

PHRONESIS

*A new series from Verso edited by
Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe*

There is today wide agreement that the left-wing project is in crisis. New antagonisms have emerged – not only in advanced capitalist societies but also in the Eastern bloc and in the Third World – that require the reformulation of the socialist ideal in terms of an extension and deepening of democracy. However, serious disagreements exist as to the theoretical strategy needed to carry out such a task. There are those for whom the current critique of rationalism and universalism puts into jeopardy the very basis of the democratic project. Others argue that the critique of essentialism – a point of convergence of the most important trends in contemporary theory: post-structuralism, philosophy of language after the later Wittgenstein, post-Heideggerian hermeneutics – is the necessary condition for understanding the widening of the field of social struggles characteristic of the present stage of democratic politics. *Phronesis* clearly locates itself among the latter. Our objective is to establish a dialogue between these theoretical developments and left-wing politics. We believe that an anti-essentialist theoretical stand is the sine qua non of a new vision for the Left conceived in terms of a radical and plural democracy.

The Sublime Object of Ideology

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK



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For Renata

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Preface

Ernesto Laclau

Like all great intellectual traditions, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory has shed light in a number of directions. Such illuminating effects have tended to present it as a source of diffuse inspiration feeding highly differentiated intellectual currents, rather than a closed and systematic theoretical corpus. The reception given to Lacan has thus varied from country to country; each set of circumstances has emphasized different aspects of a theoretical body of work which had itself undergone considerable transformation over a long period of time. In France, and in Latin countries in general, the influence of Lacan has been mainly clinical and has therefore been closely linked with psychoanalytic practice. The professional training of psychoanalysts has been the most important aspect of this, which has taken place in institutions organized accordingly — first, *L'école freudienne de Paris*, and then *L'école de la cause freudienne*. This does not mean that the cultural impact of Lacanian theory has not extended to broader circles — to literature, philosophy, film theory and so on — but that clinical practice has remained the central point of reference, in spite of these extensions.

In Anglo-Saxon countries this centrality of the clinical aspect has, to a large extent, been absent and the influence of Lacan has revolved almost exclusively around the literature-cinema-feminism triangle. Thus, for example, the work linked to *Screen* magazine during the 1970s (Stephen Heath, Colin MacCabe, Jacqueline Rose) with its theory of 'stature'; or, in the field of feminism, the critical use of certain Lacanian notions, such as the 'phallic signifier', to expose the functioning of the patriarchal order (Juliet Mitchell, Jacqueline Rose and the group surrounding the journal *mf*). It is also worth mentioning that the tendency in the Anglo-Saxon world has been to emphasize the affinities of Lacanian theory with the general field of 'post-structuralism' — deconstruction, for instance —

while in France greater degrees of demarcation and confrontation have been maintained between intellectual currents.

To these national variants we must also add a differentiation in terms of the diverse *interpretations* of the Lacanian corpus, as well as the various attempts to articulate this with *other* theoretical approaches. As regards interpretation, we should point to the opposition that exists in France between the different Lacanian 'generations'. On the one hand, we find the approach of the 'old school' or first generation of Lacanians (Ocrave and Maud Mannoni, Serge Leclair, Moustafa Safouan etc.), who emphasize clinical problems and the crucial role of the *Symbolic* in the psychoanalytical process. This approach is largely based on Lacan's writing in the 1950s, the era of high structuralism, in which the Imaginary register is presented as a series of variants that must be referred to a stable symbolic matrix. On the other hand, the younger generation (Michel Silvestre, Alain Grosrichard etc., led by Jacques-Alain Miller) has attempted to formalize Lacanian theory, pointing out the distinctions between the different stages of his teaching, and placing an accent on the theoretical importance of the last stage, in which a central role is granted to the notion of the *Real* as that which resists symbolization. As regards the attempts to articulate Lacanian theory with other theoretical approaches, it is worth mentioning in the first instance the hermeneutical appropriation of Lacan that has taken place, principally in German (Hermann Lang, Manfred Frank etc.). This consists mainly in an attempt to show that the hermeneutical 'horizon of prejudices' can offer the proper philosophical foundation to psychoanalysis. To this one should add the Marxist-structuralist interpretation of Lacan carried out by Althusser and his followers (especially Michel Pécheux). In this reading, Lacanian psychoanalysis is presented as the only psychological theory which contains a notion of the subject that is compatible with historical materialism.

Within this general framework, the Slovenian Lacanian school, to which this book by Žižek belongs, possesses highly original features. In contrast with the Latin and Anglo-Saxon world, Lacanian categories have been used in a reflection which is essentially *philosophical* and *political*. And while the Slovenian theoreticians make some effort to extend their analysis to the domain of literature and film, the clinical dimension is totally absent. Two main features characterize this school. The first is its insistent reference to the ideological-political field: its description and theorization of the fundamental mechanisms of ideology (identification, the role of the master signifier, ideological fantasy); its attempts to define

the specificity of 'totalitarianism' and its different variants (Stalinism, fascism), and to outline the main characteristics of radical democratic struggles in Eastern European societies. The Lacanian notion of the *point de capiton* is conceived as the fundamental ideological operation; 'fantasy' becomes an imaginary scenario concealing the fundamental split or 'antagonism' around which the social field is structured; 'identification' is seen as the process through which the ideological field is constituted; enjoyment, or *jouissance* enables us to understand the logic of exclusion operating in discourses such as racism. The second distinctive feature of the Slovenian school is the use of Lacanian categories in the analysis of classical philosophical texts: Plato, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Marx, Heidegger; the Anglo-Saxon analytical tradition and, above all, Hegel. The specific 'flavour' of the Slovenian theorists is given by their Hegelian orientation: they attempt to articulate a new reading of Hegel's philosophy which leaves behind such long-established assumptions as Hegel's presumed pan-logicism or the notion that the systematic character of his reflection leads to the abolition of all differences in the final mediation by Reason.

The production of the Slovenian school is already considerable.* Today, Lacanian theory is the main philosophical orientation in Slovenia. It has also been one of the principal reference points of the so-called 'Slovenia Spring' — that is to say the democratization campaigns that have taken place in recent years. The weekly *Mladina*, on which Žižek is the main political columnist, is the most important mouthpiece of this movement.

The interest of the Slovenian theoreticians in the problems of a radical democracy and their efforts to link the Lacanian Real to what in *Hegemony*

*Two of their books have recently been translated into French: the co-lective volume *Tout ce que vous avez toujours voulu savoir sur Lacan, sans jamais oser le demander à Hitchcock* (Navarin, Paris 1988); and Slavoj Žižek's *Le plus sublime des hystériques — Hegel passe* (Point Hors Ligne, Paris 1988). But in Slovenian there are already more than twenty volumes published. Among them we should mention *Hegel and the Signifier* (Slavoj Žižek, Ljubljana 1980); *History and the Unconscious* (Slavoj Žižek, Ljubljana 1982); *Hegel and the Object*, (Mladen Dolar and Slavoj Žižek, Ljubljana 1985); *Problems and the Theory of Fetishism* (Rado Riha and Slavoj Žižek, Ljubljana 1985); *The Structure of Fascist Domination* (Mladen Dolar, Ljubljana 1982); *Philosophy in the Science* (Rado Riha, Ljubljana 1982). Apart from Žižek, we should mention the important theoretical contributions of Miran Božovič (readings of Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza); Zravko Kobe (studies in Hegel's logic); Zdenko Vrdolovec; Stojan Peško and Marcel Stefančič (film theory); Eva D. Bihovec (epistemology); Jelica Sunić-Riha (analytical philosophy); and Renata Salecl (law).

and *Socialist Strategy* Chantal Mouffe and I have called the 'constitutive character of antagonisms', have created the possibility for fruitful intellectual exchange. Žižek has visited our research programme on Ideology and Discourse Analysis at the Department of Government at the University of Essex on many occasions; a number of joint research projects have stemmed from these contacts. This does not mean, of course, that there has been complete agreement in our view, the Slovenian school initially drew too drastic a line of separation between Lacanian theory and post-structuralism; we also have a number of reservations about their reading of Hegel. If, in the first case, our differences have tended to diminish in the course of debate, in the second, discussions are still taking place. Nevertheless, in spite of these differences, there can be no doubt as to the richness and depth offered by the Slovenian school's interpretation of Hegel. Its special combination of Hegelianism and Lacanian theory currently represents one of the most innovative and promising theoretical projects on the European intellectual scene.

At this point I would like to offer a series of suggestions for the reading of this book. The reader could quite easily end up disorientated as to its literary genre. It is certainly not a book in the classical sense; that is to say, a systematic structure in which an argument is developed according to a pre-determined plan. Nor is it a collection of essays, each of which constitutes a finished product and whose 'unity' with the rest is merely the result of its thematic discussion of a common problem. It is rather a series of theoretical interventions which shed mutual light on each other, not in terms of the *progression* of an argument, but in terms of what we could call the *reiteration* of the latter in different discursive contexts. The basic thesis of the book — that the category of 'subject' cannot be reduced to the 'positions of subject', since before subjectivation the subject is the subject of a lack — is formulated in the first chapter: each of the subsequent chapters which reiterate this thesis does so in a new discursive context which sheds light on it from a different angle. But as this process of refinement is not the result of a necessary progression, the text reaches a point of interruption rather than conclusion, thus inviting the reader to continue for him- or herself the discursive proliferation in which the author has been engaged. Thus, where Žižek has spoken of Lacan, Hegel, Kripke, Kafka or Hitchcock, the reader could continue, referring to Plato, Wittgenstein, Leibniz, Gramsci or Sorel. And each of these reiterations partially *constructs* the argument instead of simply repeating it. Žižek's texts is an eminent example of what Barthes has called a 'writerly text'.

This book also contains an implicit invitation to break the barrier separating theoretical languages from those of everyday life. Contemporary criticism of the notion of meta-language has paved the way for a generalized transgression of boundaries, but Žižek's text — with its movement from film to philosophy, from literature to politics — is especially rich in this respect. No one who attaches a 'super-hard transcendentalism' to their own theoretical perspective or who continues to live in the mythological world of 'case studies' will feel comfortable reading this book. The limits which the presence of the Real imposes on all symbolization also affect theoretical discourses: the radical contingency that this introduces is based on an almost pragmatist 'constitutive incompleteness'. From this point of view, the emphasis on the Real necessarily leads to a deeper exploration of the *conditions of possibility* of any objectivity.

It would be a betrayal of Žižek's text if I were to attempt to draw up a systematic picture of its categories, when the author has preferred to establish a much subtler process of open reference between them. Nevertheless, I would like to draw attention to two key points in the text, given their productivity in terms of political analysis. The first refers to the use which is made of Saul Kripke's anti-descriptivism in political analysis. The dispute between descriptivists and anti-descriptivists revolves around the question of the way in which names refer to objects. According to the descriptivists, the link is the result of the *meaning* of a name — that is to say, each name involves a cluster of descriptive features and refers to those objects in the real world displaying those features. For the anti-descriptivists, on the other hand, the name refers to the object by means of what they call a 'primal baptism' in which the name continues to refer to that *object* even if all the descriptive features of the object at the time of its baptism have disappeared. Like myself, Žižek sides with the anti-descriptivists. But he also introduces a variant into the argument which is of crucial importance. The central problem for any anti-descriptivist approach is to determine what it is in the object, beyond its descriptive features, that constitutes its identity — that is to say, what it is that constitutes the objective correlative of the 'rigid designator'. On this point, Žižek presents the following argument: 'What is overlooked, at least in the standard version of anti-descriptivism, is that this guaranteeing the identity of an object in all counterfactual situations, that is, through a change of all its descriptive features, is the *retroactive effect of naming itself*: it is the name itself, the signifier, which supports the identity of the object. That "surplus" in the object which stays the same in

all possible worlds is “something in it more than itself”, that is to say the Lacanian *objet petit a*: we search in vain for it in positive reality because it has no positive consistency, that is, because it is just a positivation of a void — of a discontinuity opened in reality by the emergence of the signifier.’ Now this argument is crucial. For if the unity of the object is the retroactive effect of naming itself, then naming is not just the pure nominalistic game of attributing an empty name to a preconstituted subject. It is the discursive construction of the object itself. The consequences of this argument for a theory of hegemony or politics are easy to see. If the descriptivist approach were correct, then the meaning of the name and the descriptive features of the objects would be given beforehand, thus discounting the possibility of any discursive hegemonic variation that could open the space for a political construction of social identities. But if the process of naming of objects amounts to the very act of their constitution, then their descriptive features will be fundamentally unstable and open to all kinds of hegemonic rearticulations. The essentially performative character of naming is the precondition for all hegemony and politics.

The second point refers to the substance–subject relationship which is discussed in the final chapter of the book. The reduction of the subject to substance is the central proposition of Spinoza’s philosophy and this has been adopted as a banner by such Marxist currents as Althusserianism (‘history is a process without subject’). All radical objectivism can only be affirmed by means of this reduction. It is important to point out that this essentialism of the substance has usually been presented as the only alternative to the essentialism of the subject, which would affirm the fullness and positivity of the latter (remember how the Cartesian *cogito* grants the unmodified category of substance to the subject itself). But Žižek’s reintroduction of the category of subject deprives it of all substantiality: ‘If the essence is not in itself split, if — in the movement of extreme alienation — it does not perceive itself as an alien Entity, then the very difference essence/appearance cannot establish itself. *This self-fissure of the essence means that the essence is “subject” and not only “substance”*, to put things in a simplified way, “substance” is the essence insofar as it reflects itself in the world of appearance, in phenomenal objectivity, and “subject” is the substance insofar as it is itself split and experiences itself as some alien, positively given Entity. In a paradoxical way, we could say that subject is precisely the *substance insofar as it experiences itself as substance* (i.e. as some alien, given, external, positive Entity, existing in itself); “subject” is nothing but the name for this inner distance of the “substance” towards itself, the

name for this empty place from which the substance can perceive itself as something alien.’

These are affirmations to which I can only strongly subscribe, since they tend to break with the structure–subject dualism, posing the question of ‘social agency’ in terms which clearly go beyond all objectivism. There is subject because the substance — objectivity — does not manage to constitute itself fully; the location of the subject is that of a fissure at the very centre of the structure. The traditional debate as to the relationship between agent and structure thus appears fundamentally displaced: the issue is no longer a problem of *autonomy*, of determinism versus free will, in which two entities fully constituted as ‘objectivities’ mutually limit each other. On the contrary, the subject emerges as a result of the failure of substance in the process of its self-constitution. In my view, this is where the theory of deconstruction can make a contribution to a theory of the *space of the subject*. Indeed, deconstruction reveals that it is the ‘undecidables’ which form the ground on which any structure is based. I have elsewhere sustained that in this sense, the subject is merely the distance between the undecidable structure and the decision. And analysis of the exact dimensions of any decision reached on an undecidable terrain is the central task of a theory of politics, a theory which has to show the contingent ‘origins’ of all objectivity. The theory which Žižek has begun to elaborate in this book represents a contribution of the highest order in this challenge.

These are just some of the principal themes dealt with by this book. For all those interested in the elaboration of a theoretical perspective that seeks to address the problems of constructing a democratic socialist political project in a post-Marxist age, it is essential reading.

Translated by Jon Barnes

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Introduction

In that book of Habermas's which specifically addresses the issue of so-called 'post-structuralism', *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (Habermas, 1985), there is a curious detail concerning Lacan's name: it is mentioned only five times and each time in conjunction with other names. (Let us cite all five instances: p. 70 — 'von Hegel und Marx bis Nietzsche und Heidegger, von Baraille und Lacan bis Foucault und Derrida'; p. 120 — 'Baraille, Lacan und Foucault'; p. 311 — 'mit Lévi-Strauss und Lacan'; p. 313 — 'den zeitgenössischen Strukturalismus, die Ethnologie von Lévi-Strauss und die Lacanische Psychoanalyse'; p. 359 — 'von Freud oder C. G. Jung, von Lacan oder Lévi-Strauss') Lacanian theory is not, then, perceived as a specific entry; it is — to use Laclau and Mouffe's term — always articulated in a series of equivalences. Why this refusal to confront Lacan directly, in a book which includes lengthy discussions of Baraille, Derrida and, above all, Foucault, the real partner of Habermas?

The answer to this enigma is to be found in another curiosity of the Habermas book, in a curious accident concerning Althusser. Of course, we are using the term 'curious accident' in a Sherlock Holmesian sense: Althusser's name is not even mentioned in Habermas's book, and that is the curious accident. So our first thesis would be that the great debate occupying the foreground of today's intellectual scene, the Habermas-Foucault debate, is masking another opposition, another debate which is theoretically more far-reaching: the Althusser-Lacan debate. There is something enigmatic in the sudden eclipse of the Althusserian school: it cannot be explained away in terms of a theoretical defeat. — It is more as if there were, in Althusser's theory, a traumatic kernel which had to be quickly forgotten, 'repressed'; it is an effective case of theoretical amnesia. Why, then, was the opposition Althusser-Lacan replaced, in a kind of

metaphorical substitution, by the opposition Habermas-Foucault? At stake here are four different ethical positions, and at the same time four different notions of the subject.

With Habermas, we have the ethics of the unbroken communication, the Ideal of the universal, transparent intersubjective community; the notion of the subject behind this is, of course, the philosophy-of-language version of the old subject of transcendental reflection. With Foucault, we have a turn against that universalist ethics which results in a kind of aestheticization of ethics: each subject must, without any support from universal rules, build his own mode of self-mastery; he must harmonize the antagonism of the powers within himself — invent himself, so to speak, produce himself as subject, find his own particular art of living. This is why Foucault was so fascinated by marginal lifestyles constructing their particular mode of subjectivity (the sadomasochistic homosexual universe, for example: see Foucault, 1984).

It is not very difficult to detect how this Foucauldian notion of subject enters the humanist-elitist tradition: its closest realization would be the Renaissance ideal of the 'all-round personality' mastering the passions within himself and making out of his own life a work of art. Foucault's notion of the subject is, rather, a classical one: subject as the power of self-mediation and harmonizing the antagonistic forces, as a way of mastering the 'use of pleasures' through a restoration of the image of self. Here Habermas and Foucault are the two sides of the same coin — the real break is represented by Althusser, by his insistence on the fact that a certain cleft, a certain fissure, misrecognition, characterizes the human condition as such: by the thesis that the idea of the possible end of ideology is an ideological idea *par excellence* (Althusser, 1965).

Although Althusser has not written extensively about ethical problems, it is clear that the whole of his work embodies a certain radical ethical attitude which we might call the heroism of alienation or of subjective destitution (although, or rather precisely, *because* Althusser refuses the very notion of 'alienation' as ideological). The point is not just that we must unmask the structural mechanism which is producing the effect of subject as ideological misrecognition, but that we must at the same time fully acknowledge this misrecognition as unavoidable — that is, we must accept a certain delusion as a condition of our historical activity, of assuming a role as agent of the historical process.

In this perspective, the subject as such is constituted through a certain misrecognition: the process of ideological interpellation through which the subject 'recognizes' itself as the addressee in the calling up of the

ideological cause implies necessarily a certain short circuit, an illusion of the type 'I was already there' which, as Michel Pêcheux — who has given us the most elaborated version of the theory of interpellation — pointed out (Pêcheux, 1975), is not without its comical effects: the short circuit of 'no wonder you were interpellated as proletarian, when you are a proletarian'. Here, Pêcheux is supplementing Marxism with the Marx Brothers, whose well-known joke goes: 'You remind me of Emmanuel Ravelli.' 'But I am Emmanuel Ravelli.' 'Then no wonder you look like him!'

In contrast to this Althusserian ethics of *alienation* in the symbolic 'process without subject', we may denote the ethics implied by Lacanian psychoanalysis as that of *separation*. The famous Lacanian motto not to give way on one's desire [*ne pas céder sur son désir*] — is aimed at the fact that we must not obliterate the distance separating the Real from its symbolization: it is this surplus of the Real over every symbolization that functions as the object-cause of desire. To come to terms with this surplus (or, more precisely, leftover) means to acknowledge a fundamental deadlock ('antagonism'); a kernel resisting symbolic integration-dissolution. The best way to locate such an ethical position is via its opposition to the traditional Marxist notion of social antagonism. This traditional notion implies two interconnected features: (1) there exists a certain fundamental antagonism possessing an ontological priority to 'mediate' all other antagonisms, determining their place and their specific weight (class antagonism, economic exploitation); (2) historical development brings about, if not a necessity, at least an 'objective possibility' of solving this fundamental antagonism and, in this way, mediating all other antagonisms — to recall the well-known Marxist formulation, the same logic which drove mankind into alienation and class division also creates the condition for its abolition — '*die Wunde schliesst der Speer nur, der sie schlingt*' (the wound can be healed only by the spear which made it) — as Wagner, Marx's contemporary, said through the mouth of Parsifal.

It is upon the unity of these two features that the Marxist notion of the revolution, of the revolutionary situation, is founded: a situation of metaphorical condensation in which it finally becomes clear to the everyday consciousness that it is not possible to solve any particular question without solving them all — that is, without solving the fundamental question which embodies the antagonistic character of the social totality. In a 'normal', pre-revolutionary state of things, everybody is fighting his own particular battles (workers are striking for better wages, feminists are fighting for the rights of women, democrats for political and social

freedoms, ecologists against the exploitation of nature, participants in the peace movements against the danger of war, and so on). Marxists are using all their skill and adroitness of argument to convince the participants in these particular struggles that the only real solution to their problem is to be found in the global revolution: as long as social relations are dominated by Capital, there will always be sexism in relations between the sexes, there will always be a threat of global war, there will always be a danger that political and social freedoms will be suspended, nature itself will always remain an object of ruthless exploitation. . . . The global revolution will then abolish the basic social antagonism, enabling the formation of a transparent, rationally governed society.

