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The Dialectical Curmudgeon: Afterlives of Hegel in German Literature and Political Thought

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The Dialectical Curmudgeon:
Afterlives of Hegel in German Literature and Political Thought

by

Kumars Salehi

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Committee in charge:
Professor Karen Feldman, Chair
Professor Ramona Naddaff
Professor Deniz Göktürk
Professor Anton Kaes

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Abstract

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Designated Emphasis in Critical Theory

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Professor Karen Feldman, Chair

The Dialectical Curmudgeon: Afterlives of Hegel in German Literature and Political Thought asks how Germany's most ambivalent intellectual tradition can serve as a resource for antiracist and feminist thought and action today. My dissertation begins with the observation of a peculiar consonance between, on one hand, the rise of a right-wing populism in the West that was codified with the election of Donald Trump and continues to threaten women, people of color and queer communities today, and on the other hand, the undercurrent of cultural conservatism running through the tradition of German literature and philosophy that can trace its intellectual lineage back to G.W.F. Hegel, who rejected modern values of democracy and women's rights as short-sighted and insisted that our attempts to create a more equal society are doomed to failure unless we can see the big picture.

The paradox of Hegel's influence on our world is that a philosopher with a firmly established reputation for conservatism should have inspired modern history's most consequential revolutionary thinkers, including but by no means limited to Karl Marx. My dissertation explains why philosophers and literary figures in the tradition of Hegel and Marx are often reflexively skeptical of the moral claims and political action of marginalized groups, dismissing the political centering of race and gender oppression as a distraction, if not counterproductive, and sometimes even adopting framings that align with racist and sexist cultural values.

I also show how this tradition has served and can still serve as a resource for struggles for social justice today. For example, chapter 3 examines the political disagreements between the theorists of the Frankfurt School, contrasting Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's dismissal of anticolonial and progressive movements both in the West and in the global South with Herbert Marcuse's mentorship of US activists in the Black radical tradition. Examining a broad swath of German literary, cultural, and political-critical work from the early 19th century to the present, I show how this German tradition of progressive thought has the potential to both offer key tools for seeing the big picture and trivialize the concerns of those on its margins. Understanding why a world-famous progressive tradition returns to its conservative roots is indispensable to safeguarding egalitarian values from the intolerance that pervades even those spaces once thought safe.

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Introduction

No philosopher since 1800 has had more influence on our world than Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. The core of Hegel's philosophy is a recognition that contradiction is inherent in the very fabric of reality, and that what appears to common sense and traditional logic as certain and clearly defined is in fact marked by ambivalence. *The Dialectical Curmudgeon: Afterlives of Hegel in German Literature and Political Thought* asks how Germany's most ambivalent intellectual tradition can serve as a resource for antiracist and feminist thought and action today. I argue that the force of Hegelian negation inhabits a broad swath of German literary, cultural, and political-critical work in the 20th century, well beyond the obvious explicit moves of Marxism, sometimes even serving to trivialize the moral claims and political action of women and people of color.

The impetus for this study derives from the observation of a peculiar consonance between, on one hand, the rise of a right-wing populism in the West that was codified with the election of Donald Trump and continues to threaten women, people of color and queer communities today, and on the other hand, the undercurrent of cultural conservatism running through the tradition of German literature and philosophy that can trace its intellectual lineage back to Hegel who rejected modern values of democracy and women's rights as short-sighted and insisted that our attempts to create a more equal society are doomed to failure unless we can see the big picture. The paradox of Hegel's influence on our world is that a philosopher with a firmly established reputation for conservatism should have inspired modern history's most consequential revolutionary thinkers, including but by no means limited to Karl Marx.

This study explains why philosophers and literary figures in the tradition of Hegel and Marx are often reflexively skeptical of the moral claims and political action of marginalized groups, dismissing the political centering of race and gender oppression as a distraction, if not counterproductive, and sometimes even adopting framings that align with racist and sexist cultural values. I also show how this tradition has served and can still serve as a resource for struggles for social justice today by analyzing the political disagreements between the theorists of the Frankfurt School. Examining a broad swath of German literary, cultural, and political-critical work from the early 19th century to the present, I show how this German tradition of progressive thought has the potential to both offer key tools for seeing the big picture and trivialize the concerns of those on its margins. Understanding why a world-famous progressive tradition returns to its conservative roots is indispensable to safeguarding egalitarian values from the intolerance that pervades even those spaces once thought safe.

Chapter 1 explores the relationship between dialectical logic and the theory of revolution in Hegel and Marx. Hegel's dialectics reveal the limits of every subjective perspective and the self-undermining nature of radical political action as concepts and forms of consciousness turn into their opposites in various scenes of performative contradiction. While Hegel saw in the French Revolution the birth of the same dangerous political modernity as did its paradigmatic conservative critic, Edmund Burke, he also honored the revolution provocatively every year with

a toast on the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. Marx claimed to have divorced Hegel's theory of dialectics from his firmly established reputation for conservative politics and appropriated it for his own revolutionary philosophy. Since Hegelianism's heyday in the German philosophy of the early 19th century, the political implications of dialectics have been subject to dispute by left- and right-wing interpreters. Marx saw his dialectics as an appropriation of Hegel's methodology that jettisons Hegel's assumptions about reality. Crucially, this allows him to locate an actual subject of revolution capable of escaping the clutches of the cunning of reason and taking an active, conscious role in bringing about material improvements in the lives of most people—the masses who had found, in the explosive potentials of a society oriented around capitalist production, only a new servitude.

Marx charges that, because Hegel ascribes primacy to the world of ideas, the contradictions of society are only ever reconciled in the abstract sense in which all things are, in the big picture, mutually interdependent. Hegel's model of social antagonism, the so-called "master-slave dialectic," and ends with the subordinated "slave", still materially subjugated, but able to find meaning, security, and an awareness of their own power through their master's dependence on them. In Marx's materialist dialectics, this is only the first of many steps, the necessary coming into consciousness of the revolutionary class made possible by economic conditions. What drives world history is not thought but action, specifically the action of producing and distributing resources in society. Interventions in the superstructure of the cultural realm cannot shake the economic base, but changes in the base reverberate for years, their effects on social life only becoming recognizable in hindsight.

As Edward Said, among many others, has observed, Marx assigns colonial subjects a marginal role in the transformation of the economic sphere and therefore in world history. I show the Hegelian origins of the tendency of Marx's theory to downplay the agency of gendered and colonized subjects by reducing their oppression to a function of the economic, a narrow conception which de facto places white male workers at the forefront of the movement. Just as Hegel's seemingly idiosyncratic conservatism, including his opposition to democracy and women's rights, follow from his account of dialectical logic, this relationship is suppressed but not overcome by Marx's faith that a consequential segment of the powerless could resolve the contradictions of society by seeing the big picture and acting on behalf of the whole. What makes Marx's critique of liberal modernity progressive is his theory of revolution, which paradoxically rests on a conservative premise: a flattened, Eurocentric conception of the collective subject of revolution as the industrial Western proletariat, increasingly united in class consciousness and undifferentiated along the lines of race, gender, and national identity.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the German Democratic Republic, where the study of Hegel and the reclamation of dialectical principles by philosophers and literary authors ranging from the poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht and the critical theorist Ernst Bloch to the novelist Christa Wolf presents a progressive challenge to the cultural stagnation reinforced by Stalinist ideological hegemony. Unlike in the West, where Marxism remained a wholly oppositional ideology, the version of Marxism promoted by the ruling Socialist Unity Party in the GDR

disavowed Hegel in name and dialectics in spirit. Bloch was forced out of the East German academy for his Hegelian critiques of Stalinism and relocated to the Federal Republic of Germany, a testament to the GDR's inhospitable environment for even heterodox Marxist philosophers. In this context, the role of the oppositional intellectual fell to literary authors, who were able to employ Hegelian negativity as social critique in their works to varying political effect.

While Hegelian Marxism tends towards a reflexive skepticism of the moral claims and political action of marginalized groups, the nature of the GDR as a state where a form of Marxism was at least superficially hegemonic allows the more progressive potentials of Hegelian thought to manifest independently of the reactionary defeatism that colored the Western Marxist tradition. As he famously assured the anticommunist House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947, at no point was Brecht a member of the German Communist Party, and his oeuvre, while far too committed to political action for the likes of Adorno, nevertheless deviated significantly both in style and substance from the socialist realism demanded of communist art by Stalinist cultural policy —nevertheless, he was celebrated as the poet laureate of the GDR, and after Stalin's death received the Stalin Peace Prize in 1954. Not only is the thoroughly Hegelian framework of "dialectical materialism" that Brecht associates with a revolutionary artistic praxis in his theoretical writings at odds with Stalin's doctrine of the same name, but the vision of a dynamic Marxism best served by Brecht's aesthetics of contradiction takes a backseat to the demands of a revolutionary government.

Brecht's legacy is that of a Marxist intellectual with an ambivalent relationship to the constraints of his role as a cultural poster boy for German socialism, in part due to his Hegelian knack for pointing out the contradictions in even the dogma he ostensibly sympathized with. Christa Wolf pushes this ambivalence further, even probing Brecht's own blind spots in her extended tenure as the definitive author of the GDR, up to and perhaps especially after its dissolution. "My generation came to Auschwitz via socialism," Wolf once wrote, noting not only the historical rupture to which, in the absence of a successful revolution, German socialism owes its birth: Wolf's concern is also the undercurrent of patriarchal and anti-Semitic attitudes that have persisted in her homeland despite every outward appearance of a radical break. Wolf's incorporation of dialectical motifs carves out space for a feminist subjectivity. Whereas Brecht's view of gender oppression was in effect an extension of the standard Marxist view, Wolf illustrates the salience of women's perspectives on patriarchy and the urgency of their struggles against discrimination that persisted long after socialism had, according to Marxist orthodoxy, overturned the economic cause for their existence.

Chapter 3 investigates the failure of Hegelian Marxists in the West to adequately theorize new social movements for racial and gender equality. The fundamental ambivalence definitive of dialectical logic in Hegel manifests conservative political tendencies in the Western tradition of Hegelian Marxist philosophy that, in turn, give rise to a popular critical theory that is reflexively skeptical of the moral claims and political action of marginalized people, whether its intellectual practitioners have disavowed Marxism or not. In the 20th century, attempts at a revision of Marx

in the face of both the advent of fascism and state socialism's living death were faced with a twofold challenge: to update Marxist categories to account not only for fascism and the liberal-democratic welfare state in the West, but also the increasingly visible and indefensible illiberalism of the state socialist experiment in the Eastern bloc. The first generation of the more or less loosely affiliated, predominantly German-Jewish theorists of what is commonly known as Frankfurt School Critical Theory, including longtime director Max Horkheimer, New Left icon Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor Adorno, undertook their project under the banner of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt and elsewhere in the capitalist, anticommunist West.

They had the seemingly impossible position of defending Marxism's vision of an emancipated society not only from capitalism, but from Marxism itself, as it was rendered its own tool of oppression in the codified doctrine of Marxism-Leninism. Unlike the literary authors Brecht and Wolf, the Frankfurt School distanced themselves from state socialism as well as organized communist activity, first in Weimar Germany and then in the United States and West Germany after the war. In the absence of a revolutionary working class that would provide a viable path out of the modern world's escalating cycles of violence, Adorno declares that political action along currently available lines—which at the time included struggles for decolonization and gender equality worldwide — were doomed to fail even when they succeed, by reinforcing a system which benefits from a false impression that things can really change.

Thus, Adorno withdraws into a political quietism that mirrors Hegel's conservative justifications for the status quo. I contrast Adorno and Horkheimer's dismissal of anticolonial and progressive movements both in the West and in the global South with Marcuse's mentorship of Angela Davis and other US activists in the Black radical tradition. Marcuse's legacy includes not only a highly public engagement with anti-war, antiracist and feminist student activists, but also a statewide campaign to force him out of the University of California, led by then-Governor of California Ronald Reagan. While studying in Frankfurt with Adorno, Davis announced her intention to return to California to participate in the rise of the Black freedom movement and other social movements of the '60s. Adorno's response was to chastise her for joining the all-Black branch of the Communist Party, declaring that as a theorist, involving herself in the activist struggles of her community was akin to a media studies scholar becoming a radio technician.

Chapter 4 pays particular attention to the political implications of the change in perspective from the first generation of critical theory, which debates the viability of political self-organization along antiracist and feminist lines, to the second generation, exemplified by Jürgen Habermas. Chapter 4 shows how Habermas abandons both the ideological trappings of Marxism and its concern with structural social antagonism in favor of an interpersonal model in which the conflicting interests of individuals are mediated through communication towards the goal of understanding. I examine how the tension between Adorno's negative dialectics and Marcuse's more optimistic Hegelianism is both suppressed and surpassed in the turn away from the radical and conservative polarities of Hegelianism towards the soft synthesis of the liberal

center, where the collective struggles of marginalized groups are reduced to aspirations for individual freedom.

Habermas's cultural influence reaches its apex following the collapse of the Soviet Union, not only within reunified Germany but throughout the Western countries: German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer called Habermas "almost a state philosopher" of Germany during the center-left government of Social Democrat Gerhard Schröder during the 1990s, and it would be no less fair to characterize Habermas as the philosopher laureate of the European Union. Thus it is not as a direct result of the impact of Adorno, but the consequence of a shared and increasingly publicized rhetorical position, that as the politics of the West (including the United States and West Germany) shift to the right over the course of the 1970s and '80s, there emerges a politically and media-savvy new generation of critical theorists who have retained and even perverted Adorno's seemingly iconoclastic and contrarian negativity. In the hands of telegenic philosophers like Peter Sloterdijk, performative contradiction indulges a contrarian impulse to undermine the supposedly liberal orthodoxy of multiculturalism and political correctness in the West.

Chapter 4 shows how, from the 1980's onwards, challenging the perceived hegemony of liberalism in the public sphere became the increasingly exclusive province of the right, in German philosophy as in the politics of the West broadly. Sloterdijk, who appeared regularly on the German television channel ZDF as one of the hosts of the weekly talk show *The Philosophical Quartet*, has situated himself as the challenger both to Habermas's liberalism and to the Marxism of the Frankfurt School, but functions as well as an heir to the spirit of conservative provocation characteristic of the Hegelian curmudgeon and typified by Adorno. Rising to prominence in the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1980s, Sloterdijk's interventions into public discourse in Germany and Europe in the past several decades have taken aim at what he sees as the liberal consensus on a range of issues from immigration and nationalism to the welfare state and the Nazi legacy of eugenics. Sloterdijk's reactionary trolling has made him a divisive figure in Germany, where many philosophy departments remain Habermasian strongholds. In the context of an ascendant West German nationalism which grew still more restless following reunification, the self-proclaimed "left-conservative" philosopher's embrace of transgressive conservatism is the logical progression of a rightward drift in the Western Marxist horizon of political action already visible in the first generation of the Frankfurt School.

The final image of Sloterdijk as the anti-Habermas is not the end of the story. Even as renewed interest in Hegel, Marxism, and the Frankfurt School continues apace elsewhere, the fate of the dialectical curmudgeon in German literature and philosophy does not only show us that the politically ambivalent resistance to the soft reconciliation of the liberal status quo is partially rooted in the impulse towards performative contradiction. Rather, it explains the consonance of Marxism and postwar cultural conservatism on key theoretical issues and political positions that seemingly place them to the right of the growing liberal consensus on questions of equity and social justice. Tracing this lineage of appropriation, iconoclasm and elective affinity

allows us to diagnose the contemporary significance of dialectical thinking for politics. I claim in closing that the relevance or irrelevance of philosophy to the realm of public discourse today is the product of its interaction with politics through these historically situated, public and private personalities, who only have been mediatized to a greater and greater degree since Hegel, the former editor of a local newspaper in Bamberg, became chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin.

Chapter One: Political Dialectics

1.1 – The Cunning of Reason: Hegel, Liberalism and Modernity

Walter Kaufmann begins his 1965 *Hegel: A Reinterpretation* by asserting a point of consensus among previous interpretations of the work of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: "It is generally agreed that Hegel was one of the greatest philosophers of all time, and no philosopher since 1800 has had more influence."[1] Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the specter of Hegel has faded with the memory of the communist project he inspired indirectly through his most famous interpreter, Karl Marx. The question of how much, and in what sense, Marx was philosophically indebted to Hegel is not merely of academic interest, but was rather of paramount importance to the revolutionary leaders of the 20th century who sought to develop a Marxist theory fit for praxis. In his notes on Hegel's *Science of Logic*, Lenin identifies the centrality of contradiction in Hegel with the philosophical core of Marxism, declaring that, "It is impossible fully to grasp Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having studied and understood the *whole* of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!!"[2] Vigorously highlighted in Lenin's notes is the passage in which Hegel asserts his own "law of contradiction," namely that "everything is inherently contradictory" ("*Alle Dinge sind an sich selbst widersprechend*") against the law observed by both traditional logic and common sense:

> But it is one of the fundamental prejudices of logic as hitherto understood and of ordinary thinking, that contradiction is not so characteristically essential and immanent a determination as identity…as against contradiction, identity is merely the determination of the simple immediate, of dead being; but contradiction is the root of all movement and vitality; it is only in so far as something has a contradiction within it that it moves, has an urge and activity.
>
> *Es ist aber eines der Grundvorurteile der bisherigen Logik und des gewöhnlichen Vorstellens, als ob der Widerspruch nicht eine so wesenhafte und immanente Bestimmung sei als die Identität...die Identität ihm gegenüber ist nur die Bestimmung des einfachen Unmittelbaren, des toten Seins; er aber ist die Wurzel aller Bewegung und Lebendigkeit; nur insofern etwas in sich selbst einen Widerspruch hat, bewegt es sich, hat Trieb und Tätigkeit.*[3]

Change can only occur because what exists does so in opposition to itself: All things are inherently ("an sich selbst," in itself) contradictory as a condition of metaphysical necessity, because what is only exists in the "becoming," out of the interplay of positivity and negativity, "being" and "non-being." The truth is arrived at, and thus in an ontological sense constituted, through the mutual interrelation of opposites, a process that refers to the origin of the term "dialectic" itself, derived from the Greek word for conversation, which came in the Platonic context to denote the working out of implicit logical contradictions through dialogue. Lenin saw in Hegel's logic, as the foundation of his integrated "system" of philosophy, the basis for the theory of revolution that could embrace the counterintuitive ambivalence of each apparently clear and distinct entity, drawing inspiration from the throes of defeat. A dialectical analysis of society could allow a minority, as the Bolsheviks did in the October Revolution, to exploit the

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[1] Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), vii.
[2] Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, "Abstract of Hegel's Science of Logic," in *Collected Works* 38 (Moscow: Progress, 1963), 180.
[3] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic* (New York: Humanity Books, 1969), 439; *Werke* 6 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 75.

contradictions of Russia in a moment of radical indeterminacy, teetering between world war and bourgeois revolution, wonderful formulation to turn an unenviable balance of power in their favor.

The Marxists who had not understood Hegel, Lenin wrote three years before the revolution in his *Philosophical Notebooks*, had dismissed him as the confused grandfather of a revolutionary progeny he could neither have understood nor accepted, a caricature captured in Marx's evocative image, codified by Engels,[4] of the Hegelian dialectic that is "standing on its head" and "must be turned right side up again."[5] This frequently misquoted passage establishes the separation between "method" and "system" that Lenin sweeps away in his call for Marxists to read the entirety of the Logic. This separation is again reasserted by Stalin in his pamphlet on "Dialectical and Historical Materialism," which attempts to draw a marked distinction between Hegel's "dialectical method" and the conclusions to which that method led Hegel himself: "Marx and Engels took from the Hegelian dialectics only its 'rational kernel,' casting aside its Hegelian idealistic shell, and developed dialectics further so as to lend it a modern scientific form."[6] While the specific relation of Marx to Hegel will be further elucidated in later in this chapter, the question of the separability of Hegel's dialectical logic as "method" from what Kaufmann calls his "firmly established reputation for conservatism" continues to be of concern to Hegelians well into the twilight of Marxism.[7] Hegel cannot be claimed without serious qualification for the right or the left, neither as a reactionary nor as a proto-Marxist, because the core of his philosophy is a recognition that what appears to common sense as certain and clearly defined is in fact marked by ambivalence as a matter of course. As this section will explore, Hegel cuts a curmudgeonly figure that recurs in the subsequent history of Marxism and German philosophy: by rejecting the intuitive in favor of an awareness of the way every discrete action is potentially self-undermining, the dialectical thinker is uniquely able to think through the fundamental contradiction and mutual interrelation driving the dynamics of seemingly discrete epiphenomena.

As contemporary Hegelian scholar Andrew Buchwalter has argued convincingly, the 21st century reception of Hegel, whether in the Anglo-American analytic tradition or the Habermasian tradition dominant in Germany, tends to proceed from the assumption that, "claims by Hegel to the contrary notwithstanding, his general logical-metaphysical account of spirit (*Geist*) is of limited value for understanding the nature and significance of his political philosophy."[8] Appropriately, no shortage of contradiction inheres in what Hegel himself thought about politics. From his early writing on "The German Constitution" and his critique of the French Revolution in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* on through his definitive political tract, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel endorses the constitutional monarchy of Prussia as the form of government most appropriate to resolving the modern era's conflicting political demands. Hegel's biographer Karl Rosenkranz describes him as "*ein für Politik höchst empfänglicher Geist*,"[9] observing that the period of time following the Treaty of Luneville, which brought the Holy Roman Empire to an end at the hands of Napoleon, saw the philosopher, then in Jena, consumed by the task of developing a model for a constitution already promised by

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[4] Friedrich Engels, *Marx-Engels Werke* 21, 293.
[5] Karl Marx, *Collected Works* 35, 19.
[6] Josef Stalin, "Dialectical and Historical Materialism" (Calcutta: Mass Publications, 1975), 3.
[7] Kaufmann, 33.
[8] Andrew Buchwalter, "The Metaphysic of Spirit and Hegel's Philosophy of Politics," in *Hegel's Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 33.
[9] Hermann Lübbe, *Die Hegelsche Rechte* (Stuttgart: F. Frommann, 1962), 29.

the Prussian King, Friedrich Wilhelm III.[10] The constitution never materialized; instead, the decades that followed saw the upheaval of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars gave way to a period of restoration in which the Junker nobility reasserted their feudal privileges in the face of a rising middle-class bureaucracy.[11]

In the *Philosophy of Right*, published from lectures given during his first years in a prestigious chair at the University of Berlin, Hegel presents his apparent political commitments to constitutional monarchy under Prussian absolutism as the extension of his system, his "general logical-metaphysical account" of the way of thought and action in the world. At the same time, this account explicitly rules out simple translation into political practice: The book's preface famously concludes with the image of the owl of Minerva that spreads its wings at dusk, and the warning that philosophy "always comes too late" to "issue instructions on how the world ought to be."[12]

As Hegel himself asserts in §31 of the *Philosophy of Right*, his system of philosophy places his logic (of which the *Science of Logic* is the most exhaustive exploration) at its center, and arguably the leading Hegelian in the United States, Robert Pippin, asserts that the so-called Greater *Logic* to this day remains critically understudied in Hegel scholarship: "To understate the matter in the extreme: this book still awaits its full contemporary reception."[13] Pippin has long sought to rescue as the philosopher of bourgeois modernity par excellence the man Karl Popper once made indirectly responsible for the twin totalitarianisms of communism and fascism, and sees in the constitution of the state described in the *Philosophy of Right* precisely the contrary, a concern for saving the freedom of liberal individualism from its own "formalist" shortcomings:

> A look at the actual details of Hegel's description of this state's constitution reveals far more similarities with such a formalist tradition than is usually admitted by commentators eager to associate him with his most famous follower. In particular, while the state is said to satisfy the ultimate interests of individual citizens, such interests are everywhere defined conceptually, and never in terms of any common, substantive goal or end. It remains the legal structure of the state itself, its actualization of individual freedom, which unites the citizens into a common whole, and not a state concern with their wealth, welfare, health or any other aspect of individual interests clearly left in the realm of civil society by Hegel.[14]

Much in Hegel's treatise on politics lends itself to the reading of the philosopher as a conservative liberal, and evinces the formative impression left by Hegel's reading of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, which he undertook in the 1790s.[15] Indeed, this was the predominant reading of Hegel among the first generation of the Old or Right Hegelian school, including such disciples of Hegel as Leopold von Henning and Heinrich Gustav Hotho, as well as Rosenkranz, Johann Eduard Erdmann, and Karl Ludwig Michelet. Naturally, this reading

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[10] Lübbe, 31.
[11] Robbie Shilliam, "Marx's Path to 'Capital': The International Dimension of an Intellectual Journey," *History of Political Thought* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2006), 353.
[12] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 23; *Werke* 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 28-9.
[13] Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Realm of Shadows: Logic as Metaphysics in "The Science of Logic"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 4.
[14] Pippin, "Hegel's Political Argument," *Political Theory* 9, no. 2 (1981): 523.
[15] Paul Gottfried, *The Search for Historical Meaning: Hegel and the Postwar American Right* (Evanston, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 1986), 8.

remains popular with contemporary Hegelians on the right, like Elizabethtown professor emeritus and self-styled "paleoconservative" intellectual Paul Gottfried, a onetime collaborator of American white supremacist leader Richard Spencer who claims credit for coining the term "alternative right".[16] Dubbed "the Frankfurt School conservative" in 2013 by the magazine *The American Conservative*, Gottfried's main concern in his writing on Hegel is to salvage a basically affirmative attitude towards modern society's institutions and values from the left-Hegelian tradition of revolutionary discontinuity and utopian negation, which will be our focus in subsequent chapters. Following Henning Ottmann, Gottfried distinguishes between the "center-liberal" perspectives of Hegel's immediate circle and later "Right-Hegelians" like Adolf Lasson and Constantin Rössler, but maintains that their distinctions pale compared to their commonalities in contrast to Marxism and the radicalism of the Young Hegelians, particularly since, even according to Ottmann, "Right-Hegelians living in the nineteenth century often produced center-liberal interpretations of Hegel's texts."[17] For Hegel, the productive power of the capitalist market economy, in which the sum of parts is greater than the whole, embodies the dialectical principle of the dynamic unity of opposites. In the section of the *Philosophy of Right* on property, Hegel makes this point explicitly, emphasizing the counterintuitive irony that "*subjective selfishness* turns into a *contribution towards the satisfaction of the needs of everyone else*".[18] Spirit, the absolute subject, is carried along its trajectory of development by its own "invisible hand," opaque to the individual subjects to whom the inevitable inequality between human beings in society appears as an obstacle to and not at the same time the primary vehicle of progress.

Hegel dismisses the "demand for equality" in civil society as "characteristic of the empty understanding" (*die Forderung der* Gleichheit *entgegen* [zu] *setzen*, *gehört dem leeren Verstände an*)[19] before explaining, in a pivotal passage, that attempts to remedy inequality through state intervention would only backfire:

> If the direct burden [of support] were to fall on the wealthier class...this would be contrary to the principle of civil society and the feeling of self-sufficiency and honour among its individual members. Alternatively, their livelihood might be mediated by work (i.e. by the opportunity to work) which would increase the volume of production; but it is precisely in overproduction and the lack of a proportionate number of consumers who are themselves productive that the evil consists, and this is merely exacerbated by the two expedients in question. This shows that, despite an *excess of wealth*, civil society is *not wealthy enough* – i.e. its own distinct resources are not sufficient – to prevent an excess of poverty and the formation of a rabble.
>
> *Wird der reicheren Klasse die direkte Last aufgelegt, oder es wären in anderem öffentlichen Eigentum (reichen Hospitälern, Stiftungen, Klöstern) die direkten Mittel vorhanden, die der Armut zugehende Masse auf dem Stande ihrer ordentlichen Lebensweise zu erhalten, so würde die Subsistenz der Bedürftigen gesichert, ohne durch die Arbeit vermittelt zu sein, was gegen das Prinzip der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft und des Gefühls ihrer Individuen von ihrer Selbständigkeit und Ehre wäre; oder sie würde durch Arbeit (durch Gelegenheit dazu) vermittelt, so würde die Menge der Produktionen vermehrt, in deren Überfluß und dem Mangel der verhältnismäßigen selbst produktiven*

[16] Jacob Siegel, "The Alt-Right's Jewish Godfather," *Tablet Magazine* 11/29/2016.
[17] Gottfried, 5.
[18] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 233; *Werke* 7, 353.
[19] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 234; 354.

> *Konsumenten gerade das Übel besteht, das auf beide Weisen sich nur vergrößert. Es kommt hierin zum Vorschein, daß bei dem* Übermaße des Reichtums *die bürgerliche Gesellschaft* nicht reich genug *ist, d. h. an dem ihr eigentümlichen Vermögen nicht genug besitzt, dem Übermaße der Armut und der Erzeugung des Pöbels zu steuern.*[20]

The idea of a welfare state that places a "direct burden" on the rich is here deemed just as unacceptable as a jobs guarantee that could trigger a crisis of overproduction, because the economic incentives that give civil society its vitality, the "feeling of self-sufficiency and honor among its individual members," can be imperiled only at the risk of society's cultural disintegration. Hegel identifies this "evil" [*Übel*] of society not with the suffering and domination that produces "an excess of poverty and the formation of a rabble," but with the paradox that human attempts to ameliorate the situation have the opposite effect as intended. It is this invisible hand of reality itself that Hegel calls the "cunning of reason," here manifested as the contradiction between unconscious driving forces of human behavior on the one hand, and the limitation of the individual's perspective and efficacy on the other.

As Hegel elaborates in the *Science of Logic*, the cunning of reason is the positive significance of the negative, the success of the whole that is enacted only through the seeming failure of its parts, the very violence of its workings:

> That the end relates itself immediately to an object and makes it a means, as also that through this means it determines another object, may be regarded as *violence* in so far as the end appears to be of quite another nature than the object, and the two objects similarly are mutually independent totalities. But that the end posits itself in a mediate relation with the object and *interposes* another object between itself and it, may be regarded as the *cunning* of reason. (*Daß der Zweck sich unmittelbar auf ein Objekt bezieht und dasselbe zum Mittel macht, wie auch daß er durch dieses ein anderes bestimmt, kann als* Gewalt *betrachtet werden, insofern der Zweck als von ganz anderer Natur erscheint als das Objekt und die beiden Objekte ebenso gegeneinander selbständige Totalitäten sind*. *Daß der Zweck sich aber in die mittelbare Beziehung mit dem Objekt setzt und zwischen sich und dasselbe ein anderes Objekt einschiebt, kann als die List der Vernunft angesehen werden*.)[21]

No subject, not even a state, can assume the position of the whole without paying the cost of unintended consequences: "It is the cunning of the Notion [*die* List *des Begriffes*]...that the aggrandizement of a State or of a fortune, etc., which leads finally to disaster for the State or for the owner, even appears at first to be their good fortune."[22] Hans Dieter Kittsteiner, who devotes a substantial part of his *Listen der Vernunft* to tracing Hegel's cunning of reason as the productive alienation of the part from the whole in Adam Smith, locates the basic starting point for skepticism about human agency in the observation that, "*Menschliches Handeln kann den Gang des Ganzen als solcher nicht bestimmen*."[23] This logical-metaphysical concept of the cunning of reason provides the philosophical basis of a fundamental skepticism about the ability

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[20] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 267; *Werke* 7, 390.
[21] Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 746; *Werke* 6, 452.
[22] Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 336; *Werke* 5, 398.
[23] Hans Dieter Kittsteiner, *Listen der Vernunft: Motive geschichtsphilosophischen Denkens* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1998), 8.

of people to understand or control the contradictory implications and concrete effects of their actions.

Hegel's opposition to democratic elections and derision of public opinion in the *Philosophy of Right* reflect this anxiety about the disastrous outcome of any politics of Enlightenment individualism that overestimates the subjective autonomy of the masses. He rebukes "the ordinary consciousness" for naively assuming "that delegates of the people, or indeed the people themselves, *must know best* what is in their own best interest" when "the reverse is in fact that case, for if the term 'the people' denotes a particular category of members of the state, it refers to that category of citizens *who do not know their own will*."[24] The remark to §303 drips with a decidedly conservative disdain, not only for the masses but for the radical and liberal intellectuals who humor them:

> *The many* as single individuals – and this is a favourite interpretation of [the term] 'the people' – do indeed live *together*, but only as a *crowd*, i.e. a formless mass whose movement and activity can consequently only be elemental, irrational, barbarous, and terrifying. If we hear any further talk of 'the people' as an unorganized whole, we know in advance that we can expect only generalities and one-sided declamations.
> (Die Vielen *als Einzelne, was man gerne unter Volk versteht, sind wohl ein* Zusammen, *aber nur als die* Menge - *eine formlose Masse, deren Bewegung und Tun eben damit nur elementarisch, vernunftlos, wild und fürchterlich wäre. Wie man in Beziehung auf Verfassung noch vom* Volke, *dieser unorganischen Gesamtheit, sprechen hört, so kann man schon zum voraus wissen, daß man nur Allgemeinheiten und schiefe Deklamationen zu erwarten hat*.)[25]

As Rebecca Comay puts it, "Abstract individualism is the abiding principle—the scary link, as far as Hegel is concerned, between the disparate ideologies of revolutionary decisionism, social contractarianism, and free-market liberalism. These are the options once life turns into a relay between the immediacies of each and all."[26] Hegel writes that it is only through subsumption under the universal will of the state that individuals can find the fulfillment of their particular needs: "This is the secret of the patriotism of the citizens in the sense that they know the state as their substance, for it is the state which supports their particular spheres and the legal recognition, authority, and welfare of these."[27] For Hegel, constitutional monarchy provides the dialectical solution to the problem of political modernity because it retains the divine element of feudal authority through which the potentially atomistic citizens of the modern state can know themselves to be part of an organic whole. "*Without* its monarch and that *articulation* of the whole which is necessarily and immediately associated with monarchy, *the* people is a formless mass".[28] As we will see in Hegel's reading of the French Revolution, the political contradiction resolved by constitutional monarchy lies in the disastrous effects of a radical break with the past that does not heed the demand of the whole for continuity. What the conservative Hegelian Hermann Lübbe calls "*das konstitutionell-liberale Grundelement in der politischen Theorie Hegels*" ("the constitutional-liberal foundation of Hegel's political theory") is neither dogmatically conservative nor liberal, but an attempt to mediate—here Lübbe cites Rosenkranz

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[24] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 340; *Werke* 7, 469.
[25] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 344; *Werke* 7, 473-4.
[26] Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2011), 68-9.
[27] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 329-30; *Werke* 7, 458.
[28] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 319; 447.

approvingly—"*zwischen den Extremen Rousseau's und des Herrn v. Haller, zwischen dem republikanischen Radicalismus* [sic] *und dem legitimen Absolutismus*," to achieve a peaceful unity out of the distinct and often opposed fragments of Germany in the "*Zeit des Kampfes der Revolution und der Restauration*" ("...between the extremes of Rousseau and [Swiss jurist and statesman Karl Ludwig] von Haller, between republican radicalism and legitimate absolutism in the era of the struggle between revolution and restoration").[29]

Hegel anticipates that the ordinary consciousness, which holds one-sidedly to its limited perspectives, will balk at his defense of monarchy: "The concept of the monarch is therefore extremely difficult for ratiocination – i.e. the reflective approach of the understanding, to grasp, because such ratiocination stops short at isolated determinations, and consequently knows only [individual] reasons, finite viewpoints, and *deduction* from reasons."[30] Here Hegel is at his most contrarian, and despite appearances his conclusion is merely not one of political convenience, but of logical necessity. The aforementioned persistence of Prussian absolutism makes it a historical misreading as much as a philosophical one to dismiss his conclusion as simple acquiescence to the status quo. In the *Logic*, Hegel distinguishes *Verstand*, the common sense of intuition, from *Vernunft*, reason, on the basis that reason, as dialectical, is capable of comprehending contradiction, the counterintuitive unity of opposites and opposition of unities, as in the identity of being and non-being that makes reality possible as a manifold process of becoming. Traditional mathematical logic, Hegel asserts, is useless for philosophical reflection because it is unable to say anything useful about the world. The law of identity ($A = A$) and its negative corollary, the law of contradiction ($A \neq -A$) come under frequent scrutiny in the course of the *Logic*—which comprises the two-part "Objective Logic" and a second volume, the "Subjective Logic"—and in either case, the law is shown to undermine itself. Common sense readily accepts that $A = A$, a tree is a tree, yet upon reflection individual trees are quite different from each other, and it is only by being something that is in a strict sense not-A that A can be anything at all.[31] Adding a predicate to A for Hegel is negation of its simple unity, yet this negation is itself always a partial one that fails to account for the fact that positive and negative inhere in everything. No finite being has its true content purely within itself, but with reference to the totality, to Absolute Spirit.

Directly preceding the section most vigorously highlighted by Lenin is a remark on a third law of traditional logic, the law of the excluded middle, according to which a given object is either A or not-A, and no third term exists:

> It implies that there *is* nothing that is *neither A nor not-A*, that there is not a third that is indifferent to the opposition. But in fact the third that is indifferent to the opposition is given in the law itself, namely, A itself is present in it. This A is neither $+A$ nor $-A$, and is equally well $+A$ as $-A$. The something that was supposed to be either $-A$ or not A is therefore related to both $+A$ and *not-A*; and again, in being related to A, it is supposed not to be related to *not-A*, nor to A, if it is related to *not-A*. The something itself, therefore, is the third which was supposed to be excluded.
>
> *Er enthält, daß es nicht etwas* gebe*, welches* weder A noch Nicht-A*, daß es nicht ein Drittes gebe, das gegen den Gegensatz gleichgültig sei. In der Tat aber* gibt es *in diesem Satze selbst das Dritte, das gleichgültig gegen den Gegensatz ist, nämlich A selbst ist darin vorhanden. Dies A ist weder* +A *noch* -A *und ebensowohl auch* +A *als* -A. *- Das*

[29] Lübbe, 46.
[30] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 318; *Werke* 7, 446.
[31] Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 416; *Werke* 6, 44-5.

> *Etwas, das entweder* +A *oder Nicht-A sein sollte, ist hiermit auf +A sowohl als Nicht-A bezogen; und wieder, indem es auf* A *bezogen ist, solle es* nicht *auf Nicht-A bezogen sein, sowie* nicht *auf* A*, indem es auf Nicht-*A *bezogen ist. Das Etwas selbst ist also das Dritte, welches ausgeschlossen sein sollte.*[32]

Hegel's concern here is to show that what appears to be the simple opposition of *A* and not-*A* breaks down immediately when put into the terms of *+A* and *-A*, positive and negative: as distinct from both its positive and negative articulations, *A* is the missing third term, but it is also revealed as the very condition of contradiction between them, the unity of those positive and negative moments. Despite the protestations of conventional logic and common sense, "the third which was supposed to be excluded" returns not only as the third term, but the Hegelian "ground" (*Grund*, also "reason") of the opposition. The dialectical contradiction is not a mere binary between terms that define each other—it is in the contradictory unity of the totality that either of them has its third term and therefore its true content. As being and non-being have their real existence in the unity of becoming, so are the true effect of things and people on the world only to be found outside of them, as the totality that determines them. This is the context in which Hegel introduces the cunning of reason in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: "it is the cunning which, while seeming to abstain from activity, looks on and watches how determinateness, with its concrete life, just where it fancies it is pursuing its own self-preservation and particular interest, is in fact doing the very opposite, is an activity that results in its own dissolution, and makes itself a moment of the whole."[33] So, too, must the truth of the citizens of the modern state lie outside of them, in the other of the monarch, so that they can realize the universal will as their own substance in the pursuit of their own finite determinateness in the concrete life of society.

The *Phenomenology* goes on to describe, in the rapturous passages on the French Revolution in the chapter on Spirit, the dialectical reversal that occurs when the "formless mass" revolts against the sovereignty of the monarch, attempting to take back on behalf of all the freedom reserved for a seemingly undeserving individual, but the authority of the revolutionaries is undermined in the very disruption of the existing order. The French Revolution is for Hegel not only the dawn of modern politics, but also the epitome of the contradiction that defines modern politics and demands mediation in the form of constitutional monarchy. To the monarchical authority falls the task of guaranteeing the stability of the whole even as it is riven by the extremes of continuity with feudal absolutism on the one hand, and on the other, the radical break irrevocably placed on the horizon by the revolutionary and democratic impulses of the modern era:

> For that universality which does not let itself advance to the reality of an organic articulation, and whose aim is to maintain itself in an unbroken continuity, at the same time creates a distinction within itself, because it is movement or consciousness in general. And, moreover, by virtue of its own abstraction, it divides itself into extremes equally abstract, into a simple, inflexible cold universality, and into the discrete, absolute hard rigidity and self-willed atomism of actual self-consciousness. Now that it has completed the destruction of the actual organization of the world, and exists now just for itself, this is its sole object, an object that no longer has any content, possession, existence, or outer extension, but is merely this knowledge of itself as an absolutely pure and free individual self. All that remains of the object by which it can be laid hold of is

[32] Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 438; 73.
[33] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 33; *Werke* 3, 53-4.

> solely its *abstract* existence as such. The relation, then, of these two, since each exists indivisibly and absolutely for itself, and thus cannot dispose of a middle term which would link them together, is one of wholly *unmediated* pure negation, a negation, moreover, of the individual as a being *existing* in the universal. The sole work and deed of universal freedom is therefore *death*, a death too which has no inner significance or filling, for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water.
> (*Aber die höchste und der allgemeinen Freiheit entgegengesetzteste Wirklichkeit oder vielmehr der einzige Gegenstand, der für sie noch wird, ist die Freiheit und Einzelheit des wirklichen Selbstbewußtseins selbst. Denn jene Allgemeinheit, die sich nicht zu der Realität der organischen Gliederung kommen läßt und in der ungeteilten Kontinuität sich zu erhalten den Zweck hat, unterscheidet sich in sich zugleich, weil sie Bewegung oder Bewußtsein überhaupt ist. Und zwar um ihrer eigenen Abstraktion willen trennt sie sich in ebenso abstrakte Extreme, in die einfache, unbiegsame, kalte Allgemeinheit und in die diskrete, absolute, harte Sprödigkeit und eigensinnige Punktualität des wirklichen Selbstbewußtseins. Nachdem sie mit der Vertilgung der realen Organisation fertig geworden und nun für sich besteht, ist dies ihr einziger Gegenstand - ein Gegenstand, der keinen anderen Inhalt, Besitz, Dasein und äußerliche Ausdehnung mehr hat, sondern er ist nur dies Wissen von sich als absolut reinem und freiem einzelnen Selbst. An was er erfaßt werden kann, ist allein sein* abstraktes *Dasein überhaupt. - Das Verhältnis also dieser beiden, da sie unteilbar absolut für sich sind und also keinen Teil in die Mitte schicken können, wodurch sie sich verknüpften, ist die ganz* unvermittelte *reine Negation, und zwar die Negation des Einzelnen als* Seienden *in dem Allgemeinen. Das einzige Werk und Tat der allgemeinen Freiheit ist daher der* Tod*, und zwar ein* Tod*, der keinen inneren Umfang und Erfüllung hat; denn was negiert wird, ist der unerfüllte Punkt des absolut freien Selbsts; er ist also der kälteste, platteste Tod, ohne mehr Bedeutung als das Durchhauen eines Kohlhaupts oder ein Schluck Wassers.*)[34]

Here the centrality of the *Logic* to Hegel's political conclusions is evident not least of all in the missing "middle term," the absence of a substantial A to "link" A and not-A of the subject and object of action together in an "organic articulation." Hegel's image of the revolution as frantic self-destruction that ends in the most banal of deaths surely evinces some of the fear that Habermas famously makes responsible for Hegel's ambivalence towards the revolution:

> Only when he had lodged the revolution deep in the beating heart of the World Spirit did he feel safe from it. Hegel did not curse the French Revolution and its children into oblivion; he celebrated them into oblivion. During all the years of his life, according to one tradition, he honored the Revolution with a toast on the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. If this ritual did indeed take place, then its magical character would be quite undeniable: the celebration would have been an exorcism.
> (*Erst als er im klopfenden Herzen des Weltgeistes selbst die Revolution festgemacht hatte, fühlte er sich vor ihr sicher. Hegel hat die Französische Revolution und deren Kinder nicht weggescholten, er hat sie hinweggefeiert. Zeit seines Lebens hat er, einer Überlieferung zufolge, am Jahrestage des Sturms auf die Bastille mit erhobenem Glas die*

[34] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 436; *Werke* 3, 359-6.

Revolution geehrt. Wenn das Ritual so stattgefunden hätte, würde es einen magischen Charakter nicht verleugnen können: die Ehrung wäre Beschwörung gewesen.)[35]

The transition from the terror of absolute freedom to Kantian morality involves another dialectical reversal in which, "the meaningless death, the unfilled negativity of the self, changes round in its inner Notion into absolute positivity. For consciousness, the immediate unity of itself with the universal will, its demand to know itself as this specific point in the universal will, is changed round into the absolutely opposite experience."[36] This notorious passage describes the dialectic of revolution at its apogee: after the initial emancipatory impulse reaches its grotesque fulfillment in the "meaningless death" of the Terror, this negativity rebounds back on itself in the "consciousness" of those left in its wake as positive knowledge of the limits of subjective particularity. The abstract negation of political reality becomes the occasion not only for radical transformation of society but for people to reevaluate the consequences of radical action: the subject of Kantian morality emerges from the French Revolution sympathetic but chastened, laying claim only to universal will only as philosophical reflection, "not will as revolutionary government or anarchy striving to establish anarchy, nor itself as the centre of this faction or the opposite faction".[37] As Kittsteiner puts it, Habermas's argument is that the cunning of reason allows Hegel to recognize the necessity of the historical movement of the French Revolution, even as the Terror itself offended his sensibilities: "*Hegel will die Revolutionierung der Wirklichkeit ohne Revolutionäre. Was er an Robespierre kritisiert, delegiert er an den 'objektiven Geist'. Die List der Vernunft schafft unbewußt, was es bewußt nicht geben darf; die Philosophie erfreut sich an den revolutionären Resultaten, ohne selbst revolutionär sein zu müssen.*"[38]

Comay takes the Habermasian reading as a starting point in her book on Hegel and the French Revolution, but sharpens the political distinctions to clarify what is perplexingly radical about Hegel's seemingly conservative critique of the revolution. While Hegel, like the paradigmatic conservative critic of the revolution, Edmund Burke, evinces an "unflinching identification of the Terror as the inauguration of political modernity," he is nonetheless able to assert its logical necessity, toasting the violence of the cunning of reason. This puts him at odds as well with Kant and the liberal consensus of "1789 without the rest, the standard reflex of the German intelligentsia. Hegel is almost unique among his contemporaries for having refused this kind of squeamish liberalism."[39] In Comay's heavily psychoanalytically-inflected reading, Hegel is unexpectedly radical in the way that his dialectical account of the French Revolution is able register the trauma of the event and anticipate the contradiction inherent in its outcome. Against Habermas, she argues that, "[t]he deadly power that knows how to reduce heads to cabbages is, for Hegel, the same abstraction that governs the ideology of liberalism: Hegel describes the latter as a reduction of the community to an aggregate of "volitional atoms"—isolated individuals bound together in common pursuit of private ends. Hegel does not simply tolerate the former (the Terror) as the historical cost of the latter (liberalism),"[40] but rather, sees the burgeoning egalitarian impulse of post-Enlightenment modernity in all its contradiction.

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[35] Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie und Praxis: Sozialphilosophische Studien* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), 128; *Theory and Practice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 121.
[36] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 363; *Werke* 3, 440.
[37] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 363; *Werke* 3, 440.
[38] Kittsteiner, *Listen der Vernunft: Motive Geschichtsphilosophischen Denkens*, 91.
[39] Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution*, 76.
[40] Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution*, 76.

Slavoj Žižek—whose Marxist reading of Hegel as simultaneously radical and conservative is central to his own work—cites Comay's study with approval, arguing that Hegel's insight into the self-undermining demand for universal freedom, which entails the destruction of abstract negation, is banal relative to its paradoxically positive necessity: "Hegel's point is rather to highlight the enigma of why, in spite of the fact that Revolutionary Terror was a historical deadlock, we have to pass through it in order to arrive at the modern rational state."[41] Hegel had no need to, in the Habermasian idiom, rid the revolution of its revolutionaries, because the violence of the cunning of reason had already done so of necessity. As so often in Hegelian dialectics, the key reversal finds the subject and predicate reversed: the political agent of negation finds itself negated by the very events it set in motion. You can, indeed, take the revolutionaries out of the revolution, and the 20th century will show that you can just as well take the revolution out of the revolutionaries, but you can't take the contradiction out of modernity. That Hegel understood this is the reason the Hegelian Marxist tradition has been able to theorize both the necessity and failure of revolutionary impulses with reference to his dialectics. While castigating Hegel for his conservatism, Marx will nonetheless find in the logic that undergirds it the inspiration for the first serious attempt.

[41] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2013), 206.

