought outside of chaos; it is sought within it. It is order that confers significance upon chaos and transforms it into value, into 'liberty'".[111]

After 1922, Tafuri writes, these two roads which we might recognise as Poggioli's negative and positive avant-gardes - were increasingly synthesised in the approaches of practitioners such as Moholy-Nagy, El Lissitzky, Hans Richter and Van Doesburg.[112]

In the early 1920s, the avant-garde was moving toward a common language.

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108. *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.108.
109. Ibid., my emphasis.
110. *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.95.
111. Ibid., p.96.
112. Ibid.

Destruction and construction were proving complementary.[113]

For example, Tafuri discusses how Van Doesburg's practice straddled a multiplicity of avant-garde sites - ones often seen as contradictory - and brought into common currency Dada, Futurism and de Stijl.[114] Tafuri locates this complementarity of destruction and construction as emerging at the core of Dadaism. Here, "the vitalistic and 'positive' pole of dada tendencies" are ascribed to the impact of Yefim Golyscheff - a Russian in Berlin, who was described by Raoul Hausmann as more authentically Dada than the Dadaists.[115] Golyscheff's work was described by another contemporary as wanting "to incite his viewer to the joy of producing", to engage in the "joy of proletarian work".[116] Golyscheff's polemic against seriousness and for lightheartedness - his Dadaist invocation to self-liberatory behaviour - was directed at the proletariat, Tafuri says; the working class was seen as "the only historical subject capable... of making its own the 'gay science' of purifying devastation".[117] Indeed, Tafuri suggests, faced with the example of Soviet Russia:

> ... dada's very spirit of contestation found itself in crisis. Or rather, the contestation now seemed a wholly contingent task, waiting to be able to create a productive organization in the field of art and collective behavior.[118]

The arrival of large numbers of Russian avant-gardists in Berlin around 1922, and the exhibition at van Diemen's gallery marks the height of this crisis. Where Dada had "limited itself merely to specifying the instruments" adequate to the Metropolis (for example, assemblage, photomontage), Constructivism showed "how to put them to institutional use" - from "mere enunciation of principles" to "the systematic definition of

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113.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.112. This is a characteristic move: "decomposition", Tafuri wrote of another matter, "showed its constructive side" (*The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.123). This mutuality of destruction and construction was also discussed in Chapter 1.
114.   This is a matter argued with full acknowledgement of Van Doesberg's role as protagonist in the latter's fractionalising.
115.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.127.
116.   Behne cited ibid.
117.   Ibid., p.128.
118.   Ibid., p.131.

a... language complete in itself".[119]

Now socialism's "liberated objects" had replaced anguish over the "revolt of the objects", providing "an answer - by turns desperate or cynical - to the tragic, and that now appeared under a new sign".[120] "Constructivism was a metaphor for the technical organization of the real", writes Tafuri, "the dynamic articulation of signs that were completely disenchanted".[121] Thus Lissitzky's *Story of Two Squares* realised the "disenchanted sign" as the basis of working construction.[122] By seeking the sign's zero degree (whether as prehistory or as a-history), the avant-garde, Tafuri argues, established its building blocks. These signs - evacuated of meaning and of any qualitative value, and functioning as some cultural analogue to universal equivalence - prepared the way, Tafuri argues, for their recombination, in order that the future could be made. By reducing the environment "to things devoid of significance", and art's syntax "to pure geometrical signs"[123] - or to a "desert", as Tafuri describes Malevich's white canvasses - the avant-gardes accommodated to the climate of dynamic intervention.

Some of the means for arriving at the "disenchanted sign" were not theoretically "pure": "mystical residues and disenchanted cynicism alternated and were superimposed".[124] Tafuri's essay "The Uncertainties of Formalism: Victor Shklovsky and the Denuding of Art" addresses this matter. Here Shklovsky's formalism is described (after

119.   Ibid., p.135.
120.   Ibid., p.134.
121.   Ibid.
122.   The time has come to build on openground", wrote Lissitzky in 1922: "Whatever is exhausted will die anyway, without assistance from us; for land that is lying fallow needs not a program, not a school of thought, but simply work" (cited ibid., p.140).
123.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.110.
124.   Ibid. Some anticipated a new future harmony where art would be superfluous; Worringer contrasted the language of the world with the language of the soul; and the Russian Formalists sought "the resurrection of the word".

Mukarovsky) as a means to an end that lay "beyond formalism".[125] The formalist exclusion of all external factors, and attention to "the internal laws of Literature",[126] is presented, Tafuri argues, as a "laboratory" period for an attempt "to reconcile the internal dynamics of the artistic structure with the context in which it is set".[127] Tafuri's argument is based upon the category, central to Russian Formalism, *ostranenie* or estrangement, which was also touched on in Chapter 1 - "a displacement of the time and space internal to the work vis-à-vis those of real life".[128] The problem is expressed by Shklovsky:

> We rarely hear the words we utter. We speak a poor language, the words of which are not thoroughly spoken. We look at each other, but we do not see each other. Our perception of the world has dried up and all we are left with is the faculty to recognize objects.[129]

The tactics of formalism, then, are designed to "defamiliarise" in order that language may speak again, to retrieve words from their habituality, their impotency and "semantic exhaustion". In other words, the aim is to retrieve human communication from its reified condition - a condition alienated from "an original meaning" "for things and concepts".[130] "Art is basically ironic and destructive", wrote Shklovsky: "It revives the world. Its task is to create deformity through confrontation".[131] Thus, formalism's *ostranenie* is "a project of 'recuperation'" - echoed in the title to Shklovsky's book of 1914: *The Resurrection of the Word*. Here, montage, juxtaposition, dislocation, etc. - the tactics of the avant-garde associated with Russian Formalism - are aimed at *closing* the gap between sign and meaning.[132] *Ostranenie* was:

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125. "The Uncertainties of Formalism: Victor Shklovsky and the Denuding of Art", *Architectural Design Profile: On the Methodology of Architectural History*, 1981, pp.73-77. Quotation from p.74.
126. Shklovsky cited ibid.
127. Ibid.
128. Ibid., p.75.
129. Shklovsky cited ibid.
130. Ibid., p.76.
131. Shklovsky cited ibid.
132. For Russian Futurist Kruchenyk in 1913, the instrument (or device) was the neologism: "The lily is beautiful, but the word 'lily' has been sullied by fingers and defiled. Therefore, I call the lily *euy* and, thus, its original purity is restored" (cited ibid., p.76).

... an instrument which disalienates, a device which makes it possible to salvage the "natural" relationship between name and thing, an act of violence done to convention so as to arrive at a primeval nucleus of meaning which is pre-existing but hidden somewhere under the floor of a "sunken cathedral".[133]

Tatlin's counter-reliefs provide Tafuri with an example from the plastic arts. Shklovsky described Tatlin's materials - the bits of tin and iron - as materials enabling a break with painting; but he went on to suggest that they, in Tafuri's words, "also reconstruct metaphorically the unbroken continuum of a mythical Eden".[134] The materials are, in Shklovsky's phrase, "pieces of a certain personal paradise where there are neither names nor voids".[135]

Thus the move to abstraction in the arts, far from being the "flight from the real", as is usually described, marks, for Tafuri, an "effort to rejoin reality":[136] from Shklovsky's "resurrections" to the effort to build a new language adequate to active intervention within the Metropolis. Indeed, Tafuri suggests that "the very concept of the avant-garde" holds a contradiction which becomes apparent "as moments of conflict that emerge along the problematic boundary line separating the avant-garde itself from the reality principle".[137] The problem is one of separation. Explicit attempts to bring together art and reality, to collapse the difference, met with failure. There are two elements to Tafuri's argument: (i) the avant-gardes are unable ever to affect the real; (ii) their striving to fuse art and life inverts and turns into its opposite, reaffirming the condition of alienation they sought to transcend. Together these elements form the parameters of a mounting crisis, and an ever exacerbating of tension.[138]

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133.   Ibid.
134.   Ibid., p.77.
135.   Shklovsky cited ibid.
136.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.112.
137.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.119.
138.   The achievements of Analytic Cubism were erased after 1910, Tafuri argues, by the likes of Juan Gris, who - under the influence of Henri Bergson - tried to synthesise subject and object, and tried to reclaim the subject through a reconquest of the real. It was, however, doomed: "that reconquest cannot act on what is real. It can only fluctuate over it, imposing its own synthesis as supreme will-to-form" (*Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.105).

Like Lissitzky's "Proun" paintings, Tatlin's counter reliefs are "condemned to 'tend towards'" the real, "to remain... pure aspiration, to live enclosed in a dream".[139] The "Monument to the Third International" - with its "materials" "of iron, glass and revolution" - was faced with the same fate, imagining that it could reconnect art and life *because* its materials were "iron, glass and revolution". It hoped that this might sidestep the void between conventional signs and their meaning. To believe that art can merge with reality is, for Tafuri, wrongheaded. Form, closed within its own systems of self-examination, does not have the power to "link".[140]

With the example of avant-garde theatre, Tafuri argues this point again. Here, he tracks the desire to merge the sign (the body in scenic space) with its action. No longer mediated by signification, this "sign" aimed to be immediate with its performance, to recover authentic expression, and "a portion of unalienated space.[141] Yet even with Meyerhold's attempt at the "construction of life", Gropius' *Totaltheater* and Piscator's Proletarian Theatre, theatre remained theatre, separated from the real. When Piscator tried to establish a counter-city or alternative reality it was, Tafuri argues, tantamount to self-deception:

> Piscator is well aware that the alienation between language and things has become internal to language itself, but he still deceives himself that he can dominate it.[142]

These counter-realities were doomed, condemned to be but pale alternatives, always superfluous to the Metropolis itself. Moreover, Tafuri argues, Meyerhold's inability to

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139.   "The Uncertainties of Formalism", op. cit., p.77.
140.   Ibid.
141.   Adolphe Appia's rebellion against naturalistic theatre and his dream of a theatre for a community that needed no theatre (*The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., pp.95-111): "The theatre became the means for the recovery of a collective catharsis - for the recovery of a portion of unalienated space" (p.96). Once again this project finds its ascetic moment, here in Fuch's theatre, where: "the marriage between soul and form presumes *renunciation* as the supreme means of representation" (p.97).
142.   Ibid., p.110.

synthesise art and life transforms into a celebration of their estrangement ;[143] Piscator's

self-deception acts back upon his work and his theatre teaches (as does Moholy Nagy's)

"the elimination of non-objective time from daily behavior, of every experience that does

not come from things and does not return to them.[144] And, of Gropius, he writes:

> ... the technological languages that have taken over *Totaltheater* sing independently the hymn of victory of the negative that has taken over the real from which that theatre tries to isolate itself.[145]

The "victory of the negative" - of estrangement and alienation, of the Metropolis -

conquers art, then, in the very moment that art seeks to counter it, or to conquer reality.

Always the Metropolis will be victorious.

Returning to the practices of El Lissitzky, et al., Tafuri notes that the "tension toward

the real was valid only so long as it remained just that, so long as it did not pretend to

arrive at concrete results".[146] Ultimately, he suggests, the avant-garde needed:

> ... intellectual work that stopped at the doors of industrial production, that touched the world of labour only tangentially, that did not abandon the field of pure ideology.[147]

The fusion of art and life was a "fiction" of "pure intellectual elaboration"; and,

moreover, it "had to remain just that: a horizon constantly shifted forward" that could act

as a catalyst for action.[148] Between artistic form and the real there is a "swerve", Tafuri

argued, echoing the dynamics of Shklovsky's knight's move. The avant-garde tried to

extinguish "that 'swerve' between the work and what is other to it, between the object

and its conditions of existence, of production, of use", they tried "to break the barrier

between the language of forms and that of existence".[149]

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143.   Ibid., p.102.
144.   Ibid., p.110.
145.   Ibid.
146.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.112.
147.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.145.
148.   Ibid., p.137.
149.   Ibid., p.17, p.19.

Nevertheless, a certain arrival "at concrete results" did occur - in the ideals of the architectural-urban plan. Within the surrounding chaos, the avant-garde made, as Tafuri puts it, an "entreaty of Reason", as it pooled its efforts into action, and into its "hopes for design",[150] foreshadowing "the coming of collective action, that will result in the new city".[151] The futility of such efforts remained; and this very drive to concretise exacted a price. It started with the crisis or the "suicide of art".[152] Both Dada and De Stijl had negated "any validity of the object".[153] Thenceforth - as the avant-garde moved into "design", and, more specifically, into architectural design - the crisis of the object proceeded through architecture itself. The architectural object - the individual building project, say - was, in a sense, a denial of the Metropolis that had given the avant-garde its raison d'être. It denied the Metropolis by attempting to be discrete from it, by turning its back upon the urban flux of capitalism; and, by denying the Metropolis, the avant-garde threatened its own existence. In fact, "architecture" itself self-negates: the conception of architecture as *object* displaced by an approach which addresses the total environment; from the individual building within the city, attention moved to the urban process itself. Henceforth, "architecture" can only be an "ambiguous object" in the Metropolitan Merz. This:

> ... dissolution of the architectural object in the overall process only emphasized the internal contradictions of the modern movement.[154]

> ... the entire cycle of modern architecture... [emerged, developed and came to crisis] as an enormous attempt - the last to be made by the great bourgeois artistic culture - to resolve, on the always more outdated level of ideology, the imbalances, contradictions, and retardations characteristic of the capitalist reorganization of the world market and productive development.[155]

Thus, once the avant-garde had "come within the sphere of the reorganization of

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150. *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.96, p.182.
151. *Theories and History of Architecture*, op. cit., p.36.
152. *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.92.
153. *Theories and History of Architecture*, op. cit., p.36.
154. *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.117.
155. Ibid., p.178.

production in general" their efforts became "the objects and not the subjects of the Plan".156

SECTION TWO: "THE NEGATIVE ASSUMES WITHIN ITSELF... 'THE TRAGEDY OF THE GIVEN'"157

I. Form Without Utopia

In Tafuri's writing, as we have seen, the negative is attributed to the flux of capitalism itself, and has been harnessed. Capitalist development, therefore, is understood as a dialectic based on - and propelled by - the negative, and the role of the avant-garde within this is related to the questions of the Metropolis and the Plan. This is a strategy that Llorens describes as "tracing architectural conceptions" - and we might add avant-gardist forms - "to some basic kernel in the economic domain".158 According to Tafuri, capitalist science, in its more advanced forms, incorporated both Nietzsche's negation of tradition *and* the negative motor of Hegel's dialectic. There was, said Tafuri, "a global rationalisation, with a positive realization of the dialectic" - "no longer Hegel but Keynes".159 "The negative is inherent in the system" - this is obvious enough, Tafuri says; rather the task was to identify what "actually makes this 'negativity' (the negative of the working class) function as a 'necessity'".160 Negation - as the Party of Catastrophe - has been internalised by the system of capital accumulation. In this sense, negation was now capitalism's motor; or, as we encountered in Negri, capital had "learned to read *Das Kapital*".

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156.   Ibid., p.100.
157.   Cacciari, "The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., pp.19-20.
158.   Llorens, op. cit., p.85. Llorens also raises the possibility that Tafuri's analysis is no more than one proceeding by analogy.
159.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.62, p.61.
160.   Ibid., p.61.

But Negri's argument places negation in a further light: capital's move to a political economy of "dynamic equilibrium" may have internalised negation, but, as we saw earlier, it also must stop "one pole of that antagonism breaking free into independent destructive action" and must perpetually postpone the resolution of the dialectic. Put this way, negation - and its *autonomy* - is rendered even more important. This is not so different from the emphasis on negation articulated by the Young Hegelians and their attempt to release the negative from its imprisonment within the strictures of the status quo.

It is a workerist thesis which is advanced by Tafuri in *Architecture and Utopia* - a book which might be regarded as a synthesis of positions and materials from *Contropiano*, reworked through the material of architectural and avant-garde histories.[161] The orientation to the "autonomy" of class interests marks out their space from both capital and the established Left. What is really at stake in Tafuri's account - and for which the fate of the avant-garde provides some allegory - is the politics of reform; both Negri's "capitalist reformism" and a socialist reformism.[162] If the former type of reformism provides the necessary ground, it is the latter which seems to be treated with more urgency. This social democratic politics is, perhaps, the real "ambiguous object" which Tafuri thinks needs divesting of its ambiguous quality, and needs its radical rhetoric exposing as the sound of capitalist management.[163] The politics of classic social

161.   There are significant elements of this approach in both earlier and later writings.
162.   Socialist reformism is classically described as a commitment to a gradual, evolutionary progression to socialism, where capitalism can be effectively reformed out of existence. The main criticisms of this approach are: its illusion in the neutrality of the state and its institutions, and thus its political avoidance of the question of the state and state power; and its faith in the essentially stable basis to capitalism's economy rather than a conception of capitalism as based on crisis, a faith which imagines capital as open to rational control and argument.
163.   It is not insignificant that Weimar Germany provides a central, and recurring, case study; nor that, for Cacciari, the focus is Germany's emergence as a modern technological nation in the early years of the 20c. The period marks the height of social democratic activity, takes in the major split between the Second and Third Internationals, and the impact of the Soviet Union on Weimar politics and culture.

democracy are, however, only a part of Tafuri's object of critique, and in the 1960s the *operaista* associated that politic with much wider sections of the Left: as much with those strains (who in the 1920s had been) associated with revolution as with "reform"; all - whether PSI or PCI - were now "basically Keynesian".[164] If the PCI's claim to revolution had already been compromised by the decisions of the Communist International under Stalin, its complicity in disarming workers in (among other places) Italy immediately after the World War Two, and (by 1973) the PCI's "historical compromise" with the Christian Democrats, would have helped fixed this assessment in the eyes of many Leftists.

If we read Tafuri's account of the architectural "ambiguous object" and the avant-garde through the prism of the *operaista* critique of reformism his point becomes clearer. According to Tafuri, a dialectic of reason and chaos unfolds along with the avant-gardists' belief that they could realise their dreams in the capitalist here and now. The consequence of this dialectic is that the closer their aims get to "fruition", the more remote and vacuous they become; and, finally, these aims must turn into their opposites. Tafuri refers to the gap between the avant-garde's subjective aims and the translation of that ideology into techniques which functioned for capitalism.[165] The critique of the avant-garde, then, was a critique made on the grounds of its false illusions in substitutionalism; and, in the context of the post-war world, it marks his rejection of the professional ideology of architects, and their sense that they are major players in "improving the world": their "dream of a 'new world' arising from the realization of the principle of Reason become the Plan".[166] Against the radical rhetoric of this ideology, Tafuri asserts that we must accept "the ineffective nature of architecture" - or, we might add, the inevitability of its always finding itself the object and not the subject of the

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164.   Negri suggests that social democracy is labour power's self-negation. See Negri, "Labor in the Constitution", *Labor of Dionysus*, op. cit., pp.53-136.
165.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.21.
166.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.171.

Plan.167

If we take seriously this context, a number of points need to be raised concerning some of the commentaries on Tafuri's work. There are two different elements here which I shall characterise as the provincialist argument and the pessimist argument.168

(i) The provincialist argument: This argument - which exists more as a common refrain than a full-blown argument - tries to "provincialise" Tafuri's analysis, claiming that it is peculiarly Italian. Certainly, the specificities of the Italian situation in the '60s and '70s are important, but such comments usually serve to keep at a distance the politics and the critique advanced by Tafuri, and their effect is to localise Tafuri's argument geographically, and thereby to "localise" its validity, removing its force vis-à-vis capitalism in general. What is never taken into account by the provincialist argument, for example, is the insistence - explicit in Negri, and present, I think, in Tafuri's work - that it is the USA which provides the classic model of capitalist development and the realm of the disenchanted.169 Whatever one thinks of Tafuri's account, a careful reading of it reveals its claim to be an anti-reformist position. Treating his account provincially, then, is another way of liberalising it. A further effect is to temporally provincialise the work, if not to absent it as some quaint, lost ('68-ish) moment. The upshot of this provincialising and liberalising is that the dynamic of Tafuri's analysis of the avant-garde is missed, and is rendered as a postmodernist critique of modernism. In other words, having stripped the analysis of its revolutionary intent - however problematic that claim might be - and, more specifically, of its more generalised applicability as a critique of capitalism and of "radical" activity in that capitalism, it is localised but only so that it can be made available for another generalised account. In as

167. *Theories and History of Architecture*, op. cit., p.4.
168. There is also a postmodernist argument, but I have chosen to incorporate it as following from the logic of the provincialist argument.
169. We should also recall the point about the importance of Germany above. Llorens is critical of this American bias (Llorens, op. cit., p.95 footnote 37).

much as Tafuri's analysis is found to be of wider intellectual interest - in particular, to the Anglophone world - it is generalised at an abstract level, and thereby "postmodernised", ignoring Tafuri's own critique of the postmodernist outlook.[170]

(ii) The pessimist argument: The initial response to Tafuri's early work was to see it as a pessimistic account. In part what is being read here is Tafuri's critique of avant-gardist and architectural ideology, and what appears to be the claim that they cannot effect significant change (or, at least, the sort of changes they intend).[171] The charge of pessimism, as we have already seen, tends to adhere to anyone who raises negativity and to anyone who does not present an affirmative (life enhancing) account of art. Tafuri, for his part, works overtime in the preface to *Architecture and Utopia* to distance himself from the charge of being doom-laden: "the expression of renunciation", he insists, was not an apocalyptic prophecy of the "death of architecture", rather the point is that capitalism has destroyed certain key tasks for architecture, "what it has taken away in general from ideological prefiguration".[172] There are two aspects then that need to be distinguished in Tafuri's argument, and which may be confused in the charges of pessimism: the critique of avant-gardist substitutionalism, and the critique of social democracy. From the perspective of the latter, for instance, we might wonder is the critique of reformism pessimistic or realistic? This is a difficult questions on the Left, never mind more broadly.

Tafuri's argument on this point amounts to little more than a base-superstructure one: the escape from the chaos of the Metropolis cannot be effected by architectural projects,

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170.   Furthermore, Tafuri's intellectual trajectory cannot be grasped; on my reading, despite the supposed "break" or "phases" of Tafuri's, the workerist critique remains constant. This, of course, has implications for how one sees negation.
171.   Tafuri himself alludes to the reception of *Theories and History* and *Architecture and Utopia* in the prefaces. Lipstadt and Mendelsohn note that it is understandable how the charges of pessimism could be made, but argue that they are based on a "superficial reading", op. cit., p.59.
172.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.ix.

but only through social revolution. As he reiterates in 1986, "there are no more utopias, the architecture of commitment, which tried to engage us politically and socially, is finished".[173] Tafuri's argument, then, has value as a refusal of reformist illusions (in both their political and artistic senses) - it might even be described as an activistic version of Adorno in this respect, a refusal of the consolation of (imagined) wholeness or a refusal of a retreat from the negative conditions of modern social life.[174] However, there is another dimension to this, specifically in the programme of response advocated by Tafuri and Cacciari - or to be more precise, in their programme (if it can be so called) of non-response. As he argues in the 1973 preface, we must accept that we are left with "form without utopia", with a return to "pure architecture",[175] or as he writes thirteen years later: "what is left to pursue is empty architecture".[176] Seen from this position, the charge of pessimism may also have a different valence. T.J. Clark - himself potentially on the receiving end of such a charge from Fried - refers to Tafuri as a "rank pessimist" along with Foucault; and Fredric Jameson attributes "cultural pessimism" to him by association with Adorno's negative dialectic and Roland Barthes' zero-degree writing.[177] Such comments do, of course, beg the question of what might be the counter-criteria of optimism on this occasion. Clark does not follow up the charge, but Jameson pursues the matter and tries to define the problem politically and intellectually. However, to try to do battle with Tafuri on Italian soil by mobilising the figure of Gramsci somewhat misses the point in a context where Gramsci had been rendered "safe" and a figurehead by the PCI.[178] Nevertheless, the likes of Clark and Jameson are

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173.   See Tafuri, "There is no criticism, only history", op. cit., p.11. This is not, he insists, a declaration of the "failure of Modern architecture".
174.   Llorens, op. cit., p.94 footnote 29, points out that Tafuri never works with the concept of alienation, although it could be argued that Cacciari's discussion of exchange value and *Vergeistigung* effectively move us onto this terrain but without the "tragic" dimensions that have often been read into alienation.
175.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.ix.
176.   "There is no criticism, only history", op. cit., p.11.
177.   Jameson, *Postmodernism*, op. cit., p.60.
178.   Jameson does, in fact, acknowledge this problem, but pursues the point nevertheless.

not making an everyday charge of pessimism. As the rest of this chapter will show, the argument about pessimism - once we have distanced it from the more usual accounts of what pessimism might be, and taken Tafuri's points on board - is not so easy to dismiss as illusions in capitalism's potential beneficence.

Before pursuing this matter of pessimism, another point needs to be noted. Tafuri makes his argument across a broader historical terrain than the 20c. avant-garde. A number of key moves and patterns recur in Tafuri's writings, and, once identified, these moves can be tracked across some very different historical objects - pointing, perhaps, to a programme of analysis that is driven primarily from the level of theory. The centrality of the Metropolis and the Plan to his account may not, in fact, be so central. It is not only the historical avant-garde which seeks out the elements of language in order to rearticulate them and only to discover their loss; Tafuri finds this process underway since the Renaissance, which he describes as the origins of the avant-garde's anti-historicism:

> ... the first great attempt of modern history to *actualise* historical values as a transition of mythical time into present time, of archaic meanings into revolutionary messages, of ancient "words" into civil actions...[179]

Through the denial of old values - achieved, paradoxically, by the appropriation of the ancient syntax - Brunelleschi (who, Tafuri says, was the first artistic avant-gardist) establishes the condition whereby "one drowns in a sea of empty and disposable symbols, pure fragments of a decomposed order".[180] Precisely through his quotations and allusions to an historical precedent, Brunelleschi unleashed "the eclipse of history", the dehistoricisation that would allow a new reality - and a new history - to be built.[181]

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179. *Theories and History of Architecture*, op. cit., p.15.
180. Ibid., p.31.
181. These comments on Brunelleschi are from *Theories and History of Architecture*. In his 1985 book, Tafuri explores "the doubts about the values of form that tormented the heterodox individuals of the sixteenth century" (*Venice and the Renaissance*, op. cit., p.196). Again, we encounter a similar

It is debatable whether Tafuri is being totally ahistorical, or whether he is articulating a sort of long durée of rising modernity,[182] and although Tafuri is critical of the work of Argan, he shares the same large interpretive schema that can be found there.[183] However, I do not want to follow the question of historical research and the question of method therein, or the validity or otherwise of Tafuri's account. The point is to recognise the centrality, for his approach, of the crisis of the object, the critique of the tragic response, and the art-historical dialectic established. Each of *these* issues in Tafuri works a sense of negation, and does so before we even encounter categories such as the Metropolis and the Plan.

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argument: Palladio's philology of Vitruvian grammar, Tafuri tells us, far from being the reassertion of a given value, or the submission to "a handbook of rules", was the route to "syntactic freedom" (p.127). Palladio's reading of Antiquity, Tafuri argues, allowed him to treat the classical codes as a "field of variations". Accordingly, invention did not proceed *from* the type, rather the type (here the *exemplum* of Vitruvius) already contained invention; indeed, Tafuri points out, Palladio's reconstruction of Vitruvius' "villa house of the ancients" only proceeded *after* he had conducted his own inventions.

> The norm thus becomes something purely *conceptual*. Indefinable, it lives ideally in a planned adventure that discovers the value of a serial arrangement: devoid of "models", Palladio's *ars combinatoria* criticizes the concept of the type and presents itself as an open structure, a logical concatenation of experiments on the aggregation of spaces, on the syntax of structures, and on the composition of pivotal elements, made possible thanks to grammatical purification . (p.127)

Again the tension towards the real is an issue. Palladio (and Alberti), Tafuri argues, preserved "the nucleus of the humanist hypothesis in an *absolutely pure* form". Yet they built "'finite' islands of rationality" which were clearly demarcated and separated from reality, their finality "tragically isolated" in "the universe of representation". Palladio's work, especially of the 1560s and '70s, "created a virtual reality that contrasted with immediate reality", living on in that reality due to its "'estranging' power": "The harmony of Palladian architecture thus projects itself beyond the present, drawing a horizon of meaning that goes beyond the sixteenth century" (p.128). However, Scamozzi (Palladio's immediate successor): "reduced *scientia* to norms validated by archaeological knowledge ... [which] were assumed as invariants devoid of internal flexibility.... abstract completeness, 'without time'" (p.163); "Scamozzian abstraction seems to have foreshadowed the even more radical abstraction of Inigo Jones and the ambiguity of an international Palladianism made of emptied forms" (p.196). Scamozzi's work, Tafuri suggests, consisted of "formal overdetermination", such that its move towards "atemporal abstraction" threatened, in the Venetian context, to overspill and invert, introducing "metaphysical nuances" (p.195). For Venice's rising *giovani*, "empty content" represented the ostentation and architecture of the Romanist patricians; here, form could not be an "autonomous system" (p.175), and Scamozzi's "atemporal abstraction" was rendered "overloaded" (p.190).

182. For instance, cf. the senses of "modern history" or the long rise of secularism, often through forms which suggest an entrenched religiosity, as Benjamin suggests of the Baroque.

