TARRYING with the NEGATIVE

Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology

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The most sublime image that emerged in the political upheavals of the last years—and the term "sublime" is to be conceived here in the strictest Kantian sense—was undoubtedly the unique picture from the time of the violent overthrow of Ceaușescu in Romania: the rebels waving the national flag with the red star, the Communist symbol, cut out, so that instead of the symbol standing for the organizing principle of the national life, there was nothing but a hole in its center. It is difficult to imagine a more salient index of the "open" character of a historical situation "in its becoming," as Kierkegaard would have put it, of that intermediate phase when the former Master-Signifier, although it has already lost the hegemonical power, has not yet been replaced by the new one. The sublime enthusiasm this picture bears witness to is in no way affected by the fact that we now know how the events were actually manipulated (ultimately it had to do with a coup of Securitate, the Communist secret police, against itself, against its own signifier: that is, the old apparatus survived by casting off its symbolic clothing): for us as well as for most of the participants themselves, all this became visible in retrospect, and what really matters is that the masses who poured into the streets of Bucharest "experienced" the situation as "open," that they participated in the unique intermediate state of passage from one discourse (social link) to another, when, for a brief, passing moment, the hole in the big Other, the symbolic order, became visible. The enthusiasm which carried them was literally the enthusiasm over this hole, not yet hegemonized by any positive ideological project; all ideological appropria-
Derrida remains thoroughly a "transcendental" philosopher: notions like difference, supplement, etc., endeavor to provide an answer to the question of the "conditions of possibility" of the philosophical discourse. That is to say, the strategy of the Derridean "deconstruction" is not to dilute philosophical stringency in the unrestrained playfulness of "writing," but to undermine the philosophical procedure by means of its most rigorous self-application: its aim is to demonstrate that the "condition of impossibility" of a philosophical system (i.e., what, within the horizon of this system, appears as the hindrance to be surmounted, the secondary moment to be subdued) actually functions as its inherent condition of possibility (there is no pure logos without writing, no origin without its supplement, etc.). And why should we not also claim for Lacan the title of "transcendental philosopher"? Is not his entire work an endeavor to answer the question of how desire is possible? Does he not offer a kind of "critique of pure desire," of the pure faculty of desiring? Are not all his fundamental concepts so many keys to the enigma of desire? Desire is constituted by "symbolic castration," the original loss of the Thing: the void of this loss is filled out by objet petit a, the fantasy-object; this loss occurs on account of our being "embedded" in the symbolic universe which derrails the "natural" circuit of our needs; etc., etc.

This thesis that Lacan is essentially a philosopher seems nonetheless all too hazardous, since it blatantly contradicts Lacan's repeated statements which explicitly dismiss philosophy as a version of the "discourse of the Master." Did Lacan not emphasize again and again the radically antiphilosophical character of his teaching, up to the pathetic "Je m'insurge contre la philosophie" from the last years of his life? However, things get complicated the moment we recall that it is already the post-Hegelian philosophy itself which, in its three main branches (analytical philosophy, phenomenology, Marxism), conceives of itself as "antiphilosophy," "not-anymore-philosophy." In his German Ideology, Marx mockingly observes that philosophy relates to "actual life" as masturbation to sexual act: the positivist tradition claims to replace philosophy (metaphysics) with the scientific analysis of concepts; the Heideggerian phenomenologists endeavor to "pass through philosophy" toward the post-philosophical "thought." In short, what is today practiced as "philosophy" are precisely different attempts to "deconstruct" something referred to as the classical philosophical corpus ("metaphysics," "logocentrism," etc.). One is therefore tempted to risk the hypothesis that what Lacan's "antiphilosophy"
opposites is this very philosophy qua antiphilosophy: what if Lacan's own theoretical practice involves a kind of return to philosophy?

According to Alain Badiou, we live today in the age of the "new sophists." The two crucial breaks in the history of philosophy, Plato's and Kant's, occurred as a reaction to new relativistic attitudes which threatened to demolish the traditional corpus of knowledge: in Plato's case, the logical argumentation of the sophists undermined the mythical foundations of the traditional mores; in Kant's case, empiricists (such as Hume) undermined the foundations of the Leibnizean-Wolffian rationalist metaphysics. In both cases, the solution offered is not a return to the traditional attitude but a new founding gesture which "beats the sophists at their own game," i.e., which surmounts the relativism of the sophists by way of its own radicalization (Plato accepts the argumentative procedure of the sophists; Kant accepts Hume's burial of the traditional metaphysics). And it is our hypothesis that Lacan opens up the possibility of another repetition of the same gesture. That is to say, the "postmodern theory" which predominates today is a mixture of neopragmatism and deconstruction best epitomized by names such as Rorty or Lyotard; their works emphasize the "anti-essentialist" refusal of universal foundation, the dissolving of "truth" into an effect of plural language-games, the relativization of its scope to historically specified intersubjective community, etc., etc. Isolated desperate endeavors of a "postmodern" return to the Sacred are quickly reduced to just another language game, to another way we "tell stories about ourselves." Lacan, however, is not part of this "postmodern theory": in this respect, his position is homologous to that of Plato or Kant. The perception of Lacan as an "anti-essentialist" or "deconstructionist" falls prey to the same illusion as that of perceiving Plato as just one among the sophists. Plato accepts from the sophists their logic of discursive argumentation, but uses it to affirm his commitment to Truth; Kant accepts the breakdown of the traditional metaphysics, but uses it to perform his transcendental turn, along the same lines. Lacan accepts the "deconstructionist" motif of radical contingency, but turns this motif against itself, using it to assert his commitment to Truth as contingent. For that very reason, deconstructionists and neopragmatists, in dealing with Lacan, are always bothered by what they perceive as some remainder of "essentialism" (in the guise of "phallogocentrism," etc.)—as if Lacan were uncannily close to them, but somehow not "one of them."

To ask "Is Lacan one among the postmodern new sophists?" is to pose a question far beyond the tedium of a specialized academic discussion. One is tempted to risk a hyperbole and to affirm that, in a sense, everything from the fate of so-called "Western civilization" up to the survival of humanity in the ecological crisis, hangs on the answer to this related question: is it possible today, apropos of the postmodern age of new sophists, to repeat mutatis mutandis the Kantian gesture?
"I or He or It (the Thing) Which Thinks"

The Noir Subject...

One way to take note of the historical gap separating the 1980s from the 1950s is to compare the classic film noir to the new wave of noir in the eighties. What I have in mind here are not primarily direct or indirect remakes (the two DOA's: Against All Odds as a remake of Out of the Past; Body Heat as a remake of Double Indemnity: No Way Out as a remake of The Big Clock, etc., up to Basic Instinct as a distant remake of Vertigo) but rather those films which endeavor to resuscitate the noir universe by way of combining it with another genre. As if noir today is a vampirelike entity which, in order to survive, needs an influx of fresh blood from other sources. Two cases are exemplary here: Alan Parker's Angel Heart, which combines noir with the occult-supernatural, and Ridley Scott's Blade Runner, which combines noir with science fiction.

Cinema theory has for a long time been haunted by the question: is noir a genre of its own or a kind of anamorphic distortion affecting different genres? From the very beginning, noir was not limited to hard-boiled detective stories: reverberations of noir motifs are easily discernible in comedies (Arsenic and Old Lace), in westerns (Pursued), in political and social dramas (All the King's Men, The Lost Weekend), etc. Do we have here a secondary impact of something that originally constitutes a genre of its own (the noir crime universe), or is the crime film only one of the possible fields of application of the noir logic? That is, is noir a predicate that entertains toward the crime universe the same relationship as toward
comedy or western, a kind of logical operator introducing the same ana-
morphic distortion in every genre to which it is applied, so that finding its
strongest application in the crime film turns on nothing but historical
contingency? To raise these questions in no way means indulging in hair-
splitting sophistry: our thesis is that the "proper," detective noir as it were
arrives at its truth—in Hegelese: realizes its notion—only by way of its
fusion with another genre, specifically science fiction or the occult.

What, then, do Blade Runner and Angel Heart have in common? Both
films deal with memory and subverted personal identity: the hero, the
hard-boiled investigator, is sent on a quest whose final outcome involves
discovering that he himself was from the very beginning implicated in the
object of his quest. In Angel Heart, he ascertains that the dead singer he was
looking for is none other than himself (in an occult ritual performed long
ago, he exchanged hearts and souls with an ex-soldier, who he now thinks
he is). In Blade Runner, he is after a group of replicants at large in L.A. of
2012; upon accomplishing his mission, he is told that he is himself a repli-
cant. The outcome of the quest is therefore in both cases the radical
undermining of self-identity masteredmind by a mysterious, all-powerful
agency, in the first case the Devil himself ("Louis Cipher"), in the second
case the Tyrell corporation, which succeeded in fabricating replicants un-
aware of their replicant status, i.e., replicants misperceiving themselves as
humans. The world depicted in both films is the world in which the corpo-
rate Capital succeeded in penetrating and dominating the very fantasy-
kernel of our being; none of our features is really "ours"; even our memo-
ries and fantasies are artificially planted. It is as if Fredric Jameson's thesis on
postmodernism as the epoch in which Capital colonizes the last resorts
hitherto excluded from its circuit is here brought to its hyperbolic conclu-
sion: the fusion of Capital and Knowledge brings about a new type of
proletarian, as it were the absolute proletarian bereft of the last pockets
of private resistance; everything, up to the most intimate memories, is
planted, so that what remains is now literally the void of pure sub stanceless
subjectivity (substanlose Subjektivität—Marx’s definition of the proletar-
ian). Ironically, one might say that Blade Runner is a film about the emer-
gence of class consciousness.