1.2 – Right Side Up Again: Marx's Hegelianism and Class Struggle

The political ambivalence of Hegel's legacy was also deeply felt by the poet Heinrich Heine, who already during Hegel's lifetime satirized the philosopher's reputation for conservative apologia in an untitled poem from his 1827 *Songbook*:

> Too fragmentary are world and life!
> For the German Professor I am rife.
> He skillfully joins all of life's shreds
> In a system through rational deduction;
> With his nightcap and his sleeping robe's threads
> He stuffs gaps in the world's construction.
> (*Zu fragmentarisch ist Welt und Leben!*
> *Ich will mich zum deutschen Professor begeben.*
> *Der weiss das Leben zusammenzusetzen,*
> *Und er macht ein verständlich System daraus;*
> *Mit seinen Nachtmützen und Schlafrockfetzen*
> *Stopft er die Lücken des Weltenbaus.*)[42]

With this caricature of the logician who sutures up a reality that cannot be justified logically, Heine mocks as a wizard of counterintuitive abstraction the philosopher he nonetheless later recognized as Germany's greatest since Leibniz.[43] At the time, Hegelianism was dominant in Germany: the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm III and particularly his Minister of Culture Karl vom Stein zum Altenstein, who had called Hegel to Berlin, continued to be favorable towards Hegel's followers after his death in 1831, and Hegelians retained top academic posts well into the decade that followed. As the British biographer of Marx David McLellan recounts, the Old Hegelians who made up Hegel's inner circle of students considered themselves faithful stenographers of an already completed system, and much of what was called Hegelianism throughout this period invites the sort ridicule to which Heine would not be the last to subject it:

> In philosophy, since they believed Hegel's system to be the final one, their work consisted mostly in writing the history of philosophy. In politics they held to the proposition that 'the real is the rational' and remained aloof, in the belief, according to Rosenkranz, that 'they should quietly take over Hegel's doctrines, avoid all extremes and, in the knowledge that their philosophy was world-historical, final and reconciling all contradictions, not get involved in the struggles of the moment: a position of positive quietism'.[44]

It is easy to see how this image of Hegel and his intellectually conformist following would rankle Heine's fiercely idiosyncratic sensibilities. A friend and collaborator of Marx during the *Vormärz* period leading up to the failed German revolutions of 1848, Heine was a liberal who recoiled as well from the conclusions reached by the most radical of the Young Hegelians: In the preface to the 1954 French edition of his autobiographical *Confessions*, Heine writes, "*Die mehr oder minder geheimen Führer der deutschen Kommunisten sind große Logiker, von denen die*

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[42] Heinrich Heine, *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 123; *Buch der Lieder*, in *Sämmtliche Werke* 15 (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1862), 241.
[43] Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation*, 362.
[44] David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (Edinburgh: Macmillan, 1969), 6.

stärksten aus der Hegelschen Schule hervorgegangen, sind sie sind ohne Zweifel die fähigsten Köpfe und die tatkräftigsten Charaktere Deutschlands. Diese Doktoren der Revolution sind die einzigen Männer in Deutschland, denen Leben innewohnt, und ihnen gehört, ich fürchte, die Zukunft" ("The more or less clandestine leaders of the German communists are great logicians, the sharpest of whom emerged from the Hegelian school to become Germany's most capable minds and consequential figures. These doctors of revolution are the only men in Germany who are truly alive, and I fear the future belongs to them"). [45] Heine's appreciation for "the German communists" specifically of "the Hegelian school" clearly reflects not only awe, but also a palpable alarm. Whatever else Hegel's logical gymnastics served to justify, politically they buttressed a conservative-liberal enshrinement of individual rights and a deep skepticism of any radical break with the established order. Marx and Engels jettison both of these Hegelian hallmarks, nowhere more famously than in the *Communist Manifesto*'s call for a dictatorship of the proletariat (although the phrase does not occur in the text) whose first order of business would be "despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production".[46] Heine's admission of anxiety about such unavoidable upheaval, "*ich fürchte*," is conspicuously absent from the German edition of the *Confessions* published the following year, an omission one might be tempted to see in a Habermasian light as Heine's own nervous Bastille Day toast, embracing with trepidation the philosophical revolution of the communist Hegelians, Marx and Engels. Appropriately, a greater unity underpins these seemingly incongruous images of Hegelianism. As the remainder of this chapter will demonstrate, Marx's own relationship to Hegel changed over the course of his life, and his theoretical trajectory is marked by the political ambivalence of Hegel's dialectical logic. The fruits of Marx's return to Hegel, at that time against orthodoxy, are readily apparent in his shift in focus from a theory of proletarian revolution to formulating the logic of capital. Marx will not be the last philosopher, nor the last Marxist, to study the *Logic* in the wake of a failed revolution, but the usefulness of the rhetorical position of the dialectical curmudgeon is already evident in the course of his intellectual evolution: contrary to historical caricature, it is the so-called mature Marx who is the more Hegelian, and it is the logic of capital developed in this later period that has retained its relevance in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Still in the 19th century, almost three decades apart, Heine's whimsical poetic jab at Hegel and his fearful celebration of the German professor's revolutionary progeny capture with remarkable prescience the polarities of Hegelianism, and hint at both its dynamism and sustained relevance to German society in the intervening years. Initially, the Young Hegelians' criticisms of Hegel were limited to the sphere of religion: where the ideal role of the state contradicted the reality of Prussia, the "left" wing of Hegelianism, from Ludwig Feuerbach to Arnold Ruge and the brothers Bruno and Edgar Bauer, blamed the church for the discrepancy. There was certainly no talk of revolution, much less a proletarian class that could carry it out.[47] It was not until the political situation in Prussia took a turn towards absolutist entrenchment that the Young Hegelians' break with Hegel and the Old Hegelians took on an explicitly political character. In 1840, both Friedrich Wilhelm III and Altenstein died, and the new king, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, unleashed a wave of reaction that saw even the constitutional monarchy advocated by Hegel branded as heresy.[48] He appointed as his new Minister of Culture Friedrich Julius Stahl, a

[45] Heinrich Heine, *Geständnisse*, in *Sämtliche Schriften* 11 (Munich: Reiher Verlag, 1976), 183.
[46] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* 6, 504; *Werke* 4, 481.
[47] McLellan, 24.
[48] Robbie Shilliam, "Marx's Path to 'Capital': The International Dimension of an Intellectual Journey," 354.

committed anti-Hegelian who gave the ultraconservative Friedrich Schelling Hegel's old seat at the University of Berlin in an effort to rid philosophy of the "dragonseed of Hegelian pantheism" ("*die Drachensaat des Hegelschen Pantheismus*").[49] In the audience at Schelling's inaugural lecture, along with Kierkegaard and Bakunin, was Engels, and the period of political disenchantment that followed saw the Young Hegelians develop a distinct variety of political positions in opposition to the mainstream of liberal opinion, as McLellan argues:

> The political philosophy of the Young Hegelians can be well described as 'philosophical radicalism'. As such they were distinct from the much more widespread liberal movement. Liberalism, being a movement with a large amount of at least tacit support among the most prosperous citizens, was above all practical. It had the ideas of the Prussian Reform Era to look back on and its philosopher was Kant. Radicalism was more inspired by Rousseau and the French Revolution seen through the eyes of the Young Hegelians and tended to be excessively theoretical. Liberal doctrines arose from the desire of the bourgeoisie to be represented in the government, whereas radicalism was limited to a small circle of intellectuals, who tended to adopt revolutionary attitudes and reject compromises. The liberals, on the other hand, had strictly limited aims, were in favour of reform and wished to arrive at some sort of agreement with the monarchy.[50]

With the scope of their revolt against Hegel expanded to politics, the Young Hegelians found themselves in a fundamentally oppositional position, beset from all sides. Shut out of academia, they carried the "dragonseed" of a Hegelianism that, in its "Old" form, was already all too radical for the king's taste. According to Lübbe, Hegelians of the center and right were able to retain a certain presence in German academia, "*die trotz mancherlei behördlicher Schikanen auch dann noch stark blieb, als nach 1840 und erst recht nach 1848 der politische Wind ihnen entgegenblies*" ("which, despite institutional harassment, remained sizeable even as the political winds began to blow against them, first after 1840 and then in full force after 1848").[51] By contrast, the Young Hegelians had mostly forsaken the bureaucracy and adopted the positions of outside agitators, an intellectual vanguard that produced in Marx its most developed and dynamic commitment to putting dialectics into the service of realizing the political praxis Hegel had refused.

For Lenin, Marx's articles in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* mark the last stage in his transition to communism and the idea of proletarian revolution from the radicalism of the Young Hegelians, whose break with liberalism was not complete enough to shake their faith in democracy.[52] It was during this period of time that Marx undertook his first extended study of Hegel. Written on his honeymoon in Kreuznach in 1843, Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (*Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*) comprises an extended commentary on sections §261-313 of the chapter on the state from the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, as well as an introduction, published as a standalone essay in the *Jahrbücher* the following year. What is commonly thought of as the young, humanist Marx's materialist critique of Hegelian idealism is here readily apparent. Marx explains how the Hegelian categories obscure the workings of real human interaction in a "logical, pantheistic mysticism" ("*logischer, pantheistischer Mystizismus*") that inverts subject and predicate, presenting the real actions of

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[49] Christoph Helferich, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1979), 99.
[50] McLellan, 24-5.
[51] Hermann Lübbe, *Die Hegelsche Rechte*, 8.
[52] Lenin, *Collected Works* 21, 47.

people and institutions as driven by the external, alien force of conceptual necessity.[53] Marx himself displays a dialectical fondness for anastrophe, the rhetorical inversion of a sentence, in his assessment of Hegel's idea of constitutional monarchy as the reconciliation of the contradictions of political modernity: "Not the logic of the matter, but the matter of logic [*Nicht die Logik der Sache, sondern die Sache der Logik*] is the philosophical element. The logic does not serve to prove the state, but the state to prove the logic." [54] A similar reversal occurs when Marx writes that, "Hegel gives *a political body to his logic*: *he does not give the* logic of the body politic."[55] In other words, Hegel's treatise on politics is not really about politics at all. Marx goes on to observe that Hegel argues for monarchy as an alternative to democracy not despite, but precisely because of the sheer arbitrariness of the hereditary monarchical claim to sovereignty. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, the *Philosophy of Right* posits that only a factor beyond the immediate opposition of particular interests can confer the unquestionable authority that allows the state to retain social cohesion. Indeed, what could be more impervious to the vicissitude of ideological claims to comparative authority than the source of absolute authority, the divinely ordained accident of birth? The constitutional monarch plays a mediating role in the syllogism of society as the middle term that, in standing above the fray of warring factions, stands also for the universal, and thereby guarantees the meaning of the totality.

Marx therefore reproaches Hegel not for his political conservatism as such, but for the naivete with which he attributes the structural inadequacy of existing, material forms of life—cracks in the edifices of man's creation—to a metaphysical rift in reality itself: "Hegel is not to be blamed for depicting the nature of the modern state as it is but for presenting that which is as the *nature of the state*. That the rational is actual is proved precisely in the *contradiction* of *irrational actuality*, which everywhere is the contrary of what it asserts, and asserts the contrary of what it is."[56] There is no middle ground between real extremes, Marx argues, and here the political implications of Marx's materialist dialectic become apparent. Hegel's idealism posits the ontological necessity of the monarch as the moment of reconciliation between society's antagonistic forces, a unity that incorporates this fundamental rivenness as an organizing principle of the body politic. In the materialist formulation, no reconciliation is possible without violent rupture and restructuring of existing institutions. It is precisely the continuity with feudalism in Hegel's solution to the problem of the French Revolution that enables Marx to begin to see in the contradictory results of bourgeois modernity the need for a total break not only with feudalism, but with the capitalist order that had unfolded from its overthrow. "The Middle Ages are the animal history (*die* Tiergeschichte) of human society, its zoology," Marx writes.[57] Modernity, which Marx identifies explicitly with civilization, has obtained a counterintuitive result: In the attempt to rescue humanity from the barbaric unfreedom of medieval Europe, it emancipated humanity by reducing it to an abstraction, giving birth to a new, civilized barbarism.

The introduction to Marx's critique, which was the only portion of the *Critique* published during Marx's lifetime, posits for the first time the proletarian class as the only subject capable of leaping dialectically beyond the opposition of the medieval and the modern in Hegel's system and German society:

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[53] Marx, *Collected Works* 3, 7; *Werke* 1, 205.
[54] Marx, *Collected Works* 3, 18; 216.
[55] Marx, *Collected Works* 3, 48; 250.
[56] Marx, *Collected Works* 3, 63; 266.
[57] Marx, *Collected Works* 3, 81; 285.

> As philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapons in philosophy. And once the lightning of thought has squarely struck this ingenuous soil of the people the emancipation of the *Germans* into *human beings* will take place. [...] The only *practically* possible liberation of Germany is liberation that proceeds from the standpoint of the theory which proclaims man to be the highest being for man. In Germany emancipation from the Middle Ages is possible only as emancipation from the partial victories over the Middle Ages as well. In Germany *no* kind of bondage can be broken without breaking *every* kind of bondage. The *thorough* Germany cannot make a revolution without making a *thoroughgoing* revolution. (*Wie die Philosophie im Proletariat ihre* materiellen*, so findet das Proletariat in der Philosophie seine* geistigen *Waffen, und sobald der Blitz des Gedankens gründlich in diesen naiven Volksboden eingeschlagen ist, wird sich die Emanzipation der* Deutschen *zu* Menschen *vollziehn. ... Die einzig* praktisch *mögliche Befreiung Deutschlands ist die Befreiung auf dem Standpunkt der Theorie, welche den Menschen für das höchste Wesen des Menschen erklärt. In Deutschland ist die Emanzipation von dem* Mittelalter *nur möglich als die Emanzipation zugleich von den* teilweisen *Überwindungen des Mittelalters. In Deutschland kann* keine *Art der Knechtschaft gebrochen werden, ohne* jede *Art der Knechtschaft zu brechen. Das* gründliche *Deutschland kann nicht revolutionieren, ohne* von Grund aus *zu revolutionieren.*)[58]

The empirical fact of Germany's relative political and economic backwardness compared with England and France confronted Marx no less than it did Hegel, and Marx's move in this passage is a recognizably dialectical one: only tactically aligned with a bourgeois revolution that had never come to absolutist Prussia, the German proletariat is the negation of the negation, ready to cast off the false liberation of capitalist humanity even while it is still mired in the feudal vestiges of animal existence. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel welcomes women into political modernity by excluding them from the realm of agency: Masculinity is "powerful and active," while femininity is "passive and subjective. Man therefore has his actual substantial life in the state, in science, etc., and otherwise in work and struggle…. In the family, he has a peaceful intuition of this unity, and an emotive and subjective ethical life. Woman, however, has her substantial vocation in the family, and her ethical disposition consists in this *piety*."[59] The semi-feudal, patriarchal structures that remained in place in the German-speaking territories well into the 19th century probably influenced Marx's estimation of the political significance of gender oppression as much as Hegel's dialectical apologia for traditional authority: It is precisely Germany's conservative cultural norms, Marx anticipates, that will make its potential economic transformation all the more radical. Marx's agent of change is not always explicitly male, but his conception of the revolutionary proletariat carries over the implication that women are not political subjects apart from the process of proletarianization which, as he states most famously in the *Communist Manifesto*, will make gender more and more irrelevant to class struggle: "Differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class," Marx and Engels write. All are instruments of labour, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex."[60] As a function of class oppression, the oppression of women will be eradicated as a matter of course, not only for the proletariat but for the capitalist class as well:

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[58] Marx, *Collected Works* 3, 187; 391.
[59] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 206.
[60] Marx, *Collected Works* 6, 491.

"The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital."[61]

Robbie Shilliam is right to emphasize the speculative nature of, indeed the contrarian undercurrent of defiant futurity in, Marx's identification of the German working class as the subject of revolution:

> ...if Marx confidently proclaimed this German agent to be none other than the proletariat, he had, at the same time, accepted that this was a class of the future. After all, no fraternal halls existed in Germany on a par with the Parisian artisan clubs. In fact, by the 1840s in Prussia the term *Proletariat* (as well as *Classe*) still denoted only a disintegrated humanity, a 'decorporized' social being that was the opposite of a fraternity, not to mention universalistic social force.[62]

Marx draws on Hegel precisely in order to, as it were, turn a negative into a positive: "If I negate powdered pigtails, I am still left with unpowdered pigtails. If I negate the German state of affairs in 1843, then, according to the French computation of time, I am hardly in the year 1789, and still less in the focus of the present," Marx observes wryly. "For we shared the restorations of the modern nations although we had not shared their revolutions."[63] Yet it is not the French working class but the German one to whom Marx allocates the historical role of the agent of total revolution, capable of "overcoming" the partial victory of bourgeois revolution. It is revealing that Marx's next major undertaking after the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* was a study of the French Revolution—an article in *Vorwärts!* the following year finds Marx startlingly close to the distrust of common sense and radical action embodied in Hegel's notion of the cunning of reason. There he argues that the advanced state of political development in France and England has made those countries all the more impervious to proletarian consciousness:

> The mightier the state, and the *more political* therefore a country is, the less is it inclined to grasp the *general* principle of social maladies and to seek their basis in the *principle of the state*, hence in the *present structure of society*, the active, conscious and official expression of which is the state. The keener and more lively it is, the *more incapable* is it of understanding social ills. The *classic* period of political intellect is the French Revolution. Far from seeing the source of social shortcomings in the principle of the state, the heroes of the *French Revolution* instead saw in social defects the source of political evils. Thus, *Robespierre* saw in great poverty and great wealth only an obstacle to *pure democracy*. Therefore he wished to establish a universal Spartan frugality.
> *Je mächtiger der Staat, je* politischer *daher ein Land ist, um so weniger ist es geneigt, im* Prinzip des Staats*, also in der* jetzigen Einrichtung der Gesellschaft*, deren tätiger, selbstbewußter und offizieller Ausdruck der Staat ist, den Grund der* sozialen *Gebrechen zu suchen und ihr* allgemeines *Prinzip zu begreifen. Der politische Verstand ist eben politischer Verstand, weil er* innerhalb *der Schranken der Politik denkt. Je geschärfter, je lebendiger, desto* unfähiger *ist er zur Auffassung sozialer Gebrechen. Die* klassische *Periode des politischen Verstandes ist die französische Revolution. Weit entfernt, im Prinzip des Staats die Quelle der sozialen Mängel zu erblicken, erblicken die Heroen der* französischen Revolution *vielmehr in den sozialen Mängeln die Quelle politischer Übelstände. So sieht* Robespierre *in der großen Armut und dem großen Reichtume nur ein*

[61] Marx, *Collected Works* 6, 502.
[62] Shilliam, 362.
[63] Marx, *Collected Works* 3, 176; 379.

> *Hindernis der* reinen Demokratie. *Er wünscht daher eine allgemeine* spartanische *Frugalität zu etablieren*.[64]

With a curmudgeonly assertion of the counterintuitive, Marx attempts to explain the limitation of the French Revolution in dialectical terms, as the failure of a human endeavor insufficiently aware of its own conditions of possibility. The more sophisticated a nation considers itself, the more rigid its understanding of the societal cause and effect in which its subjects attempt to intervene. Robespierre's error unto terror was the assumption, common to French political culture, of a narrow conception of politics that precludes the economic basis of "social shortcomings". The "political intellect" (Marx's use of "*Verstand*" evokes Hegel's distinction between "*Vernunft*," capable of dialectical reason, and the "understanding" of traditional logic and common sense) whose acuity blinds an agent to the fundamental structural antagonisms of society, is nothing other than the one-sided, factional sense of politics Hegel in the *Phenomenology* associates with the post-revolutionary crisis of authority. As we discussed earlier in this chapter, the positive result of the French Revolution, inclusive of the Terror, consists in the enhanced moral sensibility cultivated by the very failure of its revolutionary project. Recognizing the Hegelian lesson of the revolution, Marx argues that the egalitarian impulse of the revolutionaries, due to the narrowness of their "political" understanding of the workings of society, rebounded back on itself in producing the dynamic, liberal social hierarchy more appropriate to the modern era. Capitalism is all the more secure in countries where the public has a sense, whether conscious or unconscious, that they are free.

If France and England were too advanced to be the frontline of revolution, then on the other hand, the colonized world was not advanced enough. Marx even going as far—as Edward Said explores at length in *Orientalism*—as to assert the dialectical necessity of British colonial rule in India:

> Karl Marx identified the notion of an Asiatic economic system in his 1853 analyses of British rule in India, and then put beside that immediately the human depredation introduced into this system by English colonial interference, rapacity, and outright cruelty. In article after article he returned with increasing conviction to the idea that even in destroying Asia, Britain was making possible there a real social revolution.[65]

The subject of revolution, therefore, could only be found in a certain Goldilocks zone of economic and cultural development. In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels operate on this assumption when they single out Germany as the theater of greatest interest to European communists, predicting that Germany is "on the eve of a bourgeois revolution" that "will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution."[66] The temporal displacement here once again points to the paradox of a revolutionary class that cannot act politically but as the completion of the partial revolution that produced its subjugation. In the case of the German proletariat, capitalism only supplanted feudalism after the egalitarian revolution in France had turned into its opposite, with Napoleon, leaving Germany mercifully untouched by the liberal political freedom bourgeois revolution would have brought. The theory of proletarian revolution, nowhere more famously developed than in the *Manifesto*, is explicitly grounded in Marx's materialist appropriation of Hegelian logic. The basic contradiction between the forces of

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[64] Marx, *Collected Works* 3, 199; 402.
[65] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 153.
[66] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works* 6, 519; *Werke* 4, 493.

production and the relations of production in capitalism leads inexorably to crisis after crisis, a state of emergency that reveals the constitutive instability of the whole: "Society suddenly finds itself put back into a state of momentary barbarism; it appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence; industry and commerce seem to be destroyed; and why? Because there is too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce."[67]

Since Marx's dialectic posits the material basis for each stage of historical development as riven by internal contradiction, the negation of the capitalist order can only emerge from within it, just as the not-A of modernity was birthed in the contradictions within the A of the Middle Ages: "The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself. But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class—the *proletarians*."[68] Within this modern working class, a unity of interests predominates that represents the lowest common denominator of society's lowest stratum: "All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority."[69] That only this class can resolve the contradictions of liberal modernity will remain a central precept of the Marxist theory of revolution retained even after the possibility of revolution itself appears more and more foreclosed. The Western industrial proletariat is Marx's subject of revolution not because it has a valid moral claim, but because it is structurally produced by capitalism in such a way that it can wield structural influence. All others would restructure society only as much as needed to benefit themselves at the expense of those with less power, eventually falling victim, by virtue of their limited subjective perspective to the cunning of reason. The liberation of the proletariat, on the other hand, is an objective necessity: "The proletariat…cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air."[70] That Marx obviously did not have the contemporary connotation of ethnic and sexual "minorities" in mind in his use of the term should not prevent us from recognizing the problem this solution to Hegel's cunning of reason will present in the subsequent chapters when racial and gender politics appear to supersede orthodox Marxist class struggle.

At a loss to explain the failure of the 1848 revolutions to achieve this result, Marx again returned to Hegel, this time engaging extensively with the *Logic*.[71] There are two main versions of the story of how Marx's relationship to Hegel developed over the course of his life. In the first version, Marx is primarily a Hegelian by virtue of his intellectual origins, and his movement away from the humanist sensibilities of the Young Hegelians towards the hard edges of a theory of revolution reflected as well an abandonment of the "idealist" assertion that contradiction inheres in reality itself, that there is indeed a middle ground between real extremes. Among all historical agents, the proletariat alone is to outwit the cunning of reason, escaping the fundamental contradiction that, according to Hegel, inevitably underlies its own revolutionary action. Lübbe writes that the conservatism of the Hegelian center and right stems in part from a fidelity to Hegel on this point: "*die Unfähigkeit, im politischen Willen bis zum totalen Gegenteil*

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[67] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works* 6, 490; 468.
[68] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works* 6, 490; 468.
[69] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works* 6, 495.
[70] Marx and Engels, *Collected Works* 6, 495.
[71] Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 41.

dessen fortzugehen, was schon ist oder passiert, ist eine der entscheidenden Wirkungen, die Hegel durch seine Schule aufs 19. Jahrhundert ausgeübt hat. Die Dialektik blieb eher eine Methode des Begreifens und der Darstellung der Revolution; als Innervationskraft eines revolutionären Willens fungierte sie kaum."[72] In Hegel's hands, the dialectical "method" is of purely analytic value: in making dialectics itself the "innervating force of a revolutionary will," Marx mutilates it beyond recognition. Conservative Hegelians like Lübbe, and interpreters of Hegel in the Anglo-American tradition generally,[73] are no less sympathetic to this story than are Marxists,[74] starting with Engels and on through Stalin, whose "Dialectical and Historical Materialism" quotes Marx's account of turning the dialectic "right side up again" in the German afterword to *Capital*. There he asserts: "My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite."[75] Yet this very passage betrays—contra these conservative Hegelian and orthodox Marxist narratives—the reductiveness of charting a linear trajectory of departure. Marx suggests that he rejected the Hegelian dialectic in its idealist form so forcefully due to its popularity:

> The mystifying side of Hegelian dialectic I criticised nearly thirty years ago, at a time when it was still the fashion. But just as I was working at the first volume of *Das Kapital*, it was the good pleasure of the peevish, arrogant, mediocre Epigoni who now talk large in cultured Germany, to treat Hegel in same way as the brave Moses Mendelssohn in Lessing's time treated Spinoza, i. e., as a "dead dog". I therefore openly avowed myself the pupil of that mighty thinker, and even here and there, in the chapter on the theory of value, coquetted with the modes of expression peculiar to him. [*Die mystifizierende Seite der Hegelschen Dialektik habe ich vor beinah 30 Jahren, zu einer Zeit kritisiert, wo sie noch Tagesmode war. Aber grade als ich den ersten Band des „Kapital" ausarbeitete, gefiel sich das verdrießliche, anmaßliche und mittelmäßige Epigonentum, welches jetzt im gebildeten Deutschland das große Wort führt, darin, Hegel zu behandeln, wie der brave Moses Mendelssohn zu Lessings Zeit den Spinoza behandelt hat, nämlich als „toten Hund". Ich bekannte mich daher offen als Schüler jenes großen Denkers und kokettierte sogar hier und da im Kapitel über die Werttheorie mit der ihm eigentümlichen Ausdrucksweise.*][76]

There is a contrarian spite to the way Marx presents both his disavowal of and his later identification with Hegel—in either case, he sees himself as going against the grain of intellectual conformity and comfortable opinion. In embracing his own continuity with the dialectical curmudgeon par excellence, Marx refuses to obscure the Hegelian origin of his own philosophical nonconformism.

In fact, Marx is putting it lightly when he describes the use of Hegelian categories as "coquetting": beyond playful allusions, the volumes of *Capital* bear witness to the articulation of the Hegelian *Geist* not just as an alienated humanity whose reconciliation with the material world will be brought about by communism, but as capital itself in its ever-expanding global network. This is the second version of the story, only hinted at in Marx's admission of softening: Marx did not become less Hegelian over the course of his life, but more Hegelian, increasingly viewing

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[72] Lübbe, 9.
[73] G.H.R. Parkinson, "Hegel, Marx and the Cunning of Reason," *Philosophy* 64, no. 249 (July 1989): 302.
[74] Ronald A. Kieve, "The Hegelian Inversion: On the Possibility of a Marxist Dialectic," *Science & Society* 47, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 37.
[75] Marx, *Collected Works* 35, 19; *Werke* 23, 27.
[76] Marx, *Collected Works* 35, 19; *Werke* 23, 27.

revolution not as a political act by an existing class of society, but as a characteristic of the driving force of historical development, the inhuman source of alienation itself. The cunning of reason cannot be outwitted; only capital has the last laugh. Kittsteiner observes how this reading of Marx puts him at odds with Engels, but notes that the germs of *Capital*'s materialist rendering of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* are already evident in *The German Ideology*: "*Denn im Gegensatz zu Engels hat er bereits ein anderes Verhältnis zu Hegel gewonnen….* Die Geschichte selbst, *die fremde Macht hinter dem Rücken der agierenden Menschen ist aus ihrer Feuerbachschen Verdammung wieder auferstanden, sie hat allerdings ihren Namen geändert. In der* Deutschen Ideologie *entziffert Marx den Hegelschen* Weltgeist *als den* Weltmarkt." ("In contrast to Engels, he had already acquired another relationship to Hegel…. *History itself*, the alien force operating behind the backs of human actors, rose up again out of its Feuerbachian damnation, albeit under a different name. In *The German Ideology* Marx decodes the Hegelian *World Spirit* as the *world market*." [77] The vulgar materialist throws out with the bathwater of idealism the baby that is the cunning of reason, rejecting the notion that history itself could exhibit the traces of subjectivity. The position of the dialectical curmudgeon is to find the truth of idealism in the contradiction of materiality, and as Kittsteiner observes, Marx breaks with the tradition of the Young Hegelians from Feuerbach onwards when he begins to reconceptualize the "alien force" at work "behind the backs of human agents" in terms of political economy.

In *Capital*, Marx's Hegelianism is fully developed: the subject of revolution is not the proletariat but capital, its action is not *revolutionieren* but *umwälzen.* The cunning of reason, "*die fremde Macht hinter dem Rücken der agierenden Menschen*," appears as the economic *Geist* of the market, a specter with the uncontrollable power to bring prosperity and ruin to all within its ever-expanding sphere of influence. The young Marx's Hegelian punching bag was the subjectified predicate, the metaphysical inversion of actual causal relations that sees the embodied existence of human beings as ontologically secondary to the concepts they instantiate. Ideology for Marx consists in the de facto assumption that these concepts are simply given, an external constraint divorced from its all-too-human origins. This ontological priority of the object, however, comes back with a vengeance in the mature Marx's analysis of capital as a self-relating totality. In the chapter on the rate of profit, Marx writes that surplus value, which distinguishes capitalism from all previous modes of production, is just such an autonomous and inaccessible object:

> In surplus value, the relation between capital and labour is laid bare; in the relation of capital to profit, i. e., of capital to surplus value that appears on the one hand as an excess over the cost price of commodities realised in the process of circulation and, on the other, as an excess more closely determined by its relation to the total capital, the *capital appears as a relation to itself*, a relation in which it, as the original sum of value, is distinguished from a new value which it generated. One is conscious that capital generates this new value by its movement in the processes of production and circulation. But the way in which this occurs is cloaked in mystery and appears to originate from hidden qualities inherent in capital itself. The further we follow the process of the self-expansion of capital, the more mysterious the relations of capital will become, and the less the secret of its internal organism will be revealed.
> (*Im Mehrwert ist das Verhältnis zwischen Kapital und Arbeit bloßgelegt; im Verhältnis von Kapital und Profit, d.h. von Kapital und dem Mehrwert, wie er einerseits als im Zirkulationsprozeß realisierter Überschuß über den Kostpreis der Ware, andrerseits als*

[77] Kittsteiner, *Listen der Vernunft: Motive Geschichtsphilosophischen Denkens*, 18.

> *ein durch sein Verhältnis zum Gesamtkapital näher bestimmter Überschuß erscheint, erscheint* das Kapital als Verhältnis zu sich selbst, *ein Verhältnis, worin es sich als ursprüngliche Wertsumme von einem, von ihm selbst gesetzten Neuwert unterscheidet. Daß es diesen Neuwert während seiner Bewegung durch den Produktionsprozeß und den Zirkulationsprozeß erzeugt, dies ist im Bewußtsein. Aber wie dies geschieht, das ist nun mystifiziert und scheint von ihm selbst zukommenden, verborgnen Qualitäten herzustammen. Je weiter wir den Verwertungsprozeß des Kapitals verfolgen, um so mehr wird sich das Kapitalverhältnis mystifizieren, und um so weniger das Geheimnis seines inneren Organismus bloßlegen*.)[78]

Capital subsumes the formerly distinct elements of production into its self-relating totality, drifting further and further from the purview of human agency: the nature of the world market is to incorporate the negative element into itself as part of its expansion. The more it develops, the less we can control or even comprehend it—"the less the secret of its internal organism will be revealed." The motif of a cunning of reason over and above human control recurs throughout the three volumes of Marx's definitive "critique of political economy," from the ultimate, instrumental value of individual, egoistic self-interest in the market mechanism he names after Jeremy Bentham,[79] to the description of land as a generator of "absurd and irrational" surplus value:

> [T]he reconciliation of irrational forms in which certain economic relations appear and assert themselves in practice does not concern the active agents of these relations in their everyday life. And since they are accustomed to move about in such relations, they find nothing strange therein. A complete contradiction offers not the least mystery to them. They feel as much at home as a fish in water among manifestations which are separated from their internal connections and absurd when isolated by themselves. What Hegel says with reference to certain mathematical formulas applies here: that which seems irrational to ordinary common sense is rational, and that which seems rational to it is itself irrational.
>
> (*Die Vermittlungen der irrationellen Formen, worin bestimmte ökonomische Verhältnisse erscheinen und sich praktisch zusammenfassen, gehn die praktischen Träger dieser Verhältnisse in ihrem Handel und Wandel jedoch nichts an; und da sie gewohnt sind, sich darin zu bewegen, findet ihr Verstand nicht im geringsten Anstoß daran. Ein vollkommner Widerspruch hat durchaus nichts Geheimnisvolles für sie. In den dem innern Zusammenhang entfremdeten und, für sich isoliert genommen, abgeschmackten Erscheinungsformen fühlen sie sich ebenfalls so zu Haus wie ein Fisch im Wasser. Es gilt hier, was Hegel mit Bezug auf gewisse mathematische Formeln sagt, daß, was der gemeine Menschenverstand irrationell findet, das Rationelle, und sein Rationelles die Irrationalität selbst ist.*)[80]

What appears to be one way, is not actually that way, but another way—there is an unshakeable sense in which Hegel's idealist metaphysics of contradiction have nonetheless survived the materialist inversion of dialectics, now inscribed into our subjective experience of reality. The "active agents" of economic relations operate in ignorance of the cunning of capital, and it is no

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[78] Marx, *Collected Works* 37, 52; *Werke* 25, 58.
[79] Marx, *Collected Works* 35, 186; *Werke* 23, 190.
[80] Marx, *Collected Works* 37, 765-6; *Werke* 25, 787.

coincidence that Marx invokes Hegel's rejection of conventional logic (i.e., "certain mathematical formulas") to describe the absurdity of capitalist economic relations: Hegel's defiance of the norms of thought prefigures Marx's defiance of norms, not only of thought, but of action. Common sense asserts *A*, or not-*A*—dialectics replies: on the contrary! *Capital* does not fully resolve this tension between Hegel's method and his system, still less between dialectics as a mode of historical analysis, on one hand, and on the other as a model for liberation, as the "innervating force of a revolutionary will."

The revolutionary will is always also that of the market, driven by the "hidden qualities inherent in capital itself," using and then tossing aside the conventional understanding of individual actors. Marx's ambivalence towards a possibility of overcoming the ontological incompleteness of human agency is readable even in *Capital*'s most explicit description of the economic base's ever more totalizing transformation of the sphere of social relations:

> Capital comes more and more to the fore as a social power, whose agent is the capitalist. This social power no longer stands in any possible relation to that which the labour of a single individual can create. It becomes an estranged, independent, social power, which stands opposed to society as an object, and as an object that is the capitalist's source of power. The contradiction between the general social power into which capital develops, on the one hand, and the private power of the individual capitalists over these social conditions of production, on the other, becomes ever more irreconcilable, and yet contains the solution of the problem, because it implies at the same time the transformation of the conditions of production into general, common, social, conditions. *Das Kapital zeigt sich immer mehr als gesellschaftliche Macht, deren Funktionär der Kapitalist ist, und die in gar keinem möglichen Verhältnisse mehr zu dem steht, was die Arbeit eines einzelnen Individuums schaffen kann - aber als entfremdete, verselbständigte gesellschaftliche Macht, die als Sache, und als Macht des Kapitalisten durch diese Sache, der Gesellschaft gegenübertritt. Der Widerspruch zwischen der allgemeinen gesellschaftlichen Macht, zu der sich das Kapital gestaltet, und der Privatmacht der einzelnen Kapitalisten über diese gesellschaftlichen Produktionsbedingungen entwickelt sich immer schreiender und schließt die Auflösung dieses Verhältnisses ein, indem sie zugleich die Herausarbeitung der Produktionsbedingungen zu allgemeinen, gemeinschaftlichen, gesellschaftlichen Produktionsbedingungen einschließt.*[81]

Marx insists that the irreconcilability of this contradiction will lead to revolution, but his dialectical "solution to the problem" is presented again in the passive voice, rooted as it is in the ultimate passivity of all other social agents except for the entrepreneurs who are themselves an unwitting tool of the unfolding of capital. It is precisely this ambiguity that Adorno seizes on in his discussion of the "unity of theory and praxis" in his essay "Resignation":

> For Marx, the dogma of this unity was animated by the immanent possibility of action which even then was not to be realized. Today it is rather the opposite situation that prevails. One clings to action because of the impossibility of action. But Marx himself reveals a concealed wound in this regard. He no doubt delivered the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach in such an authoritarian fashion because he was not at all sure of it himself. *Bei Marx war die Lehre von jener Einheit beseelt von der — schon damals nicht realisierten — präsenten Möglichkeit der Aktion. Heute zeichnet eher das Gegenteil sich ab. Man klammert sich an Aktionen um der Unmöglichkeit der Aktion willen. Schon bei*

[81] Marx, *Collected Works* 37, 263; *Werke* 25, 274-5.

> *Marx allerdings verbirgt sich da eine Wunde. Er mochte die elfte Feuerbachthese so autoritär vortragen, weil er ihrer nicht ganz sicher wußte.*[82]

It is the predominantly male industrial proletariat that can, according to Marx, escape the cunning of reason by acting as its fully self-aware agent, in-and-for-itself, able to overturn the relations of society without undermining itself in the process. As we will explore further in chapter 3, Adorno and other Marxists in the Frankfurt School tradition grapple with the implications of its failure to materialize as a revolutionary subject. Kaufmann, whose "reinterpretation" of Hegel at the height of the Cold War seeks to salvage him in a quasi-Nietzschean vein as a philosopher of language, dismisses both Marxist and conservative Hegelian claims to a coherent dialectical method or system: "We are not tempted to contemplate Hegel's books as the Old Testament of Marxism—at least not the way a Christian fundamentalist looks at the Old Testament."[83] Lenin certainly presents Hegel this way, yet as we will see in subsequent chapters, the tradition of German Marxists who (none more impiously than Adorno) sought to reinterpret a world irrevocably changed by the fundamentalism of Marxism-Leninism found in the return to Hegel a site of resistance to the oppressive dullness of orthodoxy. Kaufmann's antipathy towards Marxism obscures the immense productivity of the nexus running from Hegel to Marx and back again, but it does not prevent him from recognizing the value of Hegel beyond the caricature of an upside-down philosopher: "Of course, if we prefer the Old Testament to the New and are used to studying the Old Testament for its own sake, not as the background of a higher dispensation, then we may compare Hegel's writings to the Old Testament," Kaufmann writes. "He, too, offers us a world of riches of which too many people know only some dry genealogies and a few pious psalms."

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[82] Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 199; *Gesammelte Schriften* 10.2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 795.
[83] Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation*, 296.

Chapter Two: The Problem of Hegel

2.1 – Too Dialectical by Half: Brecht Between Hegel and Stalin

The *Communist Manifesto*'s prediction of a socialist Germany finally came to pass after the second World War, but in a perverted form, not through the sequence of bourgeois and proletarian revolutions Marx had predicted for Germany, but imposed from above by the occupying power of the Soviet Military Administration. Stalin's vision of socialism had disavowed Hegel not only in name, but in precisely the spirit Lenin had prized, jettisoning the characteristic ability of Hegelian Marxism to think through the inherent contradictoriness of all things, as the pamphlet on "Dialectical and Historical Materialism" spells out. Stalin's self-styled "dialectical materialism" not only reasserts the vulgar materialist distinction between the conservative implications of Hegel's "system" and the radical potential of his "method," but also concludes that the question of whether a proletarian revolution could be ontologically exempt from the cunning of reason has been substantively resolved in the status quo of the Soviet Union:

> Here there are no longer exploiters and exploited. The goods produced are distributed according to labor performed, on the principle: "He who does not work, neither shall he eat." Here the mutual relations of people in the process of production are marked by comradely cooperation and the socialist mutual assistance of workers who are free from exploitation. Here the relations of production fully correspond to the state of productive forces; for the social character of the process of production is reinforced by the social ownership of the means of production.[84]

Dialectics itself becomes its own opposite in the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism: as a maxim of Stalinist morality, "He who does not work, neither shall he eat" captures quite poignantly the coercion that gives the lie to the rosy description of "socialist mutual assistance of workers who are free from exploitation." After all, "if you don't work, then you don't eat" is no less the ethos of the most ruthless capitalism. If Stalin is taken at his word—and history certainly bears him out—then only the specific definition of what constitutes legitimate work separates the ruling conceptions of the acceptable grounds for starvation in capitalist society and its socialist negation. Stalin pays lip service to dialectical materialism, but his version of socialism does not take up the Hegelian emphasis on contradictions—his undialectical reading of Hegel serves to justify an undialectical socialism.

The dismissal of Hegel in Stalin's 1938 pamphlet was, as Camilla Warnke describes, cited by his top propagandist Andrej Zhdanov when he argued at a 1947 philosophy conference in Moscow that "the problem of Hegel has long since been solved." Zhdanov's address was translated into German the following year, and even before the German Democratic Republic came into formal existence in 1949, the Socialist Unity Party's leading intellectuals took Zhdanov's prohibition to heart:

> Gerhard Harig…chair of philosophy in the central committee of the Socialist Unity Party, declared with an appeal to Stalin that Marx's dialectical and historical materialism had overcome all forms of *'Hegelei'* and 'developed apart from bourgeois philosophy.' He also called for the defense of materialism against revisionist and bourgeois attempts to water it down. Finally, at the GDR's first convention on culture, Otto Grotewohl presented Stalin's divided Hegel as the party line: the Hegel of the progressive dialectical method and the Hegel of a reactionary "political and legal theory.

[84] Stalin, "Dialectical and Historical Materialism" (Calcutta: Mass Publications, 1975), 33.

> *Gerhard Harig...damals Hauptreferent für Philosophie im Zentralsekretariat der SED, befand 1948 mit der Berufung auf Stalin, dass der dialektische und historische Materialismus von Marx jedwede "Hegelei" überwunden habe und "außerhalb der bürgerlichen Philosophie groß geworden" sei. Und er forderte in diesem Kontext auf, den Materialismus gegen revisionistische und bürgerliche Aufweichungsversuche zu verteidigen. Und schließlich präsentierte Otto Grotewohl auf dem 1. Kulturtag der SED im Mai 1948 als parteioffizielles Urteil Stalins zweigeteilten Hegel: den der progressiven dialektischen Methode und den einer reaktionären "Staats- und Rechtslehre."*[85]

By virtue of his irreducibly ambivalent relationship to the revolutionary ends of Marxism, Hegel became synonymous in East Germany with deviationism, the Stalinist term for a break with the official party line. Whereas Lenin had once made the *Logic* required reading, Stalin saw in that same source of inspiration the threat of an alternative socialist praxis. The Soviet-aligned bloc, therefore, came to enforce a de facto moratorium on any "bourgeois" or "revisionist" theory that might look to Marxism's Old Testament for guidance. Marx had embraced "*Hegelei*" all the more once the tide of popular opinion had turned against it, but continued to oscillate in typical Hegelian fashion between identification with Hegel and opposition to him. The fundamentalist gospel of vulgar materialism, anchored by the concrete demands of running a state, halted the dialectic at one pole of oscillation, and so opposed Hegel and all *Hegelei*. Underpinning the Stalinist prohibition on Hegel is the sneaking suspicion that the dialectic does not necessarily move in their favor, that nothing—not even socialist revolution—can escape the inevitability of contradiction.

It was Stalin's socialism that was finally realized on German soil, and with it the exiled poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht—one of the great purveyors of *Hegelei* in the history of Marxism—returned home as socialist Germany's favorite son, even penning a national anthem for the nascent GDR. The unofficial poet laureate of a country where censorship rendered all poetry official, Brecht received a full government subsidy and, in 1954, the Stalin Peace Prize, remaining a cultural icon of East Germany long after his death two years later. David Bathrick recounts a 1968 symposium commemorating what would have been Brecht's 70th birthday:

> Once maligned for his formalist tendencies within the socialist camp, Brecht was now recognized in Werner Mittenzwei's words as "*the* great model for the theater life of the GDR." But it was Alexander Abusch, representing the Council of Ministers who paid the greatest tribute: "It is altogether fitting that we celebrate Brecht's 70th birthday together with the 120th anniversary of the appearance of the Communist Manifesto, for Brecht's life work is the manifesto made poetry and theatrical practice."[86]

The paradox of Brecht's accession to Stalinist royalty is that the man whose "life work is the manifesto made poetry and theatrical practice" could only be a deeply unorthodox Marxist. He never joined the German Communist Party in the Weimar Republic; nevertheless, he was rumored to be number five on Hitler's death list when he fled the Third Reich to Scandinavia.[87] Years later, in 1947, his exile in America was in turn cut short after he was called before the

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[85] Camilla Warnke, "Das Problem Hegel ist längst gelöst: Eine Debatte in der DDR-Philosophie der fünfziger Jahre," in *Anfänge der DDR-Philosophie* (Berlin: 2001), 5; translation my own.
[86] David Bathrick, "The Dialectics of Legitimation: Brecht in the GDR," *New German Critique*, no. 2 (Spring 1974): 90.
[87] Jan Needle and Peter Thomson, *Brecht* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 47.

House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), where he was able to answer honestly (in-between a tour de force of playful guile) that he had never been a member of a communist party. In their study of Brecht, Jan Needle and Peter Thomson sum up what might be called the "problem" of Brecht: "[E]ven at his most apparently straightforward, Brecht's inability to see only one side of any question was absolute. Irony and ambiguity," the suppressed Hegelian flipside of Stalinist vulgar materialism, mark even the most didactic of Brecht's works, ensuring that by and large, "for his fellow Marxists, he was too dialectical by half."[88] Brecht's oft-cited theory of *Verfremdung* is commonly referred to as "Brechtian alienation," but in a Marxist context this is functionally a misnomer: I contend that *Verfremdung* is better understood as dialectical reversal, in other words, the negation of alienation. In a pattern that will become familiar in the course of this study, Brecht's deviation from Marxist orthodoxy is reflected as clearly as anywhere in his willingness to dust off Marxism's Old Testament in search of an explanation for the counterintuitive.

The only explicit reference to Hegel in Brecht's dramatic corpus occurs in the *Flüchtlingsgespräche* (*Refugee Conversations*), unpublished in English translation until 2019, which stages a series of conversations between two exiles. The businessman Ziffel and the doctor Kalle meet weekly to discuss politics and culture, and Hegel turns up in an unexpected place: ""When it comes to humor, I always think of Hegel," Ziffel remarks:

> I once read his book "the greater Logic" when I was suffering from rheumatism and could not move. It is one of the greatest comic works in all of world literature. It deals with the ways of life of concepts, these slippery, unstable, unaccountable existences; how they insult each other and do battle with knives and then sit down together for dinner in the evening, as if nothing had happened.
> *Bei Humor denk ich immer an den Philosophen Hegel. Sein Buch '*die große Logik*' habe ich einmal gelesen, wie ich Rheumatismus hatte und mich selbst nicht bewegen konnte. Es ist eines der größten humoristischen Werke der Weltliteratur. Es behandelt die Lebensweise der Begriffe, dieser schlüpfrigen, unstabilen, verantwortungslosigen* [sic] *Existenzen; wie sie einander beschimpfen und mit dem Messer bekämpfen und sich dann zusammen zum Abendessen setzen, als sei nichts gewesen.*[89]

Ziffel describes the *Logic* as a sort of comedy of manners: Hegel is chronicling the lives of ideas, an analogy that reads dramatic tension, with all the passion and intrigue of a satire of high society, into a dialectical schema of mutually co-constitutive opposites that pass into each other and are meaningless without each other. In his recent study of Brecht's Hegelianism, Frank D. Wagner calls this passage "*die freundlichste und seltsamste Charakterisierung des Werkes in der Weltliteratur*,"[90] and it is all the more notable for the way Ziffel's ironic presentation of Hegel as himself an ironist seizes on the lesson of the cunning of reason—which survives in Marx's materialist appropriation—about the intrinsically contradictory nature of reality: "*Den Witz einer Sache hat er die Dialektik genannt*," he tells Kalle. "*Wie alle großen Humoristen hat er alles mit todernstem Gesicht vorgebracht.*" Just as humor relies on the subversion of expectations, Brecht has his character draw a parallel with the movement through which the particular subject comes to appreciate its true relationship to an objective totality by shedding the atomistic illusions of its

[88] Needle and Thomson, 63.
[89] Bertolt Brecht, *Flüchtlingsgespräche* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1961), 108-9; translation modified from *Refugee Conversations*, ed. Tom Kuhn (London, Bloomsbury Methuen, 2020), 62-3.
[90] Frank D. Wagner, *Minima Hegeliana:Brechts Denkbilder* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2017), 29.