183. See Giulio Carlo Argan, *The Baroque Age* (1964), Skira, 1989. Argan runs his dialectic as essentially harmonious, which is where, of course, Tafuri's account is sharply different, charting an increasing exacerbation of tensions. For Tafuri, the "unity in variety" of the late Baroque passes over into an approach to the city characterised as "order and chaos, regularity and irregularity, organic structure and the lack of organic structure" (*Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.21). Llorens sees these more as paradoxes than as dialectic, effectively re-living a common distinction made between Adornian and Lukácsian approaches to cultural history.

Tracking forward historically to the Enlightenment we find him writing of Piranesi: "all

forms of classical derivation are treated as mere fragments, as deformed symbols".[184]

Order itself thus dissolves into "a monstrous pullulation of symbols devoid of

significance", rationalism becomes irrationalism.[185] In Piranesi's *Campo Marzio*, Tafuri

says, these opposite forces exist in extreme tension; but in his *Carceri* we encounter the

"silence of things".[186] "A universe of empty signs is a place of total disorder": this is

Piranesi's prophecy, Tafuri insists, his "anguished anticipation" of a world which has

lost its ancient order and values.[187] Piranesi represents, for Tafuri, the first modern

manifestation of "the experience of anguish", and the first response to "the revolt of the

objects"; yet it is in his work, nevertheless - and inescapably - that "images and forms

are reduced to empty signs".[188] Thenceforth, he tells us, two roads become available to

modern art and architecture: the one explores the depths and wretchedness of reality (the

"forest"); the other tries to go beyond reality and to create *ex novo* (the "aristocratic

reserve"). The anxiety provoked by the Metropolis is now on the cards, but the

opposition of two roads has a longer genesis. In *Architecture and Utopia*, Tafuri divides

the Enlightenment architects between those with "excessive symbolism" (Ledoux and

Lequeu) and those who work with "geometric silence" (Durand).[189] In the case of early

20c. architecture, Tafuri charts this same duality through Expressionism and Neue

Sachlichkeit: respectively, the "exasperation of the object" and the "destruction of the

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184.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.14.
185.   Ibid.
186.   Ibid., p.19.
187.   Ibid.
188.   Ibid.
189.   In late 16c. Venice, Scamozzi's excess found its dialectical counterpart, we are told, in the "formal silence" and "restrained subdivisions" of the plans for the Fondamenta Nuova draughted by Giovanni Alvise Galesi (*Venice and the Renaissance*, op. cit., p.190). In *Theories and History of Architecture*, op. cit..pp.15-17 and pp.19-21, Tafuri's counterpoints are set up between, for example, Alberti and Brunelleschi (and their relation to the Gothic); and between Borromini and Bernini (historicist experimentalism versus rigorist abstraction).

object and its substitution by a process to be lived".[190] Once again, one recognises this as tragic anguish versus anti-tragic, active consciousness: the two responses to the crisis of form and the crisis of value. For the mid-20c., Tafuri's opposition is between neo-avant-garde "noise" (with its desperate - and, he notes, sceptical - formal distortion) on the one hand, and, on the other, the silence and deliberate muteness of form in the work of Mies van der Rohe.

II. "Only Through A Total Alienation" & The "Total Introjection Of... Nothingness"[191]

> For the avant-garde movements the destruction of values offered a wholly *new type of rationality*, which was capable of coming *face to face with the negative*, in order to *make the negative itself the release valve* of an unlimited potential for development.[192]

If we have addressed the negative as "release valve", what might it be to come "face to face" with it? We may ask this question of Tafuri's analysis *of the avant-garde*, but also *of his analysis*. In fact, it might be said that it is facing the negative to which Tafuri and Cacciari increasingly turn their attentions, both as something to investigate and as something to make into a methodological and political strategy. Where did that negative take the avant-garde? It lay, says Tafuri, in "the discovery of the silence surrounding the sign, that residue, that insuppressible boundary that remained after the dadaist devastation".[193] He continues:

> The negative, having arrived at the limit that *separates language from silence*, was in a position to organize syntactical structures deprived of referents - or, better, full of referents intent on verifying themselves.[194]

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190.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.110.
191.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., pp.101-2, p.98.
192.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.56, my emphasis.
193.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.148.
194.   Ibid., my emphasis. There is an interesting parallel with Clark's account of the negation of metaphor turning into the multiplication of metaphor.

We have seen the central issues of Tafuri's dialectic of the avant-garde, a dialectic that ran into increasingly fraught relations with the Metropolis, the avant-garde's validity becoming more and more attenuated. So what, then, might be the correct response to the Metropolis? What scope is there, and for what sort of action? As might be anticipated, it is the "silence", rather than the "noise", which is the answer favoured by Tafuri. Since the crisis of the object - simultaneous with the Metropolis - architecture has been obliged "to become a spectre of itself".[195] Mies' buildings, he argues, "are objects that 'exist by means of their own death', only in this way saving themselves from certain failure".[196] Such buildings have ceased resisting, and have surrendered to total alienation.

> In that space [the "Barcelona Pavilion"], a place of *absence* , empty, conscious of the impossibility of restoring "synthesis" once the "negative" of the metropolis has been understood, man, the spectator of a spectacle that is really "total" because it is nonexistent, is obliged to perform a pantomime that reproduces the wandering in the urban labyrinth of sign-beings among signs having no sense, a pantomime that he must attempt daily. In the absoluteness of silence, the audience of the Barcelona Pavilion can thus be "reintegrated" with that absence.... Mies gives life to a language composed of empty and isolated signifiers, in which things are portrayed as mute events.[197]

Thus, in such works one faces the "'negative' of the metropolis". Having accepted its elements as "pure signs", architecture abandons any attempt to reconstruct or reimpose meaning, and refuses any illusory claim that it can patch-up the fissures and gaps.

> The expressionist, futurist, or dadaist cabaret is thus the crucible in which the metropolitan grotesque, the clash between objects in ebullition, is assumed and represented - even if only as a means of provoking the total introjection of the nothingness that runs through its formless structure.[198]

Here, Tafuri's qualification - "even if only" - threatens what is, in fact, central to his account: "the total introjection of the nothingness" is a crucial aspect of Tafurian negation.

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195. *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.145. Hence the phenomenon of university "cities" as collections of formal architectural experiments.
196. Ibid., p.148.
197. *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., pp.111-2.
198. Ibid., p.98.

It is Schopenhauer whose philosophy is explicitly referred to in this respect of resignation. Tafuri notes the "Schopenhauerian negation of all will and of all representation" and Schopenhauer's "asceticism as flight from the tragic".[199] What we find in Schopenhauer's writing is a philosophy of pessimism, or a strong and explicit advocation of pessimism, which may shed some light on the question of pessimism addressed earlier. In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer advances an argument which privileges "will" (essence, or noumena) over "representation" (the world of life, contingency and appearance, or phenomena).[200] This echoes a long dualist tradition from Plato to Kant, but in the third and fourth books Schopenhauer re-addresses these categories in what he calls their "second aspect". Here the straightforward privileging of will gives way: he argues that will is objectified as "the will-to-live", that will comes to know itself insofar as it mirrors itself in life or representation, and that this knowledge can either affirm or deny the will-to-live.[201]

The affirmation of the will-to-live is haunted by an "original discord" or inner antagonism because it derives from the *principium individuationis* (principle of individuation).[202] Here the ego's "enhanced distinctness" wills not only to live, but to do so at the expense of, and in conflict with, others.[203] Thus willing is "destined to

199.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.108, p.111. Cf. his comments on Shklovsky's irony instead of pathos ("The Uncertainties of Formalism", op. cit., p.76).

200.   See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, Dover Publications, 1969. Schopenhauer's asceticism is another key site for the debate over pessimism. R.J. Hollingdale notes that Schopenhauer is unusual for the depth of his justification of pessimism and for establishing a metaphysics to advance the pessimistic ethic. See R.J. Hollingdale, "Introduction" (1970) to Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, Penguin, 1970, p. 22-3. See also Julian Roberts, *German Philosophy: An Introduction*, Polity Press, 1990, pp.162-184 (and pp.183-184 for a discussion of pessimism, the *via negativa*, and comparison with Adorno); Christopher Janaway, *Schopenhauer*, Oxford University Press, 1994, especially pp.85-99.

201.   Schopenhauer, op. cit., p.285.

202.   Ibid., p.333.

203.   Ibid., p.331; "every individual, completely vanishing and reduced to nothing in a boundless world, nevertheless makes himself the centre of the world, and considers his own existence and well-being before everything else. In fact, from the natural standpoint, he is ready for this to sacrifice everything else; he is ready to annihilate the world, in order to maintain his own self, that drop in the

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pain" and "all life is suffering".204 Consequently, happiness is not a positive concept,

but a negative one: merely the diminution of suffering.205 Pessimism, he argues, is the

only appropriate ethical response; optimism is for the shallow-minded or the wicked: "a

bitter mockery of the unspeakable suffering of mankind".206 Knowledge must be

knowledge of the will itself - not of particular and contingent phenomena (the

principium individuationis which continually "motivates" the will); knowledge must

"become the *quieter* of all and every willing",207 the denial of the will-to-live, "silencing

and suppressing all willing".208 This "elective decision" to "escape" life's suffering and

conflict is a will that "freely abolishes itself",209 and is best realised as *asceticism* which

is "a constant mortification of the will", a *via negativa* to a state of "freedom of the

will".210

The "negative avant-gardes", Tafuri argues, advocated salvation from the Metropolis

through a total surrender to it - "by losing oneself in the unformed", he notes, "one

might be able to save one's soul".211 For the Futurists, salvation might be found at the

far end of alienation, and so they followed the process of *Vergeistigung* through to its

conclusion.212

> The vitalism that shapes the first dadaist cabaret rushes toward the most absolute
> annihilation of the soul, toward the "yes" said to collective alienation, to the

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ocean, a little longer" (p.332).

204.   Ibid., p.312, p.310. The idea of pain is very central to Schopenhauer: its absence, or the absence of the need to struggle to survive, renders life empty and boring and makes existence "an intolerable burden" (p.312).

205.   Ibid., p.319. He argues that art is unable to produce images of enduring happiness, but can only propose or imply it. Dante, for instance, could represent Hell, for it is our world, but his representation of Heaven was limited to repeating second-hand images gleaned from the saints and Beatrice.

206.   Ibid., p.326.

207.   Ibid., p.379.

208.   Ibid., p.308.

209.   Ibid., p.285.

210.   Ibid., p.381, p.404. Schopenhauer compares this to the state of "grace" advocated by Christian mystics.

211.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.108.

212.   And, turning to the Cabaret Voltaire, he tells us that the "sole duty" of the dada-priest "is to have everyone witness his own decomposition" (*The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.100).

putting to death of values.[213]

Tafuri's point becomes most explicit - and makes us recall Golyscheff - in his comments

on Meyerhold's 1922 production of *Magnanimous Cuckold*:

> "The art of the festival" is no longer just the destruction of old churches. Now it must penetrate into the interior of the productive processes, transform their forms, bring back to them a Dionysian liberation. To Meyerhold, planning and Taylorization meant establishing within work the need for play. Only through a maximum of planning and mechanization (thus, only through a total alienation) can man-mass be dragged into a collective work-festival, liberated from the sacrificial rites of dadaism.[214]

Accordingly, one must acknowledge and indulge the Metropolitan situation. One must

discover the "value of non-value",[215] and *participate* in this - participate in this *to the*

point of excess in order to come out on the far side. The possibility of "salvation" can

only be achieved through total submission to the dynamics of the Metropolis - one must

accept the void between sign and meaning, and revel in it: "To save oneself one must

lose one's self, one must resign oneself to being submerged in the chaos, one must

make oneself sign among signs. But by action".[216] Salvation lay not in revolt but in

surrender,[217] argues Tafuri, and it takes courage to surrender:

> ... Dada displayed not only the indifference that is the badge of the man who has the courage to open his eyes to the reality of a merchandising world, but also the void that the end of values - the Nietzschean death of God - leaves behind it.[218]

Those who resist it - whether by nostalgia or tragic anxiety, by attempts to escape in

"alternatives", or to synthesise its contradictions - are doomed to repeat, and to

exacerbate, the pain of impossibility.[219] Those who can face this negative may make

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213.   Ibid., p.100.
214.   Ibid., pp.101-2.
215.   Ibid., p.135.
216.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.108. Of Schlemmer, Tafuri notes that the "great yes" said to the reality that reduces man to a marionette "liberates" that same marionette (*The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.106).
217.   *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., pp.72-4.
218.   *Modern Architecture/1*, op. cit., p.108.
219.   Baudelaire's flâneur and Simmel's blasé type recognised the inescapability of Metropolitan *Vergeistigung*, Tafuri argues. Moreover, we are told, Baudelaire recognised that the situation would be *exacerbated* by any attempt to escape it (*Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.92); all would lead,

their gains, and find a space for liberation.[220]

III. Negative Thought

The trajectory demanded by facing the negative is, Tafuri suggests, also recognised by a section of the avant-garde - this time the "positive avant-garde".[221]

> The avant-garde, brought back to its elementary principles, was thus obliged to reveal its cards completely, to recognize its own origins in "negative thought", to declare once again not only its own nonpolitical nature, but also its own immoralism...[222]

Further attention to this "negative thought" - a focus developed by Cacciari - will take us to a more theoretical exploration of the notion of negation used by Tafuri.

Cacciari defines negative thought as the blasé type's sense of the Metropolis, his "perspective of his own inability to go beyond it... the perspective of his own negated individuality":[223]

> Merely to reflect it [the Metropolis] would be to reflect it not at all: between the forms and modes of such a simple reflection and the specifically dialectical structure of the Metropolis, no consistency is possible.... only a thought that is able to see the subsuming of individuality not in terms of negation but in terms of use and functionality... can express the ideology of the Metropolis.[224]

nevertheless, to "pure silence" (p.74).

220. "The acceptance of the mask transforms the reified condition into a term of "probation": the *only* liberty still attainable and able to show the possibility of a space of action in which the man who has learned to accept the conditioning of objects may find new ritual dimensions, in harmony with a geometric freezing of the real" (*The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.106).

221. Here is an extract from the manifesto of the International Union of Neoplastic Constructivists of 1922, signed by van Doesburg, Hans Richter, Karel Maes, Max Burchartz and Lissitzky, and cited by Tafuri: "This international is not the result of some humanitarian, idealistic, or political sentiment, but springs from the same amoral and elementary principles on which both science and technology are based" (cited ibid., pp.147-8).

222. Ibid., p.148.

223. Cacciari, "The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., p.9. According to Cacciari the Metropolitan experience is infused through and through with the negative - this is, after all, its definition - infused with devaluation, with the removal of all quality, and with a complete subjection to a field of equivalent signs. The ideology appropriate to the Metropolis is "negative thought"; and its most advanced exponents have been those who accepted disenchantment: Weber, Nietzsche, Keynes, Baudelaire, and Benjamin.

224. Ibid.

Negative thought reflects the structural contradictions of the Metropolis: "negative thought presupposes contradictions", and signifies "the discovery of the negativity of the Metropolis itself".[225] Fantasies and illusions of the good life, of the organic city - whether in social visions, or in art - are mystifications of the worst kind. Negative thought, in contrast, presupposes devaluation (*Entwertung*). The negative is negative "precisely because it is *Entwertung*", Cacciari argues: it accepts that escape (practical or theoretical) is hopeless, simply "a prayer for consolation".[226] It not only assumes its own total immersion within the condition of the Metropolis, it takes this seriously. Simmel, Cacciari continues, addressed negativity, but only went so far with negative thought, following the logic of the negative only to the point where the social equilibrium - its synthesis and recuperation - might be cut off. He treated negative thought as an entity with some autonomy from the Metropolis, able to take its distance in sociological objectivity. As such, Simmel only described the relations of the Metropolis, but remained oblivious to its function as a tool of political domination.[227] Consequently, Cacciari argues, Simmel's exploration of *Verstand* and *Nervenleben* did not progress to a theory of *Vergeistigung* of capitalist production relations, but tried instead to forge a synthesis of the individual and society, of the particular and the general.[228] Simmel thereby assimilated the negative, and constantly organising his analysis under the sway of humanist values. In contrast, Cacciari argues, Benjamin's

225.   Ibid., p.10. For Cacciari, "negative thought registers the leaps, the ruptures, the innovations that occur in history, never the transition, the flow, the continuum", and, with echoes of Negri, he continues, "herein lies its formidable function, its value as symbol; it represents not merely a movement of crisis in the growth of capitalism but the very crisis serving as a function within this growth" (p.13).
226.   Ibid., p.19, p.20.
227.   Simmel himself concludes "The Metropolis and Mental Life" with the statement: "it is our task not to complain or to condone but only to understand" (Simmel, op. cit., p.339). He did not explain the *use* of *Nervenleben* and *Verstand*, and he saw the division of labour, Cacciari says, as nothing more than "specialisation" ("The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., p.11) and scope for some "freedom" and "individuality" (Simmel, op. cit., p.324). In fact, Simmel did note some of the less benign effects of the division of labour, although Cacciari's point stands.
228.   Simmel: "It is the function of the metropolis to make a place for the conflict [of individual and totality] and for the attempts at unification of both of these in the sense that its own peculiar conditions have been revealed to us as the occasion and the stimulus for the development of both" (Simmel, op. cit., p.339).

analysis more fully sublimates Metropolitan stimuli, and "the cultural forms of the Metropolis appear totally integrated into the overall functions and contents of its growth".[229] In Benjamin's Metropolis "no aura can survive", everything and everybody is engulfed.[230] The subject, discovering his own commercialisation, learns to enjoy "being simultaneously torturer and tortured".[231] This sado-masochistic image is one favoured by Benjamin;[232] here, for Tafuri and Cacciari, it functions as a transition from object to subject. In fact, the crossing of this "divide", the collapsing of the distinction, is precisely what is at stake not just in the Metropolis, but in negative thought, and not just in the negative thought of Benjamin, but also in that advocated and adopted by Tafuri and Cacciari. As Cacciari put it, "the negative assumes within itself, completely internalizes 'the tragedy of the given', and lets it speak for itself";[233] the negative presupposes shock and presumes *no distance* from that shock. Or as Tafuri puts it (in a different context): "criticism takes over the instruments hitherto belonging to the object of analysis".[234] What we need, Cacciari says, is an approach which is self-conscious of what it means to "integrate the negative within itself".[235]

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229.   "The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., p.17.
230.   Ibid., p.21. Benjamin describes Baudelaire's crowd as one which engulfs the "observer", which internalises the circulation of commodities in a way which is analogous to the labour process itself; hence, "the image of shock reveals its own class status" (p.21). Likewise, Tafuri discusses Baudelaire's flâneur as the new user of the city, who, like Baudelaire himself, had to acknowledge "his own unendurable position of participant" (*Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.80) in the world of merchandise (and, therefore, his own prostitution). This discovery of the object's commercialisation forms a tension with those false and deluded attempts to recover authenticity. There is, in other words, no longer any culture which is autonomous from the Metropolis - no *Kultur* and no ideology of the "city"; now that we face Metropolitan shock, Cacciari says, thought can no longer dominate lived experience. Moreover, attempts to deny or reduce the negative are futile: "the perspective of the negative reemerges" ("The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., p.16).
231.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.119.
232.   See Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, op. cit., pp.184-5.
233.   "The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., pp.19-20.
234.   "The Uncertainties of Formalism", op. cit., p.76.
235.   "The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., p.16.

IV. Completed Nihilism

Thus negative thought is seen - when exercised not only on its external object but also when it exercises itself - as an appropriate response to the Metropolis, capital and its alienation. Nihilism has been "the motivating force of the age of technique", Tafuri wrote, and "has always claimed for itself the field of differences between the project and utopia".[236] This nihilism has to be "completed", Cacciari argues; one must take Nietzsche and Heidegger "seriously".[237] What might this mean?

Nietzsche's position in relation to avant-gardist negation seems straightforward; after all, he advocated nothing less than the death of God, the death of tradition and the death of values. The association of his writing with the avant-garde (both in historiography and the texts of the avant-gardists) typically points to the avant-garde's "nay-saying" - a nay-saying voiced with the force and gusto of a Zarathustra, the Nietzschean *Ubermench*.[238] Concluding the second essay of his *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), Nietzsche stated: "If a temple is to be erected *a temple must be destroyed*: that is the law", and described "Zarathustra the godless" as "this Anti-Christ and anti-nihilist; this victor over God and nothingness".[239] Tafuri, in his analysis of the avant-garde, constantly foregrounds the Nietzschean strain (for example, Dadaist and Futurist "gaiety"); and Cacciari situates Nietzsche's work as part of the negation of value that is necessary to predicate the modern world (a negative thinker alongside Weber, Keynes, etc.) - a narrative within which Tafuri's own analysis must be situated.[240] However, the

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236. *History of Italian Architecture*, op. cit., p.198, p.199.
237. Ibid., p.199. Tafuri is paraphrasing Cacciari.
238. Many artists of the inter-war period were confirmed Nietzscheans, and many had read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in their youth, prior to World War 1 (Dix, Picasso, Le Corbusier, spring immediately to mind).
239. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Random House, 1969, p.95, p.96. This conclusion to the second essay contains calls for destruction (what is popularly associated with Nietzsche), Cacciari's and Negri's thesis (the interrelation of negation and rebuilding), and the thorn with which we must grapple (the question of challenge to nihilism, negation and nothingness). See also *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), Penguin, 1969.
240. Nietzsche's statement that "it is a scandal that one takes the trouble even of denying God" (cited Löwith, op. cit., p.9) reeks of the resignation of "total alienation".

coupling of the name Nietzsche with the concept of negation has, since Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, been brought into question. [241] On Deleuze's reading, it is an anti-nihilism and anti-negation which best typifies the Nietzschean approach; and, in saying this, we must not understand that *anti-* stance, that *against negation*, as a Hegelian *negation of the negation* - for Deleuze's account aims specifically at distancing Nietzsche from Hegel. It is precisely this question of Nietzschean nihilism and Nietzschean negation which needs interrogating.

Nietzsche discusses the emergence of human morality and dismisses the existing philosophical accounts of ethics. These are, he argues, overwhelmingly subsumed by "the slave revolt in morality",[242] a "sickness" which Nietzsche thinks has dominated humanity since the shift from the Greco-Roman to Judeo-Christian era. Contrasting the noble knightly-aristocratic type to the base slave "herd", Nietzsche distinguishes two versions of morality: respectively, the "good versus bad" ("master morality") and the "good versus evil" ("slave morality").[243] Whereas the noble says "I am good, therefore you are bad", the slave says "you are bad, thus I am good". In other words, the noble's mode of valuation is, as Nietzsche puts it, its own "positive basic concept" which grows out of itself, and "seeks its opposite [the base] only so as to affirm itself more gratefully and triumphantly".[244] The slave's morality, however, is defined negatively; the slave defines himself as good in *reaction* to his conception of "the Evil One". This re-active morality is, Nietzsche argues, characterised by *ressentiment* (a sort of festering resentment).[245]

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241.   Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, The Athlone Press, 1983.

242.   *On the Genealogy of Morals*, op. cit., p.34.

243.   The noble type is, Nietzsche asserts, powerfully physical, sensual, and healthy; he engages in war, hunting and vigourous dancing. Needless to say, the herd are unhealthy, anti-sensuous, impotent and abstinent.

244.   Ibid., p.37.

245.   Ibid., p.39. It is important to note that *ressentiment* does not play passivity to the noble's activity, but is re-*active*. Likewise, slave morality does not play the "will-less" to the "will to power" of the *Ubermensch*, but is a particular (self-contradictory and degenerate) manifestation of the will. Interestingly, given it recurrence in this dissertation, Nietzsche goes on to locate the concept of "guilt",

> The slave revolt in morality begins with *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values.... While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is "outside", what is "different", what is "not itself"; and *this* No is its creative deed. This inversion of the value positing eye - this *need* to direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself - is of the essence of *ressentiment:* in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order ~~out~~ at all - its action is fundamentally reaction.[246]

Deleuze specifically takes this distinction of affirming noble and negating slave as an argument against Hegelian negativity. Accordingly, even moments of affirmation in the Hegelian dialectic are seen as essentially negative, and the dialectic of self-affirmation always begins with the recognition of the "not-I" realising itself as the "not-not-I". For Deleuze, a properly affirmative outlook rejects opposition, contradiction and negation, and, instead, *differentiates* itself in a "Dionysian Yes".

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central to slave morality, in the relation of debtor and creditor: "Setting prices, determining values, contriving equivalences, exchanging - these preoccupied the earliest thinking of man to so great an extent that in a certain sense they constitute thinking *as such*.... man designating himself as the creature that measures values, evaluates and measures, as the 'valuating animal as such'" (p.70). Dismissing any inherent authority of law or morality - which, Nietzsche insists, are latecomers on the human stage, the *product* of all this buying and selling - Nietzsche returns us to the enactments of a will-preserving individual, a will now perverted by the spirit of *ressentiment*. Both the noble's forgetting and the slave's memory are the *active* desires of a *will;* but while the former is "a form of *robust* health" (p.58), Nietzsche argues, the latter is sick. Indeed, slave morality uses memory "to stand security" (p.58) for any credit, and to imprint, as "fixed ideas", the "unforgettable" historical acts of violence and violation conducted against the bodies and possessions of bad debtors. Compensation for the bad debt is, for the creditor, a veritable festival of cruelty, a pleasure in one's exercise of power over another - although, this pleasure has, in recent centuries, been compromised by shame and guilt. With Christianity, man's indebtedness towards his origin has no "prospect of a final discharge", it is an "irredeemable penance" (p.91). Indeed, with Christianity, even the creditor cannot escape, "the creditor sacrifices himself for his debtor, out of *love* (can one credit that?)" (p.92)!

246.   Ibid., pp.36-7.

Deleuze's argument has been very influential, but, is open to many substantive criticisms.[247] My own sense of Nietzsche's *Genealogy* - besides a general distaste for his class prejudice and irrationalism - is that it is primarily a critique of Schopenhauer.[248] In the preface, Nietzsche states the continuity between this book and *Human, All Too Human,* a continuity which concerns Schopenhauer, "my great teacher", but also Nietzsche's main target.[249]

> What was especially at stake was the value of the 'unegoistic', the instincts of pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice, which Schopenhauer has gilded, deified, and projected into a beyond for so long that at last they became for him 'value-in-itself', on the basis of which he *said No* to life and to himself. But it was against precisely *these* instincts that there spoke from me an ever more fundamental mistrust, an ever more corrosive scepticism! It was precisely here that I saw the *great* danger to mankind, its sublimest enticement and seduction - but to what? to nothingness? - it was precisely here that I saw the beginning of the end, the dead stop, a retrospective weariness, the will turning *against* life, the tender and sorrowful signs of the ultimate illness: I understood the ever spreading morality of pity that had ceased even on philosophers and made them ill, as the most sinister symptom of a European culture that had itself become sinister, perhaps as its by-pass to a new Buddhism? to a Buddhism for Europeans? to - *nihilism*?[250]

The *ressentiment* of the slave is voiced, Nietzsche argues, by a priestly caste. Asceticism, or ascetic ideals - propagated by the ascetic priest - form the philosophical

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247. See Daniel Breazeale, "The Hegel-Nietzsche Problem", *Nietzsche-Studien*, 1975, vol.4, pp.146-64. Breazeale gives a resumé of both the arguments of Deleuze and those who argue for the "*rapprochement*" of Hegelian and Nietzschean philosophies. Breazeale's own view is that Deleuze's account is important, but that it is cavalier with Nietzsche's text, and that Deleuze bases his own understanding of Hegel on Hyppolite and Wahl "from which he adopts the conclusion (with none of their prudent qualifications) that the unhappy consciousness is the 'essence of Hegelianism'" (p.159). Indeed, Nietzsche's own sense of Hegel is largely secondary, based on Burckhardt, Strauss, Hartmann, Stirner and Bruno Bauer. Moreover, Breazeale argues, Deleuze makes some substantive mistakes: firstly suggesting that Hegel ignored "real difference" for "abstract oppositions", whereas Hegel discussed precisely this in his distinction between "concrete difference" and "essential difference"; secondly, Deleuze charges Hegel with having a formal and abstract sense of negation and affirmation - a common but inexcusable mistake, Breazeale observes. In the end, Breazeale goes on, Deleuze's sense of Nietzsche is partial - a partiality that is driven by Deleuze's determination to set Nietzsche against Hegel. Nietzsche's critique of "Hegelian" history can be found in "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life", op. cit.
248. Even Heidegger found it necessary to remark that Nietzsche's philosophy was one only for "overmen"(Breazeale, op. cit., p.157). Unlike Hegel's, Schopenhauer's was an oeuvre - along with that of Plato and Kant - with which Nietzsche had a substantial and primary engagement (p.158).
249. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, op. cit., p.19. The third essay of the *Genealogy* is entitled "What Is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?"
250. Ibid.

backbone, and apogee, of *ressentiment*: "pleasure is felt and *sought* in ill-constitutedness, decay, pain, mischance, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, self-mortification, self-flagellation, self-sacrifice".[251] Asceticism, Nietzsche says, is "a self-contradiction", it is paradoxical: "a discord that wants to be discordant", that grows more satisfied the more its own life diminishes.[252] Appearing to itself as utter will-less-ness, asceticism's denial of the self is, in fact, its very opposite: the assertion of the will; its claim to be disinterested - to be concerned with knowledge-in-itself (or pure reason) - is interested; its seemingly nay-saying, is, in fact, yay-saying.