This truth is concealed, in one film metaphorically, in the other me-
tonymically: in Angel Heart, corporate Capital is substituted by the met-
aphorical figure of the Devil, whereas in Blade Runner, a metonymical imped-
iment prevents the film from carrying out its inherent logic. That is to say,
the director's cut of Blade Runner differs in two crucial features from the
version released in 1982: there is no voiceover, and at the end, Deckard
(Harrison Ford) discovers that he also is a replicant.1 But even in the two
released versions, especially in the version released in 1992, a whole series of
features points toward Deckard's true status: strong accent falls on the
visual parallelism between Deckard and Leon Kowalski, a replicant ques-
tioned in the Tyrell building at the beginning of the film; after Deckard
proves to Rachael (Sean Young) that she is a replicant by quoting her most
intimate child-recollections she did not share with anyone, the camera
provides a brief survey of his personal mythologies (old childhood pictures
on the piano, his dream-recollected of a unicorn), with a clear implication
that they also are fabricated, not "true" memories or dreams, so that when
Rachael mockingly asks him if he also underwent the replicant test, the
question resounds with ominous undertones: the patronizing-cynical atti-

dude of the policeman who serves as Deckard's contact to the police chief,
as well as the fact that he makes small paper models of unicorns, clearly in-
dicates his awareness that Deckard is a replicant (and we can safely surmise
that in the true director's cut he viciously informs Deckard of this fact). The
paradox here is that the subversive effect (the blurring of the line of distinc-
tion between humans and androids) hinges on the narrative closure, on the
loop by means of which the beginning metaphorically augurs the end
(when, at the beginning of the film, Deckard replays the tape of Kowalski's
interrogation, he is yet unaware that at the end he will himself occupy
Kowalski's place), whereas the evasion of the narrative closure (in the 1982
version, the hints of Deckard's replicant status are barely perceptible)
functions as a conformist compromise which cuts off the subversive edge.

How, then, are we to diagnose the position of the hero at the end of his
quest, after the recovery of memory deprives him of his very self-identity? It
is here that the gap separating the classical noir from the noir of the eighties
emerges in its purest form. Today, even the mass media is aware of the
extent to which our perception of reality, including the reality of our
innermost self-experience, depends upon symbolic fictions. Suffice it to
quote from a recent issue of Time magazine: "Stories are precious, indispensible.
Everyone must have his history, her narrative. You do not know
who you are until you possess the imaginative version of yourself. You
almost do not exist without it." Classical noirs remain within these con-
fines: they abound with cases of amnesia in which the hero does not know
who he is or what he did during his blackout. Yet amnesia is here a
deficiency measured by the standard of integration into the field of intersubjectivity, of symbolic community: a successful recollection means that, by way of organizing his life-experience into a consistent narrative, the hero exorcizes the dark demons of the past. But in the universe of Blade Runner or Angel Heart, recollection designates something incomparably more radical: the total loss of the hero’s symbolic identity. He is forced to assume that he is not what he thought himself to be, but somebody-something else. For that reason, the “director’s cut” of Blade Runner is fully justified in dispensing with the voice-off of Deckard (homophonous with Descartes): in the noir universe, the voice-off narrative realizes the integration of the subject’s experience into the big Other, the field of intersubjective symbolic tradition.

One of the commonplaces about the classic noir sets its philosophical background in French existentialism; however, in order to grasp the implications of the radical shift at work in the noir of the eighties, one has to reach back farther, to the Cartesian-Kantian problematic of the subject qua pure, substanceless “I think.”

...Out of Joint

Descartes was the first to introduce a crack in the ontologically consistent universe: contracting absolute certainty to the punctum of “I think” opens up, for a brief moment, the hypothesis of Evil Genius (le malin génie) who, behind my back, dominates me and pulls the strings of what I experience as “reality”—the prototype of the Scientist-Maker who creates an artificial man. from Dr. Frankenstein to Tyrell in Blade Runner. However, by reducing his cogito to res cogitans, Descartes, as it were, patches up the wound he cut into the texture of reality. Only Kant fully articulates the inherent paradoxes of self-consciousness. What Kant’s “transcendental turn” renders manifest is the impossibility of locating the subject in the “great chain of being,” into the Whole of the universe—all those notions of the universe as a harmonious Whole in which every element has its own place (today, they abound in ecological ideology). In contrast to it, subject is in the most radical sense “out of joint”: it constitutively lacks its own place, which is why Lacan designates it by the mathem $\mathbb{S}$, the “barred” $S$.

In Descartes, this “out of joint” state is still concealed. The Cartesian universe stays within the confines of what Foucault, in his The Order of Things, called “classical episteme,” that epistemological field regulated by

the problematic of representations—their causal enchainment, their clarity and evidence, the connection between representation and represented content, etc. Upon reaching the point of absolute certainty in cogito ergo sum, Descartes does not yet conceive of the cogito as correlative to the whole of reality, i.e., as the point external to reality, exempted from it, which delineates reality’s horizon (in the sense of Wittgenstein’s well-known Tractatus metaphor on the eye that can never be part of the seen reality). Rather than the autonomous agent which “spontaneously” constitutes the objective world opposed to itself, the Cartesian cogito is a representation which, by following the inherent notional enchainment, leads us to other, superior representations. The subject first ascertains that cogito is a representation which belongs to an inherently deficient being (doubt is a sign of imperfection); as such, it entails the representation of a perfect being free of incertitude. Since it is obvious that a deficient, inferior entity or representation cannot be the cause of a superior entity or representation, the perfect being (God) had to exist. The veracious nature of God furthermore assures the reliability of our representations of external reality, and so forth. In Descartes’ final vision of the universe, cogito is therefore just one among many representations in an intricate totality: part of reality and not yet (or, in Hegelese, only “in itself”) correlative to the whole of reality.

What, then, marks the break between Descartes’ cogito and Kant’s “I” of transcendental apperception? The key to it is offered by Kant’s Wittgensteian remark, aimed at Descartes, that it is not legitimate to use “I think” as a complete phrase, since it calls for a continuation—“I think that . . . (it will rain, you are right, we shall win . . .).” According to Kant, Descartes falls prey to the “subversion of the hypostasized consciousness”: he wrongly concludes that, in the empty “I think” which accompanies every representation of an object, we get hold of a positive phenomenal entity, res cogitans (a “small piece of the world,” as Husserl put it), which thinks and is transparent to itself in its capacity to think. In other words, self-consciousness renders self-present and self-transparent the “thing” in me which thinks. What is lost thereby is the topological discord between the form “I think” and the substance which thinks, i.e., the distinction between the analytical proposition on the identity of the logical subject of thought, contained in “I think,” and the synthetical proposition on the identity of a person qua thinking thing-substance. By articulating this distinction, Kant logically precedes Descartes: he brings to light a kind of “ vanishing media-
tor,” a moment which has to disappear if the Cartesian *res cogitans* is to emerge (CPR, A 354–56). This Kantian distinction is revived by Lacan in the guise of the distinction between the subject of the enunciation (sujet de l’énunciation) and the subject of the enunciated (sujet de l’énoncé): the Lacanian subject of the enunciation ($S$) is also an empty, nonsubstantial logical variable (not function), whereas the subject of the enunciated (the “person”) consists of the fantasmatic “stuff” which fills out the void of $S$.

This gap which separates the empirical I’s self-experience from the I of transcendental apperception coincides with the distinction between existence qua experiential reality and existence qua logical construction, i.e., existence in the mathematical sense (“there exists an $X$ which . . .”). The status of Kant’s I of transcendental apperception is that of a necessary and simultaneously impossible logical construction (“impossible” in the precise sense that its notion can never be filled out with intuited experiential reality), in short: of the Lacanian real. Descartes’ error was precisely to confuse experiential reality with logical construction qua the real-impossible.

Kant’s reasoning is here far more refined than it may appear. In order to appreciate fully its finesses, one has to make use of Lacan’s formula of fantasy ($\emptyset \circ a$): “I think” only insofar as I am inaccessible to myself qua noumenal Thing which thinks. The Thing is originally lost and the fantasy-object ($a$) fills out its void (in this precise Kantian sense Lacan remarks that $a$ is “the stuff of the I”).7 The act of “I think” is trans-phenomenal, it is not an object of inner experience or intuition; yet for all that, it is not a noumenal Thing, but rather the void of its lack: it is not sufficient to say about the I of pure apperception that “of it, apart from them [the thoughts which are its predicates], we cannot have any concept whatsoever” (CPR, A 346). One has to add that this lack of intuited content is constitutive of the I; the inaccessibility to the I of its own “kernel of being” makes it an I.8 This is what Kant is not quite clear about, which is why he again and again yields to the temptation of conceiving of the relationship between the I of pure apperception and the I of self-experience as the relationship between a Thing in itself and an experiential phenomenon.9

When, consequently, Kant remarks that, “in the synthetic original unity of apperception, I am conscious of myself, not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am” (CPR, B 157), the first thing one has to notice here is the fundamental paradox of this formulation: I encounter being devoid of all determinations-of-thought at the very moment when, by way of the utmost abstraction, I confine myself to the empty form of thought which accompanies every representation of mine. Thus, the empty form of thought coincides with being, which lacks any formal determination-of-thought. Here, however, where Kant seems at his closest to Descartes, the distance that separates them is infinite: in Kant, this coincidence of thought and being in the act of self-consciousness in no way implies access to myself qua thinking substance: “Through this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of the thoughts = X. It is known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatsoever” (CPR, A 346). In short: we can provide no possible answer to the question “How is the Thing which thinks structured?” The paradox of self-consciousness is that it is possible only against the background of its own impossibility: I am conscious of myself only insofar as I am out of reach to myself qua the real kernel of my being (“I or he or it (the thing) which thinks”). I cannot acquire consciousness of myself in my capacity of the “Thing which thinks.”10 In Blade Runner, Deckard, after learning that Rachael is a replicant who (mis)perceives herself as human, asks in astonishment: “How can it not know what it is?” We can see, now, how much more than two hundred years ago, Kant’s philosophy outlined an answer to this enigma: the very notion of self-consciousness implies the subject’s self-decenterment, which is far more radical than the opposition between subject and object. This is what Kant’s theory of metaphysics ultimately is about: metaphysics endeavors to heal the wound of the “primordial repression” (the inaccessibility of the “Thing which thinks”) by allocating to the subject a place in the “great chain of being.” What metaphysics fails to notice is the price to be paid for this allocation: the loss of the very capacity it wanted to account for, i.e., human freedom. Kant himself commits an error when, in his Critique of Practical Reason, he conceives of freedom (the postulate of practical reason) as a noumenal Thing; what gets obfuscated thereby is his fundamental insight according to which I retain my capacity of a spontaneous-autonomous agent precisely and only insofar as I am not accessible to myself as a Thing.