"unhappy consciousness." When the businessman asks Kalle where else he has heard Hegel's name mentioned, the doctor replies, "*In der Politik*." Ziffel's response captures the paradox of Hegel's legacy: "*Das ist auch einer von seinen Witzen. Die größten Aufrührer bezeichnen sich als die Schüler des größten Verfechters des Staates. Nebenbei, es spricht für sie, daß sie Humor haben. Ich habe nämlich noch keinen Menschen ohne Humor getroffen, der die Dialektik des Hegel verstanden hat*." ("That's another of his jokes. The greatest rabble-rousers regard themselves as the disciples of the greatest champion of the state. Incidentally, the fact that they have a sense of humour says something for them. I've never met a humourless person who understood Hegel's dialectic.")[91] What this characterization calls attention to is a certain appreciation for irony at the core of dialectics, its deadpan quality. A punchline for Brecht is a distinctly Hegelian operation. How, indeed, did great revolutionaries come to see the status quo's proudest apologist as a weapon against it? Here the "joke" models the dialectical movement that undermines naively posited extremes by pointing to the hidden ground of the opposition, the unexamined assumption of *A* that unites its own positive and negative. The latent humor of the austere Hegel becomes for Brecht the dialectical key to salvaging Hegel's legacy from the mockery of popular caricature and rendering comprehensible how it became a source of radical political inspiration, as Wagner observes:

> Humor has a liberatory effect. It distances itself from two one-sided points of view and rids them of the pressure of one-sidedness. There is a reductive critique of Hegel as well as a territorial worship of him. Humor frees itself from both of these positions, and tries out a third. In its capacity to render everything solid fluid, humor is deeply related to dialectics. What humor does with pleasure, dialectics does with utmost seriousness. *Humor hat den Effekt der Befreiung. Er rückt zwei einseitige Sichtweisen in die Ferne, nimmt ihnen so die Bedrückung der Einseitigkeit. Es gibt die einengende Hegelkritik wie die gebieterische Hegelverehrung. Humor entlastet von beiden Haltungen, probiert eine dritte Haltung. Humor ist in dieser Fähigkeit zur Verflüssigung alles Festen der Dialektik verwandt. Humor arbeitet mit Freude, Dialektik mit Ernst am gleichen Geschäft.*[92]

It is the third position towards Hegel, between dismissal and worship, that we have already seen Marx take up when he embraces the mantle of Hegelianism in defiance of its reputation for stolid inscrutability and curmudgeonly conservatism: Brecht repeats this recognizably dialectical move of returning to Hegel to read him against the grain, the Marxian oscillation between disavowal and identification. The "secularization" of idealist metaphysics cannot simply jettison Hegel's description of the movement of Spirit, but must reckon with its material reality as a structuring principle of consciousness. The cunning of reason, translated into the terms of a modern philosophy that can no longer presume the grand machinations of a unified rationality, as "*die Vernunft der List*,"[93] the reason of cunning, the force of the counterintuitive. Melanie Selfe argues along these lines when she writes that Brecht's engagement with Hegel—also expressed in the experimental prose of the *Buch der Wendungen*, which refers to Hegel as "Meister Hü-jeh or He-leh"—models in exemplary fashion "how a reader can appropriate Hegel's dialectic while retaining its critical force, or perhaps how the contradiction between the metaphysical and the

[91] Brecht, *Flüchtlingsgespräche*, 110-1.
[92] Wagner, *Minima Hegeliana: Brechts Denkbilder*, 27.
[93] Wagner, *Minima Hegeliana: Brechts Denkbilder*, 27.

concrete can allow a productive misreading of Hegel's *Logik*."[94] What Brecht, through the character of Ziffel, stands on its head is not Hegel's dialectic but the dominant reading of Hegel, which fails to account for the ambivalence at the core of his demonstrable influence.

As Selfe argues, Brecht's own reading of Hegel's *Logic* (which began in Weimar and continued during his exile in Denmark) was decisive in his theoretical trajectory towards an embrace of "the cunning to work with contradictions and the need to intervene in the instability of concepts".[95] Indeed, it is Brecht's overarching fidelity to the Hegelian notion of contradiction that leads Fredric Jameson to acknowledge him alongside Hegel and Marx for his singular contribution to the tradition of "dialectical thinking." The innovation of Brecht's theory and its application over the course of his life, Jameson writes, was to

> isolate the fundamental feature of the operation itself: this is, indeed, the emphasis on contradiction as such, and we may honor Brecht for his insistence on this requirement, and for his lesson, in a great variety of contexts and forms, that dialectical thinking begins with the contradiction, that it means finding the inevitable contradiction at the heart of things and seeing and reconstructing them in terms of contradictions, or (if you prefer) that the various forms of non-dialectical thinking can always be identified as so many strategies for containing, repressing, or naturalizing contradictions as such.[96]

Brecht's strategy to counter the containment, repression, or naturalization of contradiction in everyday thinking is at its most refined in his notion of *Verfremdung*, crystallized from the earlier model of "epic theater" and developed through his agitational *Lehrstücke* ("teaching-plays").[97] *Verfremdung* is by all accounts a Brechtian coinage that derives from the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky's "*priyom ostrayeniya*," literally "a way of making strange": after encountering it in Moscow in 1935,[98] Brecht rendered the term into German by first adopting and later modifying the word *Entfremdung* or "alienation,"[99] which enjoys common use independently of its centrality in both Hegel and Marx. Instead of *Ent-fremdung*, which denotes the straightforward separation of different ("*fremd*," also "foreign," "strange") entities from an originary unity, Brecht employs the prefix *ver-*, which tends to pervert, to radicalize, or to undermine the meaning of the root verb. For example, adding *ver-* to *kennen*, "to know," produces *verkennen*, "to misjudge," while *schlafen* ("to sleep") is rendered *verschlafen* ("to oversleep") and *folgen* meaning "to follow" becomes *verfolgen*, which can refer to persecution as well as the tracking of game animals. *Verfremdung*, which can be functionally (albeit still roughly) translated as distanciation or defamiliarization, is in the Hegelian idiom the negation of the negation, the alienation of alienation.

The principle of *Verfremdung* manifests in the *Verfremdungseffekt*, which Brecht, in a note to his "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting," models with the help of a distinctly Hegelian sentence structure: "The very simplest sentences that apply in the A-effect are those with 'Not ... But': (He didn't say 'come in' but 'keep moving'. He was not pleased but annoyed). They include an expectation which is justified by experience but, in the event,

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[94] Melanie Selfe, "Reading Hegel with Brecht," *Brecht/Marxism/Ethics//Brecht/Marxismus/Ethik*, Friedemann Weidauer and Dorothee Ostmeier, eds., *The Brecht Yearbook / Das Brecht-Jahrbuch* 35 (2010): 187.
[95] Selfe, 183.
[96] Fredric Jameson, "Persistencies of the Dialectic: Three Sites," *Science & Society* 62, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 360.
[97] Reiner Steinweg, *Das Lehrstück: Brechts Theorie einer politisch-ästhetischen Erziehung* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1976): 159-60.
[98] Brecht, in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. John Willett (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974), 99n.
[99] Reiner Steinweg, *Das Lehrstück: Brechts Theorie einer politisch-ästhetischen Erziehung*, 160.

disappointed." ("*Allereinfachste Sätze, die den V-Effekt anwenden, sind Sätze mit 'nicht-sondern' (er sagte nicht 'kommt herein', sondern 'geht weiter'. Er freute sich nicht, sondern er ärgerte sich.'*").[100] In contrast to the indicative tense of bourgeois realism, Brecht imagines *Verfremdung* as a subjunctive tense that can engage in determinate negation of the given facts, to open up the space of uncertainty through which the latent utopian potential of human activity can shine through. For Brecht, who discovered Marx early in his career, an artistic praxis to counter *Entfremdung* and make the familiar seem strange would have to show the workings of capitalism as unnatural, as capable of alteration rather than the inexorable destiny of human society. Brecht develops the notion of *Verfremdung* out of the initial notion of epic theater while in exile, and as Selfe observes in her study of his notes on the *Logic*, by the time of his sojourn in Denmark he explicitly identified his revised conception of theatrical praxis with the radical skepticism of common sense he celebrates in Hegel's dialectics.[101] In an appendix to his final and most developed theoretical tract, *A Short Organum for the Theater*—published in the GDR in 1949—Brecht writes, "The theatre of the scientific age is in a position to make dialectics into a source of enjoyment. The unexpectedness of logically progressive or zigzag development, the instability of every circumstance, the joke of contradiction and so forth."[102] The motif of contradiction as a joke confirms Ziffel's reading of Hegel as Brecht's own, and the embrace of enjoyment contrasts with the earlier, more rigidly didactic demand that his teaching-plays have "no value as art which would justify any performance not intended for learning."[103] But *Verfremdung* as a dialectical principle is the latent horizon of Brecht's work even in the Weimar agitprop period. The 1930 *Lehrstück* entitled *Die Maßnahme* (usually translated as *The Measures Taken*, alternatively as *The Decision*), is the most explicit depiction of communist politics in Brecht's dramatic oeuvre. A parable about Soviet Communist Party functionaries on an undercover expedition in China, the play presents itself as a case study in revolutionary discipline while simultaneously distancing itself from Marxist-Leninist doctrine to produce a thoroughly ambiguous political valence.

Adorno singles out *The Measures Taken* on multiple occasions in his critique of Brecht in the essay on "Commitment" ("*Engagement*") as apologia for Stalinist terror that ranks among Brecht's "most questionable creations" for the way it "bluntly glorifies the Party,"[104] a reading surely lost on the Soviet censors who banned it. Brecht intended his *Lehrstücke* to be laboratories for critical thought, but *The Measures Taken* provoked a less encouraging reaction: In 1932, Brecht and his frequent collaborator, the composer Hanns Eisler, banned public performances of the play after a production in Erfurt sparked a riot, leading police to shut down the theater.[105] Brecht and Eisler's exact reasoning is unclear; far easier to guess is the source of the communist censors' discomfort. Adherence to the party line in the face of contradiction is presented in precisely such a way that the moral tenability of the result remains stubbornly in question. The play begins with Four Agitators, now back from their mission, who inform the Central Committee ("the Control Chorus") during their debriefing that they were forced to kill a comrade

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[100] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 144, translation modified; "Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt," in *Gesammelte Werke* 15, 341.
[101] Selfe, 196.
[102] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 277; "Nachträge zum 'Kleinen Organon,'" in *Gesammelte Werke* 15, 701-708.
[103] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 31.
[104] Adorno, "Engagement," in *Gesammelte Schriften* 11 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 398; "Commitment," *New Left Review* 87-88 (Sept./Dec. 1974): 83-4.
[105] Benton Jay Komins, "Rewriting, Violence, and Theater: Bertolt Brecht's *The Measures Taken* and Heiner Müller's *Mauser*," *The Comparatist* 26 (January 2002), 103.

who had accompanied them. Brecht's choice of frame narrative is anything but incidental to the project of *Verfremdung*. While the fate of the Young Comrade is recounted entirely from the point of view of his killers, this is explicitly thematized in what is effectively a trial, not only calling attention to but specifically casting doubt upon the veracity of events. The audience is thus invited to consider, along with the Control Chorus, whether the killing was justified. The ensuing plot, retold for our judgment, follows the inexperienced Young Comrade as he joins the Four Agitators as they cross the Chinese border to aid the cause of revolution in the city of Mukden. When the Young Comrade asks what resources they have brought with them and if the agents of Moscow could possibly help his own struggling village first, the agitators reply in unison that they have brought him nothing:

> But to the Chinese workers across the border in Mukden we bring the teachings of the Classics and the Propagandists: the ABC of Communism. To the ignorant we bring instruction concerning their condition; to the oppressed, class-consciousness; and to the class-conscious, practical knowledge of the revolution. We are to ask you for a motor-car and a leader.[106]

"The ABC of Communism," an apparent allusion to Bolshevik leader and key Stalin ally Nikolai Bukharin's 1924 book by the same name, stands for the corpus of Marxist-Leninist doctrine apart from which the Russian agents offer nothing of immediate usefulness. Unapologetically, they demand only sacrifice in return. Along the way, the Young Comrade again and again falls into conflict with the party's mandate when he fails to subordinate his pity and righteous indignation to the rigorous discipline demanded by the long-term strategy of the party functionaries. Brecht's dialogue brings out the pathos of the Young Comrade's enthusiasm and naïveté, opposing it to the rigid, inhuman sloganeering of the others, whose lines are delivered sometimes by all Four Agitators, sometimes only by three, in a move that emphasizes the fluid and inconsequential nature of individuality in the party structure. When the agitators instruct the Young Comrade to inform the exploited barge-haulers how they can improve their working conditions, he succumbs to the raw pathos of their suffering and ends up shouldering some of the burden himself in a failed effort to help a single struggling coolie. When he is told to encourage the masses of the unemployed to common cause with the army soldiers who terrorize them, he cannot shake his moralistic outrage: "I've already reminded the unemployed of how often the soldiers have fired at them. Am I to tell them now that they're to demonstrate with murderers?"[107] Fatefully, when the clandestine revolutionaries find themselves in the middle of a hunger riot in Mukden, the Young Comrade denounces the party and betrays his identity in an anguished plea for the party to aid the city's starving poor.

It is at this point that the pattern in which the Young Comrade's lack of revolutionary discipline causes him to "fall prey to pity" reaches its climax: With the object of the audience's dread, already a known quantity, now realized, Brecht challenges us to sit with the affective contradiction—an irreducible tension between thinking and feeling, or morality and reason—that a revolutionary without delusion cannot avoid grappling with. The Four Agitators know their cover will be blown and the cause of revolution set back immeasurably if the Young Comrade is seen with them. They therefore resolve, with his suspiciously placid and remorseful consent, to kill him and dispose of his body in lime. Unable to pull the trigger on himself, the Young

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[106] Brecht, *Die Maßnahme*, in *Gesammelte Werke* 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 635; *The Measures Taken and Other Lehrstücke* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2006), 10-11.
[107] Brecht, *The Measures Taken and Other Lehrstücke*, 27.

Comrade's companions cradle him in their arms and shoot him. Adorno acknowledges the sinister undertone of this moment—in which it is not the familiar ideological trappings of capitalist modernity, but its communist negation that appears strange—but does not give Brecht credit for evoking this reading. "In despair at violence," Adorno writes, Brecht "suddenly hastens towards a violent practice which he has every reason to fear. The wild roar of *The Measures Taken* drowns out the noise of the disaster that has overtaken the cause, which Brecht convulsively tries to proclaim as salvation."[108] In declaring that the catastrophe of the communist project had "overtaken" the capitalist alienation that gave rise to it, Adorno certainly differs with Brecht, a difference borne out in their post-exile decisions to resettle in West and East Germany, respectively. Adorno, like many of Brecht's critics, reads the play in hindsight as a sort of apologia in advance for the Great Purges of the 1930s and, in turn, a window into Brecht's reconciliation with the repressive Stalinist state he returned home to. Yet the very formal tensions that feed Adorno's anxiety about apologia for terror, such as the "play within a play" structure which guarantees that the fate of the Young Comrade is shown exclusively from the perspective of his killers, are simultaneously indications that even at Brecht's most apparently vulgar, there is also always *Hegelei* afoot.

In lambasting Brecht for his apparent adherence to the Soviet Communist party line, Adorno, paradigmatic curmudgeon though he may be, nevertheless fails to appreciate the dialectical lesson of *The Measures Taken*. Well before the end, the Control Chorus is firmly convinced that the titular measures were above board. Brecht forces us to sit with the contradiction long after the Control Chorus has telegraphed that the verdict has been rendered. Ultimately, the Central Committee celebrates the Four Agitators by repeating the refrain about "the ABC of Communism," but at the apex of his frustration, the Young Comrade tears the vaunted classics to shreds, compulsively proclaiming his dissent: "I can't submit, because I know I'm right. I can see with my two eyes that misery cannot wait." The next line is given to the Control Chorus, which begins the most notorious of the play's eight songs, "In Praise of the Party":

> The individual has only two eyes
> The Party has a thousand eyes.
> The Party can see seven lands
> The individual a single city.
> The individual has only his hour
> The Party has many hours.
> The individual can be annihilated
> But the Party cannot be annihilated
> For it is the vanguard of the masses
> And it lays out its battles
> According to the methods of our classics, which are derived from
> The recognition of reality.
> *Der Einzelne hat zwei Augen*
> *Die Partei hat tausend Augen.*
> *Die Partei sieht sieben Staaten*
> *Der Einzelne sieht eine Stadt.*
> *Der Einzelne hat seine Stunde*
> *Aber die Partei hat viele Stunden.*

[108] Adorno, "Engagement," in *Gesammelte Schriften* 11, 398; "Commitment," 83-4.

Der Einzelne kann vernichtet werden
Aber die Partei kann nicht vernichtet werden
Denn sie ist der Vortrupp der Massen
Und führt ihren Kampf
Mit den Methoden der Klassiker, welche geschöpft sind
Aus der Kenntnis der Wirklichkeit.[109]

Again, the language of deference towards the classics and their straightforward derivation from reality rankles, as it were, from both sides: in attempting to present dogma frankly, Brecht's song overstates the case in a way that strips the mission of distributing communist literature abroad of its self-evident virtue. In praise of a party the likes of which he never thought fit to join, Brecht has his Control Chorus silence the Young Comrade's outburst of conscience by affirming the nullity of the individual's perspective in the face of the larger historical project of communism, the true subject of which is "the Party" qua "vanguard of the masses." The Hegelian question of whether proletarian revolution is exempt from the cunning of reason peeks out from behind the Stalinist prohibition on *Hegelei*. It is interesting that Adorno cites this song in particular when he resumes his critique of Brecht in *Negative Dialectics*: "Brecht's line—that the party has a thousand eyes while the individual has but two—is as false as any bromide ever. A dissenter's exact imagination can see more than a thousand eyes peering through the same pink spectacles, confusing what they see with universal truth, and regressing." Adorno indicts Brecht for donning rose-colored glasses in his view of actually existing socialism long before he settled in "the East," where "the theoretical short circuit in the views of individuality has served as a pretext for collective oppression. The party, even if deluded or terrorized, is deemed a priori superior in judgment to each individual because of the number of its members."[110] To hear Adorno tell it, Brecht is by contrast the optimist, the vulgar materialist, certainly the more orthodox Marxist—and in a sense, compared to Adorno, the high priest of Hegelian negativity, he could not help but be. Yet Brecht is no less a dialectical curmudgeon in his own right, eschewing easy political allegiance in favor of his commitment to grappling with, to borrow Jameson's words, the "inevitable contradiction at the heart of things." The cunning of reason is the Hegelian joke that makes a mockery of us all, and no party is spared from being the butt of it.

Adorno would declare it obscene to take *The Measures Taken* as a joke. But Slavoj Žižek evokes a similar ambiguity with regard to a resonant anecdote, related by historian David Caute, about an exchange between Brecht and the American philosopher Sidney Hook concerning the Bolshevik leaders accused at Stalin's show trials:

> In 1935 Brecht visited Hook's house in Manhattan. When Hook raised the question of the recent arrest and imprisonment of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and thousands of others, Brecht is alleged by Hook to have replied calmly in German: "The more innocent they are, the more they deserve to be shot." As Hook tells it, he then handed Brecht his hat and coat. Brecht left "with a sickly smile."[111]

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[109] Brecht, *The Measures Taken and Other Lehrstücke*, 29; *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 657.
[110] Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966), 53; *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 46-7.
[111] David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 299.

Žižek's reading of the political ambivalence in Brecht's statement is strikingly consonant with Brecht's own interpretation of dialectical logic along the lines of the joke structure:

> Brecht's statement is thoroughly ambiguous—it can be read as a standard assertion of radical Stalinism (your very insistence on your innocence, your refusal to sacrifice yourself for the Cause, bears witness to your guilt, which resides in giving preference to your individual interests over the larger interests of the Party), or it can be read in a radically anti-Stalinist manner: if they were in a position to plot the assassination of Stalin and his entourage, and were 'innocent' (that is, did not grasp the opportunity), then they really deserve to die for having failed to rid us of Stalin.[112]

The dialectical thrust of the joke consists in how the solidity of previous assumptions melts into air upon the unexpected reversal of the callousness of the first interpretation into its opposite, the "radically anti-Stalinist" contention that the accused were guilty after all, but not of what they were accused of. In effect, the "innocent" victims of the Stalinist purges were guilty of not being guilty:

> The properly dialectical way to grasp the imbrication of these two meanings would be to start with the first reading, followed by the common-sense moralistic reaction to Brecht: 'But how can you say something so ruthless? Surely such a logic, demanding blind self-sacrifice to satisfy the whims of the Leader, can only function within a terrifying and criminal totalitarian system—it is surely the duty of every ethical subject to fight such a system with all means possible, including the physical removal, murder if necessary, of the totalitarian leadership?" "Yes, so you can see how, if the accused were innocent, they deserve all the more to be shot—they effectively *were* in a position to rid us of Stalin and his henchmen, and missed this unique opportunity to spare humanity from his terrible crimes!"[113]

Is the attempt to work through this contradiction not already present in the (at the time uncoined) *Verfremdungseffekt* produced in Stalinist and anti-Stalinist interpreters of *The Measures Taken*? The analogy between the plot of *The Measures Taken* and the initial gutpunch of Brecht's contrarian response is instructive: the "guilt" of the Young Comrade, as with the "guilt" of Stalin's rivals like key Lenin ally (and Leon Trotsky's cousin) Lev Kamenev, consists not in the commission of a particular crime but in dissidence as such, which undermines the party.

One of the Young Comrade's failed tests involves dining with a local merchant to secure his support for an alliance of barge-haulers. As they converse, the Young Comrade becomes disgusted with the merchant's ruthless and chauvinistic disregard for the humanity of the coolies. Refusing to dine with a man who holds such repugnant views, the Young Comrade leaves only to be chastised by his companions and, in the frame narrative, lectured by the Control Chorus, who ask with contempt:

> Who are you?
> Sink in filth
> Embrace the butcher, but
> Change the world: It needs it!
> (*Wer bist du?*
> *Versinke in Schmutz*

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[112] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, 533.
[113] Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, 533-4.

Umarme den Schlächter, aber
Ändere die Welt: sie braucht es!)[114]

Brecht's willingness to join the socialist project underway in his homeland despite everything he knew about its administrators can be read with justification as a consequence of his commitment to Marxism, the denouement of his own path towards embracing the butcher. His dissent towards the policies of the SED was registered privately, often in the form of poems circulated among his friends and acquaintances, at the same time as he assured the party leadership of his allegiance.[115] But the Hegelian element in Brecht's theory and practice—the *Verfremdung* that progressively undermines each subsequent position, even the progressive ones—complicates any interpretation of his work that downplays the unshakeable contradiction he evokes even at his most seemingly doctrinaire. The truth of Brecht's life and work is a radical ambivalence that the German Democratic Republic would continue to suppress, long after Brecht's passing, as the forbidden Hegelian flipside of Stalinist orthodoxy.

[114] Brecht, *The Measures Taken and Other Lehrstücke*, 24; *Gesammelte Werke* 2, 652.
[115] Mark W. Clark, "Hero or Villain? Bertolt Brecht and the Crisis Surrounding June 1953," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 3 (July 2006): 470.

2.2 – Socialism by way of Auschwitz: The Dialectical Dissidence of Christa Wolf

For a short time, anyway — until his death in 1956 — Brecht had a kindred spirit of sorts in Ernst Bloch, the Frankfurt School affiliate who joined him in eventually resettling in the German Democratic Republic after the end of the war. Even more explicitly than Brecht the poet, Bloch followed Lenin in acknowledging the return to Hegel as central to the project of a dynamic Marxism. The Soviet Union had modernized within a generation, but showed no signs of progressing beyond an initial stage of socialist transformation, stalled at the way station of what Lenin himself had called state capitalism and singularly focused on the development of productive forces. Bloch thus returned to a Soviet satellite state mired in an aggressively undialectical Stalinism, whose narrow economism reigned supreme also in the intellectual sphere. But Bloch was not long for East Germany: Within a decade he was blacklisted from academia by the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) for his Hegelianism, which represented the scandalous possibility that things could be otherwise. Bloch gives an account of history as not teleological but contingent — driven forth by the inescapable contradiction between what is and what ought to be — most notably in his three-volume magnum opus *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (*The Principle of Hope*, 1954-9) and in his lesser-known *Subjekt-Objekt: Erläuterungen zu Hegel* (*Subject-Object: Commentary on Hegel*, 1951), which with the exception of two chapters still awaits its English translation. These texts articulate a utopian Marxism whose fidelity to its originators lies in its capacity for renewal in light of new circumstances by a return to first principles. Bloch's appreciation for Hegel was as deep as it was and untimely: As Cat Moir notes, Bloch explicitly rejected the denigration of Hegel and the study of his work as reactionary *Hegelei* by Stalinist cultural politics: "The appearance of *Subjekt–Objekt* in 1951 did little to dispel this impression. Considering the official GDR line on Hegel, Bloch's book could only be read as a provocation"[116]. He cites Lenin's commentary on Hegel in the *Philosophical Notebooks* throughout *Subjekt-Objekt*, concluding that

> Therefore, even orthodox Marxism, which was renewed by Lenin, presumes familiarity with Hegel; in stark contrast to a vulgar and traditionless-schematic Marxism, which by isolating Marx – mechanistically, as if fired from a barrel of a pistol – only isolates itself from Marx.
> *Gerade der orthodoxe Marxismus also, der von Lenin wiederhergestellte, setzt diese Hegelkenntnis voraus; zum Unterschied von einem vulgären und einem traditionslos-schematischen, der freilich, indem er Marx - wie aus der Pistole geschossen - isolierte, nur sich selber von Marx isolierte.*[117]

According to Bloch, to dismiss Hegel as "the so-called philosopher of reaction" is a hallmark of "vulgar" Marxism, a "traditionless-schematic" iteration incapable of tolerating the dialectical truth of its own roots in what is supposedly external and insubstantial, the other which is excluded. In contending that the Soviet Union does not engage in *Hegelei*—indeed, by disputing that there is such a thing—*Subjekt-Objekt* seeks to normalize the openness and creative productivity of the theoretical nexus between Marx and Hegel in a dogmatic intellectual climate that is openly hostile to dialectical thinking. As the bulk of this chapter will argue, one of the

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[116] Cat Moir, "Speculation, Dialectic, and Critique: Hegel and Critical Theory in Germany after 1945," *Hegel Bulletin* 38, no. 2 (2017): 202.
[117] Ernst Bloch, *Subjekt-Objekt: Erläuterungen zu Hegel* in *Gesamtausgabe* 8 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1962), 382-3.

most consequential readers of Bloch was the novelist Christa Wolf, the GDR's single most titanic figure in world literature and Brecht's spiritual heir as the socialist poet laureate who toed the line without ever fully losing sight of what ought to be. Launched into the paradoxical position of a socialist poster girl in whom neither East nor West could find uncomplicated affirmation, Wolf's status in the GDR was that of an ersatz philosopher in a society in which philosophy had been made impossible—a dialectical curmudgeon in her own right, whose narratives reveal the Hegelianism of Bloch to be an underappreciated influence on her intellectual trajectory.

Emphasizing the continuity between Hegel and Marx, Bloch argues that vulgar materialism retains limited explanatory power next to Hegel's speculative idealism, and could never have served as the basis for a revolutionary theory of reality. Invoking Hegel's controversial assertion in the *Philosophy of Right* that "what is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational" as the most popular example of his alleged "conservative thought," Bloch highlights the opposite implication to what often caricatured as a reactionary call to reconcile with existing reality: If only what is rational has true reality, then that which is irrational in the world at any given point is finite, mutable, capable of being otherwise—making the first half of the sentence "*ebenso revolutionär, wie der zweite konservativ sein mag, und der erste Teil ist grundlegend* ("...just as revolutionary as the second part may be conservative, and the first part is the more fundamental.").[118] In other words, what exists now for us exists only as an incomplete moment in a dialectical process, always in tension with its potential, rational fulfillment. Far from an indictment of his politics, Bloch claims, Hegel's formulation is a window into utopian possibility, articulating the gap between what seems to be and what should be, between the reality we experience and what something in its nature truly is or could be. This negation of what empirically exists through its speculative ideal is captured for Bloch (as it was for Herbert Marcuse) in the notion of the Hegelian absolute as *das Sollen*, "the ought," and constitutes the "more fundamentally" progressive basis underlying the implicit quietism of that notorious dictum: "*Dieser Satz enthält gegen dasjenige im Wirklichen, das nicht vernünftig ist, vielmehr ein forttreibendes Sollen*." ("This line contains, against that in actuality which is not rational, rather the forward momentum of the ought.")[119] Bloch's *Sollen* asserts not only the potential for things to be different than they are, but also the determining role of contingency—history is not hurtling towards a preordained goal, but rather "driven forth" by the incompleteness, the internal contradiction of what exists in the present. Sounding very much like Herbert Marcuse without his psychoanalysis or Adorno without his crushing pessimism, Bloch argues that a truly dialectical materialism, i.e., a synthesis of idealism and materialism, refuses to subordinate the speculative moment of dialectics to the sequence of falling dominoes that issues from the unrestrained primacy of the material.

Camilla Warnke hits upon precisely why this Hegelian legacy was so dangerous to the status quo under the SED when she observes that Hegelian dialectics functioned "*in der DDR-Ideologie als eines der möglichen Mittel, dogmatisch verfestigte, totalitäre Denkstrukturen in Frage zu stellen, also das Moment der ihr inhärenten Negativität zu entfalten*" ("...in GDR state ideology as one possible means of questioning ossified, totalitarian structures of thought, and thus to unravel the moment of inherent negativity within them.") [120] According to Bloch's interpretation of history, the GDR is not simply an incomplete project — this is, after all, inevitable — but actively in denial of its need to remain open to change. This was not lost on the

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[118] Bloch, *Subjekt-Objekt: Erläuterungen zu Hegel*, 253.
[119] Bloch, *Subjekt-Objekt: Erläuterungen zu Hegel*, 442.
[120] Camilla Warnke, "Das Problem Hegel ist längst gelöst: Eine Debatte in der DDR-Philosophie der 50er Jahre," 2.

party leadership and its sycophants: Just as Marxist theory had ossified at the head of an authoritarian state apparatus, Bloch found himself increasingly frozen out of East German academia, a process that came to a head after he invoked Hegel to criticize the heavy hand of Soviet repression in 1956:

> In November that year, at an event marking 125 years since Hegel's death, Bloch expressed his opposition to the regime in the strongest terms yet. Just a month or so earlier Soviet troops had violently quashed demands for freedom in Poland and Hungary, and in his lecture, "Hegel and the Violence of the System," Bloch made it clear that he saw this brutality as of a piece with the same repression of critical thought to which the anti-Hegel line belonged.[121]

During the thaw that followed Stalin's death in 1953, the taboo on debate over the party line was briefly lifted—but this did not work in Bloch's favor, for it was only then that the Hegel book and his philosophical non-conformism began to receive the full weight of institutional backlash.[122] Bloch, in turn, grew increasingly vocal in his opposition to the government, which culminated in a lecture on the 125th anniversary of Hegel's death that criticized the Soviet Union's repression of popular uprisings in Poland and Hungary. Bloch was declared "unfit to teach"[123] in a wave of repression that saw his purported allies like the SED's *Ideologiechef* ("head of ideology") turn on him; even party chairman Walter Ulbricht condemned "the philosophical revisionist in Leipzig."[124] In 1957 Bloch was called before a tribunal in which, as Warnke recounts, his lecture on Hegel and violence "*wurde als Indiz für Blochs Revisionismus bemüht: Indem er das „Reaktionärste an Hegels Philosophie, sein idealistisches System zu neuem Leben erwecken wolle, nehme er Kurs auf revisionistische Verfälschung der marxistischen Philosophie*" ("was considered an index of Bloch's revisionism: insofar as he sought to revive the most reactionary element of Hegel's philosophy, his idealist system, he had opened the door to the revisionist falsification of Marxist philosophy").[125] Isolated and unemployable, he found himself with nothing to lose when, during a visit to the Federal Republic in 1961, he and his wife heard the news that the Berlin Wall had gone up overnight, and applied for asylum in the West.

In the afterword to the second edition of *Subjekt-Objekt*, written in 1962, Bloch invokes a less disputably conservative line from the *Philosophy of Right*, noting wryly that "*Hegel ist im Osten derzeit nicht mehr recht beliebt, trotz des Satzes seiner Rechtsphilosophie, daß das Parlament nur die Aufgabe habe, dem Volk zu zeigen, daß es recht regiert sei.*" (Hegel is no longer properly appreciated in the East, despite the line from his *Philosophy of Right*, that the only task of parliament is to show the people that it is ruled justly.")[126] The cultural Sovietization of East Germany had made a dialectical curmudgeon like Bloch impossible: an oppositional philosopher poking and prodding at the fault lines of the post-revolutionary order that had been, in a strict sense, quite inorganically imposed upon his homeland, trying to carve out an alternate vision of socialist modernity. The truth of the SED's charges against Bloch was that he was the furthest thing imaginable from a *Kaderphilosoph*, a party functionary—his Hegelianism allowed him to tolerate and productively explore ambivalence in an ideological environment that considered internal contradiction, like the old problem of Hegel, long since resolved.

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[121] Moir, "Speculation, Dialectic, and Critique: Hegel and Critical Theory in Germany after 1945," 204.
[122] Moir, "Speculation, Dialectic, and Critique: Hegel and Critical Theory in Germany after 1945," 204.
[123] Moir, "Speculation, Dialectic, and Critique: Hegel and Critical Theory in Germany after 1945," 205.
[124] Camilla Warnke, "Das Problem Hegel ist längst gelöst: Eine Debatte in der DDR-Philosophie der 50er Jahre," 22.
[125] Camilla Warnke, "Das Problem Hegel ist längst gelöst: Eine Debatte in der DDR-Philosophie der 50er Jahre," 24.
[126] Bloch, *Subjekt-Objekt: Erläuterungen zu Hegel*, 13.

But the problem had not been solved, and long after his official discrediting, Bloch and represented for East Germany's dissident voices the possibility that things could be otherwise, and in his utopian negativity they had a framework to analyze, if not necessarily counter, something Marxist-Leninist doctrine had not prepared its adherents for: the stagnation of the socialist project. This core acknowledgement of ambivalence about life as a socialist citizen features heavily in the writing of Wolf, who studied under Bloch at the University of Leipzig and uses dialectical tools to explore not only the stalling of the socialist project in general but the gendered experience of the affective violence inflicted on its subjects by the concomitant cultural stagnation. The central motif and temporal nucleus of her breakthrough novel *Geteilte Himmel* (1963, "Divided Sky," translated into English either as *Divided Heaven* or *They Divided the Sky*) is the erection of the Berlin Wall, precisely the event that served as the last straw for Bloch. The book is often discussed in contrast with Wolf's later, explicitly feminist works, but I contend that the dialectical bridge from dour Socialist Realism to the radicalism and experimentation for which she is best known is already built in this novel, whose nonlinear narrative structure gives rise to a dual-layered temporality that challenges the reader to trace its thematic constellations through inference and affect. By carving out space for interiority against the grain of previous Marxist aesthetics, Wolf calls attention to the importance of subjective experience and the stagnation of socialism as a historical process. *Divided Heaven* announces a break with the celebratory atmosphere of GDR *Ankunftsliteratur*, which takes as its premise that socialism is already here. Wolf's engagement with the suppressed Hegelian tradition allows her to articulate through literature the dialectical interplay between really existing socialism and a socialism that is not yet here, but could be. Beginning with her first novel and developing in sophistication over the course of her career, Wolf's most radical contribution to socialist literature is carving out space for interiority in the East German political imagination, not just in her experimentation with narrative form, but in her theoretically informed engagement with the inescapably gendered experience of a society that purports to put Marxism into practice.

In a society in which philosophy has been virtually proscribed, the role of the critical intellectual falls to the artists. Like Brecht, Wolf's worldview was at odds with official ideology in the GDR, and only grew more so with time. In Leipzig she studied not only with Bloch but also the Germanist Hans Mayer, another Hegelian who would eventually follow Bloch into the West in 1963.[127] The totalitarian cultural politics of the SED government forced an older generation of heterodox socialists, once displaced by the Nazis, to emigrate yet again. In contrast, Wolf's cohort had grown up in Germany under the Third Reich, and Wolf's experience of ideology was constituted by traumatic rupture, summed up in the somber dictum, which she herself famously invoked, of her fellow East German author Franz Fühmann: "My generation came to socialism by way of Auschwitz."[128] In Wolf's case, she was a member of the girls' branch of the Hitler Youth, remaining an enthusiastic supporter of Hitler even after the end of the war, until the socialist state that had been deferred at such cost was imposed on Germany by the victors, the Soviet power whose specter had already allowed the bourgeoisie to plunge the country into a fascist nightmare.

But this was not the same state that was once hoped for—how could it have been? When a particularly curmudgeonly minor character in *Divided Heaven*, opines that "a German revolution" constitutes "a contradiction in terms" ("*ein Widerspruch in sich*")[129]—even at her

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[127] Anna Kuhn, *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision: From Marxism to Feminism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 8.
[128] Ulrich Rüdenauer, "Zum Tod von Christa Wolf: Die DDR als Brennglas," *Die Zeit*, 12/1/2011.
[129] Christa Wolf, *They Divided the Sky* (Ottawa: Ottawa UP, 2013), 114.

most comradely, Wolf never refutes this kernel of glib essentialism. Rather, her oeuvre represents a quest to fulfill her own demand that "contradiction must not only be tolerated in the GDR in the future, but made productive,"[130] a dialectical insight infused with the utopian negation of the Hegelian "ought". The reader of Wolf is hard-pressed, irrespective of one's ideological orientation, to deny that actually existing socialism in Germany was, to remain in the Hegelian idiom, non-identical with what had been imagined for it. The transition from fascism to socialism was historically unprecedented, and characterized less by historical materialism's logical development than by blunt, violent fracture. The original paradox of freedom from class domination under the control of the Soviet Military Administration left the society that resulted riddled with unproductive contradiction.

By 1949, when the GDR was founded, Wolf had made something of her own transition, and joined the SED. In the decade that followed, her engagement with the suppressed Hegelian tradition planted the seeds a highly sophisticated understanding of Marxism and a knack for dialectical thinking, manifesting concretely in her literary output as an appreciation for the need to acknowledge and productively work through the unexamined trauma and unresolved contradiction that remained in the supposed East German paradise-in-progress. Similarly to the developments in philosophy, in the GDR's literary production Stalin's death led to even stricter enforcement of the official cultural policy of Socialist Realism than before, but Wolf throughout her oeuvre develops and sharpens narrative tendencies towards ambivalence and nonlinearity that run against the grain of previously established Marxist aesthetics—not only Socialist Realism, but even, in an important way, Brecht's theater of *Verfremdung*, as Renate Rechtien points out:

> Wolf's prose theory and her literary practice take the interpretation of Marx's theory of historical materialism an important step further than Brecht had done. While her exploration of 'individuals as they really are' continues to include the dimension of outer material, socio-political and historical reality as it impinges on the individual's ability to act, her prime focus of attention shifts towards those aspects of human experience that are less easily penetrable by rational or scientific observation and thought, namely to the domain of the inner emotional and psychological reality of subjective individual experience.[131]

It is fitting that Bloch's return to Hegel served as a philosophical conduit for Wolf's attempt to render, in aesthetic form, an expression of the subjective experience of political impotence in the face of the stifling primacy of the objective, which in East German was embodied in the state and the new social order in its totality. What is "the dimension of outer material, socio-political and historical reality as it impinges on the individual's ability to act" but the Hegelian cunning of reason? In a 1972 interview with Joachim Walther, Wolf identifies the mode in which she teases out the irreducible tensions of cultural life "subjective authenticity," pointing directly to the way her project draws from and pushes further than Brecht in opening up the possibility that what an individual person thinks or feels is worth analyzing, not to mine it for catharsis, but to understand and articulate the empirical realities that persist despite the overwhelming power of the objective that structures them. "Brecht tended to lay emphasis on the social determinants, while the current

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[130] Wolf, *The Author's Dimension: Selected Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993), 289.
[131] Renate Rechtien, "Relations of Production? Christa Wolf's Extended Engagement with the Legacy of Bertolt Brecht," in *Bertolt Brecht: Centenary Essays* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 202.

trend among Marxist writers is to examine the role of the individual,"[132] the unconscious agent of history who cannot, on some existential level that the advent of socialist governance in Germany has failed to quell, stop yearning for some choice in the matter. Wolf's concern is for "the individual whom we must not paralyse by presenting his or her fate as being exclusively determined by objective, economic factors," at the same time as we ask "how much scope individuals have for freely-determined action" as the footsoldiers of reason's unfolding.

Wolf's status was thus doubly oppositional, an orientation Anke Pinkert describes in less generous terms as "soft dissidence"[133]: as a critical supporter of socialism, in whom neither the capitalist West nor the powers that be in the GDR could find uncomplicated affirmation, she could play the game her intellectual influences in the academy gave up. Wolf reflects on the human reality of the socialist project from a position situated firmly within the German Marxist tradition, able to resist full cooptation by either side—like Brecht, one could say that Christa Wolf was too dialectical by half. After the archives of the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* were made public in 1992 pursuant to reunified Germany's new Stasi Document Law, Western critics had a field day when Wolf—uniquely among East German public figures—released the records of her activity as an *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiterin* ("informal collaborator," or "IM" for short) from 1959-62. Having already been thrust into the center of a scandal known as the *Literaturstreit* two years earlier, Wolf found herself, once again, smeared in the feuilletons as a tool of totalitarianism. As Sonja E. Klocke laments, Western coverage "refused to make room for nuances beyond a simple black-and-white judgment,"[134] ignoring the fact that Wolf stopped cooperating shortly after the building of the government's so-called "antifascist protective barrier." In 1963, Wolf went on to be elected to the SED Central Committee as a candidate member and served for four years, during which she came under fire from the SED leadership, including Ulbricht, and surveillance from the Stasi until 1989, producing a file that dwarfs the record of her collaboration.[135] 1963 was also the year she published *Divided Heaven*, which despite sparking controversy, received significant acclaim domestically. An immediate commercial success, the book was awarded East Germany's Heinrich Mann prize and was promptly adapted for the big screen by the state-owned film studio DEFA. Yet Wolf's appeal was distinctly broader than her function as a socialist poster girl: she quickly became the GDR's hottest literary export, garnering international prizes and rivaling Günter Grass in the Federal Republic as the postwar era's most well-known German author.

But it wasn't always this way. In her landmark study *From Marxism to Feminism: Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision*, Anna Kuhn observes that it is not until her second novel, *Nachdenken über Christa T.*—usually translated in somewhat heavy-handed fashion as *The Quest for Christa T.*—that Wolf meaningfully departs from the party line:

> Beginning with *The Quest for Christa T.*, her later works distinguish between reason and instrumental rationality and call for a broader, more integrative definition of self-actualization which emphasizes the development of the full range of human potential. To the extent that Wolf increasingly emphasizes the nonrational, the imaginative, the fantastic in her definition of what is human, her work can be seen as a

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[132] Karen McPherson, *The Fourth Dimension: Interviews with Christa Wolf* (New York: Verso, 1988), 24.
[133] Anke Pinkert, "Pleasures of Fear: Antifascist Myth, Holocaust, and Soft Dissidence in Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*," *The German Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 25.
[134] Sonja E. Klocke, "The Triumph of the Obituary: Constructing Christa Wolf for the Berlin Republic," *German Studies Review* 37, no. 2 (May 2014): 318.
[135] Sonja E. Klocke, 319.

> movement away from the Enlightenment to Romanticism; away from orthodox Marxist-Leninism to Ernst Bloch.[136]

Over the course of her book, Kuhn argues that this intellectual evolution goes through the open, porous Hegelianism of Bloch to a pioneering and increasingly radical articulation of feminist politics in narrative practice. Wolf's first major publication was also her last before the completion of the Berlin Wall on August 13, 1961. *Moscow Novella* flew under the radar in East Germany, a Stalinist morality play uncontroversial in theme and conventional in form. Here Wolf's autobiographical tendencies, which later serve as a wellspring of emotionally rich rebellion, are already clear from the story of Vera Brauer, who is won over from fascism to socialism in a work Wolf later in large part repudiated as a product of her own naive embrace of Socialist Realism. Her follow-up, however, was her first novel proper and her unmistakable commercial breakthrough.

Divided Heaven is a *Bildungsroman* of sorts, centered around the doomed romance between Rita Seidel and Manfred Herrfurth, which ends tragically when Manfred flees to the FRG just prior to the closing of the border. The story begins when 19-year-old Rita, a recent high school graduate, meets her lover Manfred, a doctoral student in chemistry ten years her senior, whose family connections present her with the opportunity to leave her small town to stay with him and his family in Halle while she studies to become a teacher. As part of her training she must work at a train car factory of the *Mildner-Waggonbau-GmbH* alongside an otherwise exclusively male roster of war veterans turned converted socialists, the model for the GDR's new man. The plot, however, presents Rita's coming of age as a committed socialist in non-chronological order, flashing back and forward between her life before and after the wall in short, untitled chapters, fragmentary vignettes that leave it up to the reader to infer at what point in the story the events take place. Wolf's attempt to represent the temporality of memory eschews even a consistently structured nonlinearity — the flashbacks and flashforwards do not simply intercut two parallel but internally linear plotlines taking place before and after the erection of the wall. Rather, they often seem to deviate from the narrative momentum in flights of fancy, hop from association to association.

The first chapter introduces Rita and offers the reader our most specific historical marker: "In those last August days of the year 1961," it begins, "the girl called Rita Seidel awoke in a small hospital room. She had not been asleep, she'd been unconscious." Rita then seems to remember an episode in which she collapsed from exhaustion:

> She still has a vague feeling of great space, and depth. But the return from endless darkness to limited light is terribly swift. Oh yes, the city. And closer by, the factory, the factory yard. That point on the tracks where I passed out. So someone must have stopped the two train cars, the ones that were coming right at me, from the right and the left. They were coming straight for me. That was the last thing.[137]

Here as throughout the book, the narrative voice oscillates between first- and third-person omniscience, leaving the reader with a constant, disorienting ambiguity and coloring each concrete action with the expressiveness of interiority. The paragraph opens by describing Rita's state matter-of-factly and in terms unknowable to the character at the time, transitioning from an external perspective into first-person brushstrokes of memory. This narrative strategy serves an

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[136] Kuhn, *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision: From Marxism to Feminism*, 26.
[137] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 4.

important plot function: obscuring the truth only revealed only at the end, that she did not pass because she was being overworked at the factory, as is implied later in the passage and in several further instances, but rather deliberately endangered her life on the train tracks in an unsuccessful suicide attempt. The doctors who treat her never learn that why she collapsed on the train tracks that day, which is confirmed in a private moment during our last glimpse of her hospitalization when she reflects: "She'd been separated from Manfred for only three weeks at that point, and already she knew: the great lovers that poets create do not seek death because of separation but because of the dull return of daily life. Leaden reality lamed her, cast a pall on her spirits, hollowed out her willpower."[138] In giving voice to the poverty of affective experience in the GDR — as the novel continues we learn that Manfred flees the East for more lucrative career opportunities when his professional development is stymied by what he sees as an uncompetitive bureaucracy, making her most meaningful relationship a victim of GDR policy in more ways than one — Wolf challenges socialist culture to do justice to the potential richness of emotional life.

Rita's lingering desire for oblivion is hinted at in her despondency in the post-wall scenes, which do not see her leave the hospital until the final chapter. In Rita's hospital room it is by means of Wolf's experimentation with narrative voice that the reader is clued in early to the mechanistic and patronizing way Rita is treated as a patient and as a woman, pointing towards the misguided futility of scientific rationalism and its disavowed dependence on the affective dimension of subjectivity. Only at the end do we—and Rita herself—gain unobstructed access to the reason behind her hospitalization, but Wolf's narrative asks the reader to piece together the image from its negative, with language that sketches from the very start an affective outline of the obstacles to self-understanding, to subjective authenticity, faced by the gendered subject of socialist society. Rita's doctor objectifies his patient in an identifiably patriarchal gesture, casually dismissing her condition after her breakdown as "shock" and prescribing a tranquilizing injection before its persistence makes him doubt his diagnosis: "But when days go by and Rita still can't have people talk to her, he becomes a little less sure of himself. He thinks how he'd like to get his hands on the guy who put this pretty, sensitive girl in such a state. For him it is clear that only love can make a young thing so sick."[139] When challenged, the arrogance of expertise breaks down and makes recourse to the irrationality of tradition, in this case a sexist trope that prevents him from inquiring further into her mental state. When another doctor is brought in who barely shows any interest in getting to the bottom of her symptoms, we read that Rita "smiles weakly at the new doctor's quiet reserve. Is he really not curious?"[140] The male faces of the medical establishment that confront Rita don't need to ask her questions—nothing about her experience could illuminate the situation better than a bit of poking and prodding. It is with resignation that Rita then "takes the small glass that smells of ether from the nurse's hand, gulps it down, hands it back, and waits for sleep to come," an echo of the self-destructive act that we later learn coincided with the erection of the wall, on August 13, 1961. "By forcing readers to draw conclusions based on information implicit in the novel," Kuhn observes, "Wolf engages us in the constitution of the text,"[141] a process of subjective co-authorship that runs against the grain of Socialist Realist aesthetics and recalls, rather, the critical reflection Brecht hoped to cultivate in his audience.

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[138] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 193-4.
[139] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 4-5.
[140] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 22.
[141] Kuhn, *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision: From Marxism to Feminism*, 27.

The basic point of Kuhn's study is that Wolf's heterodox Marxism is the condition of possibility for the more radical gender politics that imbue her later work. Kuhn stresses the extent to which *Divided Heaven* evidences at best an intermediary stage in Wolf's feminist awakening still in line with the aims of GDR cultural policy, downplaying the extent to which the narrative is already quite Blochian in its outlook and modernist in its construction. Other critics like Myra Love point out, reasonably in my view, the limits to the book's critical potential imposed by its "male-centered" narrative, and qualifies even her appraisal of Wolf's follow-up, *The Quest for Christa T.*, noting that "it would be very questionable to assert that Christa Wolf was writing an intentionally anti-patriarchal work in *The Quest for Christa T.* However, since patriarchal conditions become a focus for her later works, though but one of many, it would not be pure fancy to recognize in *The Quest for Christa T.* anti-patriarchal and even germinally feminist insights."[142] I think that this is putting it mildly, but more to the point, it would not be inappropriate to grant *Divided Heaven* the same benefit of the doubt. Indeed, I tend to agree with Sabine Wilke's assessment that the first novel is a text that to this day "noch auf seine kritische Erschließung wartet."[143] Both in its formal experimentation and thematic preoccupations, Wolf's debut novel is marked by the traumatic experience, from the socialist side of the wall, of the violent split that resulted from the closing of the border to the West. The wall itself is never mentioned directly; rather, a brief prologue sets the scene in East Berlin in vague and impressionistic fashion, evoking an atmosphere saturated with malaise. "The air weighed down on them, and the water—this damned water that had reeked of chemicals for as long as they could remember—tasted bitter," the novel begins, alluding only to the wall by way of the image of "a shadow [that] had fallen over the city".[144] While such references are in short supply, mentions of foul stenches, air pollution and other environmental degradation recur throughout the novel, and the unease of these descriptions, together with the smattering of explicitly political exchanges, go some length in explaining why *Divided Heaven* was controversial with party officials. The smell, the taste, and even the weight of toxicity, expressed not by an identifiable character but through the unspecified narrator, take on metaphorical value independently of their factual correspondence with a literally polluted atmosphere. Even though Rita's character upholds model socialist behavior by refusing *Republikflucht* to join her lover in the FRG, Wolf's blasphemy was to point out that, after boasting the strongest economy of the Eastern bloc countries in the postwar years, the GDR was culturally stagnant.