> ... *the ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of a degenerating life* which tries by all means to sustain itself and to fight for its existence.... the cases... the opposite of what those who reverence this ideal believe: life wrestles in it and through it with death and *against* death; the ascetic ideal is an artifice for the *preservation* of life.[253]

> The No he says to life brings to light, as if by magic, an abundance of Yeses; even when he *wounds* himself, this master of destruction, of self-destruction - the very wound itself afterward compels him *to live*.[254]

The role of the ascetic priest is to detonate the forces that have built up - festering in the herd of *ressentiment* - without simultaneously destroying the herd and himself, in a sort of controlled explosion.[255]

Schopenhauer noted that the "grace" of asceticism, or self-denial and surrender, lead into "empty nothingness".[256] This consequence of renunciation is, he argued, often evaded by resorting to myths of reabsorption. He distinguishes two types of "nothing": *nihil privativum* and *nihil negativum*; respectively, a nothing that is relative to that which it negates, and a nothing that is absolute and "in every respect... nothing".[257] The latter,

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251.   Ibid., p.118.
252.   Ibid., p.117, p.118.
253.   Ibid., p.120.
254.   Ibid., p.121.
255.   Utilising a range of devices (consolation, mechanical activity, petty pleasure, congregation), the priest aims to catalyse "an orgy of feeling" (ibid., p.136).
256.   Schopenhauer, op. cit., p.409.
257.   Ibid.

however, is beyond conception.[258]

But while Schopenhauer criticised those who failed to take on the full consequences of "empty nothingness", Nietzsche turns the same argument on Schopenhauer. In the end, Nietzsche insists, asceticism cannot face the *horror vacui*, but seeks to fill it with its interpretations (offering meaning to man's suffering).[259] Nihilism in Nietzsche, then, *is* about "the death of God" and "the death of values", about meaninglessness and the lack of grounds for truth, validation and legitimation.[260] Forecasting that "Christianity *as morality* must now perish" and that "we stand on the threshold of *this* event", Nietzsche argues that: "All great things bring about their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming [*Selbstaufhebung*]".[261] This coming to self-consciousness will reveal what

258.   Ibid., p.409. "For it is a word-combination; it is an example of the unthinkable which is necessarily required in logic to demonstrate the laws of thought.... Thus every *nihil negativum* or absolute nothing, if subordinated to a higher concept, will appear as a mere *nihil privativum* or relative nothing, which can always change signs with what it negates, so that would then be thought of as negation, but it itself as affirmation" (p.409). Schopenhauer's conclusion is an extreme form of idealism, albeit one generated on negativity. Being, he argued, is usually assumed to be positive, the negation of nothing, but is in fact "the world as representation" (p.410), along with the word and the concept (the material of philosophy). The in-itself (will or noumena) is nothing: "Denial, abolition, turning of the will are also abolition and disappearance of the world, of its mirror. If we no longer perceive the will in this mirror, we ask in vain in what direction it has turned, and then, because it no longer has any *where* and any *when*, we complain that it is lost in nothingness.... No will: no representation, no world" (p.410, p.411).
259.   The will to nothingness was a *will*; "man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will", Nietzsche argues *"the will itself was saved"* (*On the Genealogy of Morals*, op. cit., p.163, p.162).
260.   Nihilism, Nietzsche wrote, proceeds when "Nothing is true any longer, everything is permitted" (cited Löwith, op. cit., p.15), and Zarathustra seeks a victory over the Nothingness that results from the death of God. See also Stanley Rosen, *Nihilism: a Philosophical Essay*, Yale University Press, 1969. Rosen argues that nihilism results from the philosophical decision to separate reason and the good (p.xiv), compounded by the subsequent characterising of reason as objectifying, alienating and reifying (p.xv). In a non-nihilistic society, "the discontinuity of remembering and forgetting is overcome by tradition" (p.230), and he argues for the revitalisation of traditional ideals instead of acquiescence to their loss (p.233). Löwith locates the rise of nihilism in the mid-19c., when, as he puts it, "European historians no longer follow the pattern of progress but that of decay" (Löwith, op. cit., p.7); by the 20c., he continues, no "truly educated people" could evade the nihilistic belief or "the disavowal of existing civilization" (p.10). For Löwith, however, the root of nihilism is the "still unfinished era of revolutions" since 1789 and the dissolution of old religions and moral unity since the German Reformation (p.3).
261.   *On the Genealogy of Morals*, op. cit., p.161.

has been hidden or repressed; or rather, it will reveal *nothing*.[262] Completed nihilism,

then, is this facing of nothingness.

In a point that echoes Negri, Cacciari maintains that, one should, instead of trying

constantly to resolve the negative, look at the fundamental contradiction to which it

points. By allowing that negativity to proceed to its limits - by surrendering to it -

negative thought, submits to the fall into the depths of "its own hopelessness", as Hegel

put it - into "utter dismemberment". Here we encounter, Cacciari notes, the

"symbol-place of the contradictions".

> The negative stays within the limits of the Metropolis, since it has uncovered the
> Metropolis's negativity. But this negativity, once demythified, demystified, and
> thrust whole into *Erlebnis* [lived experience] and *Verstand*, presents an image of
> the Metropolis as symbol-place of the contradictions and functions of modern
> capitalist society. The negative, used correctly - that is, according to the terms of
> its own hopelessness, and not mystified as a requisite for synthesis, as a prayer
> for consolation - leads to this limit.[263]

This opposition to synthesis as a figure of "consolation" is echoed in Tafuri's sense of

synthesis as a self-deluding search for origins and fullness.[264] Historiography, Tafuri

argues, entertains a fiction when it believes that it can "fill" the gap - the "silence" -

between history and its object. Criticism, then, must throw itself, and its language, into

crisis along with the object. Historical work should be conscious of its own "murders" -

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262.   It is not just asceticism and slave morality which has hidden this. Nietzsche locates this with the emergence of animals from the sea! With the exposure of their "unconscious and fallible drives" (ibid., p.84) these animals: "were reduced to thinking, inferring, reckoning, co-ordinating cause and effect..; they were reduced to their 'consciousness', their weakest and most fallible organ!.... All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn inward* - that is what I call the *internalisation* [*Verinnerlichung*] of man: thus it was that man first developed what was later called his 'soul'" (p.84). From this violent sundering of man from his animal past came "bad conscience", "man's suffering... *of himself*", "an animal soul turned against itself" (p.85). The "instinct for freedom" or will to power, is "pushed back and repressed, incarcerated within and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself" (p.87). The violent break is compared to an "artists' violence"; and Nietzsche argues that its "form-giving force" manifests itself as either internalised bad conscience (*ressentiment*), or as externalised in the will to power (or instinct for freedom) exercised upon another.

263.   "The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., p.20.

264.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.1. "'Negative thought' had enunciated its own project for survival in its refutation of the Hegelian dialectic and a recovery of the contradictions this had eliminated. 'Positive thought' does nothing but overturn that negativeness on itself. The negative is revealed as such, even in its 'ineluctability'" (*Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.76)

its self-reflexivity must be relentless.[265] It must work within, and explore, that negative space, "descend[ing] into the interstices of techniques and languages" in order to elaborate the limits.[266] What is encountered there is "the silence surrounding the sign", the "residue", the "insuppressible boundary", "the limit that separates language from silence".[267] Negativity, argued Tafuri, must be *made* to speak: speak of its making, its becoming, its function, its conflicts. But what, one may be entitled to ask, does this "making speak" produce? Tafuri tells us that the historian must make the silences, or negativity, into "determinate abstractions", and do so in order to establish "historic space".

> Historical space... explores what such distance expresses: it probes what appears to be a *void*, trying to make the absence that seems to dwell in that void speak.[268]

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Llorens refers to Tafuri's and Cacciari's work as "neo-avant-garde", and as "radical gauchisme".[269] He argues that their claim - that their "dialectics of negativity" is Marxist *and* anti-Hegelian - is, in fact, Nietzschean and pre-Kantian.

> The role of "negation" in Hegel's dialectics is often misunderstood. Hegel made it correspond to the second of Kant's "regulative principles of reason"... or, more properly, "determination". It can be said that Marx "inverted" Hegel by transferring this category from the epistemological to the ontological domain - or rather, by giving priority to the latter; in this sense he went further than Hegel in his critique of Kant's anti-metaphysical stance. But for this interpretation to make sense, it is necessary that the original framework, ie the postulation of a *transition* between the epistemological and the ontological, be retained. This is precisely what makes it possible to speak of marxist *dialectics*.... Like Marx, Nietzsche "inverted" Hegel by postulating the priority of the ontological. But

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265.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit. Cf. Tafuri's comments on architectural theory and practice: "it is the conflict of things that is important, that is productive" ("There is no criticism, only history", op. cit., p.11); or on the historian's activity: "Distance is fundamental to history; the historian examining current work must create *artificial* distance" (p.10).

266.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.13..

267.   Ibid., p.148.

268.   Ibid., p.13.

269.   Llorens, op. cit., p.94, footnote 15.

unlike Marx he did so by breaking it free from the critical framework of
epistemology. Therefore there is no transfer, in Nietzsche, of logical categories,
and his "negativity" is "negation" in a pre-kantian, material sense. How one can
then speak of dialectics - Hegelian or not - I do not understand.[270]

I am inclined to agree with Llorens, but the accusation he makes seems scarcely a shock
when Nietzscheanism has been wielded so self-consciously, and neither does it get to
grips with the arguments with the established Left that such work proposes. Moreover -
and as we shall see later - some may see the issues at stake here as already present in
Hegel. What I find interesting is the passage in Tafuri's and Cacciari's work; not the
passage "from" workerism "to" nihilism - for this reduces the complex interchanges of
the terrain, and ignores that nihilism, for these thinkers, was always inscribed in their
form of Marxism - but the passage of negativity.

The dislike for "mediation" and the preference for negation appears not too far from the
Frankfurt School; and the "social factory" seems remarkably similar to "total
reification". As for Adorno, the power of the negative has been compromised or tamed,
and strategies must be devised for retrieving it, but whereas Adorno's perspective sees
the demise of the social agent for change, the Italians maintain activistic elements in their
thought which pulls them closer to the far edges of Young Hegelianism.[271] With
Adorno they share a taste for the more ascetic forms of modern art/architectural practice
and are suspicious of the radical claims of the avant-garde. For Adorno, "autonomous
art" is the last home of negativity as critical distance and non-identity; for Cacciari and
Tafuri, a Loos, or a Mies, simply stops trying to resist *Vergeistigung*, giving in with the

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270.   Ibid., p.94, footnote 28.
271.   Cacciari: "... our progression should be from the negative, to the Metropolis as an instrument
of class, to its negativity as a contradiction of class: from the perspective of the negative to the
perspective of class." ("The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., p.16). Cf. Negri
where rupture is counterposed to mediation, simple negation to dialectical negation: "The dialectic is
finished. Hegel is dead. What remains of Hegel is the self-consciousness of the bourgeois world. The
bourgeois world is dialectical and cannot but be dialectical. But we are not. The workerist critique is not
today the restoration of the dialectic, but rather the discovery of the terrain and the form of the conflict"
(Negri, "Labor in the Constitution", op. cit., p.135).

view to coming out the other side. As Cacciari puts it, negative thought:

> ... lays bare the logic of this society...; the negative reaches the point where it exposes this society's internal conflicts and contradictions, its fundamental problematics or negativity.[272]

Moreover, it seems that we need to read the criticisms of avant-gardism not so much in the context of the differences between Brecht and Adorno, but as a critique of post-war social democracy. In the end, what Cacciari and Tafuri seem to propose is both more reification and less; completed nihilism and revolution; Nietzsche *and* Negri, so to speak. "Facing the negative" is the *nihil* of total negative thought, accepting the inorganic *and* the working class as negation - a class tamed, not destroyed, and uninterrupted class struggle.[273] Indeed, in a 1978 lecture, Negri argues that "negative thought, ripped from its bourgeois origins, is a fundamental element of the workers' point of view".[274] I would suggest, reductive as this formulation is, that it is possible to see Tafuri and Cacciari as far-left Adornians. Once again, we encounter the self-conscious movements from object to subject, and also the simultaneous compromising and reassertion of negation. This reassertion of negation, however, is not a retreat to the core of the mimetic moment of autonomous art, as it becomes for Adorno, but an assertion of class autonomy and its "ineliminable antagonism".

272.   "The Dialectics of the Negative and the Metropolis", op. cit., p.19.
273.   In an article written in 1964 (although not published for over a decade), Negri reiterates that: "Even though capital's own essential negation arises from the capitalist process itself, capital cannot destroy that negative force but must tame it. The negation inheres within capital as a necessary product, which continually grows larger as capital extends across society, and which continually grows more antagonistic as the social accumulation of capital abstracts the value of labour and consolidates it in the dead substance of its own power. An uninterrupted process of struggle is thus initiated" (Negri, "Labor in the Constitution", op. cit., pp.59-60). And of the working class he notes that "its very existence is the sign of a latent dissociation" (p.60). He distinguishes a "capitalist Aufhebung" which holds down the working class, and "the Aufhebung of the working class" which "burns the successive levels of capital's development, reproposing its rupture and its supersession" (p.61).
274.   Antonio Negri, "Capitalist Development and Revolutionary Class", *Marx Beyond Marx. Lessons on the Grundrisse*, Pluto Press, 1991, p.188.

Chapter 3

ABSOLUTE DIALECTICAL UNREST,
OR, THE DIZZINESS OF A PERPETUALLY SELF-
ENGENDERED DISORDER

"What is laid on us is to accomplish the negative - the positive is already given"[1]

The negative has also had an interesting life in the writings on art in the journal *October*.

These texts, especially from the late '70s and early '80s echo the same moment, and to

some degree the same concerns, as those addressed in Chapter 1. But while the

modern/postmodern debate is again central, both the writers and their pitch are distinct

from those concerns voiced at the conferences in Vancouver and Chicago in the early

'80s. Indeed, the latter may, to a certain extent, be seen as responding to some of the

agendas of *October*. At least on the surface, the fascination with postmodern art,

photography, and allegory - which characterises a central tendency in *October* - seems

not to foreground the term "negation", probably because it resonates too much with the

heritage of/unfavoured intellectual tradition of Hegel. But it is present in this work in a

range of alternative designations - gap, disjunction, discontinuity, difference[2] - which

shape the direction of debates and the formulation of concepts, as is, ironically, that

unwanted tradition itself, in the attention to the writings of Lacan and Bataille. Here the

postmodern condition and the crisis of High Modernism are seen to induce an

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1.   Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, cited Edwin Honig, *Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory* (1959), Oxford University Press, 1966, p.161.
2.   The rejection of the "unities of historicist thought as tradition, influence, development, evolution, source, and origin", for "concepts such as discontinuity, rupture, threshold, limit, and transformation", is acknowledged by Douglas Crimp as Foucauldian. See Douglas Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins" (1980), *On the Museum's Ruins*, MIT, 1993, p.47. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Tavistock, 1972. It may be worth noting that, for Stanley Rosen, "the fundamental feature of nihilism is *discontinuity*" (Rosen, op. cit., p.230). Gillian Rose attributes these Foucauldian principles - anti-identity, anti-analogy, anti-resemblance, anti-opposition - to Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche. She argues that Foucault reduces the concept of history to four principles - reversal, discontinuity, specificity, and exteriority - which treat history as an "event". See Gillian Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism. Poststructuralism and Law*, op. cit., p.203. As we have seen, the sense of history as "event" is central to the account of Tafuri and Cacciari.

"allegorical impulse", as Craig Owens called it.[3]

Allegory introduces a specific form or life of negativity into the methodologies of art history, and is, perhaps, negativity's most resolutely art historical form. "Allegory", it should be noted, is but one possible articulation of, one name for, a commitment to discontinuity and disjunction, albeit one which has a special presence in art. In other words, I see the opposition of allegory and symbol - which will be discussed in this chapter - not as *the* root of the debate, but as one formulation of, one figuring of, a philosophical problem. In many ways, this chapter may appear to be a departure from the concerns addressed so far: the emphasis is more on rhetorical figures, the historical material worked through may be Baroque (in the case of Benjamin) or Romanticism (de Man), and neither of the key authors is as overtly political as some of those in Chapters 1 or 2. The connection with my earlier accounts exists in part in the use of this material for accounts of modernism and postmoderism, and in part from the return to the issue of affirmative plenitude and negation. The symbol is the rhetorical figure of "throwing together" (*sum-ballein*), allegory is that of "other-speaking" (*allos-agoreuein*) - that is, broadly speaking, the one privileges identity, the other non-identity.

A look at the history of allegory shows at least some residual antipathy towards it since Plato, and its rise and fall as a significant genre. Rhetorically speaking, it is an "extended trope" or "figure", which can include within it other tropes.[4] Typically, allegory is a "twice-told tale", which depends upon an original authoritative text such as the Bible.[5] Its roots seem to be in textual exegesis: firstly in the exegesis of Homer's

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3.   See Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism", published in two parts, *October* 12, Spring 1980, pp.67-86 and *October* 13, Summer 1980, pp.59-80. These essays form part of a wave on the theme of allegory and postmodernist art in the late-1970s and early-1980s. See, for instance, Joel Fineman, "The Structure of Allegorical Desire", *October* 12, Spring 1980, pp.47-66, and essays by Douglas Crimp and Stephen Melville, which will be introduced in the course of discussion.
4.   Edwin Honig, op. cit., p.114.
5.   Ibid., p.12.

Odyssey and Iliad, and the Pergamean school's defence of Homer from the Pre-Socratics; and later in the exegesis of the Bible. In the latter case, this consisted of making of analogies between episodes and themes in the Old and New Testaments, largely driven by, Quilligan tells us, the need to modernise the ancient scriptures and make them meaningful for a changing world.[6] In this sense of being twice-told, then, allegory can be seen as "double"; but it is also double in the sense that it sets up analogies and correspondences between its "realistic" (or better: its "literal") and its "symbolic" levels, producing, when handled well, what has been called, an "allegorical waver".[7] This, in turn, points to a third valence of allegory's "doubleness": this "waver" may play with our ethical and epistemological frameworks, suggesting an "ambivalence" between the good and the bad, or truth and falsehood.[8] Fletcher notes C.S. Lewis' comment that "Allegory's natural theme is temptation", and Anne Ferry argued that "Satan is the father of lies, the father of Sin, and in a special sense, the father of allegory".[9] This Faustian quality has a ring to it which perhaps makes it especially seductive for the modern ear, but the analogy with this myth for the modern age - and, within it, the role of the spirit of negation - suggests something of the stakes that allegory is seen to provoke.

Traditionally and typically, allegorical texts were structured around the theme of a journey - for example, Dante's *Commedia*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Faerie Queene* - in which the protagonist encounters a range of personifications or daemons (some which may be aspects of himself, some which may be entirely other to his being; some which may be good, others evil). Significantly, the journey involves the loss of home, an alienation from some first moment, in order that the hero may come to face and

6. Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory. Defining the Genre*, Cornell University Press, 1979, p.29.
7. Honig, op. cit., p.125.
8. See Quilligan, op. cit., p.235, p.241; and Angus Fletcher, *Allegory. The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, Cornell University Press, 1964, p.219.
9. Lewis cited ibid., p.36. Ferry cited Quilligan, op. cit., p.179.

overcome a number of challenges - as he progresses via battles, and psychomachic struggles between good and evil - before "regaining", or returning, "home". The passage may be presented as a literal journey, or it may be fantastic, or it may progress through both, but, traditionally, these travels were allegories of (Christian) spiritual self-discovery, leading to a more profound reconciliation with God, the "home". Such works, of course, took as their ur-text the Christian Bible.

In the post-Reformation period, however, the textual authority of the Bible for allegories waned, and, depending on how one reads the histories, allegory either went into demise, or it transposed itself into its modern form.[10] Quilligan, for one, identifies the demise of previous allegorical ages with the growing suspicion of language and rhetoric. Whereas from late antiquity to the Renaissance etymology had been treated as a category of thought, subsequently there was a waning of the belief in the "sacralizing power in language" which allegory had presupposed.[11] Francis Bacon called the "study of words and not matter" the "first distemper", and from the 17c., Quilligan argues, "things" come to take precedence over language.[12] However, there has been, Quilligan goes on, a revival in the interest in language as a means of "interpenetrating the nonverbal world",

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10. Fletcher argues that Northrop Frye was wrong to think that we are in "anti-allegorical" times; rather, allegory has proliferated, but in "anti-affirmative", regressive, "katagogic", essentially negative, kako-daemonic, or evil-daemoned forms (Fletcher, op. cit., p.157, p.159, p.341). Quilligan insists that modern allegory is characterised not by optimism, but by doubt (Quilligan, op. cit., p.200), and that such doubt is not "overcome" in the course of the allegorical novel's progress. In this sense, modern allegory is also marked not just by the ambivalence of the "waver" but by ambiguity. Honig describes how "the ambivalent personification, though framed in a religious dualism whose doctrinal base has crumbled, seems to measure the distance that exists between the world of reality, order, and truth" (Honig, op. cit., p.117). In its modern form, Honig writes, allegory often incorporates its authority within its own structure, as, for instance, with the history of whaling in Melville's *Moby Dick* (p.104). Quilligan sees allegories - both modern and pre-modern - as "narrative investigations of their own threshold texts" (Quilligan, op. cit., p.53), and as incorporating within themselves their own acts of self-referential allegoresis. For Quilligan, allegory is an investigation into language's potential to lead the reader astray with its polysemous character. "If he [the reader] does not perceive this basic fact of his language [polysemy], his words will confuse and ultimately control him through their dangerous polysemousness" (p.63). This approach gives a particular linguistic ring to the katagogic account of the modern allegorical form.
11. Ibid., p.156.
12. Ibid., p.173, p.157.

present in Freud, but made central by French structuralism - including Barthes, Kristeva, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan; Quilligan includes here what has come to be associated with poststructuralism - which again asks "how language defines our present episteme".[13] We have, according to Quilligan, writing in the late '70s, "reentered an allegorical age";[14] or, as Craig Owens put it in 1980, we are witnessing the return of an "allegorical impulse". Indeed, these commentators may themselves be seen as very much part of what they describe.[15] The tone of all these works - despite their differences of objects, approaches, philosophy, etc. - suggests an intellectual climate in which allegory had to be not just defended and justified as an appropriate literary device, but also constructed as a new (or reclaimed) world-view. This seemingly rarefied debate concerning symbol and allegory lies within the wider climate marked by a loss of faith in the modern project. (Benjamin's book, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, it may be noted, although written in the 1920s, was reissued in German in 1963 and published in English in 1977).[16]

The attention to allegory by postmodernist art criticism, then, follows a wave of interest in literary studies, and, with an interest in structuralist and poststructuralist thought, brings allegory into critical orbit of the "linguistic turn".[17] Furthermore, the terms of the questions addressed fitted well with the project - if it can be so called - to challenge the

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13.   Ibid., p.216, p.203 footnote 67.
14.   Quilligan, op. cit., p.155.
15.   A wave of attention to allegory seems to have occurred in American literary studies since 1959, when Edwin Honig wrote *Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory* (not published, however, until 1966). Angus Fletcher's *Allegory. The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* appeared in 1964, and in 1979 Maureen Quilligan's *The Language of Allegory. Defining the Genre* was published. De Man's seminal essay, "The Rhetoric of Temporality" appeared in 1969, and the collection *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, YaleUniversity Press in 1979.
16.   I will concentrate on Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* in this discussion, although he works with allegory in other works, such as his book on *Charles Baudelaire*, op. cit.
17.   For an extended discussion of the linguistic turn see, for example among a vast literature, Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, California University Press, 1994. For a recent questioning of this, and the suggestion that we now find ourselves in a "pictorial turn", see W.J.T. Mitchell, "Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture", op. cit.

dominance of Greenbergian Modernism.[18] If language and rhetoric had to be defended against the suspicions of Anglo-American philosophy with its empiricist bias, on the one hand, it was also necessary, on the other, to clarify a defence against a very different form of antipathy to allegory: the symbol. Indeed, these two challenges echo the terrains over which allegory must distinguish itself: one which reverberates within the literary debates as "allegory versus realism", and the other as "allegory versus the symbol". We might take Benjamin's account of this as foundational, although it works over a distinct canon of writing, and, in its engagement with the Baroque, would seem to offer an object of study somewhat out of kilter with later American-based writers. In his book *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin argues that Romanticism saw the onset of the reign of the symbol, or what he refers to as "the tyranny of a usurper".[19] From circa 1800, with a new terrain of concepts and values laid out, allegory fades as a genre, as much due to the weakness of its own supporters as to the attacks by its detractors. From Goethe, through Schopenhauer, to W.B. Yeats, Benjamin argues, allegory has been posited as the prosaic to symbol's poetry, as the mechanical concept to the organic idea, as the conventional sign to the essential and true symbol.[20] The claims of Romantic and post-Romantic symbolic thought, he writes, was tantamount to "illegitimate talk" and "abuse", setting up allegory as the "speculative counterpart" to the symbol, "the dark background against which the bright world of the symbol might stand out".[21]

In this chapter I shall initially address the opposition of symbol and allegory, although the distinctions between the "real" and allegory will come, increasingly, to inflect the

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18.   *October* was neither the first not the only site where this challenge was made. See Chapter 1.
19.   Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, op. cit., 159. From now on I will refer to this as the *Trauerspiel*.
20.   In particular Benjamin charts the debate through the writings of German art historians, philosophers and aestheticians. As his targets he has Creuzer and Görres from the early 19c.; Hermann Cohen and Carl Horst (both Neo-Kantians), and (more favourably) Karl Giehlow from the early 20c. See, for example, *Trauerspiel*, pp.168-77.
21.   Ibid., pp.160-1.

discussion. The "real" is constantly implied by the *October*-ist critique of representation, although it is less explicit in their accounts of allegory. I shall be addressing not only allegorical negativity, but also the moves by which negativity comes to extend to the very limits of allegory, indeed, even to allegory's "beyond".

SECTION ONE: ALLEGORICAL NEGATIVITY, SYMBOLIC POSITIVITY & PREMATURE SYNTHESIS

I. Disruptions & Impluses

Craig Owens' two part essay "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism" (1980) is seminal in the art-historical reemergence of allegory. According to Owens, this impulse marks the revival of the fortunes of allegory following a long period of suppression by art theory - indeed a "permanent strategy" of suppression from Romanticism through Modernism.[22] Owens locates the return of allegory with "Postmodern" art - or, at least, with art which challenges the High Modernist canon. Now a set of practices - practices both in terms of technique and attitude - had emerged which inverted that long-standing hierarchy, and which had valorised those long despised qualities of allegory. Owens is quite explicit about the impact of this: this allegorical impulse threatens the very foundations of formalist aesthetics.[23]

Douglas Crimp makes a similar point. Photography's entry into the museums is seen to

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22.   Craig Owens, part 1, op. cit., p.83.
23.   In this sense, he represents a similar concern to that expressed at, for example, the 1981 conference "Modernism and Modernity", discussed in Chapter 1. However, both the intellectual resources and some of the sites of struggle are distinct. Owens shapes allegory with the resources of structuralism and poststructuralism (the supplement, the palimpsest, the shift from speech to writing, image to text; counter-narrative tendencies; the breaking of sign from referent and signifier from signified; the constant deferral of meaning). Allegory, here, is associated explicitly with the arbitrary sign (ibid., p.82).

introduce a disruptive impulse just at the very moment when museology is asserting a powerful homogenising gaze upon its contents. In his essay "On the Museum's Ruins" (1980), Crimp describes Andre Malraux's "Museum without Walls" - a museum achieved through the possibilities of photographic reproduction. Imagining that it might enable the free comparison of art- and museum-objects throughout the world's museums, Malraux's museum is seen, by Crimp, as dissolving at the very point where photography becomes not just the means of reproducing art-objects, but where photographic-objects are also presented, as objects, within this "museum". Here, photography is seen as a force of "heterogeneity" which cannot be suppressed or contained as some servant to the desire to homogenise. [24] Appearing at the very heart of the universalising project, it has the power to unravel the systems of knowledge which this project proposes. For the most part, Crimp argues, Malraux can contain this force by treating it as a means - the universal language - by which to bring together disparate and diverse objects; but the introduction of the photographic-object into his museum fails "For even photography cannot hypostatize style from a photograph". [25] Robert Rauschenberg's work of the early 1960s is seen to have had a similar effect, and to have "threatened the museum's order of discourse":

> The vast array of objects that the museum had always attempted to systematize now reinvaded the institution as pure heterogeneity. [26]

This same destructive force - considered inherent in photography - is seen to be at play in the institutionalisation of a photographic canon, or in the elevation of photography to the status of art, in Crimp's article "The Museum's Old, the Library's New Subject"(1981). [27] The attempts by John Szarkowski to construe photography "ontologically", to override its plurality, and to bring it into the modernist mainstream

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24.   Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins", op. cit., p.56.
25.   Ibid.
26.   Douglas Crimp, "Appropriating Appropriation" (1982), in Crimp, op. cit., p.134.
27.   Douglas Crimp, "The Museum's Old, the Library's New Subject" (1981), in Crimp, op. cit., pp.66-83.

of the Museum of Modern Art, demanded, Crimp argues, a revision of the paradigm of

modernism:[28]

> ... and it can happen only because that paradigm has indeed become
> dysfunctional.... it is photography's reevaluation as a modernist medium that
> signals the end of modernism. Postmodernism begins when photography comes
> to pervert modernism.[29]

Here, the larger claims echo the point made about Malraux's project, one where:

"heterogeneity is reestablished at the heart of the museum; its pretensions to knowledge

are doomed".[30]

Owens also foregrounds practices which are largely defined by the photograph - here,

what have come to be accepted as postmodern practices, and which he considers to be

self-conscious in their use of photography's powers: for example, the work of Robert

Longo, Sherrie Levine, and Cindy Sherman. Owens sees the photographic medium as

central to the allegorical character of such practices; indeed, the practice of photography

is designated "an allegorical art" par excellence, and the mechanical reproducibility -

which traditionally ensured such a lowly status for photography vis-à-vis art - is seen as

the source of its strength.[31] As Owens describes it: "Allegory is consistently attracted to

the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete".[32] Such work witnessed the return of

devices of appropriation, site specificity, discursivity, accumulation, hybridisation. For

example, Sherrie Levine's practice of photographing the photographs of canonical

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28.   Ibid., p.72.
29.   Ibid., p.77.
30.   "On the Museum's Ruins", op. cit., p.56. The futility of the search for knowledge is emphasised in Crimp's discussion - via Foucault and Eugenio Donato - of Flaubert's novel, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. The two protagonists realise that "the knowledge they've relied on is a mass of haphazard contradictions quite disjunct from the reality they'd sought to confront" (p.51). Donato describes how the museum's fiction of coherence dissolves into: "'bric-a-brac', a heap of meaningless and valueless fragments of objects which are incapable of substituting themselves either metonymically for the original objects or metaphorically for their representations" (Donato, cited p.53).
31.   Owens, part 1, op. cit., p.71. For Fletcher, allegory's "mechanical" qualities are precisely its virtue, and this is considered to violate the principle of "disinterestedness" - a point that would fit well with the critique of Greenberg.
32.   Ibid., p.70.

photographers (such as Ed Weston or Ansel Adams) shows the device of appropriation at its most obvious, and is also seen as a discursive practice, treating its "(re)sources" as textual. Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* is cited as an example of site specificity, relating the work to the particular myths of the lake in which it was made. This work is also seen as an example of impermanence - considered appropriate to allegorical art - as it decays and dissolves back into the landscape, "preserved" by the allegorical, and photographic, "ruin".