On closer examination, what makes up the inconsistencies which emerge when the I of pure apperception is identified with the noumenal Self (the “Thing which thinks”)? As Henry Allison puts it in his perspicuous summary of Strawson’s critique of Kant,11 in the case of this identification, the phenomenal I (the empirical subject) has to be conceived of simultaneously as something which (in the guise of an object of experience)
appears to the noumenal subject and as the appearance of the noumenal subject. That is to say, everything that appears as part of the constituted reality appears to the transcendental subject (which is here conceived as identical with the noumenal subject); on the other hand, the empirical subject is, as is the case with every intuited reality, a phenomenal appearance of some noumenal entity in this case, of the noumenal subject. This doubling, however, is a nonsensical, self-canceling short-circuit: if the noumenal subject appears to itself, the distance that separates appearance from noumena falls away. The agency which perceives something as an appearance cannot itself be an appearance. In such a case, we find ourselves in the nonsensical vicious circle described by Alphonse Allais, where two appearances mutually recognize themselves as appearances (Raoul and Marguerite make an appointment at a masked ball; in a secret corner, they both take off their masks and utter a cry of surprise—Raoul, since his partner is not Marguerite, and Marguerite, since her partner is not Raoul). Thus, the only way out of this impasse is to distinguish between the I of pure apperception and the Thing which-thinks: what I experience, what is given to me phenomenally in my intuition, the content of my person (the object of empirical psychology), is, of course, as with every phenomenon, the appearing of a Thing (in this case of the Thing which-thinks), but this Thing cannot be the I of pure apperception, the transcendental subject to whom the “Thing which thinks” appears as the empirical I.

With this crucial point in mind, we can give a precise account of the difference between the inaccessibility of the noumenal Self and of any object of perception. When Kant says that the transcendental subject “is known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatsoever” (CPR, A 346), does not the same also hold true for the table in front of me, for example? The table is also known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatsoever. However, due to the above described self-referential doubling of the appearing in the case of the I, “I think” must also remain empty on the phenomenal level. The I’s apperception is by definition devoid of any intuitional content: it is an empty representation which carves a hole into the field of representations. To put it concisely: Kant is compelled to define the I of transcendental apperception as neither phenomenal nor noumenal because of the paradox of auto-affection: if I were given to myself phenomenally, as an object of experience, I would simultaneously have to be given to myself noumenally.

Another way to arrive at the same result is via the duality of discursive and intuitive intellect: on account of his finitude, the subject disposes only of discursive intellect. He is affected by things-in-themselves, and he makes use of the discursive intellect (the network of formal transcendental categories) to structure the multitude of formless affects into objective reality: this structuring is his own “spontaneous,” autonomous act. If the subject were to possess intuitive intellect, it would fill out the abyss which separates intellect from intuition and would thus gain access to things as they are in themselves. However, “while I can coherently, if vacuously, claim that if I had an intuitive instead of a discursive intellect, I could know other things (objects) as they are in themselves, I cannot similarly claim that I could know myself as object in my capacity as a spontaneous, thinking subject.” Why not? If I were to possess an intuition of myself qua “Thing which thinks,” i.e., if I were to have an access to my noumenal Self, I would thereby lose the very feature which makes me an I of pure apperception; I would cease to be the spontaneous transcendental agent that constitutes reality.

The same paradox repeats itself apropos of the transcendental object qua correlate to the I of pure apperception. That is to say, how does Kant arrive at the notion of transcendental object? Why can’t he get by with transcendental categories on the one hand and the affects which bear witness to our being acted upon by Things-in-themselves on the other hand? The “transcendental object, that is, the completely indeterminate thought of something in general,” has the function of conferring “upon all our empirical concepts in general relation to an object, that is, objective validity” (CPR, A 109). In other words, without this paradoxical object which “can be thought only as something in general = X” (CPR, A 109), the difference between formal and transcendental logic would fall off, that is, the table of a priori categories would remain a mere formal-logical network, bereft of the transcendental power to constitute “objective reality.” Transcendental object is the form of the object in general by means of a reference to which a priori categories synthesize the multitude of sensible intuitions into the representation of a unified object: it marks the point at which the general form of every possible object reverts to the empty representation of the “object in general.” For that reason, the notion of the transcendental object undermines the standard Kantian distinction between the formless stuff which descends from the transcendental Thing (sensible affects which bear witness to how the subject is passively affected by some noumenal entities), and the transcendental form by means of which the subject molds this
intuited stuff into “reality”: it is an object entirely “created” by the subject, the “unity which thought projects in front of itself as the shadow of an object,” an intelligible form which is its own stuff. As such, it is the semblance of an object, i.e., strincto sensu a metonymical object: the space for it is opened up by the simultaneous (actual) finitude and (potential) infinitude of our experience. The transcendental object gives a body to the gap which forever separates the universal formal-transcendental frame of “empty” categories from the finite scope of our actual experience. of the affects that provide our intuition with positive content. Its function is thus eminently anti-Humean, anti-skeptical: it guarantees that transcendental categories will refer to all possible future objects of experience. This distinction between Ding-an-sich and the transcendental object corresponds perfectly to the Lacanian distinction between the Real qua Ding and objet petit a: the latter is precisely such a metonymical object which gives a body, to the lack of positive objects.15

Apropos of “the transcendental object, that is, the completely indeterminate thought of something in general.” Kant says: “This cannot be entitled the noemenon; for I know nothing of what it is in itself, and have no concept of it save as merely the object of a sensible intuition in general” (CPA, A 253). In a first approach, Kant seems to contradict his own basic premise. citing as proof of the non-noumenal status of the transcendental object the fact that we know nothing of what it is in itself: isn’t this unknowableness the very definition of the noumenal object? However, this apparent inconsistency is easily dispelled by taking into account the precise nature of the transcendental object:16 insofar as it gives body to the object in general, i.e., insofar as it functions as a metonymical place-holder of the objectivity in whole, it is an object which, if given to me in intuition, would simultaneously have to be given to me as it is in itself. (We may recall that herein also lies the fundamental feature of the I of pure apperception: its representation is empty since, were it to be given phenomenally, it would also be given noumenally.)17

From Kant to Hegel

This ambiguity of Kant’s concerning the transcendental object (Kant oscillates between conceiving of it as a Thing and as something which is neither phenomenal nor noumenal) is the reverse of the ambiguity concerning the transcendental subject; and, furthermore, it is not a simple default whose correction would enable us to formulate the “proper” Kantian theory, but a necessary equivocality whose roots became visible only with hindsight, from a Hegelian perspective: if we choose any of the two poles of the alternative, Kant’s system in its entirety disintegrates. That is to say, if, on the one hand, we stick to the identification of the transcendental I with the noumenal Thing-Self, the noumenal Self phenomenally appears to itself, which means that the difference between phenomena and noumena dissolves—“I” becomes the singular subject-object given to itself in the “intellectual intuition,” the “eye which sees itself” (the step accomplished by Fichte and Schelling, but unconditionally prohibited by Kant: intellektuelle Anschauung as the “absolute starting-point” of philosophizing). If, on the other hand, the I of apperception—this autonomous agent of the constitution of reality—is not a noumenal Thing, then the difference between phenomena and noumena again dissolves, yet in a wholly different way: in Hegel’s way. What we have to bear in mind here is that Hegel rejects the very notion of “intellectual intuition” as an inadequate, “immediate” synthesis, i.e., that he remains thoroughly Kantian in his insistence on the irreducible gap that separates discursive intellect (the level of the Notion) from intuition. Far from simply healing the Kantian split, Hegel even radicalizes it—how?

At this point, it is advisable to forget the standard textbook phrases on Hegel’s “absolute idealism” in which—or so the story goes—the Notion’s self-movement overcomes formalism by generating the entire content out of itself and thus becoming able to dispense with the external instigation of the Thing-in-itself. Instead of directly plunging into such “fundamental Hegelian propositions,” let us rather return to the Kantian duality of the transcendental network of categories and of Things-in-themselves: transcendental categories mold the affects which originate in noumenal things into “objective reality.” However, as we have already seen, the problem lies in the radical finitude of the affects: they are never “all,” since the totality of affects is never given to us; if this totality were to be given, we would have access to Things-in-themselves. At this precise point, Hegel’s critique of Kantian “formalism” intervenes: he identifies as the site of insufficiency not the finite nature of affects, but the abstract character of thought itself. The very need for affects (i.e., for a heterogeneous material to provide content to our intellect) bears witness to the fact that our thought is abstract-formal, that it has not yet achieved the level of what Hegel calls “absolute form.”