Kuhn recounts that, in particular, East German critics noted the insufficiently exemplary and unconvincingly socialist personalities we meet among Rita's coworkers at the factory compared with the richness of characterization afforded their "foils" in the bourgeois Herrfurth family.[145] In contrast to the other characters, the Herrfurth family represents the old bourgeoisie of Berlin, bitter and unable to find their place in the new society. As we glean from bits of dialogue, the Herrfurths were active Nazi party members—Manfred was in the Hitler Youth, and his father served in the war, an experience that left Rolf Herrfurth passive and broken, a husk of a man, and his son an angsty, sneering contrarian whose resistance to the perceived uniformity and stasis of the new order is evident well before his escape to the West.

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[142] Myra Love, "Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection," *New German Critique* 16 (Winter 1979): 32.
[143] Sabine Wilke, "Dialektik von Utopie und Untergang, Kritik und Übereinstimmung: Eine Analyse von Christa Wolfs jüngsten Texten," *Colloquia Germanica* 24, no. 2 (1991): 122.
[144] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 3.
[145] Kuhn, *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision: From Marxism to Feminism*, 30-1.

It is Manfred who first points out to Rita the unconvincing presumption of discontinuity with the populace that supported the Third Reich. Towards the beginning of their relationship, he recounts the sight of impoverished former military officers forced to dye their old uniforms. The family's class status ensured Herr Herrfurth was not reduced to this particular indignity, although he was not spared others: ""One day," he tells Rita, "the new party insignia appeared in my father's buttonhole. I burst out laughing when I saw it, and he's been insulted ever since, just at the sight of me."" The narrator then ventures into Manfred's stream of consciousness: "He wasn't the only one, Manfred thought; some were far worse. But many had been lucky too, meeting up with honest people just when they needed them. That's not what happened to me. Whenever I took a closer look, the other colour would shimmer through."[146] While it is tempting and often fruitful to read the book's female protagonist as the character most infused with Wolf's own authorial perspective, the omniscient narrator expresses the interiority of the Herrfurths as well, ensuring that the fluid oscillation between first and third person prevents the reader (in a Brechtian vein, perhaps) from fully identifying with Rita and equating her point of view with Wolf's. It is worth remembering that Wolf herself was of Manfred's generation, and her own early history in the girls' wing of the Hitler Youth might be seen to lend Manfred's traumatized cynicism its pathos. Kuhn does not go this far, emphasizing (not without merit) that the characters still conform to East German literary convention by offering didactic "models of behavior."[147] I contend that while the ideological conflicts that emerge in the course of the plot do figure the various characters allegorically, a narrative strategy not in and of itself at odds with the paint-by-numbers propaganda of Socialist Realism, this is done in a way that suggests Wolf herself is sympathetic to the pull of the West, including with regard to the harshly criminalized act of *Republikflucht* that multiple characters undertake.

In an episode that occurs just before this in the plot but much earlier in the story, Rita is implicated when her friend Sigrid confesses to her that she has been covering up her father's flight to the West, and it is no dissident but rather Rita's socialist mentor Schwarzenbach who intervenes to spare them the consequences when a classmate at the teachers' college—the hardline ideologue Mangold, who according to Rita "talked about the party line the way Catholics talk about the immaculate conception"[148]—threatens to report them. Lying in her hospital bed, a closed national border away from her former lover, Rita looks back in a redemptive light on the moment they learned the news that Soviets had put the first man in space. "She understands him better today: 'History's bottom line is the despair of the individual.' He was already doing everything he could to consolidate that unnerving idea."[149] Manfred's reaction to the celebratory mood is to lament that a socialist propaganda victory will merely reinforce the stifling atmosphere behind the Iron Curtain suddenly makes more sense, and she appears to accept with minimal judgment that, on the level of temperament no less than ideology, he was simply not cut out for life in socialist Germany.

Shortly before the wall goes up, a lovesick Rita travels to the Federal Republic and finds Manfred in defiant mood, reveling in capitalist society's indulgence of his individualism: "Here, I know what I'm at. I'm ready for anything. Over there, it's going to take God knows how long for actual facts to emerge from behind the lovely words. The fact is: humans are not made to be

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[146] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 43-4.
[147] Kuhn, *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision: From Marxism to Feminism*, 58.
[148] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 131.
[149] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 148.

socialists."[150] Unlike Manfred, whose coming of age during the Third Reich has left him incapable of belief in anything but his own ability to compete for distinction in a meritocracy, his mother never lost her faith in the old order that had been so rudely swept away by communist invaders. This raises the stakes considerably for Wolf's narrative attempt to revitalize socialist culture, providing her protagonist and the reader with a personification of the threat of counterrevolution. Responding to news of a production crisis at the factory, she waxes nostalgic for Hitler's Germany and observes the chaos under heaven on the socialist side of the wall with relish: "What had been going on outside her own four walls for more than a decade had so far only annoyed her because it forced her into conformist manoeuvres. But it was all quite stupid and absurd, really, and wouldn't last. Suddenly something she had been waiting for was happening: the tedious new reality was under threat".[151] But where in conventional Socialist Realism this characterization could have remained a simple negative pole in a dogmatic morality play, Wolf uses Frau Herrfurth to draw a further parallel that expands the main character's critique to the dogmatism of party-line socialists of the ilk who had driven her intellectual mentors into the West. Not only does Frau Herrfurth retain her affinity for fascism in her resentment of the "annoying" and "tedious" experience of the socialist project, but Rita later concludes that in doing so she is a mirror image of Mangold's vindictive simple-mindedness: "The same blind zeal, the same lack of moderation, the same egotism," she reflects. "Can the same methods be deployed for completely different purposes?"[152] With the exception of Frau Herrfurth and Rita's smirking, standoffish factory colleague Herbert Kuhl (nicknamed "The Lieutenant"), both of whose continued Nazi sympathies are explicitly suggested, Mangold receives by far the most negative treatment of the notable characters. In fact, the figure of Mangold is notable precisely because he makes a mockery of the SED functionary by his frenzied interrogation of his fellow students, his Marxism limited to the repetition of slogans and the inflexible application of doctrine: "Tighten the screws on each question to get at the very core of the contradictions! That would be in line with the party,"[153] he declares, articulating with his almost comically mechanical image of contradiction laid bare by a hardware tune-up that reduces it to its core, manichaean meaning—effectively the polar opposite of Wolf's dialectical demand that contradiction be not only "tolerated" in the GDR, but "made productive". Switching back and forth between first- and third-person omniscient narrative voices, productive contradiction emerges not only in the clash of perspectives, but in their unexpected convergence.

Throughout the novel Rita grapples with the stifled need to articulate ambivalence about her life as a socialist citizen: the fragmented interiority articulated by the freewheeling narrative voice reveals her teetering between the utopianism of hope and the pessimism of resignation. The "lack of moderation" Rita recognizes in both Mangold and the Herrfurth matriarch would strike Manfred's more jaded perspective as proof positive of the authoritarian personality underlying all political commitment, but Wolf's protagonist sees a way out in the unorthodox and compassionate praxis of her mentors at the train car factory. After Schwarzenbach intervenes on her and Sigrid's behalf, Rita reflects privately that "[t]he attitudes of people such as Meternagel and Wendland and Schwarzenbach had not yet been firmly established as guiding principles that everyone would live by one day," and that [w]ithout them, the Herrfurths of the world would

[150] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 184.
[151] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 59.
[152] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 125.
[153] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 131.

prevail."[154] While Kuhn is correct to insist that it is not until her next novel, *Christa T.*, that Wolf manages to "create a truly dialectical structure in which the reader must participate to create a synthesis,"[155] *Divided Heaven* nevertheless represents a firm departure from the celebratory atmosphere of GDR *Ankunftsliteratur*, the "literature of arrival," which takes as its premise that socialism is here. Wolf's Blochian rebuttal presents socialism rather as something that not only could be, but is latent as a potentiality, as the *Sollen* that persists even when it has been categorically ruled out. After her final goodbye with Manfred, Rita dozes off on the train back to East Berlin: "She didn't sleep, but she wasn't fully conscious either. The first thing she noticed after quite some time was a still, light pond out in the dark countryside. It had attracted the little bit of light that was still in the sky and was reflecting it back, enhanced. Strange, Rita thought. So much light in so much dark."[156] The book's nonlinear temporality, environmental metaphorics and speculative critique of party-line dogmatism do indeed challenge the reader to reconstruct the narrative through inference and affect, and in doing so, to find light in the dark. Wolf's breakthrough novel defies easy categorization along Cold War political lines because it bears witness both to the difficulty of individual dissent as Germany's caravan stalls on the road to paradise and the hope that an alternative modernity, the "*forttreibendes Sollen*" of really existing socialism, will begin to make itself known.

It is this appeal to utopia that demonstrators at Berlin's Alexanderplatz on November 4, 1989 heard from the East German *Staatsdichterin* who had quit the SED five months prior. Against the notion of the *Wende*—loaded as it already was with the implication of regime change and the end of the socialist project—Wolf tries to reframe the unprecedented anti-government protest movement in the GDR as a moment for "revolutionary renewal." A change in values is needed to invert the power structure that has led to the political disenfranchisement of the masses under socialism. The answer, Wolf implores in thinly veiled language, is not Western-style liberal democracy, but a revolution within socialism to center the demands, long been ignored by an elite party bureaucracy, of the people who had at last made their singular name heard in city streets across the nation. It is not at all clear that the crowd assembled understands, much less sympathizes with, the implications of Wolf's doubly oppositional ambivalence. Standing at the podium, calling for a Hegelian renewal of Marxism, she cuts the lonely figure of a gadfly standing athwart history, defending "the people" against themselves: "[*D*]*ieser Wechsel stellt die sozialistische Gesellschaft vom Kopf auf die Füße*," Wolf declares in plainly Hegelian terms, acknowledging that decades of silence had finally been broken, invoking Bloch's watchword *Hoffnung* and ending with a typically dialectical chiasmus, demanding with tongue-in-cheek that the next May Day ceremonies reverse the usual tradition such that "our leaders parade in honor of the people." Repeating the slogan of the so-called "peaceful revolution"—"*Wir sind das Volk!*"—Wolf urges the movement to stay peaceful if any such renewal is to be possible. The pronoun "we" feels awkward in this context, a concession to the narrative voice of the untameable masses who need to hear their own words repeated back to them. However understandably, her new candor bespeaks not only her stalwart utopianism, but also something else she shared with Bloch, who jumped ship far more decisively over a quarter century earlier: a certain apprehensiveness, panic that a moment of contingency is already passing, a brief glimmer of hope swallowed back into the dark of necessity.

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[154] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 124.
[155] Kuhn, *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision*, 42.
[156] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 192.

The Quest for Christa T. does indeed represent a more ambitious attempt at carving out space for a feminist interiority than *Divided Heaven*. The book is more radical in its critique of state socialism's repression of subjectivity, and even more explicitly Blochian in its language. The novels also share a reliance on a device that figures heavily in the undercurrent of critical support for the status quo that remains operative throughout Wolf's East German oeuvre, and which ensured her position as somehow simultaneously poet laureate and oppositional intellectual. As is the case with Rita's hospitalization and gradually confirmed death wish, *Christa T*. presents illness as a personalized symptom of societal contradiction, and suicide as the only meaningful act of dissent besides *Republikflucht* (It is notable that the corresponding verb for both for suicide and "desertion of the republic" is *begehen*, indicative of the self-destruction implicit in either alternative). Rita's mental breakdown and suicide attempt in *Divided Heaven* is repeated, more tragically and with even more challenging nonlinearity, in Christa T.'s diagnosis of leukemia and successful suicide. Despite the sympathetic view of the narrator, a friend of the recently deceased who has taken it upon herself to reconstruct a comprehensible image of the enigmatic Christa T. from scattered memories and writings, it is clear that Christa is far more incompatible with the criteria for model socialist behavior than Rita. Wolf creates dialectical characters in her own curmudgeonly image: "Believe me, one doesn't change; one remains everlastingly out of it, unfit for life. Intelligent, yes. Too soft; all the fruitless pondering; a scrupulous petit bourgeoise," Christa writes in her suicide note, addressed to her sister. "I know what's wrong with me, but it's still me, and I can't wrench it out of myself! Yet I can: I know one way to be rid of the whole business once and for all...I can't stop thinking about it."[157] Right after giving voice to the bitter, ironic pathos of her namesake character, Wolf hints at the causal influence of a generally oppressive political atmosphere, if all too preciously, when the narrator reflects on her own failure as a friend: "Yet why didn't I notice she'd disappeared? What can have been on our minds that summer of 1953?"[158] Kuhn points out that this "seemingly innocuous question, unanswered in the text, would immediately strike a chord in a GDR reader, for the summer of 1953 marked a momentous event in GDR history: the 17 June populist uprising and its suppression by the Soviets."[159] As with the implicit structuring role played by the erection of the Berlin Wall as a historical event underlying the narrative of *Divided Heaven*, here too the unresolved tension of repressive state socialist policy appears (with plausible deniability) as the unspoken prime mover, well upstream of personal affliction and the minutiae of cultural life.

Anke Pinkert observes with regard to a later work, 1976's *Kindheitsmuster* or *Patterns of Childhood*, what is surely already apparent in these earliest novels: "Wolf protects the real existing socialist system and ultimately her own role as an intellectual within this system by assuming the role of the scapegoat, that is, by constructing her autobiographical characters as defective selves,"[160] Pinkert writes, describing the extent of Wolf's oppositional function as one of "soft dissidence" or "suspended critique, a position walking a thin line between transgression and conformity".[161] Once again in *Christa T*., the cold, scientific rationality of the medical establishment, standing in for the governing logic of the socialist state, is unable to grasp the

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[157] Wolf, *The Quest for Christa T*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 70.
[158] Wolf, *The Quest for Christa T*., 71.
[159] Kuhn, *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision*, 80.
[160] Pinkert, "Pleasures of Fear: Antifascist Myth, Holocaust, and Soft Dissidence in Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*," 33.
[161] Pinkert, "Pleasures of Fear: Antifascist Myth, Holocaust, and Soft Dissidence in Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*," 31.

depths of the titular character's individual experience of suffering: "One can always say that it had to do with her sickness," laments the narrator. "The death wish as sickness. Neurosis as deficient capacity to adapt oneself to existing circumstances. That's what the doctor said when he wrote the medical certificate for the university authorities."[162] For Pinkert, Wolf is all too tolerant of contradiction, unwilling to represent disenchantment with the GDR without hedging and linking it with mental and bodily deficiency.

Perhaps we can read the self-negating impulses of Wolf's protagonists as her own curmudgeonly protest, a testament to the untenability of her paradoxical position as a figurehead of a socialist intelligentsia that, as Pinkert says, "had actually failed to revitalize Marxism as a tool for a dialectical understanding of concrete reality."[163] In view of GDR cultural policy, it appears quite by design that heterodox Marxist philosophers had forsaken either their principles or their citizenship. Having witnessed firsthand the impossibility of articulating the objective failures of collective transformation, Wolf had in some sense no choice but to recoil from the emptiness of "we," that degraded second person plural, and to instead give voice to the subjectivity of the isolated individual. In *Divided Heaven*, even one-off characters drip into the fluctuating stream of consciousness, creating a plurivocal interiority and the promise of a seemingly boundless potential for human connection, if only collective structures could alleviate rather than further entrench our alienation. As Rita and Manfred part for the last time, the narration informs us that a "man selling flowers, who had studied exactly when best to approach lovers saying goodbye, stepped up to them. 'A little bouquet, perhaps?' Rita hastily shook her head. The man sidled off. You never stop learning."[164] Indeed, one never does, least of all the student of dialectics, whose greatest weapon—for good or ill, against the revolution or for it—is negation as the promise of change and the foundation of hope, the explosion of present circumstances latent in each moment. "Whoever is alive, never say 'never,'" declares the final chorus in Brecht's 1931 play *Die Mutter*, "It will not stay the way it is."

[162] Wolf, *The Quest for Christa T.*, 72.
[163] Pinkert, "Pleasures of Fear: Antifascist Myth, Holocaust, and Soft Dissidence in Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*," 33.
[164] Wolf, *They Divided the Sky*, 192.

Chapter Three: No Politics After Auschwitz

3.1 – Affirmative Dissent: Marcuse, Identity Politics and the Decline of Marxism

The other German philosopher who sought redemption for Marxism in the negative power of Hegel's *Sollen* was Herbert Marcuse, who finds in dialectics the theoretical basis for action in the wake of the failure of orthodox Marxism's Western industrial proletariat to materialize as the subject of revolution. In his 1941 study of Hegel, *Reason and Revolution*, Marcuse writes that "[t]he real shows itself to be antagonistic, split into its being and its ought."[165] The world as it exists is not merely what appears to be, but also contains "in itself" what it should be and is not yet. As it will for Bloch, Marcuse's reinterpretation opens up space for hope, for a philosophical defiance of the given. So identified with the renewal of the radical left in the postwar era was he that when the Occupy Wall Street protests began in 2011, *The Economist* greeted the Occupy Wall Street protests in 2011 with a column headlined, "Please don't bring back Herbert Marcuse."[166] The Hegel book did not get its full reception until Marcuse was catapulted into celebrity during unofficial tenure as the patron saint of the New Left, but it bears all the wounds of an interwar period that, from the perspective of the German left, could not have gone more poorly. Hope was badly needed and defiance was in short supply.

Like his colleagues at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Marcuse saw in the abortive German Revolution of 1918-9 and Germany's subsequent turn towards fascism a repudiation of Marx's theory of the proletariat as the gravediggers of capitalism. Since 1930, when Max Horkheimer assumed directorship of the Institute in 1930, the energies of the Frankfurt School (the more or less loosely affiliated, predominantly German-Jewish practitioners of what Horkheimer in a key 1937 essay dubbed "critical theory") were consumed with updating Marxist categories to reflect a changed reality. Most pressing was the task of explaining why German workers had not embraced socialism, but rather, defected in large enough numbers from the traditional left-wing parties to form—along with Hitler's base in the middle and upper classes—a critical mass of support for National Socialism.[167] Inspired by György Lukács's 1923 *History and Class Consciousness*, which followed Lenin's lead in emphasizing the productive renewal of the Hegel-Marx nexus, Marcuse, Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and other marquee names associated with the Institute returned to Hegel in order to rethink Marx. But unlike the Hungarian philosopher of Leninism, the Frankfurt School maintained a sometimes outright hostile distance from political practice, including state socialism and organized communist activity, first in the Weimar Republic, then in the United States and West Germany.

In this regard, Marcuse was something of an exception. As a young man his privilege as the son of a successful Berlin industrialist prevented him neither from joining the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1915, nor from being drafted into the German army a year later. As historian Barry M. Katz recounts, Marcuse's increasing penchant for talking politics earned the trust of his fellow soldiers, which in turn saw him elected to the Berlin *Soldatenrat* or Soldiers' Council once the German Empire's military defeat gave way to the tumultuous period of revolt and fracture leading up to the Spartacist Uprising.[168] The revolution,

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[165] Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 2000), 170.
[166] Peter David, "Please don't bring back Herbert Marcuse," *The Economist* 10/3/2011.
[167] Peter D. Stachura, "National Socialism and the German Proletariat, 1925-1935: Old Myths and New Perspectives," *The Historical Journal* 36, no. 3 (Sept. 1993): 707.
[168] Barry M. Katz, "Praxis and Poiesis: Toward an Intellectual Biography of Herbert Marcuse [1898-1979]," *New German Critique* 18 (1979): 13.

> was a rather short-lived affair for Marcuse: he attended meetings, rallies, and street demonstrations (some called by the Spartacists), and as part of the security force mobilized to defend against the incipient counter-revolution, was assigned to stand with a rifle in the Berlin Alexanderplatz and return the fire of snipers. He was discharged in September, by which time an element of disillusionment had already begun to set in.[169]

Marcuse quit the governing SPD the following spring, after Chancellor Friedrich Ebert's government approved the assassinations of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht by the paramilitary *Freikorps*,[170] putting the final nail in the coffin of a doomed rebellion. Marcuse would go on to vote for the Communist Party (the renamed *Spartakusbund* of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, formed out of the SPD's splintered left wing) through 1928, but never involved himself in party activities. He had a much more direct experience of the bitterness of political failure, not to mention the horror of imperialist war, than his colleagues in Frankfurt. Yet despite sharing many of their premises, he retained throughout his life an openness to praxis that is unique among them.

As we will see later in this chapter, Marcuse diverged from the opinions of Adorno and Horkheimer on the question of political organizing along lines other than the traditional Marxist delineation of class struggle with the male-dominated, Western industrial proletariat on its front lines. He did not, however, dispute that Marx's prognosis for this class as a unified historical actor had not come to pass. "Those social groups which dialectical theory identified as the forces of negation are either defeated or reconciled with the established system," he writes in the 1960 preface to *Reason and Revolution*. "Before the power of the given facts, the power of negative thinking stands condemned."[171] The function of negative thinking is to insist, in spite of the facts, on the necessity of change and therefore the possibility of change for the better, "to demonstrate that unfreedom is so much at the core of things that the development of their internal contradictions leads necessarily to qualitative change: the explosion and catastrophe of the established state of affairs."[172] What Hegel offers Marcuse is hope beyond hope, the disquieting knowledge that an emancipatory alternative can only reveal itself when we act as if the possibility of its realization in the world has not been foreclosed through a sort of leap of faith.

In a private memorandum sent to Horkheimer in 1947, two years before the latter would return from American exile to reestablish the Institute for Social Research in the nascent Federal Republic, Marcuse enumerates 33 theses on the state of the world. Douglas Kellner—a leading scholar of Marcuse, and his former student—recounts that the manuscript was "intended as a contribution for a possible relaunching of the Institute journal *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*,"[173] and while nothing more seems to have come of it, the unpublished draft has the defiant air of a statement of principles. This manuscript finds Marcuse at his most lucid, declaring that "[r]ealization is neither a criterion nor the content of Marxist truth, but the historical impossibility of realization is irreconcilable with it."[174] I claim that Marcuse's theoretical justification for hope is given to him, in the first instance, by his affirmative reading of Hegel, and it is this hope which enables his continued proximity to political action in the face of what

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[169] Barry M. Katz, 14.
[170] Klaus Gietinger, "100 Jahre Novemberrevolution: Als die Matrosen meuterten," *Die Wochenzeitung* 45 (2018).
[171] Marcuse, "A Note on Dialectic," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1977), 451.
[172] Marcuse, "A Note on Dialectic," 447.
[173] Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 1998), 216.
[174] Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, 218.

Adorno and Horkheimer would regard as mounting evidence of its futility. Dialectics reminds us that many things appear impossible until they have already happened, after which they appear inevitable.

The curmudgeon has a penchant for debunking established wisdom. With *Reason and Revolution*, Marcuse didn't just reject the predominant dismissal of Hegel as a conservative in the Marxist tradition from Engels to Stalin—he also went sharply against the grain of received wisdom in the Anglo-American intellectual sphere, where postwar critics like Bertrand Russell and Karl Popper charged Hegel with laying the ideological groundwork for the twin totalitarianisms of fascism and state socialism.[175] So full-throated was Marcuse's embrace of Hegel's logic—compared not only to the Marxist tradition at large, but even to his fellow dialecticians at the Institute—that Jürgen Habermas, in his catalog of political Hegelianisms, bothers only to name Marcuse among the "Left Hegelians."[176] Indeed, Marcuse is in this respect the consummate Hegelian Marxist: In the context of the mid-20th century left, equal parts demoralized and deluded, Marcuse is a gadfly of the most measured sort, the stubborn voice of radical possibility. When everything appears hopeless, Marcuse writes, dialectics reveals every state of affairs to be transient, capable of being otherwise. Hegel's philosophy "takes rules, forms, and all the categories of traditional logic to be false because they disregard the negative and contradictory nature of reality." Against "common sense," described here as "the gospel of everyday thinking (including ordinary scientific thinking) and of everyday practice," Hegel asserts the truth of the counterintuitive:

> The dialectical categories construct a topsy-turvy world, opening with the identity of being and nothing and closing with the notion as the true reality. Hegel plays up the absurd and paradoxical character of this world, but he who follows the dialectical process to the end discovers that the paradox is the receptacle of the hidden truth...that the potentialities inherent in men and things may require the dissolution of the given forms.[177]

The "dissolution of the given forms" is Marcuse's attempt to salvage Marx's conception of socialist revolution. The telos of Marx's theory of history is, in Hegelese, none other than the unity of freedom and necessity, the liberation of "the potentialities inherent in men and things." The "ought" is an indictment of all that exists: As Marcuse puts it, "every form of existence must justify before a higher tribunal whether it is adequate to its content or not."[178] *Sollen* is operative in the world as the rivenness of each thing, and in the power of negative thinking.

As discussed in previous chapters, Lenin's sympathetic reading of Hegel held that the essence of dialectics resides primarily in the first operation, the moment of negation, and not in the second, the hotly debated moment of reconciliation and subsumption into the absolute. On this matter, Marcuse shows more fidelity to Lenin than any proponent of the doctrine named after him, explaining that

> the task of breaking the hold of common sense belongs to the dialectical logic. Hegel repeats over and over that dialectics has this 'negative' character. The negative 'constitutes the quality of dialectical Reason,' and the first step 'towards the true concept of Reason' is a 'negative step'; the negative 'constitutes the genuine dialectical

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[175] Richard Gaskins, "Marcuse's Hegel: Hope and Despair in the Logic of Negation," *Society* 55 (2018): 361.
[176] Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 195.
[177] Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 142.
[178] Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 151.

> procedure.' In all these uses 'negative' has a twofold reference: it indicates, first, the negation of the fixed and static categories of common sense and, secondly, the negative and therefore untrue character of the world designated by these categories.[179]

The critical theorist, as a purveyor of dialectical thought, cuts a necessarily iconoclastic figure, at times appearing to "common sense" to be a cheap party trick at best, and at its most malevolent, a vector of contrarian spite. Marcuse appears to concede this when he argues that it is in the function of pointing beyond what is currently in existence—or what even seems imaginable—that "the dialectical contradiction is distinguished from all pseudo- and crackpot opposition, beatnik and hipsterism."[180] Marcuse sees as well as Lenin did that the intrinsically radical implication of Hegel's philosophy—what made it such fertile ground on which a revolutionary philosophical tradition could grow—is that change occurs because reality itself has the structure of antagonism. This is the meaning of Hegel's observation that "the being as such of finite things is to have the germ of decease as their being-within-self: the hour of their birth is the hour of their death."[181] Nothing ever stays only what it is, but contains within it a negativity through which it passes into its opposite.

In his contribution to a recent volume of essays on Hegelian Marxism, Anders Bartonek reexamines Marcuse's Hegelianism, which he notes has received far less scholarly attention than Marcuse's earlier Heideggerianism, and in what little literature there is, "this in almost every case is reduced to a side question."[182] He concludes that, "Even if some attempts have been made to explain why Marcuse put so much of his theoretical energy into Hegel, the question cannot be viewed as entirely solved,"[183] citing Kellner's assessment that Marcuse "never really explained why he involved himself in such intensive work on Hegel."[184] This may well be. It is nevertheless fair to say that Marcuse recognized that the productivity of the Hegel-Marx nexus resides in the centrality of Hegel's corpus to not only the genealogy of Marxism, but its living substance as well. "Marx's materialistic 'subversion' of Hegel," he writes, "was not a shift from one philosophical position to another nor from philosophy to social theory, but rather a recognition that the established forms of life were reaching the stage of their historical negation."[185] Marcuse thinks his interpretation of Hegel can reestablish the broken link between Marxist theory and revolutionary practice because it makes recourse to the logic foundational to Marxism itself. It is important for Marcuse that the Greater *Logic* culminates in the presentation of the absolute as the unity of the theoretical idea and the practical idea. "The 'ought' is not a province of morality or religion, but of actual practice," Marcuse claims. "The negation of finitude"—that is, the negation of the gap between what is and what should be—"involves the demand that the 'ought' be fulfilled in this world."[186] Hegel's logic necessitates that the negativity of *Sollen* cannot be merely neutralized and subsumed back into the whole, but must be integrated in the process of becoming.

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[179] Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 143.
[180] Marcuse, "A Note on Dialectic," 449.
[181] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 29.
[182] Anders Bartonek, "No Dialectics, No Critique" in *Hegelian Marxism: The Uses of Hegel's Philosophy in Marxist Theory from Georg Lukács to Slavoj Žižek* (Södertörn: Södertörn University, 2018), 84.
[183] Bartonek, "No Dialectics, No Critique," 81.
[184] Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (London: Palgrave, 1984), 69.
[185] Marcuse, "A Note on Dialectic," 450.
[186] Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 158-9.

On the merits, Habermas sides with the liberal and conservative interpreters of Hegel on the grounds that the Left Hegelian reading of Hegel must be a willful misreading of sorts: Marcuse's interpretation sacrifices fidelity to the Hegel we know and either ignore or reject the resoundingly anti-revolutionary conclusions of his thought. Consciously or not, Habermas writes, the "Left Hegelian interpreters become critics of Hegel."[187] In "enlisting Hegel's dialectic to keep the door perpetually open for Marxian Revolution," Richard Gaskins observes, "Marcuse parts company with Hegel, who had warned against using transcendental logic to protect preconceived utopias."[188] In one sense this cannot help but be true. I contend, however, that Marcuse's interpretation of Hegel is itself a dialectical enterprise, that through the productive misreading of a quintessentially conservative thinker there may emerge a radical truth, heretofore inaccessible. According to Marcuse, "It is consonant with the innermost effort of Hegel's thought if his own philosophy is 'cancelled.'"[189] He locates Marxism not in opposition to Hegel, but firmly within the Hegelian tradition, in doing so identifying Hegel's philosophy as the theoretical core of Marxism and the eternal wellspring of its renewal.

Not merely the reassertion of orthodoxy, but only a fundamental revision would do. The first half of the 20th century, which Marxists had hoped would be a century of fulfillment, was instead a catastrophe. The Frankfurt School concluded from the failure of socialism to take hold in the West, as well as the susceptibility of German workers to fascism, that the proletariat Marx designated as the subject of revolution was nowhere to be found. While Marx's concepts were ossified into rhetorical cudgels with which ruling Stalinist parties enforced submission, they were also no longer of any use in explaining contemporary reality in the capitalist world. The very class structure of society had to be rethought. Despite their theoretical differences with respect to the question of political action, the Frankfurt School were more or less in agreement in their analysis of the problem: The Western industrial proletariat as the locus of change, the organized working class designated by Marx as the subject of revolution, had not materialized as an inevitable result of their exclusion from the spoils of the economy.

In a supplementary epilogue accompanying the 1954 reprint of the Hegel book, Marcuse writes that Marx's category of the proletariat was valid precisely for the bourgeois liberal order he encountered during capitalism's early state of development, that is, "a society in which the free operation of the basic economic laws and relations would increase the internal contradictions and make the industrial proletariat their principal victim as well as the self-conscious agent of their revolutionary solution." Instead, something happened that Marx did not predict: "[S]ince about the turn of the century, the internal contradictions became subject to increasingly efficient organization, and the negative force of the proletariat was increasingly whittled down. Not only a small 'labor aristocracy' but the larger part of the laboring classes were made into a positive part of the established society."[190] What could be described as the working class had, in large part anyway, been co-opted, cut in on a dirty deal. Capitalism in the Western countries has achieved a level of standard of living for the majority of people that Marx could not have imagined, in part because the system itself had been streamlined in a way that allowed it to overcome its "internal contradictions". The market was no longer the sphere of free enterprise, to whatever extent 19th century capitalism had allowed it to flourish—economic power is now consolidated into monopolies that reduce the inefficiencies that lead to crisis. This

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[187] Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 195.
[188] Gaskins, *Marcuse's Hegel: Hope and Despair in the Logic of Negation*, 365-6.
[189] Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 158.
[190] Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 482.

development, alongside increasing state intervention into the economy and the advent of the Keynesian welfare state, had transformed the society of bourgeois liberalism into a totally "administered" one able to assimilate a sizable portion of its would-be gravediggers.

As Marcuse told British philosopher Bryan Magee on the latter's one-of-a-kind BBC interview series *Talking Philosophy* in 1977, alluding to the final lines of the *Communist Manifesto*, "The working class has no longer nothing to lose but its chains, but a lot more." Yet the notion that workers were, in an important sense, bought off does not by itself suffice to explain why, at the moment of capitalism's most catastrophic crisis to date, German workers who had a rational interest in socialist revolution instead submitted to—and to an extent, embraced—modernity's most openly regressive restoration. Critical theory locates the answer not merely in the loosening of material tensions—after all, workers still had an interest in socialism insofar as they did not own the means of production and remained alienated from their labor—but in the increasingly direct role of culture in shaping the contours of ordinary people's subjectivity. As Marcuse puts it in the theses sent to Horkheimer, "The economical and political identification of the integrated part of the workers with the capitalist state is accompanied by a no less decisive 'cultural' integration and identification."[191] With the overwhelming encroachment of the state into private life, the liberal fiction of the autonomous individual is rendered *a priori* impossible, and with it is lost at least the promise of freedom. Nor does the vulgar materialist account explain why a fundamental restructuring of the economy in the Eastern bloc had seemingly placed culture in the straightjacket of a "totalitarian logic" that stifles not only dissent, but all expressions of individual subjectivity in the public sphere: "There, freedom is the way of life instituted by a communist regime, and all other transcending modes of freedom are either capitalistic, or revisionist, or leftist sectarianism."[192] From the perspective of orthodox Marxism, including Marxism-Leninism, this is a non-issue: Society's material base in the objective relations of production determines everything about subjective experience and cultural life; the causality is direct and goes one way. According to this view, what was done in the Soviet Union should be enough to liberate the potential inherent in human beings. On the contrary, as Marcuse points out, precisely the opposite has happened: "The fact that the first successful socialist revolution has not yet led to a freer and happier society has contributed immeasurably to reconciliation with capitalism and has objectively discredited the revolution."[193] Irrespective of comparative economic productivity, the totalitarian cultural logic of the Soviet Union has in turn damned the cause of a revolutionary workers' movement in the West.

In his aforementioned essay defining "Traditional and Critical Theory," Horkheimer refers to the vulgar materialist model of base and superstructure as "economism," and if the loose grouping of intellectuals known as the Frankfurt School share one point of agreement, it is surely their opposition to this view. "It would be mechanistic, not dialectical thinking," Horkheimer writes in the postscript, "to judge the future forms of society solely according to their economy. Historical change does not leave untouched the relations between the spheres of culture," spheres that have developed their own internal dynamics that reinforce, reciprocally, the relations of production in ever more ideologically manipulative ways through their actual interaction with individuals. "Economism," he asserts in seemingly paradoxical fashion, "does not consist in

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[191] Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, 221.
[192] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 1991), 16-17.
[193] Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, 221.

giving too much importance to the economy, but in giving it too narrow a scope."[194] What this means is that the traditional model of base and superstructure has led not only to the dismissal of the latter as an object of theoretical inquiry, but also the neglect of the extent to which the distinction itself belies the mutual imbrication of the two. Ben Agger notes this irony in his study of the Frankfurt School when he explains that in a significant sense,

> the Frankfurt thinkers are more economics oriented than many orthodox Marxists, who view the relationship between base and superstructure as static and who repeat arguments in *The German Ideology* about the mechanical determination of superstructure by base, thus implying that they are separate to some extent. But the Frankfurt position is that the superstructural sphere—art, politics, quotidian experience—is increasingly "economized" in face of the imperatives both of social control and profit in advanced capitalism.[195]

It is only through an increased emphasis on culture's dynamic relationship to the material base that the full nature of the contemporary determination of flesh-and-blood individuals by economic circumstances receives its due. On this matter the influence of the return to Hegel is evident. The dialectical integration of subjective experience into the objective totality begins to restore to Marxist class analysis its otherwise declining explanatory power. According to Horkheimer, "Whether a real socialization is going on, that is, whether a higher principle of economic life is actually being developed, does not depend simply on, for example, a change in certain property relations or on increased productivity in new forms of social collaboration."[196] The poverty of culture in the Soviet Union is not a failure of economic development, but the result of a singular focus on productivity, the fetishization of one aspect of the material base and the undialectical failure to see it in its totality.

Marcuse, meanwhile, goes so far as to indict Marx himself as a vulgar materialist whose fetishization of work provides the theoretical grounds for the productivism of governing communist parties.[197] In the preface to Raya Dunayevskaya's 1958 manifesto *Marxism and Freedom*, he writes that Marx's vision of a socialist society, vague as it remains, gestures in precisely the wrong direction by conditioning its fulfillment solely on "the emancipation and organization of labor." The state socialist experiment suggests that, compared to the Frankfurt School's more expansive (though often no less vague) notions of a fundamentally transformed human experience, the historical task of achieving "a truly rational societal organization of labor" is an easy enough problem to solve:

> For Marx, it is to be solved by a revolution which brings the productive process under the collective control of the "immediate producers." But this is not freedom. Freedom is living without toil, without anxiety: the play of human faculties. The realization of freedom is a problem of time: reduction of the working day to the minimum which turns quantity into quality. A socialist society is a society in which free time, not labor time is the social measure of wealth and the dimension of the individual existence.[198]

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[194] Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 248.
[195] Ben Agger, *The Discourse of Domination: From the Frankfurt School to Postmodernism* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1992), 132.
[196] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 249.
[197] *The Dunayevskaya-Marcuse-Fromm Correspondence, 1954–1978: Dialogues on Hegel, Marx, and Critical Theory*, eds. Kevin B. Anderson and Russell Rockwell (Lanham: Lexington, 2012), 512.
[198] *The Dunayevskaya-Marcuse-Fromm Correspondence, 1954–1978*, 512.

For the first generation of the Frankfurt School, the shortcomings of Marx's theory of revolution could be traced to his failure, all too understandable, in Marcuse's estimation, to factor into his notion of base and superstructure the "dimension of the individual existence" as it is determined at the intersection of the economic and cultural spheres. As Stuart Jeffries observes, Marcuse's "argument showed how far critical theory had departed from Marxist orthodoxy: Marx was effectively cast as a philosopher who bought into capitalist ideology by eulogising self-fulfilment through labour, albeit non-alienated labour."[199] This break with Marx opens the door for critical theory to explain the stagnation of socialist culture in the Eastern bloc and the cooptation of revolutionary energies in the West. Here Marcuse, as most of his colleagues, turned to psychoanalysis for a theory of interiority, "the play of human faculties," without which Marxism could not account for the irrational domination and escalating destruction that still accompanied the development, not just of capitalism as such, but of what critical theory in light of the state socialist project refers to more broadly as industrial society.

As the preeminent scholar of the Frankfurt School Martin Jay puts it in his seminal history of the Institute's first decades, "A gap in the classical Marxist model of substructure and superstructure had to be filled. The missing link was psychological, and the theory the Institut chose to supply it was Freud's."[200] The Frankfurt School's Marxist insistence on the irrationality of the supposedly rational order of society finds its micro-level complement practically tailor-made in psychoanalysis, which according to Marcuse "is in theory based on the acceptance of the specific rationality of the irrational."[201] Interpreted as a bourgeois prophet of the counterintuitive, Freud fit the Institute's Hegelian Marxism like a glove. For Freud, the subject is neither autonomous nor unified, but rather riven by a gap between the conscious and unconscious aspects of cognition, with the underlying causal structures of behavior often apparent only as a negative, implicit in the contradiction between the ego we experience as an autonomous self (*das Ich*, the "I") and the inaccessible id (*das Es*, the "it"). Freud proposes that the secret cause of human behavior, from which our will to live ultimately derives, is an "erotic" instinct towards pleasure, submerged beneath the surface of conscious cognition. Over the course of his career, he also grew more and more convinced of the existence of a countervailing aggressive instinct, the *Todestrieb* ("death drive" or "death instinct"), better understood as a longing for inertia than a sort of bloodlust. In a 1932 letter to Albert Einstein in response to the latter's inquiry regarding the persistent occurrence of war, Freud explains: "The death instinct becomes an impulse to destruction when, with the aid of certain organs, it directs its action outward, against external objects. The living being, that is to say, defends its own existence by destroying an external one."[202] The prerequisite for *Kultur* (usually rendered in English as "civilization") is a process by which individualized is socialized to curb these instincts: to overcome an originary craving for immediate satisfaction, which Freud dubs the "pleasure principle," by replacing it with the "reality principle," the law of delayed gratification that acknowledges external constraints on subjective agency.[203]

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[199] Stuart Jeffries, *The Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School* (London: Verso, 2016), 543.
[200] Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950*, 85.
[201] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 249.
[202] Translation modified from Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* vol. 22 (New York: Vintage, 2001), 210.
[203] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Norton, 1961), 4.

In the absence of a coherent historical framework, we find instead in Freud what Andrew Pendakis calls a "pessimistic philosophical anthropology,"[204] a parallel between maturation during a human lifetime and the world-historical development of civilization. Both processes depend on increasing levels of the psychic operation Freud calls repression, wherein

> instincts or parts of instincts turn out to be incompatible in their aims or demands with the remaining ones, which are able to combine into the inclusive unity of the ego. The former are then split off from this unity by the process of repression, held back at lower levels of psychical development and cut off, to begin with, from the possibility of satisfaction.[205]

In other words, as Marcuse puts it in his 1955 *Eros and Civilization*, subtitled *A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, "the history of man is the history of his repression. … Civilization begins when the primary objective—namely, integral satisfaction of needs—is effectively renounced."[206] As in Freud's famous example of the child's *fort-da* game, repression is never complete, manifesting as a neurotic symptom in the "compulsion to repeat," the reenactment of a frustrated desire in a defiant attempt to master it.[207] Since the neurotic who cannot remember trauma's details "is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience," Freud writes in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," the psychoanalyst must get the patient "to re-experience some portion of his forgotten life, but must see to it, on the other hand, that the patient retains some degree of aloofness, which will enable him, in spite of everything to recognize that what appears to be reality is in fact only a reflection of a forgotten past."[208] Psychoanalytic practice thus carries a latent dialectical quality in its skepticism of appearances and rejection of common sense. In one of the more memorable aphorisms from his *Minima Moralia*, Adorno observes that, "In psycho-analysis nothing is true except the exaggerations."[209] In therapy, the unfolding of alienated subjectivity reveals what the subject is *an sich*, but not yet *für uns*.

Freud's recognition of the counterintuitive nature of reality—counterintuitive, that is, from the perspective of the individual—allows the Frankfurt School to establish what Agger calls the "objectivity of the subject," grounding the experience of culture in materiality of the most flesh-and-blood sort: "Freud is so important for Marcuse precisely because he treats the individual's instincts as at once subjective and objective...their subjectivity is rooted in our unique developmental experiences, and their objectivity involves the deep imprinting of phylogenetic forces on the developing and developed individual."[210] Hegel could not himself illuminate this dimension, although the logic he imputes to the very fabric of reality finds unique consonance in psychoanalytic practice, where our most deeply held convictions about the world are revealed to be contradictory, a symptom that belies the cause. As we will continue to explore when our attention turns to Adorno, he, Marcuse, and others in their orbit like Erich Fromm each developed their distinct variations of Freudian theory. In virtually every case, the incorporation of a psychoanalytic component enables Marxism for the first time to pay properly dialectical attention not only to the relations of production, but also to the relation of the subject to itself.

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[204] Andrew Pendakis, "Frankfurt – New York – San Diego 1924–1968; or, Critical Theory," in "A Companion to Critical and Cultural Theory," eds. Imre Szeman, Sarah Blacker and Justin Sully (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 13.
[205] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 5.
[206] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 11.
[207] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* 11.
[208] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* 12-3.
[209] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2005), 49.
[210] Ben Agger, *The Discourse of Domination: From the Frankfurt School to Postmodernism*, 105-6.

Adorno and Horkheimer had already integrated Freudian categories into their studies of the "authoritarian personality" in exile from the relocated Institute in California and New York. Marcuse, however, spent the 1940s in Washington doing anti-Nazi propaganda and intelligence work,[211] later advising on US occupation policies,[212] and did not seriously engage with psychoanalysis until his study of Freud in the '50s. Nonetheless, *Eros and Civilization* remains the most holistic attempt in the Frankfurt School corpus to render Hegelian metaphysics material, and it bears all the hallmarks of Marcuse's signature iconoclasm. For one thing, Marcuse's interpretation of Freud has been criticized fairly widely as a misreading.[213] His central conceit is that a non-repressive civilization is possible, and that this possibility is "derivable from Freud's instinct theory itself,"[214] because there is a functional analogy and reciprocal relationship between the micro- and macro-level explanatory mechanisms of economic structure and unconscious primary drives. Marcuse claims that not all repression is necessary, that in fact some repression is "surplus-repression," the product of a historically obsolete (capitalist) reality principle. A change in the economic structure that also made headway in liberating the instincts would lead to "not simply a release but a *transformation* of the libido,"[215] enabling people to find gratification not in emancipated labor but in free play. Throughout, Marcuse insists that Freud is more radical than meets the eye:

> The notion that a non-repressive civilization is impossible is a cornerstone of Freudian theory. However, his theory contains elements that break through this rationalization; they shatter the predominant tradition of Western thought and even suggest its reversal. His work is characterized by an uncompromising insistence on showing up the repressive content of the highest values and achievements of culture. In so far as he does this, he denies the equation of reason with repression on which the ideology of culture is built.[216]

The greater the repression required to maintain the current level of civilization, the more surplus aggression is mobilized and released—this is how fascism was able to harness the barbarism lurking beneath the surface of European society at the height of culture. It is easy in hindsight to overlook how unlikely a combination this all appeared at the time. Even at his most radical, Freud himself was decidedly conservative. In the letter to Einstein, Freud practically sneers at "the Bolshevists" who "aspire to do away with human aggressiveness by guaranteeing the satisfaction of material needs and equality between members of the community. To me this hope seems vain. Meanwhile they busily perfect their armaments, and hatred over all beyond their borders is not least among the factors of cohesion among themselves."[217] Once again, what separates Marcuse from his colleagues is not his reinterpretation of quintessentially conservative thinkers—this he shares with the entire tradition of dialectical curmudgeons going back to Marx—but rather, his insistence on reading them against the grain, as radicals.

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[211] Barry M. Katz, "Praxis and Poiesis: Toward an Intellectual Biography of Herbert Marcuse [1898-1979]," 17.
[212] *The Dunayevskaya-Marcuse-Fromm Correspondence, 1954–1978*, eds. Kevin B. Anderson and Russell Rockwell, xvi.
[213] Peter M. Stirk, "Eros and Civilization Revisited," *History of the Human Sciences* 12, no. 1 (1999): 74-5. See also: Christopher Nichols, "On the Several Sources of Freud's Conservatism: Some Comments on the Work of Horowitz and Marcuse," *Human Studies* 5, no. 1 (1982): 71.
[214] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, 131.
[215] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, 201.
[216] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, 17.
[217] Translation modified from Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. 22, 210-1.

Unwilling to foreclose on the possibility of realization of Marxism's telos, Marcuse remained close to political practice as a sort of Kantian regulative principle. "Dialectical theory is not refuted, but it cannot offer the remedy," Marcuse admits in *One-Dimensional Man*. "It defines the historical possibilities, even necessities; but their realization can only be in the practice which responds to the theory, and, at present, the practice gives no such response."[218] The critique that led Adorno to political quietism is instead, in Marcuse, accompanied by a theory of emancipation, no matter how dubious. As Katz puts it, "From Angela Davis to the war in Vietnam, Marcuse was determinately for and against things."[219] And Marcuse had no scruples about adapting for political expediency. In Washington he worked for three US government agencies including the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the precursor to the CIA, where he "was a member of a team of leftist scholars in which he identified Nazi and anti-Nazi groups and individuals in fascist Germany and, in the last year of the war, assisted in the preparation of the denazification program of the occupation authorities."[220] Unlike Brecht and Bloch, who returned from exile to the GDR—and unlike Horkheimer and Adorno, who came home to Frankfurt in the capitalist West—Marcuse did not go back to Germany at all. He had become an American citizen in 1940, and in 1953 he moved to California, where he taught philosophy at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD). There, to the great consternation of the fiercely anticommunist mainstream of American society, he engaged with the growing student and minority activist movements of the 60's, encouraged them in the direction of anti-war mobilization,[221] and was welcomed as a prophet, earning him a reputation as the "father of the New Left."[222] This made him the target of a highly publicized witch hunt calling for his removal led by the American Legion, then-Governor of California Ronald Reagan, and Vice President Spiro Agnew. The Legion hung Marcuse in effigy and offered to buy out his contract. As American Legionnaire Harry Foster told a reporter in 1968: "It seems to be that wherever the radicals in this so-called New Left appear, Marcuse somewhere is in the background. We are convinced that he has to convey some of his ideas and thoughts directly to the students, and in this lies the danger of Marcuse to the University of California." His office in San Diego received a letter from the Ku Klux Klan with the warning: "Marcuse, you are a very dirty Communist dog. We give you 72 hours to leave the United States. 72 hours more, Marcuse, and we kill you."[223] They did not. His name was invoked in 1968 when students marched through European cities carrying banners that read: "Marx, Mao and Marcuse."[224] In a very peculiar way, long after the publication of his major theoretical works, Marcuse found himself transformed into a philosophical media event. By 1969 *One-Dimensional Man* "had sold over 100,000 copies in the United States and been translated into 16 languages,"[225] and particularly in the last decade of his life, Marcuse made a number of radio and television appearances. He couldn't publish in the popular press in the US in the way that Adorno would in the Federal Republic, but his reputation preceded him. He was on the cover of *Life* magazine, and as his former student Andrew Feenberg recounts in Paul Alexander

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[218] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 252-3.
[219] Barry M. Katz, "Praxis and Poiesis: Toward an Intellectual Biography of Herbert Marcuse [1898-1979]," 18.
[220] Barry M. Katz, "Praxis and Poiesis: Toward an Intellectual Biography of Herbert Marcuse [1898-1979]," 17.
[221] Barry M. Katz, *Herbert Marcuse and the Art of Liberation: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Schocken, 1982), 2.
[222] Tom Bourne, "Herbert Marcuse: Grandfather of the New Left," *Change* 11, no. 6 (Sept. 1979): 36.
[223] Tom Bourne, "Herbert Marcuse: Grandfather of the New Left," 36.
[224] Jerzy J. Wiatr and Henry F. Mins, "Herbert Marcuse: Philosopher of a Lost Radicalism," *Science & Society* 34, no. 3 (Fall 1970): 319.
[225] Barry M. Katz, "Praxis and Poiesis: Toward an Intellectual Biography of Herbert Marcuse [1898-1979]," 18.