According to Benjamin Buchloh, the return of properly allegorical procedures - procedures which Buchloh considers to have been central to the historical avant-garde - is prepared by artists such as Asher, Buren and Broodthaers in the mid-'60s. Their work, Buchloh argues, "integrates the historical ramifications of the Ready-made model and the consequences of a self-referential analysis of the pictorial construction itself".[33] In other words, there emerges a dual approach: a recognition and intervention both at the level of the sign's framework - audience, institutions, etc., or what is called "situational aesthetics" - and at the level of the sign's own internal structures.[34] All these practices are dubbed "allegorical deconstruction" by Buchloh - that is, he tells us, a simultaneously negating and not negating process - and are seen to pave the way for the "paradigmatic shift" of the late-'70s, represented by artists such as Birnbaum, Lawler, Rosler, and Levine.[35]

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33.   See Benjamin Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures", op. cit., p.47. The same argument is made by Peter Bürger in *Theory of the Avant-garde*, op. cit.
34.   Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures", op. cit., p.48. Buchloh states explicitly that these developments produced a situation which could never be retracted - "an irreversible change in the cognitive conditions of art production" (p.48). This situation is seen as echoing another one provoked, much earlier, by Cubism, and establishes a reading of "historical logic".
35.   Ibid., p.47. Here, Buchloh considers the different problems attendant on the varying political strategies of these artists under conditions where their resistances can be easily absorbed and recuperated, but where, nevertheless, certain temporary assaults on the institution can be maintained.

II. Some Disjunctions

Allegory has been referred to, disparagingly, as artificial, excessive, mechanical, and inorganic.[36] Honig, in his opening pages, notes a more extensive list of derisive terms: allegory, its opponents claim, is obvious, polemical, sermon-like, formulaic, doctrinal, and dated. These terms of dismissal - or the nub of their force - need to be further explored. This takes us back to the question of allegory's "double-ness". Honig describes allegory as "the product of disjunction between the workings of reason and the workings of the imagination" and "a disjunction between the 'inside' and the 'outside'".[37] Likewise, Owens favours allegory's "atomizing, disjunctive principle", its positing of "the distance between an object and its significance".[38] According to Honig, the split between subject and object is the core to the allegorical world-view, a split which, although still present in the Romantics, was programmatically denied through the post-Romantic period.[39] Fletcher also raises the themes of distance, remoteness and alienation[40] - what might also be described as allegory's incorporation of both thesis and antithesis, its conscription to some form of "otherness", or its belonging to a post-lapsarian world. Allegory has a "characteristic splitting" - indeed, the key allegorical agent in his account, the daemon, probably has at its etymological root the idea of division[41] - and allegory exists, he argues (reminding us of some of its supposed Satanic qualities), to put secondary meanings into play, to induce dualities, pluralities, and polysemy.[42]

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36.   The genre, Fletcher argues, is geared to rigid, ritualised control and schema, fixed hierarchies, lack of individual freedom for its characters, and a structure whereby the whole controls the function of all parts and agents (Fletcher, op. cit., p.64, p.198). Details control the character's "fictional destiny" and serves "the purposes of magical containment" (p.199). The protagonist behaves with almost the logic of a robot, and allegorical agents are the machines or engines of a shamanistic "fantasied energy" (p.58).

37.   Honig, op. cit., p.4, p.5.

38.   Owens, part 1, op. cit., p.79, p.85. The first phrase is straight from Benjamin (*Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.208).

39.   Honig, op. cit., p.50.

40.   Fletcher, op. cit., p.96.

41.   Ibid., p.43.

42.   Ibid., pp.220-1.

Echoing some of these characteristics of allegory, Buchloh links allegory with montage

through a consideration of the inter-war European avant-gardes:[43]

> The procedure of montage is one in which all allegorical principles are executed:
> appropriation and depletion of meaning, fragmentation and dialectical
> juxtaposition of fragments, and separation of signifier and signified.[44]

This Saussurean dichotomy - signifier and signified, sign and referent - has shaped

innumerable attempts to renovate art history, despite the problems attendant on the

application of a (not uncontroversial) language model for analysing the visual realm.[45]

In establishing the nature of allegory - in terms of its split between signifier and

signified, its fragmentation - Buchloh explicitly draws upon Benjamin's Baroque book,

and his "Central Park" essay.[46]

> The allegorical mind arbitrarily selects from a vast and disordered material that its
> knowledge has to offer. It tries to match one piece with another to figure out
> whether they can be combined. This meaning with that image, or that image with
> this meaning. The result is never predictable since there is no organic relation
> between the two.[47]

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43.   Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures", op. cit., p.43. He calls this "the dialectic of montage".
44.   Ibid., p.44. He takes the argument, via Duchamp, to the American post-war "neo-avant-garde",
as Bürger would call them. Like Bürger, Buchloh sees the "neo-Dadaists" (this is not his term) as a form
of "liberal reconciliation" (p.46) which fell "for the premature delusion of an immediate reconciliation
between high art and mass culture' (p.47). Accordingly, Greenberg's resistance to Duchamp, despite its
grounding of "conservative formalism", probably contained nevertheless "a moment of radical truth"
(p.47). Here Buchloh gives an Adornian gloss to the subject.
45.   For visual analysis, Roland Barthes' approaches to the photographic images have been central.
See, for example, Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image" (1964), *Image-Music-Text*; Fontana, 1977,
pp.32-51; "The Photographic Message" (1961), ibid, pp.15-31; "Myth Today" (1957), *Mythologies*,
Paladin, 1973, pp.117-74. Many of these ideas were adopted by the projects of *Screen*, and extended into
the analysis of films; by Judith Williamson in *Decoding Advertisements. Ideology and Meaning in
Advertising*, Marion Boyars, 1978, and by Erkhardt Siepmann's account of Heartfield's photomontages
in "Heartfield's 'Millions' Montage: (Attempt at) a Structural Analysis", *Photography/Politics: One*,
eds. Terry Dennett et al., Photography Workshop, 1979, pp.38-50. How useful this model was beyond
analysing advertisements, and other explicitly "coded" visual production, soon began to tell. See, for
example, Margaret Iverson, "Saussure v. Peirce: Models for a Semiotics of Visual Art", *The New Art
History*, eds. A.L. Rees and Francis Borzello, Camden Press, 1986, pp.82-94.
46.   See Walter Benjamin, "Central Park" (1939-40), *New German Critique*, vol.34, 1985, pp.32-
58.
47.   Cited Buchloh, op. cit., p.46.

Benjamin's terms of description, in the *Trauerspiel*,[48] point to the distinction of symbol

and allegory along the lines of immediate identity and disjunction, or presence and

distance. Symbolic language insists, he writes, "on the indivisible unity of form and

content", implied the "unbroken whole" of the beautiful and the Divine, or the "unity of

the material and the transcendental object".[49] Picking up on these points, Owens

describes Modernist criticism as symbolic, emphasising the "indissoluble unity of form

and substance" and "pure presence".[50] The symbol, de Man echoes in "The Rhetoric of

Temporality", posits an "intimate unity" between subjective experience and the

representation of that experience, "an intimate unity between the image that rises up

before the senses and the supersensory totality that the image suggests"; it "postulates

the possibility of identity or identification".[51] This marriage of experience and language

draws together an otherwise distinct and disparate array of experiences into "a

configuration of symbols ultimately leading to a total, single, and universal meaning",

he argues, paraphrasing Gadamer.[52]

Where the symbol is traditionally seen as self-contained, as concentrated Being, or as

the direct incarnation of the Idea, a totality - the sine qua non of art and poetry, or that

which overbrims and multiplies in suggestive possibilities - allegory is traditionally

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48.   The book, based on a failed Habilitation thesis, addresses 17c. German dramatic works of the Baroque period, largely through comparisons with similar, but, in certain senses, more successful plays from Spain (such as those by Calderón). It is interesting not only for its analysis of the designated object - Baroque art - but also for its implicit claims for modernity and its art forms; and many of the themes can be traced into Benjamin's later work. Many of the themes and figures of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* can be seen in "A Small History of Photography", op. cit. For instance, cf., Benjamin's emphasis on the meaning (and power of meaning) secreted in the folds of drapery in ibid., p.248, and in *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.191.

49.   *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.160. Cf. Ernst Bloch's's distinction which draws on Benjamin: allegory is characterised by *Alteritas* and by being transitory and "On The Way", symbol by *Unitas* and by being an archetype of "a strict Absolute or final sense". See Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol.1 (1938-47, revised 1953 and 1959), MIT, 1995, pp.175-6. The discussion of allegory and symbol falls in Part Two, "Anticipatory Consciousness", in the subsection entitled "Discovery of the Not-Yet-Conscious or of Forward Dawning..."

50.   Owens, part 1, op. cit., p.81.

51.   Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (1969), *Blindness and Insight. Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, second edition, Minnesota University Press, 1983, p.189, p.207.

52.   Ibid., p.188.

presented as its opposite: a lesser, dogmatic art, a sign with finite meanings.[53] Both
Benjamin and de Man revalorise these qualities as one aspect of their revising of
allegory. It is, Benjamin writes, an idea, different from "itself", a substitute, a
fragment.[54] Allegory is structured, de Man insists, in such a way that:

> ... the relationship between sign and meaning is discontinuous, involving an
> *extraneous* principle that determines the point and the manner at and in which the
> relationship is articulated.... [T]he sign points to something that differs from its
> literal meaning and has for its function the thematization of this difference.[55]

Consequently, allegory explicitly challenges both the organic claims to correspondence
attributed to the symbol (and the claim to a mimetic continuity between fiction and
reality). In other words, to the attributed immediacy and identity of symbol (and, we
should note, also of mimesis), allegory is counterposed as non-identical, disjunctive,
different and discontinuous. It is, Benjamin notes, and as Creuzer had said (albeit
disparagingly), a *Zeichenallegorie*, or sign-allegory.[56]

We can explore further how Benjamin describes allegory in terms which emphasise
"radical disjunction", or "the disjunctive, atomizing principle of the allegorical
approach".[57] Allegory, he argues, accumulates fragments, sees the world in fragments
or ruins, and makes its art fragmentary, like *disjecta membra*.[58] The dialogues of the
Baroque plays, or Trauerspiele - with their discontinuous, halting rhythm, and staccato
of conversational content - are less "dialogues" intent on conveying narrative or

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53. The classic example of this account is Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual; or,
the Bible the Best Guide to Political Skill and Foresight: a Lay Sermon, Addressed to the Higher
Classes of Society*, in *Lay Sermons* , second edition, ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge, London, 1879. "It is
among the miseries of the present age that it recognizes no *medium* between literal and metaphorical.
Faith is either to be buried in the dead letter, or its name and honors usurped by a counterfeit product of
the mechanical understanding, which in the blindness of self-complacency confounds symbols with
allegories". To the symbol's "translucence", allegory is defined as "a translation of abstract notions into
a picture-language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses" (p.230).
54. *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., pp.163-6.
55. "The Rhetoric of Temporality", op. cit., p.209.
56. *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.163.
57. Ibid., p.193, p.208.
58. Ibid., p.199.

communicating, and more commentaries or captions. Such "dialogue", Benjamin suggests, is characterised by "the irregular rhythm of the constant pause, the sudden change of direction".[59] "The division between signifying written language and intoxicating spoken language", he writes, "opens up a gulf in the solid massif of verbal meaning".[60] The use of anagrams releases both word and sound from meaning and communication, and such linguistic material is reduced to empty signs awaiting orchestration by the allegorist.[61] Benjamin describes the components of allegory in terms of atomised image-ruins, orchestrated as *tableaux vivantes*.[62] These German plays of the 17c. operate with a duality of meaning (the literal and the proper meaning in the double titles), and with a radical disjunction of meaning and reality, which has echoes in the very tectonic structure of the plays, and even in the structure of the theatres.[63]

The symbol, he claims, "remains persistently the same", but allegory must constantly resist "absorption" by utilising "shock". Christine Buci-Glucksmann explains that this "logic of dislocation" in Benjamin counters that of symbolic transcendence, and can be found in allegory and montage (in both Surrealist and Brechtian modes), and in the emphasis on trauma, shock, spleen, and distancing.[64] Allegory's shocks, then, are like the "alienation effect" discussed in Chapter 1. This can be seen in Benjamin's work on Baudelaire's Paris, where he attempts to break open the conventions of seeing, and "the empathy of the soul with the commodity".[65] She goes on to parallel this "baroque reason" - or "the reason of allegory and the Other, the reason of an unreconciled history"[66] - with "a rent Marxism", as opposed to "Marxisms of progress"; and this is

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59.   Ibid., p.197.
60.   Ibid., p.201.
61.   Ibid., p.207, p.209.
62.   Ibid., p.195.
63.   Ibid., p.193-4.
64.   Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason. The Aesthetics of Modernity* (1984), Sage, 1994, p.48.
65.   Ibid., p.76.
66.   Ibid., p.89.

further associated with, respectively, female- and male-type metaphors, where the former emphasises break and rupture. Here negation is emphasised:

> ... the metaphor of the feminine then rises up as an element in the break with a certain discredited rationality based upon the idea of a historical and symbolic continuum. It does this by designating a new heterogeneity, a new otherness.... a whole network of negativity escaping the dominance of the Concept, a whole 'culture' of the feminine.... a culture of *Spaltung*, of splitting...[67]

This "consciousness of rupture" is again given further layers by Buci-Glucksmann with, what she describes as, a Judaic sense of history, as radically insecure, unstable and catastrophic.[68] The rupture is, she asserts, the "gulf between reality and illusion" which - and this may, in the light of the discussions of Chapter 1, be significant - "cannot be bridged".[69]

It is this rupturing device of shock which, for Benjamin, renders redundant each successive form taken by allegory, and registers discontinuity into the historical continuum.[70] Nevertheless, he writes, allegory foregrounds history, hence the virtue of its didacticism, for it is orientated for present use, not for future prosperity.[71] Here, the similarities with the projects and practices championed by Owens can be seen.

> Throughout its history allegory has demonstrated a capacity for widespread popular appeal, suggesting that its function is social as well as aesthetic; this would account for its frequent appropriation for didactic and/or exhortative purposes.... The withdrawal of the modernist arts from allegory may thus be one factor in their ever-accelerating loss of audience.[72]

Work such as Levine's, Owens implies, figures in a political battle with the forces of Greenbergian modernism, operating in some cause of greater populism. Rejecting the

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67.   Ibid., p.49.
68.   Ibid., p.63.
69.   Ibid., p.71. For a contrasting account of gender in allegory, see Helga Geyer-Ryan, *Fables of Desire*, Polity Press, pp.197-8. Geyer-Ryan sees de Manian allegory as a repression of corporeality, specifically the mother's body, and describes allegory as a figure of patriarchal treatment of the feminine with the female body made a sign for masculine meaning. Even Benjamin's allegory is not exempt from this criticism: "allegory is a battlefield on which the body - especially the female body - is torn apart" (p.199).
70.   *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.183.
71.   Ibid., p.181.
72.   Owens, part 2, op. cit., pp.72-3.

claim to an art of transcendence and aesthetic validity, postmodern practitioners collect their "ruins" from modernism's corpse, raid the archives of mass culture, assembling statements which intervene in contemporary discourses (artistic and political), alerting their "reader-spectators" to historical contingency.

> The appropriated image may be a film still, a photograph, a drawing; it is often itself already a reproduction. However, the manipulations to which these artists [Longo, Levine, Brauntuch] subject such images work to empty them of their resonance, their significance, their authoritative claim to meaning.[73]

Here emancipatory claims are associated with the freeing of meaning from any fixity, privilege, or origin.[74] Similarly, Crimp writes of Sherman:

> Her photographs show that the supposed autonomous and unitary self out of which those other 'directors' would create their fictions is itself nothing other than a discontinuous series of representations, copies, and fakes.[75]

Like Benjamin, de Man picks up an ethical dimension to his reconsideration of the symbol/allegory opposition. Among de Man's targets are the tropes of symbol, metaphor, synecdoche, mimesis, and personification; all are, he thinks, figures privileging immediacy, presentness, plenitude and genetic (or organic) causality; and all have had privileged roles within, what he calls, the "aesthetic ideology" engendered by Romanticism. This privileging of the symbol has been accompanied by an increasing faith in its powers, and a progressive and uncritical acceptance of its structures, such that few ever bother to interrogate its workings, except as an exercise in shoring up its already established status.[76] It would be a mistake, however, to think of the symbol just

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73.   Ibid., p.69.
74.   Cf. Crimp's comments on Richard Prince's re-photographed photographs, or, more specifically, on the commodity fetishism to which they are seen to refer: "It has, we might say, acquired an aura, only now it is a function not of presence but of absence, severed from an origin, from an originator, from authenticity. In our time, the aura has become only a presence, which is to say, a ghost " ("The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism" (1980), in Crimp, op. cit., p.124).
75.   Ibid., p.122.
76.   De Man suggests that all this provides temptations; or, as Jameson puts it, for de Man Romanticism represents a "moment of seductiveness" (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, op. cit., p.221). De Man: "The aesthetic is, by definition, a seductive notion that appeals to the pleasure principle, a eudaemonic judgment that can displace and conceal values of truth and falsehood likely to be more resilient to desire than values of pleasure and pain". Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory*, Manchester University Press, 1986, p.64.

as *immediate* identity and *pure* presence. For aesthetic ideology, synecdoche is the favoured trope, one which draws an "intimate unity" between a part and the whole. This is not a "causal" link, or contiguity, in the more "mechanical" or "quantitative" manner associated with the trope of metonymy, but an "organic" and "qualitative" connection. Indeed, the very terms used to make this distinction echo those which distinguish allegory and symbol, as well as the terms traditionally employed to set a non-dialectical account against a dialectical one.[77]

The emergence of Romanticism, and with it the symbol, is described, by de Man, as laying claim to a growing play of traditional oppositions: mind and nature, subject and object, depth and surface. From operating by means of "associative analogy" in the early 18c. - an analogy between self and non-self, subject and object, consciousness and nature - there was, he argues, as the century progresses, a move to "a more vital form of analogy, to one of "affinity" and "sympathy".[78] With this, the key relation shifts from the realm of the intersubjective to that of the intrasubjective, and to the elevation of the subject as the "infinite self".[79] Thus, those more thoughtful critics, as de Man acknowledges, conceive of the symbol/metaphor as a dialectical synthesis: "a dialectic between subject and object, in which the experience of the object takes on the form of a perception or a sensation".[80] Nevertheless, de Man objects to this manner of reconciliation or *return* to immediacy - "prematurely synthesizing" activities, Norris calls them - for it is, in his view, a far stronger claim.[81] This issue is central to de Man's work. In "Form and Intent in the American New Criticism" he challenges Stephen

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77.   The relation or difference between metaphor, synecdoche and metonymy is a fraught issue. For a summary discussion of the "Metaphorical-Metonymical dyad" versus a "fourfold conception of the tropes", see Hayden White, op. cit., pp.31-33 footnote 13.
78.   "The Rhetoric of Temporality", op. cit., p.195.
79.   Ibid., p.196.
80.   Ibid., p.195.
81.   See Christopher Norris, *Paul de Man. Deconstruction and the Critique of Aesthetic Ideology*, Routledge, 1988. The terms of Crimp's description of Levine's work are also worth noting: "no combinations, no transformations, no synthesis" ("Appropriating Appropriation", op. cit., p.129).

Ullmann's claim that a continuity can be drawn between surface and depth, that is, between sensory and subjective experience. Taking Erich Auerbach's argument that Western literature demonstrates a "struggle between sensory appearance and meaning" as his starting-point, de Man writes:[82]

> ... if this is indeed the case, the study of the "sensory *appearances*" that is the field of stylistics can never lead to the real meaning of the themes since both, at least in Western literature, are separated by a radical discontinuity that no dialectic is able to bridge.[83]

In "The Dead-End of Formalist Criticism", he argues against William Empson's characterisation of art as the reconciliation of opposites.[84] In "The Rhetoric of Temporality" this same mediating role for art is identified in the work of Jean Starobinski and Peter Szondi, who, de Man argues, manage to treat even irony - another trope of disjunction and discontinuity (and closely associated with allegory) - as a way *beyond* disjunction and alienation: for Starobinski, as a reconciliation of spirit and world; or, in the case of Szondi, as "a reconciliation between the ideal and the real as the result of an action or the activity of the mind".[85] In "Literary History and Literary Modernity", de Man criticises literature's tendency to attempt "to fulfil itself in a single moment", and to try to destroy temporal distance.[86] "The temptation of immediacy",[87] to which de Man refers, the dangers of "impatient 'pastoral' thought: formalism, false historicism, and utopianism", the desire to reconcile and to redeem through art: against all these one must be constantly vigilant, for they are the lures into the trap of aesthetic ideology.[88]

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82.   Paul de Man, "Form and Intent in the American New Criticism", *Blindness and Insight*, op. cit., pp.20-35 (an earlier version of the essay was published in French in 1966). De Man cites Auerbach on p.23.

83.   Ibid., p.23.

84.   Paul de Man, "The Dead-End of Formalist Criticism", *Blindness and Insight*, op. cit., pp.229-245.

85.   "The Rhetoric of Temporality", op. cit., p.220.

86.   Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity" (1972), *Blindness and Insight*, op. cit., pp.142-165. Citation from p.152.

87.   Ibid.

88.   "The Dead-End of Formalist Criticism", op. cit., p.241.

This point can be taken further if we attend closely to de Man's argument. De Man suggests that the tropes and figures of aesthetic ideology are not only the *objects* of literary criticism and theory (to be found, and valorised, in the texts under study), but also structure the critics' and theorists' own patterns of conceptualisation. Indeed, he suggests that this is *so* to such an extent that a trope like synecdoche is imposed everywhere (it is seen everywhere) in the very acts of perception, cognition and understanding,[89] hinting at the severity of the undertaking at hand. The issue appears to be clear. Allegory, it would seem, points to radical non-identity, and explicitly challenges both moments of identity and moments of reconciliation, both in the simple sense of disjunction/discontinuity, and the more complex dialectical *Aufhebung*. I will argue, however, that to leave things here would be a mistake, and that neither de Man nor Benjamin do so. The difference lies in the sense of disjunction propounded.[90] This will involve some playing with the Devil, who will, as always, be something of a shifting persona.

III. Some Problems

Benjamin argued that allegory plays through a progression of temporal moments,[91] and de Man wrote that allegory's "temporal void" implies "an unreachable anteriority".[92] In

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89.   In other words, he suggests, there is some transference between object and subject. On this, see for example, "Form and Intent in the American New Criticism", op. cit., where de Man describes how the hermeneutic process is misrecognised. The critics (here formalist ones) see their own interpretation, but mistake it as belonging to their object of study.

90.   Fred Orton, in *Figuring Jasper Johns*, Reaktion, 1994, argues that Owens et al. are mistaken to fix the allegory/symbol distinction on, respectively, Postmodernism and Modernism. Orton takes this analogy to be less secure, and suggests that these critics simply invert the valorisation of allegory and symbol (pp.12-13). My approach shares these criticisms, but is centred on the understanding of disjunction, and the failure to grasp its transpositions and transferences - the dynamics which shape the approaches in the work of both Benjamin and de Man.

91.   *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., pp.163-6.

92.   "The Rhetoric of Temporality", op. cit., p.222.

"The Dead-End of Formalist Criticism", the importance of the stakes for this sense of disjunction is clarified:

> A truly historical poetics would attempt to think the divide in truly temporal dimensions instead of imposing upon it cyclical or eternalist schemata of a spatial nature...[93]

For de Man, in "The Rhetoric of Temporality", then, the essential point about allegorical disjunction is its temporal nature.

> Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an *identity* or identification, allegory designates primarily a *distance* in relation to its own origin.[94]

Allegory, explains de Man, is not the mechanical assertion on the relation of sign and meaning - as the language of the symbol might suggest - but rather a *relation between* signs, "the repetition... of a previous sign".[95] Allegory, then, indicates not only the radical disjunction of sign and meaning, etc., which is so frequently emphasised, but, more precisely, a disjunction at the level of the temporal rather than the spatial - a distance which, as we shall see, sets up a dynamic of transferences. Moreover, de Man continues, allegory represents a "repetition... of a previous sign with which it can never coincide", and it "renounc[es] the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference".[96] This "unveiling of an authentically temporal destiny", or "discovery of a truly temporal predicament", represents the unveiling of man's self-mystification, specifically his attempt to seek immutability through an "affinity" with nature.[97]

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93.   "The Dead-End of Formalist Criticism", op. cit., p.242.
94.   "The Rhetoric of Temporality", op. cit., p.242, my emphasis.
95.   Ibid., p.207.
96.   Ibid.
97.   Ibid., p.207, p.222. This figures as Goethe's *Dauer im Wechsel*, or eternity in motion. De Man isolates within the move to affinity and analogy an aporetic kernel, unbeknown to the historians of Romanticism, but around which, by the dynamic of their own analysis, they are forced to circle: "They are obliged, on the one hand, to assert the priority of object over subject that is implicit in an organic conception of language... [putting] the priority unquestionably in the natural world, limiting the task of the mind to interpreting what is given in nature... [and, on the other hand, they] confer an equally absolute priority to the self over nature" (pp.197-198). This contradiction between the solipsism of subjective idealism and a secularised naturalism is described by de Man as "a pseudo dialectic" (p.198), and one which is itself supported by the assumptions about the symbol.

[Allegory] prevents the self from an illusory identification with the non-self, which is now fully... recognized as a non-self.[98]

The dialectical relationship between subject and object is no longer the central statement of romantic thought, but this dialectic is now located entirely in the temporal relationships that exist within a system of allegorical signs. It becomes a conflict between a conception of the self seen in its authentically temporal predicament and a defensive strategy that tries to hide from this negative self knowledge.[99]

This is much like Benjamin's figure of the death's-head, reminding us of our mutability, but not simply to dent man's pride, as in a vanitas or memento mori, but more specifically as a hindrance to any attempt to hide from this knowledge. The issue, then, turns on challenging those modes of thinking which try to maintain the illusion, and refuse to face up to, indeed *conceal*, the truth; and it is in this epistemological claim - this claim to "truth" - that de Man and Benjamin, to note but one way, differ fundamentally from Owens and Crimp.[100]

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Veering, at times, closer to Crimp's and Owens' position, Maureen Quilligan, in her account of allegory, explicitly rejects the claim to allegorical "disjunction". For her, the "other" of allegory's *allos* is not some second level of meaning beyond or beneath the literalness of the text itself. She argues that the tradition of allegoresis - that is, the textual interpretation of sacred texts, a vertical interpretation of hidden meanings suggesting metaphors of surface and depth, shell and kernel - should not be confused

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98.   Ibid., p.207.
99.   Ibid., p.208.
100.   We should note, however, that a predisposition to structuralism and poststructuralism is not necessarily the only prerequisite for adopting the reading of symbol and allegory used by Owens and Crimp. The valorisation of the Saussurean disjunction is challenged, for instance, by Helga Geyer-Ryan. She argues that all signifying practices are acts of "the violence of semiosis" or processes of figuration and disfiguration, but that "The more signifier and signified are torn apart to form hermetic constellations and hard edges, the deeper the essential abyss which opens up between them, an abyss bridged only by conventions. In this abyss, violence reveals itself as a strain on meaning" (*Fables of Desire*, op. cit., p.198). Nevertheless, like Owens, she sees allegory as a violent and unmediated construction (p.199).

with allegory.