This way, the transcendental object radically changes its function: from
the index of a deficiency on the side of intuition—i.e., of the fact that our representations are forever branded by our finitude, that the world of intuited objects is never given in its totality—it shifts into the index of the deficiency of the very discursive form. In this precise sense Hegel's "absolute idealism" is nothing but the Kantian "criticism" brought to its utmost consequences: "there is no metalanguage": it is never possible for us to occupy the neutral place from which we could measure the distance that separates our semblance of knowledge from the In-itself of Truth. In short, Hegel carries to its extreme Kant's criticism at the very point where he seems to regress into absolute "panlogicism": by way of affirming that every tension between Notion and reality, every relationship of the Notion to what appears as its irreducible Other encountered in the sensible, extra-notional experience, already is an intra-notional tension, i.e., already implies a minimal notional determination of this "otherness." The most obvious example of this notional determination, of course, is the empirist counterposition of primary (shape) and secondary (color, taste) qualities of the perceived object: the subject has in itself the measure which allows him to distinguish between what are merely its "subjective impressions" and what "objectively exists." Yet the same goes for the Kantian Thing-in-itself: how does the subject arrive at it? In abstracting from every sensible determination that pertains to the objects of experience, what remains is the object of pure abstraction, the pure "thing-of-thought" (Gedankending). In short, our search for a pure presupposition, unaffected by the subject's spontaneous activity, produces an entity which is pure positedness.

Therein consists Hegel's "idealist" wager: what appears in and to our experience as the extra-notional surplus, as the "otherness" of the object irreducible to the subject's notional framework, impenetrable to it, is always-already the fetishistic, "reified" (mis)perception of an inconsistency of the notion to itself. In this sense, Hegel points out, in his Introduction to Phenomenology of Spirit, how the very measure we use to test the truth of our knowledge-claims is always caught in the process of testing: if our knowledge is proved inadequate, if it does not fit our measure of what counts as True, then we must not only exchange our knowledge for its more adequate form, but we must simultaneously replace the very measuring rod of Truth, the In-itself which our knowledge failed to attain. Hegel's point is not a delirious solipsism, but rather a simple insight into how we—finite, historical subjects—forever lack any measuring-rod which would guarantee our contact with the Thing itself. The dogmatic-rationalist intuition of eternal Truths, the empiricist sensible perceptions, the a priori categorial framework of the transcendental reflection, or—two examples whose value is not purely historical, since they indicate positions still claimed by contemporary philosophy—the phenomenological notion of Lebenswelt (life-world) as the always-already presupposed foundation of our reasoning, and the intersubjective speech-community, all are false attempts to break the vicious circle of what Hegel called "experience."

In a first approach, what Hegel accomplishes here may strike us as a simple reversal of Kant: instead of the gap separating forever the subject from the substantial Thing, we get their identity (the Absolute qua substance = subject). Hegel is nonetheless the most consequential of Kantians: the Hegelian subject—i.e., what Hegel designates as absolute, self-relating negativity—is nothing but the very gap which separates phenomena from the Thing, the abyss beyond phenomena conceived in its negative mode, i.e., the purely negative gesture of limiting phenomena without providing any positive content which would fill out the space beyond the limit. For that reason, we must be very attentive if we are not to miss what Hegel has in mind when he insists that the Absolute has to be conceived also as subject, not only as substance: the standard notion of the gradual becoming-subject of the substance (of the "active" subject leaving its "imprint" on the substance, molding it, mediating it, expressing in it his subjective content) is here doubly misleading. First, we must bear in mind that with Hegel this subjectivization of the object never "turns out": there is always a remainder of the substance which eludes the grasp of "subjective mediation" and far from being a simple impediment preventing the subject's full actualization, this remainder is stricto sensu correlative to the very being of the subject. We reach thereby one of the possible definitions of objet a: that surplus of the Substance, that "bone," which resists subjectivization; objet a is correlative to the subject in its very radical incommensurability with it. Secondly, we have the opposite notion according to which the subject is that very "nothing," the purely formal void which is left over after the substantial content has wholly "passed over" into its predicates-determinations: in the "subjectivization" of Substance, its compact In-itself is dissolved into the multitude of its particular predicates-determinations, of its "beings-for-other," and "subject" is that very X, the empty form of a "container," which remains after all its content was "subjectivized." These two conceptions are strictly correlative, i.e., "subject" and "object" are the two left-overs of this same process, or, rather, the two sides of the same left-
over conceived either in the modality of form (subject) or in the modality of content, of “stuff” (object): a is the “stuff” of the subject qua empty form.

The Nonequivalent Exchange

The same paradox pertains to the Hegelian notion of infinite judgment in its opposition to negative judgment.21 With reference to the infamous thesis on “determinate negation,” one would expect negative judgment to succeed infinite judgment as a “higher,” more concrete form of dialectical unity-within-difference: by affirming a non-predicate, the infinite judgment merely posits an abstract, wholly indeterminate, empty Beyond, whereas negative judgment negates positive judgment in a determinate way (i.e., by saying that a thing is an object of nonsensible intuition, we not only abstractly negate one of its predicates, we also invert abstract negation into positive determination: we delineate the field of “nonsensible intuition” as that to which the thing in question belongs). For Hegel, however, it is infinite judgment with its abstract, indeterminate negation which brings forth the “truth” of negative judgment—why? Perhaps what offers a key to this enigma is the logic of exchange at work here: negative judgment remains within the confines of an “equivalent exchange”: implicitly at least, we get something in exchange for what we renounce (by saying that a thing is “an object of nonsensible intuition,” we obtain in exchange for the loss of the domain of sensible intuition another positively determined domain, that of nonsensible intuition), whereas in the case of infinite judgment the loss is pure: we get nothing in exchange.

Let us examine more closely the paradigmatic case of this logic of exchange, the dialectic of Bildung (culture-education) in the chapter on Spirit from the Phenomenology of Spirit.22 The starting point of this dialectic is the state of extreme alienation, of the splitting of subject and substance, which are here opposed under the guises of “noble consciousness” and the State. As a matter of fact, this very opposition already results from an implicit act of exchange: in exchange for his utter alienation (for his yielding all substantial content to the Other, to the State), the subject—self-consciousness—receives honor (the honor of serving the common Good embodied in the State). Between these two extremes a process of exchange/mediation takes place: the “noble consciousness” alienates its pure For itself (its silent honorable serving of the State) in language qua medium of the universality of thought (flattery to the Monarch, the head of the State); in exchange for this alienation, substance itself accomplishes a first step toward its “subjectivization,” i.e., it changes from the unattainable State, abstractly opposed to us, into wealth qua substantial content which already is at our disposal (money we get for flattering the Monarch). On the other hand, Substance itself (the State) is not only subordinated to the subjectivity of self-consciousness via its transformation into wealth: in exchange for this subordination, it acquires itself the form of subjectivity—the impersonal State is replaced by the absolute Monarchy; it becomes identified with the person of the Monarch (“L’Etat, c’est moi.”). Throughout the entire dialectic of Bildung, the appearance of an equivalent exchange between subject (self-consciousness) and substance is thus maintained: in exchange for his increasing alienation, for sacrificing a further substantial part of himself, the subject receives honor, wealth, the language of Spirit and insight, the heaven of Faith, the Utility of the Enlightenment. However, when we reach the apogee of this dialectic, “absolute freedom,” the exchange between the particular and the universal Will, the subject “gets nothing in exchange for everything.” He “passes into an empty nothing”; his alienation becomes an abstract negation which offers no positive, determinate content in exchange. (The historical epoch which stands for this moment of “absolute freedom” is, of course, the Jacobinical Reign of Terror, in which, for no apparent reason, I could be proclaimed traitor and have my head cut off at any moment: the chapter on Spirit encompasses the entire spiritual development of Europe from the medi eval feudal state to the French Revolution.) Yet it is precisely this falling apart of the appearance of a symmetrical, balanced exchange that makes possible the speculative-dialectical reversal: self-consciousness has only to become aware of how this Nothingness which appears to a particular Will as an abstract, opposed, external threat coincides with its own force of negativity; it has to internalize this force of negativity and recognize in it its own essence, the very kernel of its own being. “Subject” emerges at this very point of utterly meaningless voidance brought about by a negativity which explodes the frame of balanced exchange. That is to say, what is “subject” if not the infinite power of absolute negativity/mediation: in contrast to a mere biological life, self-consciousness contains in itself its own negation, it maintains itself by way of negative self-relating. This way, we pass from absolute freedom (of the revolutionary citoyen) into “the Spirit certain of itself” epitomized by the Kantian moral subject: the external negativity of the revolutionary Terror is internalized into the power of
moral Law, into the pure Knowledge and Will qua Universality, which is not something externally opposed to the subject but something which constitutes the very axis of his self-certainty: "Free Will" is a Will that acts in accordance with the universal moral Law, not in accordance with particular ("pathological") motivations which enslave it to the world of objects. Here is the passage from Phenomenology which recapitulates this movement:

In the world of culture (Bildung) itself, it [self-consciousness] does not get as far as to behold its negation or alienation in this form of pure abstraction: on the contrary, its negation is filled with a content, either honour or wealth, which it gains in place of the self that it has alienated from itself; or the language of Spirit and insight which the disrupted consciousness acquires; or it is the heaven of faith, or the Utility of the Enlightenment. All these determinations have vanished in the loss suffered by the self in absolute freedom: its negation is the death that is without meaning, the sheer terror of the negative that contains nothing positive, nothing that fills it with a content. At the same time, however, this negation in its real existence is not something alien: it is neither the universal inaccessible necessity in which the ethical world perisheth, nor the particular accident of private possession, nor the whim of the owner on which the disrupted consciousness sees itself dependent; on the contrary, it is the universal will which in this its ultimate abstraction has nothing positive and therefore can give nothing in return for the sacrifice. But for that very reason it is immediately one with self-consciousness, or it is the pure positive, because it is the pure negative; and the meaningless death, the unfilled negativity of the self, changes round in its inner Notion into absolute positivity.24

The logic of this internalization of negativity usually undergoes two types of criticism. The standard Marxist approach cites it as the supreme proof of Hegel's "hidden positivism," of his "acceptance of the existing order [das Bestehende]:" it sets in it the repetition of the Protestant gesture of dislocating actual social freedom into "inner" moral freedom, which leaves untouched all the distortions of actual social life. According to this approach, the Hegelian "reconciliation" qua internalization of negativity bears witness to an indubitable mark of renunciation, of a resigned acceptance of "irrational," perverted social conditions: by way of this internalization of the French social revolution into the German philosophical revolution, Reason is compelled to recognize itself in the un-Reason of the world. In a different vein, the deconstructionist reading insists on how this passage, from external revolutionary Terror into the pressure of moral conscience which terrorizes us from within, hinges on a "closed economy" which enables us to internalize-domesticate the radical Externality of the Terror to transform it into a subordinated moment of our self-relating.

This second reading fails to appreciate the extent to which the "internalization" of the Terror into the moral Law, far from "gentrifying" its traumatic impact, gives rise to a kind of parasitical, malign foreign body in the very kernel of the subject's being. Hegel's implicit lesson here is that the "external" revolutionary Terror would not be able to hold the subject in check were he not already terrorized "from within," by the inexorable superego-agency whose demands can never be met since, in its eyes, our very existence is branded by guilt. The result of this "internalization" is the Kantian subject: the subject condemned to an eternal split, i.e., forever doomed to contend with "pathological" impulses. The pressure exerted on the subject, which first seemed to come from the outside, is now experienced as something which defines—or, rather, subverts—the very kernel of his self-identity. The subject who, in the Jacobinical Terror, had to accept his worthlessness in the eyes of the state, must now, in his capacity as moral subject, sacrifice what he most cherishes to a Demon within. Therein consists the Hegelian "negation of negation": what first appears as an external obstacle reveals itself to be an inherent hindrance, i.e., an outside force turns into an inner compulsion.25

The reproach, according to which the Hegelian dialectical process implies a "closed economy" where every loss is in advance recompensed, "sublated" into a moment of self-mediation, thus results from a misreading. Paradoxically, the one to whom such a "closed economy" can legitimately be attributed is Marx himself. What I have in mind here, of course, is the unique moment when Marx is at his most Hegelian: his formulation of the proletarian as "substanceless subjectivity" in the famous manuscript-fragment on "Precapitalist epochs" from Grundrisse.26 After deploying his grandiose conception of the proletariat as the apogee of the historical process of "alienation," of the gradual disengaging of the labor force from the domination of the "organic," substantial conditions of the process of production (the double freedom of the proletarian: he stands for the abstract subjectivity freed from all substantial-organic ties, yet at the same
time he is dispossessed and thus obliged to sell on the market his own labor force in order to survive). Marx conceives of the proletarian revolution as a "materialist" version of the Hegelian reconciliation of subject and substance: it reestablishes the unity of the subject (labor force) with the objective conditions of the process of production, yet not under the hegemony of these objective conditions (where individuals figure as mere subordinated moments of their social totality), but with collective subjectivity as the mediating force of this unity. In socialism, the collective subject is bound to render transparent and control the process of production and social reproduction in its entirety.

From this Marxian perspective, of course, the Hegelian "reconciliation" emerges as a mere "reconciliation in the medium of thought" that leaves social reality undisturbed. Perhaps, however, after more than a century of polemics on the Marxist "materialist reversal of Hegel," the time has come to raise the inverse possibility of a Hegelian critique of Marx. Does not Hegel enable us to discern, in the very foundation of the Marxian notion of the proletarian revolution, a kind of perspective-illusion which hinges precisely on the "closed economy" of the dialectical reversal? It was possible for Marx to imagine "dis-alignment" as the reversal by means of which the subject reappropriates the entire substantial content. However, such a reversal is precisely what Hegel precludes: in Hegel's philosophy, "reconciliation" does not designate the moment when "subject becomes subject," when absolute subjectivity is elevated into the productive ground of all entities. Rather, the recognition that the dimension of subjectivity is inscribed into the very core of Substance in the guise of an irreducible lack which forever prevents it from achieving full self-identity. "Subject as subject" ultimately means that a kind of ontological "crack" forever denies as a semblance every "world-view," every notion of the universe qua totality of the "great chain of being." One must therefore draw the conclusion that Marx himself, under the guise of combating Hegel, retroactively constructs the figure of Hegel qua the philosopher who elevates self-mediating Notion into the Ground and Substance of the universe: what Marx boxes with is ultimately the idealistic shadow of his own ontological premises. In short, "Hegel as absolute idealist" is a displacement of Marx's own disavowed ontology. Is not the symptom of this displacement, and thereby of the inherent impossibility of the Marxian project, the radically ambiguous character of Marx's reference to Hegel? That is to say, in his endeavor to delineate the Capital-universe by means of

the categories of Hegel's logic, Marx continually and systematically oscillates between two possibilities:

- The qualification of Capital as the alienated Substance of the historical process which reigns over the atomized subjects (see the famous formulae from Grundrisse on the proletariat qua "substanceless subjectivity" which posits Capital as its own nonbeing); within this perspective, Revolution necessarily appears as an act by means of which the Historical Subject appropriates to himself his alienated substantial content, i.e., recognizes in it his own product. This motif achieved its ultimate expression in Georg Lukács' History and Class Consciousness.

- The opposite qualification of Capital as Substance which is already in itself Subject, i.e., which is not anymore an empty abstract universality but an universality reproducing itself through the circular process of its self-mediation and self-posting (see the definition of Capital as "money which begets more money": Money-Commodity-Money)—in short, Capital is Money-which-became-Subject. This theme of "Hegel's logic as the notional structure of the movement of Capital" assumes its ultimate expression in the Hegelian reading of the "critique of political economy," which flourished in West Germany in the early seventies.

Money and Subjectivity

Let us then return to Hegel: revolutionary Terror designates the turning point at which the appearance of an equivalent exchange collapses, the point at which the subject gets nothing in exchange for its sacrifice. Here, however, at this very point at which negation ceases to be "determinate" and becomes "absolute," the subject encounters itself, since the subject qua cogito is this very negativity prior to every act of exchange. The crucial move from revolutionary Terror to the Kantian subject is thus simply the move from $S$ to $S$: at the level of Terror, the subject is not yet barred but remains a full, substantial entity, identical to a particular content which is threatened by the external pressure of the Terror's abstract and arbitrary negativity. The Kantian subject, on the contrary, is this very abyss, this void of absolute negativity to whom every "pathological," particular positive content appears as "posited," as something externally assumed and thus ultimately contingent. Consequently, the move from $S$ to $S$ entails a radical shift in the very notion of the subject's self-identity: in it, I identify myself to that very void which a moment ago threatened to swallow the most
precious particular kernel of my being. This is how the subject qua $ emerges from the structure of exchange: it emerges when “something is exchanged for nothing,” that is to say, it is the very “nothing” I get from the symbolic structure, from the Other, in exchange for sacrificing my “pathological” particularity, the kernel of my being. When I get nothing in return, I get myself qua $, qua the empty point of self-relating. 

It would be of great theoretical interest to establish the conceptual link between this genesis of self-consciousness and the modern notion of paper money. In the Middle Ages, money was a commodity which so to speak guaranteed its own value: a gold coin—like any other commodity—was simply worth its “actual” value. How did we get from that value to today’s paper money, which is intrinsically worthless, yet universally used to purchase commodities? Brian Rotman demonstrated the necessity of an intermediate term, the so-called “imaginary money.” The problem with the gold money was that of physical debasement: a gap necessarily arose between “good” money (the pure unsullied issue of the state) and “bad” money (the worn and diminished coins in circulation); this gap between the good standard money and the worn currency was known as ago. On the basis of this difference between “good” and “bad” money, a new form of money emerged in mercantile states, a so-called “bank money”: it represented money exactly according to the standard of mint, i.e., money insofar as it has not yet been devalued by use; however, for this very reason, it was not embodied but existed only as an imaginary point of reference. More precisely, it existed as a convention between a bank and an individual: as a paper by means of which a bank promised to pay a particular merchant a certain amount upon his presenting this paper. This way, the merchant was guaranteed that the money he gave to the bank would keep its “real” value.