The basic feature of so-called 'post-Marxism' is, of course, the break with this logic — which, incidentally, does not necessarily have a Marxist connotation: almost any of the antagonisms which, in the light of Marxism, appear to be secondary can take over this essential role of mediator for all the others. We have, for example, feminist fundamentalism (no global liberation without the emancipation of women, without the abolition of sexism); democratic fundamentalism (democracy as the fundamental value of Western civilization; all other struggles — economic, feminist, of minorities, and so on — are simply further applications of the basic democratic, egalitarian principle); ecological fundamentalism (ecological deadlock as the fundamental problem of mankind); and — why not? — also psychoanalytic fundamentalism as articulated in Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (the key to liberation lies in changing the repressive libidinal structure: see Marcuse, 1955).

Psychoanalytic 'essentialism' is paradoxical in so far as it is precisely psychoanalysis — at least in its Lacanian reading — which presents the real break with essentialist logic. That is to say, Lacanian psychoanalysis goes a decisive step further than the usual 'post-Marxist' anti-essentialism affirming the irreducible plurality of particular struggles — in other words, demonstrating how their articulation into a series of equivalences depends always on the radical contingency of the social-historical process: it enables us to grasp this plurality itself as a multitude of responses to the same impossible-real kernel.

Let us take the Freudian notion of the 'death drive'. Of course, we have to abstract Freud's biologism: 'death drive' is not a biological fact but a notion indicating that the human psychic apparatus is subordinated to a blind automatism of repetition beyond pleasure-seeking, self-preservation, accordance between man and his milieu. Man is — Hegel *dixit* — 'an animal sick unto death', an animal extorted by an insatiable

parasite (reason, *logos*, language). In this perspective, the 'death drive', this dimension of radical negativity, cannot be reduced to an expression of alienated social conditions, it defines *la condition humaine* as such: there is no solution, no escape from it; the thing to do is not to 'overcome', to 'abolish' it, but to come to terms with it, to learn to recognize it in its terrifying dimension and then, on the basis of this fundamental recognition, to try to articulate a *modus vivendi* with it.

All 'culture' is in a way a reaction-formation, an attempt to limit, canalize — to *cultivate* this imbalance, this traumatic kernel, this radical antagonism through which man cuts his umbilical cord with nature, with animal homeostasis. It is not only that the aim is no longer to abolish this drive antagonism, but the aspiration to abolish it is precisely the source of totalitarian temptation: the greatest mass murders and holocausts have always been perpetrated in the name of man as *homo*, as *hominous* being, of a New Man without antagonistic tension.

We have the same logic with ecology: man as such is 'the wound of nature', there is no return to the natural balance; to accord with his milieu, the only thing man can do is accept fully this cleft, this fissure, this structural rooting-out, and to try as far as possible to patch things up afterwards; all other solutions — the illusion of a possible return to nature, the idea of a total socialization of nature — are a direct path to totalitarianism. We have the same logic with feminism: 'there is no sexual relationship': that is, the relation between sexes is by definition 'impossible'; antagonistic; there is no final solution, and the only basis for a somewhat bearable relation between the sexes is an acknowledgement of this basic antagonism, this basic impossibility.

We have the same logic with democracy: it is — to use the worn-out phrase attributed to Churchill — the worst of all possible systems; the only problem is that there is no other which would be better. That is to say, democracy always entails the possibility of corruption, of the rule of dull mediocrity; the only problem is that every attempt to elude this inherent risk and to restore 'real' democracy necessarily brings about its opposite — it ends in the abolition of democracy itself. Here it would be possible to defend a thesis that the first post-Marxist was none other than Hegel himself: according to Hegel, the antagonism of civil society cannot be suppressed without a fall into totalitarian terrorism — only afterwards can the state limit its disastrous effects.

It is the merit of Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe that they have, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Laclau-Mouffe 1985), developed a theory of the social field founded on such a notion of antagonism — on an

acknowledgement of an original 'trauma', an impossible kernel which resists symbolization, totalization, symbolic integration. Every attempt at symbolization-totalization comes afterwards: it is an attempt to suture an original cleft — an attempt which is, in the last resort, by definition doomed to failure. They emphasize that we must not be 'radical' in the sense of aiming at a radical solution: we always live in an interspace and in borrowed time; every solution is provisional and temporary, a kind of postponing of a fundamental impossibility. Their term 'radical democracy' is thus to be taken somehow paradoxically: it is precisely *not* 'radical' in the sense of pure, true democracy; its radical character implies, on the contrary, that we can save democracy only by *taking into account its own radical impossibility*. Here we can see how we have reached the opposite extreme of the traditional Marxist standpoint: in traditional Marxism, the global solution-revolution is the condition of the effective solution of all particular problems, while here every provisional, temporarily successful solution of a particular problem entails an acknowledgement of the global radical deadlock, impossibility, the acknowledgement of a fundamental antagonism.

My thesis (developed in *Le plus sublime des hystériques: Hegel passe*, Paris 1988), is that the most consistent model of such an acknowledgement of antagonism is offered by Hegelian dialectics: far from being a story of its progressive overcoming, dialectics is for Hegel a systematic notation of the failure of all such attempts — 'absolute knowledge' denotes a subjective position which finally accepts 'contradiction' as an internal condition of every identity. In other words, Hegelian 'reconciliation' is not a 'paralogist' sublation of all reality in the Concept but a final consent to the fact that the Concept itself is 'not-all' (to use this Lacanian term). In this sense we can repeat the thesis of Hegel as the first post-Marxist: he opened up the field of a certain fissure subsequently 'sutured' by Marxism.

Such an understanding of Hegel inevitably runs counter to the accepted notion of 'absolute knowledge' as a monster of conceptual totality devouring every contingency, this commonplace of Hegel simply *shoots too fast*, like the patrolling soldier of the well-known joke from Jaruzelski's Poland immediately after the military coup. At that time, military patrols had the right to shoot without warning at people walking on the streets after curfew (ten o'clock); one of the two soldiers on patrol sees somebody in a hurry at ten minutes to ten and shoots him immediately. When his colleague asks him why he shot when it was only ten to ten, he answers: 'I knew the fellow — he lived far from here and in

any case would not be able to reach his home in ten minutes, so to simplify matters, I shot him now. . . .' This is exactly how the critics of Hegel's presumed 'paralogicism' proceed: they condemn absolute knowledge 'before it is ten o'clock', without reaching it — that is, they refuse nothing with their criticism but their own prejudices about it.

The aim of this book is thus threefold:

- to serve as an introduction to some of the fundamental concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis: against the distorted picture of Lacan as belonging to the field of 'post-structuralism', the book articulates his radical break with 'post-structuralism'; against the distorted picture of Lacan's obscurantism, it locates him in the lineage of rationalism. Lacanian theory is perhaps the most radical contemporary version of the Enlightenment.
- to accomplish a kind of 'return to Hegel' — to reactualize Hegelian dialectics by giving it a new reading on the basis of Lacanian psychoanalysis. The current image of Hegel as an 'idealist-monist' is totally misleading: what we find in Hegel is the strongest affirmation yet of difference and contingency — 'absolute knowledge' itself is nothing but a name for the acknowledgement of a certain radical loss.

- to contribute to the theory of ideology via a new reading of some well-known classical motifs (commodity fetishism, and so on) and of some crucial Lacanian concepts which, on a first approach, have nothing to offer to the theory of ideology: the 'quilting point' (*le point de capiton*: 'upholstery button'), sublime object, surplus-enjoyment, and so on.

It is my belief that these three aims are deeply connected: the only way to 'save Hegel' is through Lacan, and this Lacanian reading of Hegel and the Hegelian heritage opens up a new approach to ideology, allowing us to grasp contemporary ideological phenomena (cynicism, 'totalitarianism', the fragile status of democracy) without falling prey to any kind of 'post-modernist' traps (such as the illusion that we live in a 'post-ideological' condition).

PART I

The Symptom

How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?

Marx, Freud: the Analysis of Form

According to Lacan, it was none other than Karl Marx who invented the notion of symptom. Is this Lacanian thesis just a sally of wit, a vague analogy, or does it possess a pertinent theoretical foundation? If Marx really articulated the notion of the symptom as it is also at work in the Freudian field, then we must ask ourselves the Kantian question concerning the epistemological 'conditions of possibility' of such an encounter: how was it possible for Marx, in his analysis of the world of commodities, to produce a notion which applies also to the analysis of dreams, hysterical phenomena, and so on?

The answer is that there is a fundamental homology between the interpretative procedure of Marx and Freud — more precisely, between their analysis of commodity and of dreams. In both cases the point is to avoid the properly fetishistic fascination of the 'content' supposedly hidden behind the form: the 'secret' to be unveiled through analysis is not the content hidden by the form (the form of commodities, the form of dreams) but, on the contrary, *the secret of this form itself*. The theoretical intelligence of the form of dreams does not consist in penetrating from the manifest content to its 'hidden kernel', to the latent dream-thoughts; it consists in the answer to the question: why have the latent dream-thoughts assumed such a form, why were they transposed into the form of a dream? It is the same with commodities: the real problem is not to penetrate to the 'hidden kernel' of the commodity — the determination of its value by the quantity of the work consumed in its production — but to explain why work assumed the form of the value of a commodity, why it can affirm its social character only in the commodity-form of its product.

The notorious reproach of 'pansexualism' addressed at the Freudian interpretation of dreams is already a commonplace. Hans-Jürgen Eysenck, a severe critic of psychoanalysis, long ago observed a crucial paradox in the Freudian approach to dreams: according to Freud, the desire articulated in a dream is supposed to be — as a rule, at least — unconscious and at the same time of a sexual nature, which contradicts the majority of examples analysed by Freud himself, starting with the dream he chose as an introductory case to exemplify the logic of dreams, the famous dream of Irma's injection. The latent thought articulated in this dream is Freud's attempt to get rid of the responsibility for the failure of his treatment of Irma, a patient of his, by means of arguments of the type 'it was not my fault, it was caused by a series of circumstances . . .'; but this 'desire', the meaning of the dream, is obviously neither of a sexual nature (it rather concerns professional ethics) nor unconscious (the failure of Irma's treatment was troubling Freud day and night) (Eysenck, 1966).

This kind of reproach is based on a fundamental theoretical error: the identification of the unconscious desire at work in the dream with the 'latent thought' — that is, the signification of the dream. But as Freud continually emphasizes, *there is nothing 'unconscious' in the 'latent dream-thought'*: this thought is an entirely 'normal' thought which can be articulated in the syntax of everyday, common language: topologically, it belongs to the system of 'consciousness/preconsciousness'; the subject is usually aware of it, even excessively so; it harasses him all the time. . . . Under certain conditions this thought is pushed away, forced out of the consciousness, drawn into the unconscious — that is, submitted to the laws of the 'primary process', translated into the 'language of the unconscious'. The relationship between the 'latent thought' and what is called the 'manifest content' of a dream — the text of the dream, the dream in its literal phenomenality — is therefore that between some entirely 'normal', (pre)conscious thought and its translation into the 'rebus' of the dream. The essential constitution of dream is thus not its 'latent thought' but this work (the mechanisms of displacement and condensation, the figuration of the contents of words or syllables) which confers on it the form of a dream.

Herein, then, lies the basic misunderstanding: if we seek the 'secret of the dream' in the latent content hidden by the manifest text, we are doomed to disappointment: all we find is some entirely 'normal' — albeit usually unpleasant — thought, the nature of which is mostly non-sexual and definitely not 'unconscious'. This 'normal', conscious/preconscious

thought is not drawn towards the unconscious, repressed simply because of its 'disagreeable' character for the conscious, but because it achieves a kind of 'short circuit' between it and another desire which is already repressed, located in the unconscious, *a desire which has nothing whatsoever to do with the 'latent dream-thought'*. 'A normal train of thought' — normal and therefore one which can be articulated in common, everyday language: that is, in the syntax of the 'secondary process' — 'is only submitted to the abnormal psychological treatment of the sort we have been describing' — to the dream-work, to the mechanisms of the 'primary process' — 'if an unconscious wish, derived from infancy and in a state of repression, has been transferred on to it' (Freud, 1977, p. 757).

It is this unconscious/sexual desire which cannot be reduced to a 'normal train of thought' because it is, from the very beginning, constitutively repressed (Freud's *Unerwünschung*) — because it has no 'original' in the 'normal' language of everyday communication, in the syntax of the conscious/preconscious; its only place is in the mechanisms of the 'primary process'. This is why we should not reduce the interpretation of dreams, or symptoms in general, to the retranslation of the 'latent dream-thought' into the 'normal', everyday common language of intersubjective communication (Habermas's formula). The structure is always triple: there are always *three* elements at work: the *manifest dream-text*, the *latent dream-content* or thought and the *unconscious desire* articulated in a dream. This desire attaches itself to the dream, it interrelates itself in the interspace between the latent thought and the manifest text: it is therefore not 'more concealed, deeper' in relation to the latent thought, it is decidedly more 'on the surface', consisting entirely of the signifier's mechanisms, of the treatment to which the latent thought is submitted. In other words, its only place is in the *form* of the 'dream': the real subject matter of the dream (the unconscious desire) articulates itself in the dream-work, in the elaboration of its 'latent content'.

As is often the case with Freud, what he formulates as an empirical observation (although of 'quite surprising frequency') announces a fundamental, universal principle: 'The form of a dream or the form in which it is dreamt is used with quite surprising frequency for representing its concealed subject matter' (Freud, 1977, p. 446). This, then, is the basic paradox of the dream: the unconscious desire, that which is supposedly its most hidden kernel, articulates itself precisely through the dissimulation work of the 'kernel' of a dream, its latent thought, through the work of disguising this content-kernel by means of its translation into the dream-rebus. Again, as characteristically, Freud gave this para-

dox its final formulation in a footnote added in a later edition:

I used at one time to find it extraordinarily difficult to accustom readers to the distinction between the manifest content of dreams and the latent dream-thoughts. Again and again arguments and objections would be brought up based upon some uninterpreted dream in the form in which it had been retained in the memory, and the need to interpret it would be ignored. But now that analysts at least have become reconciled to replacing the manifest dream by the meaning revealed by its interpretation, many of them have become guilty of falling into another confusion which they cling to with an equal obstinacy. They seek to find the essence of dreams in their latent content and in so doing they overlook the distinction between the latent dream-thoughts and the dream-work.

At bottom, dreams are nothing other than a particular form of thinking, made possible by the conditions of the state of sleep. It is the dream-work which creates that form, and it alone is the essence of dreaming — the explanation of its peculiar nature. (Freud, 1977, p.650)

Freud proceeds here in two stages:

- First, we must break the appearance according to which a dream is nothing but a simple and meaningless confusion, a disorder caused by physiological processes and as such having nothing whatsoever to do with signification. In other words, we must accomplish a crucial step towards a *hermeneutical* approach and conceive the dream as a meaningful phenomenon, as something transmitting a repressed message which has to be discovered by an interpretative procedure;

- Then we must get rid of the fascination in this kernel of signification, in the 'hidden meaning' of the dream — that is to say, in the content concealed behind the form of a dream — and centre our attention on this form itself, on the dream-work to which the 'latent dream-thoughts' were submitted.

The crucial thing to note here is that we find exactly the same articulation in two stages with Marx, in his analysis of the 'secret of the commodity-form':

- First, we must break the appearance according to which the value of a commodity depends on pure hazard — on an accidental interplay

between supply and demand, for example. We must accomplish the crucial step of conceiving the hidden 'meaning' behind the commodity-form, the signification 'expressed' by this form; we must penetrate the 'secret' of the value of commodities:

The determination of the magnitude of value by labour-time is therefore a secret, hidden under the apparent fluctuations in the relative values of commodities. Its discovery, while removing all appearance of mere accidentality from the determination of the magnitude of the values of products, yet in no way alters the mode in which that determination takes place. (Marx, 1974, p.80)

- But as Marx points out, there is a certain 'yet': the unmasking of the secret is *not sufficient*. Classical bourgeois political economy has already discovered the 'secret' of the commodity-form; its limit is that it is not able to disengage itself from this fascination in the secret hidden behind the commodity-form — that its attention is captivated by labour as the true source of wealth. In other words, classical political economy is interested only in contents concealed behind the commodity-form, which is why it cannot explain the true secret, not the secret *behind* the form but *the secret of this form itself*. In spite of its quite correct explanation of the 'secret of the magnitude of value', the commodity remains for classical political economy a mysterious, enigmatic thing — it is the same as with the dream: even after we have explained its hidden meaning, its latent thought, the dream remains an enigmatic phenomenon; what is not yet explained is simply its form, the process by means of which the hidden meaning disguised itself in such a form.

We must, then, accomplish another crucial step and analyse the genesis of the commodity-form itself. It is not sufficient to reduce the form to the essence, to the hidden kernel; we must also examine the process — homologous to the 'dream-work' — by means of which the concealed content assumes such a form, because, as Marx points out: 'Whence, then, arises the enigmatical character of the product of labour, as soon as it assumes the form of commodities? Clearly from this form itself' (Marx, 1974, p. 76). It is this step towards the genesis of the form that classical political economy cannot accomplish, and this is its crucial weakness:

Political economy has indeed analysed value and its magnitude, however

incompletely, and has uncovered the content concealed within these forms. But it has never once asked the question why this content has assumed that particular form, that is to say, why labour is expressed in value, and why the measurement of labour by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product. (Sohn-Rethel, 1978, p.31)

The Unconscious of the Commodity-form

Why did the Marxian analysis of the commodity-form — which, *prima facie*, concerns a purely economic question — exert such an influence in the general field of social sciences; why has it fascinated generations of philosophers, sociologists, art historians, and others? Because it offers a kind of matrix enabling us to generate all other forms of the 'fetishistic inversion': it is as if the dialectics of the commodity-form presents us with a pure — distilled, so to speak — version of a mechanism offering us a key to the theoretical understanding of phenomena which, at first sight, have nothing whatsoever to do with the field of political economy (law, religion, and so on). In the commodity-form there is definitely more at stake than the commodity-form itself, and it was precisely this 'more' which exerted such a fascinating power of attraction. The theoretician who has gone furthest in unfolding the universal reach of the commodity-form is indubitably Alfred Sohn-Rethel, one of the 'fellow-travellers' of the Frankfurt School. His fundamental thesis was that

the formal analysis of the commodity holds the key not only to the critique of political economy, but also to the historical explanation of the abstract conceptual mode of thinking and of the division of intellectual and manual labour which came into existence with it. (Sohn-Rethel, 1978, p. 33)

In other words, in the structure of the commodity-form it is possible to find the transcendental subject: the commodity-form articulates in advance the anatomy, the skeleton of the Kantian transcendental subject — that is, the network of transcendental categories which constitute the a priori frame of 'objective' scientific knowledge. Herein lies the paradox of the commodity-form: it — this inner-worldly, 'pathological' (in the Kantian meaning of the word) phenomenon — offers us a key to solving the fundamental question of the theory of knowledge: objective knowledge with universal validity — how is this possible?

After a series of detailed analyses, Sohn-Rethel came to the following

conclusion: the apparatus of categories presupposed, implied by the scientific procedure (that, of course of the Newtonian science of nature), the network of notions by means of which it seizes nature, is already present in the social effectivity, already at work in the act of commodity exchange. Before thought could arrive at pure *abstraction*, the abstraction was already at work in the social effectivity of the market. The exchange of commodities implies a double abstraction: the abstraction from the changeable character of the commodity during the act of exchange and the abstraction from the concrete, empirical, sensual, particular character of the commodity (in the act of exchange, the distinct, particular qualitative determination of a commodity is not taken into account; a commodity is reduced to an abstract entity which — irrespective of its particular nature, of its 'use-value' — possesses 'the same value' as another commodity for which it is being exchanged).

Before thought could arrive at the idea of a purely *quantitative* determination, a *sine qua non* of the modern science of nature, pure quantity was already at work in money, that commodity which renders possible the commensurability of the value of all other commodities notwithstanding their particular qualitative determination. Before physics could articulate the notion of a purely abstract *movement* going on in a geometric space, independently of all qualitative determinations of the moving objects, the social act of exchange had already realized such a 'pure', abstract movement which leaves totally intact the concrete-sensual properties of the object caught in movement: the transference of property. And Sohn-Rethel demonstrated the same about the relationship of substance and its accidents, about the notion of causality operative in Newtonian science — in short, about the whole network of categories of pure reason.

In this way, the transcendental subject, the support of the net of a priori categories, is confronted with the disquieting fact that it depends, in its very formal genesis, on some inner-worldly, 'pathological' process — a scandal, a nonsensical impossibility from the transcendental point of view, in so far as the formal-transcendental a priori is by definition independent of all positive contents: a scandal corresponding perfectly to the 'scandalous' character of the Freudian unconscious, which is also unbearable from the transcendental-philosophical perspective. That is to say, if we look closely at the ontological status of what Sohn-Rethel calls the 'real abstraction' [*das reale Abstraktion*] (that is, the act of abstraction at work in the very *effective* process of the exchange of commodities), the homology between its status and that of the unconscious, this signifying

chain which persists on 'another Scene', is striking: *the 'real abstraction' is the unconscious of the transcendental subject, the support of objective-universal scientific knowledge.*

On the one hand, the 'real abstraction' is of course not 'real' in the sense of the real, effective properties of commodities as material objects: the object-commodity does not contain 'value' in the same way as it possesses a set of particular properties determining its 'use-value' (its form, colour, taste, and so on). As Sohn-Rethel pointed out, its nature is that of a *postulate* implied by the effective act of exchange — in other words, that of a certain 'as if' [*als ob*]; during the act of exchange, individuals proceed *as if* the commodity is not submitted to physical, material exchanges; *as if* it is excluded from the natural cycle of generation and corruption; although on the level of their 'consciousness' they 'know very well' that this is not the case.