> It does not name the many other things language means, or the disjunction between saying and meaning, but the often problematical process of meaning multiple things simultaneously with one word.[101]

But from this argument for polysemy, Quilligan, without ever moving in a de Manian direction, comes to argue for some compatible dynamics. Instead of attending to the disjunction of word and meaning, of literal and metaphorical, or the gaps between different levels of meaning, she argues - instead of trying to *translate* the texts (an exercise which tends to downgrade the textual surface, and can degenerate into seeing allegory as mere "double-talk") - we should be concerned, she argues, with "the relationships across the gaps".[102] These are "the problematic tensions", tensions between literal and metaphoric, which play out across the very surface of the text.[103] She advocates "the most profound attention to the radical significance of that much-dismissed literal surface", an attention which has often been seen as tantamount to formalism, but which has also been significant for deconstructive accounts.[104] Allegory, she writes, involves complex webs of meaning working across "horizontal verbal surfaces", "peopled by words moving about an intricately reechoing landscape of language".[105] Indeed, the disjunctions encountered here have to be treated with caution: "There are disjunctions in this surface, or illogical juxtapositions of sequence, which tempt translation as a means of bridging the gaps".[106] The reader is constantly involved in acts of critical self-reflexivity in which they must repeatedly interpret their interpretation, and reconsider its validity - "the text constantly invites and then exposes the reader's imposition of meaning".[107] Quilligan implies that there is a difference

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101.   Quilligan, op. cit., p.26.
102.   Ibid., p.27.
103.   Ibid., p.67.
104.   Ibid., p.29.
105.   Ibid., p.33, p.156. Cf. Buci-Glucksmann, op. cit., pp.84-5, on the woven, labyrinthine nature of Benjamin's concept of allegory.
106.   Quilligan, op. cit., p.235.
107.   Ibid., p.252, p.277.

between "bridging the gaps" and attending to "the relationships across the gaps", the

"problematic tensions". This temptation to translation - as an all-too-easy reconciliation -

edges close to de Man's warnings about aesthetic ideology, or the reliance on tropes like

synecdoche at crucial points of difficulty.

Fred Orton in *Figuring Jasper Johns*, like Quilligan and de Man, emphasises a close

rhetorical attention to the "surface matter" (as distinct from "subject matter"), and refuses

to "find" the meaning as if it was awaiting the arrival of some master decoder. While

disjunction is a theme retained - along with allegory's gap between signifier and

signified - Orton suggests a disjunction or gap which figures closer to what we might

call aporia.[108]

> Mute and eloquent, opaque and lucid, *Flag* works in the space of difference
> where it articulates well-rehearsed oppositions and disarticulates them. Neither
> positive nor negative, but both positive and negative, *Flag* cannot be resolved
> into a pure positivity or a pure negativity and seems always to force seeing and
> understanding, reading and writing to another time and place.[109]

This needs to be seen in contrast to the accounts of postmodernism given by Owens (its

being beyond modernism), but also to Greenberg's account of Johns, related by Orton

as follows:

> Greenberg thinks that Johns's painting marks a moment of development,
> mediation and transition in which one quality is about to be, but is not yet,
> negated by its opposite: 'he brings de Kooning's influence to a head by
> suspending it clearly, as it were, between abstraction and representation'. An
> effective Johns' painting holds image (subject) and surface in tension. If either is
> allowed to become predominant, the value, the pleasure, the effectiveness is
> lost.[110]

Orton refers to *Flag*'s "non-synthesized tension", which suggests a different weight to

Greenberg's sense of a surface in tension or in clear suspension.[111]

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108.   *Figuring Jasper Johns*, op. cit., p.169, p.14, p.145.
109.   Ibid., p.146.
110.   Ibid., pp.134-5.
111.   Ibid., p.131. Cf. some of the arguments in Chapter 1.

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Stephen Melville, responding to the wave of essays on allegory in *October*, identified a

number of problems with the accounts of this "reemergence of 'allegory'".[112] The terms

of this response are interesting, for Melville identifies and challenges a tendency by

Owens to de-allegorise allegory; in other words, Melville criticises the presentation of

postmodernism as a radical break with modernism. Melville's "hinge" on this occasion

is the work of Michael Fried, in particular, his categories of "art and objecthood" and

"absorption and theatricality". These terms coincide, in their conceptual economy, with

symbol and allegory - theatricality being "work that distances itself from... the

beholder".[113] Melville notes that Fried has been associated with the prioritisation of the

symbol over allegory and has been seen in direct continuity with the Greenbergian

"dialectics of purity".[114] But, Melville argues, the rush to criticise Fried on these

grounds, as well as failing to account for the power of the argument it provides, also

fails to see that "it is between and across purity's eclipse and recovery of itself that the

work of this criticism is achieved".[115] Fried, Melville insists, describes "painting's

continuing effort to recover itself through and across its denials and evasions of its

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112.   See Stephen Melville, "Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory, the Forgetting of Modernism, the Necessity of Rhetoric, and the Conditions of Publicity in Art and Criticism", *October* 19, Winter 1981, pp.55-92. Citation from p.56. He refers to the *October* project collectively as "this baggy monster", "a position" or "a thesis" which has emerged out of a self-referring community of interests, whose members have an "embeddedness in one another" (p.90).

113.   Ibid., p.61.

114.   Ibid., p.62. With reference to Diderot, this discussion concerns painting's "primordial convention" (Fried) of being beheld like theatre. This was denied by painting in its attempt to construct for itself a project "of rational self-criticism" (p.65), and to make itself "simply present", "undivided and unposed, graceful" (p.75). To put it another way, it *attempted* to negate - Fried uses the term - this convention, but was doomed to endure the return of the repressed. See Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality. Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, The University of Chicago Press, 1980, p.103. Melville uses the terms "displacements", "deferrals", and makes analogy to "the fact and fear of castration" (Melville, "Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory", op. cit., p.65): "The beholder, always there, gazing, is the silent motor that drives the history of modern painting forward, forcing it to find behind its ever more radical claims to absorption always the same brute fact of theatre" (Melville, op. cit., p.66).

115.   Ibid., p.63.

necessary conditions". [116] Fried, then, in Melville's account, is more deconstructive than are the advocates of deconstruction, and closer to "postmodernism" than they recognise. [117] The latter's attacks upon Fried - and also modernism - are "too easy", argues Melville; and Owens' project, to establish "radical distinction and exclusion" (between modernism and postmodernism), is just a late echo of the attempt made by Fried to radically distinguish art and objecthood. [118] However, in Fried's hands, Melville claims, this radical distinction has come to unfold itself, unpack itself, and "break down". [119] The "postmodern", Melville argues, can only be properly understood as "an allegory of the modern". [120]

> Where postmodernism would mean something more radically separate from modernism (where it would forget modernism) it will end by forgetting itself as well - and it will do so by falling into the trap of modernism's favored mode of (self-) forgetting, the (non)dialectic of the mere and the pure. Postmodernism would proof itself against this risk by appealing to a deconstructive impulse working beyond the (merely) self-critical tendency of modernism - but the risk shows itself in the bare statement: the practice of deconstruction cannot rigorously hold itself apart from something called self-criticism except by hypostatizing its self in just the way it would avoid; it can articulate itself only insofar as it acknowledges explicitly its emergence from and dependence upon what might otherwise appear as mere self-criticism. [121]

Melville describes Fried's narrative as "dialectically charged" [122] - a phrase which points to the interesting boundary between dialectics and deconstruction, and one which I propose to consider via a closer look at the writings of Benjamin and de Man. De Man, we might note, also advocated a critical approach which had echoes of Adorno, and which "promised nothing except the fact that poetic thought will keep on becoming, will

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116.	Ibid., p.65.
117.	Ibid., p.74.
118.	Cf. Orton, *Figuring Jasper Johns*, op. cit.
119.	Melville, "Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory", op. cit., p.82.
120.	Ibid.
121.	Ibid., p.91. Cf. the idea of vanishing mediators. "Postmodernism" means, if anything, something about the way in which modernism must inevitably come to see in itself its own allegory (and so also something like its own failure, its non-identity with itself - but these then would be the terms of its power and success)" (p.91).
122.	Ibid., p.65.

continue to ground itself in a space beyond its failure".[123]

SECTION 2: ANXIOUS BECOMINGS

I. Ideas Evaporating In Images, & Remnants Of Meaning Lurking In The Depths Of Language

Benjamin suggests that *both* symbol and allegory became debased concepts in the hands of those who had sought to elevate the former over the latter - initially the later Romantics and, later still, the neo-Kantians, used this false symbol to evade art's ethical dimension. Although the concept of the symbol is made to sound dialectical by such writers, it has, Benjamin insists, sunk into a pale shadow. This "distorted conception of the symbol", he argues, lacks "dialectical rigour", and what claims to be a *dialectic* of appearance and essence is, in fact, nothing but a *paradox*, and "fails to do justice to content in formal analysis and to form in the aesthetics of content".[124] We must beware, Benjamin warns, of treating the terms employed in describing allegory and symbol, and their dichotomising, too rigidly.[125] Allegory's opposition to the symbol cannot be simply rendered as the opposition of "thing" to the "personal", or of "fragment" to "totality", and, even in pro-symbol literature, he finds that Görres' concept of "real symbol" comes closer to something we might call allegory.[126]

Benjamin's key argument is with the neo-Kantian tradition.[127] The criticism of the

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123.   "The Dead-End of Formalist Criticism", op. cit., p.242.
124.   *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.160.
125.   Ibid., p.196.
126.   Ibid., p.187.
127.   Gillian Rose notes that the Neo-Kantians developed an anti-dialectical account of antinomy and that they "resolve the oppositions of autonomy and heteronomy and of morality and legality into a unified legal science by drawing an 'original' category out of the *Critique of Pure Reason*… which seems to reunite the realms of the practical and theoretical, of freedom and necessity" (Gillian Rose,

symbolic mode for Benjamin is directed at the thought of Stefan George and Ludwig Klages, both of whom had some influence over the younger Benjamin, but had become the object of his distrust since the First World War.[128] For such thinkers, the symbol, like the Christian Creed, immediately *was* something (rather than being a reference to something), and Being and sign were one. In other words, the symbol-object was directly entwined with meaning - meaning was immanent to it, and did not require the intervention, or mediation, of conceptual analysis, nor even a subject to activate its significance. This immediacy of significance was seen to lie in the symbol-object's material presence, and everything and every meaning was, as Julian Roberts puts it, "immediately physical, natural, and sensory".[129] For Klages this "picture" was "unspeakable", accessible only by "insight" (*Schauung*) - the access to which might be enabled by "ecstasy", attainable perhaps by means of drugs or a state of drunkenness. The "insight" was accompanied, Klages wrote, by "the radiant trembling which surrounds it in the moment of becoming".[130]

In the *Trauerspiel*, however, it is the Neo-Kantians Hermann Cohen and Carl Horst who figure larger than George or Klages. Benjamin challenges their attempts to maintain allegory's subservient status. They fail, he says, to grasp dialectical complexity, indeed, these writers see ambiguity as something to be mistrusted, or as something which - through its hybridisation of different forms of representation - is, as Horst put it, "a harsh disturbance of the peace and a disruption of law and order in the arts".[131]

Dialectic of Nihilism. Poststructuralism and Law, op. cit., p.4). This is a philosophical tendency which Rose associates with poststructuralism.

128.   Cf. de Man's antipathy to aesthetic ideology. Nevertheless, Benjamin continues to draw much from the thought of these thinkers. These thinkers, around whom significant circles of intellectuals congregated represent, in fact, certain transformations from neo-Kantianism proper. Especially noteworthy is the ontological turn which finds its major proponent in the figure of Heidegger (he developed the ideas later); not to mention many aspects of Benjamin's own thought. See Julian Roberts, *Walter Benjamin*, Macmillan, 1982.

129.   Ibid., p.109.
130.   Cited ibid., p.107.
131.   Carl Horst cited in Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.177. Here one senses the association that the symbol had, for Benjamin, with some enforced social stability, and part of the investment that he had with the negative, destructive, and allegorical. "Ambiguity", Benjamin writes in "Paris - the Capital

> The undialectical neo-Kantian mode of thought is not able to grasp the synthesis which is reached in allegorical writing as a result of the conflict between theological and artistic intentions, a synthesis not so much in the sense of a peace as a *treuga dei* between the conflicting opinions.[132]

In his "Epistemo-Critical Prologue", Benjamin criticises the "attempt to find a substitute for reflection on the philosophy of art in a syncretism of cultural-historical, literary-historical, and biographical approaches".[133] This approach tries to empathise with its object - a "pathological suggestibility" and a "self-absorbed fantasizing" - where "idle curiosity masquerades as method". Julian Roberts argues that Benjamin's antipathy to this lay in its tendency to seek "only to convert all divergences into an indifferent historical motion", and into "the 'unpolarised inwardliness' of symbolist individualism".[134] Instead, Benjamin emphasised "art philosophy" which "uses the extremes to construct the extensive unity of the idea".[135] The Baroque tends to propel its interpreters into dizziness, Benjamin warns, so one must take a critical distance and, to start with, not try to address the whole. Then, he writes, "can the mind be led, through a more or less ascetic apprenticeship, to the position of strength from which it is possible to take in the whole panorama and yet remain in control of oneself".[136]

Against the false faith in the symbol - whether neo-Kantian or neo-Classicist - Benjamin writes:

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of the Nineteenth Century", and with the figure of the prostitute (simultaneously the seller and the commodity) in mind, "is the figurative appearance of the dialectic, the law of the dialectic at a standstill". Here he suggests that it is peculiar to capitalism. See Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, op. cit., p.171.

132.   *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.177.
133.   Ibid., p.53.
134.   Roberts, *Walter Benjamin*, op. cit., p.118, p.143.
135.   Ibid., p.118.
136.   *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.56. Benjamin castigates philosophy's dismissal of the detail for its conception of beauty. Beauty, he argues, is "empty" without "the life of the detail", and, moreover, "structure [ie. the general] and detail are always historically charged" (p.182). Philosophical criticism should make "historical content" and "material content" the basis of its "truth content"; rather than holding the latter up against the former, the issue, Benjamin claims, is to demonstrate the movements and transformations of the one into the other.

> Where man is drawn towards the symbol, allegory emerges from the depths of being to intercept the intention, and to triumph over it.[137]

With this return of this repressed negative power, Benjamin is able to transform the symbol into allegory.[138] His passage on Wincklemann's discussion of the Belvedere torso is revealing here. Benjamin suggests that:

> By its very essence classicism was not permitted to behold the lack of freedom, the imperfection, the collapse of the physical, beautiful, nature.[139]

Nevertheless, in the very attempt to see and to describe symbolically, Wincklemann is forced, Benjamin argues, to render the torso allegorically: firstly, by exploring the torso part by part, his attention dissolves "the false appearance of totality"; and, secondly, his attempt to bring the torso into the realm of knowledge,[140] of necessity, evaporates the symbolic claim to transcend the concept.

In contrast to neo-classicism's attempt (albeit failed) to evade the allegorical truth content, Baroque allegory "proclaims" this imperfection "with unprecedented emphasis".[141] Benjamin, as we have seen, pursues his analysis of the Trauerspiel form through "radical disjunction".[142] However, such disjunction - and the language which I shall continue to use to describe Benjamin's approach: antithesis, division, duality, dichotomy, duplicity - has to be understood, I think, in a specific manner. The oppositions in play are not static negatives, whether externally defined as the negative to the symbol, or as allegory's internal economy of negativity (the disjunction of sign and meaning); rather, they need to be grasped in terms of the dynamics, movement,

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137. Ibid., p.183.
138. In addition to the obvious Freudian reference, this can be compared with the idea of the "vanishing mediator", where the necessary ground and flux of a process - by way of its very success (and universalisation) - disappears, so that the result appears, in fact, to be radically other to it (to have opposed and defeated this ground/flux, for instance). See Chapter 1. The inevitable "return" of allegory, at the heart of the symbol, seems to share the claims of the vanished mediator to be the heart of the process; hence, the insistence of both de Man and Benjamin that allegory is "the authentic".
139. Ibid., p.176.
140. Benjamin associates this knowledge-seeking with the Fall, and, of course, with allegory.
141. Ibid., p.176.
142. Ibid., p.193.

unfolding, working and playing that the oppositions put into action. This goes, I think, even when - indeed, *especially* when - Benjamin explicitly refers to allegory's staticity or "rigidity".

In short, allegory functions for Benjamin as a defence of dialectics.[143] The "baroque apotheosis", he argues, "is a dialectical one";[144] allegory's temporality is dialectical, and an understanding of Baroque drama requires a dialectical sense of allegory;[145] we need a dialectical discussion of allegory's antinomies, and a consideration of its dialectic of form and its dialectic of content.[146] Indeed, Benjamin goes as far as advocating a dialectical "solution" to allegory's antinomies, one which, he claims, "lies in the essence of writing itself".[147]

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143.   This is an interesting inversion of the "mechanical" qualities of allegory into the figure of dialectics, for the traditional language of dialectics tends to emphasise figures more akin to the symbol: organic, internalisation. This theme will be picked up again later. My argument also touches on the fraught question of Adorno's relation to Benjamin. Bainard Cowan, for instance, claims that Adorno and, subsequently, Rolf Tiedemann were responsible for putting a Hegelian gloss on an essentially anti-Hegelian project. See Bainard Cowan, "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory", *New German Critique*, no.22, Winter 1981, pp.109-122. The issue is addressed more fully in Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, MIT, 1989. Buck-Morss' sixth chapter, "Historical Nature: Ruin", deals extensively with the theme of allegory in Benjamin's work. My own reading of the *Trauerspiel* is as an anti-neo-Kantian, and self-consciously dialectical, project. This would seem to be in line with Benjamin's own comments on the work. Whether this makes his project "Hegelian" is, I think, an open and complex question, depending on one's sense of Hegel: one's emphasis on the method or the result, or one's take on the open dialectic versus a totalising one. Buck-Morss usefully discusses Adorno's 1932 essay "The Idea of Natural History" where he compares and contrasts the treatments of the idea of "second nature" in Lukács and Benjamin (p.160).

144.   *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.160.

145.   Ibid, p.166, p.189.

146.   Ibid., pp.174-5. Cf. Ernst Bloch: "every metaphor that remains in multiplicity, Alteritas, represents an allegory.... If however the metaphor expresses unity, central things in general, if it converges towards these with an unquestionable certainty which is beginning to appear, even though it is still cloaked, then symbolism is achieved unequivocally.... And the form of both is that dialectical form which Goethe called, in a phrase which itself has a dialectical tension, 'a public mystery', precisely as a still continuing merging of what is opened and what is cloaked, what has not yet been removed from the cloak" (Bloch, op. cit., pp.176-7).

147.   *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.175. For the dialectic of form he names the antinomies between: convention and expression, secret and public expressions of authority, cold technique and eruptive expression of interpretation. For the dialectic of content he discusses the contradictory tendencies of the treatment of the profane detail in allegory, where it is both devalued (anything "can mean absolutely anything else", thus making the detail unimportant, and elevated (the moment of the detail's sanctification on the "higher plane"). The significance of Benjamin's statement on writing will become apparent when we pursue de Man's argument later in this chapter.

The structure of Baroque drama, Benjamin explains, has its acts divided by interludes or choruses, and these are the centres of allegorical assaults on the drama's "claim to be a Greek temple".[148] These interludes emphasise the "genuinely visual" and "spectacle proper" through the use of tableaux vivantes,[149] and their "display of expressive statuary":

> With all the power at its disposal the will to allegory makes use of the "dumb show" to bring back the fading word, in order to make it accessible to the unimaginative visual faculty.[150]

The division between the action of the acts and the frozen nature of the interludes echoes, for Benjamin, the division of dream and reality, or of meaning and reality. Often seen by the critics as a deadening device, or as a slowness of action, these interludes, Benjamin suggests, are best seen as "the irregular rhythm of the constant pause, the sudden change of direction, and consolidation into new rigidity".[151] This sense of a moment of frozen movement can be found in Benjamin's other accounts of allegory: for example, in the famous formulation - one especially favoured by Adorno - of "dialectics at a standstill"; or in that of "the image of transfixed unrest";[152] or even his sense of allegory as akin to the Stations of the Cross.[153] The disjunction is not static, then, but presented as if it was like the children's games of musical statues or peep-behind-the-curtain: there is a lot of movement before the "freeze-moment", and, it could be argued, just as much during it.

Some of the disjunctions mentioned earlier can be seen in terms of a dynamic, and can

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148. *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.189.
149. Ibid., p.191.
150. Ibid., p.192.
151. Ibid., p.197. The whole can be seen as a working of the duality of exterior and interior, of classicist structure and the means of expression, of mathematical precision and uncontrolled imagination (p.194).
152. "Central Park", op. cit., p.38.
153. Ibid., p.36.

be expanded. The duality of the Trauerspiel finds plastic form in the very set-up of the stage, with its drop-scenes allowing an alternation, or transposition, between foreground and background; [154] the duplicity of the titles, signifying both subject matter and allegorical content, provoke the "waver" that Honig highlights. Often in Baroque architecture there is a division between the controlled, mathematical simplicity of the exterior and interior's exuberance of expression and "uncontrolled imagination"; [155] not dissimilar to the antinomy of cold, facile technique and the eruptive expression which Benjamin attributes to the Trauerspiele themselves. [156] The point here is not the fact of discontinuity, but the play of interchanges and effects it sets in motion. The soaring angels of Baroque architectural sculpture are, Benjamin tells us, supported from below by massive pedestals and columns, which draw "attention to the difficulties of supporting from below". [157] This is, of course, like foregrounding one's device, but its effect goes beyond this highlighting of the artifice of representation. As Benjamin's figure makes clear, it highlights "the difficulties" which *ground* the act of representation.

Elsewhere - and in an analogy which runs across Baroque drama and painting - he describes how plastic form *works* the dichotomy of background and foreground. The "exaggerated realism" in the foreground sets off the background's "visionary objects".[158] In this fashion, when Christ is depicted in the foreground, he can mediate Heaven and earth, but, by finding himself "in the realm of the provisional, the everyday, the unreliable", this threatens to become a "provocative" and "offensive" gesture.[159]

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154.   *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.194.
155.   Ibid., p.194.
156.   Ibid., p.175.
157.   Ibid., p.235.
158.   Ibid., p.183.
159.   Ibid., p.183. Here, I think, Murillo's *The Two Trinities* (National Gallery, London) serves as an excellent example: both in terms of its explicit subject matter (the mediator of the Christ child, linking the Holy Trinity and the earthly one, although he is, for the moment of this painting, very much of our world), and in terms of the mode of painterly depiction. Despite the - to modern sensibilities - appearance of saccharine sweetness in the faces of the earthly family, so sweet that they defy any "reality effect", there is an astounding clarity to, for example, Joseph's hand; and all this set against the emanating "atmospheres" of heaven, where dark clouds open into a realm of light which

One of the significant points about the Baroque for Benjamin lies in the secularising tendency that attends on, or countervails against its explicit religiosity, a matter that takes on specific twists in the post-Reformation German lands. What sets out in one direction finds itself realising effects quite opposite of either its initial intent, its explicit claims, or its surface form. Repeatedly, we find that "the symbolic becomes distorted into the allegorical".[160]

The divisions of the Trauerspiele find form in the very speech of the actors, their mode of speech having its "structural, logical meaning" occluded by "the ornamental aspect", the "staged *exemplum*, staged antithesis, and staged metaphor".[161] The direction adopted by Benjamin can be seen in his analysis of the antinomies - or "elegant antitheses" - in the sensuous metaphors of Baroque language.[162] These metaphors are set side-by-side with "an extreme recourse to concrete words", as in Hallmann's composition: "Lechery cannot occupy the palace of virtue.... Ironwort blossoms beside noble roses".[163] But something odd follows from these excesses. Benjamin cites Cysarz's description:

> Every idea, however abstract, is compressed into an image, and this image, however concrete, is then stamped out in verbal form.[164]

These metaphors are not traditional poetic metaphors - or, rather, they don't behave as such - because they serve to do something other. In Benjamin's account, they invert their traditional characteristics, and fail to emphasise the metaphorical character of the formulation. Indeed, the "visuality" implied by such loaded metaphors, their "imagistic" use of language - we might say: their *excess of metaphoricity* - serves to undermine the metaphor itself. This is important, and contrasts to the usual characteristics attributed to

seem to tip over into the sulphurous.
160.   Ibid., p.183.
161.   Ibid., p.192.
162.   Ibid., p.198.
163.   Ibid., p.198, Hallmann cited p.199.
164.   Cysarz cited ibid., p.199.

metaphor where it finds its ultimate moment in its "image".[165] The intensity of the metaphors makes Baroque language "heavy with material display", "intent on the display of its own substance".[166] As Benjamin puts it:

> With every idea the moment of expression coincides with a veritable eruption of images, which gives rise to a chaotic mass of metaphors.[167]

The metaphors are set up, and then extended, but to such a degree that their imagery gets out of hand and degenerates, and the "ideas evaporate in images";[168] or, as Benjamin writes a little later, the language of the Trauerspiel "expands in painterly fashion in the alexandrine".[169]

One further example makes the same point. The question of writing and speech has provided the main object of attention for recent criticism, and Benjamin himself does argue that the two exist in a polarity: "The division between signifying written language and intoxicating spoken language opens up a gulf in the solid massif of verbal meaning...".[170] This polarity is one which, once again, unfolds. The dynamic, mutually-inflecting quality of this antinomy is highlighted in this statement:

> The antithesis of sound and meaning could not but be at its most intense where

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165. The play of image and text as two poles in an economy of representation - which might be quickly summarised as immediacy and mediacy - has a wider resonance, whether, as here, in a differentiation of different forms of language-use, or as the differentiation within image types. On this latter point, we might - taking Richard Shiff's examination of the proper and the figured, for instance - think of the contrast of photography and painting. Shiff also explores this, as an historically changing relation, within painting itself. See Richard Shiff, "Phototropism (Figuring the Proper)", *Studies in the History of Art*, vol.20, 1989, pp.161-179. See also W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, The University of Chicago Press, 1986.

166. *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.200, p.201.

167. Ibid., p.173. This figure is adopted by Tafuri, in, for example, the monstrous pullulation of symbol, discussed in Chapter 2 (Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, op. cit., p.14). Also cf. Clark's comments on metaphorical multiplication in Chapter 1.

168. *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.199.

169. Ibid., p.206. Cf. Benjamin's comments in "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" where he compares the Baroque with decadence - and its exaggerated language - through explicit comparison with Riegl's analysis of late antiquity, and the emphasis on "artistic will" (p.54-5). Cf. also Benjamin's approval of Baudelaire because "He devalued certain poetic freedoms of the romantics by means of his classical management of the Alexandrine, and the classical poetic by means of those *caesura* and blanks within the classical verse itself which were peculiar to him" ("Central Park", op. cit., p.37).

170. *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.201.

both could be successfully combined into *one*, without their actually cohering in the sense of forming an organic linguistic structure.[171]

Baroque language, Benjamin says, is constantly convulsed by the rebellion of its elements, and the fragments - which we have thought to have been stripped of any original signification - contain a threatening "remnant of meaning".[172] And thus, in Baroque drama, what seem to be episodes opening into the realm of pure sound - that is, sound divorced from meaning, and within which Benjamin includes, on the one hand, what he calls the sound of spontaneous, creaturely utterance, and, on the other, the free play of the sound of an echo - become episodes which provoke meaning and serves as a prophecy or a warning.[173]

The stakes here are high. This division of speech and writing, he argues, "forces the gaze into the depths of language",[174] the Baroque was particularly attuned to "the problematic character of art".[175] In a strange inversion of the relation of symbol and allegory - where, as we have seen, allegory is "the dark background against which the bright world of the symbol may stand out"[176] - Benjamin implies a different inflection to the symbolist's own claim. Here, that "dark background" ceases to be the "mere" backdrop to the symbol's bright performance, and becomes its *necessary* ground.[177] We have, to pursue the transformation further, and to sink into Benjamin's favoured figures, not the lightening flash of the symbol - the mystical instant, or the momentary insight[178] - but the flash of allegory illuminating the obfuscations of the symbol's

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171.   Ibid., p.206. Cf. Adorno's description of high and low culture: the two exist as "torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up". See Theodor Adorno, Letter to Walter Benjamin, 18th March, 1936, in *Aesthetics and Politics*, op. cit., p.123.
172.   *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.209.
173.   Ibid., p.210.
174.   Ibid., p.201.
175.   Ibid., p.176.
176.   Ibid., p.161.
177.   This might be compared to de Man's sense of allegory as more "authentic" than the symbol ("The Rhetoric of Temporality", op. cit., p.206).
178.   *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.163.

mystifying world, a flash which returns us to the play of history, nature, and ethics.