There are two crucial points to be noted here. The first is that, by way of this operation, “money entered into a relation with itself and became a commodity”... the duplication into “good,” but only imaginary, money and “bad,” empirically existing gold money, subjected to wear and tear, made it possible to measure the “price of money itself.” It was possible to say that this gold coin that I hold in my hand, due to its wear and tear, is worth only so much, only a percentage of “good” money, of its own “true” value. The second point is that this imaginary money was “deictically rooted in the signature of a particular named payee.” The paper issued by the bank was a monetary promise made by it to a named, individual merchant. In order to arrive at paper money as we know it today, this
dectic promise with concrete dates and names has to be depersonalized into a promise made to the anonymous “bearer” to pay the gold-equivalent of the sum written on paper money—thus, the anchoring, the link to a concrete individual was cut loose. And the subject who came to recognize itself as this anonymous “bearer” is the very subject of self-consciousness—why? What is at stake here is not simply that this “bearer” designates a neutral universal function which can be filled in by any individual; if we are to attain self-consciousness, the empty universality of the “bearer” has to assume actual existence, it has to be posited as such, i.e., the subject has to relate to itself, to conceive of itself, as (to) an empty “bearer,” and to perceive his empirical features which constitute the positive content of his particular “person” as a contingent variable. This shift is again the very shift from $ to $, from the fullness of the “pathological” subject to cogito qua empty self-relating which experiences its own positive, empirical content as something “posited,” i.e., contingent and ultimately indifferent.

From Subject to Substance . . . and Back

The gap that separates Marx from Hegel, i.e., the crucial dimension of what Hegel calls “subject” (as opposed to empirical individuals), becomes visible the moment one traverses the path “from substance to subject” in the opposite direction. What we have in mind here is the reproach usually addressed to Hegel by his nominalist adversaries. From Feuerbach and young Marx onwards, whose basic premise is that “actually existing individuals” realize their potentials in the social network of their mutual relationships (“the essence of man is the totality of his social relationships,” as Marx put it). According to this reproach, Hegel’s “idealist mystification” proceeds in two steps. First, Hegel transposes-translates this multitude of relations between subjects qua concrete individuals into the relationship of the subject-individual to the Substance: social relationships between individuals undergo a sudden transsubstantiation and change into the relationship of the individual to the Society qua substance. Thereupon, in a second move, Hegel transposes this relationship of the individual-subject to the Substance into the relationship of the Substance to itself. The paradigmatic case of this “unmasking of the idealist mystification” is provided by the critique of religious consciousness elaborated by Feuerbach and young Marx, which conceives of God as the alienated, inverted, “substantialized” expression of the basic structure of social relations between actual and
active individuals. According to this critique, the first step of the religious mystification is to "ground" the individual's relations to his social environs, to other individuals, in his relationship to God: when I relate to God, I relate in an inverted-alienated form to my own social essence, i.e., what I (mis)perceive as "God" is nothing but a "reified," externalized expression of the fundamental way I am related to my fellow creatures. Once this step is accomplished, the next step that follows automatically is that I, a concrete individual, identify my relating to God with God's self-relating. Suffice it to recall mystical formulas on how the eye through which I see God is the very eye through which God is looking at Himself.

From the proper Hegelian perspective, however, we are here at the very opposite point of losing the specific dimension of subjectivity, i.e., of reducing the subject to a subordinated moment of the Substance's self-relating. It is precisely and only here that we encounter subject as distinct from the "individual": the Hegelian "subject" is ultimately nothing but a name for the externality of the Substance to itself, for the "crack" by way of which the Substance becomes "alien" to itself. (mis)perceiving itself through human eyes as the inaccessible reified Otherness. That is to say, insofar as the relationship of the subject to the Substance overlaps with the Substance's self-relating, the fact that Substance appears to subject as an alien-external inaccessible entity bears witness to a self-splitting of the Substance itself.13 In his Ecrits, Lacan resolves the worn-out problem of the relationship between the individual and society via an elegant reference to precisely this moment of Hegel's philosophy: psychoanalytical theory enables us to recognize their "reconciliation"—the "mediation" of the Individual and the Universal—in the very splitting that runs through both of them.14 In other words, the problem remains unsolvable as long as we insist upon either the individual or Society as an organic, self-enclosed Whole: the first step toward the solution is to relate the splitting which traverses the social Substance ("social antagonism") to the splitting which is constitutive of the subject (in the Lacanian theory, the subject is precisely not "in-dividual," an indivisible One, but constitutionally divided, $). This reading of Hegel which locates the "reconciliation" of the Universal and the Particular into the very splitting which cuts through them and thus unites them, also provides an answer to the eternal problem of solipsism and the possibility of communication (between different subjects or, at a more general level, between different cultures): what begs the question in the solipsist hypothesis is the presupposed self-enclosure of the individual or society. In other words, communication is rendered possible by the very feature which may seem to undermine most radically its possibility: I can communicate with the Other, I am "open" to him (or it), precisely and only insofar as I am already in myself split, branded by "repression," i.e., insofar as (to put it in a somewhat naive-pathetic way) I cannot ever truly communicate with myself: the Other is originally the centered Other Place of my own splitting. In classical Freudian terms: "others" are here only because and insofar as I am not simply identical to myself but have an unconscious, insofar as I am prevented from having direct access to the truth of my own being. It is this truth that I am looking for in others: what propels me to "communicate" with them is the hope that I will receive from them the truth about myself, about my own desire. And the same goes for the no less worn-out problem of "communication between different cultures." The common ground that allows cultures to talk to each other, to exchange messages, is not some presupposed shared set of universal values, etc., but rather its opposite, some shared deadlock; cultures "communicate" insofar as they can recognize in each other a different answer to the same fundamental "antagonism," deadlock, point of failure.15

What is therefore crucial for Hegel's notion of act is that an act always, by definition, involves a moment of externalization, self-objectivation, of the jump into the unknown. To "pass to the act" means to assume the risk that what I am about to do will be inscribed into a framework whose contours elude my grasp, that it may set in motion an unforeseeable train of events, that it will acquire a meaning different from or even totally opposed to what I intended to accomplish—in short, it means to assume one's role in the game of the "cunning of reason." (And what is at stake in la passe, the concluding moment of the psychoanalytical process, is precisely the analyst's readiness to fully assume this radical self-externalization, i.e., "subjective destruction": I am only what I am for the others, which is why I have to renounce the fantasy-support of my being, my clinging to "my own private Idaho," "some hidden treasure in me, inaccessible to others."16 The basic problem with the act in Hegel is therefore not its necessary ultimate failure (due to the interference of the Other subverting every intended meaning, one can never adequately externalize, transpose into the mode of intersubjective actuality, our internal project), but rather its exact opposite: a wholly successful act (an act "corresponding to its notion") would bring about catastrophe, i.e., either a suicide (the accomplished self-objectivation, the transformation of the subject into a thing) or a lapse
into madness (the “short-circuit,” the immediate sign of equality, between Inside and Outside, i.e., the (mis)perception of the Law of my Heart as the Law of the World). In other words, if the subject is to survive his act, he is compelled to organize its ultimate failure, to accomplish it “with fingers crossed,” to avoid totally identifying with it, to inscribe it into an overall economy which subverts its proclaimed goal, so that what appears as a failure is actually its true aim.

The common notion of the “cunning of reason” reduces it to a relationship of technological manipulation: instead of acting directly upon the object, we interpose between ourselves and the object another object and let them interact freely; the frictional wear and tear of objects realizes our aim, while we maintain a safe distance, keeping ourselves out of the melee. One has only to recall Adam Smith’s “invisible hand of the market”: every individual pursues his or her egotistical interests, but their interaction realizes the Common Good of increasing the nation’s welfare. The idea is that the Hegelian Absolute entertains the same relationship toward concrete individuals engaging in historical struggles:

It is not the general idea that is implicated in opposition and combat, and that is exposed to danger. It remains in the background, untouched and uninjured. This may be called the cunning of reason— that it sets the passions to work for itself, while that which develops its existence through such impulsion pays the penalty, and suffers loss. . . . The particular is for the most part of too trivial value as compared with the general: individuals are sacrificed and abandoned. The idea pays the penalty of determinate existence and corruptibility, not from itself, but from the passions of individuals.17

This quotation from Hegel’s The Philosophy of History fits perfectly the common notion of the “cunning of reason”: individuals who follow their particular aims are unknowingly instruments of the realization of the Divine plan. But certain elements disturb this seemingly clear picture. Usually passed over in silence is the very main point of Hegel’s argumentation apropos of the “cunning of reason”: the ultimate impossibility of it. It is impossible for any determinate subject to occupy the place of the “cunning of reason” and to exploit another’s passions without getting involved in their labor, i.e., without paying in flesh the price for his exploitation. In this precise sense, the “cunning of reason” is always redoubled: an artisan, for example, makes use of the forces of nature (water, steam . . .) and lets them interact for ends external to them, to mold the raw material into a form appropriate for human consumption; for him, the aim of the process of production is the satisfaction of human needs. It is here, however, that he is as it were the victim of his own ruse: the true aim of the process of social production is not the satisfaction of individual needs but the very development of productive forces, what Hegel refers to as the “objectivization of the Spirit.” Hegel’s thesis is therefore that the manipulator himself is always-already manipulated: the artisan who exploits nature by way of the “cunning of reason” is in turn exploited by the “objective spirit.” And, according to Hegel, the supreme proof of this impossibility of occupying the position of the “cunning of reason” is provided by God himself: Christ’s suffering on the cross exploits the logic of Divinity who keeps itself in the background and pulls the strings of the theater of History from a safe distance. Crucifixion designates the point at which it is no longer possible for the divine Idea to “remain in the background, untouched and uninjured”: it is God himself who, by way of “becoming man” and dying on the cross, “pays the penalty.”