The easiest way to detect the effectivity of this postulate is to think of the way we behave towards the materiality of money: we know very well that money, like all other material objects, suffers the effects of use, that its material body changes through time, but in the social *effectivity* of the market we none the less *treat* coins as if they consist 'of an immutable substance, a substance over which time has no power, and which stands in antithetic contrast to any matter found in nature' (Sohn-Rethel, 1978, p. 59). How tempting to recall here the formula of fetishistic disavowal: 'I know very well, but still . . .'. To the current exemplifications of this formula ('I know that Mother has not got a phallus, but still . . . [I believe she has got one]'; 'I know that Jews are people like us, but still . . . [there is something in them]') we must undoubtedly add also the variant of money: 'I know that money is a material object like others, but still . . . [it is as if it were made of a special substance over which time has no power]'.¹

Here we have touched a problem unsolved by Marx, that of the *material* character of money: not of the empirical, material stuff money is made of, but of the *sublime* material, of that other 'indestructible and immutable' body which persists beyond the corruption of the body physical — this other body of money is like the corpse of the Sadeian victim which endures all torments and survives with its beauty immaculate. This immaterial corporality of the 'body within the body' gives us a precise definition of the sublime object, and it is in this sense only that the psychoanalytic notion of money as a 'pre-phallic', 'anal' object is acceptable — provided that we do not forget how this postulated existence of the sublime body depends on the symbolic order: the index-tructible 'body-within-the-body' exempted from the effects of wear and

tear is always sustained by the guarantee of some symbolic authority.

A coin has it stamped upon its body that it is to serve as a means of exchange and not as an object of use. Its weight and metallic purity are guaranteed by the issuing authority so that, if by the wear and tear of circulation it has lost in weight, full replacement is provided. Its physical matter has visibly become a mere carrier of its social function. (Sohn-Rethel, 1978, p. 59)

If, then, the 'real abstraction' has nothing to do with the level of 'reality', of the effective properties, of an object, it would be wrong for that reason to conceive of it as a 'thought-abstraction', as a process taking place in the 'interior' of the thinking subject: in relation to this 'interior', the abstraction appertaining to the act of exchange is in an irreducible way external, decentred — or, to quote Sohn-Rethel's concise formulation: 'The exchange abstraction is *not* thought, but it has the *form* of thought.'

Here we have one of the possible definitions of the unconscious: *the form of thought whose ontological status is not that of thought*, that is to say, the form of thought external to the thought itself — in short, some Other Scene external to the thought whereby the form of the thought is already articulated in advance. The symbolic order is precisely such a formal order which supplements and/or disrupts the dual relationship of 'external' factual reality and 'internal' subjective experience; Sohn-Rethel is thus quite justified in his criticism of Althusser, who conceives abstraction as a process taking place entirely in the domain of knowledge and refuses for that reason the category of 'real abstraction' as the expression of an 'epistemological confusion'. The 'real abstraction' is unthinkable in the frame of the fundamental Althusserian epistemological distinction between the 'real object' and the 'object of knowledge' in so far as it introduces a third element which subverts the very field of this distinction: the form of the thought previous and external to the thought — in short: the symbolic order.

We are now able to formulate precisely the 'scandalous' nature of Sohn-Rethel's undertaking for philosophical reflection: he has confronted the closed circle of philosophical reflection with an external place where its form is already 'staged'. Philosophical reflection is thus subjected to an uncanny experience similar to the one summarized by the old oriental formula 'thou art that': there, in the external effectivity of the exchange process, is your proper place; there is the theatre in which your truth was performed before you took cognizance of it. The confrontation with this place is unbearable because philosophy as such is

defined by its blindness to this place: it cannot take it into consideration without dissolving itself, without losing its consistency.

This does not mean, on the other hand, that everyday 'practical' consciousness, as opposed to the philosophical-theoretical one — the consciousness of the individuals partaking in the act of exchange — is not also subjected to a complementary blindness. During the act of exchange, individuals proceed as 'practical solipsists', they misrecognize the socio-synthetic function of exchange: that is the level of the 'real abstraction' as the form of socialization of private production through the medium of the market: 'What the commodity owners do in an exchange relation is practical solipsism — irrespective of what they think and say about it' (Sohn-Rethel, 1978, p. 42). Such a misrecognition is the *sine qua non* of the effectuation of an act of exchange — if the participants were to take note of the dimension of 'real abstraction', the 'effective' act of exchange itself would no longer be possible:

Thus, in speaking of the abstractness of exchange we must be careful not to apply the term to the consciousness of the exchange agents. They are supposed to be occupied with the use of the commodities they see, but occupied in their imagination only. It is the action of exchange, and the action alone, that is abstract . . . the abstractness of that action cannot be noted when it happens because the consciousness of its agents is taken up with their business and with the empirical appearance of things which pertain to their use. One could say that the abstractness of their action is beyond realization by the actors because their very consciousness stands in the way. Were the abstractness to catch their minds their action would cease to be exchange and the abstraction would not arise. (Sohn-Rethel, 1978, pp. 26–7)

This misrecognition brings about the fissure of the consciousness into 'practical' and 'theoretical': the proprietor partaking in the act of exchange proceeds as a 'practical solipsist': he overlooks the universal, socio-synthetic dimension of his act, reducing it to a casual encounter of atomized individuals in the market. This 'repressed' social dimension of his act emerges thereupon in the form of its contrary — as universal Reason turned towards the observation of nature (the network of categories of 'pure reason' as the conceptual frame of natural sciences).

The crucial paradox of this relationship between the social effectivity of the commodity exchange and the 'consciousness' of it is that — to use again a concise formulation by Sohn-Rethel — 'this non-knowledge of the reality is part of its very essence': the social effectivity of the exchange

process is a kind of reality which is possible only on condition that the individuals partaking in it are not aware of its proper logic; that is, a kind of reality whose very ontological consistency implies a certain non-knowledge of its participants — if we come to 'know too much', to pierce the true functioning of social reality, this reality would dissolve itself.

This is probably the fundamental dimension of 'ideology': ideology is not simply a 'false consciousness', an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as 'ideological' — 'ideological' is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence — that is, the social effectivity, the very reproduction of which implies that the individuals 'do not know what they are doing'. 'Ideological' is not the false consciousness of a (social) being but this being itself in so far as it is supported by false consciousness'. Thus we have finally reached the dimension of the symptom, because one of its possible definitions would also be 'a formation whose very consistency implies a certain non-knowledge on the part of the subject': the subject can 'enjoy his symptom' only in so far as its logic escapes him — the measure of the success of its interpretation is precisely its dissolution.

The Social Symptom

How, then, can we define the Marxian symptom? Marx 'invented the symptom' (Lacan) by means of detecting a certain fissure, an asymmetry, a certain 'pathological' imbalance which belies the universalism of the bourgeois 'rights and duties'. This imbalance, far from announcing the 'imperfect realization' of these universal principles — that is, an insufficiency to be abolished by further development — functions as their constitutive moment: the 'symptom' is, strictly speaking, a particular element which subverts its own universal foundation, a species subverting its own genus. In this sense, we can say that the elementary Marxian procedure of 'criticism of ideology' is already 'symptomatic': it consists in detecting a point of breakdown *heterogeneous* to a given ideological field and at the same time *necessary* for that field to achieve its closure, its accomplished form.

This procedure thus implies a certain logic of exception: every ideological Universal — for example freedom, equality — is 'false' in so far as it necessarily includes a specific case which breaks its unity, lays open its falsity. Freedom, for example: a universal notion comprising a number of species (freedom of speech and press, freedom of consciousness, freedom

of commerce, political freedom, and so on) but also, by means of a structural necessity, a specific freedom (that of the worker to sell freely his own labour on the market) which subverts this universal notion. That is to say, this freedom is the very opposite of effective freedom: by selling his labour 'freely', the worker *loses* his freedom — the real content of this free act of sale is the worker's enslavement to capital. The crucial point is, of course, that it is precisely this paradoxical freedom, the form of its opposite, which closes the circle of 'bourgeois freedoms'.

The same can also be shown for fair, equivalent exchange, this ideal of the market. When, in pre-capitalist society, the production of commodities has not yet attained universal character — that is, when it is still so-called 'natural production' which predominates — the proprietors of the means of production are still themselves producers (as a rule, at least); it is artisan production; the proprietors themselves work and sell their products on the market. At this stage of development there is no exploitation (in principle, at least — that is, if we do not consider the exploitation of apprentices, and so on); the exchange on the market is equivalent, every commodity is paid its full value. But as soon as production for the market prevails in the economic edifice of a given society, this *generalization* is necessarily accompanied by the appearance of a new, paradoxical type of commodity: the labour force; the workers who are not themselves proprietors of the means of production and who are consequently obliged to sell on the market their own labour instead of the products of their labour.

With this new commodity, the equivalent exchange becomes its own negation — the very form of exploitation, of appropriation of the surplus-value. The crucial point not to be missed here is that this negation is strictly *internal* to equivalent exchange, not its simple violation: the labour force is not 'exploited' in the sense that its full value is not remunerated; in principle at least, the exchange between labour and capital is wholly equivalent and equitable. The catch is that the labour force is a peculiar commodity, the use of which — labour itself — produces a certain surplus-value, and it is this surplus over the value of the labour force itself which is appropriated by the capitalist.

We have here again a certain ideological Universal, that of equivalent and equitable exchange, and a particular paradoxical exchange — that of the labour force for its wages — which, precisely as an equivalent, functions as the very form of exploitation. The 'quantitative' development itself, the universalization of the production of commodities, brings about a new 'quality', the emergence of a new commodity representing

the internal negation of the universal principle of equivalent exchange of commodities; in other words, *it brings about a symptom*. And in the Marxian perspective, *utopian* socialism consists in the very belief that a society is possible in which the relations of exchange are universalized and production for the market predominates, but workers themselves none the less remain proprietors of their means of production and are therefore not exploited — in short, 'utopian' conveys a belief in the possibility of *a universalily without its symptom*, without the point of exception functioning as its internal negation.

This is also the logic of the Marxian critique of Hegel, of the Hegelian notion of society as a rational totality: as soon as we try to conceive the existing social order as a rational totality, we must include in it a paradoxical element which, without ceasing to be its internal constituent, functions as its symptom — subverts the very universal rational principle of this totality. For Marx, this 'irrational' element of the existing society was, of course, the proletariat, 'the unreason of reason itself' (Marx), the point at which the Reason embodied in the existing social order encounters its own unreason.

Commodity Fetishism

In his attribution of the discovery of symptom to Marx, Lacan is, however, more distinct: he locates this discovery in the way Marx conceived the *passage* from feudalism to capitalism: 'One has to look for the origins of the notion of symptom not in Hippocrates but in Marx, in the connection he was first to establish between capitalism and what? — the good old times, what we call the feudal times' (Lacan, 1975a, p. 106). To grasp the logic of this passage from feudalism to capitalism we have first to elucidate its theoretical background, the Marxian notion of commodity fetishism.

In a first approach, commodity fetishism is 'a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things' (Marx, 1974, p. 77). The *value* of a certain commodity, which is effectively an insignia of a network of social relations between producers of diverse commodities, assumes the form of a quasi-'natural' property of another thing—commodity, money: we say that the value of a certain commodity is such-and-such amount of money. Consequently, the essential feature of commodity fetishism does not consist of the famous replacement of men with things ('a relation between men

assumes the form of a relation between things); rather, it consists of a certain misrecognition which concerns the relation between a structured network and one of its elements: what is really a structural effect, an effect of the network of relations between elements, appears as an immediate property of one of the elements, as if this property also belongs to it outside its relation with other elements.

Such a misrecognition can take place in a 'relation between things' as well as in a 'relation between men' — Marx states this explicitly apropos of the simple form of the value-expression. The commodity A can express its value only by referring itself to another commodity, B, which thus becomes its equivalent: in the value relationship, the natural form of the commodity B (its use-value, its positive, empirical properties) functions as a form of value of the commodity A; in other words, the body of B becomes for A the mirror of its value. To these reflections, Marx added the following note:

In a sort of way, it is with man as with commodities. Since he comes into the world neither with a looking-glass in his hand, nor as a Fichtian philosopher, to whom 'I am I' is sufficient, man first sees and recognizes himself in other men. Peter only establishes his own identity as a man by first comparing himself with Paul as being of like kind. And thereby Paul, just as he stands in his Pauline personality, becomes to Peter the type of the genus homo. (Marx, 1974, p. 59)

This short note anticipates in a way the Lacanian theory of the mirror stage: only by being reflected in another man — that is, in so far as this other man offers it an image of its unity — can the ego arrive at its self-identity; identity and alienation are thus strictly correlative. Marx pursues this homology: the other commodity (B) is an equivalent only in so far as A relates to it as to the form-of-appearance of its own value, only within this relationship. But the appearance — and herein lies the effect of inversion proper to fetishism — the appearance is exactly opposite: A seems to relate to B as if, for B, to be an equivalent of A would not be a 'reflexive determination' (Marx) of A — that is as if B would *already in itself* be the equivalent of A; the property of 'being-an-equivalent' appears to belong to it even outside its relation to A, on the same level as its other 'natural' effective properties constituting its use-value. To these reflections, Marx again added a very interesting note:

Such expressions of relations in general, called by Hegel reflex-categories,

form a very curious class. For instance, one man is king only because other men stand in the relation of subjects to him. They, on the contrary, imagine that they are subjects because he is king. (Marx, 1974, p. 63)

'Being-a-king' is an effect of the network of social relations between a 'king' and his 'subjects'; but — and here is the fetishistic misrecognition — to the participants of this social bond, the relationship appears necessarily in an inverse form: they think that they are subjects giving the king royal treatment because the king is already in himself, outside the relationship to his subjects, a king; as if the determination of 'being-a-king' were a 'natural' property of the person of a king. How can one not remind oneself here of the famous Lacanian affirmation that a madman who believes himself to be a king is no more mad than a king who believes himself to be a king — who, that is, identifies immediately with the mandate 'king'?

What we have here is thus a parallel between two modes of fetishism, and the crucial question concerns the exact relationship between these two levels. That is to say, this relationship is by no means a simple homology: we cannot say that in societies in which production for the market predominates — ultimately, that is, in capitalist societies — 'it is with man as with commodities'. Precisely the opposite is true: commodity fetishism occurs in capitalist societies, but in capitalism relations between men are definitely *not* 'fetishized'; what we have here are relations between 'free' people, each following his or her proper egoistic interest. The predominant and determining form of their interrelations is not domination and servitude but a contract between free people who are equal in the eyes of the law. Its model is the market exchange: here, two subjects meet, their relation is free of all the lumber of veneration of the Master, of the Master's patronage and care for his subjects; they meet as two persons whose activity is thoroughly determined by their egoistic interests; every one of them proceeds as a good utilitarian; the other person is for him wholly delivered of all mystical aura; all he sees in his partner is another subject who follows his interest and interests him only in so far as he possesses something — a commodity — that could satisfy some of his needs.

The two forms of fetishism are thus *incompatible*: in societies in which commodity fetishism reigns, the 'relations between men' are totally de-fetishized, while in societies in which there is fetishism in 'relations between men' — in pre-capitalist societies — commodity fetishism is not yet developed, because it is 'natural' production, not production for the

market which predominates. This fetishism in relations between men has to be called by its proper name: what we have here are, as Marx points out, 'relations of domination and servitude' — that is to say, precisely the relation of Lordship and Bondage in a Hegelian sense;* and it is as if the retreat of the Master in capitalism was only a *displacement*: as if the de-fetishization in the 'relations between men' was paid for by the emergence of fetishism in the 'relations between things' — by commodity fetishism. The place of fetishism has just shifted from intersubjective relations to relations 'between things': the crucial social relations, those of production, are no longer immediately transparent in the form of the interpersonal relations of domination and servitude (of the Lord and his serfs, and so on); they disguise themselves — to use Marx's accurate formula — 'under the shape of social relations between things, between the products of labour'.

This is why one has to look for the discovery of the symptom in the way Marx conceived the passage from feudalism to capitalism. With the establishment of bourgeois society, the relations of domination and servitude are *repressed*: formally, we are apparently concerned with free subjects whose interpersonal relations are discharged of all fetishism; the repressed truth — that of the persistence of domination and servitude — emerges in a symptom which subverts the ideological appearance of equality, freedom, and so on. This symptom, the point of emergence of the truth about social relations, is precisely the 'social relations between things' — in contrast to feudal society, where

no matter what we may think of the parts played by the different classes of people themselves in this society, the social relations between individuals in the performance of their labour, appear at all events as their own mutual personal relations, and are not disguised under the shape of social relations between things, between the products of labour. (Marx, 1974, p. 82)

Instead of appearing at all events as their own mutual relations, the social relations between individuals are disguised under the shape of social relations between things' — here we have a precise definition of the hysterical symptom, of the 'hysteria of conversion' proper to capitalism.

*'Lordship' and 'Bondage' are the terms used in the translation we refer to (Hegel, 1977); following Kojève, Lacan uses 'maître' and 'esclave', which are then translated as 'master' and 'slave'.

Totalitarian Laughter

Here Marx is more subversive than the majority of his contemporary critics who discard the dialectics of commodity fetishism as outdated: this dialectics can still help us to grasp the phenomenon of so-called 'totalitarianism'. Let us take as our starting point Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose*, precisely because there is something wrong with this book. This criticism does not apply only to its ideology, which might be called — on the model of *spaghetti* Westerns — *spaghetti* structuralism: a kind of simplified, mass-culture version of structuralist and post-structuralist ideas (there is no final reality, we all live in a world of signs referring to other signs . . .). What should bother us about this book is its basic underlying thesis: the source of totalitarianism is a dogmatic attachment to the official word: the lack of laughter, of ironic detachment. An excessive commitment to Good may in itself become the greatest Evil: real Evil is any kind of fanatical dogmatism, especially that exerted in the name of the supreme Good.

This thesis is already part of the enlightened version of religious belief itself: if we become too obsessed with the Good and with a corresponding hate for the secular, our obsession with Good may itself turn into a force of Evil: a form of destructive hatred for all that fails to correspond to our idea of Good. The real Evil is the supposedly innocent gaze which perceives in the world nothing but Evil, as in *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James, in which the real Evil is, of course, the gaze of the storyteller (the young governess) herself . . .

First, this idea of an obsession with (a fanatical devotion to) Good turning into Evil masks the inverse experience, which is much more disquieting: how an obsessive, fanatical attachment to Evil may in itself acquire the status of an ethical position, of a position which is not guided by our egotistical interests. Consider only Mozart's Don Giovanni at the end of the opera, when he is confronted with the following choice: if he confesses his sins, he can still achieve salvation; if he persists, he will be damned for ever. From the viewpoint of the pleasure principle, the proper thing to do would be to renounce his past, but he does not, he persists in his Evil, although he knows that by persisting he will be damned for ever. Paradoxically, with his final choice of Evil, he acquires the status of an ethical hero — that is, of someone who is guided by fundamental principles 'beyond the pleasure principle' and not just by the search for pleasure or material gain.

What is really disturbing about *The Name of the Rose*, however, is the

underlying belief in the liberating, anti-totalitarian force of laughter, of ironic distance. Our thesis here is almost the exact opposite of this underlying premise of Eco's novel: in contemporary societies, democratic or totalitarian, that cynical distance, laughter, irony, are, so to speak, part of the game. The ruling ideology is not meant to be taken seriously or literally. Perhaps the greatest danger for totalitarianism is people who take its ideology literally — even in Eco's novel, poor old Jorge, the incarnation of dogmatic belief who does not laugh, is rather a tragic figure: outdated, a kind of living dead, a remnant of the past, certainly not a person representing the existing social and political powers.

What conclusion should we draw from this? Should we say that we live in a post-ideological society? Perhaps it would be better, first, to try to specify what we mean by ideology.

Cynicism as a Form of Ideology

The most elementary definition of ideology is probably the well-known phrase from Marx's *Capital*: '*Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es*' — '*they do not know it, but they are doing it*'. The very concept of ideology implies a kind of basic, constitutive *naïveté*: the misrecognition of its own pre-suppositions, of its own effective conditions, a distance, a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation, our false consciousness of it. That is why such a 'naïve consciousness' can be submitted to a critical-ideological procedure. The aim of this procedure is to lead the naïve ideological consciousness to a point at which it can recognize its own effective conditions, the social reality that it is distorting, and through this very act dissolve itself. In the more sophisticated versions of the critics of ideology — that developed by the Frankfurt School, for example — it is not just a question of seeing things (that is, social reality) as they 'really are', of throwing away the distorting spectacles of ideology; the main point is to see how the reality itself cannot reproduce itself without this so-called ideological mystification. The mask is not simply hiding the real state of things: the ideological distortion is written into its very essence.

We find, then, the paradox of a being which can reproduce itself only in so far as it is misrecognized and overlooked: the moment we see it 'as it really is', this being dissolves itself into nothingness or, more precisely, it changes into another kind of reality. That is why we must avoid the simple metaphors of demasking, of throwing away the veils which are

supposed to hide the naked reality. We can see why Lacan, in his Seminar on *The Ethic of Psychoanalysis*, distances himself from the liberating gesture of saying finally that 'the emperor has no clothes'. The point is, as Lacan puts it, that the emperor is naked only beneath his clothes, so if there is an unmasking gesture of psychoanalysis, it is closer to Alphonse Allais's well-known joke, quoted by Lacan: somebody points at a woman and utters a horrified cry, 'Look at her, what a shame, under her clothes, she is totally naked' (Lacan, 1986, p.231).

But all this is already well known: it is the classic concept of ideology as 'false consciousness', misrecognition of the social reality which is part of this reality itself. Our question is: Does this concept of ideology as a naïve consciousness still apply to today's world? Is it still operating today? In the *Critique of Cynical Reason*, a great bestseller in Germany (Sloterdijk, 1983), Peter Sloterdijk puts forward the thesis that ideology's dominant mode of functioning is cynical, which renders impossible — or, more precisely, vain — the classic critical-ideological procedure. The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask. The formula, as proposed by Sloterdijk, would then be: 'they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it'. Cynical reason is no longer naïve, but is a paradox of an enlightened false consciousness: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it.