II. "Charity Devoid Of Charity"

On January 18th, 1926, Benjamin wrote in his *Moscow Diary*:

> Then I read the lesbian scene from Proust. Asja grasped its savage nihilism: how Proust in a certain fashion ventures into the tidy private chamber within the petit bourgeois that bears the inscription *sadism* and then mercilessly smashes everything to pieces, so that nothing remains of the untarnished, clear-cut conception of wickedness, but instead within every fracture evil explicitly shows its true substance - "humanity", or even "kindness". And as I was explaining this to Asja, it became clear to me how closely this coincided with the thrust of my baroque book. Just as the previous evening, while reading alone in my room and coming across the extraordinary passage on Giotto's *Caritas*, it had become clear to me that Proust was here developing a conception that corresponds at every point to what I myself have tried to subsume under the concept of allegory.[179]

Proust's account of Giotto's Caritas, or Charity, also becomes the focus for de Man, who makes some similar points (and movements).[180] Taking a text - Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* - which has traditionally been treated as a prime symbolic work, de Man proceeds to deconstruct this assumption via a close reading of the rhetorical structure of some passages from *Du côté de chez Swann*. The work is not, de Man insists, "the unmediated experience of an identity", available for consciousness to retrieve by memory, specifically the involuntary memory, or *memoire involuntaire*, so celebrated by commentators.[181] Here, de Man reveals that what seems to be the reign of

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179.   Walter Benjamin, *Moscow Diary* (1926-7), ed. Gary Smith, Harvard University Press, 1986, p.95. In "Central Park" he writes: "The motif of the androgyne, the lesbian or the barren woman is to be dealt with in relation to the destructive violence of the allegorical intention"("Central Park", op. cit., p.35). This points to the wider resonance of the association of the figure of the lesbian, the destructive principle, and allegory. For further discussion see Buci-Glucksmann, op. cit., pp.79-80, pp.106-9.
180.   Jameson describes de Man's critique of metaphor as a "dethroning", but also as one which does not prioritise another trope in its place. In terms which are relevant for some of the problems in thinking allegory in terms of radical disjunction, he states that de Man's account marks a "shift from structure to event, from the positing of a structural relationship within a textual moment to the attention to its subsequent effects, which then disaggregate the initial structure" (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, op. cit., p.227). Jameson sees this as de Man's most dialectical moment.
181.   Paul de Man, "Reading (Proust)" (earlier version published in 1972), *Allegories of Reading*, op. cit., pp.57-78. Citation from p.57.

metaphor can in fact be shown to be shaped by the trope of metonymy,[182] or, what seems to be symbol is shown to be allegory. Proust's text may be abounding in "seductive metaphors", and even makes explicit comments on the superiority of metaphor, but "persuasion is achieved by a figural play in which contingent figures of chance masquerade deceptively as figures of necessity".[183] While a thematic or literal reading tends to uphold metaphor as the master trope, closer rhetorical attention reveals the gaps and fissures in the claims of the "figures of necessity".

There are, de Man explains, two incompatible readings: one forged of the reader's aesthetic response, the other by rhetorical awareness. Recognition of this difference marks the aporetic state of the text, an aporia based on logical, and not simply representational, incompatibility. Thus the grand synthesis of Proust's work - the submission to the master metaphor which finally brings all fragments into the orbit and unity of "all the forces of" Marcel's life - is revealed as false, merely the semblance of synthesis. The chain of metaphoric connotations (orchestrated around figures of internality, repose, darkness and coolness) and that of metonymic connotations (externality, action, light and heat) refuse to coincide or ever to add up. This would make the text, de Man says, referring to Genette and Deleuze, an allegory of its own deconstruction.[184] But this is precisely what the latter part of de Man's essay aims to challenge, for if we say that Proust's novel is an allegory of its own deconstruction we have effectively reinstated a coherent meaning to it. In other words, however much a deconstructive reading undoes, disbands and disrupts metaphoric or symbolic structures, however much it upsets a secure epistemology with a negative one, it simply

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182.   The organic association of summer with the "chamber music" sound of buzzing flies is established by a "necessary link" characteristic of a metaphorically orientated synecdoche. Strictly speaking, de Man talks of the transfers or crossings (the chiasmus) between metaphor and metonymy, and their associated chains of connotations.

183.   Ibid., p.67.

184.   This position of Genette and Deleuze (as described by de Man) might be compared to that of Owens. Also cf. de Man's argument to that of Melville on the "anxiety for the recovery of a new beyond" (Melville, op. cit., p.64).

unifies the reading at a higher level.

> What is at stake is the possibility of including the contradictions of reading in a narrative that would be able to contain them... an allegory of reading.[185]

In treating allegory as "the report" of the process, its "destructive power" is evaded, and "the contradictions of reading" are contained, grounding "the stability of the text";[186] "at the far end of its successive negations, it [the interpretation/reading] will recover the adequation between structure and statement on which any thematic reading depends".[187] It is precisely this which de Man hopes to undermine - what might be called a "safe" or "secure" deconstruction.[188] For de Man, irony and allegory are not playful in the light sense of the word; and to unpack and deconstruct a symbolically saturated text is not a satisfying activity of work achieved. Such activity always points to something deadly serious. Any deconstructive sense of superiority, then, is challenged along with the targets of its purview. Not only must the claims of the symbolic and the mimetic accounts be traumatised, so must allegory itself. De Man's strategy might be described, albeit inadequately, as a radicalising of deconstruction, radical in the sense that it pushes the negative moments further, and lets the degenerative potential take hold.[189]

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185.   "Reading (Proust)", op. cit., p.72.
186.   Ibid.
187.   Ibid., p.77.
188.   Elsewhere de Man distinguishes "primary deconstructive narratives centred on figures and ultimately always on metaphor" from allegories which work at "the second (or the third) degree". Allegory, he writes, "does not erase the figure", are always allegories of metaphor, and thus of the impossibility of reading. See Paul de Man, "Allegory (Julie)", Allegories of Reading, op. cit., p.205.
189.   In this sense, certain dialectical accounts - and Adorno springs to mind - may come closer to this version of deconstruction than much self-professed deconstruction. An alternative reading would be to say that de Man is more Hegelian than deconstructive. The labels here - and the invocation to choose between, or allocate different accounts to, them - fail to respond adequately to the material. Jameson goes as far as to argue that de Man and Derrida "have nothing whatsoever to do with each other" (Jameson, Postmodernism, op. cit., p.225): the latter being preoccupied with how to imagine the unimaginable, inaccessible, radical difference, with how to pose in language a pre-linguistic moment; the former with "the birth of abstraction and indeed philosophical conceptuality as such" (p.227). Norris parallels de Manian deconstruction with Adornian negative dialectics: "Deconstruction is indeed a form of negative dialectics, an activity that carries on the project of immanent or self-reflective critique developed by Hegel out of Kant, but which turns this project against its own desire for such premature endpoints as Symbol or Absolute Reason" (Christopher Norris, Paul de Man, op. cit., p.61)

This is where "Giotto's Charity" becomes significant. In this episode Marcel, Proust's fictional narrator, considers Giotto's Vices and Virtues in the Arena Chapel in Padua, or, to be accurate, he considers the photographic reproductions of them on his schoolroom wall. The occasion is prompted by thoughts about the pregnant kitchen-maid at Combray, who Swann, a family friend and bearer of these photographic gifts, had nicknamed "Giotto's Charity" on account of their resemblance. Marcel considers a number of ways of seeing this resemblance. For Swann, they are physiognomically alike, and the phrase "Giotto's Charity" becomes, in Swann's hands, a metaphor for the kitchen-maid. For Marcel, the resemblance between maid and fresco is a more complex affair, and turns on the inability of each to grasp their own significance; in other words, it turns on the disjunction between "vehicle" and its proper, or allegorical, meaning. For Marcel, the kitchen-maid is blind to the spiritual import of her "mysterious basket" (that is, the bulge of her pregnancy which is compared to the basket held by Charity in Giotto's fresco), despite (or perhaps because of) the obvious hindrance to the demands of her employment. Moreover, his interpretation of the real and the allegorical cross over, each turning into its opposite. The actual, particular kitchen-maid seems, to Marcel, to signify as abstract and figural (she is, he notes, but one moment in an on-going representation of the abstract quality of "kitchen-maid-ness"). Meanwhile the power of Giotto's allegorical fresco, he thinks, resides in its realistic representation (the fact that what should be an allegorical, abstract personification resolves itself into the look of secular particularity, an everyday scene of someone handing up a corkscrew through the cellar window). Both are representations, de Man notes, and both are representations requiring reading.

In de Man's account, Proust takes the reader from symbol to allegory, primarily in this shift from Swann's perspective to that of Marcel. We might break this down as follows: (i) The symbol's synthesis of literal and figural in a proper meaning is played out across the figure of the kitchen-maid and her basic resemblance to the fresco, (rather than in the

fresco per se - although the implication might be that Swann reads the frescoes symbolically too). Here a number of oppositions seem reconciled: particular and universal, matron and virgin, profane and sacred, low and high.

(ii) Marcel - described by de Man as more rhetorically sophisticated than Swann - sees not in terms of symbol, but in terms of allegory; not as a *synthesis* of literal and figural, but as a *disjunction* and divergence between a meaning proper to the literal, and a meaning proper to the allegory. This discussion focuses upon the images, with passing reference to the kitchen-maid, who simply serves to demonstrate the same process of crossing from the opposite direction.

(iii) Initially, Marcel does not like this discordance, and sees the frescoes as failures. Or, at least, they fail for him: the discordance between their "look" and their meaning being so pronounced that Charity was "Charity devoid of charity", Justice looked more like Injustice, and Envy failed even to invoke her countering vice and looked more like a medical illustration. But what at first seems to be the shortcomings of allegory - the way discordance hinders the attainment of the symbolic, (the symbolic moment that Swann, in his ignorance of the difficulties, *can* attain) - this shortcoming develops, for Marcel, into the very heart of the frescoes' power or "special beauty", a power which now resided precisely *in* this disjunction.

> I came to understand that the arresting strangeness, the special beauty of these frescoes derived from the great part played in them by symbolism, and the fact that this was represented not as a symbol (for the thought symbolised was nowhere expressed) but as a reality, actually felt or materially handled, added something more precise and more literal to the meaning of the work, something more concrete and more striking to the lesson imparted.[190]

(iv) It is crucial to grasp that this is not just a *revaluation* of allegory, in the sense of placing a plus where once there had stood a minus (and here we will see the difference of this reading with the claims of a postmodern "allegorical impulse" which has inverted the rule of the symbolic). Marcel's shift in appreciation rests neither on seeing the frescoes as symbols (as does Swann), nor simply on the disjunctive mode summarised

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190.   Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Volume 1, Penguin, 1983, p.88.

by "Charity devoid of charity" (as they do for Marcel in his initial view). Instead it rests on Marcel's recognition of the *necessity* of the vehicle (the literal representation) for the allegory no matter how divorced their relation appears; or, to be precise, it is a necessity which works across the disjunction. Marcel realises that the fresco's meaning is made more forcefully *through* the realistic representation that seems "devoid of charity"; and that the allegory is dependent upon a literal representation that seems to have nothing to do with the proper meaning. Allegory, asserts de Man, can not do without the powers of literal representation. There is, then, not a simple disjunction between the literal and allegorical meanings, but a disjunction which is articulated within some sort of dialectic of mutual dependence. Marcel goes on to note that in "real life" the "truly saintly embodiments of practical charity" never appear remotely compassionate, but are as brusque as "a busy surgeon";[191] and he makes the following analogy with his understanding of the frescoes:

> ... are not the thoughts of the dying often turned towards the practical, painful, obscure, visceral aspect, towards that "seamy side" of death which is, as it happens, the side that death actually presents to them and forces them to feel, and which far more closely resembles a crushing burden, a difficulty in breathing, a destroying thirst, than the abstract idea to which we are accustomed to give the name of Death?[192]

(v) What is there, then, to distinguish this from the "necessary link" of metaphor, or a return to plenitude, or, even, the sanitisation of disjunction which de Man attributes to Genette and Deleuze? This mutual interaction is not one of mutual support so much as one of *destructive* dependence, and an erosive dynamic is set in motion. De Man describes a certain deflection, whereby the literal representation overtakes the proper allegorical meaning. In the case of Invidia, or Envy, an iconic detail is hyperbolised: the exaggerated emphasis on the serpent-tongue - and we might extend the example to her ears - almost obliterates the proper meaning. We look at Envy, but we do not think

191. Ibid., p.89. This refers us back, perhaps, to vice, in the image of Envy who "looked like nothing so much as a plate in some medical book, illustrating the compression of the glottis or the uvula by a tumour of the tongue or by the introduction of the operator's instrument" (p.88).
192. Ibid., p.88.

about the vice (the proper meaning), or meditate on its evil implications, and neither is

our attention directed in line the proper intent: towards goodness and virtue.[193] De Man

puts it this way: "the allegorical representation leads towards a meaning that diverges

from the initial meaning to the point of foreclosing its manifestation".[194] The force of

our fixation upon such details, de Man says, re-directs our thoughts: "... the mind is

distracted towards something even more threatening than vice, namely death".[195]

III. Negative Knowledge, Permanent Parabasis & Unrelieved Vertige

Death, de Man wrote in "Autobiography as De-Facement", is "a displaced name for a

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193.   The literal is allowed to obliterate the allegorical meaning. In the case of Charity, the production of double meaning is made via Ruskin's self-correction of his initial reading of the Giotto fresco in *Fors Clavigera*. The passage, and Proust's adaptation of it, highlights the comparison between Giotto's fresco of Charity and Françoise, the cook at Combray, and immediate mistress of the kitchen-maid "Giotto's Charity". Whatever attributes may be ascribed to Françoise, charity is not one of them; indeed, any feelings of pity are somewhat hypocritical on her part, and she finds it easy to shed tears over written reports of suffering, but incapable of responding to any suffering under her very nose. Cf. the theme of the piece: Marcel's guilty reading, the play of action and repose; and Marcel's seeming to better engage life through the mediation of the book, life's opposite. (In fact, it is largely Françoise who is the cause of the kitchen-maid's suffering!) Thus the photograph of Giotto's Caritas invokes two incompatible associations: Françoise and the kitchen-maid; uncharitability and the object of charity (the latter easily confused *with* charity). "The rhetorical interest of the section... is that a single icon engenders two meanings, the one representation and literal, the other allegorical and "proper", and that the two meanings fight each other with the blind power of stupidity" ("Reading (Proust)", op. cit., p.76). Cf. Benjamin on the "ideas evaporating in images" in the *Trauerspiel*, p.199. As de Man remarks: "the literal sense of this allegory treats its proper sense in a most uncharitable manner"; but just as Marcel will never dispense with Françoise, so Proust will never cast away "the thematic powers of literal representation". Indeed, de Man insists, he "would not be able to do so if he tried" ("Reading (Proust)", op. cit., p.76). However, this still admits a possibility of treating Proust's novel as a narrative of its own deconstruction. What de Man wants to foreground is not the allegory of the crossing of two incompatible readings, but the allegory of Reading per se, an allegory which "narrates the impossibility of reading": "We accede to the proper meaning [of Giotto's Caritas] by a direct act of reading, not by the oblique reading of the allegory. This literal reading is possible because the notion of charity, on this level of illusion, is considered to be a referential and empirical experience that is not confined to an intra-textual system of relationships" (p.77). We access the meaning proper to the allegory, then, not by representation (which works against the allegory) but by reading the words "CARITAS" or "INVIDIA". In the case of Giotto's frescoes, we can only access the proper meaning by way of reading the inscriptions to the images, by reading "CARITAS" or "INVIDIA". However, this recourse to language is not the locus for a deferral of meaning, the moment of language and death, since - and this is de Man's argument - the word "INVIDIA" does not perform within a text, but instead refers us outside. Here, then, it is reading and writing which would seem to claim immediacy, not the images, which operate "obliquely" - temporally - displacing and pointing to "death".

194.   Ibid., p.75.
195.   Ibid.

temporal predicament", the deferral of meaning in language.[196] What we have, though, is not the deferral about which Derrida writes. The same destructive dynamic, as we have seen de Man describe with respect to Giotto's Envy in Proust, is also the sense of irony described by him in "The Rhetoric of Temporality".[197]

> The act of irony... reveals the existence of a temporality that is definitely not organic, in that it relates to its source only in terms of distance and difference and allows for no end, for no totality.[198]
>
> Both [allegory and irony] are determined by an authentic experience of temporality which, seen from the point of view of the self engaged in the world, is a negative one.[199]

The above quotations repeat the themes already attended to in the case of de Man's discussion of allegory: inorganicism, distance, difference, irreconcilability; in short, some form of radical negativity. But in discussing irony, and in particular Baudelaire's conception of comedy, de Man draws out the distinction between "simple comedy", or *le comique significatif*, and *le comique absolu* , or irony - a distinction which has some important repercussions. The former operates at an intersubjective level, orientated towards others for its effect - laughing *at* someone. In *comique absolu* this relation is projected inwards, becoming a matter of self-duplication or *dédoublement* - where the self becomes a multiple consciousness capable of laughing at itself.[200] What is treated as the mutual interaction of two different subjects in simple comedy, becomes in *comique absolu*, that between two parts of the same subject - between the two parts of a divided or "split" subject, as one part of the subject reflects ironically on its other part. De Man implies that *comique absolu* is a better approximation of the groundlessness of negative

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196.   Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement" (1979), *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, Columbia University Press, 1984, pp.67-82. Citation from p.81.

197.   Stephen Melville notes that, for recent criticism, allegory is "a belated rewriting of 'irony'", the difference being that it allows for wider realms of application ("Notes on the Reemergence of Allegory", op. cit., p.60).

198.   "The Rhetoric of Temporality", op. cit., p.222.

199.   Ibid., p.226.

200.   Note that there is again a movement from an inter- to intrasubjective relation. Earlier, in the discussion of Romanticism's shift from analogy to affinity, this represented a movement into symbolic understanding. Here, by contrast, a similar pattern is set up by the shift into irony, and marks the internalising of the bad knowledge - the negative self-knowledge - of radical difference.

self-knowledge, and that simple comedy entails a retreat from that knowledge:

> In a false feeling of pride the self has substituted, in its relationship to nature, an intersubjective feeling (of superiority) for the knowledge of a difference.[201]

This high degree of self-reflexivity is seen to be the preserve of highly sophisticated, rather than everyday, language-use (that is, the language-use of philosophers and artists).[202] De Man clarifies the full implications of this:

> The reflective disjunction not only occurs *by means of* language as a privileged category, but it transfers the self out of the empirical world into a world constituted out of, and in, language - a language that it finds in the world like one entity among others, but that remains unique in being the only entity by means of which it can differentiate itself from the world. Language thus conceived divides the subject into an empirical self, immersed in the world, and a self that becomes like a sign in its attempt at differentiation and self definition.[203]

> The ironic language splits the subject into an empirical self that exists in a state of inauthenticity and a self that exists only in the form of a language that asserts the knowledge of this inauthenticity. This does not, however, make it into an authentic language, for to know inauthenticity is not the same as to be authentic.[204]

In other words, there cannot be a recovery, or reconciliation, by way of irony's self-reflexiveness.[205] There is an "unrelieved *vertige*" induced by the movement of ironic consciousness, which cannot be corralled without being reduced back into *comique significatif*, back to the level of the intersubjective, with a loss of the distance between fiction and the empirical world.[206] There is, as Schlegel put it, only "permanent parabasis".[207]

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201.   Ibid., p.214.
202.   This concurs with Benjamin's sense of Baroque allegory as a privileged, secret and elite mode of language; a point also made, with wider applicability, in the literature on allegory.
203.   Ibid., p.213.
204.   Ibid., p.214.
205.   This needs to be contrasted with de Man's critique of Szondi and Starobinski for making the irony of irony some form of recovery, instead of recognising its absolute, vertiginous character (ibid., p.220).
206.   De Man: "... it serves to prevent the all too readily mystified reader from confusing fact and fiction and from forgetting the essential negativity of the fiction" (ibid., p.219).
207.   Schlegel is unusual among the writers of the Romantic period in seeing allegory as central to the poetic (see Buci-Glucksmann, op. cit., p.69). Cf. Schlegel's "permanente Insurrektion" of 1796: "Der absolute Despotismus ist nicht einmal ein Quasistaat, sondern vielmehr ein Antistaat und (wenn auch viellecht physisch erträglicher) doch ein ungleich größeres politisches Übel als selbst *Anarchie*.

De Man's very late essays pursue this question of "negative self-knowledge" and the "temporal predicament" further.[208] The "ideology of the symbol", or "aesthetic ideology," is usually presented as the subject's attempt to hide from this knowledge. At first, we appear to be on familiar territory: de Man analyses Hegel's opposition of sign and symbol in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, an opposition which echoes that of allegory/irony versus symbol. Where the symbol presumes a relation between the meaning and the sensory form in the physical world by which that meaning finds signification - a relation with some causality, linkage or mutual interpenetration - the sign, in contrast, has this relation as arbitrary, as predicated or asserted. It is, for de Man, Hegel's attention to the sign which opens some interesting issues, and produces some strange turnings.

The arbitrariness of the sign means that the subject can enact a certain *freedom* of intellect; he or she can will the relation, and "subject" the world via language, just like Benjamin's allegorist; in other words, with language, the subject predicates the world. At its most basic, such predication is deictic - using words relating to the specificity of the time and place of utterance - "this", "that", "now", "here".[209] Predication in language always presumes an implicit subject, an "I" who *declares that....* But what seems to be the very specification and particularisation of deictic statements - that most specifying and particularising of linguistic events - is, in fact, hollow. Language is the

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Diese ist bloß eine Negation des politisch Positiven; jener eine Position des politisch Negativen. Die Anarchie ist entweder ein *fließender Despotismus*, in dem sowohl das Personale der herrschenden Macht, als sie Grenzen der beherrschten Masse stets wechseln; oder eine unechte und *permanente Insurrektion*: denn die echte und politisch mögliche ist notwendig transitorisch." ("Versuch über den Begriff des Republikanismus - Veranlaßt durch die Kantische Schrift zum ewigen Frieden", *Friedensutopien. Kant, Fichte, Schlegel, Görres*, eds. Zwi Batscha and Richard Saage, suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft 267, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1979)

208.   Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*", *Critical Inquiry*, vol.8, Summer 1982, pp.761-775, and "Hegel on the Sublime", in *Displacement: Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick, Indiana University Press, 1983, pp.139-153.

209.   This is a matter that, as we have seen, can also be followed in the section on "Sense-Certainty" in Hegel's *Phenomenology.*, op. cit., pp.58-66.

agent by which "thought subsumes the infinite singularity and individuation of the

perceived world under ordering principles that lay claim to generality",[210] and as Hegel

puts it: "Since language is the labour of thought, we cannot say anything in language

that is not general".[211] There is, in other words, a perpetual failure to "encounter" the

perceived world in its particularity, and that very encounter must, of necessity, reduce it

to generality.[212]

De Man pursues this with another basic philosophical statement - "I am I" - the statement

by which we earn, so to speak, our theoretical right to think anything else, indeed, our

right to think at all, to say "I think" - and which has implications for the subject. As

before:

> ... the I, so *singular* in its independence from anything that is not itself,
> becomes, in the general thought of logic, the most inclusive, plural, general, and
> impersonal of subjects.[213]

This subject, then, is self-effacing, in that it must lose its "'I'-ness" in the very moment

it declares itself "I".[214] De Man starts with Hegel's statement in *The Encyclopaedia*

Logic: "Since language states only what is general, I cannot say what is only my

opinion".[215]

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210.   "Sign and Symbol", op. cit., p.767.
211.   Cited ibid., p.768. Cf. "we do not *envisage* the universal This or Being in general, but we *utter* the universal" (*Phenomenology*, op. cit., p.60). Coleridge's sense of allegory as "a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses" may take on a twist in the light of this discussion of Hegel on Sense-Certainty (Coleridge, op. cit., p.230).
212.   Jameson discusses this with reference to de Man's reading of Rousseau, as a question of "names" and "metaphors", or between "nomination" and "abstraction" (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, op. cit., p.229).
213.   "Sign and Symbol", op. cit., p.768.
214.   This self-effacing, then, is not the same as philosophy's claims to transcend individual subjectivity and opinion to become a disinterested subject. Far from striving to be disinterested, to lose our subjectivity, we cannot do other than already be self-effaced.
215.   Cited by de Man, "Sign and Symbol", op. cit., p.768. De Man pursues this point of self-erasure through a sequence of translations of Hegel's phrase. These are based on the arguments already rehearsed and on the connotations of the German word *Meinung*, rendered above by de Man as "opinion", but also with connotations firstly of personal possession, *mein*; and, secondly of "to mean", or "to make mine" *meinen*. The sequence of moves made by de Man can be summarised as follows: (i) "I cannot say what is only my opinion"; (ii) "I cannot say what I make mine/what I mean" (since to make

We are left, then, at the very attempt to ground our first principles, in a state of paralysis: "I cannot say I". In order to go on, argues de Man, (indeed, in order theoretically, logically, to survive), we must suspend this realisation, and forget the knowledge of this paralysis. The mind must, *of necessity*, "shelter itself from self-erasure".216 In de Man's reading, Hegel's narrative (by which we should have in mind the Hegelian history of the mind in the *Phenomenology*) has to take the form of prolepsis and anagorisis.217 This anticipation (our proleptic projection of our hypothesis) of the moment of post festum recognition - that which will lead us back via the unravelling of the knot (anagorisis) - is *itself* "the plot and the suspense" of Hegel's narrative, thus adding an interesting inflection to the flight of Minerva's owl.218 "The hyperbolic I projects itself as thought in the hope of recognizing itself when it will have run its course".219

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mine/to mean is "opinion"); (iii) "I cannot say what I think" (since to think is to make mine, to subsume or to subject the world); (iv) "I cannot say I" (since, for Hegel, to think presupposes an I, a subject, an ego). The logic which takes us from (iii) to (iv), is also what is undermined by (iv), for if "I cannot say I" the possibility of thought is erased. This, de Man observes, is "a disturbing proposition". At first sight, all this seems a little slippery. However, the point seems to be sustained in the Hegel literature. The crucial passage occurs in Hegel's Remark to the twentieth proposition, or paragraph. The current English translation does not even render *Meinung* as "opinion", as de Man does, but moves straight for "to mean", what de Man has to establish by connotation. De Man's own play on the words *meinen, mein* and *Meinung* seems to be sustained, the use, in the previous sentence, of *meine* and *mein* being italicised and attention drawn to them in a footnote from the translators. "And because *language* is the work of thought, nothing can be said in language that is not universal. What I only *mean* [*meine*] is *mine* [*mein*]; it belongs to me as this particular individual. But if language expresses only what is universal, then I cannot say what I only *mean*" (*The Encyclopaedia Logic*, op. cit., p.50, Remarks to paragraph 20). The exchange between de Man and Raymond Geuss turns on the reading of this paragraph, is a matter which I cannot make judgement on, as my German and my grasp on Hegel is limited. Nevertheless, I can say that de Man's reading is not as bizarre as it first appears. See Raymond Geuss, "Critical Response I. A Response to Paul de Man", *Critical Inquiry*, vol.10, December 1983, pp.375-382; and Paul de Man's reply in the same issue, "Critical Response II. Reply to Raymond Geuss", pp.383-390.

216.   "Sign and Symbol", op. cit., p.770. I emphasise the necessity here, because it starts to lend a different cast to de Man's comments about the aesthetic. I will return to this point later.

217.   Prolepsis (*pro-lambanein*, or before-to take) is the figure of anticipation. Anagorisis is the figure of recognition (at the point hitherto anticipated) which leads to *denouement*, a recognition leading to the unravelling of the knot of the plot.

218.   Ibid.

219.   Ibid.

However, this entirely necessary survival tactic hits a further problem. There has to be "something there to recognize when the time comes", the mind "has to recognize itself as itself, that is to say, as I".[220] This is a problem because "how are we to recognize what will necessarily be erased and forgotten, since 'I' is, per definition, what I can never say?".[221] We have already had to forget the problem of "I cannot say I", but now we must also turn a blind eye to this problem of delayed recognition if we are not, once again, to get stuck in theoretical paralysis; we must, de Man suggests, *forget again*.

This abyss of forgetting the groundlessness of thought, like irony's "permanent parabasis", is a perpetual dialectic of self-destruction and self-invention with no reconciliation or closure. We may, in Hegel's account, move through progressive stages of self-consciousness, but, de Man suggests (against the explicit direction of the narrative, and the assessment of most of Hegel's commentators), these are ones without any resolution, with only repetitions and an increasing negative knowledge. The "progressive" dialectic, then is rendered as "regressive" and "degenerative"; or, rather, de Man relates it as an account which progresses on the basis of an implicit acknowledgement of this destructive dynamic. To extend the point made earlier, de Man writes:

> The act of irony... reveals the existence of a temporality that is definitely not organic, in that it relates to its source only in terms of distance and difference and allows for no end, for no totality. Irony divides the flow of temporal experience into a past that is pure mystification and a future that remains harassed forever by a relapse into the inauthentic. It can know this inauthenticity but can never overcome it. It can only restate and repeat it on an increasingly conscious level, but it remains endlessly caught in the impossibility of making this knowledge applicable to the empirical world. It dissolves in the narrowing spiral of a linguistic sign that becomes more and more remote from its meaning, and it can find no escape from this spiral.... More clearly even than allegory, the rhetorical mode of irony takes us back to the predicament of the conscious subject; this consciousness is clearly an unhappy one that strives to move beyond and outside itself.[222]

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220.   Ibid.
221.   Ibid.
222.   "The Rhetoric of Temporality", op. cit., p.222.