Juutilainen's 1996 documentary *Herbert's Hippopotamus* that when *Playboy* requested an interview, Marcuse agreed, on the condition that he would be the centerfold.[226]

While Marcuse has not, as *The Economist* feared, regained currency in the eyes of the contemporary left, his most indelible mark on American politics remains his influence on the generation of radical intellectuals who emerged from the period of revolt between 1965 and 1972 known as "the '60's" into the desolate political landscape of restoration. Perhaps the most prominent of these is his student, the scholar and activist Angela Davis, who recounts: "Marcuse was the one who taught me that it was possible to be an academic and an activist, a scholar and a revolutionary."[227] In the Juutilainen documentary, she recalls that one feminist group early on named him an "honorary woman," and when the Black Student Council and Mexican American Association at UCSD occupied the office of the registrar demanding the establishment of a radical center for political and ethnic studies on campus, dubbed the "Lumumba-Zapata College,"[228] Marcuse was "the first one in the door." Davis—then a member of the Communist Party USA and a onetime affiliate of the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party—says Marcuse never agreed with her decision to join the Communist Party but continued to support her, all the more vigorously in 1969 after the University of California at Los Angeles, again on the urging of Governor Reagan, invoked her party affiliation as grounds to fire her from her assistant professorship. At a rally in Berkeley demanding the resignation of the Board of Regents and Davis's reinstatement, Marcuse urged the assembled protesters to continue their demonstrations:

> The full weight of repression is falling upon the schools and universities and on the black militants in the ghettos with whom you have joined the fight. The full weight of repression is not falling on organized labor. It is falling on you, and they know why, and they know why they have to do it. In other words, if there is anyone capable of breaking the insanity which is daily reproduced, it is you, and only you, black white and brown, who can break this insanity.[229]

No one else among the Frankfurt School's first generation spoke this way, in the anti-racist idiom of the American radical tradition. As Jeffries observes with respect to Davis, "What resonated for her in Marcuse's writings was, in part, what she called 'the emancipatory promise of the German philosophical tradition', but also his ability to reveal the barbarous underside to the American dream."[230] That he did so to such effect, from the belly of the beast and at the height of the Cold War, goes a long way towards explaining why his rise to fame was the source of such scandal. Indeed, with Marcuse, the dialectical tradition produces a truly public-facing gadfly. While the soft dissidence of Brecht could never be explicitly oppositional vis-a-vis the Stalinist state, Marcuse is able to direct his critique at the whole of society in the Western capitalist nations, implicating culture and by extension most people, whose identification with it appears unshakeable.

But Marcuse held fast to the glimmer of hope for which he could still find a theoretical justification. In the closing passage of *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse explains that since the

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[226] *Herbert's Hippopotamus: Marcuse and Revolution in Paradise*, dir. Paul Alexander Juutilainen, 1996.
[227] Angela Davis, Preface to *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, eds. John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.
[228] Stephen Ferguson, *Philosophy of African American Studies: Nothing Left of Blackness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 28.
[229] Belva Davis, *KPIX Eyewitness News* 10/24/1969.
[230] Jeffries, *The Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School*, 599-600.

majority of people, once potentially "the ferment of social change, have 'moved up' to become the ferment of social cohesion," that the full weight of exploitation has shifted to the margins of society. "Underneath the conservative popular base," he explains, "is the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable."[231] Marcuse already has this conception almost two decades earlier, in the theses sent to Horkheimer, where he counts among this outsider class "agricultural and migrant workers, minorities, colonized and half-colonized,"[232] but had only identified them as the primary losers of this tendency of monopoly capitalism. As we will explore further in the next section, for Horkheimer and Adorno, with the vanishing proletariat, so too disappears the subject of revolution—and that is that. The contradiction between the interests of capital and labor has not been resolved, but rather sublated in the unfolding of global capital as Hegelian *Geist*: The cunning of reason strikes again. Marcuse eschews the mournful quality this recognition imparts to essays like "Recognition," which finds Adorno cautioning that, "At the present moment, no higher form of society is concretely visible: for that reason, anything that seems in easy reach is regressive. According to Freud, however, whoever regresses has not achieved the goal of his drives."[233] During the '60s, Marcuse develops a growing suspicion that marginalized groups represent not a replacement for the traditional working class, but placeholders, still every bit the indictment of capitalism that Marx considered definitive of the proletariat: "[T]heir life is the most immediate and the most real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions. Thus their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not."[234] In the absence of even a pre-revolutionary situation, Marcuse articulates a sketch of what would later be coined identity politics, a basis for radical organizing around the intersecting forms of oppression that are co-constitutive of mass society.

For Marcuse, marginalized subjects function not merely as ersatz but expanded vectors of class struggle, and thus a potential locus of change. In a rare appearance on German television in 1976, Marcuse explained to his interviewers,

> I never believed the 60's movement was a revolutionary movement. Only movements supported by revolutionary masses are revolutionary. This was not the case in the 60s It was a movement that reflected the changes that had occurred in advanced capitalist societies, and which so to speak anticipated new goals and models of radical change. Students, women, oppressed nationalities and racial minorities, were a vanguard in the sense that they anticipated future possibilities and goals of radical change.
>
> *Ich habe nie geglaubt, dass die Bewegung der 60igen Jahre eine revolutionäre Bewegung war. Revolutionär sind nur Bewegungen, die von revolutionären Massen getragen werden. Das war in der 60er Jahren nicht der Fall. Es war eine Bewegung, die zum Ausdruck machte, die Veränderungen die in der hochkapitalistischen Gesellschaft vor sich gegangen sind und die eine Bewegung die sozusagen vorwegnahm neue Ziele, neue Modelle einer radikalen Veränderung. Die Studenten, die Frauen, die unterdrückten*

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[231] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 256.
[232] Marcuse, in: *Technology, War and Fascism: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Douglas Kellner, Vol. 1, 220.
[233] Adorno, "Resignation," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 202.
[234] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 256.

> *Nationalen und rassistischen Minoritäten waren in diesem Sinn eine Avant-garde, in dem Sinn des Vorwegnehmens, künftige Möglichkeiten und Ziele radikaler Veränderung.*[235]

Marcuse is usually careful to qualify any political agency he attributes to this gendered, racialized, colonized, and otherwise excluded vanguard by referring, as he does here, to "goals of radical change": As both distinct from and a necessary step towards revolution, "radical change" is real progress resulting from political practice, resistance that is not merely recuperated by the system insofar as it "preserve[s] the illusion of popular sovereignty."[236] Marcuse's unique contribution to the first generation of critical theory was, I contend, precisely this dogged but realistic pursuit of the next best thing. And even if nothing comes of it, he assures us, our attempts to make the world better will not be wholly in vain: they can be counted towards "the Great Refusal—the protest against that which is," the unknowable history of human yearning and defiance.[237]

As for revolution, he could only ever salvage the possibility of it—what he refused was the nullity of the subject, carving out a position of ambivalent optimism that was just as divisive within the Frankfurt School's orbit as outside of it. In her memorial essay after Marcuse's death in 1979, Dunayevskaya captures something of the contrarian spirit who recognizes the practice necessity of acting as if radical change might still be in reach: "Those gentle eyes of his had a way of smiling even when he was theoretically shouting at you—as if he were saying: 'It really is good to have one who still believes; for, without revolution, what is there?'"[238]

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[235] "Herbert Marcuse im Gespräch mit Ivo Frenzel und Willy Hochkeppel," *Bayerischer Rundfunk* 11/11/1976.
[236] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 256.
[237] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 63.
[238] *The Dunayevskaya-Marcuse-Fromm Correspondence, 1954–1978*, eds. Kevin B. Anderson and Russell Rockwell, 465.

3.2 – Absolute Negation: Adorno's Dialectical Quietism

In the pantheon of philosophical gadflies, the curmudgeon *par excellence* is surely Theodor Adorno. And like the figures we have examined who loom large in the German tradition of critical theory, Adorno's reputation as the high priest of negativity is mediated by—indeed, practically a function of—his interpretation of Hegel. In Adorno, against Marx's attempt to construct a dialectical theory of revolution, not merely to interpret the world, Hegel's political quietism reasserts itself. Where Angela Davis had found in Marcuse a cynical but patient mentor, glad to have one who still believes, her time studying with Adorno in Frankfurt was marked by a more dramatic disconnect. In contrast to Marcuse's general attitude of openness and encouragement towards the novel left-wing political formations of the '60s, she encountered in Adorno a ruthless naysayer, stalwartly unconvinced that radical change was possible in a historical moment when the would-be proletariat had joined what Marcuse called the conservative popular base of the postwar welfare state. "After the founding of the Black Panther Party in 1966, I felt very much drawn back to this country," Davis recounts. "During one of my last meetings with him…he suggested that my desire to work directly in the radical movements of that period was akin to a media studies scholar deciding to become a radio technician."[239] Indeed, through all the political tumult of the years leading up to his death in 1969, Adorno and the nascent left in the West were on completely different wavelengths. In the last lines of his essay "Resignation," Adorno writes, "Whoever thinks is without anger in all criticism: Thinking sublimates anger."[240] A political bumper sticker in the spirit of Adorno, though he would surely retch at the thought of such a thing, might put a counterintuitive spin on a musty cliché that one who is not outraged is not paying attention: If you're outraged, you're not thinking dialectically.

In 2003, at what would seem the nadir of Marxism's post-Soviet exile from relevance, the Feuilleton editor of *Die Zeit*, a weekly German newspaper to which Adorno himself once contributed, penned a retrospective declaring Adorno "the true conservative."[241] This was not meant entirely literally—from a different point of view, it was meant all too literally—but it echoes a sentiment expressed by Adorno's lifelong writing partner and intellectual kindred spirit Max Horkheimer in a 1967 television interview with the Bavarian public broadcaster Bayerische Rundfunk: "Critical theory has the task—and here the apparent conservative in the apparent revolutionary suggests, or the true conservative in the true revolutionary suggests—that we must offer serious resistance to ensure that what was once called culture is not simply erased by technology."[242] Adorno's thinking, though riven in a meaningful sense by the historical singularity of the Holocaust, is concerned throughout his oeuvre with the encroachment of capital and the state—fused beyond Marx's wildest dreams through technological and bureaucratic administration—into the very essence of individual consciousness and social being. "Adorno had no use for statecraft," Assheuer writes, "because if the domination of nature and the domination of people are inexorably entwined, then domination pervades every all social relations, and it becomes virtually arbitrary which form of government a polity adopts." ("*Mit Adorno ließ sich kein Staat machen … Denn wenn Naturbeherrschung und Menschenbeherrschung unauflöslich ineinander verflochten sind, dann greifen sie durch alle*

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[239] Angela Davis, "Marcuse's Legacies," in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 46-7.
[240] Theodor W. Adorno, "Resignation," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Verso, 1991), 203.
[241] Thomas Assheuer, "Der wahre Konservative," *Die Zeit* 9/4/2003.
[242] Dagobert Lindlau, Interview with Max Horkheimer, "Report München," *Bayerische Rundfunk*, 1967.

Verhältnisse hindurch, und es scheint nahezu gleichgültig, welche politische Verfassung sich ein Gemeinwesen gibt.")[243] Adorno's conservatism, therefore, consists not in an active project to "stand athwart history, yelling Stop,"[244] as William F. Buckley put it in the inaugural issue of *National Review*, but an imperative to withdraw from the pretense of all but the most distanced position with respect to participation in a historical process that appeared to lead, not to any fulfillment of Marxist teleology, but to genocide, the return to barbarism in modernity. At his most dialectical, however, he seems to transcend his critique of Hegel's conservatism in order to embody it himself. While Adorno retreated ever more into the realm of aesthetics later in life, Horkheimer's more overtly political conservatism—evidenced by his comfort using the term—sheds light on Adorno's reactionary dismissal of the progressive and anticolonial movements of his day.

More markedly than anyone else in the Frankfurt School orbit—with the arguable exception of Adorno's friend and theoretical sparring partner Walter Benjamin, who did not escape fascism and died by his own hand—Adorno's writing is imbued with a distinctly mournful quality. Written during Adorno's Californian exile, in the final years and immediate aftermath of World War II, the aphorisms of *Minima Moralia* grieve not only the semblance of autonomy maintained by the bourgeois subject, but a central Marxist premise as well: that the historical categories borrowed from Hegel correspond meaningfully to reality. In his dedication to Horkheimer, on the occasion of whose fiftieth birthday the book was originally conceived, Adorno explains that the form of the text is meant to give shape to the fragmented perspective of the individual in light of "the nullity demonstrated to subjects by the concentration camp."[245] The Holocaust, for Adorno, reveals the true fate of the individual, neglected by Hegel a century and a half earlier, as the particular subsumed under a universal that will tolerate no difference. "Hegel, whose method schooled that of *Minima Moralia*, argued against the mere being-for-itself of subjectivity on all its levels," Adorno writes. "Dialectical theory, abhorring anything isolated, cannot admit aphorisms as such." As I have argued, however, the attempt to revise Hegelian categories by explicating them in a contemporary context is itself a core dialectical enterprise. Adorno is no exception—his aphorisms are meant to "insist, in opposition to Hegel's practice and yet in accordance with his thought, on negativity."[246] What Adorno proposes is, in one respect, recognizable by now as the Hegelian Marxist move to emphasize the negative operation of the dialectic, but he also goes further than, for example, Marcuse in declaring the truth of the dialectic to be only this difference, the non-identity of the part in relation to the whole, the object in relation to its concept.

For Adorno, the moment of particularity is all that can be salvaged from the nexus of Hegel and Marx when one jettisons "the large historical categories, after all that has meanwhile been perpetrated with their help."[247] Indeed, Adorno's position within the Hegelian tradition does not prevent him from indicting Hegel's concepts for providing an ideological buttress to totalitarianism, as liberal and conservative critics like Karl Popper and Hannah Arendt would. Only Adorno's critique is an immanent one, and in his magnum opus on philosophy, 1966's *Negative Dialectics*, he articulates the definitive account of his criticism: "What is negated is negative until it has passed. This is the decisive break with Hegel. To use identity as a palliative

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[243] Thomas Assheuer, "Der wahre Konservative," *Die Zeit* 9/4/2003.
[244] William F. Buckley, Jr., "Our Mission Statement," National Review 11/19/1955.
[245] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2005), 16.
[246] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, 16.
[247] Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, 17.

for dialectical contradiction, for the expression of the insolubly nonidentical, is to ignore what the contradiction means."[248] In other words, the dialectical contradiction cannot be resolved—identity cannot be achieved—except through the negation of what is non-identical, what Adorno in *Minima Moralia* portentously calls the "liquidation of the particular [*Liquidierung des Besonderen*]."[249] Alison Stone captures the distinction nicely when she writes that "contra Hegel, Adornian reconciliation holds together differences – of object from concept, nature from subject, myth from enlightenment – letting them remain different, juxtaposed as such, without subsuming them under any unifying structure."[250] By the mid-20th century, it appears to Adorno that reality itself has, in a sense, become more Hegelian: "To preserve itself, to remain the same, to 'be'," Adorno writes, bourgeois society "must constantly expand, progress, advance its frontiers, not respect any limit, not remain the same. It has been demonstrated to bourgeois society that it would no sooner reach a ceiling, would no sooner cease to have noncapitalist areas available outside itself, than its own concept would force its self-liquidation [*ihrem Begriff nach sich aufheben müßte*]."[251] The story of the Third Reich, for Adorno, is the story of these two liquidations: the implosion and reconsolidation of bourgeois society around the eradication of difference from the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the cleansing of individuals to restore the health of the social body.

"Nowhere in his work is the primacy of the whole doubted," Adorno laments. "Hegel, in hypostatizing both bourgeois society and its fundamental category, the individual, did not truly carry through the dialectic between the two."[252] This non-identity survives only in the otherness of the individual: It "is not to be obtained directly, as something positive on its part, nor is it obtainable by a negation of the negative. This negation is not an affirmation itself, as it is to Hegel."[253] Difference is not, as in Hegel's understanding of *Aufhebung*, preserved through its negation in the absolute—it is annihilated: "What thus wins out in the inmost core of dialectics is the anti-dialectical principle: that traditional logic which, *more arithmetico*, takes minus times minus for a plus. It was borrowed from that very mathematics to which Hegel reacts so idiosyncratically elsewhere."[254] Rather than a positive, harmonious whole, Hegel's universal in Adorno's formulation appears as no more or less than the negative sum of its liquidated particularities. Adorno's point here is very clever: The subjective particularity that is negated in the second operation is not preserved in any meaningful sense, and the proof is in the pudding of history. As James Gordon Finlayson puts it, "He realizes that what makes a negation determinate according to Hegel, that is, what gives rise to something new, and not just new but something better and higher, is its being a moment in the development of the absolute idea."[255] "Hegel's transposition of the particular into particularity follows the practice of a society that tolerates the particular only as a category, a form of the supremacy of the universal," Adorno writes, noting once more that Marx's description of the way capital dissolves all fixed relations into exchange value mirrors the progressive advance of Hegel's *Weltgeist*. "Such negative supremacy of the concept makes clear why Hegel, its apologist, and Marx, its critic, concur in the notion that what

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[248] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 160.
[249] Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, 17.
[250] Alison Stone, "Adorno, Hegel, and Dialectic," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy 22* (2014): 1130.
[251] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 26.
[252] Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, 17.
[253] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 158.
[254] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 158.
[255] James Gordon Finlayson, "Hegel, Adorno and the Origins of Immanent Criticism," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22, no. 6 (2014): 1161.

Hegel calls the world spirit has a preponderance of being-in-itself—that it does not (as would be solely fitting for Hegel) have merely its objective substance in the individuals."[256] Again the charge is leveled that Hegel himself was not Hegelian enough: To do justice to his logic would be to accept that the cunning of reason is a projection of our own powerlessness before a system of our making.

Adorno's reproach, much more pointedly than Marcuse's interpretation, conceives Hegel as a conservative, whose radical tendencies are implicit but did not, in the final analysis, win the day. His assessment of the deadlock to which Hegel's thought ultimately leads reveals Adorno himself to be conservative in a much more literal sense: "As Adorno sees it," Stone observes, "to take another step forward on the same course that history has run so far would be to continue the effort of enlightenment to posit itself as separate from nature, which would merely incur another dialectical fall back into nature."[257] To stand athwart history, yelling "stop"—to this imperative must be added the injunction for critical theory to gesture towards a true reconciliation between subject and object that can only be mirrored negatively: "Utopia is blocked off by possibility, never by immediate reality; this is why it seems abstract in the midst of extant things," Adorno writes in one of *Negative Dialectics*' most oracular passages. "Thought is its servant, a piece of existence extending—however negatively—to that which is not."[258] Curiously enough, in this respect, Adorno's own appropriation of dialectics bears a striking resemblance to Marcuse's picture of Hegel, and in Adorno Hegel becomes a sort of scapegoat, the receptacle for all the philosophical refuse that must be jettisoned to salvage dialectics. Indeed, like Marx before him, Adorno's public orientation towards Hegel vacillated according to the time, the milieu and even the interlocutor: What is the last word on Hegel for Adorno? Depends who's asking. For all the horrors to which his philosophy has contributed, Hegel must die so that Hegel may live.

In fact, defending Hegel against himself does not appear to be an entirely counterintuitive position for a thinker who saw early on, well before joining the Institute for Social Research, how vital Hegel would be to the renewal of a Marxism hampered in large part by the ossification of his historical categories. In more innocent times, Adorno devoted his professional dissertation to defending Hegel from his dubious treatment in Kierkegaard as a pantheist whose philosophy served only to justify the preponderance of the object, a reading which had since become codified in the canon of existentialism that reveres Kierkegaard as its grandfather. Written from 1929-30, Adorno's *Habilitationsschrift* was published in modified form as *Kierkegaard: Construction of an Aesthetic* on January 30, 1933—the very day, as Susan Buck-Morss points out, that Hitler was inaugurated.[259] It is certainly clear in hindsight that the real object of Adorno's critique is not Kierkegaard himself but his brood, existentialism in the molds of Heidegger and of Karl Jaspers, then no less dominant than positivism at Weimar universities.[260] Adorno, presciently as it turns out, reads Kierkegaard's famed decisionism as subjective isolation, as the turning inward of reflection in the face of a hostile, topsy-turvy world. A member of a declining European aristocracy living comfortably off of an inheritance, Kierkegaard treats the interiority of the subject as a refuge from the absurdity and paradox of existence in modernity, a sphere in which some measure of personal choice, and therefore

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[256] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 334.
[257] Stone, "Adorno, Hegel, and Dialectic," 1139.
[258] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 57.
[259] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1979), 136.
[260] Walter Kaufmann, *The Future of the Humanities: Teaching Art, Religion, Philosophy, Literature, and History* (Reader's Digest Press, 1977), 14.

subjective self-determination, is still possible. Adorno draws an analogy between this interiority—which, in the attempt to seal itself off from the consciousness of historical truth, reverts to myth—and the motif of the bourgeois *intérieur*, the socially and historically determined space of the 19th-century apartment.[261] While Adorno grew more reticent to emphasize this as the preponderance of the object came to take on a more sinister significance, what is affirmative in his reading of Hegel is (contra Kierkegaard's mostly second-hand impressions) the radical explanatory power of Hegel's account of the dialectical relationship between the individual and collectivity. Decades later Adorno would describe this reciprocal determination of part and whole as exemplary of the "Janus character of Hegel's philosophy":

> Hegel sees through the moment of illusion in individuation as well as his antipode Schopenhauer does—the obstinacy of dwelling on what one merely is oneself, the narrowness and particularity of individual interests. Nevertheless Hegel did not dispossess objectivity or essence of their relationship to the individual and the immediate. The universal is always also the particular and the particular the universal.
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> *Er durchschaut so gut wie der Antipode Schopenhauer das Moment des Scheins an der Individuation, die Verstocktheit des Beharrens auf dem, was man bloß selber ist, die Enge und Partikularität des Einzelinteresses,. aber er hat dennoch die Objektivität oder das Wesen nicht ihrer Beziehung zum Individuum und zum Unmittelbaren enteignet: das Allgemeine ist immer zugleich das Besondere und das Besondere das Allgemeine.*[262]

Though he would not yet formally join the ranks of the Institute for Social Research for another decade, Adorno in 1929 is already sketching the contours of the Hegelian Marxism that would become synonymous with the Frankfurt School.

Adorno's work with the Institute in exile witnesses the development of a Freudian theory of fascism, famously culminating in their study of *The Authoritarian Personality* which applied psychoanalytic categories to empirical social research in an attempt to identify an individual's proclivity towards fascism along the "F-scale," based on such factors as anti-intellectualism and normative attitudes towards to convention. The deliberate absence of Marxist terminology in the published study should not be ascribed solely to an overabundance of caution with respect to their host nation, already in the throes of the Second Red Scare by the time the study was published in 1950. As we will explore further later on in this section, Horkheimer in particular had been increasingly concerned since assuming the Institute's directorship with the task of distancing critical theory from the state socialist project: "The Russians," he would later remark in conversation with Adorno, "are already halfway towards fascism."[263] Adorno himself rarely mentioned Marx by name. While the study, according to Martin Jay, "became a classic of social science immediately after its completion,"[264] its findings rankled nonetheless: Stuart Jeffries recounts that the F-scale was criticized "not least for its assumption that conservatism and authoritarianism were related."[265] Freud, as we have seen in the Marcuse section, does not provide the Frankfurt School a ready-made social psychology, but rather essential components to

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[261] Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Konstruktion eines Ästhetischen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), 62.
[262] Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies* (Boston: MIT Press, 1993), 45; Adorno, *Drei Studien zu Hegel*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften* 5, 289.
[263] Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto?", *New Left Review* 65 (Sept.-Oct. 2010): 49.
[264] Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 220.
[265] Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School*, 472.

be fashioned into one. Their respective retellings are mostly in agreement on the broad strokes, including the nature of this scandalous relation: Freud, the prophet of the counterintuitive, supplies a theory of libidinal economy to explain the rise of far-right politics and the concomitant relapse of industrial modernity—seemingly at the very apex of its technical and cultural sophistication—into the most traditional forms of authority, that is, into barbarism.

In an essay published a year after *The Authoritarian Personality*, Adorno writes that, "Fascist agitation is centered in the idea of the leader, no matter whether he actually leads or is only the mandatary of group interests, because only the psychological image of the leader is apt to reanimate the idea of the all-powerful and threatening primal father."[266] In other words, fascism taps into the modern individual's primordial irrationality, exploiting drives Freud had already identified in the individual psyche. Leader worship provides, through the mechanism of identification, vicarious gratification otherwise closed off to the individual. For Freud, Adorno says, the driving force of mass psychology is libidinal, i.e., the "actual or vicarious gratifications individuals obtain from surrendering to the mass."[267] In order to harness individuals' libidinal energy for itself, fascist propaganda must uphold and in some cases radicalize the repression of drives Freud considers dialectically intertwined with civilization: "A basic tenet of fascist leadership is to keep primary libidinal energy on an unconscious level so as to divert its manifestations in a way suitable to political ends."[268] From this basic tenet could be derived a simple motto: Make war, not love—this is the Freudian truth of fascism, its psychodynamic injunction.

It is the great innovation of the Frankfurt School to supplement Hegelian Marxism with a just account of the life of the subject, of the relation between part and whole. The appeal of far-right politics, neglected in vulgar materialist analyses of the interwar period, can only be properly accounted for in a Marxist frame through the secularization of idealist metaphysics: "Modern analytical psychology's recognition that what the individual human being thinks about himself is illusory and to a large extent mere 'rationalization,'" Adorno writes in his *Drei Studien zu Hegel*, "has provided a home for one piece of Hegelian speculation."[269] As we will see shortly in Adorno's debate with Marcuse on the New Left of the 1960s, psychoanalysis plays a role in Adorno's analysis of left-wing social movements as well, allowing him to pathologize their activism and rejection of authority as a compulsion to repeat the inconsequential "pseudo-activity" whose inefficacy is disavowed and oftentimes counterproductive. As with Hegel, Freud's theory of drives takes on a more pessimistic inflection in Adorno than Marcuse, but both recognize the productiveness of the Hegel-Freud nexus that would become the Frankfurt School's signature: Beneath the reactionary trappings of each of these these two reputationally conservative thinkers is a core of dialectical insight into the underlying condition responsible for otherwise inexplicable symptoms, though neither's account, naturally, would be judged Hegelian enough.

Neither, unsurprisingly, would Brecht, whose dialectical prankishness was, as far as Adorno was concerned, still too communist by half. Indeed, Brecht had already been the source of some irritation on Adorno's part well before spending his last years of life as the poet laureate of the GDR, where Adorno and Horkheimer maintained "they would have long since been

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[266] Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1982), 416.
[267] Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," 413.
[268] Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," 415.
[269] Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, 47.

killed."[270] From the relative comfort of the liberal West, Adorno saw his theory of the hollowed-out subject of industrial society vindicated in the reconciliation-cum-liquidation of the subject already proceeding under a communist ideological banner in the Eastern bloc, and his critique of state socialism and Marxist orthodoxy is, as ever, grounded in this dialectical-psychoanalytic nexus of Hegelian materialism. In *Negative Dialectics* he writes,

> In the East, the theoretical short circuit in the views of individuality has served as a pretext for collective oppression. The party, even if deluded or terrorized, is deemed *a priori* superior in judgment to each individual because of the number of its members. Yet the isolated individual unhampered by any ukase may at times perceive objectivities more clearly than the collective, which is no more than the ideology of its functionaries, anyway. Brecht's line—that the party has a thousand eyes while the individual has but two—is as false as any bromide ever. A dissenter's exact imagination can see more than a thousand eyes peering through the same pink spectacles, confusing what they see with universal truth, and regressing.
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> [*Im Osten hat der theoretische Kurzschluß in der Ansicht vom Individuum kollektiver Unterdrückung zum Vorwand gedient. Die Partei soll der Zahl ihrer Mitglieder wegen a priori jeglichem Einzelnen an Erkenntniskraft überlegen sein, auch wenn sie verblendet oder terrorisiert ist. Das isolierte Individuum jedoch, unbeeinträchtigt vom Ukas, mag zuzeiten der Objektivität ungetrübter gewahr werden als ein Kollektiv, das ohnehin nur noch die Ideologie seiner Gremien ist. Brechts Satz, die Partei habe tausend Augen, der Einzelne nur zwei, ist falsch wie nur je die Binsenweisheit. Exakte Phantasie eines Dissentierenden kann mehr sehen als tausend Augen, denen die rosarote Einheitsbrille aufgestülpt ward, die dann, was sie erblicken, mit der Allgemeinheit des Wahren verwechseln und regredieren.*][271]

Adorno's reference, to the song "In Praise of the Party" from *The Measures Taken*, reads all possibility of ironic tension out of Brecht's most controversial play, one that, as we explored in the previous chapter, Brecht himself would later disavow for the unsavory historical resonance retroactively gifted to it by the Great Purge that followed. For Adorno, there is no contradiction, no paradoxical necessity to be pondered here: The song, the play, and Brecht's entire project of a political art in service of socialism is what it feels like at first glance—a naive endorsement of murder. As Adorno puts it in "Commitment," an essay on literature in which Brecht's "politically committed art" is compared unfavorably to the "autonomous" experimentation of Kafka and Samuel Beckett, "what he justified was not simply, as he long sincerely believed, an incomplete socialism, but a coercive domination in which blindly irrational social forces returned to work once again."[272] Brecht, we will recall, conceives of *Verfremdung* as a sort of ideological negation-of-the-negation, a reconciliation of the audience with their latent revolutionary potential to be dialectical subjects, i.e., co-authors of a contingent historical process. Adorno's view is that aesthetics cannot be wielded as a political weapon in this way without trivializing the reality of horror that the process of aestheticization itself makes consumable. By way of an example, Adorno mentions Brecht's satire of Hitler's rise to power, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*,

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[270] Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 415.
[271] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 46-7; *Negative Dialektik*, 56-7.
[272] Adorno, "Engagement," in *Gesammelte Schriften* 11 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), 397; "Commitment," *New Left Review* 87 (September 1974), 83.

whose narrative reliance on "the buffoonery of fascism" he likens, with a palpable grimace, to the cartoonish shenanigans of Chaplin's *Great Dictator*. "The anti-ideological artist," reads Adorno's indictment of Brecht, "thus prepared the degradation of his own ideas into ideology. Tacit acceptance of the claim that one half of the world no longer contains antagonisms is supplemented by jests at everything that belies the official theodicy of the other half."[273] The attempt to hold a reasonably combative partisan position and the imperative of *Ideologiekritik* together in a work of art is, as Adorno puts it in his *Aesthetic Theory*, Brecht's "discursive barbarity," collapsing under the sheer weight of what must be disavowed.

Aesthetic Theory, *Negative Dialectics*, and "Commitment" were all written and published after Brecht's death in 1956, a year that witnessed the Hungarian Revolution and Nikita Khruschev's denunciation of Stalin disclosed to the world. Closer to home, a young Jürgen Habermas arrived from Bonn at the restored Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt am Main at the beginning of the summer term, where he recalls often attending Adorno's lectures on Hegel. Months earlier, Adorno and Horkheimer had carried on an extended conversation over the course of two weeks about the orientation of critical theory towards contemporary politics: Published in English as *Towards a New Manifesto*, this text is an overlooked document of a discussion that would have been lost to history were it not for the transcription of Adorno's wife Gretel, and reveals a pair of intellectuals jousting with, ironically, an almost Brechtian flexibility and willingness to contradict themselves. Horkheimer, who appears to have taken to heart a *Time* report (headlined "China: High Tide of Terror"[274]) that the Chinese Communist Party had the blood of "twenty million murdered Chinese" on its hands, brazenly defends the superiority of Western civilization: "I believe that Europe and America are probably the best civilizations that history has produced up to now as far as prosperity and justice are concerned," he tells Adorno on the evening of March 12, 1956.[275] Horkheimer is particularly bullish on the United States, regarding the American way, seemingly with a mix of defeatism and romanticization, as the national spirit to whom the coming era rightfully belongs. Referring to the US Secretary of State at the time in the Eisenhower administration, which had by then had executed coups d'etat in Iran and Guatemala, Horkheimer's apologia for US military aggression warns of "a kind of dominant stratum in the East compared to which John Foster Dulles is an amiable innocent."[276] When he declares that, "We can expect nothing more from mankind than a more or less worn-out version of the American system,"[277] any sense of reluctance is drowned out by a certain contrarian spite: "We have to be clear about the yardsticks we are applying, otherwise Marx will keep reappearing at the seams. We want the preservation for the future of everything that has been achieved in America today, such as the reliability of the legal system, the drugstores, etc."[278] Adorno's priorities, however, are clear from his answer: "That includes getting rid of tv programmes when they are rubbish."[279]

Some of this does seem to go too far for Adorno. "We cannot call for the defence of the Western world," he cautions, to which Horkheimer retorts: "We cannot do so because that would destroy it."[280] But despite admitting that "we know nothing of Asia," Adorno too partakes of the

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[273] Adorno, "Commitment," 81.
[274] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto," 42.
[275] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto," 41.
[276] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto," 39.
[277] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto," 36.
[278] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto," 48.
[279] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto," 49.
[280] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto," 41.

orientalism that lends this particular discussion of the capitalist West its uncharacteristically rosy hue, fretting that "under the banner of Marxism, the East might overtake Western civilization. This would mean a shift in the entire dynamics of history. Marxism is being adopted in Asia in much the same way as Christianity was taken up in Mexico at one time. Europe too will probably be swallowed up at some point in the future." Horkheimer echoes the same racialized cultural anxiety about the Asian masses: "If we were to defend the Russians, that's like regarding the invading Teutonic hordes as morally superior to the [Roman] slave economy."[281] Adorno and Horkheimer's lack of interest in the imperial adventures of the West, evidenced as much here as it is by the complete absence of the concepts of race and colonialism from the rest of their corpus, left them inclined to view decolonization through the prism of Cold War politics and not as a struggle against the retrenchment of global white supremacy. To the chagrin of the German student movement, Horkheimer later supported the Vietnam War as, in the recollection of Friedrich Pollock, "a justified attempt to halt the Chinese in Asia," fearing that US withdrawal would "expedite China's passage to the Rhine."[282] In 1956, when Adorno suggests that "even Mr Eisenhower will be unable to choose Nixon as his running mate for fear of a preventive war," Horkheimer finds this prospect trivial, once again fixating on the *Time* magazine cover story: "But what is that compared to the murder of twenty million Chinese?"[283] That same year, Israel, France, and the United Kingdom invaded Egypt after Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal. *Der Spiegel* attacked the United Nations for condemning the assault, Adorno and Horkheimer wrote to *Der Spiegel* concurring with its editorial line, calling Nasser "a fascist chieftain who conspires with Moscow" and decrying the "fact … that, as in Hitler's time, they show greater concern about breaking treaties than about the treaties themselves and their sanctity; and that no one even ventures to point out that these Arab robber states have been on the lookout for years for an opportunity to fall upon Israel and to slaughter the Jews who have found refuge there."[284] This rhetoric of demonization, comparing Nasser to Hitler and the growth of China to the invasion of the Rhineland, is striking precisely because it is so familiar from today's neoconservative lexicon.

The dialogue in 1956, therefore, sharpens the distinctions between the temperaments, if not always the concrete political positions, of Adorno and Horkheimer, so often sympatico that the dedication to *Minima Moralia* compares the book to a "*dialogue intérieur*: there is not a motif in it that does not belong as much to Horkheimer as to him who found the time to formulate it."[285] In private and against the canvas of Horkheimer's cynicism, Adorno feels liberated to experiment, even hazarding a qualified defense of Marx in multiple instances.[286] "My innermost feeling," he confesses, "is that at the moment everything has shut down, but it could all change at a moment's notice."[287] The freewheeling debate thus sees certain undercurrents of their "shared philosophy" pitted against each other, with Horkheimer emerging as far and away the more insistently conservative: His politics had moved so far to the right in the era of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's *Wirtschaftswunder* that the young research assistant Habermas worried Horkheimer's party line had imparted to "Café Max" a stifling atmosphere that ran

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[281] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto," 41.
[282] Peter M. R. Stirk, *Max Horkheimer: A New Interpretation* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 180.
[283] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto," 42.
[284] Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*, 413.
[285] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 18.
[286] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto," 55.
[287] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto," 42.

counter to the Frankfurt School tradition's critical thrust. "His public demeanour and his policy for the institute," Habermas recounts, "seemed to us to be almost the expression of an opportunist conformity which was at odds with the critical tradition."[288] Already in the late '30s, Horkheimer's reactionary cultural tendencies prompted a defense of patriarchal authority and a lament for its disintegration in advanced capitalist mass society: In *Authority and the Family*, he writes,

> family life has for a long time been progressively breaking up over the greatest part of the Western world, ever since the growth of large-scale manufacturing and increasing unemployment, and the break-up has affected even large sectors of the bourgeoisie. … Within the family, however, unlike public life, relationships were not mediated through the market and the individual members were not competing with each other. Consequently the individual always had the possibility there of living not as a mere function but as a human being.[289]

Horkheimer recognizes but is not concerned with the structural obstacles to the free development of women's individuality beyond their assigned function in traditional heterosexual marriage. Like Hegel, he considers the family a bulwark of autonomy, albeit hardly a radical one, vis-a-vis the atomizing effect of liberal capitalist society, and in this sense declines to fundamentally question the role of women's subjugation in what Marxist feminists call social reproduction.[290] In fact, he regard the growing emancipation of women in society as a false, bourgeois equality that undermines the struggle of workers: "The introduction of the franchise for women," he writes, "was a gain for conservative forces even in states where a strengthening of labor groups had been expected."[291] Adorno, who writes in the dedication of *Minima Moralia* that "there is not a motif in it that does not belong as much to Horkheimer as to him who found the time to formulate it,"[292] acknowledges the oppressive constraints of bourgeois marriage in places, while in others he approaches Horkheimer's contrarian nostalgia for the instrumental value of traditional motherhood for the development of political agency in the (implicitly male) individual:

> sometimes seems as if the fatal germ-cell of society, the family, were at the same time the nurturing germ-cell of uncompromising pursuit of another. With the family there passes away, while the system lasts, not only the most effective agency of the bourgeoisie, but also the resistance which, though repressing the individual, also strengthened, perhaps even produced him. The end of the family paralyses forces of opposition. The rising collectivist order is a mockery of a classless one: together with the bourgeois it liquidates the Utopia that once drew sustenance from motherly love.[293]

By the '50s, even the empirical research of the Institute in the United States, already scrubbed of Marxist trappings, appears to have taken on added significance for Horkheimer's cultural conservatism. Jay notes one study in particular that looked into "the pattern of help extended by German gentiles to Jewish victims of Hitler," carried out by the Institute's New York contingent and backed, incidentally, by Thomas Mann: "Although never published, the study did show that

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[288] Müller-Doohm, Adorno: A Biography, 415.
[289] Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (Continuum: New York, 1975), 113-14.
[290] Martha E. Giminez, "Capitalism and the Oppression of Women: Marx Revisited," *Science & Society* 69, no. 1 (January 2005): 24.
[291] Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, 120.
[292] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 18.
[293] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 22-23.

Catholics and conservatives had given more assistance than Protestants and liberals. According to Paul Massing, this conclusion was later used by Horkheimer to support his argument that conservatives were often better preservers of critical ideals than liberals."[294] Horkheimer had always been cautious, but in the context of West Germany at the height of the conservative CDU/CSU's political dominance, the contrarian tendency once comfortably explicable as a constitutional intolerance of received wisdom begins to take on precisely the "opportunist," no longer dialectical but flatly reactionary character to which Habermas tentatively alludes.

Adorno, meanwhile, is found toying with language about the "introduction of fully fledged socialism, Third Phase in the various countries. Everything hinges on that," he muses before proposing the *Communist Manifesto* "as a theme for variations."[295] At one point he proposes that the manifesto must be "strictly Leninist."[296] Indeed, these are all radical motifs Adorno would likely have scoffed at in the hands of a Brecht or a Marcuse. This does not go unnoticed when Adorno suggests that there is no way out of the present deadlock other than "a particular way of writing that offends against specific taboos" and mentions, in this capacity, sexual taboos: "Marcuse, take care," Horkheimer quips. "I take the opposite view. The more eager one is to break the taboo, the more harmless it is. The more specific your aim, the more powerful the effect. Join the CDU, but make that possible also for deserters," to which Adorno must admit, "There is something seductive about that idea."[297] True, perhaps, to his idiosyncratic interpretation of Lenin, Adorno would remain more sympathetic to the allure of such dialectical sleights of hand than to Marcuse, with whom his disagreements extended well beyond Marcuse's questionable reading of Freud and Angela Davis's career choices. As we have seen, Marcuse stands virtually alone in the Frankfurt School orbit in his direct and varied experience of political practice beyond theory, and for his receptiveness to the language of racial justice inherited by the New Left from the American radical tradition. This put him not only at odds with his former colleagues at the Institute, but also at odds with an emphatic consensus in the mainstream of postwar US and West German society. For Marcuse, however, antiracism and the firm stake it entails in the grand narrative of decolonization follow naturally from his reorientation around the non-revolutionary subject of radical change: He saw early on the potential for activism in solidarity with the victims of imperial aggression in the Third World to generate not only a formidable anti-war movement, but also a broader cultural platform from which to challenge entrenched social hierarchies at home and set a progressive agenda in the West independently of the zombie model of Communist Party organizing. As he wrote to Adorno in 1969, the last year of the latter's life, in a tense exchange of letters on the New Left, "We know (and they know) that the situation is not a revolutionary one, not even a pre-revolutionary one. But this same situation is so terrible, so suffocating and demeaning, that rebellion against it forces a biological, physiological reaction: one can bear it no longer, one is suffocating and one has to let some air in."[298] The echoes of Frantz Fanon, for all we know, were lost on Adorno.

Marcuse was writing to decline Adorno's invitation to give a lecture in Frankfurt after hearing from Davis and others about the increasingly explosive confrontations between the administration of the Institute and student activists led by Frankfurt Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) leader Hans-Jürgen Krahl, a self-styled pupil of Adorno and Horkheimer. Of

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[294] Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 220.
[295] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto," 40.
[296] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto," 57.
[297] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto," 46.
[298] Adorno and Marcuse, "Correspondence on the German Student Movement," *New Left Review* 233 (Jan.-Feb. 1999), 125.

particular concern to Marcuse was an incident in which Adorno and Horkheimer had called the police to remove protesters occupying the Institute.[299] Marcuse goes on to implicate Adorno in Horkheimer's more strident conformism, his syntax bordering on passive-aggressive: "I would despair about myself (us) if I (we) would appear to be on the side of a world that supports mass murder in Vietnam, or says nothing about it, and which makes a hell of any realms that are outside the reach of its own repressive power."[300] Adorno admits to being hurt by the characterization, and attempts to call Marcuse's bluff: "If that really is your reaction, then you should not only protest against the horror of napalm bombs but also against the unspeakable Chinese-style tortures that the Vietcong carry out permanently. If you do not take that on board too, then the protest against the Americans takes on an ideological character."[301] Marcuse's response makes explicit the latent distinction between his attitude and what Adorno found "seductive" in Horkheimer's, with whom he had clearly by now thrown in his lot: "Here is, I suppose, the deepest divergence between us. To speak of the 'Chinese on the Rhine', as long as the Americans are based on the Rhine, would be an impossibility for me."[302] Marcuse does not mince words—touting the success of the US student movement in "the mobilization of further circles of the populace against American imperialism," he adds parenthetically, "I really can see no reason to be allergic to the use of this concept."[303] Marcuse appears considerably less confident about the potential for radical change to arise from student activism in the current configuration of West German society, however, and it was this aspect of obdurate rebellion, a blind pressing-on irrespective of external circumstances, that confronted Adorno in his lecture hall. "The violent blockades of the Springer press that the SDS had organized after the attempted assassination of Rudi Dutschke at Easter 1968 were followed by the spectacular but unsuccessful mass protests against the Emergency Laws," Detlev Claussen recounts in his biography, *Adorno: One Last Genius*:

> The protests against the Emergency Laws had been followed by a spectacular occupation of Frankfurt University by the students, who tried to turn it into a political university. The police intervened to put a stop to this by force. With the occupation of the Institute for Social Research, the SDS wished to provoke a further intervention on the part of the police so as to mobilize the students to resist the university authorities without regard to eventual casualties.[304]

The history of domestic terror in the '70s in the Federal Republic suggests that Adorno was correct to be alarmed at the potential for fanaticism to arise from a certain feedback cycle of desperation and zeal. This was certainly true of the West German student movement to a greater degree than on the American New Left, towards which Adorno was similarly dismissive. Claussen quotes a 1965 lecture in which he describes the function of activism in the contemporary United States: "[A]n organizer, as such people are known in America; in other words, someone who brings people together, organizes, agitates, and such like," does so as a compensatory mechanism. "And the more you suspect that this is not true practice, the more doggedly and passionately you become attached to such activities."[305] According to Adorno, this

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[299] Detlev Claussen, *Adorno: One Last Genius* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008), 332.
[300] Adorno and Marcuse, "Correspondence on the German Student Movement," 126.
[301] Adorno and Marcuse, "Correspondence on the German Student Movement," 127.
[302] Adorno and Marcuse, "Correspondence on the German Student Movement," 128.
[303] Adorno and Marcuse, "Correspondence on the German Student Movement," 133.
[304] Claussen, *Adorno: One Last Genius*, 337.
[305] Claussen, *Adorno: One Last Genius*, 337.

is a reality that activists, Marcuse included, must disavow: Precisely because meaningful fulfillment in revolution is impossible today, organizing on the margins of society works primarily to provide the practitioner an *Ersatzbefriedigung*, substitute satisfaction.

For Adorno and Horkheimer in particular, Freudian psychoanalysis supplements a dialectical analysis with a materialist rendering of the cunning of reason that undermines the moral claims and political action of marginalized groups. As Adorno writes in his final publication, an essay called "Resignation" first given as a radio lecture, "Repressive intolerance toward a thought not immediately accompanied by instructions for action is founded in fear."[306] For Adorno, it is of no importance psychologically whether activism really changes anything—in fact, its inefficacy is the very condition of possibility for its continued practice:

> Thought, enlightenment conscious of itself, threatens to disenchant pseudo-reality within which, according to Habermas' formulation, activism moves. This activism is tolerated only because it is viewed as pseudo-activity. Pseudo-activity is allied with pseudo-reality in the design of a subjective position; an activity that overplays itself and fires itself up for the sake of its own publicity without admitting to what degree it serves as a substitute for satisfaction, thus elevating itself to an end in itself.
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> [*Der Gedanke, die ihrer selbst bewußte Aufklärung, droht die Pseudorealität zu entzaubern, in der, nach der Formulierung von Habermas, der Aktionismus sich bewegt. Diesen läßt man nur darum gewähren, weil man ihn als Pseudorealität einschätzt. Ihr ist, als subjektives Verhalten, Pseudo-Aktivität zugeordnet, Tun, das sich überspielt und der eigenen publicity zuliebe anheizt, ohne sich einzugestehen, in welchem Maß es der Ersatzbefriedigung dient, sich zum Selbstzweck erhebt.*][307]

What Adorno seems to be saying is that if organizing changed anything, as the anarchist Emma Goldman once remarked about a different form of political participation, "they would make it illegal." For Adorno, the purely performative nature of the range of political action available to the citizen of bourgeois democracy—purely performative, he concludes, because they are available—is adequately expressed in the concept of "publicity," which appears in English in the German original. The real goal of activism is pseudo-activity itself, endorphins to quell the anxiety of an aimless, naive youth.

In the essay's most provocative image, Adorno asserts that even "Marx himself reveals a concealed wound in this regard. He no doubt delivered the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach in such an authoritarian fashion because he was not at all sure of it himself."[308] It is, in the sense of world-historical necessity, simply the lot of our age that a fundamental inability to realize an alternative relationship to self and nature dooms each well-intentioned rebellion: At this time no higher form of society is concretely visible: for that reason whatever acts as though it were in easy reach has something regressive about it. But according to Freud, whoever regresses has not reached his instinctual aim."[309] You can never have, Adorno says, the next best thing. "We withstood in our time, you no less than me, a much more dreadful situation—that of the murder of the Jews, without proceeding to praxis; simply because it was blocked for us," Adorno wrote to Marcuse in response to the Fanonian image of a physiological compulsion to act. "I think that

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[306] Adorno, "Resignation," 200.
[307] Adorno, "Resignation," 201; in *Gesammelte Schriften* 10.2, 796.
[308] Adorno, "Resignation," 290.
[309] Adorno, "Resignation," 292.

clarity about the streak of coldness in one's self is a matter for self-contemplation."[310] Marcuse replies that he does not feel the coldness Adorno senses, and it is not difficult to believe him: "I am unable to discover the 'cold streak in one's self'," he writes. "Is it not at least just as possible that precisely the acknowledgement of coldness is itself self-delusion and a 'defence mechanism'? And to say that one may not protest against the agony of imperialism, without in the same breath accusing those who desperately fight against this hell, by whatever means they can, seems to me to be somehow inhuman."[311] His outrage had not subsided no matter how deeply he pondered, because his resentment never overcame the compassion from which he drew an undyingly progressive investment in politics, and he proved it in his indefatigable effort to reconstruct a viable Marxism sans proletariat. What Adorno mistakes for his own mere indifference, a sage nonpartisanship, is in reality shot through with spite, the prickly bitterness of one who knows everything turns into its opposite.