We must distinguish this cynical position strictly from what Sloterdijk calls *kyrnism*. *Kyrnism* represents the popular, plebeian rejection of the official culture by means of irony and sarcasm: the classical *kyrnical* procedure is to confront the pathetic phrases of the ruling official ideology — its solemn, grave tonality — with everyday banality and to hold them up to ridicule, thus exposing behind the sublime *noblesse* of the ideological phrases the egotistical interests, the violence, the brutal claims to power. This procedure, then, is more pragmatic than argumentative: it subverts the official proposition by confronting it with the situation of its enunciation; it proceeds *ad hominem* (for example when a politician preaches the duty of patriotic sacrifice, *kyrnism* exposes the personal gain he is making from the sacrifice of others).

Cynicism is the answer of the ruling culture to this *kyrnical* subversion: it recognizes, it takes into account, the particular interest behind the ideological universality, the distance between the ideological mask and the reality, but it still finds reasons to retain the mask. This *cynicism*

is not a direct position of immorality, it is more like morality itself put in the service of immorality — the model of cynical wisdom is to conceive probity, integrity, as a supreme form of dishonesty, and morals as a supreme form of profligacy, the truth as the most effective form of a lie. This cynicism is therefore a kind of perverted negation of the negation of the official ideology: confronted with illegal enrichment, with robbery, the cynical reaction consists in saying that legal enrichment is a lot more effective and, moreover, protected by the law. As Bertolt Brecht puts it in his *Threepenny Opera*: 'what is the robbery of a bank compared to the founding of a new bank?'

It is clear, therefore, that confronted with such cynical reason, the traditional critique of ideology no longer works. We can no longer subject the ideological text to 'symptomatic reading', confronting it with its blank spots, with what it must repress to organize itself, to preserve its consistency — cynical reason takes this distance into account in advance. Is then the only issue left to us to affirm that, with the reign of cynical reason, we find ourselves in the so-called post-ideological world? Even Adorno came to this conclusion, starting from the premise that ideology is, strictly speaking, only a system which makes a claim to the truth — that is, which is not simply a lie but a lie experienced as truth, a lie which pretends to be taken seriously. Totalitarian ideology no longer has this pretension. It is no longer meant, even by its authors, to be taken seriously — its status is just that of a means of manipulation, purely external and instrumental: its rule is secured not by its truth-value but by simple extra-ideological violence and promise of gain.

It is here, at this point, that the distinction between *symptom* and *fantasy* must be introduced in order to show how the idea that we live in a post-ideological society proceeds a little too quickly: cynical reason, with all its ironic detachment, leaves untouched the fundamental level of ideological fantasy, the level on which ideology structures the social reality itself.

Ideological Fantasy

If we want to grasp this dimension of fantasy, we must return to the Marxian formula 'they do not know it, but they are doing it', and pose ourselves a very simple question: Where is the place of ideological illusion, in the 'knowing' or in the 'doing' in the reality itself? At first sight, the answer seems obvious: ideological illusion lies in the 'knowing'. It is a

matter of a discordance between what people are effectively doing and what they think they are doing — ideology consists in the very fact that the people 'do not know what they are really doing', that they have a false representation of the social reality to which they belong (the distortion produced, of course, by the same reality). Let us take again the classic Marxian example of so-called commodity fetishism: money is in reality just an embodiment, a condensation, a materialization of a network of social relations — the fact that it functions as a universal equivalent of all commodities is conditioned by its position in the texture of social relations. But to the individuals themselves, this function of money — to be the embodiment of wealth — appears as an immediate, natural property of a thing called 'money', as if money is already in itself, in its immediate material reality, the embodiment of wealth. Here, we have touched upon the classic Marxist motive of 'reification': behind the things, the relation between things, we must detect the social relations, the relations between human subjects.

But such a reading of the Marxian formula leaves out an illusion, an error, a distortion which is already at work in the social reality itself, at the level of what the individuals are *doing*, and not only what they *think* or *know* they are doing. When individuals use money, they know very well that there is nothing magical about it — that money, in its materiality, is simply an expression of social relations. The everyday spontaneous ideology reduces money to a simple sign giving the individual possessing it a right to a certain part of the social product. So, on an everyday level, the individuals know very well that there are relations between people behind the relations between things. The problem is that in their social activity itself, in what they are *doing*, they are *acting* as if money, in its material reality, is the immediate embodiment of wealth as such. They are fetishists in practice, not in theory. What they 'do not know', what they misrecognize, is the fact that in their social reality itself, in their social activity — in the act of commodity exchange — they are guided by the fetishistic illusion.

To make this clear, let us again take the classic Marxian motive of the speculative inversion of the relationship between the Universal and the Particular. The Universal is just a property of particular objects which really exist, but when we are victims of commodity fetishism it appears as if the concrete content of a commodity (its use-value) is an expression of its abstract universality (its exchange-value) — the abstract Universal, the Value, appears as a real Substance which successively incarnates itself in a series of concrete objects. That is the basic Marxian thesis: it is

already the effective world of commodities which behaves like a Hegelian subject-substance, like a Universal going through a series of particular embodiments. Marx speaks about 'commodity metaphysics' about the 'religion of everyday life'. The roots of philosophical speculative idealism are in the social reality of the world of commodities; it is this world which behaves 'ideally' — or, as Marx puts it in the first chapter of the first edition of *Capital*:

This *inversion* through which what is sensible and concrete counts only as a phenomenal form of what is abstract and universal, contrary to the real state of things where the abstract and the universal count only as a property of the concrete — such an inversion is characteristic of the expression of value, and it is this inversion which, at the same time, makes the understanding of this expression so difficult. If I say: Roman law and German law are both laws, it is something which goes by itself. But if, on the contrary, I say: THE LAW, this abstract thing, realizes itself in Roman law and in German law, i.e. in these concrete laws, the interconnection becomes mystical. (Marx, 1977, p. 132)

The question to ask again is: Where is the illusion here? We must not forget that the bourgeois individual, in his everyday ideology, is definitely not a speculative Hegelian: he does not conceive the particular content as resulting from an autonomous movement of the universal Idea. He is, on the contrary, a good Anglo-Saxon nominalist, thinking that the Universal is a property of the Particular — that is, of really existing things. Value in itself does not exist, there are just individual things which, among other properties, have value. The problem is that in his practice, in his real activity, he acts as if the particular things (the commodities) were just so many embodiments of universal Value. To rephrase Marx: *He knows very well that Roman law and German law are just two kinds of law, but in his practice, he acts as if the Law itself, this abstract entity, realizes itself in Roman law and in German law.*

So now we have made a decisive step forward; we have established a new way to read the Marxian formula 'they do not know it, but they are doing it': the illusion is not on the side of knowledge, it is already on the side of reality itself, of what the people are doing. What they do not know is that their social reality itself, their activity, is guided by an illusion, by a fetishistic inversion. What they overlook, what they misrecognize, is not the reality but the illusion which is structuring their reality, their real social activity. They know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know. The illusion is therefore double: it consists in overlooking the illusion which is struc-

turing our real, effective relationship to reality. And this overlooked, unconscious illusion is what may be called the *ideological fantasy*.

If our concept of ideology remains the classic one in which the illusion is located in knowledge, then today's society must appear post-ideological: the prevailing ideology is that of cynicism; people no longer believe in ideological truth; they do not take ideological propositions seriously. The fundamental level of ideology, however, is not of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself. And at this level, we are of course far from being post-ideological society. Cynical distance is just one way — one of many ways — to blind ourselves to the structuring power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, *we are still doing them*.

It is from this standpoint that we can account for the formula of cynical reason proposed by Sloterdijk: 'they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it'. If the illusion were on the side of knowledge, then the cynical position would really be a post-ideological position, simply a position without illusions: 'they know what they are doing, and they are doing it'. But if the place of the illusion is in the reality of doing itself, then this formula can be read in quite another way: 'they know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it'. For example, they know that their idea of Freedom is masking a particular form of exploitation, but they still continue to follow this idea of Freedom.

The Objectivity of Belief

From this standpoint, it would also be worth rereading the elementary Marxian formulation of so-called commodity fetishism: in a society in which the products of human labour acquire the form of commodities, the crucial relations between people take on the form of relations between things, between commodities — instead of immediate relations between people, we have social relations between things. In the 1960s and 1970s, this whole problem was discredited through Althusserian anti-humanism. The principal reproach of the Althusserians was that the Marxian theory of commodity fetishism is based on a naïve, ideological, epistemologically unfounded opposition between persons (human subjects) and things. But a Lacanian reading can give this formulation a new, unexpected twist: the subversive power of Marx's approach

lies precisely in the way he uses the opposition of persons and things.

In feudalism, as we have seen, relations between people are mystified, mediated through a web of ideological beliefs and superstitions. They are the relations between the master and his servant, whereby the master exerts his charismatic power of fascination, and so forth. Although in capitalism the subjects are emancipated, perceiving themselves as free from medieval religious superstitions, when they deal with one another they do so as rational utilitarians, guided only by their selfish interests. The point of Marx's analysis, however, is that *the things (commodities) themselves believe in their place*, instead of the subjects: it is as if all their beliefs, superstitions and metaphysical mystifications, supposedly summounded by the rational, utilitarian personality, are embodied in the 'social relations between things'. They no longer believe, *but the things themselves believe for them*.

This seems also to be a basic Lacanian proposition, contrary to the usual thesis that a belief is something interior and knowledge something exterior (in the sense that it can be verified through an external procedure). Rather, it is belief which is radically exterior, embodied in the practical, effective procedure of people. It is similar to Tibetan prayer wheels: you write a prayer on a paper, put the rolled paper into a wheel, and turn it automatically, without thinking (or, if you want to proceed according to the Hegelian 'cunning of reason', you attach it to a windmill, so that it is moved around by the wind). In this way, the wheel itself is praying for me, instead of me — or, more precisely, I myself am praying through the medium of the wheel. The beauty of it all is that in my psychological interiority I can think about whatever I want, I can yield to the most dirty and obscene fantasies, and it does not matter because — to use a good old Stalinist expression — whatever I am thinking, *objectively* I am praying.

This is how we should grasp the fundamental Lacanian proposition that psychoanalysis is not a psychology: the most intimate beliefs, even the most intimate emotions such as compassion, crying, sorrow, laughter, can be transferred, delegated to others without losing their sincerity. In his Seminar on *The Ethic of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan speaks of the role of the Chorus in classical tragedy: we, the spectators, came to the theatre worried, full of everyday problems, unable to adjust without reserve to the problems of the play, that is to feel the required fears and passions — but no problem, there is the Chorus, who feels the sorrow and the compassion instead of us — or, more precisely, we feel the required emotions through the medium of the Chorus: 'You are then relieved of

all worries, even if you do not feel anything, the Chorus will do so in your place' (Lacan, 1986, p. 295).

Even if we, the spectators, are just drowsily watching the show, objectively — to use again the old Stalinist expression — we are doing our duty of compassion for the heroes. In so-called primitive societies we find the same phenomenon in the form of 'weepers', women hired to cry instead of us: so, through the medium of the other, we accomplish our duty of mourning, while we can spend our time on more profitable exploits — disputing the division of the inheritance of the deceased, for example.

But to avoid the impression that this exteriorization, this transference of our most intimate feeling, is simply a characteristic of the so-called primitive stages of development, let us remind ourselves of a phenomenon quite usual in popular television shows or serials: 'canned laughter'. After some supposedly funny or witty remark, you can hear the laughter and applause included in the soundtrack of the show itself — here we have the exact counterpart of the Chorus in classical tragedy; it is here that we have to look for 'living Antiquity'. That is to say, why this laughter? The first possible answer — that it serves to remind us when to laugh — is interesting enough, because it implies the paradox that laughter is a matter of duty and not of some spontaneous feeling; but this answer is not sufficient because we do *not* usually laugh. The only correct answer would be that the Other — embodied in the television set — is relieving us even of our duty to laugh — is laughing instead of us. So even if, tired from a hard day's stupid work, all evening we did nothing but gaze drowsily into the television screen, we can say afterwards that objectively, through the medium of the other, we had a really good time.

If we do not take into account this objective status of belief, we might finish like the fool from a well-known joke who thought he was a grain of corn. After some time in a mental hospital, he was finally cured: now he knew that he was not a grain but a man. So they let him out; but soon afterwards he came running back, saying: 'I met a hen and I was afraid she would eat me.' The doctors tried to calm him: 'But what are you afraid of? Now you know that you are not a grain but a man.' The fool answered: 'Yes, of course, I know that, but does the *hen* know that I am no longer a grain?'

'Law is Law'

The lesson to be drawn from this concerning the social field is above all that belief, far from being an 'intimate', purely mental state, is always *materialized* in our effective social activity: belief supports the fantasy which regulates social reality. Let us take the case of Kafka: it is usually said that in the 'irrational' universe of his novels, Kafka has given an 'exaggerated', 'fantastic', 'subjectively distorted' expression to modern bureaucracy and the fate of the individual within it. In saying this we overlook the crucial fact that it is this very 'exaggeration' which articulates the fantasy regulating the libidinal functioning of the 'effective', 'real' bureaucracy itself.

The so-called 'Kafka's universe' is not a 'fantasy-image of social reality' but, on the contrary, the *mise en scène of the fantasy which is at work in the midst of social reality itself*: we all know very well that bureaucracy is not all-powerful, but our 'effective' conduct in the presence of bureaucratic machinery is already regulated by a belief in its almightiness. . . . In contrast to the usual 'criticism of ideology' trying to deduce the ideological form of a determinate society from the conjunction of its effective social relations, the analytical approach aims above all at the ideological fantasy efficient in social reality itself.

What we call 'social reality' is in the last resort an ethical construction; it is supported by a certain *as if* (we act *as if* we believe in the almightiness of bureaucracy, *as if* the President incarnates the Will of the People, *as if* the Parry expresses the objective interest of the working class. . .). As soon as the belief (which, let us remind ourselves again, is definitely not to be conceived at a 'psychological' level: it is embodied, materialized, in the effective functioning of the social field) is lost, the very texture of the social field disintegrates. This was already articulated by Pascal, one of Althusser's principal points of reference in his attempt to develop the concept of 'ideological State Apparatuses'. According to Pascal, the interiority of our reasoning is determined by the external, nonsensical 'machine' — automatism of the signifier, of the symbolic network in which the subjects are caught

For we must make no mistake about ourselves: we are as much automaton as mind. . . . Proofs only convince the mind; habit provides the strongest proofs and those that are most believed. It inclines the automaton, which leads the mind unconsciously along with it. (Pascal, 1966, p. 274)

Here Pascal produces the very Lacanian definition of the unconscious: 'the automaton (i.e. the dead, senseless letter), which leads the mind unconsciously [*sans le savoir*] with it'. It follows, from this constitutively senseless character of the Law, that we must obey it not because it is just, good or even beneficial, but simply *because it is the law* — this tautology articulates the vicious circle of its authority, the fact that the last foundation of the Law's authority lies in its process of enunciation:

Custom is the whole of equity for the sole reason that it is accepted. That is the mystic basis of its authority. Anyone who tries to bring it back to its first principle destroys it. (*ibid.*, p. 46)

The only real obedience, then, is an 'external' one: obedience out of conviction is not real obedience because it is already 'mediated' through our subjectivity — that is, we are not really obeying the authority but simply following our judgement, which tells us that the authority deserves to be obeyed in so far as it is good, wise, beneficent. . . . Even more than for our relation to 'external' social authority, this inversion applies to our obedience to the internal authority of belief: it was Kierkegaard who wrote that to believe in Christ because we consider him wise and good is a dreadful blasphemy — it is, on the contrary, only the act of belief itself which can give us an insight into his goodness and wisdom. Certainly we must search for rational reasons which can substantiate our belief, our obedience to the religious command, but the crucial religious experience is that these reasons reveal themselves only to those who already believe — we find reasons attesting our belief because we already believe; we do not believe because we have found sufficient good reasons to believe.

'External' obedience to the Law is thus not submission to external pressure, to so-called non-ideological 'brute force', but obedience to the Command in so far as it is 'incomprehensible', not understood; in so far as it retains a 'traumatic', 'irrational' character: far from hiding its full authority, this traumatic, non-integrated character of the Law is a *positive condition of it*. This is the fundamental feature of the psychoanalytic concept of the *superego*: an injunction which is experienced as traumatic, 'senseless' — that is, which cannot be integrated into the symbolic universe of the subject. But for the Law to function 'normally', this traumatic fact that 'custom is the whole of equity for the sole reason that it is accepted' — the dependence of the Law on its process of enunciation or, to use a concept developed by Laclau and Mouffe, its radically *contingent*

character — must be repressed into the unconscious, through the ideological, imaginary experience of the 'meaning' of the Law, of its foundation in Justice, Truth (or, in a more modern way, functionality):

It would therefore be a good thing for us to obey laws and customs because they are laws. . . . But people are not amenable to this doctrine, and thus, believing that truth can be found and resides in laws and customs, they believe them and take their antiquity as a proof of their truth (and not just of their authority, without truth). (Pascal, 1966, p. 216)

It is highly significant that we find exactly the same formulation in Kafka's *Trial*, at the end of the conversation between K. and the priest:

'I do not agree with that point of view,' said K., shaking his head, 'for if one accepts it, one must accept as true everything the door-keeper says. But you yourself have sufficiently proved how impossible it is to do that.' 'No,' said the priest, 'it is not necessary to accept everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary.' 'A melancholy conclusion,' said K. 'It turns lying into a universal principle.' (Kafka, 1985, p. 243)

What is 'repressed' then, is not some obscure origin of the Law but the very fact that the Law is not to be accepted as true, only as necessary — the fact that *its authority is without truth*. The necessary structural illusion which drives people to believe that truth can be found in laws describes precisely the mechanism of *transference*: transference is this supposition of a Truth, of a Meaning behind the stupid, traumatic, inconsistent fact of the Law. In other words, 'transference' names the vicious circle of belief: the reasons why we should believe are persuasive only to those who already believe. The crucial text of Pascal here is the famous fragment 233 on the necessity of the wager; the first, largest part of it demonstrates at length why it is rationally sensible to 'bet on God', but this argument is invalidated by the following remark of Pascal's imaginary partner in dialogue:

. . . my hands are tied and my lips are sealed, I am being forced to wager and I am not free; I am being held fast and I am so made that I cannot believe. What do you want me to do then? — That is true, but at least get it into your head that, if you are unable to believe, it is because of your passions, since reason impels you to believe and yet you cannot do so. Concentrate then not on convincing yourself by multiplying proofs of God's existence but by diminishing your passions. You want to find faith and you do not

know the road. You want to be cured of unbelief and you ask for the remedy: learn from those who were once bound like you and who now wager all they have. These are people who know the road you wish to follow, who have been cured of the affliction of which you wish to be cured: follow the way by which they began. They behaved just as if they did believe, taking holy water, having masses said, and so on. That will make you believe quite naturally, and will make you more docile.

Now what harm will come to you from choosing this course? You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, full of good works, a sincere, true friend. . . . It is true you will not enjoy noxious pleasures, glory and good living, but will you not have others?

I tell you that you will gain even in this life, and that at every step you take along this road you will see that your gain is so certain and your risk so negligible that in the end you will realize that you have wagered on something certain and infinite for which you have paid nothing'. (Pascal, 1966, pp. 152-3)

Pascal's final answer, then, is: leave rational argumentation and submit yourself simply to ideological ritual, stupidity yourself by repeating the meaningless gestures, act *as if* you already believe, and the belief will come by itself.

Far from being limited to Catholicism, such a procedure for obtaining ideological conversion has universal application, which is why, in a certain epoch, it was very popular among French Communists. The Marxist version of the theme of 'wager' runs as follows: the bourgeois intellectual has his hands tied and his lips sealed. Apparently he is free, bound only to the argument of his reason, but in reality he is permeated by bourgeois prejudices. These prejudices do not let him go, so he cannot believe in the sense of history, in the historical mission of the working class. So what can he do?

The answer: first, he should at least recognize his impotence, his incapacity to believe in the Sense of history; even if his reason leans towards the truth, the passions and prejudices produced by his class position prevent him from accepting it. So he should not exert himself with proving the truth of the historical mission of the working class; rather, he should learn to subdue his petty-bourgeois passions and prejudices. He should take lessons from those who were once as impotent as he is now but are ready to risk all for the revolutionary Cause. He should imitate the way they began: they behaved just as if they did believe in the mission of the working class, they became active in the Party, they

collected money to help strikers, propagate the workers' movement, and so on. This stupefied them and made them believe quite naturally. And really, what harm has come to them through choosing this course? They became faithful, full of good works, sincere and noble. . . . It is true that they had to renounce a few noxious petty-bourgeois pleasures, their egocentrist intellectualist trifling, their false sense of individual freedom, but on the other hand — and notwithstanding the factual truth of their belief — they gained a lot: they live a meaningful life, free of doubts and uncertainty; all their everyday activity is accompanied by the consciousness that they are making their small contribution to the great and noble Cause.

What distinguishes this Pascalian 'custom' from inispid behaviourist wisdom ('the content of your belief is conditioned by your factual behaviour') is the paradoxical status of a *belief before belief*: by following a custom, the subject believes without knowing it, so that the final version is merely a formal act by means of which we recognize what we have already believed. In other words, what the behaviourist reading of Pascalian 'custom' misses is the crucial fact that the external custom is always a material support for the subject's unconscious. The main achievement of Marek Kaniewska's film *Another Country* is to designate, in a sensitive and delicate way, this precarious status of 'believing without knowing it' — precisely apropos of the conversion to Communism.

Another Country is a film *à clef* about the relationship between two Cambridge students, the Communist Judd (real model: John Cornford, idol of the Oxford student left, who died in 1936 in Spain) and the rich homosexual Guy Bennett, who later becomes a Russian spy and tells the story in retrospect to an English journalist who visits him in his Moscow exile (real model: Guy Burgess, of course). There is no sexual relationship between them; Judd is the only one who is not sensitive to Guy's charm ('the exception to the Bennett rule', as Guy puts it): precisely for that reason, for Guy he is the point of his transferential identification.