The Subject as “Vanishing Mediator”

This paradoxical relationship of subject and substance, where the subject emerges as the crack in the universal Substance, hinges on the notion of the subject as the “vanishing mediator” in the precise sense of the Freudian-Lacanian Real, i.e., the structure of an element which, although nowhere actually present and as such inaccessible to our experience, nonetheless has to be retroactively constructed, presupposed, if all other elements are to retain their consistency. In Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, we encounter more than once this structure of the “vanishing mediator.” Suffice it to mention two such loci: the passage of the dialectic of Lord and Bondsman into stoicism; the passage of “phrenology,” the last form of the “observing Reason,” into “active Reason”:

—in the dialectic of Lord (Master) and Bondsman, Knowledge first belongs to the Bondsman in the guise of his “savoir-faire” (know-how), of his practical skills about handling things in order to provide satisfaction for the Lord-Master. It may seem that the passage from this technical “know-how” to Thought (and thereby to stoicism as the position of the thinking Bondsman—Slave: it is clear from Hegel’s presentation that it is the Slave, not the Master, who arrives at the “labor of the Notion” by means of the
"I or He or It (the Thing) Which Thinks"
cially: the transcendental object is the underlying, unknown ground of appearance, i.e., of what we perceive as an object of experience. However, it is this ground conceived of in the mode of our thinking; that is, it is the unknown X that has to be thought of as an X (a sensuously unfulfilled conception) if our experience is to retain its consistency. The point is, precisely, that it has to be thought. In other words, the transcendental object is a Gedankendieng; it is as if we were the "In-itself insofar as it is for us, for the consciousness," i.e., it designates the way the In-itself is present in thought.42

The problem with this seemingly obvious solution is that it leads to the "substantivalization" of the Thing; it compels us to conceive the Thing as the fullness of the In-itself and the transcendental object as the way this fullness is present in our experience—in the guise of its opposite, of an empty thought devoid of any intuitive content. In this perspective, the status of the transcendental object is strictly secondary; it designates the negative way the Thing is present in the field of our experience: as the empty thought of an underlying, inaccessible X. And are things not homologous in the relationship between the Lacanian Thing qua substance of jouissance and objet petit a, the surplus-enjoyment? Is not the Real Thing a kind of preexisting substance "cultivated," "gentrified" by the Symbolic, and is not a the semblance of the lost jouissance, i.e., what remains in the Symbolic of the lost Real? It is here that the fate of our comprehension of Lacan and Kant is decided. That is to say, a certain fundamental ambiguity pertains to the notion of the Real in Lacan: the Real designates a substantial hard kernel that precedes and resists symbolization and, simultaneously, designates the left-over, which is posted or "produced" by symbolization itself.43 However, what we must avoid at any price is conceiving of this left-over as simply secondary, as if we have first the substantial fullness of the Real and then the process of symbolization which "evacuates" jouissance, yet not entirely, leaving behind isolated remainders, islands of enjoyment, objets petit a. If we succumb to this notion, we lose the paradox of the Lacanian Real: there is no substance of enjoyment without, prior to, the surplus of enjoyment. The substance is a mirage retroactively invoked by the surplus. The illusion that pertains to a qua surplus-enjoyment is therefore the very illusion that, behind it, there is the lost substance of jouissance. In other words, a qua semblance deceives in a Lacanian way: not because it is a deceitful substitute of the Real, but precisely because it invokes the impression of some substantial Real behind it: it deceives by posing as a shadow of

the underlying Real.44 And the same goes for Kant: what Kant fails to notice is that das Ding is a mirage invoked by the transcendental object. Limitation precedes transcendence: all that "actually exists" is the field of phenomena and its limitation, whereas das Ding is nothing but a phantasm which, subsequently, fills out the void of the transcendental object.

Lacan's ultimate point in his reading of Kant is that the distinction between phenomena and the Thing can be sustained only within the space of desire as structured by the intervention of the signifier: it is this intervention that brings about the split separating the accessible, symbolically structured, reality from the void of the Real, the index of the lost Thing. What we experience as "reality" discloses itself against the background of the lack, of the absence of it, of the Thing, of the mythical object whose encounter would bring about the full satisfaction of the drive. This lack of the Thing constitutive of "reality" is therefore, in its fundamental dimension, not epistemological, but rather pertains to the paradoxical logic of desire—the paradox being that this Thing is retroactively produced by the very process of symbolization, i.e., that it emerges in the very gesture of its loss. In other (Hegel's) words, there is nothing—no positive substantial entity—behind the phenomenal curtain, only the gaze whose phantasmasgeries assume the different shapes of the Thing. Lacan is for that reason far from falling prey to a theoretically illegitimate short-circuit between the psychoanalytical problematic of the unattainable lost object of desire and the epistemological problematic of the object of knowledge, of its unknowable character.45 Quite to the contrary, what he aims to do is to demonstrate precisely how this short-circuit results from a kind of perspective illusion which generates an illegitimate (although structurally necessary) "substantialization" of the Thing. The status of the Thing jouissance becomes epistemological; its unknowable character is perceived as unknowableness the moment we "substantialize" it and assume that it ontologically precedes its loss, i.e., that there is something to see "behind the curtain" (of the phenomena).

This priority of limitation over transcendence also sheds a new (Hege-
lian) light on the Kantian sublime: what we experience as the positive sublime content (the moral law in ourselves, the dignity of the free will) is of a strictly secondary nature; it is something which merely fills out the original void opened up by the breakdown of the field of representations. In other words, the Sublime does not involve the breakdown of the field of phenomena, i.e., the experience of how no phenomenon, even the mightiest one, can appropriately express the supersensible Idea. This notion—
that, in the experience of the Sublime, phenomena prove unfit to render the idea—results from a kind of perspective-illusion. What actually breaks down in the experience of the Sublime is the very notion that, behind the field of phenomena, lies some inaccessible positive, substantial Thing. In other words, this experience demonstrates that phenomena and noumena are not to be conceived as two positive domains separated by a frontier: the field of phenomena as such is limited, yet this limitation is its inherent determination, so that there is nothing "beyond" this limit. The limit ontologically precedes its Beyond: the object which we experience as "sublime," its elevated glitter, Schein, is a mere secondary positivation of the "nothing," the void, beyond the limit. And—as demonstrated by Lacan in his Seminar on the Ethics of Psychoanalysis—this Kantian notion of the Sublime is wholly compatible with the Freudian notion of sublimation: in the Freudian theory, the "sublime" designates an empirical object that occupies, fills in, the void, the empty place, of the "primordially repressed" Thing, becoming "elevated to the dignity of the Thing." In this precise sense, the sublime object is simultaneously the surface Schein or "grimece," a pure semblance devoid of any substantial support, and something "more real than reality itself": in its very capacity of a pure semblance, it "gives body" to a boundary which fixes the limits of (what we experience as) reality, i.e., it holds the place of, stands in for, what has to be excluded, foreclosed, if "reality" is to retain its consistency.46

As regards Hegel's critique of Kant, the crucial thing is to avoid the seemingly obvious conclusion that Hegel "delivers," makes a foray into, what Kant shirks from and designates as inaccessible. That is to say, according to Kant, we, finite beings, are condemned to the gap that separates intuition from concept; it is this very gap which defines our finitude. Kant's point is that transcendental constitution (i.e., the subject's "spontaneity") can occur only within this horizon of finitude: in an infinite being (God), intuition and intellect would coincide, which is why such a being would overcome the opposition of theoretical and practical reason (and, consequently, the need for their mediation in the "capacity of judging"). Such a being would be capable of "intellectual intuition" or, to put it in another way, of productive perception: the very act of perception would create (not merely "constitute" in the transcendental sense) the perceived objects. How does Hegel respond to this splitting? He in no way asserts that this intellectual intuition, the unity of concept and intuition, posited by Kant in the inaccessible divine Beyond, is already actual, present, in the I of pure self-consciousness: if this were the case, we would have to do with a senseless solipsistic creationism, with the notion of an I directly creating objects. Hegel's point here is far more refined: according to him, the very notion of "intellectual intuition" belongs to the level of abstract Understanding (as opposed to dialectical Reason), i.e., it presents the synthesis of the Sensible and the Intellectual as something that takes place in a separate domain beyond their splitting. The actual synthesis of the Sensible and of the Intellectual is already effectuated in what was for Kant their splitting, since the supersensible Idea is nothing but the inherent limitation of the intuited phenomena. Hegel thus can be said to reaffirm the Kantian gap that forever separates intuition and intellect: for an "object" to emerge in the field of what we experience as reality, the multitude of sensible intuitions which provide its content must be supplemented by the "sensuously unfulfilled conception" of an X qua Gedankendring, i.e., the void which no empirical, positive feature can fill out, since it is a correlative, a "refined" effect of the subject's synthetic act of apperception.47

The very tetrad of Kant-Fichte-Schelling-Hegel appears thus in a new light. When Kant formulated the problematic of transcendental constitution, of the I qua pure apperception, he opened up a new domain, yet he advanced only half-way into it and thus got stuck in inconsistencies: both Fichte and Schelling endeavored to overcome these Kantian inconsistencies by conceiving of the Kantian split between intellect and (sensible) intuition as the lapse from some original unity, the true starting point of philosophy, which, of course, is none other than intellectual intuition (intelletktuelle Anschauung), the unity of intuition and intellect, of object and subject, of theory and praxis, etc. Hegel, however, paradoxically returns to Kant, i.e., he rejects these post-Kantian attempts of a beforehand, precipitate, "immediate" synthesis and proposes to overcome Kant's inconsistencies in a different "Hegelian" way: by demonstrating how synthesis already is actualized where Kant saw only the splitting, so that there is no need to postulate a separate, additional act of synthesis in the "intellectual intuition." We do not pass from Kant to Hegel by filling out the empty place of the Thing, i.e., the black void perceptible in the crack of the half-opened window in Magritte's Lune de approche, but by affirming this void as such, in its priority to any positive entity that strives to fill it out.

