

Part I

For those who do not know the Hegelian language, we shall give the consecrating formula—affirmation, negation, and negation of the negation.

—Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*

From Negation to Affirmation

Working in and for the Negative: On Hegel's Dialectic

In order to understand the role that the concept of affirmation has played in contemporary critical theory and cultural studies, as in Marcuse's phrase the "affirmative character of culture," it is important to understand something of the history of the concept of negation. That history begins with Hegel.

In the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel insists—recollecting Spinoza (*omnis determinatio negatio est*)—that understanding is philosophically insipid, a matter of mere edification, if one does not take into account pain, patience, and seriousness: "the work of the negative."¹ More specifically, spirit—for Hegel, the philosophical power *par excellence*—"is not . . . the positive that looks away from the negative. . . . The spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face and abiding with it" (PS 50).

Yet if spirit realizes its truth “only by finding itself in absolute dismemberment” (PS 50), analytic understanding—even the sort of negative analysis that characterizes Kant’s *Zerrissenheit* in the three *Critiques*—is not enough. One must take another step up the ladder of knowledge, and that step is the second negative, the negation of the negation or, in terms of the trajectory of Hegel’s own work, the *Logic* itself.²

In the *Science of Logic* (1812–16), the sequel to the *Phenomenology* and part of the announced but never completed *System of Science*, Hegel defines the difference between reason (*Vernunft*) and understanding (*Verstand*): where understanding fixes what it determines, reason is both negative and positive, positive “because it generates the universal and comprehends the particular therein,” negative—and, consequently, *dialectical*—“because it resolves the determinations of the understanding into nothing.”³ Indeed, reason is ultimately spirit (*Geist*), since it supercedes both “positive reason” (as exemplified in Kant) as well as “merely intuitive understanding” (as in those philosophies of intuition or *Anschauung* associated with the German Romantics). This reason-as-spirit is, in turn, negativity as such.

In the introduction to the Greater *Logic* (which concerns itself not so much with consciousness, as in the *Phenomenology*, as with the “forms of consciousness”), Hegel presents his concept of negation and thereby distinguishes his understanding of the dialectic from that of Plato and, in particular, Kant:

All that is necessary to achieve scientific progress—and it is essential to strive to gain this quite *simple* insight—is the recognition . . . that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its *particular* content, in other words, that such a negation is not all and every negation but the negation of a specific subject matter which resolves itself, and consequently is a specific negation [*bestimmte Negation*] Because the result, the negation, is a *specific* negation it has a *content*. It is a fresh Concept [*Begriff*] but higher and richer than its predecessor; for it is richer by the negation or opposite of the latter, therefore contains it, but also something more, and is the unity of itself and its opposite. (SL 54)

Unlike Plato who, according to Hegel, regarded the dialectic only in its abstract negative aspect (as, that is to say, an external activity), and unlike Kant who grasped that the dialectic in its positive aspect is

“nothing else but the *inner* negativity of the determinations [of reason] as their self-moving soul” (SL 56, emphasis mine) yet was nonetheless unable to advance beyond Plato’s limited understanding of dialecticity as, say, a mode of refutation,⁴ Hegel conceives the dialectic as the speculative comprehension (*Begreifen*) of opposites in their unity: the positive in the negative or, to echo Marx’s *Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), the affirmation in the negation. Hence, in the section on “Something” in the *Logic*, Hegel argues that “negation is determinate being, not the supposedly abstract nothing but . . . as it is in itself, as affirmatively present, belonging to the sphere of determinate being” (SL 115).

Though it is obviously impossible to do justice to the scope, let alone complexity, of even a small part of the *Logic*, I have chosen the above passage not only because it looks forward to a crucial moment in Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* (to which we will turn in a moment) but, more importantly, because “something” represents, according to Hegel, “the *first negation of negation*” (SL 115). In other words, the self-movement of something re-presents, as it were, the genesis of that “scientific” logic which is the dialectic itself.

Yet, as Hegel explains in the section on “Determinate Being,” negation in general “is as little an ultimate for [speculative] philosophy as reality is for its truth” (SL 113). In this sense, the negativity that drives the dialectic is as little about affirmation (being) as it is about negation (nothing); rather, the dialectic aims precisely to reconcile this contradiction and is therefore ultimately more about what Hegel calls the second negation, or the negation of the negation.

Now, inasmuch as the concept of contradiction is decisive for the Hegelian dialectic and radically differentiates it from formal logic (what for formal logic is unthinkable is, for Hegel, precisely what the dialectic *thinks*), I want to conclude these preliminary remarks on Hegel—which constitute this book’s genealogical point of departure—by citing a passage from the last chapter of the *Logic* titled, appropriately enough, “The Absolute Idea”:

Now the negativity just considered [second negation] constitutes the *turning point* of the movement of the Concept. It is the *simple point of the negative relation* to self, the innermost source of all activity, of all animate and spiritual self-movement, the dialectical soul that everything true possesses and through which alone it is true; for on this subjectivity alone rests the sublating [*Aufheben*] of the opposition between Concept and reality, and the unity that is truth. The *second negative*, the negative of the negative, . . . is this sublating of the contradiction, but just as little as the contradiction is it an *act of external*

reflection, but rather the *innermost, most objective moment* of life and spirit, through which a *subject, a person, a free being*, exists. (SL 835–36)