The action occurs in the 'public school' environment of the thirties: the patriotic empty talk, the terror of the student-heads ('gods') over ordinary students, yet in all this terror there is something non-binding, not quite serious, it has the ring of an amusing travesty concealing a universe in which enjoyment actually reigns in all its obscurity, above all in the form of a ramified network of homosexual relations — the real terror is, rather, the unbearable pressure of enjoyment. It is for *this* reason that Oxford and Cambridge in the thirties offered such a rich field for the KGB: not only because of the 'guilt complex' of rich students doing so

well in the midst of the economic and social crisis, but above all because of this stuffy atmosphere of enjoyment, the very inertia of which creates an unbearable tension, a tension which could be dissolved only by a 'totalitarian' appeal to *renunciation* of the enjoyment — in Germany, it was Hitler who knew how to occupy the place of this appeal; in England, at least among the elite students, the KGB hunters were best versed in it.

The film is worth mentioning for the way it depicts Guy's conversion: its delicacy is attested by the very fact that it *does not* depict it, that it only lays all the elements for it. That is to say, the flashback to the thirties which occupies the main part of the film stops at the precise point at which Guy is already converted, although he does not yet know it — the film is delicate enough to leave out the formal act of conversion; it suspends the flashback in a situation homologous to one in which somebody is already in love but is not yet aware of it, and for this reason gives expression to his love in the form of an excessively cynical attitude and defensive aggressivity towards the person with whom he is in love.

What is, then, looking closer, the denouement of the film? Two reactions to this situation of stuffy enjoyment are opposed: Judd's renunciation, his openly declared Communism (it is for this reason that he *couldn't* be a KGB agent) and on the other side Guy as a representative of the extreme, putrefied hedonism whose game, however, starts to fall apart (the 'gods' have humiliated him by a ritual beating because his personal enemy, a patriotic career seeker, has unmasked his homosexual relationship with a younger student in this way, Guy lost a promised opportunity to become a 'god' himself the following year). At this point, Guy becomes aware of the fact that the key to the dissolution of his unbearable situation lies in his transferential relationship to Judd: this is nicely indicated by two details.

First, he reproaches Judd for not himself being liberated of bourgeois prejudices — in spite of all his talk about equality and fraternity, he still thinks that 'some persons are better than others because of the way they make love'; in short, he catches the subject on whom he has a transference in his inconsistency, in his lack. Secondly, he reveals to the naïve Judd the very mechanism of transference: Judd thinks that his belief in the truth of Communism results from his thorough study of history and the texts of Marx, to which Guy replies, 'You are not a Communist because you understand Marx, you understand Marx because you are a Communist' — that is to say, Judd understands Marx because he presupposes in advance that Marx is the bearer of knowledge enabling access to the truth of history, like the Christian believer who does not believe in

Christ because he has been convinced by theological arguments but, on the contrary, is susceptible to theological arguments because he is already illuminated by the grace of belief.

In a first, naïve approach it could appear that because of these two features Guy is on the brink of liberating himself from his transference on Judd (he catches Judd in his inconsistency, and even unmasks the very mechanism of transference to boot), but the truth is none the less the opposite: these two features only confirm how 'those in the know are lost' [*les non-dupes errent*], as Lacan would say. Precisely as one 'in the know', Guy is caught in transference — both reproaches of Judd receive their meaning only against the background that his relationship with Judd is already a transferential one (as with the analysand who finds such pleasure in discovering small weaknesses and mistakes in the analyst precisely because the transference is already at work).

The state in which Guy finds himself immediately before his conversion, this state of extreme tension, is best rendered by his own answer to Judd's reproach that he is himself to blame for the mess he is in (if he had only proceeded with a little discretion and hidden his homosexuality instead of flaunting it in a provocative and defiant way, there would have been no unpleasant disclosure to ruin him): 'What better cover for someone like me than total indiscretion?' This is, of course, the very Lacanian definition of deception in its specifically human dimension, where we deceive the Other by means of the truth itself: in a universe in which all are looking for the true face beneath the mask, the best way to lead them astray is to wear the mask of truth itself. But it is impossible to maintain the coincidence of mask and truth: far from gaining us a kind of 'immediate contact with our fellow-men', this coincidence renders the situation unbearable; all communication is impossible because we are totally isolated through the very disclosure — the *sine qua non* of successful communication is a minimum of distance between appearance and its hidden rear.

The only door open is thus escape into belief in the transcendent 'another country' (Communism) and into conspiracy (becoming a KGB agent), which introduces a radical gap between the mask and the true face. So when, in the last scene of the flashback, Judd and Guy traverse the college courtyard, Guy is already a believer; his face is scaled, even if he does not yet know it. His introductory words, 'Wouldn't it be wonderful if Communism were really true?', reveal his belief, which is for the time being still delegated, transferred on to another — and so we can immediately pass on to the Moscow exile decades later where the

only leftover of enjoyment binding the old and crippled Guy to his country is the memory of cricket.

Kafka, Critic of Althusser

The externality of the symbolic machine ('automaton') is therefore not simply external: it is at the same time the place where the fate of our internal, most 'sincere' and 'intimate' beliefs is in advance staged and decided. When we subject ourselves to the machine of a religious ritual, we already believe without knowing it: our belief is already materialized in the external ritual; in other words, we already believe *unconsciously*, because it is from this external character of the symbolic machine that we can explain the status of the unconscious as radically external — that of a dead letter. Belief is an affair of obedience to the dead, uncomprehended letter. It is this short-circuit between the intimate belief and the external 'machine' which is the most subversive kernel of Pascalian theology.

Of course, in his theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser, 1976), Althusser gave an elaborated, contemporary version of this Pascalian 'machine'; but the weak point of his theory is that he or his school never succeeded in thinking out the link between Ideological State Apparatuses and ideological interpellation: how does the Ideological State Apparatus (the Pascalian 'machine', the signifying automatism) 'internalize' itself; how does it produce the effect of ideological belief in a Cause and the interconnecting effect of subjectivation, of recognition of one's ideological position? The answer to this is, as we have seen, that this external 'machine' of State Apparatuses exercises its force only in so far as it is experienced, in the unconscious economy of the subject, as a traumatic, senseless injunction. Althusser speaks only of the process of ideological interpellation through which the symbolic machine of ideology is 'internalized' into the ideological experience of Meaning and Truth: but we can learn from Pascal that this 'internalization', by structural necessity, never fully succeeds, that there is always a residue, a leftover, a stain of traumatic irrationality and senselessness sticking to it, and that *this leftover, far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it*: it is precisely this non-integrated surplus of senseless traumatism which confers on the Law its unconditional authority; in other words, which — in so far as it escapes ideological sense — sustains what we might call the ideological

joie-sense, enjoyment-in-sense (enjoy-meant), proper to ideology.

And again, it was no accident that we mentioned the name of Kafka: concerning this ideological *joie-sense* we can say that Kafka develops a kind of criticism of Althusser *avant la lettre*, in letting us see that which is constitutive of the gap between 'machine' and its 'internalization'. Is not Kafka's 'irrational' bureaucracy, this blind, gigantic, nonsensical apparatus, precisely the Ideological State Apparatus with which a subject is confronted *before* any identification, any recognition — any *subjectivation* — takes place? What, then, can we learn from Kafka?

In a first approach, the starting point in Kafka's novels is that of an interpellation: the Kafkaesque subject is interpellated by a mysterious bureaucratic entity (Law, Castle). But this interpellation has a somewhat strange look: it is, so to say, an *interpellation without identification/subjectivation*; it does not offer us a Cause with which to identify — the Kafkaesque subject is the subject desperately seeking a trait with which to identify, he does not understand the meaning of the call of the Other.

This is the dimension overlooked in the Althusserian account of interpellation: before being caught in the identification, in the symbolic recognition/misrecognition, the subject (§) is trapped by the Other through a paradoxical object-cause of desire in the midst of it (*a*), through this secret supposed to be hidden in the Other: §∅*a* — the Lacanian formula of fantasy. What does it mean, more precisely, to say that ideological fantasy structures reality itself? Let us explain by starting from the fundamental Lacanian thesis that in the opposition between dream and reality, fantasy is on the side of reality: it is, as Lacan once said, the support that gives consistency to what we call 'reality'.

In his Seminar on the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan develops this through an interpretation of the well-known dream about the 'burning child':

A father had been watching beside his child's sick-bed for days and nights on end. After the child had died, he went into the next room to lie down, but left the door open so that he could see from his bedroom into the room in which his child's body was laid out, with tall candles standing round it. An old man had been engaged to keep watch over it, and sat beside the body murmuring prayers. After a few hours' sleep, the father had a dream that his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?' He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of

his beloved child's dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them. (Freud, 1977, p. 652)

The usual interpretation of this dream is based on a thesis that one of the functions of the dream is to enable the dreamer to prolong his sleep. The sleeper is suddenly exposed to an exterior irritation, a stimulus coming from reality (the ringing of an alarm clock, knocking on the door or, in this case, the smell of smoke), and to prolong his sleep he quickly, on the spot, constructs a dream: a little scene, a small story, which includes this irritating element. However, the external irritation soon becomes too strong and the subject is awakened.

The Lacanian reading is directly opposed to this. The subject does not awake himself when the external irritation becomes too strong; the logic of his awakening is quite different. First he constructs a dream, a story which enables him to prolong his sleep, to avoid awakening into reality. But the thing that he encounters in the dream, the reality of his desire, the Lacanian Real — in our case, the reality of the child's reproach to his father, 'Can't you see that I am burning?', implying the father's fundamental guilt — is more terrifying than so-called external reality itself, and that is why he awakens: to escape the Real of his desire, which announces itself in the terrifying dream. He escapes into so-called reality to be able to continue to sleep, to maintain his blindness, to elude awakening into the real of his desire. We can rephrase here the old 'happy' motto of the 1960s: reality is for those who cannot support the dream. 'Reality' is a fantasy-construction which enables us to mask the Real of our desire (Lacan, 1979, chs 5 and 6).

It is exactly the same with ideology. Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel (conceptualized by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe as 'antagonism': a traumatic social division which cannot be symbolized). The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel. To explain this logic, let us refer again to the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Lacan, 1979, ch. 6). Here Lacan mentions the well-known paradox of Zhuang Zi, who dreamt of being a butterfly, and after his awakening posed himself a question: How does he know that he is not *now* a butterfly dreaming of being Zhuang Zi? Lacan's commentary is

that this question is justified, for two reasons:

First, it proves that Zhuang Zi was not a fool. The Lacanian definition of a fool is somebody who believes in his immediate identity with himself; somebody who is not capable of a dialectically mediated distance towards himself, like a king who thinks he is a king, who takes his being-a-king as his immediate property and not as a symbolic mandate imposed on him by a network of intersubjective relations of which he is a part (example of a king who was a fool thinking he was a king: Ludwig II of Bavaria, Wagner's patron).

However, this is not all; if it were, the subject could be reduced to a void, to an empty place in which his or her whole content is procured by others, by the symbolic network of intersubjective relations: I am 'in myself' a nothingness, the positive content of myself is what I am for others. In other words, if this were all, Lacan's last word would be a radical alienation of the subject. His content 'what he is', would be determined by an exterior signifying network offering him the points of symbolic identification, conferring on him certain symbolic mandates. But Lacan's basic thesis, at least in his last works, is that there is a possibility for the subject to obtain some contents, some kind of positive consistency, also outside the big Other, the alienating symbolic network. This other possibility is that offered by fantasy: equating the subject to an object of fantasy. When he was thinking that he was a butterfly dreaming of being Zhuang Zi, Zhuang Zi was in a way correct. The butterfly was the object which constituted the frame, the backbone, of his fantasy-identity (the relationship *Zhuang Zi-butterfly* can be written $8\&a$). In the symbolic reality he was Zhuang Zi, but in the real of his desire he was a butterfly. Being a butterfly was the whole consistency of his positive being outside the symbolic network. Perhaps it is not quite by accident that we find a kind of echo of this in Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil*, which depicts, in a disgustingly funny way, a totalitarian society: the hero finds an ambiguous point of escape from everyday reality in his dream of being a man-butterfly.

At first sight, what we have here is a simple symmetrical inversion of the so-called normal, ordinary perspective. In our everyday understanding, Zhuang Zi is the 'real' person dreaming of being a butterfly, and here we have something which is 'really' a butterfly dreaming of being Zhuang Zi. But as Lacan points out, this symmetrical relationship is an illusion: when Zhuang Zi is awakened, he can think to himself that he is Zhuang Zi who dreamed of being a butterfly, but in his dream, when he is a butterfly, he cannot ask himself if when awoken, when he thought he

was Zhuang Zi, he was not this butterfly that is now dreaming of being Zhuang Zi. The question, the dialectical split, is possible only when we are awake. In other words, the illusion cannot be symmetrical, it cannot run both ways, because if it did we would find ourselves in a nonsensical situation described — again — by Alphonse Allais: Raoul and Marguerite, two lovers, arrange to meet at a masked ball; there they skip into a hidden corner, embrace and fondle each other. Finally, they both put down their masks, and — surprise — Raoul finds that he is embracing the wrong woman, that she is not Marguerite, and Marguerite also finds that the other person is not Raoul but some unknown stranger. . . .

Fantasy as a Support of Reality

This problem must be approached from the Lacanian thesis that it is only in the dream that we come close to the real awakening — that is, to the Real of our desire. When Lacan says that the last support of what we call 'reality' is a fantasy, this is definitely not to be understood in the sense of 'life is just a dream', 'what we call reality is just an illusion', and so forth. We find such a theme in many science-fiction stories: reality as a generalized dream or illusion. The story is usually told from the perspective of a hero who gradually makes the horrifying discovery that all the people around him are not really human beings but some kind of automatons, robots, who only look and act like real human beings; the final point of these stories is of course the hero's discovery that he himself is also such an automaton and not a real human being. Such a generalized illusion is impossible: we find the same paradox in a well-known drawing by Escher of two hands drawing each other.

The Lacanian thesis is, on the contrary, that there is always a hard kernel, a leftover which persists and cannot be reduced to a universal play of illusory mirroring. The difference between Lacan and 'naïve realism' is that for Lacan, the *only point at which we approach this hard kernel of the Real is indeed the dream*. When we awaken into reality after a dream, we usually say to ourselves 'it was just a dream', thereby blinding ourselves to the fact that in our everyday, waking reality we are *nothing but a consciousness of this dream*. It was only in the dream that we approached the fantasy-framework which determines our activity, our mode of acting in reality itself.

It is the same with the ideological dream, with the determination of ideology as a dreamlike construction hindering us from seeing the real

state of things, reality as such. In vain do we try to break out of the ideological dream by 'opening our eyes and trying to see reality as it is', by throwing away the ideological spectacles: as the subjects of such a post-ideological, objective, sober look, free of so-called ideological prejudices, as the subjects of a look which views the facts as they are, we remain throughout 'the consciousness of our ideological dream'. The only way to break the power of our ideological dream is to confront the Real of our desire which announces itself in this dream.

Let us examine anti-Semitism. It is not enough to say that we must liberate ourselves of so-called 'anti-Semitic prejudices' and learn to see Jews as they really are — in this way we will certainly remain victims of these so-called prejudices. We must confront ourselves with how the ideological figure of the Jew is invested with our unconscious desire, with how we have constructed this figure to escape a certain deadlock of our desire.

Let us suppose, for example, that an objective look would confirm — why not? — that Jews really do financially exploit the rest of the population, that they do sometimes seduce our young daughters, that some of them do not wash regularly. It is not clear that this has nothing to do with the real roots of our anti-Semitism? Here, we have only to remember the Lacanian proposition concerning the pathologically jealous husband: even if all the facts he quotes in support of his jealousy are true, even if his wife really is sleeping around with other men, this does not change one bit the fact that his jealousy is a pathological, paranoïd construction.

Let us ask ourselves a simple question: In the Germany of the late 1930s, what would be the result of such a non-ideological, objective approach? Probably something like: 'The Nazis are condemning the Jews too hastily, without proper argument, so let us take a cool, sober look and see if they are really guilty or not; let us see if there is some truth in the accusations against them.' Is it really necessary to add that such an approach would merely confirm our so-called 'unconscious prejudices' with additional rationalizations? The proper answer to anti-Semitism is therefore not Jews are really not like that but 'the anti-Semitic idea of Jew has nothing to do with Jews; the ideological figure of a Jew is a way to stitch up the inconsistency of our own ideological system.'

That is why we are also unable to shake so-called ideological prejudices by taking into account the pre-ideological level of everyday experience. The basis of this argument is that the ideological construction always finds its limits in the field of everyday experience — that

it is unable to reduce, to contain, to absorb and annihilate this level. Let us again take a typical individual in Germany in the late 1930s. He is bombarded by anti-Semitic propaganda depicting a Jew as a monstrous incarnation of Evil, the great wire-puller, and so on. But when he returns home he encounters Mr Stern, his neighbour: a good man to chat with in the evenings, whose children play with his. Does not this everyday experience offer an irreducible resistance to the ideological construction?

The answer is, of course, no. If everyday experience offers such a resistance, then the anti-Semitic ideology has not yet really grasped us. An ideology is really 'holding us' only when we do not feel any opposition between it and reality — that is, when the ideology succeeds in determining the mode of our everyday experience of reality itself. How then would our poor German, if he were a good anti-Semite, react to this gap between the ideological figure of the Jew (schemer, wire-puller, exploiting our brave men and so on) and the common everyday experience of his good neighbour, Mr Stern? His answer would be to turn this gap, this discrepancy itself, into an argument for anti-Semitism: 'You see how dangerous they really are? It is difficult to recognize their real nature. They hide it behind the mask of everyday appearance — and it is exactly this hiding of one's real nature, this duplicity, that is a basic feature of the Jewish nature.' An ideology really succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favour.

Surplus-value and Surplus-enjoyment

Herein lies the difference with Marxism: in the predominant Marxist perspective the ideological gaze is a *partial* gaze overlooking the *totality* of social relations, whereas in the Lacanian perspective ideology rather designates a *totality* set on *effacing the traces of its own impossibility*. This difference corresponds to the one which distinguishes the Freudian from the Marxian notion of fetishism: in Marxism a fetish conceals the positive network of social relations, whereas in Freud a fetish conceals the lack ('castration') around which the symbolic network is articulated.

In so far as we conceive the Real as that which 'always returns to the same place', we can deduce another, no less crucial difference. From the Marxist point of view, the ideological procedure *par excellence* is that of '*false eternalization and/or universalization*: a state which depends on a concrete historical conjunction appears as an eternal, universal feature of

the human condition; the interest of a particular class disguises itself as universal human interest . . . and the aim of the 'criticism of ideology' is to denounce this false universality; to detect behind man in general the bourgeois individual; behind the universal rights of man the form which renders possible capitalist exploitation; behind the 'nuclear family' as a trans-historical constant the historically specified and limited form of kinship relations; and so on.

In the Lacanian perspective, we should change the terms and designate as the most 'cunning' ideological procedure the very opposite of eternalization: an *over-rapid historicization*. Let us take one of the commonplaces of the Marxist-feminist criticism of psychoanalysis, the idea that its insistence on the crucial role of the Oedipus complex and the nuclear-family triangle transforms a historically conditioned form of patriarchal family into a feature of the universal human condition: is not this effort to historicize the family triangle precisely an attempt to elude the 'hard kernel' which announces itself through the 'patriarchal family' — the Real of the Law, the rock of castration? In other words, if over-rapid universalization produces a quasi-universal image whose function is to make us blind to its historical, socio-symbolic determination, over-rapid historicization makes us blind to the real kernel which returns as the same through diverse historicizations/symbolizations.

It is the same with a phenomenon that designates most accurately the 'perverse' obverse of twentieth-century civilization: concentration camps. All the different attempts to attach this phenomenon to a concrete image ('Holocaust', 'Gulag' . . .), to reduce it to a product of a concrete social order (Fascism, Stalinism . . .) — what are they if not so many attempts to elude the fact that we are dealing here with the 'real' of our civilization which returns as the same traumatic kernel in all social systems? (We should not forget that concentration camps were an invention of 'liberal' England, dating from the Boer War; that they were also used in the USA to isolate the Japanese population, and so on.)

Marxism, then, did not succeed in taking into account, coming to terms with, the surplus-object, the leftover of the Real eluding symbolization — a fact all the more surprising if we recall that Lacan modelled his notion of surplus-enjoyment on the Marxian notion of surplus-value. The proof that Marxian surplus-value announces effectively the logic of the Lacanian *objet petit a* as the embodiment of surplus-enjoyment is already provided by the decisive formula used by Marx, in the third volume of *Capital*, to designate the logical-historical limit of capitalism:

'the limit of capital is capital itself, i.e. the capitalist mode of production.'

This formula can be read in two ways. The first, usual historicist-evolutionist reading conceives it, in accordance with the unfortunate paradigm of the dialectics of productive forces and relations of production, as that of 'content' and 'form'. This paradigm follows roughly the metaphor of the serpent which, from time to time, sheds its skin, which has grown too tight: one posits as the last impetus of social development — as its (so to speak) 'natural', 'spontaneous' constant — the incessant growth of the productive forces (as a rule reduced to technical development); this 'spontaneous' growth is then followed, with a greater or lesser degree of delay, by the inert, dependent moment, the relationship of production. We have thus epochs in which the relation of production are in accordance with the productive forces, then those forces develop and outgrow their 'social clothes', the frame of relationships; this frame becomes an obstacle to their further development, until social revolution again co-ordinates forces and relations by replacing the old relations with new ones which correspond to the new state of forces.

If we conceive the formula of capital as its own limit from this point of view, it means simply that the capitalist relation of production which at first made possible the fast development of productive forces became at a certain point an obstacle to their further development: that these forces have outgrown their frame and demand a new form of social relations.