The reference here is clearly to Hegel, [223]and in particular to the unhappy consciousness, which, in the *Phenomenology*, figures as a moment of internalisation of the problem of negativity. It is precisely this internalising of the problem which exacerbates the effect of this split (in Hegel between Subject and Substance) - in comparison with the externally driven dialectic of lordship and bondage.[224]

Benjamin compares Baroque and modern forms of allegory in similar terms: "Baroque allegory sees the corpse only from the outside. Baudelaire, in contrast, sees it also from the inside".[225] Or, as Buci-Glucksmann observes, where once death and the abyss were objectified, now they are internalised as spleen, and the corpse is now inside oneself: "a radically disturbing novelty which demolishes the acquired certainties of the 'subject'".[226] According to Julian Roberts, Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* is best compared with Hegel's *Phenomenology*, and the resolution found by Benjamin for allegory's antinomies reflects Hegel's for the unhappy consciousness. The melancholic allegorist is like Hegel's Stoic consciousness: despairing of the inaccessibility of the absolute, he

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223.   "The ambiguity poetry speaks of is the fundamental one that prevails between the world of the spirit and the world of sentient substance: to ground itself, the spirit cannot coincide with its object and this separation is infinitely sorrowful" ("The Dead-End of Formalist Criticism", op. cit., p.237). De Man warns of the danger of recovering a coherent historical picture in the face of the subject's incoherency ("The Rhetoric of Temporality", op. cit., p.222). He undermines any attempt at sitting contented with the unhappy consciousness, emphasising its "dialectical anxiety" (against Doubrovsky's plenitude), and the torment of its condition, a sort of condemnation to perpetual alienation ("Form and Intent in the American New Criticism", op. cit., p.34) . The struggle must not be made comfortable, lest it deny or elide its very condition. De Man's constant struggle is to prevent a condition of negation being turned into an affirmative one, preventing non-identity from being resolved into identity at another level. How, he wonders, can a text transcend irony, and become meta-ironical, "without falling into the myth of an organic totality or bypassing the temporality of all language"? See "The Rhetoric of Temporality", op. cit., p.223.
224.   Norris contrasts Marxism's understanding of the unhappy consciousness with de Man's; for the former, the dilemma of the unhappy consciousness is a historical predicament; for the latter it marks an "ontological gulf" "between phenomenal and semantic orders of sense" which cannot be overcome or transcended (Norris, op. cit., p.3). Norris, however, suggests that the figure is particular to de Man's early, more existential work; although he also says that the later work generalises such "themes" (p.xix).
225.   "Central Park", op. cit., p.35.
226.   Buci-Glucksmann, op. cit., pp.76-7.

turns to the certainties of present reality as "the symbol of its material transience".[227]

Similarly, Baroque drama, for all its allegories, remained unconscious of its antinomy of

word and script; for all its sense of history, in the end, remained unhistorical.[228]

Whether we identify the allegorical figure as the melancholic's "torpor" or as the

intriguer's "nihilism", it must, Roberts argues, be surpassed. He puts it this way:

> Allegory itself now reaches its dialectical resolution, the settling of the infinity of
> meanings within which its superabundance of signification threatens to
> disappear. Precisely in the allegory of the grave, the "vision of ecstatic
> annihilation", it reveals its own limits. "Here decay is not so much signified,
> represented allegorically, as itself significant, offered as allegory - the allegory of
> resurrection." And so the whole nihilistic technique of destructive contemplation
> at the last moment turns in on itself. Allegory is allegorised by reality.[229]

IV. The "Negative Capability" Of "Infinite Regressions"

Similar themes to Benjamin's emerge in the other literature on allegory. Honig notes that

in the thematic structure of the allegorical journey the hero enters a process of self-

discovery, which, in allegory, means confronting contradictions, engaging in the battles

between virtue and vice. He thereby "extend[s] his identity" in order to regain

paradise.[230] But in modern allegories, Honig argues - in the katagogic form, as Fletcher

would describe it - the narrative commences from the hero's initial self-judgement, but

establishes "no vital mission". The narrative "constantly dwindles", and "instead of

finding his many actual identities, he [the hero] shrinks and is finally converted into

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227.   Roberts, *Walter Benjamin*, op. cit., p.134. Paradoxically, it is the German Lutheran tradition - which, unlike that of Catholicism, is strictly transcendental, providing no earthly institutions, having no ground for ethics in the here and now, and has no access to concrete representations of the beyond (p.139) - that makes the allegorical German Baroque drama turn back to myth and symbolic correspondence (p.140).

228.   Ibid., p.151.

229.   Ibid., p.150.

230.   Honig, op. cit., p.68.

nothingness".[231] Quilligan also refers to "the vertigo readers of allegory often suffer when the plot simply evaporates".[232]

Owens' account is far less traumatised. Laurie Anderson's *Americans on the Move* takes on a particularly significant status in his explanation of allegory. He describes how she utilises a range of media or signs to make her performance, and how she establishes that "the world is a vast network of signs... [which] continually elicits reading, interpretation".[233] But this eliciting of reading only points to the impossibility of its realisation, a reference which is clearly de Manian[234] - and Anderson has a character remark on the schematic image of a man and a woman on the Apollo 10 spaceship:

> In our country, we send pictures of our sign language into outer space. They are speaking our sign language in these pictures. Do you think they will think his hand is permanently attached that way? Or do you think they will read our signs? In our country, goodbye looks just like hello.[235]

Here, Owens states, "two *clearly defined but mutually incompatible* readings are engaged in blind confrontation in such a way that it is impossible to choose between them",[236] just as in allegory we find a confrontation between virtue and vice. This can be compared to Quilligan's account:

> The plots of all allegorical narratives... unfold as investigations into the literal truth inherent in individual words, considered in the context of their whole histories as words.[237]

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231. Ibid.
232. Quilligan, op. cit., p.68.
233. Owens, part 2, op. cit., p.62.
234. Owens describes de Man thus: "De Man recognizes allegory as the structural interference of two distinct levels or usages of language, literal and rhetorical (metaphoric), one of which denies precisely what the other affirms. In most allegories a literal reading will 'deconstruct' a metaphorical one; recalling medieval schemas of textual exegesis, de Man identifies such readings as tropological. Yet because literal language is itself rhetorical, the product of metaphoric substitutions and reversals, such readings are inevitably implicated in what they set out to expose, and the result is allegory" (ibid., p.63).
235. Cited ibid., p.60.
236. Ibid., p.61. Cf. Orton's "non-synthesized tension" mentioned earlier (*Figuring Jasper Johns*, op. cit., p.131).
237. Quilligan, op. cit., p.33.

For example, in *The Faerie Queene* there is a constant play on, and interrogation of, the name and word "Error". Indeed, more broadly, the allegories addressed by Quilligan all focus on one's faith, or confidence, in words and language.[238] The attentive reader is, Quilligan argues, confronted with his "tendency to misread", by being confronted with "the nearly fatal mistakes"[239] of the allegory's characters, and their inability to distinguish, for example, between "bad literal-mindedness" and "good literalness".[240] This inability to differentiate results in a reification of language, Quilligan points out[241] - or as Bunyan put it: "By misinterpreting evil insues";[242] and, the reader, like such characters, receives "a lesson in reading".[243]

At first sight, Quilligan would seem to see allegory as radically divorced from any commitment to the real.[244] The poet, she says, does not mimic life, but "the life of the mind", and foregrounds questions of language itself: "More than any other creator of narrative, the allegorist begins with language purely; he also ends there".[245] However, for Quilligan, a self-consciousness of language and textual self-referentiality per se are not enough. The text is not simply an intensive consideration of language but must point beyond. Foucault, she argues, sets up Borges as a self-referential text, but allegory proper is not a closed system, and has to be as much concerned with reading the world.[246] Indeed, the very point of allegory's questioning of our "culture's assumptions

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238.   Ibid., p.46.
239.   Ibid., p.79, p.80.
240.   Ibid., p.70.
241.   Ibid., p.71.
242.   Cited ibid., p.131.
243.   Ibid., p.109.
244.   Fletcher sees allegory as opposed to Aristotelian mimesis, organised by ritualistic necessity (utilising the supernatural, magical deus ex machina) rather than according to probability (Fletcher, op. cit., p.150). Any appearance of realism in the narrative is, for Fletcher, superficial and must, in any case, give way to increasing domination by magical topoi (p.198) - and naturalistic novels, such as those by Zola or Sinclair, are themselves closer to allegory than realism, with their "daemonically simplified" heros, whose destinies are proscribed by the "machine" of the plot (p.315).
245.   Quilligan, op. cit., p.42.
246.   Ibid. p.219. Cf. her comments on Pynchon and Nabakov.

about the ability of language to state or reveal value" is to take us beyond - and not

deeper into - linguistic self-referentiality.[247]

> By virtue of the fact that the immediate focus of the narrative is the language in
> which it is written, not only must the reader come to terms with the language in
> which such questions are asked, but he must also recognize that his answers - or
> such answers as seem to be indicated by the text - can be made only in language.
> The circular process ends in a self-consciousness the only way out of which may
> seem to be an arbitrary act of choice. Language does or does not lie. And if a
> reader chooses not to choose, he or she is left with a series of infinite
> regressions.[248]

The task of allegory, Quilligan writes, is to raise the reader's self-consciousness, and to

provoke them to "ethical action".[249] The "burden of choice"[250] proffered by the

allegorical text - truth or untruth - extends, she argues, to the extra-textual world.[251]

Such decisions can be optimistic or dwell in "a gloom of negativity".[252] Quilligan

concludes with Dante's proposition that the refusal to choose or decide in what one

believes - and thereby the refusal of self-definition - is worse than damnation: "[they] are

condemned to spend eternity chasing elusive banners in the vestibule of the inferno. Not

even hell will have them".[253] Honig notes that the "abyss of despair" - into which, for

him, allegory leads - ultimately lacks "a complete stultification" which might provide the

catalyst for a "leap" to commitment. The narrative ends, he writes, "with the stark

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247.   Ibid., p.221. Quilligan's sense of this beyond is quite specific: "Allegory calls attention to the
'other' - in a word, to God, or to some sort of possible sacredness" (p.52). She makes the distinction
between two sorts of "beyond" to textual internality: "allegory reflects... the culture's assumptions
about the ability of language to state or reveal value; that is, value conceived in an extramundane way,
not mere market-place value, or the goings on in the *agora*, but something *allos*" (p.221).
248.   Ibid., p.278. She goes on to qualify: "Such a negative capability may, however, be purely the
privilege of authors; for even if the reader chooses to accept the infinite regressions for what they are -
inconclusive - that in itself is a choice".
249.   Ibid., p.235. Quilligan argues that "Perhaps language cannot redeem language, so that poetry
cannot redeem society; fiction may only entertain. But all allegorists do aim at redemption; and because
they must work with language, they ultimately turn to the paradox at the heart of their own
assumptions about words and make the final focus of their narratives not merely the social function of
language, but, in particular, the slippery tensions between literalness and metaphor. They scrutinize
language's own problematic polysemy" (p.64).
250.   Ibid., p.277.
251.   Ibid., p.241.
252.   Ibid., p.265.
253.   Ibid., p.278.

critical question of the individual and society".[254] In the end, Honig writes, allegory abandons "the fundamental device of hypothetical construction" and reveals life; "the allegorical work dispenses with the concept of allegory".[255]

This ethical direction of allegory's purpose is also shared by Benjamin. Allegory may be a move beyond the symbol for Benjamin, but it is not the end; and the reaction to the symbol is not enough. Indeed, as we have seen, allegory becomes central only in order to subject it to dialectical scrutiny, and we watch it unfold its own contradictions and transform itself. It is not just the disjunctive, not just the negative, but a process or dynamic in which its antinomies cross, interact, exacerbate and even degenerate. For Benjamin, allegory demystifies the symbol, better approximating the truth of a fallen world and the disarticulation of consciousness and physis. For the symbol, truths are (mistakenly) deemed immediately present and plenitudinous, for allegory they are forever lost, and recognised as such. Yet despite this promise of demystification, Benjamin suggests, allegory is limited by its fetishism of fragments and its retreat into melancholic inwardness - an inwardness that spectates a world devoid of meaning and grieves for this loss. Unhindered negativity - even that which moves - leads only to "melancholic immersion", Benjamin argues:

> And those who lose their footing turn somersaults in their fall, so would the allegorical intention fall from emblem to emblem down into the dizziness of its

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254.   Honig, op. cit., p.68.
255.   Ibid., p.179. He sees "prescriptive allegory" and "programmatic realism" as equally abstracted from reality, equally hostile to representation, and that they equally confuse the particular and the universal (p.180): "The literary allegory does not oppose a realistic account of the universe. Its very power lies in its giving proof to the physical and ethical realities of life objectively conceived" (p.179). "Allegory, which is symbolic in method, is realistic in aim and in the content of its perception" (p179.). Romanticism here functions as Honig's identification of the Fall, with its hostility to Christian analogy and the natural sciences, emptied the symbol of its "ontological basis" (p.181): "In losing its objective character, the symbol became a simulacrum, a disembodied form in which ideas or feelings were arbitrarily substituted for real events, persons, and things... reality-drained..." (p.181). And thus "the search for symbolic meaning is an essential part of the effort to name and renew a full awareness of reality in contemporary terms" (p.183). It is difficult to say whether this amounts to another happy resolution. Honig ends with the words of Wallace Stevens: "a name for something that never could be named", the "inconceivable idea", existing "in the difficulty of what is to be" (cited p.183).

bottomless depths...[256]

In the final pages of his Baroque book, Benjamin charts allegory's "about-turn into salvation and redemption", "the direction of allegorical reflection is reversed; on the second part of its wide arc it returns, to redeem".[257] Benjamin's approval of "destructive" work has to be seen in a wider context.[258] In 1931, he wrote this about certain left-intellectuals and their "nihilism":

> ... this left-wing radicalism is precisely the attitude to which there is no longer in general any corresponding political action. It is to the left not of this or that tendency, but simply to the left of what is in general possible. For from the beginning all it has in mind is to enjoy itself in a negativistic quiet.[259]

For Benjamin, it is clear that some further resolution must be found. It has been widely argued that Benjamin advocates a "resolution" - or, at least, a leap - into praxis.[260]

This is the direction assumed by Buchloh in his survey of allegorical practices. Levine's strategy is presented as closest to the allegorical melancholic, and "the strongest negation within the gallery framework".[261] Buchloh describes how:

> The allegorical mind sides with the object and protests against its devaluation to the status of a commodity by devaluating it a second time in allegorical practice.[262]

Levine, he says, "devalues the object of representation for the second time", yet her

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256. *Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.232.
257. Ibid.
258. See, for example, "Central Park", op. cit.; "The Destructive Character", *One Way Street*, op. cit., pp.157-9; "Karl Kraus", *One Way Street*, op. cit., pp.256-90, especially his quotation of Adolf Loos: "When human labour consists only of destruction, then it will be really human, natural and noble labour" (cited p.289). Benjamin had an approving sense of a "humanity that affirms itself in destruction" (cited Buci-Glucksmann, op. cit., p.58). Buci-Glucksmann links this "destructive principle" with the need to make "leaps" across the "unbridgeable gulf" - which, she believes, Benjamin saw as separating Jewish history and messianic freedom - and with a politics of anarchism and nihilism (pp.63-4). See also Julian Roberts, *Walter Benjamin*, op. cit., p.7.
259. Walter Benjamin, "Left-Wing Melancholy. (On Erich Kästner's new book of poems)", *Screen*, no.2, Summer 1974, p.30.
260. Cf., for example, Julian Roberts, *Walter Benjamin*, op. cit., p.146.
261. Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures", op. cit., p.52.
262. Ibid., p.44. Once again this figure can be compared to Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*.

"apparently radical denial of authorship" is "complacent in defeat", encouraging a "fatalistic acceptance", "a silent complacency in the face of the static conditions of reified existence".263 The work does not open up, what he calls, "a dimension of critical negativity", but like Benjamin's melancholic endures "the violence of the passive denial that the allegorical subject imposes upon itself as well as upon the objects of its choice".264 Buchloh sees Benjamin as moving away from this sense of allegory to one with a political inflection in his work on Baudelaire and in his famous essay "The Author as Producer";265 and for Buchloh it is Martha Rosler's work which best approximates this latter sense of allegorical praxis. This wing of allegorical (or beyond allegorical) activity is interventionist, and produces art outside of the accepted frames of reference: it "produces" radical work, and refuses to supply the apparatus.266

There is a choice here as to how we might read allegory: on the one hand, a move out of itself (in its melancholic form) into the "world", the extra-textual, construction, or praxis; on the other, as an infinite regress into, what Benjamin calls, the bottomless depths. Of course, this formulation gives a particular inflection to the matter, and it might be presented differently: on the one hand, as a resolution akin to the Hegelian *Aufhebung*; on the other, as a perpetual openness. Both inflections - whatever their emphases, and however these emphases may be further inflected by different commentators - inevitably pitch the question into a political realm of judgement; and one which has been running at least since the debates of the 1840s. 267 It could be said that we are working with two versions of the dialectic: that which must move to something positive (whether as the building of a new social framework beyond capital, or as a

263.   Ibid., p.52.
264.   Ibid., p.52, p.53.
265.   See Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer" (1934), *Understanding Brecht*, New Left Books, 1973, pp.85-103.
266.   Ibid. Nevertheless, Buchloh points to a problem: for him, Rosler's work remains subject to a certain impotence by this very externality.
267.   For example: Left versus Right Hegelians; Lukács versus Adorno; Lukács versus Brecht; Benjamin versus Adorno; poststructuralism versus Marxism.

return to order); or that which retains its negativity (whether as some force of emancipatory impulse, or as a drift into nihilism). And in this very last example I raise the question of the distinction between negative dialectics and nihilism.

Hegel's account of the unhappy consciousness can be read as one stage on the way to Absolute Knowledge and final *Aufhebung*; and, according to one's predispositions, one can see this as either "positive" or "negative", reactionary or liberatory, method or result. What has come to interest me, however, is that it can also be read as lacking any internally generated resolution. The unhappy consciousness itself dives into something akin to nihilism. The only way beyond its incessant circlings and its ever deepening "infinite regressions" - in other words, the only way forward for the narrative of the *Phenomenology* to the following section on Reason - comes via the intervention of some "deus ex machina". In the final lines of the section on the unhappy consciousness we find the mediator in the figure of a priest.[268] Put this way, Hegel's unhappy consciousness looks far less like part of some relentless and all-powerful mechanism, and seems more to resemble nihilism. This, I suspect, would not tally with the account of either the pro- or anti-Hegelian camps. What it seems to do, however, is problematise the very borders of hitherto secure "positions". If this is so, then the frequent resort to the figure of the unhappy consciousness may take on more significance.

The resort, in the final analysis, to Benjamin in his Brechtian mode, is the favoured option of many writers, even when this is glossed by Adornian cautions. I can see why this is desirable, but confess to finding it increasingly pat. In particular, it seems to close the issue just as things begin to look interesting. What happens if we pursue things even just a little further? If we hold in abeyance, just for a few pages, the choices offered by

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268.   Interestingly, allegory also has frequent resort to a *deus ex machina* (see, for example, Fletcher, op. cit., p.150). Jameson notes that Rousseau, in his exploration of language's beginning, gets caught in a conundrum, and has to find "a detonator" or "causal concept" to reverse his narrative (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, op. cit., p.223).

the call to arms? De Man, as we have seen, warns against resolving one's sense of allegory too soon (for example, seeing a text as an allegory of its own deconstruction), but he also points to the dangers involved in a sense of allegory which tends towards another (connected?) complacency: as though the issue is resolved by exposing representation as representation, and declaring the matter resolved. Allegory and irony, he says, are demystified forms of language, but while "Both modes are fully de-mystified when they remain within the realm of their respective languages [they]... are totally vulnerable to renewed blindness as soon as they leave it for the empirical world".[269] Honig notes that allegory "constantly reappears on the borders between religion or philosophy and art",[270] and within it one can find the philosophical metaphors of "identification, motion, unity, and immutability".[271] Allegory's emphasis on the relation between reality and representation, and on the problem of interpretation, raises significant metaphysical, ontological, epistemological and ethical issues.[272]

The further we move into these difficulties, what had seemed like two quite distinct lines of criticism by allegory - against the symbol and against mimesis - start to cross paths.[273] Indeed, we are referred not just to different modalities of representation, but to

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269.   "The Rhetoric of Temporality", op. cit., p.226.
270.   Honig, op. cit., p.7; or - widening the terrain still further - it "hovers on the borders between primitive mythological figurations and the more sophisticated structures of philosophical thought" (p.25).
271.   Ibid., p.30.
272.   Jameson suggests that this range of issues - and the slippage between tropology, philosophy, politics, literature, etc. - amounts to a "transcoding", and that de Man utilises his concept of metaphor to enact, and to generalise, this transcoding. In particular, it is not a narrow sense of trope which de Man employs, but "the dynamics of the trope" which is "identified" with, and "pronounced to be 'the same' as", other theoretical discourses. This makes, Jameson argues, de Man's metaphor "itself a metaphorical act and a violent yoking together of distinct and heterogeneous objects" (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, op. cit., p.238). This is a strong argument, and one which can be directed at most writers on art/culture who propose any import for their claims beyond the material. This also goes for a writer like Jameson, of course - a point I make not to deflate his, but to indicate the difficulty in this matter. It brings us back to the question of how to mediate text and context discussed in Chapter 1; note that Jameson here explicitly describes de Man's concept of metaphor as "mediatory". It also moves us into the question of subject/object transpositions.
273.   Fredric Jameson has presented this as the heart of the de Manian matter. Jameson articulates this around metaphor rather than symbol: "... paradoxically, far from being the very heartland of the figural and the space in which language is liberated from the literal and the referential..., metaphor is for

the very problem of this in relation to "the real". This is a question which has become

the ground for easy statements - the more degenerated forms of statements, such as:

there is nothing outside representation, etc. - rather than a point of difficulty for theory.

The matters of representation, of knowledge, of attempts to know the real, or represent

it - and, by extension, we might include questions such as realism, materialism, etc. -

just do not lend themselves to simple positions, or quick dismissals. I read both de Man

and Benjamin - whatever their differences, whatever their weaknesses - as dealing with

such matters as the very stakes of their projects.[274] As Norris has put it: de Man "allows

of no premature appeal to rhetoric as a means of escape from epistemological issues".[275]

> Rhetoric may figure as the problematic term, the aspect of language that complicates the move from phenomenal perception to concepts of pure understanding. But it can exert this deconstructive leverage only in so far as it remains an activity of thought closely in touch with epistemology and critical reason.[276]

V. Signs, Symbols, And Some Strange Turnings

De Man names the key moment in the mind's resistance to self-erasure as *the aesthetic*,

which operates as a defence against this negative self-knowledge. But this defense is not

de Man something like the source and origin, the deeper cause, of the literal and referential illusions themselves..." (ibid., p.227).

274.   Jameson describes de Man's project as an attempt at "restoring the clumsiness of some initial thought process", an effort to recover the crudeness of fundamentals comparable to early hominids (ibid., pp.218-20). Jameson concentrates on de Man's reading of Rousseau, and suggests that the former's interest in the latter is due to Rousseau's offering of "the spectacle of this crude new thought - history - on the moment of its invention out of nothingness" (p.219). This would present de Man as some extreme version of "foregrounding one's devices".

275.   Norris, op. cit., p.78. Discussing the question of aesthetics and epistemology in an interview with Robert Moynihan, de Man remarks: "If there is a priority, that is, if there has to be one, it certainly is epistemological" (cited p.71). Norris sees de Man as distinct from postmodern and poststructuralist thought: "For the upshot of such counterdisciplinary gestures is first to reduce every discourse to an undifferentiated general rhetoric, and then to deprive rhetoric itself of any critical or epistemological force" (p.101). Foucault, he writes, presents rhetoric as "the active antithesis of knowledge and truth - a disruptive force within language that lays bare the ruses of that will-to-power concealed behind the claims of pure, disinterested reason" (p.94). Jameson reaches a different judgement from Norris, and says of de Man: "the positions and the arguments are "postmodern"... even if the conclusions are not" (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, op. cit., p.255).

276.   Ibid., p.94.

just evasive, but, as we have seen, entirely necessary.[277] This is worth exploring, for de Man makes a further move: "the sign, random and singular at its first position, turns into symbol";[278] or, the sign represents itself as symbol. In other words, sign and symbol are not just distinct, but are found to be in a relation of paralysis like the self-effacing I, or, as de Man puts it, one of "mutual obliteration".[279] This move is lived out a second time - and raises further issues - as de Man goes on to consider "the commanding metaphor... of interiorization".[280] Interiorisation, or internalisation, is a powerful rhetorical model (which he sees as utilised by the ideology of the symbol or aesthetic ideology), which, according to de Man, is "the understanding of aesthetic beauty as the external manifestation of an ideal content which is itself an interiorized experience".[281]

What lies at the heart of the theory of the symbol is the concept of *Erinnerung*, remembrance, or the "recollection as the inner gathering and preserving of experience".[282] The emphasis in *Erinnerung* is on the organicism of the relations it mediates, the interpenetration of form and content (which reminds us of the traditional language of dialectics). But despite being the theoretician of *Erinnerung,* and despite the power of the "dialectics of internalization", de Man insists that Hegel is also the theoretician of *Gedächtnis* - memorisation (in the sense of the memorisation of rote

277.   Jameson also sees the "errors" of aesthetic ideology as necessary; or, as he puts it: "metaphor is and is not an 'error': it generates illusions; yet insofar as it is inescapable and part of the very fabric of language itself, 'error' does not seem a particularly suitable word for it, since we have no space available that might allow us to get outside language and to make such judgments" (ibid., p.228). Accordingly, metaphor is an operation which emerges from this abstraction (p.229), but this is also an act of "primal metaphor" from which allegory itself emerges as a self-reflexive narration (p.233) - "the birth of allegory out of the primal metaphorical dilemma" (p.241).
278.   "Sign and Symbol", op. cit., p.768.
279.   Ibid., p.770. "Since, however, it [the sign] states itself as what it is not, it represents a determined relationship to the world that is in fact arbitrary, that is to say it states itself as symbol". If we take up Jameson's point about allegory's birth from primal metaphor we have an interesting picture before us of the play of identity and non-identity, especially if we contrast this with the sign can only survive as a symbol.
280.   Ibid., p.771.
281.   Ibid.
282.   Ibid.

learning). The distinction, which is again often collapsed, is crucial, for *Gedächtnis* is to *Erinnerung* as sign is to symbol, or as allegory is to symbol, and the former's act of relating name and meaning is an "empty link", mechanical and arbitrary. De Man, of course, is keen to maintain the difference, as is, to some extent, de Man's Hegel, although for the latter this is not without problems for his system. Indeed, it is, emphasises de Man, *Gedächtnis*, not *Erinnerung*, which plays the key role in Hegel's philosophy. Specifically, this is a mediating role in the progression from perception through representation (in which *Gedächtnis* is a sub-species) to thought. This is a matter of no little importance, and one which bears significantly upon the central statement of the *Aesthetics* - and, the work's key claim to the symbol - "art is the sensory manifestation of the idea". How, wonders de Man, is the idea (thought) *externally manifested*, made over into a form appropriable by sensory experience? To be experienced sensually, it must, for a start, leave "a material trace upon the world".[283]

Here the full implications of *Gedächtnis* come into play, for the memorisation of rote learning - particularly when one writes down words in order to forget them, or when one copies a text mechanistically such that the meaning of the words is forgotten - treats words as names, and memorises by material inscription in order to forget. By contrast, the remembrance or recollection of *Erinnerung* occurs not in the written word, but, by contrast, in sounds and images.

> ... memory [*Gedächtnis*] is a truth of which the aesthetic [cf. *Erinnerung*] is the defensive, ideological, and censored translation. In order to have memory one has to be able to forget remembrance and reach the machinelike exteriority, the outward turn [of rote learning].[284]

Thus, according to de Man, this memorisation is necessary to the existence of thought, and moreover, it is, as inscription, necessary for thought's sensory manifestation. Of necessity - as the precondition of thought - *Gedächtnis* effaces, forgets, and puts into the

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283.   Ibid.
284.   Ibid., p.773.

past *Erinnerung* - and along with it remembrance, the symbolic mode, the aesthetic, *the preservation of thought*, interiorised as ideal content. *Erinnerung* is but the "defensive, ideological, and censored translation" which defensively covers over this necessity.