To use Hegel's language in anticipation of Adorno's, the negation of the negation—the *turning point* of the movement of the concept (*die Bewegung des Begriffes*)—is the unity or dialectical identity of the identical and the non-identical or, in the language of this book, the affirmative and the first negative. As Hegel himself puts it, the Concept is “*alike* the universal that is in itself [*an sich*], *and* the negative that is for itself [*für sich*], *and* also the third, that which is both in and for itself [*an und für sich*], the *universal* that runs through all the moments” (SL 837–38). Here, in the conclusion to the *Logic*, Hegel fulfills Spinoza's sublime demand: that thinking “consider everything under the form of eternity”—that is to say, “as it is in the absolute.”⁵

At the very same time (to reverse critical gears), if the Absolute Idea designates the apotheosis of the Hegelian dialectic,⁶ Hegel's theoretical absolutism could also be said to constitute a form of positivism or “bad” universalism. More to the point of this book, if post-modernism is itself—as Fredric Jameson suggests—a belated instance of positivism,⁷ what good is an absolute affirmation that for all its negativity rehearses the ancient subsumption of the particular under the party of the universal?

Late Hegelianism: On Adorno's Negative Dialectics

Through the absolute rule of negation the movement of thought as of history becomes, in accordance with the pattern of immanent antithesis, unambiguously, exclusively, implacably positive.

—Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

We remain contemporaries of the Young Hegelians. . . .

—Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*

If Slavoj Žižek's work offers the most recent and compelling defense of the Hegelian dialectic,⁸ Adorno's work—for all *its* obvious indebtedness

to Hegel—represents, it seems to me, an even more searching reading of his dialectic, so much so that it may well be time to read Hegel not only *with* Lacan (as Žižek suggests) but *after* Adorno.⁹

After Hegel, then, Adorno. In the preface to *Negative Dialectics* (1966), Adorno revises Plato and Hegel as well as the whole of that philosophical tradition that has sought dialectically to “achieve something positive by means of negation,” via—in particular—“the thought figure of a ‘negation of negation.’”¹⁰ In a paradoxical formulation that is characteristically Adornian, Adorno comments that the aim of *Negative Dialectics* is to free dialectics from affirmation without “reducing its determinacy” (ND xix).

I will return to the question of determinacy in a moment, but first it is imperative to stress the destructive, even deconstructive, character of Adorno’s *negative*-dialectical project. From the latter, Derridian perspective, negative dialectics as the anti-system or *Unphilosophie* it is, is a wholesale assault on the philosophical valorization of affirmation or, more precisely, positivity: the “place” of that which is (*positivus*). Indeed, such is the negativity of the dialectic in Adorno that he can claim, against Hegel, that “dialectical logic is more positivistic than the positivism that outlaws it” (ND 141).

While the excessive formality of Hegel’s logic—as evidenced, for example, in *The Science of Logic*—suggests a certain, stubborn faith in the positivities of “dialectical logic,” this is not to say that Hegel, or at least the young Hegel, did not understand the value of negativity. As Adorno maintains with respect to his own preferred, negative-dialectical mode of analysis, the positive announced in the preface to the *Phenomenology* is to “such analysis, as it was to [Hegel], the negative” (ND 38). In other words, the “positive for the young Hegel does not think,” since it is precisely thinking that causes negation, “negative motion” (ND 38). And yet, the positive does not simply disappear in the Hegelian dialectic, and this is true whether one considers its end or its origin. For if there is Being at the end of the dialectic, it is also always there at the beginning. Appropriately enough, the first triad of the *Logic* begins not with something but Being, where something signifies, for Adorno, the “cogitatively indispensable substrate of any concept, including that of Being” (ND 135).

Given Adorno’s critique of Hegel’s originary and teleological identitarianism, the question is: What is the relation between negative dialectics and that something which escapes the Concept (*Begriff*)? More specifically, if negative dialectics does not—despite its anti-systematic thrust—seek to posit another ontology, not even an anti-ontology, what is its aim?

The answers to these particular questions can, I think, be found in “Critique of Positive Negation,” that section of *Negative Dialectics* where Adorno decisively articulates his break with Hegel and what one might call Hegel’s *positive* dialectics. Significantly, this section is also the location of one of Adorno’s fiercest attacks on the fetish of affirmation, what he calls the “fetish of the irrevocability of things in being” (ND 52):

The nonidentical is not to be obtained directly, as something positive on its part, nor is it obtainable by a negation of the negative. This negation is not an affirmation itself, as it is to Hegel. The positive, which to his mind is due to result from the negation, has more than its name in common with the positivity he fought in his youth. To equate the negation of the negation with positivity is the quintessence of identification. . . . (ND 158)

“Something positive”—that something which can be obtained immediately—is not the same, finally, as that non-identity which Hegel found unbearable and of which the word *something* is, according to Adorno, a reminder.