In the end, as it does for us all, the negative came for Theodor Adorno. The situation in Frankfurt became untenable. In April of 1969, student activists distributed flyers declaring "Adorno as an institution is dead,"[312] and on the 22nd Adorno's aesthetics lecture was interrupted by protesters, including 3 women who flashed him after another student wrote on the board behind him: "*Wer nur den lieben Adorno lässt walten, der wird den Kapitalismus ein Leben lang behalten.*" ("If Adorno is left in peace, capitalism will never cease")[313] The incident, commonly referred to in the press as the *Busen-Aktion* or the *Busenattentat* ("breast action" and "breast assassination," respectively), was too much for Adorno to bear. He retreated to the Swiss Alps, where he carried on his correspondence with Marcuse until he died 3 months later of a fatal heart attack after traveling 3000 meters by cable car up a mountain peak against the advice of his doctor.[314] In his last letter to Marcuse, dated August 6th, Adorno, though obviously still agitated to be branded a reactionary, seems to find some vindication in the pan-ideological character of the attacks on him: "I got dragged into a similarly concocted affair over the Benjamin-edition, likewise by the Right (Hannah Arendt) and the ApO-activists," he reminds Marcuse. "In puncto simplification I hold a *completely* different view—just as I did towards Brecht in his time—but I cannot go into that today."[315]

That Adorno did not feel the same compunction Marcuse did—which Adorno explained to himself as the "cold streak in one's self," the sobriety that comes with *Ideologiekritik*—is most certainly overdetermined, but one plausible factor is the primacy of his critique of morality, one he attributes in large part to the influence of Nietzsche, with whom he shares not a dialectical political quietism per se, but an aestheticization of politics that gravitates in the same direction: "Whoever thinks much is not suitable as a party member," Nietzsche writes in *Human, All Too Human*. "He soon thinks himself right through the party."[316] It was also Nietzsche who possessed something of that coldness, however fiery its delivery in the aphoristic style that Adorno, in his darkest hour, made his own. Ulrich Plass notes that in the final lecture of his course on moral philosophy, Adorno confesses, "to tell the truth, of all the so‐called great philosophers I owe [Nietzsche] the greatest debt —more even than Hegel."[317] Like many of Adorno's more

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[310] Adorno and Marcuse, "Correspondence on the German Student Movement," 127.
[311] Adorno and Marcuse, "Correspondence on the German Student Movement," 127.
[312] Jeffries, The *Grand Hotel Abyss*, 649.
[313] Jeffries, The *Grand Hotel Abyss*, 590.
[314] Adorno and Marcuse, "Correspondence on the German Student Movement," 123.
[315] Adorno and Marcuse, "Correspondence on the German Student Movement," 135-6.
[316] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP: 1986), 188.
[317] Ulrich Plass, "Moral Critique and Private Ethics in Nietzsche and Adorno," *Constellations* 22, no. 3 (2015): 381.

polemical declarations, it is likely to be an exaggeration, but it presents no insurmountable diagnostic problems for us if we do not take Adorno at his word: As *Minima Moralia*'s most memorable one-liner contends, "In psychoanalysis, nothing is true but the exaggerations."[318] According to Plass, "Adorno's programmatic endorsement of Nietzsche's condemnation of morality at the outset of his lecture series is based … on their shared suspicion that behind even and especially in the purest moral norms there lurk very specific power interests, and thus there is no such thing as neutral, disinterested, objective, or universally true morality."[319] This is all incredibly apropos for Adorno, since nowhere is it shown more clearly than in the critique of morality what is simultaneously radical and conservative in Nietzsche's thought. While it is certainly the case that Nietzsche maintains a critical distance towards the contrasting sets of moral values he dubs "master morality" and "slave morality," his begrudging respect for the Jews' "radical transvaluation of their values, through an art of *the most intelligent revenge*,"[320] is encumbered at every turn by his lamentation at the tediousness of this outcome, when his sympathy for the heroic excellence valorized in master morality shines through and he claims, for example, that "the aggressive man, the stronger, braver, nobler man has at all times had the *freer* eye, the *better* conscience at his side."[321] His prose can barely contain the exuberance in his celebration of Napoleon as a sort of world-historical nonconformist: "[A]gainst the will to the belittlement, humiliation, levelling, decline, and twilight of man, the fearful and delightful slogan of the *prerogative of the few* rang out once more, stronger, simpler, more insistent than ever! Like a last gesture in the other direction, Napoleon appeared, the most individual and most belatedly born man ever to have existed."[322] In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche writes that Napoleon "should be credited one day for having enabled man in Europe to become the master over the businessman and the philistine—perhaps even over 'woman', who has been spoiled by Christianity and the enthusiastic spirit of the eighteenth century, and even more by 'modern ideas'."[323] The irony of the Nietzschean concept of *ressentiment*—as Adorno puts it, of "morality as revenge"[324]—is that Nietzsche's explanation of it is practically seething with resentment of a simpler kind, the disdain for leveling felt by the embattled defender of *joie de vivre* and aristocratic sensibilities. No matter how austere his demeanor, Adorno retains an identification with the trickster in Nietzsche, the provocateur who despised the notions of socialism and democracy in equal measure, though Adorno takes comparably little joy in swatting away the naive aspirations of the New Left.

Only one ethical injunction, for Adorno, had survived the Holocaust: He writes in *Negative Dialectics* that, "A new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen."[325] Since the possibility of revolution is "blocked," any effort at change beyond this preservationist function risks a backslide into the neo-primordial atrocity of fascism. The short 20th century, Adorno concludes, has confirmed beyond doubt the folly of pursuing lofty ideals at the expense of human life and self-awareness: As Nietzsche once put it, "[A]ll these privileges and showpieces of man: what a high price has been paid for them! How

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[318] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 29.
[319] Plass, "Moral Critique and Private Ethics in Nietzsche and Adorno," 381.
[320] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 19.
[321] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 55.
[322] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 36.
[323] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2008), 227.
[324] Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, 47.
[325] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 365.

much blood and horror is at the bottom of all 'good things'!"[326] This is how we should take Adorno's notorious dictum that, "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."[327] Even the most self-evidently good intentions, to say nothing of the instinct towards self-expression, are no longer above ruthless suspicion. Adorno's dialectics therefore begin to take on a predictable character, appearing here as iconoclasm, there as a counterintuitive defense of conventional wisdom. Habermas, writing in *Die Zeit*, captures something of its allure in the recollection of his first Adorno lecture in that summer of 1956:

> The first time I struggled to follow the talk; blinded by the brilliance of expression and the way he presented it, I was lagging behind the diction of the thought. I only noticed later that this dialectics often fossilized into mere manner/affectation. The main impression was the sparkling pretense of enlightenment that was still in the darkness of the not understood, the promise to make concealed connections transparent.
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> *Beim ersten Mal hatte ich Mühe, dem Vortrag zu folgen; geblendet von der Brillanz des Ausdrucks und der Präsentation, stolperte ich dem Duktus des Gedankens hinterher. Dass sich auch diese Dialektik oft zur bloßen Manier verfestigte, merkte ich erst später. Der beherrschende Eindruck war die noch aus dem Dunkel des Unverstandenen funkelnde Prätention der Aufklärung – das Versprechen, verschwiegene Zusammenhänge transparent zu machen.*[328]

Adorno's mystique belies the reality that he is a contrarian in the most Hegelian sense, communicating above all else what he ultimately describes as the true meaning of dialectics, "the consistent sense of non-identity."[329] In his studies on Hegel he writes that Hegel "was probably the first to express, in the *Phenomenology*, the idea that the rift between self and world passes in turn through the self."[330] The dialectician is the midwife of the repressed on its way back to the surface, the messenger who is shot over and over again. Adorno's radicalism and his conservatism are—like Nietzsche's, like Freud's, and above all like Hegel's—inextricably entwined. The contradiction inherent to reality, according to a properly dialectical perspective, leaves no ideological position untouched: Even Marx, the standard-bearer for the left, owes the revolutionary thrust of his appropriation of Hegel's dialectic to a suspension of Hegelian logic at the very climax of his historical narrative. Hegel's political quietism, the "cold streak" in his thought, is in the end for Adorno his greatest virtue, and the guarantee of his philosophy's timelessness: "Hegel's apologetics and his resignation are the bourgeois mask that utopia has put on to avoid being immediately recognized and apprehended; to avoid remaining impotent."[331] The fact that, from Lenin onwards, the gaps in Marx's thought have been filled not by abandoning its Hegelian roots, but by returning to them is, as Brecht's refugees once joked, a testament to Hegel's cleverness, and to a paradoxically practical spirit Adorno never abandoned. "Tell all the truth but tell it slant," Emily Dickinson once advised. "Success in Circuit lies."[332]

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[326] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 44.
[327] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms* (Boston: MIT Press, 1981), 34.
[328] Jürgen Habermas, "Dual Layered Time: Reflections on T.W. Adorno in the 1950's," *Logos* 2, no. 4 (Fall 2003); "Die Zeit hatte einen doppelten Boden," *Die Zeit*, 9/4/2003.
[329] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 4.
[330] Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, 47.
[331] Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, 47.
[332] Emily Dickinson, #1263 in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), 553.

Chapter Four: Pax Habermasiana

4.1 – Procedural Utopia: Habermas and the Frankfurt School's Liberal Turn

Adorno's mature writing owes the enormity of its pathos to the melancholy conviction, too dialectical by half, that nothing would ever be the same. Adorno reports in *Negative Dialectics* that a "new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen."[333] And nothing did—but over the course of the 1970s and '80s, the balance of power in the Western liberal democracies shifted away from the organized left. During this period, the consensus on economic and social policy among elites in those countries trended steadily rightward—including, most saliently, the United States and the *Bundesrepublik*, but also culminating, no less notoriously, in a Thatcherite United Kingdom. The end of the Cold War, which entailed the end of the threat of would see the nominally center-left parties in these countries abandon the social-democratic welfare state for neoliberal policy and rhetorical frames. In the '90s, the new neoliberal center would be able to emulate the success of the right in the previous decade, with the US Democrats, SPD, and UK Labour all returning to power only to enact significant cuts to the welfare state.

Amid the rightward drift of politics in the Western liberal democracies after World War II, it is Adorno's former graduate assistant Habermas who bites the bullet and abandons Marxism wholesale, jettisoning the sweeping collective categories and underlying rejection of formal logic that had contributed to the endemic political paralysis of Marxism in those countries. In light of the theoretical deadlock of the Frankfurt School and the various defeats and cooptations of the new left-wing social movements, this appears somewhat unavoidable. "The utopias of social labor are out of date," Habermas remarks in an interview for the *Frankfurter Rundschau* in 1988, at the tail end of a decade in which organized labor had been beaten back in the Federal Republic and, in the United States, openly crushed. The "procedural utopia," by contrast, eschews transhistorical categories and clearly defined group interests, abandoning Marx's theory of revolution together with the dialectical model of social change upon which it was based—the melancholy of failed revolutionaries is replaced in Habermas's political theory with a bureaucratic matter-of-factness that "focuses on the structures and presuppositions for a radical-pluralistic, largely decentralized process of will-formation that produces complexity and is certainly costly, a process of will-formation the content and outcomes of which no one can—or should want to—anticipate."[334] As we will see, his alternative vision of an emancipated society is an idealized model of verbal communication that aims to uphold Adorno's categorical imperative through what amounts to a talking cure for social antagonism. Its procedural aspect regulates relations between a society of individuals Adorno was convinced had no individuality left to speak of, no will to speak of. In the 1971 introduction to the fourth German edition of *Theory and Practice*, a collection of his political essays from the early '60s, Habermas takes stock of critical theory at the end of its most influential decade, stating plainly, "We no longer find in dialectical logic, as in a certain way Marx still did, the normative basis for a social theory constructed with practical intent."[335] In his reflection on Adorno as "the true conservative," Thomas Assheuer heralds Habermas as a liberator:

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[333] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 365.
[334] Jürgen Habermas, "Political Culture in Germany Since 1968: An Interview with Dr. Rainer Erd for the Frankfurter Rundschau," *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 192.
[335] Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 16.

> It was Habermas whose foundational critique leads to a dead-end, a self-contradiction that the tools of philosophy cannot resolve … He cut the dialectical knot in which Adorno had tied the domination of nature to the domination of people.
> *Es war Jürgen Habermas, der in einer, man muss es so sagen: Fundamentalkritik kristallklar gezeigt hat, dass Adornos Denken in eine Sackgasse führt, in einen Selbstwiderspruch, der mit den Mitteln der Philosophie nicht aufzulösen ist … Er durchschlug den dialektischen Knoten, mit dem Adorno die Herrschaft über die Natur mit der Herrschaft über Menschen verknüpft hatte.*[336]

For Martin Jay, Habermas is a Marxist in spite of his deviations from dialectical orthodoxy because his project, viewed as the "reconstruction of Western Marxist holism,"[337] appears perfectly consonant with the revisionist impulse of the Frankfurt School. The theoretical edifice that emerges from this reconstruction, however, is not merely updated but unrecognizable, and it culminates not in the paralysis of dialectical stalemate, but in what Seyla Benhabib, a onetime student of Habermas, has called (borrowing her mentor's phrase with some irony) the "'joyless reformism' of a welfare-statist or social-democratic compromise."[338] As this section will explore, it is more accurate to say that Habermas picks up where Marxists left off, seemingly at an impasse between radical optimism and cynicism of a startlingly conservative variety, and realizes almost immediately that he can drag their theoretical baggage no further. In fact, Habermas has, throughout the half century he has spent as Germany's premier public intellectual, more or less forcefully distanced himself from the concerns and language not only of classical Marxism and the New Left—arguably par for the course in the Frankfurt School tradition—but also of that first generation of critical theory, resulting in what turns out to be an additional, quite consequential degree of separation from the productive nexus of Hegel and Marx.

The dominant interpretation in Habermas scholarship holds that he moved away from this nexus over the course of his career. In fact, his trajectory does not encompass a transition from socialist to liberal political orientations: Rather, it constitutes the completion of the turn away from the revolutionary horizon of communism that had already begun in the first generation of critical theory and intensified with the onset of World War II. It is for this reason that Habermas's oeuvre admits of no dramatic breaks with the revolutionary horizon of Marxism, nor does it bear witness to any particularly compelling upticks in the explanatory power of critical theory—on the contrary, we find the meticulous expansion, through neverending revision, of a deceptively modest philosophical system based on a normative theory of society that explicitly departs from the premises of what he calls "Marxist functionalism," a reductive tendency from which even the heterodoxy of his mentors could not escape. Habermas considers Marxism functionalist insofar as it privileges Hegel's conception of human action as self-actualization through labor, through working on the world. Marx, Habermas argues, neglects not only the subject but the dimension of intersubjectivity when he uncritically inverts the all-consuming totality of Hegelian idealism: "He simply took the apex and center of the social whole, into which individuals are incorporated as parts, and turned them right side up. The manifest unity of a legally constituted political order was replaced by the systemically produced, latent unity of capital's self-valorization." Marx's

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[336] Thomas Assheuer, "Der wahre Konservative," *Die Zeit* 9/4/2003.
[337] Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 468.
[338] Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 329.

"objectivating approach" has cursed his intellectual progeny, including Lenin, with a political philosophy that was practically unworkable even in its time—falling victim even in its most dynamic constructions to economic determinism to the exclusion of any robust concept of democratic rights: "From this perspective, the image of social integration occurring through values, norms, communication, and even law disintegrates into mere illusion."[339] In Habermas's account, even the first generation of Frankfurt School theorists were too indebted to the Hegelian Marxist model to fully appreciate the semi-autonomous internal logics of the spheres of culture and politics previously understood as superstructure.

As we noted in chapter three, the one-dimensionality thesis—which holds that with the vanishing of the proletariat as an empirically existing category, subjectivity in the mass society of advanced industrial civilization has been hollowed out of its historical agency—was shared by both Marcuse and Adorno. By attributing Adorno's political quietism to an economic determinism inextricably entwined in the very DNA of Marxism, Habermas is able to claim that critical theory's break with "vulgar" materialism was, in spite of it all, still too crude and incomplete to do justice to the dimensions of social interaction and individual experience. It is thus less as an epiphany and more as his final word on the matter when Habermas, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, declares that "confidence in the dialectic of reason and revolution, played out by Hegel and Marx as a philosophy of history, has been exhausted—and only the reformist path of trial and error remains both practically available and morally reasonable."[340] In the place of a Hegelian construction whose walls had long since closed in, Habermas carves a way out for those pragmatic enough to take it: a Kantian ethics of communication, the elucidation of regulative principles that ensure that a non-instrumental rationality plays a greater and greater determining role in how we treat each other, if we are to live together all after all. At the core of Habermas's theoretical work is the impulse to remain true to the Adornian categorical imperative at all costs. It can be seen as a mark of his own soft contrarianism—heresy, perhaps, only with respect to the Hegelian Marxist tradition itself—that he would to make good on its guarantee by embarking on a route his mentor considered a dead end, not to mention deeply undialectical: achieving mutual understanding through the dialogic-argumentative pursuit of "rationally motivated consensus." Jürgen Habermas decided to try anyway, lest Germany lapse into barbarism once more.

As he came of age in the ruins of National Socialism, Habermas recognized the latent threat of its return submerged in not only in the institutional continuity of the Federal Republic, but also in the pathological attitudes of its citizens. The partisans of barbarism were not only of one stripe, in either Germany: Habermas has retained throughout his extraordinary tenure a heightened sensitivity towards the ways in which, as Manfred Herrfurth notices in Christa Wolf's novel, the other color shines through. Born in Düsseldorf in 1929, Habermas was of Wolf's generation: Like her, he was a member of the Hitler Youth, and like her character Manfred, he emerged with an undying suspicion of grand narratives and an almost allergic reaction to the semblance of dogmatic thinking. Since Habermas's arrival in Frankfurt from Bonn in 1956, Adorno and his onetime graduate assistant were largely in agreement on the issues of the day, nowhere more strikingly than in their analysis of the New Left—so much so, in fact, that Adorno was given to citing Habermas's concepts of "actionism" and "pseudo-reality" when describing

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[339] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 46.
[340] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 57.

the perverse incentive structure of substitute satisfactions pursued by the new social movements.[341]

At times it seems as though Habermas is the only young person for whom Adorno has any significant amount of respect. When Adorno—in his letter to Marcuse dated February 14, 1969, the tail end of a winter that would be considered the climax of protests at West German universities—complains that the Frankfurt SDS had occupied a room in the Institute for Social Research, he mentions Habermas's presence numerous times, as if to reassure Marcuse that he did not call the police on the student protesters all by himself.[342] Marcuse, himself under no illusions about the existence of a revolutionary situation in the Western liberal democracies after World War II, is less impressed by Habermas's categorical dismissal of the "pseudorevolutionary adventures" of the students in the Federal Republic.[343] As Habermas informed the Goethe-Institut in New York in November 1967, "the Free University is the Berkeley of West Germany," and demonstrations have spread from Berlin to campuses nationwide in the wake of the police killing of Benno Ohnesorg (a protester Habermas refers to only as "a politically rather undistinguished student") at a rally against a state visit by the Shah of Iran.[344] Habermas takes the view that the New Left in the Federal Republic is not only politically unserious, but also prone to hysterical exaggeration and delusions of grandeur, even in comparison with its American counterparts: "But we have no ghettos that could possibly serve as the basis for urban guerrilla actions, and no students who are drafted to fight guerrillas in Southeast Asia." Absent the institutional conditions of apartheid and the looming threat of death in imperialist war, "[t]he attempts of our activists to challenge and make manifest the violence of institutions are therefore a bit superficial compared with the actions of the New Left in the United States."[345] In their written correspondence, Marcuse appears to hold Adorno accountable for arguments and turns of phrase that clearly originate with Habermas: Most notoriously, a conference in Hannover that same year saw Habermas characterize the "voluntaristic ideology" of the *Außerparlamentarische Opposition* or APO, led by student activists like Rudi Dutschke, as "left-wing fascism,"[346] a charge which Habermas claims he retracted to Dutschke's satisfaction 10 years later.[347] Conservatives in the FRG, on the other hand, wasted no time deploying Habermas's coinage as a cudgel against the New Left,[348] and *Linksfaschismus* has persisted as a motif on the German right to this day.[349]

Marcuse invokes the Fanonian image of "a biological, physiological reaction" wherein "one is suffocating and one has to let some air in. And this fresh air is not that of a 'left fascism' (*contradictio in adjecto*!)."[350] Marcuse could be referring to Habermas's invective no less than Adorno's call to the police when he goes on to chide his colleague: "I discuss things with the students and I attack them if, in my opinion, they are being stupid, playing into the hands of the other side, but I would probably not call to my aid worse, more awful weapons against their bad

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[341] See Adorno, "Resignation," 291.
[342] Adorno and Marcuse, *Correspondence on the German Student Movement*, 124.
[343] Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics* (Boston: Polity, 1987), 46.
[344] Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*, 15.
[345] Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*, 27.
[346] Habermas, *Kleine Politische Schriften* I-IV (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 214.
[347] Habermas, "Political Culture in Germany Since 1968: An Interview with Dr. Rainer Erd for the Frankfurter Rundschau," in: *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, 185.
[348] See Heidrun Kämper, "Der Faschismus-Diskurs 1967/68: Semantik und Funktion," in: *1968. Eine sprachwissenschaftliche Zwischenbilanz* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 259-285.
[349] Philipp Schulz, "'Linksfaschismus': SPD stellt sich hinter Linke-Politikerin Oldenburg," *Nordkurier* 2/21/2020.
[350] Adorno and Marcuse, *Correspondence on the German Student Movement*, 125.

ones."[351] Of course, Marcuse in California and Adorno and Habermas in Frankfurt primarily interacted with students in their respective domestic contexts, but Marcuse maintains that there is a broad continuity among the left-wing social movements operative in the United States and various European countries, even if they vary greatly both in terms of genesis and of effectiveness: "[T]he causes that set off the process are all very different, but, unlike Habermas, it seems to me that, despite all the differences, the driving motivation aims for the same goal. And this goal is now a protest against capitalism, which cuts to the roots of its existence, against its henchmen in the Third World, its culture, its morality."[352] For Habermas, on the other hand, this notion of a convergent, ultimate trajectory is wishful thinking that belies what the New Left in the United States and West Germany really have in common: "Participants in student protests are almost exclusively bourgeois youth—'white middle class kids'—who do not represent the working class, or blacks, or the underdeveloped countries but want to act for them and in their name."[353] Once the New Left has been reduced to "student protests," this becomes an almost tautological claim about the demographics of American university students. The picture Habermas presents is clear, and solidarity does not enter into it—the fact that Americans will mobilize against the Vietnam war out of self-interest is the only thing that confirms the authenticity of that resistance. The disjuncture of theory and practice operative in the student movement in the FRG, then, is all the more crippling because it *a priori* renders as purely performative any form of solidarity with, for example, the victims of neocolonial relations that implicate West Germans, who were after all the enormous the beneficiaries of a Marshall Plan financed by the continued economic dominance of the Western powers, which is in turn secured by US military hegemony. As we discussed earlier in this chapter, among the luminaries in the Frankfurt School's orbit, only Marcuse was inclined to think along these lines for very long, and Habermas was well aware of it: "In both countries we observe the fundamental attitudes that find expression in the features of a neoanarchist worldview whether emotionally on the level of the Beatles and folk songs, politically on the level of Castroism and quotations from Chairman Mao, or reflectively on the level of a theory that somewhat existentializes Marx and Freud, as in the works of Herbert Marcuse."[354]

From Habermas's perspective, Adorno's quietism appears was a virtue by comparison, since the politics that can emerge from this ideological hodgepodge are pathological and aestheticized, making them, on one hand, easy to neutralize in spheres of subcultural consumption, and at the same time, explosively dangerous in combination with the proclivity towards aggression that Adorno notices in "modes of behaviour such as those that I had to witness" on the part of student activists which "really display something of that thoughtless violence that once belonged to fascism."[355] Despite the fundamental philosophical differences that had only begun to sharpen when Adorno died in 1969, Habermas shares with Adorno this trepidation about endorsing radical political action, a tendency which becomes, in an important respect, all the more conservative when unmoored from its theoretical buttress in dialectics. But it would be reductive to read Habermas's liberalism, as Habermas's more polemical critics like Raymond Geuss have,[356] as a dastardly betrayal of Marxism without properly accounting for the historical context of the postwar political situation in the West. The heavily phenomenological

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[351] Adorno and Marcuse, *Correspondence on the German Student Movement,* 125-6.
[352] Adorno and Marcuse, *Correspondence on the German Student Movement*, 133.
[353] Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*, 28.
[354] Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*, 28.
[355] Adorno and Marcuse, *Correspondence on the German Student Movement*, 128.
[356] See: Raymond Guess, "A Republic of Discussion: Habermas at Ninety," *The Point* 6/18/2019.

abstraction of Habermas's arguments make it all the more necessary to consider this backdrop, not only internally to the history of philosophy, but more broadly in light of the political developments, unfolding in real time, to which theory writ large has always responded in more or less explicit and self-aware fashion. To name a particularly unsubtle example, the 1972 *Berufsverbot* ("professional ban," commonly referred to as the *Radikalenerlass* or "Anti-Radical Decree") imposed by the Minister-Presidents' Conference, a committee of the heads of state governments, was meant to effectively bar radical leftists from public sector jobs in Federal Republic of Germany, where communist parties were already banned by the constitution.[357] The liberal turn carried through by Habermas, which has come to define the second generation of the Frankfurt School, was a survivalist concession that made critical theory responsive to the current moment where it had previously been intransigent, in a way that it was not before and arguably had not been since World War II and the Holocaust.

As we will see, Habermas reacquaints the Frankfurt School with empirical research and declares the Frankfurt School once again open for business, but in making practice informed by theory thinkable once again, sanctions little more than the extension of existing institutions and practices in an increasingly conservative political climate. *Between Facts and Norms* is usually considered definitive of the political theory of the mature Habermas—there, he writes that "political steering," which comes to be his preferred term for political action precisely in virtue of its administrative connotations, "must...leave intact the modes of operation internal to functional systems and other highly organized spheres of action. As a result, democratic movements emerging from civil society must give up holistic aspirations to a self-organizing society, aspirations that also undergirded Marxist ideas of social revolution." Habermas sees totalitarianism implicit in the very notion of a Hegelian collective subject that takes for granted the violent ("functionalist") subsumption of individual agency into a systemic whole. "Civil society can directly transform only itself," Habermas writes, "in no way does it occupy the position of a macrosubject supposed to bring society as a whole under control and simultaneously act for it." What's more, Habermas concludes, "the administrative power deployed for purposes of social planning and supervision is not a suitable medium for fostering emancipated forms of life."[358]

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, a concept of "functionalism" is not required to recognize that there is a great deal of Hegel in Adorno. Nonetheless, the widespread impression of Adorno's exaggerated antipathy towards Hegel (a narrative in scholarship for which Adorno is, admittedly, largely responsible) has led some critics to assume a meaningful continuity between Habermas's reading of Hegel, on one hand, and on the other, that of Adorno and the first generation Frankfurt School more broadly. In fact, Habermas's explicitly anti-Marxist critique of Hegel is more expansive in scope than Adorno's—indeed, to the point of implicating Adorno himself—and is in this respect much closer to the Popperian or Arendtian lines. Robert Pippin, arguably the leading US Hegelian today—who, as we saw in chapter one, reads Hegel as a conservative liberal—characterizes Habermas's position as a "standard view" predominant not least in the tradition of critical theory, but seems to admit that Habermas goes further than his Left Hegelian forerunners in claiming "unequivocally that all substantive questions of the 'good life' or 'personal values,' etc. are not subject to any universal rationalization."[359]

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[357] K.H.F. Dyson, "Left-wing Political Extremism and the Problem of Tolerance in West Germany," *Government and Opposition* 10, no. 3 (Summer 1975): 308.
[358] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 372.
[359] Robert Pippin, "Hegel, Modernity, and Habermas," *The Monist* 74, no. 3 (July 1991): 345.

The precepts of Habermas's liberal commitments are surprisingly evident early on in his career, and not only in his writings on Hegel—from his intervention in the so-called Positivism Dispute (which pitted the Frankfurt School, most notably Adorno, against prominent German followers, not coincidentally, of Karl Popper) to his *Habilitationsschrift* or professional dissertation, published in 1962 as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas is quick to shed the unseasonable trappings of continental radicalism. According to Jay, it is over the course of the *Positivismusstreit* that Habermas begins to abandon dialectics,[360] and can be seen moving towards an alternate model he designates (drawing on systems theory and Husserl's phenomenology) as the opposition between "system" and "lifeworld."[361] The substance of the dispute, to which Popper himself eventually responded, concerns the subordination of philosophy to the criteria of the natural sciences in the analytic tradition that became the only game in town in postwar philosophy departments in the US and much of Germany, a phenomenon John McCumber has dubbed "Cold War philosophy."[362] Interestingly, Habermas's most notable contribution rests on a rather backhanded defense of Popper as a positivist who is so eager to remedy the perceived lack of scientific rigor in philosophy that, by conditioning the validity of knowledge on its empirical testability, he "unintentionally makes his own suggested solution problematical."[363] Daniel C. Henrich summarizes Habermas's position thusly: "*Habermas legt den Schwerpunkt im Zusammenhang des Positivismusstreits auf eine Kritik der Vergegenständlichung subjektiver Elemente als Folge des Wertfreiheitspostulats der Wissenschaft. Dabei macht er deutlich, inwiefern dass Wertfreiheitspostulat auf die Selbstvergessenheit des Interesses der Wissenschaft zurückzufuhren ist*,"[364] meaning that the sciences themselves cannot be theorized as autonomous "systems"—as is the custom in the analytic tradition—but in their dialectical totality. "*Nur wenn der Begriff des 'Systems' durch den Begriff der 'Totalität' im Sinne einer dialektischen Analyse ersetzt und die Rückwirkung dieser Totalität auf den Forschungsprozess selbst begriffen werde*," explains Henrich, "*könne eine 'Verfälschung des Objekts' im Sinne einer Vergegenständlichung verhindert werden.*"[365] The irony of Habermas's insistence on the primacy of the social whole is that he does not remain convinced of its urgency for very long: The notion of totality disappears from his analytical frame soon after, to be replaced by precisely the concept of autonomous or self-steering functional systems. Indeed, it is altogether absent—along with most of the other relatively innocuous bits of Marxist terminology that survived the Institute's euphemistic self-censorship—from *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, where Habermas unveils the signature conceptual innovation of his early period.

Already looking for a way out of the functionalism of the historical materialist base-superstructure model, Habermas's account of the development of capitalism introduces the "public sphere" (*Öffentlichkeit*) as a third level of society mediating between the economic base and cultural experience. The advent of the public sphere, Habermas contends, coincides with the onset of modernity, and not by accident: "Sociologically, that is to say by reference to

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[360] Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 471.
[361] Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 472-3.
[362] John McCumber, *The Philosophy Scare: The Politics of Reason in the Early Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 1-2.
[363] Habermas, "A Positivistically Bisected Rationalism: A Reply to a Pamphlet," in: *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 202.
[364] Daniel C. Henrich, *Zwischen Bewusstseinsphilosophie und Naturalismus: Zu den metaphysischen Implikationen der Diskursethik von Jürgen Habermas* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007), 176.
[365] Henrich, *Zwischen Bewusstseinsphilosophie und Naturalismus*, 174.

institutional criteria, a public sphere in the sense of a separate realm distinguished from the private sphere cannot be shown to have existed in the feudal society of the High Middle Ages."[366] As Habermas notes, the German noun *Öffentlichkeit* is only coined in the 18th century, corresponding not only to the formation of analogous words in English ("publicity") and French (*publicité*),[367] but also to the conversion of the German manorial authority into "private landed property ... as part of the liberation of the peasants and the clearing of land holdings from feudal obligations."[368] Kant, who is often credited in conventional retellings with single-handedly dragging the German people out of medieval darkness, theorizes "publicity" (*Publicität*) as a "transcendental formula" that is "not only *ethical* (as belonging to the doctrine of virtue), but also *juridical* (as concerning the rights of humans),"[369] and therefore capable of mediating between the state and civil society. "Even before 'public opinion' became established as a standard phrase in the German-speaking areas," Habermas claims, "the idea of the bourgeois public sphere attained its theoretically fully developed form with Kant's elaboration of the principle of publicity,"[370] which, as the empirical bourgeois public formed, "held good as the one principle that could guarantee the convergence of politics and morality."[371] Formulated as a version of the categorical imperative, the principle states that, "All actions that affect the rights of other human beings, the maxims of which are incompatible with publicity, are unjust."[372] *Publicität* here denotes not only the hypothetical universalizability constitutive of the categorical imperative, but also a sort of "openness" readily apparent in the etymology of the adjective *öffentlich*, such that, "If I may not *utter* my maxim explicitly without thereby thwarting my own aim, if it must rather be *kept secret* if it is to succeed, if I cannot *admit it publicly* without thereby inevitably provoking the resistance of all others to my plan,"[373] then the principle has been violated. In the roughly 200 years following the Glorious Revolution in England, it was the spirit, if not the letter, of this law that reigned in the zone of unprecedented egalitarianism that spread to the French *salons* and German *Tischgesellschaften* concomitantly with the rise of liberal capitalism which, after all, was to thank for the bourgeoisie's political leverage vis-a-vis institutions of feudal absolutism. Thus, what characterizes the era of bourgeois liberalism is that "[i]n the measure to which it was linked to market exchange, production was disengaged from its connection with functions of public authority; conversely, political administration was released from production tasks."[374] Already in 1962, the determining role of the economic in society overall is strikingly variable for Habermas: As the bourgeois economy grows in importance, so does the seeming autonomy of the public sphere as "the go-between linking state and society,"[375] because the robust separation between the latter two spheres is the very condition of possibility for the former.

The economic depression following the Panic of 1873 marks the beginning of the end of the liberal era. The so-called age of imperialism is notable for Habermas primarily as the period

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[366] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Boston: MIT Press, 1991), 7.
[367] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 3.
[368] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 5.
[369] Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2006), 104-5.
[370] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 102.
[371] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 104.
[372] Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, 104.
[373] Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, 105.
[374] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 141.
[375] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 177.

when the development of monopoly capitalism triggers state intervention into the private realm. "Only when new functions accrued to the state did the 'barrier' between it and society begin to lose its firmness."[376] Habermas cites antitrust legislation in the US and Germany as an example of this encroachment, but is less concerned with the implications for political economy than with the withering autonomy of the bourgeois nuclear family, which appears as the last vestige of protection for bourgeois subjectivity during an ignominious and interminable decline from the 19th to the 20th century that culminates in the reduction of the citizen in mass democracy to a consumer and client of the welfare state. Habermas presents the nuclear family as a meaningful site of autonomy and resistance to the market, and the decline of the family as part and parcel of a process of postliberal "refeudalization" through which the public degenerates from a "culture-debating" (*kulturräsonierend*) to a "culture-consuming public."[377] What is lost for Habermas is not only economic but cultural security: "Parallel to its release from economic tasks the family lost power as an agent of personal internalization," he explains. "The family increasingly disengaged from its direct connections with the reproduction of society, thus retained only the illusion of an inner space of intensified privacy. In truth it lost its protective functions along with its economic tasks."[378] Without "the type of privacy that evolved during the eighteenth century out of the experiential context of the conjugal family's audience-oriented intimate sphere," the public sphere is "replaced by the pseudo-public or sham-private world of culture consumption."[379] As Habermas later admits, what makes bourgeois publicity authentic was not that it ever really existed as a singular, unified sphere. Rather, "the bold fiction" of an abstract universality alone makes the mediation of politics and morality—in Habermas's terms, "the dependence of all politically consequential decision-making processes on the legally secured discursive formation of will on the part of the citizen public," which suffers a downward trajectory that continues over the course of the 19th century and well into the 20th—possible in the modern era to begin with.[380]

Habermas therefore defines legitimate politics against the classical liberal standard of Kantian impartiality that entails the bracketing of individual, private interests, although in practice, the private interests of individuals were precisely what bourgeois politics served. As Benhabib argues, this aspect of Habermas's theory betrays, among other things, a failure to think through the relation of capital to the oppression of women:

> "Habermas subsumes the family under the lifeworld; in this respect he echoes some of the more conservative diagnoses of the Frankfurt School and, following them, of Christopher Lasch on the changing nature of the family. Such diagnoses are oblivious to the fact that the monogamous nuclear family historically has been the arena for the oppression of women. Furthermore, the interaction between state and family is not as recent as some of these theorists lead us to believe … the family has always interacted with systems of action either in the form of market forces or in the person of state, health, and education officials."[381]

The exclusion that Habermas overlooks in his concept of the public sphere—the social antagonism he hides behind a veil of ignorance—is not a bug but a feature, not a distortion of the

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[376] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 145.
[377] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 159.
[378] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 156-7.
[379] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 159.
[380] Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 26.
[381] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, 251-2.

field but its constitutive element. In fact, what this reveals is how the so-called bracketing of social antagonisms (both in the broader economy as well as in the home) belies the actual accommodation of patriarchal ideological precepts on the part of the universal subject of rational debate. "Bourgeois culture was not mere ideology," Habermas writes, almost wistfully. "The rational-critical debate of private people in the *salons*, clubs, and reading societies was not directly subject to the cycle of production and consumption, that is, to the dictates of life's necessities."[382] Benhabib's interpretation is here extremely compelling. Passages like these are Habermas's lamentations for the model of the liberal public sphere—not for its inherent self-contradiction, its submerged hierarchy and false equality, but simply because there wasn't enough of it, and that it couldn't go on forever.

The most salient critiques of *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* have come from within the orbit of contemporary critical theory and, while they cannot be recounted in any detail here, they share a number of other interesting elements. Feminist theorists like Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, and Miriam Hansen, not to mention the writing pair of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (themselves students of Habermas and Adorno, respectively), have all been influenced by Habermas in their own theoretical work to varying extents, and largely concede that this reconstruction of the bourgeois public sphere in the "heroic" era of capitalism, while historically inaccurate, is a useful thought experiment. Each, however, is forced to conclude that the bourgeois public sphere is, as its class designation suggests, by its very nature so exclusionary and political that the Kantian "bracketing of inequalities of status" that Habermas celebrates as a utopia of the hypothetical appears, in fact, to be little more than "mere ideology" after all. In their attempts to salvage the concept of the public sphere, they repudiate Habermas's idyllic portrait of its bourgeois manifestation. Negt and Kluge's *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* (*The Public Sphere and Experience*, 1972) and Fraser's well known essay "Rethinking the Public Sphere" both argue that the fictive singularity of the Habermasian public sphere crowds out the possibility—and in some cases, the real existence—of proletarian *Gegenöffentlichkeiten* or "subaltern counterpublics."[383] As Fraser puts it, "the problem is not only that Habermas idealizes the liberal public sphere but also that he fails to examine other, nonliberal, non-bourgeois, competing public spheres. Or rather, it is precisely because he fails to examine these other public spheres that he ends up idealizing the liberal public sphere."[384]

Like Benhabib, Kluge and Negt apply to Habermas's theory a (modified) Hegelian critique of Kant's "abstract general,"[385] but unlike the later feminist critics, they do not, as Hansen points out, theorize nonlabor politics and thereby fail to make good on the potential of the concrete particular to reflect the full range of the interests of women and minorities.[386] By contrast, Fraser draws particular attention to the specific "bourgeois masculinist" notion of the singular public sphere, operative in Habermas's theory, that cordons off "private interests" from contestation by proscribing state intervention in civil society (including economic relations) while claiming a sort of transcendental impartiality with respect to empirically existing status inequality. It is precisely in the spheres of culture and economics—both of which, she notes, are

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[382] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 160.
[383] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 67.
[384] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," 59.
[385] Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *The Public Sphere and Experience: Towards an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 10.
[386] Miriam Hansen, Foreword to *The Public Sphere and Experience: Toward and Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, xvi.

in liberal political theory subsumed under the category of civil society in contradistinction to the state—that inequality persists even after formal political strictures have been repealed.

As we will examine in greater detail later in this chapter, Habermas stands in opposition to conservative critics of the welfare state[387]—but it is not always clear on what grounds. Indeed, even in light of the events of his day, some of Habermas's worries about the harmful encroachment of the state into private life betray not so much an anticipation that the welfare state arrangement is inadequate to guarantee that social-democratic intervention will not be rolled back by future policy decisions, but apprehension about the encroachment as such. This is crucial to understanding the implications of Habermas's move to replace the two-level "base-superstructure" model of society with a fully developed opposition between the lifeworld and "functionally differentiated," largely autonomous subsystems such as "the money-steered economy and a power-steered administration [which] develop out of, and only out of, the 'society' component of the lifeworld."[388] Habermas's concept of the lifeworld recognizes that "culture" as a monolithic category no longer suffices to describe the matrix of substitute satisfactions in which the individuated receiver of public communication in mass society is embedded. The concept of the lifeworld as opposed (and in an inherent state of resistance) to the system functionally replaces the Hegelian Marxist subject whose dialectical relationship to the whole has come to a standstill. Jettisoning the "subject-centered reason" of dialectics is the only way, Habermas reckons, for critical theory to break out of a cycle endemic to the German philosophical tradition: The "crisis of Marxism" is the apogee of that cycle, culminating in a return to the hereditary—that is to say, Hegelian—quietism sanctioned by Adorno's totalizing vision of annihilating reconciliation, the Absolute Subject made literal in the closed system of the administered society.

Habermas, unattached to Adorno's dashed Marxist hopes, sees this in a much more positive light: He contends that, because the crisis potential of monopoly capitalism ("the money-steered economy") is more or less adequately managed by the intervention of the welfare state ("power-steered administration"), the integration of capitalism and liberal-democratic society is basically stable. In his magnum opus, the two-volume *Theory of Communicative Action*, capitalism as such is barely mentioned except in the occasional cautionary note (emphasis in the original):

> Between capitalism and democracy there is an *indissoluble* tension ... the internal dynamics of the capitalist economic system can be preserved only insofar as the accumulation process is uncoupled from orientations to use value. The propelling mechanism of the economic system has to be kept as free as possible from lifeworld restrictions as well as from the demands for legitimation directed to the administrative system.
>
> *Zwischen Kapitalismus und Demokratie besteht ein* unauflösliches *Spannungsverhältnis ... Andererseits kann die kapitalistische Eigendynamik des Wirtschaftssystem nur in dem Maße gewahrt bleiben, wie der Akkumulationsprozeß von Gebrauchswertorientierungen abgekoppelt wird. Der Antriebsmechanismus des Wirtschaftssystems muß von*

[387] See Habermas, "Neoconservative Cultural Criticism in the United States and West Germany," in *The New Conservatism*, 22-45.
[388] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 56-7.

> *lebensweltlichen Restriktionen, also auch von den ans administrative Handlungssystem gerichteten Legitimationsforderungen möglichst freigehalten werden.*[389]

In the most generous reading, Habermas is merely stating descriptively the limits of social-democratic reform: At the end of the day, the welfare state is compensating for inequality in a zero-sum game, and you can't just get rid of the propertied classes, so you have to create a business-friendly environment and, in the parlance of macroeconomics, "grow the pie." Once fantasies of revolution have been abandoned, it is the purview of the government (itself practically inaccessible, as a largely autonomous subsystem, to the mass of people) to balance out the excesses of the economic sphere without tampering with its internal structure: Even in this light, there remains an uncomfortable resonance between this delimitation of acceptable social-democratic intervention and the appropriation by the neoliberal right of classical liberalism's insistence—criticized, as we have seen in chapter one, already by Hegel—on the sanctified "barrier" between the state and civil society.

Whereas the Frankfurt School's dynamization of the base-superstructure model deployed the dialectics of individual subjectivity supplied by Freudian psychoanalysis to mediate between the economic and cultural strata, Habermas's demolition of that structure clears the way for a different but no less problematically rigid dichotomy, system-lifeworld. This pair is mediated in an intersubjective mode, through the logic of discourse, communication that is aimed at "coming to an understanding" (*Verständigung*, as opposed to the less active *Einverständnis*), that is, uncoerced agreement. Humans, Habermas claims, desire consensus by nature, and since civil society, set apart from the political and economic subsystems, can only act to change itself, then resistance is futile—except in the realm of discourse. If truth is intersubjectively determined, no dialectic of subject and object can allow one particular faction to assume the vanguard role in the collective subject and direct society in accordance with its (in spite of all dialectical gimmickry nevertheless "subjective") interpretation of the objective tendency of the totality. The economic and political subsystems, steered by the "media" of power and money, respectively, are so complex and (compared to any particular human agency) effective at self-regulation that "capitalist growth triggers conflicts within the lifeworld chiefly as a consequence of the expansion and the increasing density of the monetary-bureaucratic complex," and not through the direct impact of participation in the market economy. "Along the front between system and lifeworld, the lifeworld evidently offers stubborn and possibly successful resistance only when functions of symbolic reproduction are in question."[390] To theorize intersubjectivity free from the constraints of Marxist functionalism and the modern "philosophy of the subject" or "philosophy of consciousness" more broadly—which, Habermas reminds us, "'lies along a 'German' line of social-theoretical thought determined by Kant and Hegel"[391]—he must take his cues from the so-called Linguistic Turn in analytic philosophy that crystallized over the course of the 1970s.

Jay regards Habermas's own personal linguistic turn as his definitive break with the Hegelian Marxist tradition.[392] As we have seen, the building blocks of that breakthrough have already been laid in this early period of his work, including in his concept of the public sphere and his preoccupation with the deleterious effect of state intervention into the economy. Indeed,

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[389] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 345; *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, vol. 2, 507.
[390] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 351.
[391] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 399.
[392] Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 468.

as early his 1965 inaugural address he is anxious to reign in what he sees as the speculative extravagance of dialectical theory through an epistemological shift that places him, interestingly enough, much closer to the positivists he had beaten back only years earlier (emphasis in the original): "What raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: *language*. Through its structure, autonomy and responsibility are posited for us. Our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus."[393] Thus the conversion of his conceptual apparatus into the language of *Sprachphilosophie* was for Habermas not so much a turn as an expansion—in other words, in the context of Hegelian Marxism and German political thought more broadly, it is my contention that Habermas is himself the turn.

The Theory of Communicative Action, published in 1981, appeared in the wake of a decade during which the radical left and organized labor, not only in the West but globally, was subject to violent repression, and with the credible threat of revolution gone, the social-democratic compromise lost its basis in social antagonism. By the 1980s, in the US and UK, and to a lesser extent in West Germany, neoliberal economic policy supplants the postwar Keynesian consensus, and all three countries rang in the new decade by electing conservative governments. The '70s began in earnest for Habermas when he left Frankfurt for Starnberg, where he co-founded a Max Planck Institute and reformulated his theory by assembling a dazzling array of sources from the Anglo-American intellectual tradition. The book is an exhaustive presentation of the theory of communicative rationality, incorporating the linguistic philosophy of Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin, John Searle, and Noam Chomsky,[394] as well as a number of naturalistically-derived theories of behavior, most notably George Herbert Mead, who according to Habermas "had already elevated symbolically mediated interaction to the new paradigm of reason and had based reason on the communicative relation between subjects."[395] Out of this synthesis is forged the theoretical foundation for a model of action based on the rationality that is "always already," to use a favorite phrase of Habermas, encoded in the very structure of communication. The results are mixed in more ways than one.

Habermas himself emerges from this project, ironically enough, as a Hegelian without dialectics, the evangelist of a rationalism that substitutes for idealist metaphysics a "quasi-transcendental" cognitivism he will later term "weak naturalism." In place of Absolute Knowledge, Habermas promises salvation in the intersubjective process of social interaction. As Pippin,[396] Henrich,[397] and Benhabib all argue, Habermas relies too heavily "on evolutionary models of 'normal' courses of development."[398] Henrich argues that Habermas's claim to operate without metaphysics ultimately holds, but that his account of the rationality governing discursive will formation requires the "*Deflationierung der Transzendentalphilosophie*"[399] through a Darwinian naturalism which, certainly in its strong form, enters into conflict with his commitments in the realm of ethics. Benhabib argues, along similar lines, that if "[d]iscursive argumentation is the new procedure replacing the universalizability test in Kantian ethics,"[400] and communicative rationality is the adaptive outcome of an evolutionary learning process,

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[393] Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 314.
[394] Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 495.
[395] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 390.
[396] Pippin, "Hegel, Modernity, and Habermas," 346.
[397] Henrich, *Zwischen Bewusstseinsphilosophie und Naturalismus*, 222.
[398] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 274.
[399] Henrich, *Zwischen Bewusstseinsphilosophie und Naturalismus*, 199.
[400] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 301.

Habermas sacrifices precisely the "anticipatory-utopian" dimension of critical theory, which she regards as "the more properly normative aspect of critique."[401] It is by virtue of the evolutionary development of society, Habermas writes, that we are cognitively inclined to recognize and accede to the non-coercive force of the better argument (in German the "*zwanglose Zwang des besseren Arguments*, a construction reminiscent of Kant's formula of bourgeois art, "*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zwecke*"). As he puts it in *Between Facts and Norms*, "Whenever we want to convince one another of something, we always already intuitively rely on a practice in which we presume that we sufficiently approximate the ideal conditions of a speech situation specially immunized against repression and inequality."[402] The only utopia to which Habermas lends any credence is this "ideal speech situation" that is, to our good fortune, is "always already" accessible to every thinking, speaking subject, as a sort of regulative principle.