Marx himself is of course far from such a simplistic evolutionary idea. If we need convincing of this, we have only to look at the passages in *Capital* where he deals with the relation between formal and real subsumption of the process of production under Capital: the formal subsumption *pretends* the real one; that is, Capital first subsumes the process of production as it found it (artisans, and so on), and only subsequently does it change the productive forces step by step, shaping them in such a way as to create correspondence. Contrary to the above-mentioned simplistic idea, it is then the *form* of the relation of production which drives the development of productive forces — that is, of its 'content'.

All we have to do to render impossible the simplistic evolutionary reading of the formula 'the limit of capital is capital itself' is to ask a very simple and obvious question: How do we define, exactly, the moment — albeit only an ideal one — at which the capitalist relation of production become an obstacle to the further development of the productive forces?

Or the obverse of the same question: When can we speak of an accordance between productive forces and relation of production in the capitalist mode of production? Strict analysis leads to only one possible answer: *never*.

This is exactly how capitalism differs from other, previous modes of production: in the latter, we can speak of periods of 'accordance' when the process of social production and reproduction goes on as a quiet, circular movement, and of periods of convulsion when the contradiction between forces and relation aggravates itself; whereas in capitalism this contradiction, the discord forces/relation, *is contained in its very concept* (in the form of the contradiction between the social mode of production and the individual, private mode of appropriation). It is this internal contradiction which compels capitalism to permanent extended reproduction — to the incessant development of its own conditions of production, in contrast to previous modes of production where, at least in their 'normal' state, (re)production goes on as a circular movement.

If this is so, then the evolutionist reading of the formula of capital as its own limit is inadequate: the point is not that, at a certain moment of its development, the frame of the relation of production starts to constrict further development of the productive forces; the point is that *it is this very immanent limit, this 'internal contradiction', which drives capitalism into permanent development*. The 'normal' state of capitalism is the permanent revolutionizing of its own conditions of existence: from the very beginning capitalism 'putrifies', it is branded by a crippling contradiction, discord, by an immanent want of balance: this is exactly why it changes, develops incessantly — incessant development is the only way for it to resolve again and again, come to terms with, its own fundamental, constitutive imbalance, 'contradiction'. Far from constricting, its limit is thus the very impetus of its development. Herein lies the paradox proper to capitalism, its last resort: capitalism is capable of transforming its limit, its very impotence, in the source of its power — the more it 'putrifies', the more its immanent contradiction is aggravated, the more it must revolutionize itself to survive.

It is this paradox which defines surplus-enjoyment: it is not a surplus which simply attaches itself to some 'normal', fundamental enjoyment, because *enjoyment as such emerges only in this surplus*, because it is constitutively an 'excess'. If we subtract the surplus we lose enjoyment itself, just as capitalism, which can survive only by incessantly revolutionizing its own material conditions, ceases to exist if it 'stays the same', if it achieves an internal balance. This, then, is the homology between

surplus-value — the 'cause' which sets in motion the capitalist process of production — and surplus-enjoyment, the object-cause of desire. Is not the paradoxical topology of the movement of capital, the fundamental blockage which resolves and reproduces itself through frenetic activity, *excessive* power as the very form of appearance of a fundamental *impotence* — this immediate passage, this coincidence of limit and excess, of lack and surplus — precisely that of the Lacanian *objet petit a*, of the leftover which embodies the fundamental, constitutive lack?

All this, of course, Marx 'knows very well . . . and yet'; and yet in the crucial formulation in the Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*, he proceeds *as if he does not know it*, by describing the very passage from capitalism to socialism in terms of the above-mentioned vulgar evolutionist dialectics of productive forces and the relation of production: when the forces surpass a certain degree, capitalist relation become an obstacle to their further development; this discord brings about the need for socialist revolution, the function of which is to co-ordinate again forces and relation; that is, to establish relations of production rendering possible the intensified development of the productive forces as the end-in-itself of the historical process.

How can we not detect in this formulation the fact that Marx failed to cope with the paradoxes of surplus-enjoyment? And the ironic vengeance of history for this failure is that today there exists a society which seems to correspond perfectly to this vulgar evolutionary dialectics of forces and relation: 'real socialism', a society which legitimizes itself by reference to Marx. Is it not already a commonplace to assert that 'real socialism' has rendered possible rapid industrialization, but that as soon as the productive forces have reached a certain level of development (usually designated by the vague term 'post-industrial society'), 'real socialist' social relationships began to constrict their further growth?

From Symptom to *Sinthome*

THE DIALECTICS OF SYMPTOM

Back to the Future

The only reference to the domain of science fiction in Lacan's work concerns the time paradox: in his first Seminar, Lacan uses Norbert Wiener's metaphor of the inverted direction of time to explain the symptom as a 'return of the repressed':

Wiener posits two beings each of whose temporal dimensions moves in the opposite direction from the other. To be sure, that means nothing, and that is how things which mean nothing all of a sudden signify something, but in a quite different domain. If one of them sends a message to the other, for example a square, the being going in the opposite direction will first of all see the square vanishing, before seeing the square. That is what we see as well. The symptom initially appears to us as a trace, which will only ever be a trace, one which will continue not to be understood until the analysis has got quite a long way, and until we have realized its meaning. (Lacan, 1988, p. 159)

The analysis is thus conceived as a symbolization, a symbolic integration of meaningless imaginary traces; this conception implies a fundamentally *imaginary* character of the unconscious: it is made of 'imaginary fixations which could not have been assimilated to the symbolic development of the subject's history; consequently, it is something which will be realized in the Symbolic, or, more precisely, something which, thanks to the symbolic progress which takes place in the analysis, *will have been*' (ibid., p. 158).

The Lacanian answer to the question: From where does the repressed return? is therefore, paradoxically: From the future. Symptoms are

meaningless traces, their meaning is not discovered, excavated from the hidden depth of the past, but constructed retroactively — the analysis produces the truth; that is, the signifying frame which gives the symptoms their symbolic place and meaning. As soon as we enter the symbolic order, the past is always present in the form of historical tradition and the meaning of these traces is not given; it changes continually with the transformations of the signifier's network. Every historical rupture, every advent of a new master-signifier, changes retroactively the meaning of all tradition, restructures the narration of the past, makes it readable in another, new way.

Thus, 'things which mean nothing all of a sudden signify something, but in a quite different domain': What is a 'journey into the future' if not this 'overtaking' by means of which we suppose in advance the presence in the other of a certain knowledge — knowledge about the meaning of our symptoms — what is it, then, if not the *transference* itself? This knowledge is an illusion, it does not really exist in the other; the other does not really possess it, it is constituted afterwards, through our — the subject's — signifier's working; but it is at the same time a necessary illusion, because we can paradoxically elaborate this knowledge only by means of the illusion that the other already possesses it and that we are only discovering it.

If — as Lacan points out — in the symptom, the repressed content is returning from the future and not from the past, then the transference — the actualization of the reality of the unconscious — must transpose us into the future, not into the past. And what is the journey into the past if not this retroactive working-through, elaboration, of the signifier itself? — a kind of hallucinatory mise-en-scène of the fact that in the field of the signifier and only in this field, we can change, we can bring about the past?

The past exists as it is included, as it enters (into) the synchronous net of the signifier — that is, as it is symbolized in the texture of the historical memory — and that is why we are all the time 'rewriting history', retroactively giving the elements their symbolic weight by including them in new textures — it is this elaboration which decides retroactively what they 'will have been'. The Oxford philosopher Michael Dummett has written two very interesting articles included in his collection of essays *Truth and Other Enigmas*: 'Can an Effect Precede its Cause?' and 'Bringing About the Past': the Lacanian answer to these two enigmas would be yes, because the symptom as a 'return of the repressed' is precisely such an effect which precedes its cause (its hidden kernel, its meaning), and in

working through the symptom we are precisely 'bringing about the past' — we are producing the symbolic reality of past, long-forgotten traumatic events.

One is therefore tempted to see in the 'time paradox' of science-fiction novels a kind of hallucinatory 'apparition in the Real' of the elementary structure of the symbolic process, the so-called internal, internally inverted eight: a circular movement, a kind of snare where we can progress only in such a manner that we 'overtake' ourselves in the transference, to find ourselves later at a point at which we have already been. The paradox consists in the fact that this superfluous detour, this supplementary snare of overtaking ourselves ('voyage into the future') and then reversing the time direction ('voyage into the past') is not just a subjective illusion/perception of an objective process taking place in so-called reality independently of these illusions. That supplementary snare is, rather, an internal condition, an internal constituent of the so-called 'objective' process itself: only through this additional detour does the past itself, the 'objective' state of things, become retroactively what it always was.

Transference is, then, an illusion, but the point is that we cannot bypass it and reach directly for the Truth: the Truth itself is constituted *through* the illusion proper to the transference — 'the Truth arises from misrecognition' (Lacan). If this paradoxical structure is not yet clear, let us take another science-fiction example, William Tenn's well-known story 'The Discovery of Morniel Mathaway'. A distinguished art historian takes a journey in a time machine from the twenty-fifth century to our day to visit and study *in vivo* the immortal Morniel Mathaway; a painter not appreciated in our time but later discovered to have been the greatest painter of the era. When he encounters him, the art historian finds no trace of a genius, just an imposter, a megalomaniac, even a swindler who steals his time machine from him and escapes into the future, so that the poor art historian stays tied to our time. The only action open to him is to assume the identity of the escaped Mathaway and to paint under his name all his masterpieces that he remembers from the future — it is himself who is really the misrecognized genius he was looking for!

This, therefore, is the basic paradox we are aiming at: the subject is confronted with a scene from the past that he wants to change, to meddle with, to intervene in; he takes a journey into the past, intervenes in the scene, and it is not that he 'cannot change anything' — quite the contrary, only through his intervention does the scene from the past

become *what it always was*: his intervention was from the beginning comprised, included. The initial 'illusion' of the subject consists in simply forgetting to include in the scene his own act — that is, to overlook how 'it counts, it is counted, and the one who counts is already included in the account' (Lacan, 1979, p. 26). This introduces a relationship between truth and misrecognition/misapprehension by which the Truth, literally, arises from misrecognition, as in the well-known story about the 'appointment in Samarra' (from Somerset Maugham's play *Sheppey*):

DEATH: There was a merchant in Bagdad who sent his servant to market to buy provisions and in a little while the servant came back, white and trembling, and said, Master, just now when I was in the market-place, I was jostled by a woman in the crowd and when I turned I saw it was death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture; now, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Samarra and there death will not find me. The merchant lent him his horse, and the servant mounted it, and he dug his spurs in its flanks and as fast as the horse could gallop he went. Then the merchant went down to the market-place and he saw me standing in the crowd and he came to me and said, Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning? That was not a threatening gesture, I said, it was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Bagdad, for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra.

We find the same structure in the myth of Oedipus: it is *predicted* to Oedipus's father that his son will kill him and marry his mother, and the prophecy realizes itself, 'becomes true', through the father's attempt to evade it (he exposes his little son in the forest, and so Oedipus, not recognizing him when he encounters him twenty years later, kills him . . .). In other words, the prophecy becomes true by means of its being communicated to the persons it affects and by means of his or her attempt to elude it: one knows in advance one's destiny, one tries to evade it, and it is by means of this very attempt that the predicted destiny realizes itself. Without the prophecy, the little Oedipus would live happily with his parents and there would be no 'Oedipus complex' . . .

Repetition in History

The time structure with which we are concerned here is such that it is

mediated through subjectivity: the subjective 'mistake', 'fault', 'error', misrecognition, arrives paradoxically *before* the truth in relation to which we are designating it as 'error', because this 'truth' itself becomes true only through — or, to use a Hegelian term, by mediation of — the error. This is the logic of the unconscious 'cunning', the way the unconscious deceives us: the unconscious is not a kind of transcendent, unattainable thing of which we are unable to take cognizance, it is rather — to follow Lacan's wordplay-translation of *Unbewusstse* — *une bewue*, an overlooking: we overlook the way our act is already part of the state of things we are looking at, the way our error is part of the Truth itself. This paradoxical structure in which the Truth arises from misrecognition also gives us the answer to the question: Why is the transference necessary, why must the analysis go through it? The transference is an essential illusion by means of which the final Truth (the meaning of a symptom) is produced.

We find the same logic of the error as an internal condition of truth with Rosa Luxemburg, with her description of the dialectics of the revolutionary process. We are alluding here to her argument against Eduard Bernstein, against his revisionist fear of seizing power 'too soon', 'prematurely', before the so-called 'objective conditions' had ripened — this was, as is well known, Bernstein's main reproach to the revolutionary wing of social democracy: they are too impatient, they want to hasten, to outrun the objective logic of historical development. Rosa Luxemburg's answer is that the first seizures of power *are necessarily 'premature'*: the only way for the working class to reach its 'maturity', to await the arrival of the 'appropriate moment' for the seizure of power, is to form itself, to educate itself for this act of seizure, and the only possible way of achieving this education is precisely the 'premature' attempts . . . If we merely wait for the 'appropriate moment' we will never live to see it, because this 'appropriate moment' cannot arrive without the subjective conditions of the maturity of the revolutionary force (subject) being fulfilled — that is, it can arrive only after a series of 'premature', failed attempts. The opposition to the 'premature' seizure of power is thus revealed as opposition to the seizure of power *as such*, *in general*: to repeat Robespierre's famous phrase, the revisionists want a 'revolution without revolution'.

If we look at this closely, we perceive that what is at stake in Rosa Luxemburg's argument is precisely the impossibility of metalanguage in the revolutionary process: the revolutionary subject does not 'conduct', 'direct' this process from an objective distance, he is constituted through

this process, and because of this — because the temporality of the revolution passes through subjectivity — we cannot 'make the revolution at the right moment' without the previous 'premature', failed attempts. Here, in the opposition between Bernstein and Luxemburg, we have the opposition between the obsessional (man) and the hysterical (woman): the obsessional is delaying, putting off the act, waiting for the right moment, while the hysterical (so to speak) overtakes herself in her act and thus unmasks the falsity of the obsessional's position. This is also what is at stake in Hegel's theory of the role of repetition in history: 'a political revolution is generally sanctioned by the opinion of the people only when it is renewed' — that is, it can succeed only as a repetition of a first failed attempt. Why this need for repetition?

Hegel developed his theory of repetition apropos of the case of Julius Caesar's death: when Caesar consolidated his personal power and strengthened it to imperial proportions, he acted 'objectively' (in itself) in accordance with historical truth, historical necessity — the Republican form was losing its validity, the only form of government which could save the unity of the Roman state was monarchy, a state based upon the will of a single individual; but it was still the Republic which prevailed formally (for itself, in the opinion of the people) — the Republic 'was still alive only because she forgot that she was already dead'; to paraphrase the famous Freudian dream of the father who did not know he was already dead: '*His father was alive once more and was talking to him in his usual way, but (the remarkable thing was that) he had really died, only he did not know it*' (Freud, 1977, p. 550).

To the 'opinion' which still believed in the Republic, Caesar's amassing of personal power — which was, of course, contrary to the spirit of the Republic — appeared an arbitrary act, an expression of contingent individual self-will: the conclusion was that if this individual (Caesar) were to be removed, the Republic would regain its full splendour. But it was precisely the conspirators against Caesar (Brutus, Cassius, and the others) who — following the logic of the 'cunning of reason' — attested the Truth (that is, the historical necessity) of Caesar: the final result, the outcome of Caesar's murder, was the reign of Augustus, the first *caesar*. The Truth thus arose from failure itself: in failing, in missing its express goal, the murder of Caesar fulfilled the task which was, in a Machiavellian way, assigned to it by history: to exhibit the historical necessity by denouncing its own non-truth — its own arbitrary, contingent character (Hegel, 1969a, pp. 111–3).

The whole problem of repetition is here: in this passage from Caesar

(the name of an individual) to caesar (title of the Roman emperor). The murder of Caesar — historical personality — provoked, as its final result, the installation of *caesarism*: *Caesar-person repeats itself as caesar-title*. What is the reason, the driving force, of this repetition? At first sight the answer seems to be clear: the delay of the consciousness as to the 'objective' historical necessity. A certain act through which breaks historical necessity is perceived by the consciousness (the 'opinion of the people') as arbitrary, as something which also could not have happened; because of this perception people try to do away with its consequences; to restore the old state of things, but when this act repeats itself it is finally perceived as an expression of the underlying historical necessity. In other words, repetition is the way historical necessity asserts itself in the eyes of 'opinion'.

But such an idea of repetition rests upon the epistemologically naïve presupposition of an objective historical necessity, persisting independently of consciousness (of the 'opinion of the people') and asserting itself finally through repetition. What is lost in this notion is the way so-called historical necessity itself is constituted through *misrecognition*, through the initial failure of 'opinion' to recognize its true character — that is, the way truth itself arises from misrecognition. The crucial point here is the changed symbolic status of an event: when it erupts for the first time it is experienced as a contingent trauma, as an intrusion of a certain non-symbolized Real; only through repetition is this event recognized in its symbolic necessity — it finds its place in the symbolic network; it is realized in the symbolic order. But as with Moses in Freud's analysis, this recognition-through-repetition presupposes necessarily the crime, the act of murder: to realize himself in his symbolic necessity — as a power-title — Caesar has to die as an empirical, flesh-and-blood personality, precisely because the 'necessity' in question is a *symbolic* one.

It is not only that in its first form of appearance, the event (for example, Caesar's amassing of individual power) was too traumatic for the people to grasp its real signification — the misrecognition of its first advent is immediately 'internal' to its symbolic necessity; it is an immediate constituent of its final recognition. The first murder (the parricide of Caesar) opened up the guilt, and it was this guilt, this debt, which was the real driving force of the repetition. The event did not repeat itself because of some objective necessity, independent of our subjective inclination and thus irresistible, but because its repetition was a repayment of our symbolic debt.

In other words, the repetition announces the advent of the Law, of the

Name-of-the-Father in place of the dead, assassinated father: the event which repeats itself receives its law retroactively, through repetition. That is why we can grasp Hegelian repetition as a passage from a lawless series to a lawlike series, as the inclusion of a lawless series — as a *gestalt* of *interpretation par excellence*, as a symbolic appropriation of a traumatic, non-symbolized event (according to Lacan, interpretation always proceeds under the sign of the Name-of-the-Father). Hegel was thus probably the first to articulate the *delay* which is constitutive of the act of interpretation: the interpretation always sets in too late, with some delay, when the event which is to be interpreted repeats itself, the event cannot already be lawlike in its first advent. This same delay is also formulated in the Preface to Hegel's *Philosophy of the Law*, in the famous passage about the owl of Minerva (that is, the philosophical comprehension of a certain epoch) which takes flight only in the evening, after this epoch has already come to its end.

The fact that the 'opinion of the people' saw in Caesar's action an individual contingency and not an expression of historical necessity is therefore not a simple case of 'delay of the consciousness in relation to the effectivity': the point is that this necessity itself — which was misrecognized by opinion in its first manifestation; that is, mistaken for a contingent self-will — constitutes itself, realizes itself, *through* this misrecognition. And we should not be surprised to find the same logic of repetition in the history of the psychoanalytic movement: it was necessary for Lacan to *repeat* his split with the International Psycho-Analytical Association. The first split (in 1953) was still experienced as a traumatic contingency — Lacanians were still trying to patch things up with the IPA, to regain admission — but in 1964 it also became clear to their 'opinion' that there was a necessity in this split, so they cut their links with the IPA and Lacan constituted his own School.

Hegel with Austen

Austen, not Austrii: it is Jane Austen who is perhaps the only counterpart to Hegel in literature: *Pride and Prejudice* is the literary *Phenomenology of Spirit*; *Mansfield Park* the *Science of Logic* and *Emma* the *Encyclopaedia*. . . . No wonder, then, that we find in *Pride and Prejudice* the perfect case of this dialectic of truth arising from misrecognition. Although they belong to different social classes — he is from an extremely rich aristocratic family, she from the impoverished middle classes — Elizabeth and

Darcy feel a strong mutual attraction. Because of his pride, his love appears to Darcy as something unworthy; when he asks for Elizabeth's hand he confesses openly his contempt for the world to which she belongs and expects her to accept his proposition as an unheard-of honour. But because of her prejudice, Elizabeth sees him as ostentatious, arrogant and vain: his condescending proposal humiliates her, and she refuses him.

This double failure, this mutual misrecognition, possesses a structure of a double movement of communication where each subject receives from the other its own message in the inverse form: Elizabeth wants to present herself to Darcy as a young cultivated woman, full of wit, and she gets from him the message 'you are nothing but a poor empty-minded creature, full of false *finesse*'; Darcy wants to present himself to her as a proud gentleman, and he gets from her the message 'your pride is nothing but contemptible arrogance'. After the break in their relationship each discovers, through a series of accidents, the true nature of the other — she the sensitive and tender nature of Darcy, he her real dignity and wit — and the novel ends as it should, with their marriage.

The theoretical interest of this story lies in the fact that the failure of their first encounter, the double misrecognition concerning the real nature of the other, functions as a positive condition of the final outcome: we cannot go directly for the truth, we cannot say 'If, from the very beginning, she had recognized his real nature and he hers, their story could have ended at once with their marriage.' Let us take as a comical hypothesis that the first encounter of the future lovers was a success — that Elizabeth had accepted Darcy's first proposal. What would happen? Instead of being bound together in true love they would become a vulgar everyday couple, a liaison of an arrogant, rich man and a pretentious, empty-minded young girl. If we want to spare ourselves the painful roundabout route through the misrecognition, we miss the Truth itself: only the 'working-through' of the misrecognition allows us to accede to the true nature of the other and at the same time to overcome our own deficiency — for Darcy, to free himself of his false pride; for Elizabeth, to get rid of her prejudices.