Moreover, since this non-identical something cannot be obtained as a result of the law of double negation either, one can therefore say, as Adorno does, that the “anti-dialectical principle”—that formal-mathematical logic which takes “minus times minus for a plus” (ND 158)—resides where one least expects it: at the very heart of the Hegelian dialectic. Indeed, it is against just such a sublative, logical-dialectical operation that Adorno *re*-affirms the force of the negative: (in)definite or (in)determinate negation.¹¹ This adamant, even revolutionary, refusal to sanction things as they are—whether the indifference of an original positivity (Being) or the “happy” state of affairs realized by positive negation (from a finalist, world-historical perspective, the Absolute Idea)—this refusal constitutes, according to Adorno, “the decisive break with Hegel” (ND 160).

Still, having done this, having, that is, arrested the dialectic in order not to erase that something which resists its consequence-driven conceptuality, where does one go? What, if anything, remains?

Something, of course, remains. As Adorno aptly puts it: “What is, is more than it is” (ND 161). But however one names this “more” (Adorno, like Derrida, has many names for it—difference, non-identity, the preponderance of the object), the constellation is one “place” where it can be located.¹² To be sure, in Adorno’s later work—in, to be specific,

the posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* (1970)—Adorno will argue that the work of art is the locus of determinate negation; in *Negative Dialectics*, though, the question of aesthetics is bracketed and the accent is not so much on the (art-) object as the subject. “To use the strength of the subject to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity”—this, according to Adorno, is his task (ND xx).

And yet, whether the non-positivistic “place” of something is dialectically determined as the art-object or the “objective” subject (and given Adorno’s own unique genius for reading: “It is when things in being are read as a text of their becoming that idealistic and materialistic dialects touch” [ND 52]), the negative “position” that both his aesthetic theory *and* critical philosophy perform would appear to be a precarious, not to say impossible, one to sustain. More importantly perhaps, even if one can sustain this high-wire act (as Adorno seemingly could, even as the German student movement of the 1960s climaxed around him), the question of politics—or, at least, the question of a less radically delimited politics—remains.¹³

To invoke Peggy Lee: Is that all there is?¹⁴

Now, to pose such a question is not to suggest that negative dialectics is merely a species of deconstruction, since—to counter a common enough comparison—there is a world of difference between Adorno and Derrida.¹⁵ While it is true that Derrida has insisted as early as the skirmish with Houdebeine and Scarpetta in *Positions* (1967) on the necessity of an affirmative, positively displacing deconstruction, his “position” on this issue has remained, as it were, flexible: “Why not leave *open* . . . this question of the position, of the *positions* (taking a position: position (/negation)? position-affirmation?”¹⁶ In other words, if Derridian deconstruction is not without a certain affirmation, this “position” nonetheless appears to be devoid of precisely the sort of determinacy that distinguishes Adornian dialectics—which is to say, it’s ultimately not much of a position.

Unlike Derrida, Adorno—even at his bleakest, as in *Minima Moralia*—harbors a position or “place,” even if it is, as Lukács said, “the Grand Hotel Abyss.” In fact, with Benjamin in mind and Lukács aside, it might not be too much to say that for Adorno the only viable position in a world dominated by the violent, equivalential logic of the commodity is precisely Utopia, “no place.” Hence the finale of *Minima Moralia*: “The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption.”¹⁷

For all its messianic aura, however, this redemptive standpoint is not the dialectical opposite of what Jameson calls “cynical empiricism”

(LM 131), since it is not so much a utopian possibility as what one might call a *utopian impossibility* or *negativity*. In this sense, Adorno's negative dialectics is itself utopian because, unlike Hegel's or Lukács's, it will not—by definition—“come to rest in itself, as if it were total” (ND 406). At the same time (to attend to that “satiric positivism” which is for Jameson the negative other of utopian possibility), there is, as it were, no determinate affirmation for Adorno. Another, rather more specific way to put this would be to say that Adorno's negative-dialectical philosophy of positionality is itself a function, at least in part, of quite concrete cultural-political conditions of possibility.

Accordingly, in order to do justice to, say, Adorno's work before the war and his expatriation to America, it is necessary to take the following historical realities into account: the “Stalinization of the KPD in the mid 1920s,” the “increasingly sclerotic and conservative behavior of the SPD and many of the trade unions” in the same period, and the “utter debacle and destruction of the Left in the wake of the Nazi seizure of power.”¹⁸ The historical irony here, of course, is that *after* the fall of the Third Reich, Adorno was—if possible—even less sanguine about the future of the Federal Republic. As a so-called “mandarin of the left” whose cultural politics were a product of the Viennese avant-garde and, in particular, the Schoenberg society, Adorno was thoroughly dismayed by the way in which postwar Germany, under the impact of administered, American-exported capitalism, was rapidly colonizing what was left of those feudal, precapitalist enclaves of Europe that had once been the source of the haute bourgeoisie as well as a certain aristocratic classicism.¹⁹