"Total Recall": Knowledge in the Real

And—to return to noir—it is this void, standing for the irreducible gap between the I of apperception and the noumenal "Thing which thinks,"
between human and android. Man is a replicant who does not know it; yet if this were all, the film would involve a simplistic reductionist notion that our self-experience qua free "human" agents is an illusion founded upon our ignorance of the causal nexus which regulates our lives. For that reason, we should supplement the former statement: it is only when, at the level of the enunciated content, I assume my replicant-status, that, at the level of enunciation, I become a truly human subject. "I am a replicant" is the statement of the subject in its purest—the same as in Althusser's theory of ideology where the statement "I am in ideology" is the only way for me to truly avoid the vicious circle of ideology (or the Spinozeian version of it: the awareness that nothing can ever escape the grasp of necessity is the only way for us to be truly free). In short, the implicit thesis of Blade Runner is that replicants are pure subjects precisely insofar as they testify that every positive, substantial content, inclusive of the most intimate fantasies, is not "their own" but already implanted. In this precise sense, subject is by definition nostalgic, a subject of loss. Let us recall how, in Blade Runner, Rachael silently starts to cry when Deckard proves to her that she is a replicant. The silent grief over the loss of her "humanity," the infinite longing to be or to become human again, although she knows this will never happen; or, conversely, the eternal gnawing doubt over whether I am truly human or just an android—it is these very undecided, intermediate states which make me human.53

What is of crucial importance here is that we do not confuse this radical "decenteredness" characterizing the replicants with the decenteredness characterizing the subject of the signifier with regard to the big Other, to the symbolic order. We can, of course, read Blade Runner as a film about the process of subjectivization of the replicants: despite the fact that their most intimate memories are not "true" but only implanted, replicants subjectivize themselves by way of combining these memories into an individual myth, a narrative which allows them to construct their place in the symbolic universe. Furthermore, are not our "human" memories also "implied" in the sense that we all borrow the elements of our individual myths from the treasury of the big Other? Are we not, prior to our speaking, spoken by the discourse of the Other? As to the truth of our memories, does not, according to Lacan, truth have the structure of a fiction? Even if its ingredients are invented or implanted, not "really ours," what remains "ours" is the unique way we subjectivize them, we integrate them into our symbolic universe. From this perspective, the lesson of Blade
Runner is that manipulation is ultimately doomed to fail: even if Tyrell artificially implanted every element of our memory, what he was not able to foresee is the way replicants will organize these elements into a mythical narrative which will then give rise to the hysterical question. What Lacan has in mind with cogito, however, is the exact opposite of this gesture of subjectification: the “subject” qua $S$ emerges not via subjectification-narrativization, i.e., via the “individual myth” constructed from the decentered pieces of tradition; instead, the subject emerges at the very moment when the individual loses its support in the network of tradition; it coincides with the void that remains after the framework of symbolic memory is suspended. The emergence of cogito thus undermines the subject’s inveterateness in the symbolic tradition by way of opening up an irreducible gap between the horizon of meaning, of narrative tradition, and an impossible knowledge whose possession would enable me to gain access to the Thing I am in the Real, beyond all narrativization, all symbolization or historicization. A full recollection (“total recall”) would therefore amount to filling out the void which constitutes me qua $S$, subject of self-consciousness, i.e., to identifying recognizing myself as “he or it, the Thing which thinks.” In Lacanian terms, “total recall” would amount to the “knowledge in the Real.”

Replicants know their life span is limited to four years. This certainly saps the openness of their “being-towards-death”: it bears witness to their arrival at the impossible point of knowing how they are structured qua “thing-machine which thinks.” For this reason, replicants are ultimately the impossible fantasy-formation of us human mortals: the fantasy of a being conscious of itself qua Thing, of a being which does not have to pay for access to self-consciousness with $S$, with the loss of its substantial support. A crack in this fantasy therefore enables us to broach the question of “artificial intelligence”: do computers think?

What is crucial to the debates on artificial intelligence is that an inversion has taken place, which is the fate of every successful metaphor: one first tries to simulate human thought with the computer, bringing the model as close as possible to the human “original,” until at a certain point matters reverse and the question emerges: what if this “model” is already a model of the “original” itself, what if human intelligence itself operates like a computer, is “programmed,” etc.? (Therein consists also the intriguing implication of the computer-generated “virtual reality”: what if our “true” reality itself has to be virtualized, conceived as an artifact?) The computer raises in pure form the question of semblance, of a discourse which would not be that of a semblance: it is clear that the computer in some sense only “simulates” thought; yet how does the total simulation of thought differ from “real” thought? No wonder, then, that the specter of “artificial intelligence” appears as an entity which is simultaneously prohibited and considered impossible: we assert that it is not possible for a machine to think; at the same time, we try to prohibit research in these directions, on the grounds that it is dangerous, ethically dubious, etc.

Do then “computers think” or not? The answer hinges precisely on this logic of the reversed metaphor where, instead of conceiving of the computer as the model for the human brain, we conceive of the brain itself as a “computer made of flesh and blood,” where, instead of defining the robot as the artificial man, we define man himself as a “natural robot,” etc. This reversal could be further exemplified by resorting to the domain of sexuality. We usually consider masturbation as an “imaginary sexual act,” i.e., an act where the bodily contact with a partner is only imagined; is it not possible to reverse the terms and to conceiving the “proper” sexual act, the act with an “actual” partner, as a kind of “masturbation with a real (instead of only imagined) partner”? The whole point of Lacan’s insistence on the “impossibility of sexual relationship” is that this, precisely, is what the “actual” sexual act is; man’s partner is never a woman in the real kernel of her being, but woman qua a, reduced to the fantasy-object (let us just recall Lacan’s definition of the phallic enjoyment as essentially masturbatory).

It is against this background that we can provide one of the possible definitions of the Lacanian Real: the Real designates the very remainder which resists this reversal (of computer qua model of human brains into brains themselves qua blood and flesh computer). It is the imaginary sexual act into the actual sexual act qua masturbation with a real partner). The Real is that $X$ on whose account this “squearing of the circle” ultimately is doomed to fail. This reversal relies on a kind of realization of the metaphor: what at first appears as a mere metaphorical simulation, a pale imitation, of the true reality (computer as a metaphor of the true brains, etc.) becomes the original paradigm imitated by blood-and-flesh reality (brains follow in an always imperfect way the functioning of the computer, etc.). What we experience as “reality” is constituted by such a reversal: as Lacan puts it, “reality” is always framed by a fantasy, i.e., for something real to be experienced as part of “reality,” it must fit the preordained coordinates of our fantasy-space (a sexual act must fit the coordi-
nates of our imagined fantasy scripts, a brain must fit the functioning of a computer, etc.). This way, we can propose a second definition of the Real: a surplus, a hard kernel, which resists any process of modeling, simulation, or metaphorization.

Let us recall how, apropos of Alien, some reviewers quoted a series of features (the action takes place in a closed male community where even Ripley has to shave her head in order to become part of it; humans are utterly defenseless against the threat of the "alien," etc.) as an argument for conceiving the "alien" as a metaphor of AIDS. What one has to add, from the Lacanian perspective, is that all the talk about "alien," the monster, as a metaphor of AIDS falls short of the crucial fact that AIDS itself owes its tremendous impact not to its raw reality of an illness, to its immediate physical impact, however horrifying it may be, but to the extraordinary libidinal energy invested in it (AIDS is perceived as irresistible, it strikes suddenly, as if from nowhere, it seems to function perfectly as God's punishment for our promiscuous way of life ...). In short, AIDS occupies a certain preordained place in our ideological fantasy space, and the monstrous "alien" ultimately just materializes, gives body to, this fantasy dimension which from the very beginning was at work in the AIDS-phenomenon.

Our point is thus a very elementary one: true, the computer-generated "virtual reality" is a semblance, it does foreclose the Real; but what we experience as the "true, hard, external reality" is based upon exactly the same exclusion. The ultimate lesson of "virtual reality" is the virtualization of the very "true" reality: by the mirage of "virtual reality," the "true" reality itself is posited as a semblance of itself, as a pure symbolic edifice. The fact that "a computer doesn’t think" means that the price for our access to "reality" is that something must remain unthought.

2. Cogito and the Sexual Difference

The Kantian Crack in the Universal

It may seem paradoxical to evoke a "crack in the universal" apropos of Kant: was Kant not obsessed by the Universal, was not his fundamental aim to establish the universal form (constitutive) of knowledge, does his ethics not propose the universal form of the rule which regulates our activity as the sole criterion of morality, etc.? Yet as soon as the Thing-in-itself is posited as unattainable, every universal is potentially suspended. Every universal implies a point of exception at which its validity, its hold, is canceled; or, to put it in the language of contemporary physics, it implies a point of singularity. This "singularity" is ultimately the Kantian subject himself, namely the empty subject of the transcendental apperception. On account of this singularity, each of Kant's three critiques "stumbles" against universalization. In "pure reason," antinomies emerge when, in the use of categories, we reach beyond our finite experience and endeavor to apply them to the totality of the universe: if we endeavor to conceive the universe as a Whole, it appears simultaneously as finite and infinite, as an all-embracing causal nexus and containing free beings. In "practical reason," the "crack" is introduced by the possibility of "radical Evil," of an Evil which, as to its form, coincides with the Good (the free will qua will which follows universal self-posted rules can choose to be "evil" out of principle, not on account of "pathological," empirical impulses). In the "capacity of judging" qua "synthesis" of pure and practical reason, the split occurs twice. First, we have the opposition of aesthetics and teleology, the two poles which, together,