Here Habermas, operating in a distinctly Kantian mode, appears nonetheless in an almost Hegelian light: Revolution and other such divisiveness, he assures us, is no longer remotely within reach, but the radical potential of modernity was, counterintuitively, right under our noses, not only "always" present in the natural history of our species, but also "already" partially realized in the "*democratic idea* developed by Rousseau and Kant,"[403] and endorsed in the liberal constitutions of the capitalist West. "The Utopian perspective of reconciliation and freedom," he argues, "is ingrained in the conditions for the communicative sociation of individuals; it is built into the linguistic mechanism of the reproduction of the species."[404] Even Adorno, in his perpetual state of low-level alarm, never fully abandoned the emancipatory horizon against which the social whole still appeared a negative totality, riddled with antagonism and pregnant with the explosive potential of contingency. By contrast, as Benhabib argues,

> Evolutionary theories flatten this horizon of the future by making the future appear like the necessary consequence of the present. To put the objection I am raising to Habermas' reliance on evolutionary theory in a nutshell: if the problem with early critical theory seemed to be that their conception of Utopian reason was so esoteric as not to allow embodiment in the present, the difficulty with Habermas concept is that it seems like such a natural outcome of the present that it is difficult to see what would constitute an emancipatory break with the present if communicative rationality were fulfilled.[405]

Benhabib concludes that this tension, attributed to the gambit through which Habermas seeks to renew critical theory's "explanatory-diagnostic" dimension, threatens to undermine the moral-transformatory element that distinguishes Habermas's theory from the more card-carrying liberalism of Rawls' theory of justice. The implications of this are evident, for example, in the way the *Theory of Communicative Action* reformulates Habermas's earlier move to decenter the economy in the analysis of society and thereby distinguish it from the Marxist concept of the material base: He explains that "we can understand by 'base' the institutional complex that, at a given stage, anchors the evolutionarily leading system mechanism in the lifeworld." The base is where "we find those system problems that can be resolved only through evolutionary innovations, that is, only when a higher level of system differentiation is institutionalized." If the lifeworld cannot interfere with "the self-steering performances of the economy,"[406] which has not

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[401] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 226.
[402] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 228.
[403] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 32.
[404] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 398.
[405] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 277.
[406] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 385.

yet outlived its evolutionary usefulness, then "innovation" in this quasi-natural sense does not occur, because there is nothing particularly wrong and nothing in particular is required to solve it. It is therefore "misleading," according to Habermas, to "to equate 'base' with 'economic structure,' for not even in capitalist societies does the basic domain, as defined above, coincide with the economic system."[407] Here as in his *Habilitationsschrift*, the economy assumes importance only at a certain point in the developmental trajectory of humanity: Capitalism thus appears, predictably enough, in naturalized form, as the pragmatic outcome of an evolutionary learning process.

The problem for Habermas is that the evolutionary learning processes of "cultural" and "societal rationalization"—concepts he borrows from Max Weber and deploys in a modified capacity to describe, without the help of dialectics, the seemingly contradictory dynamic of modernity—still carries with it the disintegrative effects on the lifeworld that concerned him in the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Adorno and Horkheimer—who, according to Habermas, failed to break out of the metaphysics entailed in the philosophy of the subject because their critique leads to subjective paralysis—attributed the counterintuitive outcomes of that dynamic to the dialectic of Enlightenment: "Horkheimer and Adorno are interested," Habermas writes, "precisely in the ironic connection that the rationalization of society seems to establish between the transformation of traditional realms of life into subsystems of purposive-rational action, on the one hand, and the 'atrophy of individuality,' on the other."[408] This heightened awareness and appreciation of historical irony (the articulation of which, as we have seen throughout this study, is characteristic of the legacy of dialectical thinking going back to Hegel) is not entirely lost with Habermas, but in his attempt to develop an alternative, non-Marxist theory of social antagonism that admits of peaceful resolution, the impulse is muddled and largely wasted.

It is, at any rate, with this intent that Habermas takes up his critique of the welfare state once more in the *Theory of Communicative Action*: Since state interventionism has more or less succeeded in pacifying class struggle, problems experienced in the lifeworld stem not directly from oppression due to inequalities of money and power, but from the very nature of the relation between the lifeworld on one hand and the self-regulating, practically untouchable subsystems of the market and the state on the other. Habermas's curious political idiosyncrasy is again on display as he hits upon a metaphor that captures his distinct concern with the encroachment of systemic imperatives into a lifeworld he has kept relatively insulated on a conceptual level from any sort of dialectical determination by the spheres of economics and politics: Indeed, as we have discussed, Habermas holds that even the determination of one subsystem by the other is problematic, both in theory and in practice. Habermas refers to the pernicious dynamic of boundary violation in the system-lifeworld relation—which, according to his concept of rationalization, merely follows from the evolutionarily advantageous degree of system differentiation attained by contemporary Western societies—as "internal colonization" (*innere Kolonialisierung*):

> When stripped of their ideological veils, the imperatives of autonomous subsystems make their way into the lifeworld *from the outside*—like colonial masters coming into a tribal society—and force a process of assimilation upon it. The diffused perspectives of the local culture cannot be sufficiently coordinated to permit the play of the metropolis and the world market to be grasped from the periphery.

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[407] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 167-8.
[408] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, 354.

> [*... die Imperative der verselbständigten Subsysteme dringen, sobald sie ihres ideologischen Schleiers entkleidet sind,* von außen *in die Lebenswelt—wie Kolonialherren in eine Stammesgesellschaft—ein und erzwingen die Assimilation; aber die zerstreuten Perspektiven der heimischen Kultur lassen sich nicht soweit koordinieren, daß das Spiel der Metropolen und des Weltmarktes von der Peripherie her durchschaut werden könnte*.][409]

It is apparently easy in Habermas scholarship to let this dodgy choice of metaphor pass without mention, and this may well be because there is not much to say in its defense. It may also, however, serve as a reminder that colonialism, including German imperialism in Africa, fails to enter the picture in an oeuvre otherwise deeply concerned with unmasking relations of domination. This is, of course, not unique to Habermas in the Frankfurt School tradition. What makes the thesis notable is the key role it plays in Habermas's system: "Internal colonization" is, as a matter of fact, the only reason that resistance on the part of the lifeworld is necessary at all—it is the justification for conflict that, in Habermas's analysis of postwar liberal capitalism, should have no other structural source. What makes the thesis questionable on the merits is twofold. The only example Habermas provides is "the relationship of clients to the administrations of the welfare state," which he calls "the model case for the colonization of the lifeworld" that "sets in when the destruction of traditional forms of life can no longer be offset by more effectively fulfilling the functions of society as a whole."[410] The harm done appears to be located not in the substantive outcome of a state action, which might prove to be more or less counterproductive, but in the act of bureaucratization itself: "The situation to be regulated ... has to be subjected to violent abstraction, not merely because it has to be subsumed under the law, but so that it can be dealt with administratively."[411] By contrast, as Deborah Cook notes in her comparative study of Adorno and Habermas, "Notwithstanding his claims about the evolutionary primacy of the economy, Habermas offers no analysis of the encroachment of monetary imperatives on the lifeworld. This lacuna in his theory is particularly glaring, and it only underlines his refusal to make common cause with Marxism."[412]

Moreover, the colonization thesis upholds the autonomy of both lifeworld and system such that the division between lifeworld and system, or indeed between the economic and the bureaucratic subsystems, is not "porous," but firm: Habermas presents as ultimately stable and secure "a rationalized lifeworld in which system imperatives clash with independent communication structures."[413] There is no dialectical relationship here insofar as the possibility of reciprocal determination is ruled out, not least of all because "Habermas also contends that these legal and administrative abstractions are unrelated to the abstractions imposed on individuals by the capitalist economy—the predominant subsystem in the West today."[414] Crises in either subsystem (that is to say, failures of self-steering in the market or the bureaucracy, which are already siloed off from each other by virtue of their sheer complexity) do not threaten the integrity of the social whole, because the systemic tensions that cause steering crises are, for the most part, smoothed out by the progressive intervention of the state and absorbed by

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[409] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 355; *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, vol. 2, 522.
[410] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 322.
[411] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 363.
[412] Deborah Cook, *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, 31.
[413] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 391.
[414] Cook, *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, 31.

individuals and by culture as "lifeworld pathologies": Habermas explains how—again seemingly only in reference to the welfare state—"anomic conditions are avoided" when "legitimations and motivations important for maintaining institutional orders are secured, at the expense of, and through the ruthless exploitation of, other resources. Culture and personality come under attack for the sake of warding off crises and stabilizing society," with the outcome that "instead of manifestations of anomie (and instead of the withdrawal of legitimation and motivation in place of anomie), phenomena of alienation and the unsettling of collective identity emerge."[415] Through this expansion of political power further into the lifeworld, traditional sources of meaning are destroyed, but for Habermas this neither jeopardizes the successful integration of individuals into society nor rebounds back onto society in any other way. Cook notes how deeply undialectical this notion is: "Inexplicably and inconsistently, he maintains that the pivotal contribution of social integration to the reproduction of the lifeworld's society component – which serves as the institutional anchor for both the economy and the state – remains largely untouched by colonization."[416] Simply put, Habermas does not seem to think colonization is a very big deal. At most, it amounts to "disturbances in the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld."[417] As jarring as the images may be that the metaphor conjures up may be, the colonization thesis demonstrates that the stakes for radical social change are considerably lower for Habermas than in previous iterations of critical theory, not only because because he conceives of the lifeworld in irreducibly dualistic terms as a robust, inextinguishable site of resistance to the system, but because any resistance must inevitably leave the system intact.

The deradicalizing move of the colonization thesis, by virtue of which social antagonism can only be located in the interstices between an inhuman but surprisingly benevolent complex of independent subsystems, is in large part what lands the theory of communicative action its politically innocuous quality—and therein lies its real utility for Habermas, for whom, in the somewhere in the background, Adorno's categorical imperative has never lost its primacy. Freed of any lingering assumptions that Marxism could be enlisted in the fight against a resurgent political barbarism, Habermas's discourse ethics fit postwar Germany's consensus-oriented, temperamentally conservative (and as the '70s went on, steadily rightward moving) political culture like a glove. Brandt's successor as chancellor, his fellow Social Democrat Helmut Schmidt, was reflective of this trend. "*Wer Visionen hat*," Schmidt famously quipped when asked by *Der Spiegel* about Brandt's rhetoric in the 1980 election, "*der sollte zum Arzt gehen*" ("Whoever has visions should go see a doctor").[418] Now was not the time for experiments on which not all strata of society could agree. The year after Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* was published, Helmut Kohl led the Christian Democratic Union in a successful effort to trigger a vote of no confidence in Schmidt, and was himself elected chancellor, putting the rightward-drifting Social Democrats out of their misery and out of government for the first time in 13 years. It would be nearly two decades before a briefly resurgent, thoroughly neoliberal SPD returned to power as the senior partner in a coalition with the Green Party, which had never governed before and included many former student activists. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, who was an active participant in the student movement, and admits to haven taken offense at the charge of "*Linksfaschismus*," lauded Habermas as "fast ein

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[415] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 386.
[416] Cook, *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, 137.
[417] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 305.
[418] Giovanni di Lorenzo, "Verstehen Sie das, Herr Schmidt?", *ZEITmagazin* 3/4/2010.

Staatsphilosoph des demokratischen Deutschlands."[419] The "red-green" coalition would spend the rest of their term implementing a series of controversial labor market reforms dubbed *Agenda 2010*, including an overhaul of unemployment provisions along the lines of the 1996 welfare reform package passed in the US Congress and signed by President Bill Clinton.

Tolerant where Horkheimer's contrarianism at its height—down to with cheeky endorsement of CDU entryism—was prickly and spiteful, Habermas approaches the ideological coordinates of Horkheimer's postwar provocations but marks a departure from the radical political horizons of the first generation of Frankfurt School thinkers. Habermas's work is not, as Horkheimer had conceived of their role in the prewar years, "a message in a bottle"—when there are no lines drawn in the sand, there is no need to write messages or set them afloat. Already in 1981 Habermas affirms the conservative social theorist Daniel Bell's proclamation of the "end of ideology" as a state of affairs that "was a long time coming."[420] No longer in exile from the future, critical theory can claim to credibly address not some inadequate intellectual vanguard or a substitute for the proletariat, but to everybody: the statesman and the layman, the expert and the entrepreneur.

Whereas Marcuse, Adorno and Horkheimer and the other critical theorists of the so-called first generation were intensely polarizing, each in his own way (in this respect one would be justified broadening the circle to include the likes of Benjamin and Bloch), Habermas advances a theory of political action that—because it cannot alienate (or even name) an empirical ruling class—is deliberately conservative in demarcating the acceptable substantial content of politics. The substantial conclusions of Habermas's own politics, no less than the systematicity of their presentation, account for the ready inclusion of his critical theory—uniquely in the dialectical tradition—in the Anglo-American canon of "political philosophy." Habermas is the reasonable one, and while he was painted as an incendiary godfather of the radical left by the right in the Federal Republic of the 1960s and '70s, he was no Marcuse, and the luminaries of the analytic philosophy which continues to predominate in the United States and Germany in the wake of the Cold War certainly prefer him as an interlocutor.[421]

This is hardly a coincidence. Habermas overcomes the crisis of Marxism by overcoming Marxism itself, returning to a sort of neo-Kantianism that dares not speak the name of the thing-in-itself for fear of lapsing into metaphysics—as we have seen, in turning from Frankfurt School's Freudian secularization of dialectics to a "weak naturalism," Habermas refuses to acknowledge a really existing unconscious other than that implicit in language. Recall how Kant himself, the paradigmatic liberal for Habermas, recoils at the terror that Hegel celebrates year after year with a toast, embracing it both in fear and in awe at its portentousness. Kant's formalistic retreat into an interiority where moral principles can be accessed and universalized is repeated in Habermas's repudiation of any claim to substantial knowledge or reconciliation of the whole by means of, respectively, Marxist theory and socialist revolution: Theory, he argues, "must refrain from critically evaluating and normatively ordering totalities, forms of life and cultures, and life-contexts and epochs *as a whole*."[422] The impossibility of speaking and acting as a particular in the name of the universal means that reconciliation can only ever be of a formal nature.

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[419] "Wegbegleiter: Jürgen Habermas erhielt Friedenspreis," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 10/14/2001.
[420] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 353.
[421] See McCumber, *The Philosophy Scare: The Politics of Reason in the Early Cold War.*
[422] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 383.

Habermas's procedural utopia is only compatible with Adorno's categorical imperative because he maintains, contra Adorno himself, that reason is not dialectically bound up in instinct (emphasis in the original):

> Horkheimer and Adorno failed to recognize the communicative rationality of the lifeworld that had to develop out of the rationalization of worldviews before there could be any development of formally organized domains of action at all. It is only this *communicative rationality*, reflected in the self-understanding of modernity, that gives an inner logic—and not merely the impotent rage of nature in revolt—to resistance against the colonization of the lifeworld by the inner dynamics of autonomous systems.
> *Horkheimer und Adorno verkennen die kommunikative Rationalität einer Lebenswelt, die sich im Gefolge der Rationalisierung von Weltbildern entwickelt haben mußte, bevor es zur Ausbildung formal organisierter Handlungsbereiche überhaupt kommen konnte. Allein diese* kommunikative Rationalität*, die sich im Selbstverständnis der Moderne spiegelt, verleiht dem Widerstand gegen die Mediatisierung der Lebenswelt durch die Eigendynamik verselbständigter Systeme eine innere Logik—und nicht nur die ohnmächtige Wut der revoltierenden Natur.*[423]

Here Adorno appears as an irrationalist Hegel, and Habermas's conceptual innovation carves a way out of the Frankfurt School's deadlock: replacing class struggle with a sort of sanitized psychoanalysis on a societal scale, a talking cure for the contradictions of capitalism. In pursuit of this project, as we have seen, Habermas undertakes operations that would have struck Adorno as profoundly undialectical and Marcuse, at the very least, as hopelessly conflict-averse. The structural logics of Freudian theory and Hegelian dialectics are in many places analogous, most of all where they foreground the counterintuitive ubiquity of antagonism. Whereas Adorno and Marcuse utilize psychoanalysis as a supplement to Marxist political economy, Habermas merely trades one for the other in a way that blunts the radical edge of both, jettisoning the emancipatory horizon of class struggle in favor of a discursive model of reconciliation.

Habermas's entire oeuvre, as we have seen, can be read as an attempt to create a system adequate to the Adornian categorical imperative without the dialectical conceptual apparatus that lent the Frankfurt School's critique of fascism both its explanatory power and its utopian horizon, making him a necessary but only tenuously adequate defender of liberalism against insurgent political reaction. Yet as this study has endeavored to demonstrate, regardless of where Habermas claims his political allegiances lie, his theoretical and political deviation is nonetheless eminently understandable. Originally meant to revitalize Marxism, critical theory itself required a reconsolidation to remain relevant in the context of global political crisis with their roots in the seemingly pacified (but at best deferred) class conflict of Western liberal democracies. The implication of Habermas's theory is that in these alienated welfare state societies, it is only the civil servants overseeing "political steering" who are in a position to "arrange their thoughts and actions" with any consequence. Habermas, having finally put critical theory in a position to give practical advice, naturally found that defending Marxism (even covertly, as had been the custom at the Institute for Social Research) while trying to convince those with a chance to govern in capitalist Germany was very impractical indeed.

By contrast, the best example of what might be considered a Habermasian lifeworld pathology, never fully comes into view as such in his early work, but motivates his project all the same: Habermas witnessing firsthand the mass denialism of West German society regarding the

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[423] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 333.

crimes of the Third Reich, which, as he recounts, hit home for him in the realm of philosophy and prompted his forceful rebuke to Heidegger's reemergence from professional hibernation.[424] It is difficult not to see the pathological character of the cultural defense mechanisms undergirding the enormous repression involved in the tenuous rehabilitation of German society. Habermas unsurprisingly refuses to attribute this to ideology per se, because his evolutionary model of societal development allows him to explain them in biologistic terms, as sickness deviating from a normative state of health. Habermas requires a positive concept of discursive will formation through rational-critical debate because he recognizes the dangers of false consensus consisting in a shared delusion—hence the need to talk it out.

Habermas's system, rather than merely shifting over the course of his staggeringly encyclopedic corpus, gives the impression of the reformulation and elaboration, in ever evolving terms, of a broad continuity. This is perhaps the respect in which Habermas hews closest to Hegel of anyone else in the dialectical tradition—along with his faith in the market. What makes him stand out in this line of gadflies and tricksters, and provocateurs is that the result of his synthesis is remarkably anodyne. Yet paradoxically Habermas secures his place in the dialectical tradition in precisely this way, by killing its most sacred cow, ruthlessly and seemingly by necessity, shifting critical theory's political center of gravity to the right for fear of losing relevance in a conservative age and and further ceding legitimacy to more reactionary elements. In the tradition of the figures we are examining, even those who inveigh the most heavily against Hegel, are nevertheless Hegelian in their own way.

But it is indisputably Habermas's turn away from the harder edge of dialectics in both its Marxist and conservative articulations that enabled his subsequent reign as the philosopher laureate of liberal internationalism, and it should not come as a surprise when the triumph of "joyless reformism" challenges a new generation of thinkers to abandon a political center that proves less secure than anticipated. In the political and intellectual history described here, to take up the Hegelian mantle is to reclaim the spirit of curmudgeonly provocation that, despite all outward signs of resignation, keeps a vision of utopia alive, preserved in negation. The goal of philosophy, radicalized by dialectics, is the elucidation of what "always already" is, for the sake of understanding what could be otherwise—what never was, or is no more, but may still be someday.

[424] See Habemas, "Work and Weltanschauung: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective," in *The New Conservatism*, 140-67.

4.2 – The New Punk: The Contrarian-Affirmative Provocations of Peter Sloterdijk

It is now clear why Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer would use the term *Staatsphilosoph* to describe the new standard-bearer not just for critical theory but for German and even European philosophy as a whole—Jürgen Habermas—whose curmudgeonly mentor, once the possibility of revolution was foreclosed, had chosen withdrawal over statecraft. In hindsight, the first real test of Habermas as the public advocate of the liberal capitalist order occurred before reunification, in an episode dubbed the *Historikerstreit* (usually translated as "historians' debate," though the German *Streit* carries a more hostile connotation). Here the stakes of consensus about the legitimacy of the postwar order are demonstrated: Indeed, the affair was a test, not only for Habermas but broadly for West German society at the time, and a bellwether of actual progress attained through the cultural discourse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, coming to terms with the past. At issue was whether German society had been forced to learn anything at all from the Third Reich, whether it could even be generally agreed upon that there was anything particularly bad about it—if not, Adorno's worst fears were already well on their way to becoming reality. Either way, the deathly menace of a new conservatism had only begun to cast its shadow over a continent that Marx had long ago imagined watched over by a very different specter.

Habermas's main antagonist in the affair was Ernst Nolte, a former student of Martin Heidegger and a conservative historian at the Free University of Berlin. What concerns Habermas, here as elsewhere, is a broader tendency towards Holocaust revisionism and the trivialization of Germany's Nazi past on the political right in West Germany. From arguments made in criminal trials to public statements by the leadership of the governing Christian Democratic Union, the '80s saw conservatives in the Federal Republic relativize the horror of the Holocaust by depicting it as on par with—even an understandable response to—atrocities attributed to Stalin and the "totalitarian" menace of state socialism. "[T]oday barriers are breaking down which until yesterday had stood fast,"[425] Habermas declares at the start of what has come to be regarded as his definitive contribution to the debate, which first appeared in the Nov. 7 1986 issue of *Die Zeit*. He quotes with palpable agitation a floor speech by Alfred Dregger, at that time the parliamentary chairman of the CDU:

> We are concerned about the lack of history and the lack of consideration towards our own nation. Without an elementary patriotism, which is quite natural to other people, our people too will not be able to survive. Whoever misuses the so-called "overcoming of the past" [*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*]—which was certainly necessary—in order to make our people incapable of a future, must meet with our opposition.[426]

For Habermas, this revisionist impulse already actively participates in the rehabilitation of anti-Semitic and anticommunist shibboleths of National Socialist propaganda that he will go on to expose in the work of his fellow intellectuals. At the same time, he reads the phenomenon as a manifestation of the general "neoconservative" reaction not only to the modest cultural and political gains of the student movement, but also to the "joyless reformism" of modern life in the liberal-democratic capitalist frame, within which the would-be revolutionaries of the 1960s and '70s continued to operate.

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[425] Jürgen Habermas, "Concerning the Public Use of History," *New German Critique* 44 (Spring-Summer 1988), 41.
[426] Habermas, "Concerning the Public Use of History," *New German Critique* 44, 41-2.

As early as 1980, in a speech given upon accepting the Adorno Prize in Frankfurt am Main, Habermas develops a typology of conservatisms, dividing political opposition to modernity into three categories: the "postmodern" neoconservatives [*Neukonservative*], the "premodern" old conservatives [*Altkonservative*], and the "antimodernist" young conservatives [*Jungkonservative*]. Habermas's terminology will almost certainly strike the contemporary reader as confusing, not least because the *Jungkonservative* include, in Habermas's book, the entire tradition of French poststructuralism, which "leads from Georges Bataille through Foucault to Derrida. Over all these figures hovers, of course, the spirit of Nietzsche, newly resurrected in the 1970s."[427] It is not at all obvious that these categories are mutually exclusive, but while Habermas sometimes uses "neoconservatism" to refer to 20th century, often specifically postwar conservatism at large, what appears to distinguish the neoconservatism of the American cultural theorist Daniel Bell and Arnold Gehlen in Germany from the neo-Aristotelianism of classicist *Altkonservative* like Leo Strauss is a practical and distinctly modern preoccupation with the question of "how to establish norms that will restrain libertinism, restore discipline and the work ethic, and promote the virtues of individual competitiveness against the levelling effects of the welfare state."[428] In what follows, we will see how Habermas's title as Germany's preeminent philosopher is challenged by Peter Sloterdijk, a self-styled Nietzsche for our times in whom elements of all three of these conservatisms coincide.

As we noted earlier in this chapter, Habermas himself arguably partakes in the reactionary anxiety about "the levelling effects of the welfare state," and it was in affirmation of Bell's thesis that Habermas declared "the end of ideology."[429] However, the neoconservatives, whose intellectual lineage he traces to Carl Schmitt and Ludwig Wittgenstein, "locate the blame for the dissolution of the Protestant ethic, something which had already disturbed Max Weber, with an 'adversary culture', that is, with a culture whose modernism encourages hostility to the conventions and the values of everyday life as rationalized under economic and administrative imperatives."[430] With economics and politics "immunized as much as possible from the demands of moral-practical legitimation," Habermas argues, "all that all that remains of cultural modernity is what is left after renouncing the project of modernity itself. The resulting space is to be filled by traditions which are to be spared all demands for justification."[431] In his intervention in the *Historikerstreit*, Habermas identifies precisely this recuperative project at work:

> [N]eo-conservative interpretations of the present situation play an important role...the moralizing resistance to our most recent pre-history obstructs the free view of Germany's thousand year history before 1933. Accordingly, without a memory of national history, which has been subjected to a "thought ban," we cannot create a positive image of ourselves. Without a collective identity, the argument continues, the forces of social integration would disappear.[432]

Proponents of the redemptive reading of German history that downplays contemporary complicity are pushing up against the most foundational taboo of West German society with the stated rationale that transgression would restore national identification, and therefore a stable,

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[427] Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on* The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity (Boston: MIT Press, 1997), 53.
[428] Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," 42.
[429] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* Vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 353.
[430] Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," 42.
[431] Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," 54.
[432] Habermas, "Concerning the Public Use of History," *New German Critique* 44, 45.

traditional source of meaning, to its rightful place in modern life. Only nominally a dispute over the facts of the uniqueness or "singularity" [*Einzigartigkeit*] of the Holocaust, a debate about the very soul of the nation played out on the pages of *Die Zeit* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* from the summer of 1986 well into the following year—one-quarter of the way into the eventually 16-year-long chancellorship of Christian Democrat Helmut Kohl, the German counterpart to Reagan and Thatcher who outlasted both the Anglo-American scions of neoliberalism as well as the East German state Reagan infamously demanded Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev relinquish unto its demise.

Although Nolte and other conservative West German academics like Michael Stürmer and Andreas Hillgruber had previously laid out such theses in their scholarly work, it was not until Nolte's article in the June 6, 1986, edition of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that a nationwide controversy erupted. "A conspicuous shortcoming of the literature on National Socialism," Nolte writes, "is that it doesn't know, or doesn't want to admit, to what extent everything that was later done by the Nazis, with the sole exception of the technical procedure of gassing, had already been described in an extensive literature dating from the early 1920s."[433] If the singularity of the Nazis can be reduced to a literal technicality, Nolte contends, "then the so-called annihilation of the Jews during the Third Reich was a reaction or a distorted copy and not a first act or an original." According to Nolte, who takes pains to justify National Socialism's conflation of Jewishness and the communist threat, it was downright understandable: "Could it be that the Nazis, that Hitler carried out an 'Asiatic' deed only because they regarded themselves and those like them as potential or actual victims of an 'Asiatic' deed? Was not the Gulag Archipelago more original than Auschwitz? Was not the 'class murder' of the Bolsheviks the logical and factual prius of the 'race murder' of the National Socialists?"[434] Habermas, cognizant of the deeper recuperative function of these provocations, refuses to engage the claims on their own terms, at the level of factuality, harkening back to the *Positivismusstreit* outlined earlier in this chapter: "It is not an issue of Popper versus Adorno, it is not a question of disputes about scientific theory, it is not about questions of value-free analysis—it is about the public use of history."[435] Nolte and others instrumentalized historiography for a political end that Habermas identifies as an existential threat to the FRG, namely, beating back the liberal political culture Habermas understands as essentially Western and therefore foundational to the postwar German social fabric: The public performance of these provocations do not "serve the purpose of enlightenment. They touch on the political morality of a community which—having been liberated by Allied troops without any German assistance—was established in the spirit of the Western understanding of freedom, responsibility and self-determination."[436] Though Habermas's charge is loaded with what should by now be a familiarly characteristic sympathy for the politics of the US and Western Europe, his liberal-democratic zeal is here (as we would expect) expended in direct confrontation with resurgent fascism, the phantom of Adorno's nightmares and the premise of his categorical imperative for Germany and the world. In other words, for Habermas, no matter how many generations removed from complicity in the Holocaust they may be, Germans have forfeited the right to simply speak for themselves.

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[433] Richard Wolin, Introduction to *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 29.
[434] Habermas, *The New Conservatism*, 29.
[435] Habermas, "Concerning the Public Use of History," *New German Critique* 44, 48.
[436] Habermas, "Concerning the Public Use of History," *New German Critique* 44, 50.

To stem the tide of nationalism and uphold the values of West German society, Habermas calls for the "critical appropriation of traditions" in the form of a "constitutional patriotism,"[437] a concept he openly borrows from the political scientist Dolf Sternberger, the intellectual founding father of the Federal Republic known for his critique of Carl Schmitt's theory of political antagonism. Habermas's solution is partial by his own admission, but he is, once again, primarily invested in the reconciliation of oppositions from which radical social upheaval could arise. I claim that in this way, rather paradoxically for one still associated with the contrarian provocation of the Frankfurt School's first generation, Habermas's job as a public intellectual became the policing of dangerous ideas. Habermas's liberal turn transformed critical theory into a workable philosophy that emerged from the Cold War as the predominant school of thought at German universities and remains so to this day, outflanked only by pockets of analytic, Heideggerian, and Schmittian philosophical orientations traditionally associated with the political right.

The absence of a viable socialist alternative shifts the political center of gravity to the right, and as we noted earlier in this chapter, its absence from academia in the West did not merely reflect a prevailing sentiment that Marxism was unfashionable, but also was largely a function of the purging of the left from civil service and most other institutional fixtures of public life. The *Radikalenerlass* ("Anti-Radical Decree") went into effect in January 1972, and by 1975, over three hundred people had been either denied or dismissed from public service posts because they were flagged as left-wing extremists whose political views were in opposition to the *freie demokratische Grundordnung* ("free democratic basic order") of West Germany.[438] Habermas—who, already sensitive from his early days in Frankfurt to the imperative to abandon Marxism, did not have to be told twice—recognized that postwar Germany's investment in consensus is considerable and requires a number of concessions on the part of critical theory that Adorno himself was not willing to make. The result is inoffensive enough to appeal to the people responsible for serious governance, economic and political leaders who could really change things, but pays its own price. An echo throughout the modern era, and a recurring theme of our study thus far, has been the structural symmetry, an affinity of pure opposition, between left- and right-wing interpretations of history and current events in contradistinction to those of the liberal center. On the terrain of German and US politics in the "postmodern" age of global capitalism, the political right holds the ideological high ground so long as it is counterbalanced solely by a conciliatory (by the mid-1990s, thoroughly neoliberal) reformism, and conservative orientations appear in turn as the only available opposition to the real or imagined hegemony of mainstream liberalism. The counterfactual utopia of Habermas's communicative rationality dissolves into an ethereal wisp the moment it is confronted with fundamental oppositions between different interests and values. It was, after all, at the dawn of this conservative *Tendenzwende* in the early '70s—the name given to the decided shift of West German public opinion towards political reaction over the course of that decade which would concern Habermas so greatly by its end—that he inherited the mantle of the "conscience of a nation" from Adorno to begin with.

In 1999, when Habermas was called upon again, it was to face a new evolution in the threat to German consensus: Sloterdijk, who proposes to disrupt the monotony of joyless reformism in the West with a "return" to traditions of Greco-Roman antiquity, values even further removed from the realm of emancipatory political action than those that underlie critical

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[437] Habermas, *The New Conservatism*, 193.

[438] K.H.F. Dyson, "Left-wing Political Extremism and the Problem of Tolerance in West Germany," *Government and Opposition* 10, no. 3 (Summer 1975): 308-9.

theory in its Habermasian incarnation. Sloterdijk, in the frame of this investigation, belongs to the generation of Christa Wolf's Rita Seidel, born in 1947 in the Karlsruhe area of the German state of Baden-Württemberg to a Dutch father who had been a sailor and happened to end up in southwest Germany at the end of the war. It is not my intention to place Sloterdijk in the Hegelian tradition, but to show how he defines himself in opposition to the Adornian Frankfurt School of his early education and above all to the stale complacency of its current Habermasian incarnation. Sloterdijk entered the German university system in 1968, studying at the Universities of Munich and Hamburg where, as he put its it in a 2007 interview with Eric Alliez for the journal *Cultural Politics*, his "original philosophical training" was "steeped...in young-Hegelian and Marxist thinking, particularly in its Adornian version,"[439] until receiving his PhD in 1975. So Sloterdijk looked elsewhere for inspiration, and elsewhere is where he found it: In 1978 he moved to India, where he lived at the ashram of Indian mystic and cult leader Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh in the city of Pune. Through French poststructuralism he rediscovered German philosophers rendered untouchable by their associations with fascism, Martin Heidegger and Nietzsche—in the fateful lecture which drew Habermas's ire, Sloterdijk refers to the latter as the "master of dangerous thinking"[440]— and was, in particular, an early appreciator of Foucault. He recounts that "it was the great stroke of luck of my intellectual life that I encountered these French Nietzscheans at a point when it was inconceivable to read Nietzsche in Germany."[441]Though quite comfortable as professor (formerly rector) at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design in his hometown, Sloterdijk continues to occupy something of a uniquely oppositional niche in German academia, and it was not by dint of warm reception by his colleagues that he came to prominence: He was a freelance writer when he finished his *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983), which sold over 70,000 copies in its first year of publication,[442] shattering records for sales of a German philosophy book and rivaling Wolf's *Kassandra* as the literary blockbuster of the year.[443]

Sloterdijk begins the book in Nietzschean fashion with a eulogy for philosophy—100 years post mortem, by his count. The book is divided into a "phenomenological" (*Phänomenologisches Hauptstück*), a "logical" (*Logisches Hauptstück*) and a "historical" (*Historisches Hauptstück*) section—each of which seems to contain equivalent amounts of "history," "logic," and "phenomenology"—and diagnoses the spiritual malady of the West in the postmodernity as "cynicism," a form of ideology for the post-ideological age that Sloterdijk defines, playing on the Marxist idiom, as "enlightened false consciousness." This "modernized, unhappy consciousness," Sloterdijk writes, alluding to the Hegelian subject that misrecognizes itself as merely particular, "has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice."[444] Cynicism is the inevitable result of, among other steps, of a Marxist theory of ideology that ultimately implicates everything, even itself (*qua* body of knowledge in the superstructure), as a "necessarily false consciousness": "In the gaze of the

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[439] Eric Alliez, "Living Hot, Thinking Coldly: An Interview with Peter Sloterdijk," *Cultural Politics* 3, no. 3 (Nov. 2007): 321.
[440] Sloterdijk, "Rules for the Human Zoo: a Response to the *Letter on Humanism*," from *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27 (2009): 21.
[441] Alliez, "Living Hot, Thinking Coldly: An Interview with Peter Sloterdijk," 321.
[442] Sjoerd van Tuinen, "Critique Beyond Resentment: An Introduction to Peter Sloterdijk's Jovial Modernity," *Cultural Politics* 3, no. 3 (Nov. 2007): 277.
[443] Neil Wilson, "Punching out the Enlightenment: A Discussion of Peter Sloterdijk's *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft*," *New German Critique* 41 (Spring-Summer 1987): 53.
[444] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 5.

Marxist system-critic, there glitters an irony that is a priori condemned to cynicism. For the critic admits that ideologies, which from an external point of view are false consciousness, are, seen from the inside, precisely the right consciousness."[445] In a repetition over a move we have already seen carried out by Habermas himself, Sloterdijk rejects Adorno and the entire lineage of Hegelian Marxism. Only this time, Adorno is the demonstrable climax of the project of Enlightenment philosophy as a whole—a project which Habermas had already abandoned Marxism in order to recuperate.

Habermas, as we have seen, claims to break free of the straightjacket of Adorno's totalizing conception of instrumental reason, premising his critique of "functionalist reason" on the undialectical new category of communicative reason. By embracing the premise of Adorno's political quietism, the infeasibility of radical action, he reduces critical theory's utopian negativity to a sort of lame consensus-building exercise. For Sloterdijk, it is Adorno who represents the endpoint of the dialectic of enlightenment as "the unavoidable politicization of thinking,"[446] modernity's attempt to understand itself through the "unmasking" of the workings of the cunning of reason, that is, hidden causal mechanisms behind surface-level phenomena humans once experienced as innocent and personally meaningful. The resignation to which "Marxist functionalism" has led is proof positive, for Sloterdijk's intents and purposes, that the critique of the enlightenment as dialectical fails to break out of the very dynamic it seeks to describe, thus remaining consistent with the tradition of idealism since Plato, a tyrannical abstraction from the reality of existence.

Like Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, to which it can be read as a response, Sloterdijk does not limit his account of the process of enlightenment to the historical timeframe roughly coinciding with the 18th century. The book presents eight "unmaskings," from the critique of Revelation through Marx's critique of labor (unveiling class interest), Nietzsche's critique of morality (unveiling *ressentiment*), Freud's critique of transparency (unveiling the post hoc nature of rationality), and ending in the poststructuralist critique of the illusion of privacy (unveiling the fictive character of the subject). Sloterdijk traces the "polemical" impulse of the Enlightenment is traced back even further, locating its origins in the Greek satirical tradition, specifically in the figure of Diogenes: Sloterdijk celebrates his historical avatar for his crude, sometimes scatological rejoinders to Socrates and Plato in colorful episodes like this one, in which

> Diogenes refutes the language of philosophers with that of the clown: "When Plato put forward the definition of the human as a featherless biped and was applauded for it, he tore the feathers from a rooster and brought it into Plato's school saying, 'That is Plato's human'; as a result, the phrase was added: 'with flattened nails'." That—and not Aristotelianism —is the real-philosophical antithesis to Socrates and Plato. Plato and Aristotle are both master-thinkers, even if a spark of Socrates' plebeian street philosophy is still present in the Platonic ironies and dialectic mannerisms. Diogenes and his followers countered this with an essentially plebeian reflection. Only the theory of this cheekiness can open up access to a political history of combative reflections.
> *Diogenes widerlegt die Sprache der Philosophen mit der des Clowns: "Als Platon die Definition aufstellte, der Mensch ist ein federloses zweifüßiges Tier, und damit Beifall fand, rupfte er einem Hahn die Federn aus und brachte ihn in dessen Schule mit den Worten: 'Das ist Platons Mensch'; infolgedessen ward der Zusatz gemacht: 'Mit*

[445] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 20.
[446] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, xxvii.

> *abgeplatteten Nägeln.'" Das—und nicht der Aristotelismus—ist die realphilosophische Antithese zu Sokrates und Plato. Herrendenker sind Plato und Aristoteles beide, mag auch in den platonischen Ironien und dialektischen Allüren noch ein Funke von Sokrates' plebejischer Straßenphilosophie nachwirken. Diogenes und die Seinen setzen dagegen eine essentiell plebejische Reflexion -. Die Theorie dieser Frechheit kann erst den Zugang zu einer politischen Geschichte kombattanter Reflexionen eröffnen.*[447]

Diogenes develops these tactics out of fundamental opposition to the "hegemony of Athenian idealism," the philosophy of the masters whose cynical command of irony made their theoretical arguments unanswerable by conventional means. Thus the roots of modern cynicism—which, by the latter half of the 20th century, has the most sophisticated dialectics at its disposal—lies in its ancient opposite, the "cheekiness" (*Frechheit*) of "kynicism," personified in the vulgar defiance of the trickster Diogenes. In other anecdotes, Diogenes urinates, defecates, and masturbates in public, each time, according to Sloterdijk, scoring one for the little guy.

Over the course of two millennia the base, animalistic resistance of kynicism (the Greek *kynikos* means "like a dog") is not only suppressed but also gradually appropriated, emptied of its politics of combative embodiment, by the many successors to the Athenian elite in the history of Western civilization: "Modern cynicism, by contrast, is the masters' antithesis to their own idealism as ideology and as masquerade. The cynical master lifts the mask, smiles at his weak adversary, and suppresses him."[448] This attitude, in which the axiom "knowledge is power" reveals its deleterious effect on knowledge, emerges in the 19th century, in the opposition between an organized, socialist worker's movement ("the old German social democracy," who strove after the "middle-class" [*biedermeierlich*] goal of "cultivation" as a means to power) and the bourgeoisie, undeserving students of Nietzsche's "right-wing cynicism of the masters" ("*den rechten Herren-Zynismus*," an obvious analogue to Nietzschean *Herrenmoral* or master morality):

> Nietzsche taught a realism that was supposed to make it easy for the upcoming generations of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois to take their farewell from idealistic absurdities, which curbed the will to power. … In Nietzsche the middle classes could study the subtleties and clever crassness of a will to power that had lost its ideals, while the workers' movement looked furtively at an idealism that better suited its still naive will to power.
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> *Nietzsche dozierte schon einen Realismus, der kommenden Bürger- und Kleinbürgergenerationen den Abschied von idealistischen Flausen, die den Machtwillen hemmen, leichtmachen sollte; die Sozialdemokratie strebte nach Teilhabe an einem Idealismus, der bis dahin das Machtversprechen in sich getragen hatte. An Nietzsche konnte das Bürgertum bereits die Raffinessen und klugen Grobheiten eines ideallos gewordenen Machtwillens studieren, als die Arbeiterbewegung nach einem Idealismus schielte, der ihrem noch naiven Machtwillen besser zu Gesicht stand*.[449]

These ideological orientations—left-wing and idealist, the other conservative and vitalist, but both cynical to varying degrees—are reconciled in the "modernized unhappy consciousness" of

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[447] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 102; *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft* Vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), 207.
[448] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 111.
[449] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, xxvii; *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft* Vol. 2, 9.

the homogenized subject of the 20th century welfare state. Cynicism functions in an attempt to recover the gap, now openly exposed after an age of failed experiments, between the real and the ideal. It is in this context that Sloterdijk goes on to read the radical social movements of the '60s as an implicitly anticommunist rejection of the cynical endpoint of critique, namely, a patronizing conservatism the West German student movement recognized and resented in Adorno, though they could not coherently articulate why. It is fair to say that Sloterdijk could not have asked for a more thematically and stylistically appropriate example of this than the *Busenaktion*, which he describes with a particularly tasteless flourish of Hegelian antimetabole (emphasis mine): "Here, on one side, stood naked flesh, exercising 'critique'; there, on the other side, stood the bitterly disappointed man without whom scarcely any of those present would have known what critique meant—cynicism in action. It was not *naked force* that reduced the philosopher to muteness, but the *force of the naked*."[450] One of the book's arguably intended ironies is that Sloterdijk's interpretation of events is itself incredibly cynical and patronizing: "Without knowing it and, for the most part, even without wanting to know it (in this country even with an outraged resoluteness not to recognize it), the New Left is an existential Left, a neokynical Left—I risk the expression: a *Heideggerian Left*."[451] In their resistance to what in their eyes might as well have been orthodox Marxism in the Frankfurt School, and in their failure to adhere to any revolutionary socialist program that had been handed down, this anarchic, anti-functionalist ideological formation—though its members were too stupid to know it—walked in the footsteps of Diogenes, voicing in the end only a feeble echo of his "existential-ontological adventure."[452]

Sloterdijk maintains that the book's theoretical perspective is oriented around this "iconoclastic—and 'Left-wing'—reading of Heidegger," but has, in the course of his well-publicized rightward political trajectory disavowed it as a naive "romanticism of dissidence."[453] Yet even in this first book, Sloterdijk's project is clearly a culturally conservative, recuperative one, concerned (as Hegel with the French Revolution) with explaining the failure of radical movements to attain the utopian liberation they promise. But unlike the Marxist thinkers we have examined thus far, Sloterdijk's Hegel is Nietzsche, and as we will continue to explore, Sloterdijk himself becomes Germany's premier purveyor of Nietzsche's "right-wing *Herren-Zynismus*." In the course of his extended plea for a radical transvaluation of values what remains unshakeable is the ambivalent—which is to say, defiant in the face of Enlightenment—sympathy for the values of antiquity as well as the conviction that when knowledge is power and politics is reduced to the interminable clashing of identities, a Greco-Roman fountain of cultural meaning will remain closed off which Sloterdijk sees as the only opportunity for the salvation of the West in postmodernity. As a result of the manic drive to recover something stable, the national social body divides into warring factions, plunging its atomized members into the solitude and disaffection of permanent cultural instability. The solution involves a return to a traditional (which is to say, Eurocentric) conception of shared Western heritage. There is no ambiguity about who is meant by "we" when Sloterdijk proclaims dramatically, on page one of the preface, that "[i]n our thinking there is no longer any spark of the uplifting flight of concepts or of the ecstasies of understanding. We are enlightened, we are

[450] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, xxxvii.
[451] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 209.
[452] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 320.
[453] van Tuinen, "Critique Beyond Resentment: An Introduction to Peter Sloterdijk's Jovial Modernity," 277.

apathetic."[454] It is perhaps not quite accurate to describe the *Critique of Cynical Reason* as a response to the Frankfurt School, since it merely talks past them in view of capitalizing on a mass audience which had already been moving further and further from the politics of the New Left for more than a decade. Beyond the short-lived novelty of his regular references to "piss" and "shit," Sloterdijk is clearly writing for a popular audience and openly flouts scholarly rigor: He is not above resorting to historically questionable cliches ("From the dawn of time," he muses, "human sentiment has regarded the old as the true"[455]) and will sometimes dismiss a term as nonsense before using it with no apparent irony in another passage. His books include many images of paintings and other visual illustrations: His awed account of Otto von Bismarck's ambition and clarity of thought ("Bismarck hated liberalism [*Freisinn*, sense of freedom] possibly even more than the 'red hordes' of social democracy"[456]) is accompanied by a painting of Frederick the II at his writing desk in his study, in the company of his dogs. Kynical dissidence frees us to live with the disinhibition of its namesake canine, with the joviality and irreverence lost to us "moderns."

In his *Punk Rock and German Crisis*, Cyrus Shahan considers Sloterdijk's kynicism in the context of a reading of punk in the FRG of the late '70s and early '80s as an irreducibly multivalent response to the disillusionment and terror accompanying the decline of radical-emancipatory grand narratives on both sides of the wall. Shahan quotes from the passage about the *Busenaktion* in the preface to the *Critique*, where Sloterdijk continues his extended metaphor: "Wanting to get to the 'naked truth' is one motive for a desperate sensuousness, which wants to tear through the veil of conventions, lies, abstractions, and discretions in order to get *to the bottom of things*."[457] For Shahan, a proper account of the West German punk scene tells the story of "how punk was acutely aware of the failures of previous interventions," in light of which "it picked up cultural materials to tear down the present and reject the possibility of its own future," but regardless of any superficial similarities the "anarchic socio-aesthetic tensions" of punk's anti-political rebellion are fundamentally at odds with what in Sloterdijk's unveiling of convention is a politically recuperative project: "[W]hereas Sloterdijk envisions this unveiling as the means to make sane the eighties 'schizoid culture,' his desire to set the clock back two hundred years and remedy cultural criticism of the affective stagnation he claims Adorno propagated is precisely the neo-Nietzschean postmodernism that would plunge the Federal Republic into a technocratic abyss."[458] As we will see later on in this section, however, this is not to say that the ethos of punk is entirely without resonance in right-wing discourses about the perceived hegemony of liberal cultural values.

Despite its hip and edgy flair and its incontrovertible commercial appeal, the *Critique of Cynical Reason* reads like a self-help book for conservative classicists—ironically, it seems to serve as a more convincing example of polemic masquerading as critique than any of Sloterdijk's own. "He implies that to overthrow the Enlightenment with words or deeds will be a good thing, but he does not seem to be so sure about how one goes about dealing with the banality of revolution," Neil Wilson argues in an essay for *New German Critique* in 1987, the year Sloterdijk's book was published in English translation. "Our suspicions that the Enlightenment has suffered a reversal of fortune are corroborated and our desires for a return to a state of

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[454] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, xxvi.
[455] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 14.
[456] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 81.
[457] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, xxxviii.
[458] Cyrus Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 144-5.

innocence where our projects are free of vice and wickedness are shared."[459] Andreas Huyssen, in the foreword to the English edition, is understandably defensive, claiming that it was due not to an honest reading of the text, but rather to discomfort at the resonance of Sloterdijk's critique of the Enlightenment with the increasingly rightward ideological movement of West German society in the preceding decade that "the Left responded by trying to relegate Sloterdijk's essay to the dustbin of history, as a rotten ware of late capitalist decline."[460] In many cases, this may well be, but critics like Wilson read Sloterdijk carefully enough to notice that "[h]is objective, in spite of his denials, appears to be the reconstitution of an orderly past that has direction and design."[461] It would not be until the following year, when Suhrkamp published a collection of his lectures that, after the *Historikerstreit* appeared done and dusted, Sloterdijk would make his contribution in print, lamenting that his generation of Germans has never known the feeling

> …of solid ground under one's feet and empowering traditions at one's back. One is here always, in a peculiar way, ontologically of bad parentage, one has only an abyss behind oneself where others have a lineage, and feels like a refugee when others appear to be still at home in their rights as natives. Since 1945 one has only the indescribable at one's back and is branded with limitless horror.
> *…guten Grund unter den Füßen und stärkende Überlieferungen im Rücken zu haben. Man ist hier immer auf eine seltsame Art ontologisch von schlechten Eltern, man hat Abgründe hinter sich, wo andere Stammbäume haben, und fühlt sich als Flüchtling, wo andere in alten Heimatrechten zu Hause zu sein scheinen. Seit dem Jahr 1945 hat man vollends das Unbeschreibliche im Rücken und ist vom unbedingten Schrecken tätowiert*.[462]

Sloterdijk's frustration with the perceived liberal moratorium on nationalist or culturally conservative sentiment, here practically dripping with disdain, is however already palpable in the *Critique*. There he mourns German nationalism with a striking nostalgia for its infancy. "It has been a long time since Germans could hear a mutual resonance of progressive and patriotic motives; the reaction has incorporated national feeling for too long," Sloterdijk writes, giving what would otherwise be a rather banal observation an oddly wistful air. "Two hundred years ago things looked a little different."[463] Indeed. The utility of Sloterdijk's proposed remedy amounts to nothing more than the satisfaction of the contrarian urge to say "nuh-uh," a kynical stone's throw from William F. Buckley's famous image of the conservative who stands athwart history.