Yet if Germany in the 1950s was a simulacrum of America in its state-monopoly phase, America between the wars was, for Adorno, a bad Grade-B movie.²⁰ Which brings me to the following working hypothesis: in terms of a postmodern theory of affirmation at least, any estimation of Adorno's corpus must take into account not only the above historical contexts (Weimar Germany, émigré America, Adenauer Germany) but, as I've remarked in the introduction, his position on mass culture. It's also worth remarking, I think, that if the “culture industry” is generally a synonym for mass culture (and mass culture should therefore be distinguished from both folk and popular culture²¹), the origins of the *Kulturindustrie* were inscribed for Adorno in the prehistory of modernism—in, that is to say, *pre-modernism* or, to be more specific yet, in the Germany of the Second Reich, the paradigmatic figure of which imperial period was Wagner himself, the “author” of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

In fact, in his book on Wagner, Adorno comments that given the “operatic” origins of the culture industry, Wagnerian opera represents

the origin of the “art work of the future” or: the “birth of film out of the spirit of music.”²² Hence the following audiovisual passage from “The Culture Industry,” a passage that in retrospect looks more and more like a *locus modernus*—for Adorno:

Television aims at a synthesis of radio and film, and is held up only because the interested parties have not yet reached agreement, but its consequences will be quite enormous and promise to intensify the impoverishment of aesthetic material so drastically, that by tomorrow the thinly veiled identity of all industrial culture products can come triumphantly into the open, derisively fulfilling the Wagnerian dream of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—the fusion of all arts in one work. The alliance of word, image, and music is all the more perfect than in *Tristan* because the sensuous elements which all approvingly reflect the surface of social reality are in principle embodied in the same technical process, the unity of which becomes its distinctive element. This process integrates all the elements of production, from the novel (shaped with an eye to the film) to the last sound effect. It is a triumph of invested capital, whose title as absolute master is etched deep into the hearts of the dispossessed in the employment line; it is the meaningful content of every film, whatever plot the production team may have selected.²³

Given the above dyspeptic vision of television, one can only wonder what Adorno would have made of MTV. As for Madonna, I don't think we have to wonder: he's still turning over in his grave.

And yet, administered and manipulative as the culture industry may be (as in Saturday morning children's programming, to take an especially obvious and egregious example),²⁴ Adorno and Horkheimer's depiction of the culture industry as enlightened mass deception has become increasingly less persuasive as postmodernism has itself become the cultural dominant of everyday life in North America. Even the late Adorno of the “Culture Industry Reconsidered”—which, irony of ironies, was first delivered on the Hessian Broadcasting System in 1963 as part of the International Radio University Program—even *this* Adorno now seems as historical as the technologism of the chronologically earlier triumvirate of Brecht, Benjamin, and Kracauer.²⁵ The catchwords of the late Adorno may well be status quo and conformity rather than barbarism and fascism, but the message remains the same: “the masses are not the measure but the ideology of the culture industry.”²⁶

However, if it is true that cultural-industrial objects are, as Adorno insists, “commodities through and through” and the masses merely an “object of calculation,” how do these same products—ostensibly served, like McDonald’s hamburgers, to the millions from above—accomplish their work as ideology? As Gramsci among others has taught us, ideology works precisely because it speaks to us, to our needs and fantasies; moreover, these desires, however much they are a function of mass media manipulation, are also always in some sense “objective.” The last suggests that, *contra* Adorno, the culture industry in fact fulfills certain public functions, satisfying cultural needs (not all of which, it is important to note, are false or retroactive) and, more importantly yet, that the mode of reproduction—the process whereby social contradictions are reproduced as ideology—is also frequently a “field of contest and struggle.”²⁷

Though the last proposition has become something of a commonplace in current critical theory, it is no less true, it seems to me, for all that. That is to say, it is still important to recognize that any reading that neglects the specific conditions of reception of a given text, mass or otherwise, risks the kind of “mandarin” abstraction and knee-jerk negativity that marks Adorno’s work at its worst (e.g., “Every visit to the cinema leaves me, against all my vigilance, stupider and worse” [MM 25]). The extraordinary German reception of the American miniseries “Holocaust” (1979) is a case in point,²⁸ since as Andreas Huyssen has shown, its effects can in no way be reduced, *pace* Adorno, to the mercenary intentions of the production team that selected it. Indeed, as I will argue in detail and at length in the second part of this book, production and consumption are never—to echo Adorno himself—identical. From a reception perspective, then, the classic cultural-industrial thesis with its stress on domination and manipulation, regression and infantilization, betrays an almost absolute negativity with respect to “mass” vis-à-vis “elite” culture, the dialectic of which cultures must be continually refigured if one is to avoid compulsively repeating their repressed history.