De Man goes still further. In inscribing, he claims - in that "outward turn" and "machinelike exteriority" - we *preserve* that which we might otherwise forget entirely. We find that memorisation can only be preserved as symbol: "the sign can only survive as a symbol".285

> Memory effaces remembrance (or recollection) just as the I effaces itself. The faculty that enables thought to exist [*Gedächtnis*] also makes its preservation impossible. The art, the *techne,* of writing which cannot be separated from thought and from memorization can only be preserved in the figural mode of the symbol, the very model it has to do away with if it is to occur at all.286

Gedächtnis ensures the material inscription (or sensory manifestation) of the idea - in the act of forgetting we inscribe, in order that forgetting is not total or absolute. It implies

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285.   Ibid., p.774. Cf. Benjamin's *synthesis* for allegory's antinomies, one which we recall "lies in the essence of writing itself" (*Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.175). Cf. the phrase - "the sign can only survive as symbol" - with the "symbol that is not symbolic" ("Sign and Symbol", op. cit., p.774).

It is worth noting that this idea of the sign which can only survive as a symbol has certain echoes of the tendency of negation to tip over into affirmation. This argument differs from the two predominant accounts, where negation is either lost in some political compromise or seen to be lost because the social grounds which hitherto supported it have changed. Atkinson has noted that disaffirmatory practices in art tend, in the act of making, to become affirmatory - a more prosaic expression of "the sign can only survive as a symbol" (Atkinson, op. cit., p.9). Sartre noted that while, with respect to the given, praxis is negativity, with respect to the object aimed at, it is positivity (*Search for a Method*, op cit., p.92). Adorno argued that "art works are not being, but becoming" (*Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit, p.252). This dynamic or "inherently processual nature of works of art", Adorno goes on, have moments of "true identity of the identical and the non-identical in terms of process - true because that identity is only a moment and not some magic formula for the whole" (p.253); nevertheless their drive to form is provided by "the heterogeneous, the non-identical, the amorphous".

> Dynamic therefore is reciprocity, a restless antithetical process which never comes to a halt in static being. Works of art exist only *in actu*; their tensions never resolve themselves into pure identity with one or the other extreme. For all that, they can act as a dynamic field of internal antagonism only if and when they are finished, congealed objects. Otherwise, the pent-up forces in them would simply run parallel to or away from each other without ever intersecting. The paradoxical phenomenon of an equilibrium of forces negates itself. Their motion must come to a halt and yet remain visible qua motion in this standstill. (p.253)

With a tone which we might recognize in de Man, Adorno wrote "Affirmation does not surround the status quo with a halo. What it does is resist death..." (p.357).

286.   Ibid., p.773.

"the particular temporality which makes art both the most proleptic and the most retrospective of activities".[287]

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This may add a somewhat different inflection to the reading of Cézanne given by Fred Orton. Taking de Man's critique of aesthetic ideology, Orton charts the inversion of the apparently paradigmatic modernist/symbolist practice of Cézanne, turning the critics' claims to aesthetic immediacy, into an allegorical account.[288] Here, we find Cézanne - or, at least, Gasquet's Cézanne - striving for the same immediacy, although this time not as the painting's viewer-critic, receiving the appropriate sensations before it in the gallery, but in terms of a striving for some immediacy of representational rendition with phenomenal experience; for example, seeking something close to a symbolic economy in matching painting to its model, let's say a matching of green oil dabs to the landscape at the Chateau de Medan. In Orton's account, Cézanne's intent of immediacy (symbolic? mimetic?), dissolves into its own impossibility - a point which the symbolic intents of the critics fail to recognise. As Orton puts it: "Each picture becomes an allegory of the

287.   See "Reply to Raymond Geuss", op. cit., 389. Cf. Timothy Bahti's comment that in de Man: "displacement, erasure, and forgetting are not the elimination of something true but the marking of its signs". See Timothy Bahti, "Lessons of Remembering and Forgetting", *Reading de Man Reading* , eds. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p.257. For a critique of "the politics of forgetting", see Helga Geyer-Ryan, op. cit., p.5
288.   See Fred Orton, "Out of Time", unpublished paper presented at the College Arts Association Annual Conference, New York, February 1994 , p.3. I take this to be quite a distinct project to the one on Jasper Johns. Johns' status has, as Orton convincingly argues, always been positioned as "undecidable", whereas Cézanne's has not been coded in this way; so the unravelling of the symbolic into the allegorical must proceed differently with Cézanne, not least because Johns has never been incorporated successfully into the symbolic paradigm. The resonance of the Johns project, to my mind, turns on the breakdown of, or hindrance to, the Greenbergian account of Modernism. In this sense, the problem of Johns has a similar - although, I think, quite distinct - role to that of Postmodern practices for Owens and Crimp: we are witnessing some sort of "beyond", or, at least, as Orton argues for Johns, some sort of playing/working at the limits (hence Orton's emphasis on "neither... nor, both... and"). Here we are presented with an allegorical practice to counter the paradigm of Modernism's symbol. With Cézanne, however, one is forced, much more like de Man, to unravel the symbol from the inside, for he lies deep inside the canon of Modernism - however "peripheral" Aix-en-Provence figures for the main accounts of Modernism's driving forces, and however difficult his practice has proved to be for certain narratives of the development of modern art (including the Open University's A315 course).

impossibility of the symbol":[289]

> The symbol always turns into thoroughly troped and figured speech, that is to say, it always resolves into allegory. It cannot contain the tropological feint which makes it what it is. The troped and figured character of the symbol always disrupts its symbolic form and so provides it with a negative moment which works against its symbolic effect and the claims made in virtue of its transcendence by forcing to mind the constitutive gap that there is in language between words, or visual images, and the reality or experience of reality that they try to evoke.[290]

(i) "Cézanne wants to provide a contact with immediate sensation, but can only do it by mediated substance".[291] The artist's serious searching for that immediacy, cannot ignore the gaps between what de Man would call "linguistic" and "natural reality", or "reference" and "phenomenalism".[292] Orton discusses the instability of the term "sensation" - "it is *of* the world outside Cézanne - nature, a person, a still life - and it is also inside *of* him".[293]

> The more he brings his sensations together, the more difficult the process of painting becomes. It's a difficult task to bring them together.... The process produces more and more difficulties, more moments of doubt... where doubts and difficulties reach aporia.[294]

This is explicitly framed by an analogy with Derrida's unstable terms, of which differance/difference is the privileged one: the "loose links and gaps as undecidables".[295] What it reminds me of, however, is de Man's discussion of Hegel,[296] and indeed of Hegel - especially the passages of sense-certainty and perception in the section on "Consciousness" in the *Phenomenology*.[297]

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289.   Ibid., p.10.
290.   Ibid., p.8.
291.   See Fred Orton, "Cézanne/Medan/de Man", unpublished paper presented at the conference "Desperately Seeking Cézanne", University of Leeds, 7th May 1993, p.9.
292.   Cited in "Out of Time", op. cit., p.10.
293.   Ibid., p.4.
294.   "Cézanne/Medan/de Man", op. cit., p.8.
295.   Ibid., p.9.
296.   Cf. also to de Man's discussion of the impossibility of philosophically defining "movement" in "The Epistemology of Metaphor", *Critical Inquiry*, vol.5, no.1, Autumn 1978, pp.13-30.
297.   Note that, in the earlier paper, Orton explicitly ties the impossibility of Cézanne's striving to the concept of the "unhappy consciousness".

(ii) "Cézanne wants to provide a contact with immediate sensation, but can only do it by mediated substance".[298] But if we follow the drive of de Man's writing on Hegel - on the complex of movements made around the term *Gedächtnis* and inscription - we may find ourselves with a sign that can only survive as a symbol. That "mediated *substance*" is where the issue lies. To reiterate: "The art, the *techne*, of writing... can only be preserved in the figural mode of the symbol, the very model it has to do away with if it is to occur at all".[299] And Orton argues:

> The foreknowledge of the paintings is that Cézanne's is an art which tells us that reality, nature, sensations cannot be conceived except as practical activity, as thought. As he conceives "sensations" so he destroys them.[300]

To claim that the sign can only survive as a symbol is not to return us to the symbolic account, its illusions and ideologies, etc. What I've argued for comes out, I think, on the far side of the argument for allegory; and it is a pedantic point to worry about whether this *is* still allegory, is *beyond* allegory, or is a proper sense for allegory. Whatever we call it, it must take the figure of allegory seriously - or, rather, it must take seriously the question of representation raised by this figure. Orton's account of Cézanne comes very close to this, and to working out these issues through historical material and a concrete practice: "reality, nature, sensations cannot be conceived except as practical activity, as thought".[301] This nod in the direction of Marx may make a move

298.   "Cézanne/Medan/de Man", op. cit, p.9.
299.   "Sign and Symbol", op. cit., p.773.
300.   "Cézanne/Medan/de Man", op. cit., p.10.
301.   Jameson also sees de Man as "returning to the act of thinking as praxis and stripping away the reifications that sediment around that act when it has become an object" (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, op. cit., p.220). Another text by de Man has provided a focus for this sort of discussion. See Paul de Man, "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant", in *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects* , eds. Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984, pp.121-144. The probing of "phenomenality and materiality" has also been taken up by T.J. Clark in an unpublished paper, "Another Cézanne", presented at the conference "Cézanne and the Aesthetic", held at the National Gallery, London (but under the auspices of the Tate Gallery), 29th March 1996. A related, although distinct, paper which emphasises Cézanne's empiricism, positivism and materialism, and "the powers and limits of a practice of knowledge", has been published: T.J. Clark, "Freud's Cézanne", *Representations* 52, Fall 1995, pp.94-122 (citation from p.115). Clark again returns to the question of negation as he draws to a summation: "Nonetheless, if I am also proposing that the ultimate interest of

similar to de Man's with *Gedächtnis*; and, interestingly, returns us to a position not too

far from Benjamin's leap to praxis. We also appear to have found some way into

considering these matters for the practice of art.

* * *

> Literary "form" is the result of the dialectic interplay between the prefigurative
> structure of the foreknowledge and the intent at totality of the interpretative
> process. This dialectic is difficult to grasp. The idea of totality suggests closed
> forms that strive for ordered and consistent systems and have an almost
> irresistible tendency to transform themselves into objective structures. Yet, the
> temporal factor, so persistently forgotten, should remind us that the form is
> never anything but *a process on the way to its completion* .... Understanding can
> be called complete only when it becomes aware of its own temporal predicament
> and realizes that the horizon within which the totalization can take place is time
> itself.[302]

The issues here may bring us closer to issues pertinent to the visual arts, except that

within de Man's texts, the visual image functions as the symbolic to writing's allegorical

system. The chains of values can be established from this passage:

> To the extent that the paradigm for art is thought rather than perception, the sign
> rather than the symbol, writing rather than painting or music, it will also be
> memorization rather than recollection. As such, it belongs indeed to a past
> which, in Proust's words, could never be recaptured, *retrouvé*.[303]

Memorisation, de Man says, "is entirely devoid of images".[304] Although the discussion

of "images" here cannot be collapsed into an art historian's sense of an "image" - just

like Hegel's criticism of "picture thoughts" cannot be understood as a critique of

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Cézanne's art lies in its happening on the powers and limits of a particular system of representation,
then presumably I do not believe that his art lies simply *within* that system - imprisoned by it,
exemplifying it. I should expect the sheer doggedness with which Cézanne tries to exercise the powers
in question lead him continually to their boundaries and insufficiencies. My argument is that glimpses
of alternative systems of representation are only thrown up by the most intense and recalcitrant effort to
make the ones we have finally deliver the goods. It is only in the process of discovering the system's
antinomies and blank spots - discovering them in practice, I mean - that the first improvised forms of
contrary imaging come to light. Though in the end these forms are less interesting in their own right -
they are too approximate, too preliminary for that - than as *repoussoir* for the system they still belong
to. They are what makes that system visible as such" (p.116). This argument is tied to a discussion of
the artificial or mechanical "grating and locking", or interruption, of Cézanne's *Bathers* (p.117).

302.   "Form and Intent in the American New Criticism", op. cit., p.31, p.32, my emphasis.
303.   "Sign and Symbol", op. cit., p.773.
304.   Ibid., p.772.

"pictures" (we must beware, here, of being "bad literal-minded") - this does, nevertheless, make it difficult to establish any straightforward "de Manian art history",[305] or to utilise the resources in unproblematic ways. Images and sounds, painting and music, may also be manifestations of thought, de Man suggests, but do not do so as sensory manifestations.[306] Elsewhere, he writes:

> ... the sign which pertains specifically to language and to rhetoric, marks, in Hegel, the passage from sheer inward recollection [*Erinnerung*] and imagination to thought [*Denken*], which occurs by way of the deliberate forgetting of substantial, aesthetic, and *pictorial symbols*.[307]

> Perception, imagination, representation, recollection, and such are all *manifestations* of the idea, but it is nevertheless the case that none of them necessarily entail its sensory manifestation. Only memorization..., to the extent that it implies notation and inscription, is necessarily a sensory and phenomenal manifestation; hence the link with inscribed language ....[308]

One could, of course, adopt the method (allegorical thinking, thinking through negativity) while jettisoning the explicit material by, and through, which this method is worked out and over. This, after all, is not too far from how Marx, for one, claimed to be indebted to Hegel; and this thesis has also tended to do this - this being a thesis on negation, and negation being the classic site over which such appropriation of methodology, without all that attends it, is acted out. But one last observation may be in order.

Benjamin would seem to offer us a more amenable account of the image, indeed his account of the inscribing process is presented as the "synthesis" of writing realised in the frozen image. This moment of rigidity, of frozen statuary, can be compared with his idea of dialectic at a standstill. But we must also beware of taking Benjamin too literally

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305.   Note the doubtful title of the session organised by T.J. Clark at the College Arts Association, February 1994: "A de Manian Art History?"
306.   "The idea... makes its sensory appearance, in Hegel, as the material inscription of names.... the synthesis of memory [*Gedächtnis*] is the only activity of the intellect to occur as sensory manifestation of an idea..." ("Sign and Symbol", op. cit., pp.772-3).
307.   De Man cited in Timothy Bahti, op. cit., p.256, my emphasis.
308.   "Critical Response II. Reply to Raymond Geuss", op. cit., p.389.

on the matter of the image. Art historians have often favoured his concept of the "dialectical image" in order to introduce dialectics into an account of pictures, and especially photography and photomontage. But any exploration of Benjamin's dialectical image suggests that the concept is about as far away from images as is de Man's account: they are in the realm of thought representations, not inscribed ones; and Klee's work may *figure* this for Benjamin more than *be* it. Ironically, in terms of a concrete discussion *of* an image *through* this material, it is de Man who provides the most extended deliberation. It is, then, perhaps appropriate that - via Proust, Marcel, Swann, or Ruskin - he discusses Giotto so indirectly.

CONCLUSION

[N]egativity does not appear as a practice which guarantees meaning or opens out a space for free play and fantasy... but, rather, negation appears as an absolute and all-encompassing fact, something which once begun is cumulative and uncontrollable; a fact which swallows meaning altogether.... On the other side of negation is always emptiness... an art in which ambiguity becomes infinite, which is on the verge of proposing... an Other which is comfortably ineffable, a vacuity, a vagueness, a mere mysticism of sight.[1]

A considerable part of the leading German intelligentsia, including Adorno, have taken up residence in the 'Grand Hotel Abyss' which I described in connection with my critique of Schopenhauer as 'a beautiful hotel, equipped with every comfort, on the edge of an abyss, of nothingness, of absurdity. And the daily contemplation of the abyss between excellent meals or artistic entertainments, can only heighten the enjoyment of the subtle comforts offered'.[2]

The remark made by Clark, quoted above, on the "ineffable" and "a mere mysticism of sight", raises the problematic terrain to which questions of negativity tend. One must wonder whether this "looking the negative in the face" - never mind Cacciari's favouring of "completed nihilism" - is possible without dissolving into what Tafuri himself feared would be irrationality.[3] Cacciari's own path involved following negativity into theology, and, specifically, into "angelology".[4] Negativity, Agamben writes, is "the original mythogeme of metaphysics", and nothingness is the

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1.   Clark, "Clement Greenberg's Theory of Art", op. cit., pp.59-60.
2.   Lukács, "Preface" (1962), *The Theory of the Novel*, MIT, 1971, p.22.
3.   Tafuri, "Introduction: The Historical Project", *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., pp.1-21.
4.   See *The Necessary Angel*, op. cit. Cacciari develops many of his questions from Benjamin's work on Paul Klee's angels. The issues are also discussed by Agamben, op. cit. Similar themes are touched on in the major writings on allegory, especially in Fletcher, op. cit.; and Benjamin ends his *Trauerspiel* with the question of the origin of evil and subject and object. Benjamin poses the origin of evil as "the theological essence of the subjective": "Evil as such... exists only in allegory, and means something different from what it is. It means precisely the non-existence of what it presents". Associating this with the melancholic's subjective view, he goes on to say that "By its allegorical form evil as such reveals itself to be a subjective phenomenon" (*Trauerspiel*, op. cit., p.233). The promise of the knowledge of both good and evil is paradoxical, for, Benjamin argues, "Knowledge of evil... has no object" for there is no evil in God's creation, but only "in man himself": "Knowledge of good, as knowledge, as secondary. It ensues from practice. Knowledge of evil - as knowledge this is primary. It ensues from contemplation. Knowledge of good and evil is, then, the opposite of all factual knowledge" (p.233). Cf. discussion of allegory and symbol in Cacciari, *The Necessary Angel*, op. cit., pp.50-53.

"metaphysical question par excellence".[5] However, for Agamben, negativity's ungroundedness is what produces mystical speculation, but, he insists, such mysticism is not the means to access this region of concerns.

For all its esotericism, however, some familiar themes emerge in works such as Cacciari's book on angels. The angel, he argues, "poses the problem of representation",[6] for although "all angels are created in grace", grace is lost at the point where the angel *decides* and exercises free will.[7] Angels, Cacciari believes, are equivalent to linguistic signs: both are caught in the contradiction of absolute freedom and absolute determination, autonomy and heteronomy.

Persistent questions into interpretation - with their close attention to language and representation - tend to this negative ground. This, it seems, is the direction taken by the exploration of the question of symbol and allegory, or by "looking the negative in the face"; and it is to be found - or at least implied - in Clark's consideration of Pollock. Is this where the "fundamental questions" and the "terrain beyond ideology" lie?[8] So although the concerns of Chapter 3 seem distant from the more explicit emancipatory rhetoric of Chapters 1 and 2, there is, I think, a common thread which connects them.

The tenor of most intellectual debates which address - or, more often, *touch on* - negativity, tend to establish a secure division between nihilism and dialectic, across which polemics are exchanged. This is a division which I am inclined to think is rather less definite, although I also think that there are good reasons for holding on to it. The

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5.   Agamben, op. cit., p.85, p.3.
6.   Cacciari, *The Necessary Angel*, op. cit., p.39.
7.   Ibid., p.61.
8.   Adorno's concept of mimesis - for him, the last bolt-hole of negation - is also posed as the problem of representation. It is notable that Adorno's discussion of the subject/object distinction is integrated with one on magic and archaic art. These are ontological questions which, it could be claimed, aspire to a terrain "beyond ideology", even if they inevitably become components in ideological orchestrations.

difficulties of addressing these debates can be intimated by a quick survey of, for example, some of the positions against nihilism from the Left. For some commentators, the problem of nihilism can be located with poststructuralist thought, or with poststructualism's sources (such as Nietzsche); and yet others, distinguish between, on the one hand, Nietzsche and Heidegger and, on the other, the use that poststructuralist philosophers have made of them (for example, Gillian Rose). Some, such as Peter Dews, would seek to critique this poststructuralist tendency with the thought of Critical Theory. For others, German Critical Theory shares with French poststructuralism a "continental" idealism and lack of rigour, which might be counterposed with the Anglo-American tradition and, especially with Wittgenstein. Yet, for someone like Stanley Rosen, the traditional antipathy of Anglo-American to continental philosophy allows the former to be blind to *its own* nihilism, and, he argues, Wittgenstein is a key figure of 20c. nihilist thought.[9] For yet others, Western Marxism can be seen as a return to the Hegelian failings that Marx overcame - idealism and lack of praxis tend to be identified as the prime failings. For certain commentators, in contrast, Hegelian philosophy holds together what Left Hegelian philosophy tears apart; thus, for Kolakowski, the rejection of Hegel's reconciliation of thought and empirical reality - initiated by the Young Hegelians - produced "the theory of an inevitable disharmony", turning reason into "a source of obligation, a standard with which to confront the world";[10] and treating the world's inertia as something to be countered by spirit's "destructive function", its function as "the agent of an eternal dissolution".[11] And recently, as part of a critical

9.   Rosen, op. cit., p.xviii.
10.   Kolakowski, op. cit., p.93.
11.   Kolakowski, op. cit., p.91. "Whereas Hegel's philosophy of history sought to maintain a positive link between the Idea and empirical reality, Bauer and other Hegelians of his school reintroduced a radical dualism between the critical mind and the existing universe. In this interpretation, the spirit is no more than the agent of an eternal dissolution to which every feature of the empirical world is bound to be subjected.... thus the spirit and the world are defined negatively by their relation to each other". (pp.91-92) Bruno Bauer's sense of intellectual activity as "purely negative" (p.91; see also McLellan, op. cit., p.52, and cf. pp.10-11) is seen by commentators as Fichtean, not Hegelian. Kolakowski, for example, tells us that for Bruno Bauer: "the whole of empirical reality presented itself to him on Fichtean lines as a collection of negatives, a kind of necessary resistance for the spirit to overcome in the course of its infinite progress" (Kolakowski, op. cit., pp.88-89) After 1840 especially, the Young

realist project, Roy Bhaskar values the Young Hegelian critique of Hegel's restoration of positivity, and emphasises negativity as the processual and transformative aspects of the dialectic's "pulse of freedom", and its role in human self-emancipation.[12]

Karl Löwith notes that Hegel's fulfillment of spirit [*Voll-endung*] is also "its final end",[13] and argues that Hegel positions his philosophy in such as way as to break irretrievably from the Christian logos, making this fulfillment a "reconciliation of decay".[14] Agamben manages to follow Hegel's negative into nihilism.[15] Similarly, Gillian Rose compares Nietzsche's self-completing nihilism (*sich vollendenden Nihilismus*) - which she prefers to translate as "self-perficient" - with Hegel's *sich vollbringende Skeptizismus*.[16] Even Hegel himself suggested that the dialectic "on its own" leads to scepticism.[17]

Working with the broad-brush distinction between a dialectic with an emphasis on

Hegelians are considered to have allied their sense of negation with Fichte's notion of obligation (*Sollen*), a moral-practical philosophy which emphasised action, but which proposed a "perpetual antagonism" between thought and world (p.53). According to Kolakowski, Fichte advocated a "dialectic of self-cancelling exteriorization" (p.52), where: "... the obligation of thought towards itself... requires the ego to create its own counterpart, in which it recognizes itself as its own self-limitation" (p.52). Julian Roberts also roots the concept of "reflection" here, and describes "the ability of the transcendental subject to distance itself from the empirical self" (German Philosophy, p.82).
12.   Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic. The Pulse of Freedom*, Verso, 1993, p.8. Bhaskar's is a project to outline a critical realist dialectic. He distinguishes different forms and aspects of negation and negativity.
13.   Löwith, op. cit., p.10.
14.   Hegel cited ibid., p.11.
15.   Cf. Otto Pöggler, "Hegel und die Anfänge der Nihilismus-Diskussion", *Man and World* 3, 1970, pp.163-99. Agamben concludes that one must avoid being caught in this as a purely metaphysical and logical abyss, but must recognise the connected role of ethics and will (Agamben, op. cit., p.86). This question of will, incidentally, seems to be a perpetual reference point for these debates.
16.   In her book *Dialectic of Nihilism: Poststructuralism and Law* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford and New York, 1984), Gillian Rose discusses Ernst Jünger's "Über die Linie" (1950) as an enquiry into whether the world has surpassed Nietzsche's completed nihilism, and also Heidegger's response (pp.68-71). Heidegger argued that Jünger's "line" - with its subject/object separation - suggests that it is possible to distinguish an age of nihilism from one beyond nihilism. Heidegger proposed that "Out of the place of the line originates the origin of the essence of nihilism and its completion"(cited p.69), and concluded that projects to cross the line will never challenge its jurisdiction (pp.69). For Heidegger, she notes, "This self-perficient nihilism is the event which completes what first occurred by seeing the litigious space of consciousness and its objects as the representing of its own original partitioning, of a disowning (*Vereignen*) which is to be owned" (p.69).
17.   Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, op. cit., p.128.

positive resolution, or one which maintains its negative, critical, open quality, it is the latter approach, in particular, where insecurities of ground are most pronounced. The emphasis on the negative claims an emancipatory impluse, but it also threatens - or offers - a plunge into the *nihil*. Between nihilism and the negative dialectic the ground - which is a negative ground, *die Abgründe*, or abyss - becomes slippy, and not as secure as some would like it to be.

Similar difficulties are returned to in considerations of the unhappy consciousness, which, in the Hegelian narrative, follows scepticism, and which, as was noted towards the end of Chapter 3, seems to focus the dangerous ground(lessness) between dialectic and nihilism. Rosen, for example, criticises the degeneration of the unhappy consciousness into superficiality and irony - its *loss* of consciousness,[18] and Kuspit, we may recall, refers to the unhappy consciousness as a pseudo-dialectic.[19] According to Rosen the unhappy consciousness is "the melancholia attendant upon freedom", which he qualifies as "freedom in the sense of discontinuity", and by which he means nihilism.[20] Others, it seems, would agree that *der Begriff des unglücklichen Bewusstseins* already has nihilism inscribed within.[21] Bhaskar, in fact, generalises this point, arguing that the core of philosophy is "a veritable citadel of the Unhappy Consciousness",[22] "necessarily aporetic", and characterised by "being out of joint with reality".[23]

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18.   Rosen, op. cit, p.235.
19.   Kuspit, "The Unhappy Consciousness of Modernism", op. cit., p.54.
20.   Rosen, op. cit., p.234, p.230. However Rosen advocates a revitalisation of traditional ideals as a remedy to nihilism (p.233).
21.   Pöggler paraphrasing Hermann Wein, Pöggler, op. cit., p.165.
22.   Bhaskar, op. cit., p.206.
23.   Ibid., p.2. Similarly, there is a good deal of disagreement about "Kantian antinomy", or whether Kant did uncouple, for example, aesthetics from ethics. For example, Helga Geyer-Ryan sees Kant as the source of the uncoupling and argues for their rapprochement. The force of her argument is directed at "the stifling soliloquies of cultural pessimism and nihilism" (*Fables of Desire*, op. cit., p.5). Bernstein, in contrast, argues that the aesthetic in Kant is imbued with ethics (Bernstein, op. cit.).

Quite how to conclude, without getting lost in - and constantly reopening - a host of political and philosophical disputes, then, is difficult to say, and we seem to be circling in "metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties".[24] There appears to be a two-way movement in the considerations of negation in the texts that I have addressed: firstly, as the historical condition of now and beyond now (most focused around the theme of aporia, and the unhappy consciousness, interpretation, and mediation); secondly, as the ontological condition of representation (especially in considerations of mimesis, subject/object splits, the *nihil*, and silence); and it is probably no accident that these two ways circle the distinction of alienation and objectification in the opening chapter. Debates often dissolve into which of these ways to privilege, but most of the accounts addressed in this thesis have a complex sense of their mutual interaction.

Looking back across the genesis of this project, I have to say that the substance of neither my thesis nor my conclusion are what I had originally expected. I had, I suppose, anticipated an exploration of a Left Hegelian tradition, and a defence of the radical power of the negative in the face of criticisms of its assimilation and recuperation. This seemed a fairly secure position, so it is "surprising" - if one can use such a term in the context of a six-year period of work - to find myself, with Adorno, in the Grand Hotel Abyss sharing contemplations on the *nihil* with guests such as Cacciari and de Man. If I share Lukács' distaste for this residence, it is with a large dose of bad faith - and, perhaps, confusion - for I have, nevertheless, allowed myself to partake of those "subtle comforts" while simultaneously addressing the "renunciation of cosiness".[25] There are certain advantages to tarrying/dwelling here a while. It *is* where one must go if one is interrogating the concept of negation, the inescapable condition of the problem. The advantage is that it is a domain where certain "fundamental questions"

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24.   Marx, *Capital*, vol.1, op. cit., p.76.
25.   This is Benjamin's description of Baudelaire's supposed "satanism" ("Central Park", op. cit., p.45).

to do with art or representation emerge, and is, perhaps, why each chapter has found itself addressing concepts like mimesis, silence, or the mutations of signs and symbols. Nevertheless, it is, I think, an area - possibly a swamp - from which it is difficult to escape or step back; in this sense Clark's remark, that negation is "cumulative and uncontrollable", is accurate. As Tafuri notes: "historical criticism must know how to balance on the razor's edge that separates detachment and participation".[26] What unites the thinkers that I have examined in this thesis - Adorno, Clark, Tafuri, Cacciari, de Man, Benjamin - is that they all "balance on the razor's edge" and this is clearly an uncomfortable position. The task of avoiding easy reconciliation, or simple affirmations, involves facing up to the demands of the negative. The problem is to endure this tortuous position and to hold one's nerve.

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Already the Great Khan was leafing through his atlas, over the maps of the cities that menace in nightmares and maledictions: Enoch, Babylon, Yahooland, Butua, Brave New World.

He said: "It is all useless, if the last landing place can only be the infernal city, and it is there that, in ever-narrowing circles, the current is drawing us."

And Polo said: "The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space."

(Italo Calvino)[27]

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26.   *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*, op. cit., p.11.
27.   Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1974, pp.164-5.

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