These two movements are interconnected because Elizabeth encounters, in Darcy's pride, the inverse image of her own prejudices; and Darcy, in Elizabeth's vanity, the inverse image of his own false pride. In other words, Darcy's pride is not a simple, positive state of things existing independently of his relationship with Elizabeth, an immediate property of his nature; it takes place, it appears, *only from the perspective of*

her prejudices; vice versa, Elizabeth is a pretenacious empty-minded girl only in Darcy's arrogant view. To articulate things in Hegelian terms: in the perceived deficiency of the other, each perceives — without knowing it — the falsity of his/her own subjective position; the deficiency of the other is simply an objectification of the distortion of our own point of view.

Two Hegelian Jokes

There is a well-known, very Hegelian joke that illustrates perfectly the way truth arises from misrecognition — the way our path towards truth coincides with the truth itself. At the beginning of this century, a Pole and a Jew were sitting in a train, facing each other. The Pole was shifting nervously, watching the Jew all the time; something was irritating him; finally, unable to restrain himself any longer, he exploded: 'Tell me, how do you Jews succeed in extracting from people the last small coin and in this way accumulate all your wealth?' The Jew replied: 'OK, I will tell you, but not for nothing; first, you give me five zloty [Polish money]! After receiving the required amount, the Jew began: 'First, you take a dead fish; you cut off her head and put her entrails in a glass of water. Then, around midnight, when the moon is full, you must bury this glass in a churchyard. . . .' 'And,' the Pole interrupted him greedily, 'if I do all this, will I also become rich?' 'Not too quickly,' replied the Jew; 'this is not all you must do; but if you want to hear the rest, you must pay me another five zloty!' After receiving the money again, the Jew continued his story: soon afterwards, he again demanded more money, and so on, until finally the Pole exploded in fury: 'You dirty rascal, do you really think I did not notice what you were aiming at? There is no secret at all, you simply want to extract the last small coin from me!' The Jew answered him calmly and with resignation: 'Well, now you see how we, the Jews. . .'

Everything in this small story is susceptible to interpretation, starting with the curious, inquisitive way the Pole looks at the Jew — it means that from the very beginning the Pole is caught in a relationship of transference: that the Jew embodies for him the subject presumed to know — to know the secret of extracting money from people. The point of the story is of course that the Jew has *not* deceived the Pole: he kept his promise and taught him how to extract money from people. What is crucial here is the double movement of the outcome — the distance between the moment when the Pole breaks out in fury and the Jew's

final answer. When the Pole blurts out 'There is no secret at all, you simply want to extract the last small coin from me!', he is already telling the truth without knowing it — that is to say, he sees, in the Jew's manipulation, a simple deception. What he misses is that through this very deception the Jew kept his word, delivered him what he was paid for (the secret of how the Jews . . .). The Pole's error is simply his perspective: he looks forward to the 'secret' being revealed somewhere at the end; he situates the Jew's narration as a path to the final revelation of the 'secret'; but the real 'secret' is already in the narration itself: in the way the Jew, through his narration, captures the Pole's desire; in the way the Pole is absorbed in this narration and prepared to pay for it.

The Jew's 'secret' lies, then, in our own (the Pole's) desire: in the fact that the Jew knows how to take our desire into account. That is why we can say that the final turn of the story, with its double twist, corresponds to the final moment of the psychoanalytic cure, the dissolution of transference and 'going through the fantasy': when the Pole breaks out in fury he has already stepped out of transference, but he has yet to traverse his fantasy — this is achieved only by realizing how, through his deception, the Jew has kept his word. The fascinating 'secret' which drives us to follow the Jew's narration carefully is precisely the Lacanian *objet petit a*, the chimerical object of fantasy, the object causing our desire and at the same time — this is its paradox — posed retroactively by this desire: in 'going through the fantasy' we experience how this fantasy-object (the 'secret') only materializes the void of our desire.

Another well-known joke possesses exactly the same structure, but this is usually overlooked — we are referring, of course, to the joke about the Door of the Law from the ninth chapter of Kafka's *Trial*, to its final turn-around when the dying man from the country asks the door-keeper:

Everyone strives to attain the law, how does it come about, then, that in all these years no one has come seeking admittance but me? The door-keeper perceives that the man is at the end of his strength and his hearing is failing, so he bellows in his ear: 'No one but you could gain admittance through this door, since the door was intended only for you. I am now going to shut it' (Kafka, 1985, p. 237)

This final twist is perfectly homologous to the one at the end of the story about the Pole and the Jew: the subject experiences how he (his desire) was part of the game from the very beginning; how the entrance was meant only for him, how the stake of the narration was only to capture

his desire. We could even invent another ending for Kafka's story to bring it nearer to the joke about the Pole and the Jew: after the long wait, the man from the country breaks out in fury and begins to cry at the door-keeper: 'You dirty rascal, why do you pretend to guard the entrance to some enormous secret, when you know very well that there is no secret beyond the door, that this door is intended only for me, to capture my desire!' and the door-keeper (if he were an analyst) would answer him calmly: 'You see, now you've discovered the real secret beyond the door is only what your desire introduces there . . .'

In both cases, the nature of the final twist follows the Hegelian logic of surmounting, of abolishing the 'bad infinity'. That is to say, in both cases the starting point is the same: the subject is confronted with some substantial Truth, a secret from which he is excluded, which evades him *ad infinitum* — the inaccessible heart of the Law beyond the infinite series of doors; the unattainable last answer, the last secret of how the Jews extract money from us, awaiting us at the end of the Jew's narration (which could go on *ad infinitum*). And the solution is the same in both cases: the subject has to grasp how, from the very start of the game, the door concealing the secret was meant only for him, how the real secret at the end of the Jew's narration is his own desire — in short, how his external position *vis-à-vis* the Other (the fact that he experiences himself as excluded from the secret of the Other) is internal to the Other itself. Here we encounter a kind of 'reflexivity' which cannot be reduced to philosophical reflection: the very feature which seems to exclude the subject from the Other (his desire to penetrate the secret of the Other — the secret of the Law, the secret of how the Jews . . .) is already a 'reflexive determination' of the Other, precisely as excluded from the Other, we are already part of its game.

A Time Trap

The positivity proper to the misrecognition — the fact that the misrecognition functions as a 'productive' instance — is to be conceived in an even more radical way: not only is the misrecognition an immanent condition of the final advent of the truth, but it already possesses in itself, so to speak, a positive ontological dimension: it founds, it renders possible a certain positive entity. To exemplify this let us refer again to science fiction, to one of the classic science-fiction novels, *The Door into Summer* by Robert A. Heinlein.

The hypothesis of this novel (written in 1957) is that in 1970, hibernation has become an ordinary procedure, managed by numerous agencies. The hero, a young engineer by the name of Daniel Boone Davis, hibernates himself as a professional deception for thirty years. After his awakening in December 2000, he encounters — among other adventures — the old Dr Twitchell, a kind of 'mad genius' who has constructed a time machine; Davis persuades Dr Twitchell to use this machine on him and to transpose him back into the year 1970. There our hero arranges his affairs (by investing his money in a company that he knows, from his voyage to 2000, will be a great success in thirty years' time, and even by arranging for his own wedding in 2000: he organizes also the hibernation of his future bride) and then hibernates himself again for thirty years; the date of his second awakening is 27 April 2001.

This way, all ends well — there is just one small detail annoying the hero: in the year 2000, the newspaper publish, beside 'Births', 'Deaths' and 'Marriages', also the column 'Awakenings', listing the names of all persons roused from hibernation. His *first* stay in the years 2000 and 2001 lasted from December 2000 until June 2001; this means that Doc Twitchell has transposed him back to the past *after* the date of his second awakening in April 2001. In *The Times* for Saturday 28 April 2001, there was of course his name in the list of those awakened on Friday 27 April: 'D.B. Davis'. Why did he, during his *first* stay in 2001, miss his own name among the 'Awakenings', although he was all the time a very attentive reader of this column? Was this an accidental oversight?

But what would I have done if I *had* seen it? Gone there, met myself — and gone stark mad? No, for if I *had* seen it, I would not have done the things I did afterward — 'afterward' for me — which led up to it. Therefore it could never have happened that way. The control is a negative feedback type, with a built-in 'fail safe', because the very existence of that line of print depended on my not seeing it; the apparent possibility that I might have seen it is one of the excluded 'not possibles' on the basic circuit design. 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will': Free will and predestination in one sentence and both true. (Heinlein, 1986, p. 287)

Here we have the literal definition of the 'agency of the letter in the unconscious': the line 'the very existence of [which] depended on my not seeing it'. If, during his first stay in 2001, the subject had perceived his own name in the newspaper — if he had perceived during his first stay the trace of his second stay in 2001 — he would have acted thereupon in a different manner (he would not have travelled back into the past, and

so only, that is, *he would have acted in a way that would have prevented his name from appearing in the newspaper*. The oversight itself therefore has, so to speak, a negative ontological dimension: it is the 'condition of the possibility' of the letter that it must be overlooked, that we must not take notice of it — its very existence depends on its not being seen by the subject. Here we have a kind of inversion of the traditional *esse — percipi*: it is the *non-percipi* which is the condition of *esse*. This is perhaps the right way to conceive the 'pre-ontological' status of the unconscious (evoked by Lacan in his *Seminar XI*): the unconscious is a paradoxical letter which *insists* only in so far as it does not *exist* ontologically.

In a homologous way, we could also determine the status of knowledge in psychoanalysis. The knowledge at work here is knowledge concerning the most intimate, traumatic being of the subject, knowledge about the particular logic of his enjoyment. In his everyday attitude, the subject refers to the objects of his *Unmuel*, of the world that surrounds him, as to some given positivity; psychoanalysis brings about a dizzy experience of how this given positivity exists and retains its consistency only in so far as somewhere else (on another scene, *an etnem andern Schauplatz*) some fundamental non-knowledge insists — it brings about the terrifying experience that if we come to know too much, we may lose our very being.

Let us take, for example, the Lacanian notion of the imaginary self: this self exists only on the basis of the misrecognition of its own conditions; it is the effect of this misrecognition. So Lacan's emphasis is not on the supposed incapacity of the self to reflect, to grasp its own conditions — on its being the plaything of inaccessible unconscious forces: his point is that the subject can pay for such a reflection with the loss of his very ontological consistency. It is in this sense that the knowledge which we approach through psychoanalysis is impossible-real: we are on dangerous ground; in getting too close to it we observe suddenly how our consistency, our positivity, is dissolving itself.

In psychoanalysis, knowledge is marked by a lethal dimension: the subject must pay the approach to it with his own being. In other words, to abolish the misrecognition means at the same time to abolish, to dissolve, the 'substance' which was supposed to hide itself behind the form-illusion of misrecognition. This 'substance' — the only one recognized in psychoanalysis — is, according to Lacan, enjoyment [*jouissance*]: access to knowledge is then paid with the loss of enjoyment — enjoyment, in its stupidity, is possible only on the basis of certain non-knowledge, ignorance. No wonder, then, that the reaction of the

analysis and to the analyst is often paranoid: by driving him towards knowledge about his desire, the analyst wants effectively to steal from him his most intimate treasure, the kernel of his enjoyment.

SYMPTOM AS REAL

The *Titanic* as Symptom

This dialectics of overtaking ourselves towards the future and simultaneous retroactive modification of the past — dialectics by which the error is internal to the truth, by which the misrecognition possesses a positive ontological dimension — has, however, its limits; it stumbles on to a rock upon which it becomes suspended. This rock is of course the Real, that which resists symbolization: the traumatic point which is always missed but none the less always returns, although we try — through a set of different strategies — to neutralize it, to integrate it into the symbolic order. In the perspective of the last stage of Lacanian teaching, it is precisely the symptom which is conceived as such a real kernel of enjoyment, which persists as a surplus and returns through all attempts to domesticate it, to gentrify it (if we may be permitted to use this term adapted to designate strategies to domesticate the slums as 'symptoms' of our cities), to dissolve it by means of explication, of putting-into-words its meaning.

To exemplify this shift of emphasis in the concept of symptom in Lacan's teaching, let us take a case which is today again attracting public attention: the wreck of the *Titanic*. Of course, it is already a commonplace to read *Titanic* as a symptom in the sense of 'knot of meanings': the sinking of the *Titanic* had a traumatic effect, it was a shock, 'the impossible happened', the unsinkable ship had sunk; but the point is that precisely as a shock, this sinking arrived at its proper time — 'the time was waiting for it': even before it actually happened, there was already a place opened, reserved for it in fantasy-space. In had such a terrific impact on 'social imaginary' by virtue of the fact that it was expected. It was foretold in amazing detail:

In 1898 a struggling author named Morgan Robertson concocted a novel about a fabulous Atlantic liner, far larger than any that had ever been built. Robertson loaded his ship with rich and complacent people and then wrecked it one cold April night on an iceberg. This somehow showed the

futility of everything, and in fact, the book was called *Futility* when it appeared that year, published by the firm of M.F. Mansfield.

Fourteen years later a British shipping company named the *White Star Line* built a steamer remarkably like the one in Robertson's novel. The new liner was 66,000 tons displacement; Robertson's was 70,000. The real ship was 882.5 feet long; the fictional one was 800 feet. Both vessels were triple screw and could make 24–25 knots. Both could carry about 3,000 people, and both had enough lifeboats for only a fraction of this number. But, then, this did not seem to matter because both were labeled 'unsinkable':

On April 10, 1912, the real ship left Southampton on her maiden voyage to New York. Her cargo included a priceless copy of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* and a list of passengers collectively worth two hundred and fifty million dollars. On her way over she too struck an iceberg and went down on a cold April night.

Robertson called his ship the *Titan*; the White Star Line called its ship the *Titanic*. (Lord, 1983, pp. XI–XII)

The reasons, the background for this incredible coincidence are not difficult to guess: at the turn of the century, it was already part of *Zeitgeist* that a certain age was coming to an end — the age of peaceful progress, of well-defined and stable class distinctions, and so on: that is, the long period from 1850 until the First World War. New dangers were hanging in the air (labour movements, eruptions of nationalism, anti-Semitism, the danger of war) which would soon tarnish the idyllic image of Western civilization, releasing its 'barbaric' potentials. And if there was a phenomenon which, at the turn of the century, embodied the end of this age, it was the great transatlantic liners: floating palaces, wonders of technical progress; incredibly complicated and well-functioning machines, and at the same time the meeting-place of the cream of society; a kind of microcosm of the social structure, an image of society not as it really was but seen as society wanted to be seen in order to appear likeable, as a stable totality with well-defined class distinctions, and so on — in brief: the ego-ideal of society.

In other words, the wreck of the *Titanic* made such a tremendous impact not because of the immediate material dimensions of the catastrophe but because of its symbolic overdetermination, because of the ideological meaning invested in it: it was read as a 'symbol', as a condensed, metaphorical representation of the approaching catastrophe of European civilization itself. The wreck of the *Titanic* was a form in which society lived the experience of its own death, and it is interesting to note how both the traditional rightist and leftist readings retain this

same perspective, with only shifts of emphasis. From the traditional perspective, the *Titanic* is a nostalgic monument of a bygone era of gallantry lost in today's world of vulgarity; from the leftist viewpoint, it is a story about the impotence of an ossified class society.

But all these are commonplace that could be found in any report on the *Titanic* — we can easily explain, in this way, the metaphorical overdetermination which confers on the *Titanic* its symbolic weight. The problem is that this is not all. We can easily convince ourselves of this by looking at the photos of the wreck of the *Titanic* taken recently by undersea cameras — where lies the terrifying power of fascination exercised by these pictures? It is, so to speak, intuitively clear that this fascinating power cannot be explained by the symbolic overdetermination, by the metaphorical meaning of the *Titanic*: its last resort is not that of representation but that of a certain inert presence. The *Titanic* is a Thing in the Lacanian sense: the material leftover, the materialization of the terrifying, impossible *jouissance*. By looking at the wreck we gain an insight into the forbidden domain, into a space that should be left unseen: visible fragments are a kind of coagulated remnant of the liquid flux of *jouissance*, a kind of petrified forest of enjoyment.

This terrifying impact has nothing to do with meaning — or, more precisely, it is a meaning permeated with enjoyment, a Lacanian *jouissance*. The wreck of the *Titanic* therefore functions as a sublime object: a positive, material object elevated to the status of the impossible Thing. And perhaps all the effort to articulate the metaphorical meaning of the *Titanic* is nothing but an attempt to escape this terrifying impact of the Thing: an attempt to domesticate the Thing by reducing it to its symbolic status, by providing it with a meaning. We usually say that the fascinating presence of a Thing obscures its meaning; here, the opposite is true: the meaning obscures the terrifying impact of its presence.

From Symptom to Sinthome

This, then, is the symptom — and it is on the basis of this notion of the symptom that we must locate the fact that in the final years of Lacan's teaching we find a kind of universalization of the symptom: almost everything that is becomes in a way symptom, so that finally even woman is determined as the symptom of man. We can even say that 'symptom' is Lacan's final answer to the eternal philosophical question 'Why is there something instead of nothing?' — this 'something' which

'is' instead of nothing is indeed the symptom.

The general reference of the philosophical discussion is usually the triangle world — language-subject, the relation of the subject to the world of objects, mediated through language; Lacan is usually reproached for his 'absolutism of the signifier' — the reproach is that he does not take into account the objective world, that he limits his theory to the interplay of subject and language; as if the objective world does not exist, as if it is only the imaginary effect-illusion of the signifier's play. But Lacan's answer to this reproach is that not only does the world — as a given whole of objects — not exist, but that neither do language and subject exist: it is already a classic Lacanian thesis that 'the big Other [that is, the symbolic order as a consistent, closed totality] does not exist', and the subject is denoted by $\$$, the crossed, blocked S , a void, an empty place in the signifier's structure.

At this point we must of course ask ourselves the naive but necessary question: If the world and language and subject do not exist, what *does* exist, more precisely: what confers on existing phenomena their consistency? Lacan's answer is, as we have already indicated, symptom. To this answer, we must give its whole anti-post-structuralist emphasis: the fundamental gesture of post-structuralism is to deconstruct every substantial identity, to denounce behind its solid consistency an interplay of symbolic overdetermination — briefly, to dissolve the substantial identity into a network of non-substantial, differential relations; the notion of symptom is the necessary counterpoint to it, the substance of enjoyment, the real kernel around which this signifying interplay is structured.

To seize the logic of this universalization of symptom, we must connect it with another universalization, that of foreclosure (*Verwerfung*). In his unpublished Seminar, J-A. Miller ironically spoke of the passage from special to general theory of foreclosure (alluding, of course, to Einstein's passage from special to general theory of relativity). When Lacan introduced the notion of foreclosure in the fifties, it designated a specific phenomenon of the exclusion of a certain key-signifier (*point de capiton*, Name-of-the-Father) from the symbolic order, triggering the psychotic process; here, the foreclosure is not proper to language as such but a distinctive feature of the psychotic phenomena. And, as Lacan reformulated Freud, what was foreclosed from the Symbolic returns in the Real — in the form of hallucinatory phenomena, for example.

However, in the last years of his teaching Lacan gave universal range to this function of foreclosure: there is a certain foreclosure proper to the

order of signifier as such; whenever we have a symbolic structure it is structured around a certain void, it implies the foreclosure of a certain key-signifier. The symbolic structuring of sexuality implies the lack of a signifier of the sexual relationship, it implies that 'there is no sexual relationship'; that the sexual relation cannot be symbolized — that it is an impossible, 'antagonistic' relationship. And to seize the interconnection between the two universalizations, we must simply again apply the proposition 'what was foreclosed from the Symbolic returns in the Real of the symptom': woman does not exist, her signifier is originally foreclosed, and that is why she returns as a symptom of man.

Symptom as real — this seems directly opposed to the classic Lacanian thesis that the unconscious is structured like a language: is not the symptom a symbolic formation *par excellence*, a cyphered, coded message which can be dissolved through interpretation because it is already in itself a signifier? Is not the whole point of Lacan that we must detect behind the corporeal-imaginary mask (for example, of a hysterical symptom), its symbolic overdetermination? To explain this apparent contradiction, we must take into account the different stages of Lacan's development.

We can use the concept of symptom as a kind of clue, or index, allowing us to differentiate the main stages of Lacan's theoretical development. At the beginning, in the early fifties, symptom was conceived as a symbolic, signifying formation, as a kind of cypher, a coded message addressed to the big Other which later was supposed to confer on it its true meaning. The symptom arises where the world failed, where the circuit of the symbolic communication was broken: it is a kind of 'prolongation of the communication by other means'; the failed, repressed word articulates itself in a coded, cyphered form. The implication of this is that the symptom can not only be interpreted but is, so to speak, already formed with an eye to its interpretation: it is addressed to the big Other presumed to contain its meaning. In other words, there is no symptom without its addressee: in the psychoanalytic cure the symptom is always addressed to the analyst, it is an appeal to him to deliver its hidden meaning. We can also say that there is no symptom without transference, without the position of some subject presumed to know its meaning. Precisely as an enigma, the symptom, so to speak, announces its dissolution through interpretation: the aim of psychoanalysis is to re-establish the broken network of communication by allowing the patient to verbalize the meaning of his symptom, through this verbalization, the symptom is automatically dissolved. This, then, is the basic point: in its

very constitution, the symptom implies the field of the big Other as consistent, complete, because its very formation is an appeal to the Other which contains its meaning.

But here the problems began: why, in spite of its interpretation, does the symptom not dissolve itself; why does it persist? The Lacanian answer is, of course, *enjoyment*. The symptom is not only a cyphered message, it is at the same time a way for the subject to organize his enjoyment — that is why, even after the completed interpretation, the subject is not prepared to renounce his symptom; that is why he loves his symptom more than himself. In locating this dimension of enjoyment in the symptom, Lacan proceeded in two stages.