This said, there is also little doubt that Anglophone cultural studies and its neo-Gramscian optimism would benefit from a strong dose of Adornian pessimism. (This is Jameson’s lesson, as we shall see in a moment, though Gramsci’s slogan was itself eminently dialectical.) The real issue, though, is less pessimism or optimism *per se* than the relative use-value of negativity. That is to say, if on one hand the accent on negation in Adorno’s work promises to retain a determinate critical utility in a new world order dominated more and more by the logic of capital, on the other hand Adorno’s philosophical discourse of moder-

nity is itself subject not only to the site-specific pressures of any given historical moment (for instance, so-called postmodern capitalism) but those cultural and institutional preconditions out of which that work emerged in the first place. The critical question concerning Adorno, then, is not so much *Is that all there is?* as *What, exactly, can his work do for us today?*

It is within just such an effective-historical context that Habermas's critique of Adorno acquires, it seems to me, its full force. It is not simply that Habermas was Adorno's assistant and thus knew his work from, as it were, the inside, nor that Habermas is the heir apparent of the Frankfurt School (a dubious honor, for some). Rather, it is that Habermas's historically specific subject-position places him in a unique, though by no means absolute, position to both respect *and* contest the question of Adorno. The critical fruits of this positionality are evident in the following passage from *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985) where Habermas describes that hyper-reflexive, post-Hegelian position that Adorno's work repeats, compulsively, like some sort of spiritual exercise:

[H]e makes the performative contradiction within which [the self-referential critique of reason] has moved since Nietzsche, and which he acknowledges to be unavoidable, into the organizational form of indirect communication. Identity thinking turned against itself becomes pressed into continual self-denial and allows the wound it inflicts on itself and its objects to be seen. This exercise quite rightly bears the name negative dialectics because Adorno practices determinate negation unremittingly, even though it has lost any foothold in the categorical network of Hegelian logic. . . . (PDM 185–86)

In lieu of the positivistic fetish of affirmation, Adorno offers, as we have seen, the fetish of demystification. At the same time, the only thing that remains from this unremitting operation of determinate negation, at least according to Habermas, is a residual, aesthetically certified faith in reason, *deranged* reason, one that has been "expelled from the domains of philosophy and become, literally, utopian" (PDM 186). In just this sense, the utopian destination of *Negative Dialectics* is, precisely, nowhere.²⁹

This is not, of course, to suggest that Adorno's work is devoid of dialectical usefulness. In fact, for the Jameson of *Late Marxism* (1990), Adorno's introspective, antipositivist dialectic, frustrating and infuriating as it is, is just what we need today, a "joyous counter-poison and

a corrosive solvent to apply to the surface of ‘what is’ ” (LM 249)—where “what is” is postmodernism itself. Then again, unlike Habermas, Jameson believes that the discourse of capital-logic so pervasive in Adorno points to an impending Hegel revival: not the “idealist-conservative Hegel who *preceded* the writings of Marx’s first great work, the unpublished commentary on *The Philosophy of Right*” but an “unfamiliar materialist-mathematical Hegel, one who comes *after* the *Grundrisse*” (LM 241).

But who is this unfamiliar Hegel if not the Hegel of the *Logic*? And who is the Adorno of *Late Marxism* if not the Hegel who comes *after* the Marx of the *Grundrisse*?³⁰

We seem to have come viciously full circle here, since Jameson’s Adorno—who appears to be a late (young) Hegelian—looks an awful lot like Žižek’s Lacanian Hegel. And yet, it is precisely at this point—where the specter of absolute negativity begins to rear its Medusa-head (whether Žižek’s Lacan, Jameson’s Adorno or, for that matter, Derrida’s Marx)—that it is useful, or so it seems to me, to invoke the Habermasian verdict on negative dialectics: “Today the *situation of consciousness* still remains one brought about by the Young Hegelians when they distanced themselves from Hegel and philosophy in general” (PDM 53). In other words, one does not have to endorse Habermas’s notion of communicative rationality and everything it entails to appreciate his attempt to *rethink* and thereby to *displace* that Hegelianism that haunts Jameson’s Adorno. Put another way, inasmuch as Habermas’s critique of that “present-open-to-the-future” which goes by the name of postmodernism is predicated on—as the above passage indicates—a critical reading of young Hegelianism, that same critique is, paradoxically enough, Adornian. Indeed, Habermas’s project to re-claim the claims of reason is a persistent endeavor to answer that question which Adorno’s work poses so singularly and insistently: Can dialectical reason play any role save that of negation?

In an interview titled “The Dialectics of Rationalization” (1981), Habermas queries: “Is it not possible—*pace* Adorno—to explicate a concept of communicative reason that can stand against Adorno’s negativism, so that it contains what Adorno believed could only be made visible indirectly, by implication, through continual and consistent negation?”³¹ Having posed this question, though, Habermas almost immediately concedes (in an afterthought that speaks volumes) that Adorno would no doubt have disagreed with him, since even the above formulation would have been—in the last analysis—“too affirmative.” One might therefore say (and here I go well beyond both the letter *and* spirit of Habermas’s work) that the philosophical discourse of modernity in

Adorno, precisely because of its intimate analytical relation to modernism, does not adequately explain either the cultural discourse of postmodernism or, for that matter, the historical project of postmodernity (the latter of which must itself be distinguished from that postmodernization associated with what—in my more polemical moments—I prefer to think of as *late* late capitalism).

In sum, if the cultural-economic discourse of postmodernism exposes the philosophical and political limits of a strictly negative, late Hegelian project such as Adorno's, perhaps it is time to reconsider that *post*-Hegelian project which Habermas refuses and which appears under the dark, mercurial sign of Nietzsche:³² the *play* of affirmation.