It is in the context of Sloterdijk's *modus operandi*, since the 1980s, of culturally conservative transgression (which Habermas had already seen modeled by the CDU and right-wing intellectuals in the *Historikerstreit*) that what is known alternatively as the *Philosophenstreit*, the *Sloterdijk-Affäre*, or less commonly (usually in Sloterdijk's company) the "Sloterdijk-Habermas affair" becomes readable not only as a historical, but also a philosophical event. Translating the German *Streit* as "debate" would be even more of a misnomer than in the *Historikerstreit*, since Habermas's intervention was limited to a private letter, sent to a number of

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[459] Neil Wilson, "Punching out the Enlightenment: A Discussion of Peter Sloterdijk's *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft*," 64.
[460] Andreas Huyssen, "Foreword: The Return of Diogenes as Postmodern Intellectual," from: Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, ix.
[461] Wilson, "Punching out the Enlightenment: A Discussion of Peter Sloterdijk's *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft*," 67.
[462] Sloterdijk, *Zur Welt kommen – zur Sprache kommen. Frankfurter Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 48; translation my own.
[463] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason,*

his friends at major media outlets, outlining his concern about a 1999 lecture, given at a Heidegger symposium at the Bavarian Schloss Elmau, called "Rules for the Human Zoo: A Response to Heidegger's Letter on Humanism," in which Sloterdijk, in the most generous reading, attempts to chart novel coordinates for humanity's self-conception beyond the Enlightenment tradition of humanism. Already criticized by Heidegger in the titular letter (later published as an essay) of 1946, humanism's attempt to make good on its "commitment to save men from barbarism," can for Sloterdijk be considered a failure insofar as rendering human beings harmless has manifested "the contemporary tendency towards the bestialization of humanity."[464] Sloterdijk spills considerable ink at the outset in the service of beating back what he considers unfair character assassination of Heidegger, with whom he shares a penchant for gratuitous neologisms and a yearning to see the modern world reechanted. Responding to an admirer in Paris named Jean Beaufret, who inquired, naively as it turns out, how humanism might be saved, Heidegger replies that humanism assumes we are "rational animals" when we are not animals at all—the human animal exists in a state of neoteny, maturation outside of the womb, constituted in a qualitatively different world and in need of self-domestication through language. This is the meaning of Heidegger's dictum that "language is the House of Being": According to Heidegger's antihumanist ontology, "'in the determination of the humanity of man...what is essential is not man but Being'," a decentering of subjectivity which for Sloterdijk "bound man into a relationship with Being that imposed radical constraints on his behavior. It contained him, the shepherd, within the house or in its neighborhood," which Sloterdijk following Heidegger calls "the Clearing" (*Die Lichtung*).[465]

In calling attention to humanity's embeddedness in nature, Sloterdijk argues, Heidegger actually points to the openness of the field of being itself: We are constituted first in the womb, and then in the Clearing, in which we become ourselves by being responsible shepherds in touch with nature through ascetic "inactivity and receptivity," or something like that. For Sloterdijk, the point of all of this seems to be that we have not adequately theorized human autoplasticity and that existential neoteny makes the breeding of humans by humans an inescapable fact of civilization with which we must contend from a bioethical perspective, but his reflections, while unfocused and inconclusive, are all the more disconcerting as a result. There is a strangely incriminating tangent that one imagines cannot have been intended to remind the reader that Heidegger was an unrepentant Nazi: "In the tragic battle of the titans of the mid-century, between bolshevism, fascism, and Americanism, Heidegger saw only three varieties of the same anthropocentric power, three candidates for a humanistically camouflaged form of world domination."[466] It is not difficult to see what Habermas, who had already fought precisely on this terrain in the *Historikerstreit*, may have found disconcerting about this casual equivocation, which goes nowhere only to be brushed off at the beginning of the next paragraph as just one of several "weird criticisms and twists."[467] Such rhetorical moves, however, are not atypical for Sloterdijk: In his later work, which features a more spirited celebration of capitalism than he ventures in the *Critique*, he is fond of referring to "Lenin, Stalin, Hitler and Mao,"[468] a quartet of horsemen for the 20th century apocalypse in which German fascism, by the numbers, plays only a fractional part.

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[464] Sloterdijk, "Rules for the Human Zoo: A response to the *Letter on Humanism*," 14.
[465] Sloterdijk, "Rules for the Human Zoo: A response to the *Letter on Humanism*," 18.
[466] Sloterdijk, "Rules for the Human Zoo: A response to the *Letter on Humanism*," 19.
[467] Sloterdijk, "Rules for the Human Zoo: A response to the *Letter on Humanism*," 20.
[468] Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 211.

It is similarly unsurprising that Nietzsche features prominently in what is essentially a Heideggerian update of his *Sittlichkeit der Sitte* or "morality of custom": "As Zarathustra wandered through the city in which everyone had grown smaller," he sees the work of "priests and teachers who pretend to be friends of man," of whom he says, "'To them virtue is whatever makes modest and tame; this is how they made the wolf into the dog and mankind himself into mankind's favorite pet'. From Zarathustra's perspective, modern men are primarily profitable breeders who have made out of wild men the Last Men,"[469] hornless herd animals robbed of all vitality and self-regard. "This is the root of the basic conflict Nietzsche postulates for the future: the battle between those who wish to breed for minimization and those who wish to breed for maximization of human function, or, as we might say, a battle between humanists and superhumanists [*Über-Humanisten*]."[470] Although Sloterdijk claims that his intention in following this line of argument—which, it should be remembered, was not originally meant for public consumption—is merely to raise the question of who today makes up the caste of "priests and teachers" may "wish to breed for minimization" with the help of future advances in genetic engineering, his obvious antipathy towards the humanist "taming of man" leaves him in a familiar Nietzschean position, swayed from the radical by the reactionary, intoxicated by the sobriety of a self-aware admiration for master morality and the thoughtless brutality of the man of action. The current that runs throughout the lecture—and, I claim, the political beating heart of Sloterdijk's philosophy—is precisely this longing to be unencumbered by the history of modernity and the cultural change it has brought.

Accounts of what happened next vary, but the lecture proved controversial even for a Heidegger conference, and bootleg drafts began to circulate. One found its way to Habermas, who wrote a furious letter to Assheuer at *Die Zeit* and other like-minded journalists, exhorting them all to inveigh publicly against Sloterdijk for effectively endorsing the position of the *Über-Humanist* and the use of the Nazi-tainted words *Züchtung* (breeding) and *Selektion*—as Jan-Werner Müller notes, the contemporary equivalent is *Auswahl*, and moreover, Sloterdijk "broke a taboo that had existed in German intellectual life since the end of the Third Reich."[471] Denied the dignity of facing the man he considered his accuser, Sloterdijk took this all very personally, as, it appears, does Sjoerd van Tuinen in the special issue of *Cultural Politics* devoted to the Sloterdijk interview. It is not enough that Sloterdijk was labeled a fascist and an advocate for eugenics in the nation's feuilletons, van Tuinen recounts:

> [A]fter the first attacks in *Der Spiegel* and *Die Zeit*, many respected academics such as Henri Atlan, Richard Dworkin, Manfred Frank, and Ernst Tugendhat also felt the need to react in various other European periodicals without taking the trouble to seriously read or contextualize Sloterdijk's text…. As typical representatives of the silent takeover of philosophy by 'professionalized' 'ethics,' they immediately cried fire and quite happily made a grotesque category mistake between ontology and democracy, assuming that they had before them an inferior text on moral 'rules' instead of a post-Heideggerian meditation on the essence of 'prescriptions'.[472]

Van Tuinen makes a point of translating the German *Regeln* in the title of Sloterdijk's lecture as "prescriptions," not "rules," stressing the provisional character of the thoughts outlined therein,

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[469] Sloterdijk, "Rules for the Human Zoo: A response to the *Letter on Humanism*," 22-3.
[470] Sloterdijk, "Rules for the Human Zoo: A response to the *Letter on Humanism*," 23.
[471] Jan-Werner Müller, "Behind the New German Right," *The New York Review of Books* 4/2016.
[472] van Tuinen, "Critique Beyond Resentment: An Introduction to Peter Sloterdijk's Jovial Modernity," 293-4.

ostensibly in order to downplay the authoritarian undercurrent unfairly imputed to Sloterdijk. In van Tuinen's view, this was all a big misunderstanding, a "grotesque category mistake," albeit a sinister one that confirms Sloterdijk's own suspicions about the cynicism lying just beneath the pretense of liberalism in the Frankfurt School's second generation, which, having cried wolf, should no longer be indulged in its flights of moral panic. Habermas, for all his talk of the force of the better argument, chose not to engage in an argument at all.

In a response van Tuinen describes as a "judo-like reaction", Sloterdijk then published two letters, one to Habermas and one to Assheuer, in the 9. September 1999 issue of Die Zeit with the headline "*Die Kritische Theorie ist tot*". His diction is sardonic as he dismisses Habermas's reading as a wild secondhand exaggeration, "*Sehr geehrter Herr Habermas*," Sloterdijk begins the second letter. "*Gerüchte reisen bekanntlich schnell*." ("Dear Mr. Habermas – Rumors famously travel fast.)"[473] Van Tuinen gushes that "these letters constitute a vehement protest against the progressive convergence of hypermorality and overmediatization,"[474] essentially repeating Sloterdijk's own accusation that his liberal critics were engaging in a performative witch-hunt the likes of which might be labeled "cancel culture" today. However, it is possible that no epithet hurled at Sloterdijk in the feuilletons struck the sort of nerve that Habermas did by refusing to dignify him with a personal response. Sloterdijk rejecting Habermas's characterization of his philosophy as *jungkonservativ* (the fact that most English-language accounts simply translate *jungkonservativ* as "neoconservative" only adds to the confusion here) while decrying his "*in Latenz gehaltener Jakobinismus – eine sozialliberale Version der Tugenddiktatur*" and drawing other ludicrous comparisons from the conservative vernacular ("*selbst das NS-Regime war technisch langsamer*").[475] When Habermas, downplayed his influence, Sloterdijk responded by accusing him and Assheuer of *Linksfaschismus* ("left-wing fascism")[476] a label which, as we will recall, Habermas himself had a hand in popularizing, but was quickly appropriated by the right.

It is not merely of incidental significance that the historian Stürmer, previously the object of Habermas's indignation in the *Historikerstreit*, defended Sloterdijk when the besieged philosopher appeared on the *Baden-Badener Disput* television program Stürmer cohosted on the regional *Südwest-Fernsehen* channel in the '90s. "*Die Ära der hypermoralischen Söhne von nationalsozialistischen Vätern läuft zeitbedingt aus*," Sloterdijk writes in closing. "*Denken heißt Danken, hatte Heidegger gesagt. Ich meine eher, Denken heißt Aufatmen.*"[477] Sloterdijk's sigh of relief is not serene: It is the performance of throwing off shackles, in this case extirpating the constraining original sin of Germanness, a doctrine preached by the Jacobinical high priest Habermas. Sloterdijk's generational argument carries a reactionary implication, the contours of which become more clearly discernible in his later writing on economics and culture: We ordinary people are not so politically correct, and we will be tame animals no longer. What this all amounts to is that Habermas, regardless of the facts of the case, judged Sloterdijk more or less correctly, although it is important to note that the orientation he identifies as "fascist" in

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[473] Sloterdijk, "Die Kritische Theorie ist tot. Peter Sloterdijk schreibt an Assheuer und Habermas," *Die Zeit* 9/9/1999.
[474] van Tuinen, "Critique Beyond Resentment: An Introduction to Peter Sloterdijk's Jovial Modernity," 294.
[475] Sloterdijk, "Die Kritische Theorie ist tot. Peter Sloterdijk schreibt an Assheuer und Habermas," *Die Zeit* 9/9/1999.
[476] Heinz-Ulrich Nennen, *Philosophie in Echtzeit – Die Sloterdijk-Debatte: Chronik einer Inszenierung* (Würzberg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 195
[477] Sloterdijk, "Die Kritische Theorie ist tot. Peter Sloterdijk schreibt an Assheuer und Habermas," *Die Zeit* 9/9/1999.

Sloterdijk is located in a space that is not only *jungkonservativ*, but also increasingly *neukonservativ*, another evolution in the line of reactionary "neoconservative" thinkers concerned with the loss of cultural meaning to a sterile, hegemonic liberal modernity. To recapitulate, Habermas counts among the *Jungkonservative* the broadly Nietzschean theorists most associated with French poststructuralism, most prominently Foucault and Derrida, and he considers Heidegger an integral part of this tradition. Their "antimodern" orientation consists in an aestheticization of politics that, by training its radical negativity on modernity as a whole, disavows all concrete political action: "They locate the spontaneous forces of imagination and self-experience, of affective life in general, in what is most distant and archaic, and in Manichaean fashion oppose instrumental reason with a principle accessible solely to evocation, whether this is the will to power or sovereignty, Being itself or the Dionysian power for the poetic."[478] Habermas notes this category of Nietzscheans as the philosophical opponents of greatest interest to him personally (here left- and right-wing Hegelians would also be in contention). I claim that Habermas's primary concern with this school of thought is its disinhibiting effect on antisocial instincts constrained by liberal cultural norms. This concern is shared, from a slightly different angle, by the postmodern *neukonservativ* camp, who "welcome the development of modern science so long as it only oversteps its own sphere in order to promote technological advance, capitalist growth and a rational form of administration. Otherwise, they recommend a politics directed essentially at defusing the explosive elements of cultural modernity."[479] Sloterdijk's embrace of capitalism and criticism of both the welfare state and liberal cultural norms will only become more central to his philosophy and public persona in the new millennium.

While it may have been called an "affair," what is remarkable is how normalized and harmless the permanent scandal of Sloterdijk became as his star continued to rise in the German media environment of the 21st century. Sloterdijk flew largely under the radar in the Anglosphere until fairly recently and much of his work remains untranslated, but he became a household name in the German-speaking world after clashing with Habermas, hosting the monthly talk show *Im Glashaus – Das philosophische Quartett* ("In the Glass House – The Philosophical Quartet") along with the historian and philosopher Rüdiger Safranski on the German broadcaster ZDF. In 2005 the magazines *Foreign Policy* and *The Prospect* named Sloterdijk one the world's "top 100 public intellectuals," one of three Germans on the list along with Pope Benedict XVI and Habermas.[480] As Müller notes, "German intellectuals mostly sided with Habermas, but Sloterdijk emerged from the scuffle with his status considerably enhanced. He was now a national figure who stood for everything that Habermas did not."[481]

In place of the meek, tentative social cohesion provided by the liberal consensus of Habermas's recuperative humanism, Sloterdijk seeks in the exit from modernity a bolder affirmation, a Nietzschean *Bejahung*, saying "yes" to life, that does justice to the wonder of the world. The contrarian would rather be polarizing and useful than achieve consensus by trying to please everyone, or through compromise, which inevitably amounts to the same thing. Freed from the conceptual prison of outdated categories like "class" and "society," Sloterdijk had found his niche: the resentment of *ressentiment*, the contrarian affirmation of what exists. Sloterdijk found a national audience by appealing not only to conservatives but also precisely the class of

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[478] Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," 53.
[479] Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," 54.
[480] "The Prospect/FP Top 100 Public Intellectuals," *Foreign Policy* 10/2005.
[481] Müller, "Behind the New German Right," *The New York Review of Books* 4/2016.

liberals who lurched to the right in the neoliberal era: According to Müller, "Sloterdijk often simply reads back to the German mainstream what it is already thinking, just sounding much deeper because of the ingenuous metaphors and analogies, cute anachronisms, and cascading neologisms."[482] A 2018 profile in *The New Yorker* observes that Sloterdijk has "a strong following among wealthy elites, who value the intellectual patina he provides for their world views." Nicolas Berggruen, a billionaire investor who "recently established an annual million-dollar philosophy prize," tells *The New Yorker* that "Sloterdijk takes on the biggest issues, but in the least conventional ways."[483] If "modern cynicism" can be found anywhere in the world, it surely consists in this *rechte Herren-Zynismus*, attested to by the readiness with which the post-reunification BRD became enraptured by a thinker whose repertoire is limited to cartoonish Nietzsche impressions. This is precisely how affluent liberals like to be provoked—from the right, in a way that wildly exaggerates their own radicalism.

Sloterdijk slots into a place in the dialectic of Enlightenment all too easily with his trademark provocation that insists the project of modernity can only be finished by expunging the latent radicalism of its ideological development since the days of classical liberalism and the Lockean axiom of "life, liberty and property": "[U]nder conditions of globalization no politics of balancing suffering on the large scale is possible that is built on holding past injustices against someone, no matter if it is codified by redemptive, social-messianic, or democratic-messianic ideologies,: he writes in the 2006 anticommunist screed *Rage and Time*, where he updates Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment*. "It is much more important...to create a space for future paradigms of detoxified worldly wisdom. The criteria are not all that new—John Locke, the mastermind of the liberal English bourgeoisie, expressed them in a simple language in 1690: the basic rights to life, freedom, and property."[484] Sloterdijk's lip service to classical liberalism in this book is indicative of his increasingly bellicose defense of capitalism, born out of a critique of the welfare state that extends far beyond the tepid ambivalence of the early Habermas. The increasingly open embrace of right-wing values and rhetoric since the dawn of the millennium, not just by Sloterdijk but by much of the West including Germany, is reflected in the substance of what might be considered the next few "Sloterdijk affairs," perhaps the most notable of which was spurred by an essay published in the June 6, 2009 issue of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in which he calls for the deconstruction of the German *Sozialstaat*, including the abolition of the income tax, on the basis that it is, in so many words, theft.

The central premise of "*Revolution der gebenden Hand*," an abridged version of which was translated by the conservative Manhattan Institute and published in English translation by *Forbes* in January 2010, is that the German government overtaxes its most productive citizens. Progressive taxation, Sloterdijk writes, might be justified if the real relation of exploitation between the upper and lower classes of society corresponded to the "*Kritik der aristokratischen und bürgerlichen Kleptokratie, die mit Rousseaus ahnungsvoll drohenden Thesen begonnen hatte,*" which "w*urde vom radikalen Flügel der Französischen Revolution mit der erbitterten Begeisterung aufgenommen, die der gefährlichen Liaison von Idealismus und Ressentiment entspringt*" ("The critique of aristocratic and bourgeois kleptocracy, which began with the presciently threatening theses of Rousseau, was taken up by the radical wing of the French Revolution with a hardened zeal borne of the dangerous liaison between idealism and

[482] Müller, "Behind the New German Right," *The New York Review of Books* 4/2016.
[483] Thomas Meaney, "A Celebrity Philosopher Explains the Populist Insurgency," *The New Yorker* 2/19/2018.
[484] Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*, 228.

ressentiment.")[485] Palpably irritated at the resurgence of Marxist motifs and anti-capitalist sentiment more broadly in the wake of the 2007-8 global financial collapse, Sloterdijk takes issue with the radical equation of capitalist productivity with exploitation and dispossession codified in contemporary Germany's "*Semi-Sozialismus*," a term which is not meant in a nice way. If ever such a relation of exploitation and dispossession obtained, he argues—and he does not concede even this, citing with contempt Brecht's adage about the comparative evils of robbing a bank and founding one—then it has certainly been inverted today: "*Lebten im ökonomischen Altertum die Reichen unmissverständlich und unmittelbar auf Kosten der Armen, so kann es in der ökonomischen Moderne dahin kommen, dass die Unproduktiven mittelbar auf Kosten der Produktiven leben*" ("In an earlier day the rich lived at the expense of the poor, directly and unequivocally; in a modern economy unproductive citizens increasingly live at the expense of productive ones").[486] And for this society's productive citizens receive not thanks but scorn, for it is generally accepted that it is only the unproductive who are owed anything. For this Sloterdijk blames not just the left, of whom nothing better can be expected, but the right, which had been in power for all but seven of the last 27 years in the BRD. The "centrism" of the Christian Democrats under Kohl, which commenced the "implosion of the political space, that advent of a boundless conformism that is the unthought element of the Habermas System."[487] At that time in a governing coalition with Sloterdijk's favored Free Democratic Party (FDP), the CDU under the chancellorships of Kohl and his "Tochter" Angela Merkel had seen the postwar welfare state degenerate into a "*Lethargokratie*," rule by the lazy.[488]

Axel Honneth, Habermas's successor as director of the Institute for Social Research, lambasted Sloterdijk in *Die Zeit*, indicting him not only for the essay but for its philosophical premises, including the claim advanced in *Rage and Time* that socialism and fascism draw their energy from the common root of *ressentiment*.[489] It is also worth mentioning that Sloterdijk is simply wrong about the facts: I argue that the broad perception that the CDU has moved to the left, leaving the welfare state intact, is based on a number of bizarre misreadings of history—it ignores, for example, the neoliberal gutting of the *Sozialstaat* under the "red-green" coalition government of Social Democrat Gerhard Schröder, which lowered taxes considerably for Sloterdijk's *Leistungsträger* while introducing new work requirements for welfare recipients.[490] By the time the CDU returned to power under Chancellor Angela Merkel, the SPD had moved so far to the right on economic issues that the conservatives had only to maintain the status quo to ensure that austerity would continue apace. Other critiques noted that by Sloterdijk's own numbers, the vast majority of the government's tax revenue comes from indirect taxes like sales taxes, which as Rudolf Walther points out in the *Tageszeitung* are highly regressive, meaning that in Germany today, contrary to the thesis of the essay, "*die Unteren zahlen, gemessen an ihrem Einkommen, überproportional viel*" ("relative to their income, those at the bottom pay disproportionately more").[491]

Most provocative of all was Sloterdijk's suggestion that the tax burden on the wealthy in Germany is so outrageous that it justifies insurrection on the part of the *Leistungsträger* (about

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[485] Sloterdijk, "Revolution der gebenden Hand," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 6/62/2009; translation mine.
[486] Sloterdijk, "Revolution der gebenden Hand," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 6/62/2009; "A Grasping Hand," *Forbes* 1/27/2010.
[487] Alliez, "Living Hot, Thinking Coldly: An Interview with Peter Sloterdijk," 314.
[488] Sloterdijk, "Aufbruch der Leistungsträger," *Cicero* 11/2009.
[489] Axel Honneth, "Fataler Tiefsinn aus Karlsruhe," *Die Zeit* 9/24/2009.
[490] Wolfgang Ochel, *CESifo DICE Report* 3, no. 2 (2010): 18-25.
[491] Rudolf Walther, *Die Tageszeitung* 10/26/2009.

25 of the BRD's 82 million citizens, he reckons): "*Voll ausgebaute Steuerstaaten reklamieren jedes Jahr die Hälfte aller Wirtschaftserfolge ihrer produktiven Schichten für den Fiskus, ohne dass die Betroffenen zu der plausibelsten Reaktion darauf, dem antifiskalischen Bürgerkrieg, ihre Zuflucht nehmen*" ("Each year modern states claim half the economic proceeds of their productive classes and pass them on to tax collectors, and yet these productive classes do not attempt to remedy their situation with the most obvious reaction: an anti-tax civil rebellion").[492] He then presumably intends to chasten his readers, to shock them out of their conformist revulsion, with the historical precedent that Queen Victoria, when introducing England's first income tax, had doubts about whether even five percent was an unreasonable imposition. Sloterdijk's "anti-fiscal" call to arms is virtually indistinguishable, apart from the sophistication of its terminology, from the rhetoric of the Tea Party movement in the United States, an event now easily readable as a harbinger of Donald Trump's presidency and the rise of neofascist movements across the West in the decade to follow.

Closer to home, Sloterdijk's proposal was welcomed by Freie Demokratische Partei leader Christian Lindner, whose libertarian *Liberalen* regularly receive Sloterdijk's endorsement in German elections, and with whom Sloterdijk most recently shared the stage at an official FDP event focusing on the topic of "political correctness" and the "threat of a new collectivism."[493] Sloterdijk tells *The New Yorker* in the wake of the 2017 German federal elections that the "most appealing scenario would be for the FDP to share a coalition with Merkel's Christian Democrats…. They could inject some sense into them."[494] If it remains unclear what Sloterdijk's idea of good fiscal sense is, that confusion is compounded even further by his proposed solution, replacing the present regime of taxation with a system of public honor for the wealthy, who would be compelled to contribute to social welfare not by a coercive state but by according to what he calls an "ethics of gifting" ("*Ethik der Gabe*"). Though it is only mentioned once in "*Revolution der gebenden Hand*," a passing reference in concluding paragraph, the conceptual apparatus undergirding what seems to be a laughably inadequate means of financing the affairs of a society—one struggles to image a welfare state funded by charity—is the theory of "thymotic energy." A countervailing force to the erotic drive exists in the human being, Sloterdijk writes, but it is not the death drive theorized by psychoanalysis, the "aggressive instinct" that convinced Freud, as we explored in the previous chapter, that an end to war was more than humanity could hope for. The twin of Eros is not Thanatos, but the libidinal energy the ancient Greeks called *thymos*.

In an argument developed at length in *Rage and Time*, first Christianity and then, in the course of secular modernity, psychoanalysis has provided the ideological basis for the cultural stigmatization of a range of affects (such as rage) associated in antiquity with power, excellence, and the heroic. that are not only untapped but actively suppressed in contemporary society. The most accurate contemporary translation of *thymos*, Sloterdijk writes, is *Beherztheit* ("stout-heartedness"), although it encompasses "human pride, courage, stout-heartedness, craving for recognition, drive for justice, sense of dignity and honor, indignation, militant and vengeful energies,"[495] and anecdotally it appears to coincide most often in his texts from this period with some version of pride or vicarious self-identification. In the celebration of those

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[492] Sloterdijk, "Revolution der gebenden Hand," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 6/62/2009. "A Grasping Hand," *Forbes* 1/27/2010.
[493] Thea Dorn, Christian Lindner, Andreas Rödder, Peter Sloterdijk, panelists, "Individuelle Freiheit unter Druck. Geht der Trend zum Kollektivismus?" 1/29/2020.
[494] Meaney, "A Celebrity Philosopher Explains the Populist Insurgency," *The New Yorker* 2/19/2018.
[495] Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*, 14.

emotions we find values easily identifiable as the *Herrenmoral* of Nietzsche, referred to here as "the most inspiring neo-thymotic psychologist of modernity."[496] The *Ethik der Gabe* harkens back to the ancient Greek ideal of the magnanimous benefactor, whose charity would restore the conditionality and reciprocality inherent in the tradition of gifting to the societal transfer of wealth for the common good that under current conditions amounts to highway robbery. In place of the current system of *Zwangssteuern*, in which the productive upper crust pay taxes involuntarily only to be resented for their remaining wealth by the "parasitic poor,"[497] Sloterdijk evisions a truly deserving elite who would receive public honors for their gifts and therefore give willingly. This line at the end of "Revolution of the Hand that Gives" is expanded upon at length in the collection of essays and interviews published as *Die nehmende Hand und die gebende Seite* ("The Hand that Takes and the Giving Side"), where Sloterdijk again calls for the abolition of mandatory taxation and complains about the political and media fixation on Germans committing tax evasion in Switzerland. Referring to the then-recent story of *Steuerflüchtlinge* ("tax refugees") whose identifying information was leaked on CD-ROMs by a French whistleblower in 2010, Sloterdijk suggests "*mir schiene es klüger, man erstellte eine Kassette mit den Namen derer, die freiwillig mehr geben*" ("It would make more sense to make a cassette with the names of those who voluntarily give more").[498] It is not clear whether he believes such an arrangement would avoid intensifying hierarchy by further stratifying society according to official rank and privileges, but it is also not clear that this is an implication he would particularly mind. In the most generous reading, it does not seem to have occurred to Sloterdijk that the feudal nobility who gave "gifts" to the monarch in medieval Europe may have had some expectations as well. "The domestication of rage creates the ancient form of a new masculinity," he explains. "Indeed, the remaining affects that are useful for the polis are incorporated into the bourgeois *thymos*," which survives as "manly courage" (*Mannesmut*) and in other forms of justified rage, but also "civil courage, the meager level of courage for losers," exemplified in German culture after 1945.[499] Sloterdijk's Nietzschean revulsion at weakness is clearly operative in his conception of gifting as an activity of the "thymotic economy," which is to say, as a masculinist display of power. The elite benefactors of antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modernity all give because they have the power to give, but concerns about inequality (or "asymmetry") are bracketed as what Sloterdijk, for what one can only assume is the lack of a better word, calls "miserabilism."[500] Sloterdijk becomes envious when he turns his gaze westward, finding some consolation in his observation that "the thymotic use of wealth in the Anglo-American world, above all, in the United States, could become a persistent fact of society. On the European mainland, on the other hand, it could not so far establish itself—largely because of blind trust in the state, subventions, and traditions of celebrating misery."[501] For Sloterdijk, who fancies himself the torchbearer of Nietzschean *Bejahung*, the rejection of slave morality enables an unproblematic embrace of empirical inequality, whereby the domination of the stronger is not attributed to greed or malice but to joy in the partaking of creation.

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[496] Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*, 26.
[497] Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital: Towards a Philosophical Theory of Globalization* (Boston: Polity, 2013), 229.
[498] Sloterdijk, *Die nehmende Hand und die gebende Seite: Beiträge zu einer Debatte über die demokratische Neubegründung von Steuern* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2011).
[499] Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*, 12.
[500] Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital: Towards a Philosophical Theory of Globalization*, 226.
[501] Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*, 35.

Thymotic energy is not limited to the "material base" of economics as traditionally conceived: It pervades every aspect of social life. In 2005's *In the World Interior of Capital*, which purports to be Sloterdijk's treatise on globalization, capitalist postmodernity appears as a force of destabilization internal to nation-states that had previously been thymotically sealed. The international flow of capital and labor presents the existential threat not only of uncompetitiveness, disinvestment, poverty, and so on, but also of cultural homogenization, which for the national community constitutes de facto annihilation and grounds for thymotically-fueled popular resistance leading to the the creation of local "immunities," the politics of which, Sloterdijk seems all too pleased to warn, will "make abstract progressives blush": What people really want, and all that politics can give them without veering into the realm of the misguided and the catastrophic, is the security of "successfully lived life, which does not become what it can without being immune, self-preferential, exclusive, selective, asymmetrical, protectionist, uncompressible and irreversible. This catalogue may sound like the summary of a far right party manifesto," Sloterdijk admits, "however, it lists the characteristics that inhere in the infrastructure of becoming in real human spheres."[502] Under conditions of globalization, Sloterdijk argues, existing hierarchies are deepened by a natural ingroup dynamic of self-preservation, and there is nothing particularly wrong with that. As a younger, nominally less conservative Sloterdijk once wrote of Diogenes's lowbrow philosophy, "Ethical living may be good, but naturalness is good too."[503]

It is impossible to read Sloterdijk's reference to a "far-right party manifesto" today without a touch of irony. One detail that went mostly unnoticed in the 2009 intervention seems remarkably prescient: Decrying the backlash to his tax reform proposals as yet another witch hunt by Habermasian conformists, Sloterdijk extended his solidarity in the conservative monthly *Cicero* to Thilo Sarrazin, the former Berlin finance senator who was already being raked over the coals in the media and threatened with expulsion from the SPD over the central argument of his forthcoming book *Deutschland schafft sich ab: Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen* ("Germany abolishes itself: How we are jeopardizing our country," 2010). Sloterdijk affirms Sarrazin's claim that the multiculturalist project of "integrating" immigrants into German society is a fool's errand tantamount to the suicide of national culture. In what should by now be a familiar rhetorical move, Sloterdijk frames the violation of a liberal taboo not as a disinhibiting act of public transgression, but as courageous truth-telling. "*Weil er so unvorsichtig war, auf die unleugbar vorhandende Integrationsscheu gewisser türkischer und arabischer Milieus in Berlin hinzuweisen, ging die ganze Szene der deutschen Berufsempörer auf die Barrikaden, um ihm zu signalisieren: Solche Deutlichkeiten sind unerwünscht*," he writes ("Because he was so careless as to point to the undeniably prevalent hesitation to integrate on the part of certain Turkish and Arab milieus in Berlin, the entire German professional outrage machine manned the barricades to send a message: These facts are not welcome"). It is par for the course for Sloterdijk—not to mention an apt demonstration of the usefulness of Nietzsche's critique of morality for conservative politics today—to declare the universal hypocrisy of all who claim the moral high ground before wildly exaggerating the threat to freedom of speech posed by criticism of Sarrazin (and himself) in the media: "*Auf Wahrheit soll künftig die Höchststrafe stehen: Existenzvernichtung*" ("Soon the truth will carry the highest penalty: extermination").[504] Sloterdijk's "far-right party manifesto" was already being written, and by the time the 2017

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[502] Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital: Towards a Philosophical Theory of Globalization*, 264.
[503] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 106.
[504] Sloterdijk, "Aufbruch der Leistungsträger," *Cicero* 11/2009.

elections rolled around, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) stormed into the Bundestag as the third-largest party.

The AfD was founded in 2013, a year before the emergence of the anti-immigrant street protest movement Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident (PEGIDA), with which the party maintained a symbiotic relationship in its formative years that saw its initially primarily Eurosceptic nationalism, rife with xenophobic stereotypes about the undeserving Southern European recipients of European Union bailouts, blossom into a broadly antiliberal, culturally reactionary party of the "populist" far right. In January 2016, at the height of the so-called *Flüchtlingskrise* ("refugee crisis"), Sloterdijk gave an interview to *Cicero* which reflected the palpably darkened tone of the debate surrounding Merkel's refugee policy and the concomitant obligation of *Willkommenskultur* in the immediate wake of the gang sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve. Sloterdijk, who had in the meantime taken more and more trading in existential threats, declares that, "*Es gibt schließlich keine moralische Pflicht zur Selbstzerstörung*" ("there is no moral duty to self-annihilation"): Merkel's "*Akt des Souveränitätsverzichts*" ("abdication of sovereignty") had allowed Germany to be "overrun" by Muslims whose creed "*lässt sich keine authentische Zivilgesellschaft führen*" ("is incompatible with authentic civil society") and "*diese Abdankung geht Tag und Nacht weiter*" ("this abdication continues day and night"), weakening Europe to the delight of US President Barack Obama.[505]

After yet another wave of outrage from the dreaded *Berufsempörer*, Sloterdijk spent the next couple of years defending himself in every available forum, and perhaps what is most striking is how many forums remained available to him. In *Die Zeit* he defended himself and Safranski, who had made similar comments "*gegen die 'Flutung' Deutschlands mit unkontrollierbaren Flüchtlingswellen*" ("against the flooding of Germany with uncontrollable waves of refugees")[506] and would go on to express his admiration for AfD leader Alexander Gauland, "*eine satisfaktionsfähige Figur des Konservativen*" ("an acceptable representative of conservatism").[507] Sloterdijk distinguished his own "*Linkskonservatismus*" from "*'nationalkonservative,' um nicht zu sagen neu-rechte Tendenzen*" ("'national conservative', not to mention neo-fascist tendencies") and "*irrwitzigen AfD-Positionen*" ("crazy AfD positions"), charging his critics with a blindness to nuance that, in a particularly awkward turn of phrase, he compares to the Cologne attacks themselves: "*Sie fallen dadurch auf, dass sie Ideen umzingeln wie Frauen in Silvesternächten*" ("They are distinguished by encircling ideas like women on New Year's Eve").[508] As a "left-conservative," Sloterdijk told *Der Spiegel*, he is of the opinion that, "*Die Rechtspflege und die sozialen Solidarsysteme lassen sich bisher nur im nationalen Rahmen erhalten und ausbauen. Nichtmitgliedern unbeschränkten Zutritt zu gestatten, mutet da wie eine Geste der Selbstzerstörung an*" ("The administration of justice and the welfare state can only be maintained and expanded at a national level. To allow non-members unrestricted access seems like an act of self-annihilation").[509] It is unclear what in particular separates this view from the politics of the AfD or the other conservative positions Sloterdijk articulates: As his tax reform proposals have already made clear, however, if Sloterdijk is concerned for the welfare

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[505] Christoph Schwennicke, "Peter Sloterdijk über die Flüchtlingskrise: 'Es gibt keine moralische Pflicht zur Selbstzerstörung,'" *Cicero* 2/2016.
[506] Sloterdijk, "Primitive Reflexe," *Die Zeit* 3/3/2016.
[507] Sebastian Hammelehle, "Rüdiger Safranski: Es gibt keine Pflicht zur Fremdenfreundlichkeit," *Der Spiegel* 3/17/2018.
[508] Sloterdijk, "Primitive Reflexe," 3/3/2016.
[509] Romain Leick, "Peter Sloterdijk über seinen zunehmenden Konservatismus," *Der Spiegel* 6/30/2017.

state, it is an imaginary one, given his silence about the devastating Hartz IV reforms under Schröder (of which Sarrazin, incidentally, remained a leading proponent).

What Sloterdijk's distancing moves consistently reveal is a single-minded intent to hammer home a distinction without a difference: He clarifies in an interview on the *Deutschlandfunk* radio program *Sein und Streit* that, "*Als Staatsbürger bin ich konservativer als in meiner Rolle als Philosoph*" ("I am more conservative as a citizen than in my role as a philosopher").[510] It is precisely his philosophical writing, however, that provides the most damning evidence that the "New Right" is Sloterdijk's intellectual progeny. The AfD's resident philosopher is Marc Jongen, a former state party chair and academic assistant to Sloterdijk in Karlsruhe whose appointment was suspended upon his election to the Bundestag, where he currently serves as deputy state leader for Baden-Württemberg.[511] "Sloterdijk has distanced himself from Jongen's self-declared 'avant-garde conservatism,'" notes Müller. "But the "psycho-political" perspective Jongen adopts is one of Sloterdijk's philosophical trademarks."[512] In what sounds like an excerpt from *Rage and Time*, Jongen tells the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* that the nation-state "*war sozusagen der letzte thymotisch aufgeladene soziale Grosskörper. Das supranationale Gebilde, sprich die EU, ist bereits eine postthymotische Struktur, die auch schon als Vorstufe eines befriedeten Weltstaates oder Nicht-mehr-Staates begriffen wird*" ("was, to to speak, the last thymotically charged collective social body. The supranational formation, i.e. the EU, is already a post-thymotic structure, which is also already understood to be the prelude to a harmonious world government or no-longer-government")[513] Annika Orich observes that "[w]hile Jongen emphasizes the significance of 'our Christian-humanistic orientation concerning moral questions,' he argues that they must be disregarded to ensure German culture's survival in a militant fashion. One must therefore raise Germans' thymotic tensions."[514] In view of the implications of Sloterdijk's philosophy, it is difficult to read his disavowal as a sign of intellectual or moral integrity rather than an act of political expediency.

Across the Atlantic, something was happening that was not so different: A murderer's row of conservative intellectuals and media personalities in the United States felt compelled to disavow, at convenient times and often only temporarily, the campaign and presidency of Donald Trump, for whom they had spent years unwittingly cultivating an audience on Fox News and in the pages of right-wing publications like Buckley's *National Review*, a practically vestigial bastion of middlebrow conservatism in the United States. As is well known, Trump himself has been asked with notoriously mixed results to distance himself from far-right organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and the neofascist ("Western chauvinist") Proud Boys, a de facto militia whose founder, the Canadian political commentator and archetypal Brooklyn hipster Gavin McInnes, also cofounded and supplied the editorial line of the early *Vice*. For several years before the election of Trump, McInnes, who styles himself as an irreverent, culturally conservative provocateur, had taken to declaring that "conservative is the new punk."[515] A number of other far-right internet personalities took up the slogan after Trump's victory only increased the backlash to—and seductive appeal of—the victorious oppressors, fed up with all the whining.

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[510] Armen Avanessian and Simone Miller, "Peter Sloterdijk über Gleichheit: 'Ausdehnung der Bürgerschafts-Zone,'" *Deutschlandfunk* 11/18/2018.
[511] Annika Orich, "Archival Resistance: Reading the New Right," *German Politics and Society* 38, no. 2 (2020): 18.
[512] Müller, "Behind the New German Right," *The New York Review of Books* 4/2016.
[513] Martin Helg, "'Wir müssen wehrhafter werden,'" *nzz am Sonntag,* 3/13/ 2016.
[514] Annika Orich, "Archival Resistance: Reading the New Right," 20.
[515] Gavin McInnes, "Punk Rockers Make Good Conservatives," *Taki's Magazine*, April 20, 2012.

And for a short period of time, even liberal outlets indulge the cartoonish mirage of reactionary cultural politics as anti-political defiance, which has since morphed back into other motifs but will never take leave of its pseudo-rebellious allure.[516] Notwithstanding anecdotes about the conservatism of Johnny Rotten and the late Johnny Ramone, McInnes's aggressively ahistorical claim doesn't make any reference to the history of political clashes in the genre of punk rock, fought by bands like the Dead Kennedys and the neo-Nazi band Skrewdriver in the '70s. To do so would be counterproductive for his aims: The point of the analogy is precisely to reposition conservatism away from the stolid, authoritarian connotations of its placement on the traditional ideological spectrum and into alignment with anti-political (if such a thing truly exists), even implicitly left-wing elements of rebellious provocation associated with punk as an attitude. In the context of the rightward drift of the West's political center of gravity, both the liberal center and increasingly nationalist conservatives are nevertheless happy to affirm a narrative that mirrors the conservative critique of capitalism in Hegel, who posits traditional social norms as countercultural in liberal modernity, and its partially inverted afterlife in Marx: namely, that the triumph of liberalism qua global capitalist system entails also the final triumph of liberal cultural values, which are themselves often unfairly conflated with the most radical left-wing politics on issues of race, gender, and colonialism. Resentment of this imagined outcome feeds the punk-rock conservative's affect of desperation and victimhood, aligning his reactionary iconoclasm with ordinary people whose traditional social values are under assault by the "cosmopolitan," "globalist" hegemony of politically correct elites.

Sloterdijk's rhetorical assaults consistently betray a satisfaction in unmasking the unmaskers, and his generous political self-identifications only echo the generations of conservatives, arguably since the founding of the modern political right in response to the French Revolution, who think of themselves not as adherents to a dogmatic right-wing ideology, but as "free thinkers" or *freie Geister*, anti-political private persons who simply wish to be left alone by pesky radicals of all stripes. From the scatological, irreverent critique of modernity to the more austere, eugenics-tinged critique of modernity to the "*Lob der Grenzen*" and "*Ethik der Gabe*," Sloterdijk reveals a predictable routine: provocation followed by the subsequent performance of aggrievement through calculated exaggerations, with the ostensible intent to shake sanctified, outdated, and uninterrogated assumptions he finds personally annoying. His relationship to the Frankfurt School is not one of shared lineage, but of fundamental antagonism and (dys)functional replacement. He is the symptom of rot at the heart of the Hegelian Marxist tradition that once challenged the reactionary critique of modernity but—as we have seen earlier in this chapter, according to Habermas himself—has been not only institutionally repressed, but robbed of its connection to the social movements which, by demanding the fulfillment of the emancipatory promise of modernity, continue to constitute its progressive element.

The dialectical tradition sought to understand the counterintuitive nature of appearances—to penetrate the surface of reality in order to redeem the whole in the name of what does not yet exist—but for Sloterdijk it is the appearances he wants to redeem, as Nietzsche did when he insisted, in the second essay of his *Genealogy of Morals*, on the impossibility of a radical break with history: "Ah, reason, seriousness, mastery over the emotions...all these privileges and showpieces of man, what a high price has been paid for them! How much blood and horror is at the bottom of all 'good things'!"[517] For Nietzsche, moralizing is both an aesthetic offense and an impracticality that impairs authentic connection to tradition. Sloterdijk attempts to

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[516] Scott Galupo, "Is Trumpism the New Punk Rock?" *The Week*, March 2, 2017.
[517] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 44.

reenact Nietzsche's relationship to German philosophy after Hegel, rampaging through the stagnant marsh of critical theory under the "Pax Habermasiana" like a barbarian horde. By that metric, he is a farcical imitation of the contrarian-affirmative "master of dangerous thinking." Where the dialectical curmudgeon, in plying his trade, runs the risk of precisely this conservative sophistry, Sloterdijk's Nietzscheanism consists of nothing else. What quickly becomes clear, in fact, is that Sloterdijk is much less Nietzsche under Kaiser Wilhelm than Heidegger under National Socialism, the *Staatsphilosoph* of a stateless postmodernity.

In his philosophical work since *Rage and Time*, he has struck a more professorial stylistic register, developing what he calls a "material anthropology" or "anthropotechnics" which "describes humans as the creatures that live in the enclosure of disciplines, involuntary and voluntary ones alike—from this angle , anarchisms and chronic indisciplines too are simply disciplines in alternative enclosures."[518] 2009's *You Must Change Your Life* is a celebration of asceticism in which Sloterdijk presents a regimen of "daily sequences of exercises" for "acrobatic existence," aesthetic procedures and subroutines people can use to channel the tensions of modern life into affirmative (that is to say, not constraining) self-discipline: "The tendency of my position is already manifest in the title of this book," Sloterdijk writes in the introduction, "whoever notes that it reads 'You Must Change *Your* Life' rather than 'You Must Change *Life*' has immediately understood what is important here."[519] Sloterdijk's longing for a return to premodern values always placed him closer than he cared to acknowledge to the neo-Aristotelianism of Habermas's "old conservatives." His classicism was always the inheritance of Nietzsche and Heidegger, an acknowledgment that if language is the house of being, then we still live in the house of the Greeks and the Romans. In his old age, it has taken a turn into the vulgar Aristotelianism of banal self-help: "Acrobatic existence de-trivializes life by placing repetition in the service of the unrepeatable. It transforms all steps into first steps, because each one could be the last."[520] Sloterdijk deals in performative contradictions, peddling visceral shock and ethical paradox in the name of shaking us out of the degenerate complacency that lets us take our lives and those of others for granted.

If any transgression has genuinely been held against him, he has been forgiven. In 2012, on the occasion of his 65th birthday, *Der Spiegel* called him "*Deutschlands virtuosester Philosoph und Debattenkünstler*,"[521] and with his 70th came amid a wave of media celebrations of his eclectic and complicated conservatism,[522] a welcome relief from the embarrassment of extreme elements who have inconveniently found their voices in his intellectual offspring, of whom Jongen is only the most prominent example. As Stuart Jeffries puts it, Sloterdijk "remains a popular figure in Germany because of rather than despite his controversial ideas."[523] The conservative German daily *Bild* was all too happy to report on *Cicero*'s 2019 list of the top 500 German-speaking intellectuals, on which Sloterdijk, Habermas, and Sarrazin placed first, second, and third, respectively.[524] Particularly beloved in Austria, Switzerland, and his native Baden-Württemberg, Sloterdijk's shenanigans have found an audience because they are not only

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[518] Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthro*potechnics (Boston: Polity, 2013), 109.
[519] Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthro*potechnics, 10.
[520] Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthro*potechnics, 207.
[521] "Miesmuscheln 'Zorn und Zeit': Sloterdijk zum 65.," *Spiegel Online* 7/8/2012.
[522] Johann Schloemann, "Unfrisierbarer Unhold: Peter Sloterdijk wird 70," *Die Zeit* 6/25/2017; Leick, "Peter Sloterdijk über seinen zunehmenden Konservatismus," *Der Spiegel* 6/30/2017.
[523] Stuart Jeffries, "German Philosophy Has Finally Gone Viral. Will That Be Its Undoing?" *Foreign Policy* 7/24/2017.
[524] Hans-Jörg Vehlewald, "Das sind Deutschlands Köpfe," *Bild* 1/29/2019.

contrarian but affirmative, the defiant theoretical justification of reactionary impulses. In 2016, following his comments on immigration, Austrian journalist Clarissa Stadler introduced him to viewers of the 3sat channel as "*der Superstar unter den Philosophen. Der Querdenker aus Karlsruhe*"—the term *Querdenker*, one who thinks differently or "crosswise," is a term which in light of its recent significance has been translated as "lateral thinker," but which more closely approximates the thrust of the aforementioned "free thinker" in a conservative ideological context. Philosopher and television host Yves Bossart began his interview with Sloterdijk on an episode of the Swiss program *Sternstunde Philosophie* by asking Sloterdijk with over-the-top reverence, "*Fühlen Sie sich manchmal wie ein Alien*?" ("Do you sometimes feel like an alien?") 10 years earlier, a week before "*Revolution der gebenden Hand*" appeared in *Die Zeit*, Sloterdijk was answering tarot questions on *Arte*. The inscrutable *Querdenker* thinks freely in all directions until arriving, mysteriously, on the political right.

"The most interesting thing about Sloterdijk may not be anything particular he has written," Martin Jay tells *The New Yorker*, "but simply the fact that he exists."[525] What to do with this fact is not entirely clear, but it is ignored at great peril. His undiminished cultural cache is a function of the crisis and decline of Marxism: The neoliberal era, having nullified the politically polarizing potentialities of dialectical thinking, let the dimming limelight for public intellectuals in Germany shine brightly again, and this time the intellectual holding the audience in his thrall cut a grotesque and reactionary figure.

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[525] Meaney, "A Celebrity Philosopher Explains the Populist Insurgency," The New Yorker 2/19/2018.

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