First, he tried to isolate this dimension of enjoyment as that of *fantasy*, and to oppose symptom and fantasy through a whole set of distinctive features: symptom is a signifying formation which, so to speak, 'overtakes itself' towards its interpretation — that is, which can be analysed; fantasy is an inert construction which cannot be analysed, which resists interpretation. Symptom implies and addresses some non-barred, consistent big Other which will retroactively confer on it its meaning; fantasy implies a crossed out, blocked, barred, non-whole, inconsistent Other — that is to say, it is filling out a void in the Other. Symptom (for example, a slip of the tongue) causes discomfort and displeasure when it occurs, but we embrace its interpretation with pleasure; we explain gladly to others the meaning of our slips; their 'intersubjective recognition' is usually a source of intellectual satisfaction. When we abandon ourselves to fantasy (for example, in daydreaming) we feel immense pleasure, but on the contrary it causes us great discomfort and shame to confess our fantasies to others.

In this way we can also articulate two stages of the psychoanalytic process: *interpretation of symptoms — going through fantasy*. When we are confronted with the patient's symptoms, we must first interpret them and penetrate through them to the fundamental fantasy as the kernel of enjoyment which is blocking the further movement of interpretation; then we must accomplish the crucial step of going through the fantasy, of obtaining distance from it, of experiencing how the fantasy-formation just masks, fills out a certain void, lack, empty place in the Other.

But here again another problem arose: how do we account for patients who have, beyond any doubt, gone through their fantasy, who have obtained distance from the fantasy-framework of their reality, but whose key symptom still persists? How do we explain this fact? What do we do with a symptom, with this pathological formation which persists not

only beyond its interpretation but even beyond fantasy? Lacan tried to answer this challenge with the concept of *sinthome*, a neologism containing a set of associations (synthetic-artificial man, synthesis between symptom and fantasy, Saint Thomas, the saint. . .) (Lacan, 1988a). Symptom as *sinthome* is a certain signifying formation penetrated with enjoyment it is a signifier as a bearer of *jouissance*, enjoyment-in-sense.

What we must bear in mind here is the radical ontological status of symptom: symptom, conceived as *sinthome*, is literally our only status, the only positive support of our being, the only point that gives consistency to the subject. In other words, symptom is the way we — the subjects — 'avoid madness', the way we 'choose something (the symptom-formation) instead of nothing (radical psychotic autism, the destruction of the symbolic universe)' through the binding of our enjoyment to a certain signifying, symbolic formation which assures a minimum of consistency to our being-in-the-world.

If the symptom in this radical dimension is unbound, it means literally 'the end of the world' — the only alternative to the symptom is nothing: pure autism, a psychic suicide, surrender to the death drive even to the total destruction of the symbolic universe. That is why the final Lacanian definition of the end of the psychoanalytic process is *identification with the symptom*. The analysis achieves its end when the patient is able to recognize, in the Real of his symptom, the only support of his being. That is how we must read Freud's *wes war, soll ich werden*: you, the subject, must identify yourself with the place where your symptom already was; in its 'pathological' particularity you must recognize the element which gives consistency to your being.

This, then, is a symptom: a particular, 'pathological', signifying formation, a binding of enjoyment, an inert stain resisting communication and interpretation, a stain which cannot be included in the circuit of discourse, of social bond network, but is at the same time a positive condition of it. Now it is perhaps clear why woman is, according to Lacan, a symptom of man — to explain this, we need only remember the well-known male chauvinist wisdom often referred to by Freud: women are impossible to bear, a source of eternal nuisance, but still, they are the best thing we have of their kind; without them, it would be even worse. So, if woman does not exist, man is perhaps simply a woman who thinks that she does exist.

'in you more than yourself'

In so far as the *sinthome* is a certain signifier which is not enclained in a network but immediately filled, penetrated with enjoyment, its status is by definition 'psychosomatic', that of a terrifying bodily mark which is merely a mute attestation bearing witness to a disgusting enjoyment, without representing anything or anyone. Is not Franz Kafka's story 'A Country Doctor' therefore the story of a *sinthome* in its pure — distilled, so to speak — form? The open wound growing luxuriantly on the child's body, this nauseous, verminous aperture — what is it if not the embodiment of vitality as such, of the life-substance in its most radical diminution of meaningless enjoyment?

In his right side, near the hip, was an open wound as big as the palm of my hand. Rose-red, in many variations of shade, dark in the grooves, lighter at the edges, softly granulated, with irregular clots of blood, open as a surface-mine to the daylight. That was how it looked from a distance. But on a closer inspection there was another complication. I could not help a low whistle of surprise. Worms, as thick and as long as my little finger, themselves rose-red and blood-spotted as well, were wriggling from their fastness in the interior of the wound towards the light, with small white heads and many little legs. Poor young man, he was past helping. I had discovered his great wound; this blossom in his side was destroying him. (Kafka, 1978, p. 122)

'In his right side, near the hips . . . ' — exactly like Christ's wound, although its closest forerunner is the suffering of Amfortas in Wagner's *Parsifal*. Amfortas's problem is that as long as his wound bleeds *he cannot die*, he cannot find peace in death; his attendants insist that he must do his duty and perform the Grail's ritual, regardless of his suffering, while he desperately asks them to have mercy on him and put an end to his suffering by simply killing him — exactly like the child in 'A Country Doctor', who addresses the narrator-doctor with the desperate request 'Doctor, let me die.'

At first sight, Wagner and Kafka are as far apart as they can be: on one hand, we have the late-Romantic revival of a medieval legend; on the other, the description of the fate of the individual in contemporary totalitarian bureaucracy . . . but if we look closely we perceive that the fundamental problem of *Parsifal* is eminently a *bureaucratic* one: the incapacity, the incompetence of Amfortas in performing his ritual-bureaucratic duty. The terrifying voice of Amfortas's father Titurel, this

superego-injunction of the living dead, addresses his impotent son in the first act with the words: 'Mein Sohn Amfortas, bist du am Amt?', to which we have to give all bureaucratic weight: Are you at your post? Are you ready to officiate? In a somewhat pertinent sociological manner, we could say that Wagner's *Parsifal* is staging the historical fact that the classical Master (Amfortas) is no longer capable of reigning in the conditions of totalitarian bureaucracy and that he must be replaced by a new figure of a Leader (*Parsifal*).

In his film version of *Parsifal*, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg demonstrated — by a series of changes to Wagner's original — that he was well aware of this fact. First there is his manipulation of the sexual difference: at the crucial moment of inversion in the second act — after Kundry's kiss — Parsifal changes his sex: the male actor is replaced by a young, cold female; what is at stake here is no ideology of hermaphroditism but a shrewd insight into the 'feminine' nature of totalitarian power: totalitarian Law is an obscene Law, penetrated by enjoyment, a Law which has lost its formal neutrality. But what is crucial for us here is another feature of Syberberg's version: the fact that he has *externalized* Amfortas's wound — it is carried on a pillow beside him, as a nauseous partial object out of which, through an aperture resembling vaginal lips, trickles blood. Here we have the contiguity with Kafka: it is as if the child's wound from 'A Country Doctor' has externalized itself, becoming a separate object, gaining independent existence or — to use Lacan's style — *ex-sistence*. That is why Syberberg stages the scene where, just before the final denouement, Amfortas desperately begs his attendants to run their swords through his body and so relieve him of his unbearable torments, in a way which differs radically from the customary way:

'Already I feel the darkness of death enshroud me,
and must I yet again return to life?
Madmen! Who would force me to live?
Could you but grant me death!
(*He tears open his garment.*)
Here I am — here is the open wound!
Here flows my blood, that poisons me.
Draw your weapons! Plunge your swords
in deep — deep, up to the hilt!

The wound is Amfortas's symptom — it embodies his filthy, nauseous enjoyment; it is his thickened, condensed life-substance which does not let him die. His words 'Here I am — here is the open wound!' are thus to

be taken literally: all his being is in this wound; if we annihilate it, he himself will lose his positive ontological consistency and cease to exist. This scene is usually staged in accordance with Wagner's instructions: Amfortas tears open his garment and points at the bleeding wound on his body; with Syberberg, who has eternalized the wound, Amfortas points at the nauseous partial object outside himself — that is, he does not point back at himself but there outside, in the sense of 'there outside I am, in that disgusting piece of the real consists all my substance!' How should we read this externality?

The first, most obvious solution is to conceive this wound as a *symbolic* one: the wound is externalized to show that it does not concern the body as such but the symbolic network into which the body is caught. To put it simply: the real reason for Amfortas's impotence, and therewith for the decay of his kingdom, is a certain blockage, a certain snag in the network of symbolic relations. 'Something is rotten' in this country where the ruler has trespassed a fundamental prohibition (he allowed himself to be seduced by Kundry); the wound is then just a materialization of a moral-symbolic decay.

But there is another, perhaps more radical reading: in so far as it sticks out from the (symbolic and symbolized) reality of the body, the wound is 'a little piece of real', a disgusting protuberance which cannot be integrated into the totality of 'our own body', a materialization of that which is 'in Amfortas more than Amfortas' and is thereby — according to the classic Lacanian formula (Lacan, 1979, ch. XX) — destroying him. It is destroying him, but at the same time it is the only thing which gives him consistency. This is the paradox of the psychoanalytic concept of the symptom: symptom is an element clinging on like a kind of parasite and 'spoiling the game', but if we annihilate it things get even worse: we lose all we had — even the rest which was threatened but not yet destroyed by the symptom. Confronted with the symptom we are always in a position of an impossible choice; illustrated by a well-known joke about the chief editor of one of Hearst's newspapers: in spite of persuasion from Hearst, he did not want to take well-deserved leave. When Hearst asked him why he did not want to go on his holidays, the editor's answer was: 'I am afraid that if I were absent for a couple of weeks, the sales of the newspaper would fall; but I am even more afraid that in spite of my absence, the sales would *not* fall!' This is the symptom: an element which causes a great deal of trouble, but its absence would mean even greater trouble: total catastrophe.

To take, as a final example, Ridley Scott's film *Alien*: is not the

disgusting parasite which jumps out of the body of poor John Hurt precisely such a symptom, is not its status precisely the same as that of Amfortas's externalized wound? The cave on the desert planet into which the space travellers enter when the computer registers signs of life in it, and where the polyp-like parasite sticks on to Hurt's face, has the status of the pre-symbolic Thing — that is, of the maternal body, of the living substance of enjoyment. The utero-vaginal associations aroused by this cave are almost too intrusive. The parasite adhering to Hurt's face is thus a kind of 'sprout of enjoyment', a leftover of the maternal Thing which then functions as a symptom — the Real of enjoyment — of the group marooned in the wandering spaceship: it threatens them and at the same time constitutes them as a closed group. The fact that this parasitical object incessantly changes its form merely confirms its *anamorphic* status: it is a pure being of semblance. The 'alien', the eighth, supplementary passenger, is an object which, being nothing at all in itself, must none the less be added, annexed as an anamorphic surplus. It is the Real at its purest: a semblance, something which on a strictly symbolic level does not exist at all but at the same time the only thing in the whole film which actually exists, the thing against which the whole reality is utterly defenceless. One has only to remember the spine-chilling scene when the liquid pouring from the polyp-like parasite after the doctor makes an incision with a scalpel dissolves the metal floor of the space ship. . . .

From this perspective of *sinthome*, truth and enjoyment are radically incompatible: the dimension of truth is opened through our misrecognition of the traumatic Thing, embodying the impossible *jouissance*.

Ideological *Jouissance*

With the designation of an inconsistency of the socio-symbolic Other, the positive side of which is obscene enjoyment, have we not consented also to the usual 'post-modernist' anti-Enlightenment *ressentiment*? The text on the cover of the French edition of Lacan's *Écrits* already belies such an understanding: Lacan conceives there his theoretical effort explicitly as a prolongation of the old struggle of Enlightenment. The Lacanian criticism of the autonomous subject and his power of reflection, of reflexive appropriation of his objective condition, is therefore far from any affirmation of some irrational ground escaping the reach of reason. Paraphrasing the well-known Marxian formula of capital itself as the limit of capitalism, we should say that according to Lacan the limit of

Enlightenment is Enlightenment itself, its usually forgotten obverse already articulated in Descartes and Kant.

The leading motif of the Enlightenment is, of course, some variation of the injunction 'Reason autonomously!': 'Use your own head, free yourself of all prejudices, do not accept anything without questioning its rational foundations, always preserve a critical distance . . .'. But Kant had already, in his famous article 'What is Enlightenment?' added to this an unpleasant, disquieting supplement, introducing a certain fissure into the very heart of the Enlightenment project: 'Reason about whatever you want and as much as you want — but *obey!*' That is to say: as the autonomous subject of theoretical reflection, addressing the enlightened public, you can think freely, you can question all authority; but as a part of the social 'machine', as a subject in the other meaning of the word, you must obey unconditionally the orders of your superiors. This fissure is proper to the project of Enlightenment as such: we find it already with Descartes, in his *Discourse on Method*. The obverse of the *cogito* doubting everything, questioning the very existence of the world, is the Cartesian 'provisional morality', a set of rules established by Descartes to enable him to survive in the everyday existence of his philosophical journey: the very first rule emphasizes the need to accept and obey the customs and laws of the country into which we were born without questioning their authority.

The main point is to perceive how this acceptance of given empirical, 'pathological' (Kant) customs and rules is not some kind of pre-Enlightenment remnant — a remnant of the traditional authoritarian attitude — but, on the contrary, *the necessary obverse of the Enlightenment itself*: through this acceptance of the customs and rules of social life in their nonsensical, given character, through acceptance of the fact that 'Law is law', we are internally freed from its constraints — the way is open for free theoretical reflection. In other words, we render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, so that we can calmly reflect on everything. This experience of the given, non-founded character of customs and social rules entails in itself a kind of distance from them. In the traditional, pre-enlightened universe, the authority of the Law is never experienced as nonsensical and unfounded; on the contrary, the Law is always illuminated by the charismatic power of fascination. Only to the already enlightened view does the universe of social customs and rule appear as a nonsensical 'machine' that must be accepted as such.

Of course, we could say that the principal illusion of the Enlightenment consists in the idea that we can preserve a simple distance from the

external 'machine' of social customs and thus keep the space of our inner reflection spotless, unblemished by the externality of customs. But this criticism does not affect Kant in so far as in his affirmation of the categorical imperative he has taken into account the traumatic, truth-less, non-sensical character of the internal, moral Law itself. The Kantian categorical imperative is precisely a Law which has a necessary, unconditional authority, without being true: it is — in Kant's own words — a kind of 'transcendental fact', a given fact the truth of which cannot be theoretically demonstrated; but its unconditional validity should nonetheless be presupposed for our moral activity to have any sense.

We can contrast this moral Law and the 'pathological', empirically given social laws through a whole set of distinctive features: social laws structure a field of social *reality*, moral Law is the *Real* of an unconditional imperative which takes no consideration of the limitations imposed on us by reality — it is an impossible injunction. 'You can, because you must! [*Du kannst, denn du sollst!*]; social laws pacify our egotism and regulate social homeostasis; moral Law creates imbalance in this homeostasis by introducing an element of unconditional compulsion. The ultimate paradox of Kant is this priority of practical over theoretical reason: we can free ourselves of external social constraints and achieve the maturity proper to the autonomous enlightened subject precisely by submitting to the 'irrational' compulsion of the categorical imperative.

It is a commonplace of Lacanian theory to emphasize how this Kantian moral imperative conceals an obscene superego injunction: 'Enjoy!' — the voice of the Other impelling us to follow our duty for the sake of duty is a traumatic irruption of an appeal to impossible *jouissance*, disrupting the homeostasis of the pleasure principle and its prolongation, the reality principle. This is why Lacan conceives Sade as the truth of Kant: 'Kant avec Sade' (Lacan, 1966). But in what precisely does this obscenity of the moral Law consist? Not in some remnants, leftovers of the empirical 'pathological' contents sticking to the pure form of the Law and smudging it, but *in this form itself*: The moral Law is obscene in so far as it is its form itself which functions as a motivating force driving us to obey its command — that is, in so far as we obey moral Law because it is law and not because of a set of positive reasons: the obscenity of moral Law is the obverse of its formal character.

Of course, the elementary feature of Kant's ethics is to exclude all empirical, 'pathological' contents — in other words, all objects producing pleasure (or displeasure) — as the locus of our moral activity, but

what remains hidden in Kant is the way this renunciation itself produces a certain surplus-enjoyment (the Lacanian *plus-de-jouir*). Let us take the case of Fascism — the Fascist ideology is based upon a purely formal imperative: Obey, because you must. In other words, renounce enjoyment, sacrifice yourself and do not ask about the meaning of it — the value of the sacrifice lies in its very meaningfulness; true sacrifice is for its own end, you must find positive fulfillment in the sacrifice itself, not in its instrumental value: it is this renunciation, this giving up of enjoyment itself, which produces a certain surplus-enjoyment.

This surplus produced through renunciation is the Lacanian *objet petit a*, the embodiment of surplus-enjoyment; here we can also grasp why Lacan coined the notion of surplus-enjoyment on the model of the Marxian notion of surplus-value — with Marx, surplus-value also implies a certain renunciation of 'pathological', empirical use-value. And Fascism is obscene in so far as it perceives directly the ideological form as its own end, as an end in itself — remember Mussolini's famous answer to the question 'How do the Fascists justify their claim to rule Italy? What is their programme?': 'Our programme is very simple: we want to rule Italy!' The ideological power of Fascism lies precisely in the feature which was perceived by liberal or leftist critics as its greater weakness: in the utterly void, formal character of its appeal, in the fact that it demands obedience and sacrifice for their own sake. For Fascist ideology, the point is not the instrumental value of the sacrifice, it is the very form of sacrifice itself, 'the spirit of sacrifice', which is the cure against the liberal-decadent disease. It is also clear why Fascism was so terrified by psychoanalysis: psychoanalysis enables us to locate an obscene enjoyment at work in this act of formal sacrifice.

This is the hidden perverse, obscene dimension of Kantian moral formalism finally appearing in Fascism: it is here that Kantian formalism rejoins — or, more precisely, explicates — the logic of the second of Descartes's maxims of provisional morality:

... that of being as firm and resolute in my actions as I could be, and not to follow less faithfully opinions the most dubious, when my mind was once made up regarding them, than if these had been beyond doubt. In this I should be following the example of travellers, who, finding themselves lost in a forest, know that they ought not to wander first to one side and then to the other; nor, still less, to stop in one place, but understand that they should continue to walk as straight as they can in one direction, not diverging for any slight reason, even though it was possibly chance alone that first deter-

mined them in their choice. By this means if they do not go exactly where they wish, they will at least arrive somewhere at the end, where probably they will be better off than in the middle of a forest. (Descartes, 1976, p. 64)

In this passage, Descartes is in a way revealing the hidden cards of ideology as such: the real aim of ideology is the attitude demanded by it, the consistency of the ideological form, the fact that we 'continue to walk as straight as we can in one direction'; the positive reasons given by ideology to justify this request — to make us obey ideological form — are there only to conceal this fact: in other words, to conceal the surplus-enjoyment proper to the ideological form as such.

Here we could refer to the notion, introduced by Jon Elster, of 'states that are essentially by-products' — that is, states that could be produced only as non-intended, as the side-effect of our activity: as soon as we aim directly at them, as soon as our activity is directly motivated by them, our procedure becomes self-defeating. From a whole series of ideological examples evoked by Elster, let us take Tocqueville's justification of the jury system: 'I do not know whether a jury is useful to the litigants, but I am sure that it is very good for those who have to decide the case. I regard it as one of the most effective means of popular education at society's disposal.' Elster's comment on this is that

... a necessary condition for the jury system to have the educational effects on the jurors for which Tocqueville recommended it is their belief that they are doing something that is worthwhile and important, beyond their own personal development. (Elster, 1982, p. 96)

— in other words, as soon as the jurors become aware that the judicial effects of their work are rather null and that the real point of it is its effect on their own civic spirit — its educational value — *this educational effect is spoilt*.

It is the same with Pascal, with his argument for the religious wager: even if we are wrong in our wager, even if there is no God, my belief in God and my acting upon it will have many beneficial effects in my terrestrial life — I will lead a dignified, calm, moral satisfying life, free of perturbations and doubts. But the point is again that I can achieve this terrestrial profit only if I really believe in God, in the religious beyond, this is probably the hidden, rather cynical logic of Pascal's argument although the real stake of religion is the terrestrial profit achieved by the religious attitude, this gain is a 'stake that is essentially a by-product' — it

can be produced only as a non-intended result of our belief in a religious beyond.

It should be no surprise to us that we find exactly the same argument in Rosa Luxemburg's description of the revolutionary process: at the beginning, the first workers' struggles are doomed to fail, their direct aims cannot be achieved, but although they necessarily end in failure, their overall balance sheet is none the less positive because their main gain is educational — that is to say, they serve the formation of the working class into the revolutionary subject. And again, the point is that if we (the Party) say directly to the fighting workers: 'It does not matter if you fail, the main point of your struggle is its educational effect on you', the educational effect will be lost.

It is as if Descartes, in the quoted passage, is giving us, perhaps for the first time, the pure form of this fundamental Ideological paradox: what is really at stake in ideology is its form, the fact that we continue to walk as straight as we can in one direction, that we follow even the most dubious opinions once our mind has been made up regarding them; but this ideological attitude can be achieved only as a 'state that is essentially by-product': the ideological subjects, 'travellers lost in a forest', must conceal from themselves the fact that 'it was possibly chance alone that first determined them in their choice'; they must believe that their decision is well founded, that it will lead to their Goal. As soon as they perceive that *the real goal is the consistency of the ideological attitude itself*, the effect is self-defeating. We can see how ideology works in a way exactly opposed to the popular idea of Jesuit morals: the aim here is to justify the means.

Why must this inversion of the relation of aim and means remain hidden, why is its revelation self-defeating? Because it would reveal the enjoyment which is at work in ideology, in the ideological renunciation itself. In other words, it would reveal that ideology serves only its own purpose, that it does not serve anything — which is precisely the Lacanian definition of *jouissance*.

PART II

Lack in the Other