Affirming Affirmation: On Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari

My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary—but love it.

—Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

Affirmation as object of affirmation— this is being. In itself and as primary affirmation, it is becoming. But it is being insofar as it is the object of another affirmation which raises [élève] becoming to being or which extracts the being of becoming. This is why affirmation in all its power is double: affirmation is affirmed.

—Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*

If, as I suggested in the preceding segment, Adorno's work represents a break with Hegel's philosophy of history, it should not be surprising—given what one reader has called Adorno's "melancholized Hegelianism"³³—that Nietzsche constitutes one of his principal antecedents. In fact, one has only to recollect Adorno's determination of *Minima Moralia* as melancholy science (*die traurige Wissenschaft*) with its ironic inversion of Nietzsche's *Gay Science* (*Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*) to register his influence on Adorno.

To assert this particular filiation between Adorno and Nietzsche is not, however, to sublime the *difference* between Hegel-Nietzsche, which is absolute. In his retrospective reevaluation of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) in *Ecce Homo*, that canniest of proleptic texts, Nietzsche writes:

Taken up with some degree of neutrality, *The Birth of Tragedy* looks quite untimely: one would never dream that it was begun amid the thunder of the battle of Worth. . . . it smells offensively Hegelian. . . . An “idea” [*Idee*]*—*the antithesis of the Dionysian and the Apollonian*—*translated into the realm of metaphysics; history itself as the development of this “idea”; in tragedy this antithesis is sublimated [*aufgehoben*] into a unity; and in this perspective things that had never before faced each other are suddenly juxtaposed, used to illuminate each other, and comprehended [*begriffen*]. . . .³⁴

“It smells offensively Hegelian”—the mephitic note is characteristically Nietzschean, as is the extended metalinguistic conceit and the sarcastic allusion to the “birth” of the *Phenomenology* (which Hegel had completed almost fifty years before, in 1806, in Jena, while the French took the city). One can also glimpse here, in Nietzsche’s critique of Hegel, that disruptive, iconoclastic will-to-deterritorialization which will later inform the discourse of poststructuralism as well as the conventional wisdom about its genesis or genealogical origin: Nietzsche not so much as the antithesis (*Gegensatz*) as the non-dialectical Other of Hegel.

The latter convention is, of course, a rather recent invention and is due in no small part to the work of Gilles Deleuze, in particular his *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962). Citing Foucault, Cornel West sums up the consequences of the Deleuze-effect for the Nietzsche-text:

Deleuze was the first to think through the notion of difference independent of Hegelian ideas of opposition, and that was the start of the radical anti-Hegelianism which has characterized French intellectual life in the last decades. This position [which] . . . we now associate with postmodernism and poststructuralism [goes] back to Deleuze’s resurrection of Nietzsche against Hegel. Foucault, already assuming this Deleuzian critique, was the first important French intellectual who could *circumvent*, rather than confront, Hegel, which is why he says we live in a “Deleuzian age.” To live in a Deleuzian age is to live in an anti-Hegelian age so that one does not have to come to terms with Lukács, Adorno or any other Hegelian marxists.³⁵

In this post-Hegelian context, one might cite as well the preface to *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) where Foucault, reciting those principles that make the Deleuze and Guattari text a post-Salesian “guide to everyday life,” issues the following non-fascist demand: “Withdraw allegiance from the old categories of the Negative (law, limit, castration, lack, lacuna), which Western thought has so long held sacred as a form of power and an access to reality.”³⁶

Now, if the discourse of negation cannot be laid simply at the door of Hegel (as Foucault’s parenthetical makes clear), Hegel and not, say, Freud or Lacan is the manifest antagonist of *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Thus, in “Against the Dialectic,” Deleuze argues not only that Nietzsche’s philosophy remains abstract and incomprehensible if we miss its habitual, Hegelian targets but that “anti-Hegelianism runs through Nietzsche’s work as its cutting edge” (*comme le fil de l’agressivité*).³⁷ Indeed, the specificity of Nietzschean empiricism can best be seen, according to Deleuze, in its uncompromising understanding of the “role of the negative.”

For Hegel, of course, the negative occupies the paramount position: it is that which drives the dialectic. The decisive term of this dialectic is in turn *aufheben*, which—as Hegel notes in *The Science of Logic*—has the twofold meaning of “to preserve, to maintain” and “to cause to cease, to put an end to.”³⁸ With this double sense in mind, one might therefore say—as Hegel does—that there is nothing without negation. Yet as Deleuze demonstrates in his practical reading of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, one might also say, after Spinoza, that negation itself is nothing.³⁹ Such an “empiricist” perspective represents a radical critique not only of Hegelian dialectics but of any philosophy of negation, effectively undoing it at its origins—which is to say, *at the roots*.

Not unlike Spinoza (Nietzsche, like Hölderlin and Kleist, is, for Deleuze, a Spinozist), Nietzsche flatly denies the *absolute* value of negation and its conceptual-lexical correlates. To positive negation or the “positivity of the negative,” Nietzsche “posits” affirmation: “the negativity of the positive” (NP 180). As Deleuze puts it: “Nietzsche’s ‘yes’ is opposed to the dialectical ‘no’; affirmation to dialectical negation; difference to dialectical contradiction; joy, enjoyment [*jouissance*], to dialectical labor; lightness, dance, to dialectical responsibilities” (NP 9).

While the antithetical tenor of this passage, not to mention Deleuze’s description of Nietzsche’s philosophy as an anti-Hegelianism, suggests that Nietzsche produces a mere reversal of Hegel, Nietzsche’s “semiology” constitutes, according to Deleuze, a thoroughgoing critical *displacement* of Hegelian dialectics (since the negative is not simply denied but delimited). For instance, in “Active and Reactive” (where becoming-active and becoming-reactive signify the affirmative and the nihilistic

respectively), Deleuze maintains that Nietzsche's interest in the active, affirmative power of negation is not, strictly speaking, re-active: "Negation, by making itself the negation of reactive forces themselves, is not only active but is . . . *transmuted*. It expresses affirmation and becoming-active as the power of affirmation" (NP 70). In other words, Nietzsche does not simply oppose affirmation to negation (or difference to dialectical contradiction); he interrogates that hierarchy or "binary machine" in which the negative has traditionally been established as the good, the high, the noble, etc.⁴⁰ Consequently, affirmation is not a vulgar, passive aspect of negation; rather, the negative becomes, via the process of transmutation, an affirmative power.

Now, if affirmation is not simple—if, in other words, it is neither a "function of being" (NP 183) nor a reactive inversion of negation—it must perforce be double. For the negation of the negation, then, what Deleuze calls the "syllogism of the slave" (NP 121), Nietzsche substitutes the affirmation of affirmation—which is to say, the affirmation both of becoming *and* the being of becoming. The net effect of this synthesis, according to Deleuze, is that *affirmation itself is affirmed*, a double affirmation that comprises the "power of affirming as a whole" (NP 186). Given this double affirmation, it is clear not only that there can be no possible compromise, as Deleuze says, between Hegel and Nietzsche, but also that Nietzsche's philosophy, like Adorno's, constitutes an "anti-system" that aims to "explore all the mystifications that find a final refuge in the dialectic" (NP 195).

Deleuze's conclusion: though the history of philosophy has been characterized by negation and reaction, by—in a Nietzschean word—nihilism, this long story (*longue histoire*) itself has a "conclusion" (*achèvement*): that point, dependent on the Eternal Return, when negation suddenly turns back on the forces of reaction and, changing quality, *becomes* active, "now only the mode of being of affirmation as such" (*plus que la manière d'être de l'affirmation comme telle* [NP 179]). This, then, is the Nietzschean moment in all its paradoxical splendor, a moment beyond negation when difference is pure affirmation and Dionysus dances lightly but joyfully on the grave of a Spirit whose resurrection in the form of the Absolute is only a bad dream, "an ass's idea" (NP 181).

* * *

Now, before I broach a brief critique of Deleuze's delirious neo-Nietzscheanism (which we see here in all its rhetorical force), I would be remiss if I did not mention where his philosophy of affirmation leads.

I am referring of course to that extraordinary assemblage, *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), where Deleuze and Guattari construct that “long road” stretching from Spinoza to Nietzsche and beyond. By way of illustration, here are Deleuze and Guattari on the Nietzschean schizo-subject:

The subject spreads itself out along the entire circumference of the circle, the center of which has been abandoned by the ego. At the center is the desiring-machine, the celibate machine of the Eternal Return. A residual subject of the machine, Nietzsche-as-subject garners a euphoric reward (Voluptas) from everything this machine turns out. . . . It is not a matter of identifying with various historical personages, but rather identifying the names of history with zones of intensity on the the body without organs; and each time Nietzsche-as-subject exclaims: “They’re *me!* So it’s *me!*” No one has ever been as deeply involved in history as the schizo, or dealt with it in this way. He consumes all of universal history in one fell swoop. (AO 21)

This is not, I should note, an innocent citation, as it is part of a much longer passage that Fredric Jameson cites in “Marxism and Historicism” (1979). More to the point, this passage highlights that voluptuous textual intensity of which *Anti-Oedipus* is, as Jameson says, the “most powerful contemporary *celebration*” (emphasis mine).⁴¹

The telltale word here is *celebration*, the sense of which is ambiguous, if not pejorative, since celebration—for a negative-dialectical critic like Jameson—is an especially uncritical mode of affirmation. Still, as any reader attentive to the subtext of *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) can attest, Jameson’s critique of Deleuze and Guattari is also already predicated on the phenomenological truth of *Anti-Oedipus*, which articulates, according to Jameson, a whole new, properly postmodernist gamut of effects (“dizziness, loathing, nausea, and Freudian decathexis” [MH 161]). True to his recuperative version of dialectical critique, Jameson observes in his concluding remarks on *Anti-Oedipus* that the malaise that distinguishes postmodernism signals an authentic contact with the object of Deleuze and Guattari’s existential historicism, “which has now become but another moment of our own past and which we live, in the no less vital mode of the negative” (MH 161–62).

Jameson’s move here—reading the affirmative, celebratory thematics of *Anti-Oedipus* as a negative instance of a more general, authentic mode of historicity—is quintessentially Jamesonian. Yet salutary as just

such a gesture is (in a Deleuzian age, Hegelianism of any sort has, to be sure, a certain, polemical-tactical effect), this move also *re-institutes* precisely the sort of universalist theory (i.e., Marxism as the “semantic horizon” or “master code” of all semiosis) which Deleuze and Guattari’s work explodes into so many schizzes and escape-lines, flow-breaks and rhizomes.

In fact, from a schizo-molecular perspective such as that of Deleuze and Guattari, Jameson’s militantly molar, not to say “paranoid,” Marxism would appear to be merely another, albeit renovated, philosophy of negation. But if Deleuze and Guattari sometimes appear to be Nietzschean vitalists in late-capitalist guise, the following passage from *Anti-Oedipus* suggests that to read their work simply from a negative-dialectical standpoint, as Jameson does, is not only to mistake its claims of generality but to misread its political implications as well:

So what is the solution? Where is the revolutionary path? . . . To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist “economic solution”? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and practice of a highly schizophrenic character. . . . The truth is that we haven’t seen anything yet. (AO 239–40)

Not to arrest the process of decoding and deterritorialization but to accelerate it, this is Deleuze and Guattari’s maximalist slogan, a maxim so outrageous on the face of things as to be beyond belief: Are we really supposed to take this *programme* seriously?

The answer is, I propose, yes *and* no. If, on one hand, the positive or affirmative position signals an effort on the part of Deleuze and Guattari to conceive a space beyond the restricted, Oedipal economies of “law, limit, castration, lack, [and] lacuna,”⁴² on the other hand, the antithetical position effectively points up, not unlike negative dialectics itself, the critical *indifference* of a strictly affirmative project.⁴³ To recollect Jameson, what is the (political) use-value of a model, like Lyotard’s in *Économie libidinale* (1974),⁴⁴ “made up of nothing but positivities”?

Now, to accuse Deleuze and Guattari of the sin of the Same may seem contradictory, especially given their programmatic insistence on difference, but their work is ultimately not as free of metaphysical postulates as it advertises (or as I have, for tactical reasons, suggested).

For instance, the ontologization of desire at work in *Anti-Oedipus* (Desire as the Eternal Return of the Same) can itself be read as so much residual Hegelianism, one that is always already operative, albeit in a different “ontological” form, in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*.⁴⁵ Moreover, if Deleuze’s project represents both a critique of Hegelian reification and a valorization of normative, non-negative affect, this philosophy of affirmation and its “vision of precultural libidinal chaos” also engenders its own kind of reification: becoming-active as the invariant, ahistorical structure of the Law of Desire.⁴⁶

From another, more site-specific perspective, Deleuze and Guattari’s program of desiring-production—including and especially such concepts as the Body without Organs and the “plane of consistence” in, respectively, *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980)⁴⁷—itself presupposes a nomadic, topo-geological conception of Desire that is a “function,” in turn, of a certain stage in the *history* of exploitation. Amin’s anticapitalist recommendation—that the Third World should withdraw from the world market—may not represent a viable or even sensible solution to the problem of colonialism (in fact, it would no doubt be counterproductive in every sense of the word); however, to argue that the answer is to accelerate the decoding logic of capital—as Deleuze and Guattari do—is to rather willfully ignore what Gayatri Spivak calls the “epistemic violence of imperialism.”⁴⁸

We haven’t seen anything yet. So Deleuze and Guattari declare, taking us castrated, privatized subjects of postmodernity to task for not taking up the “task of schizoanalysis.” Yet even as one concedes the force of their schizophrenic critique (psychoanalysis is inconceivable, as they show, without some notion of surplus-value), the truth is that we have seen quite enough already, especially *if* one bears the above epistemic violence in mind. In fact, given the last barbaric scenario—so-called peripheral Fordism or, rather more pointedly, what Alain Lipietz calls “bloody Taylorism”⁴⁹—it seems to me that Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy of Desire-as-denegation demands not so much a programmatic counter negation as a counterdiscourse that explicitly takes into account the political-economic preconditions of desire, what one might call the *culture of capitalism* (where the global or transnational culture industries are inconceivable without that extraction of surplus-value associated with neo-colonialism).

For it is only when one attends to specific historical and economic-institutional conditions of possibility that the problem of affirmation for contemporary cultural theory begins to assume its determinate but not prohibitive disposition: how to avoid the lure of a molar, monolithic totality, so-called total affirmation, as well as an equally “totalitarian,”

because politically inflexible, molecularity; or, in the philosophical idelect of this book, how to think affirmation without reinscribing an infinite dialectics of negativity (as in Hegel and Adorno respectively) or, what is ultimately the other side of the same coin, a delirious, neo-Nietzschean will-to-affirmation (as in Deleuze and Guattari).⁵⁰