1

Genealogy One: Hegel's Plague

Lacan's idea that Hegel was responsible for a theoretical hystericization of philosophy is also what underpins Vincent Descombes's discussion of Kojève's impact in the 1930s.[1] I still believe today that a grounding in the patient reading of Hegel (which includes at least the Preface and some key passages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) is, if not a prerequisite, at least an essential step on the way to an understanding of Theory. The text is difficult to be sure, but the effort of teasing out its implications and mastering its dialectical idiom affords a good starting point after which one can maneuver freely in other discourses. In a similar vein, Michael Hardt has noticed that everything in French theory – to which one could add German theory – has tended to hinge around a rejection or an acceptation of Hegel's dialectics of negativity and mediation. The Hegel discussion was also crucial in the debate about Critical Theory which opposed Adorno and Benjamin, a debate that still has momentous consequences today (we will return to it later). Hardt has commented on Deleuze's stubborn anti-Hegelianism in a balanced introduction to Deleuze's works entitled "Hegel and the Foundations of Poststructuralism." He shows there that if the first problem of poststructuralism has been to evade Hegel, the second problem has been not to become Hegelian by that very evasion.[2] Precisely because I entirely agree with this view, I would be wary of generalizing Deleuze's choice of a radical positivity, be it located in difference, affirmation, or new assemblages of desire, to a whole

generation; in that sense, I would still state that the last century has not been Deleuzian (contrary to what Foucault had claimed) but post-Hegelian.

Another point of departure could be Althusser's rewriting of Marx in the name of "theory": for him, Marx had to be the first serious, that is, "scientific" theoretician. The question then becomes: which Marx? The young Hegelian who devotes brilliant pages of witty literary criticism to his former colleagues in *The German Ideology*, or the observer of early capitalism in Britain who posits that an understanding of the economic basis is as necessary for philosophy as for a revolution? Whatever Marx one chooses, it is difficult avoiding the theses systematized by Althusser, whose main claim to fame (beside strangling his wife in a moment of aberration) was his choice of the heading "*collection théorie*" for the famous series he edited at Maspéro in the 1960s. The general argument for the series ran as follows: Theory would bridge the gap between the conceptual elaboration of the philosophical principles contained in Marx's works and new scientific discoveries, contemporary epistemology, and the history of the sciences. It was indeed a time when the (very) red cover of the *Marxist-Leninist Review* was adorned with a running epigraph from Lenin: "Marx's theory is all powerful because it is true."[3] I will return to Althusser's spectacular orbit in due course, noting simply that the word "Theory" in the last century has been indelibly marked by various waves of neo-Hegelianism, most of which took new disguises in successive Gallic impersonations.

Besides, just as it had been important for Mallarmé to think in German through Hegel so as to read in English Poe's poems, thereby durably transform French poetics and poetry, one can sketch a history of French Theory caught emerging from Bergsonism toward existentialism and beyond to structuralism and then post-structuralism; much of its impetus derives from conceptual reversals and borrowings which only make sense if one follows the many avatars of Hegel. Thus Derrida was not being too frivolous or outrageous when he translated Hegel into *Aigle* in *Glas* to echo Jean Genet's puns on his own name (translated as *genêt–je nais*) duplicating, perhaps without being aware of it, Marcel Broodthaers's invention of a whole museum devoted to collecting artifacts evoking or

representing eagles: Hegel's plaster bust should be included in the zany zoology of *la section des aigles* which, thanks to the glorious monumentalization of the "king of birds," should provide an ironical postmodern framework to what remains today of "absolute knowledge."

It has often been noted that what passes in America and England as a typically "French" accent given to Theory consisted mainly in retranslations into English of French versions of some German texts – this being especially true of Heidegger, often felt to be almost unreadable in his native German because of the loaded associations with the Nazi period his texts cannot but help carry with them, but who hopefully might be "saved," reinvented, or rediscovered in translation. While Hegel's thought implies technical difficulties in English, there has been a bifurcation in conceptual choices which has radically separated the "continental" Hegel from his British or American versions. I will try to show how Hegel's thought, often allied with Husserlian or Heideggerian components, has kept feeding the theory machine, which should allow us to grasp the intellectual genesis of Theory.

Logic and Existence

Symptomatically in this context, the first translator who introduced Hegel's texts to a French audience was an Italian, Augusto Vera, who had been Hegel's student in Berlin during the last years of the latter's life and translated his works between 1855 and 1878. The most striking feature in these comprehensive translations is the absence of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Vera bypassed it, since what motivated him was to show the construction of a scientific system, moving from the *Logic* to the *Philosophy of Nature*, then the *Philosophy of Spirit* and finally the *Philosophy of Religion*. It is a pity that these first translations are forgotten, for they read well and are accompanied by useful annotations, often notes taken directly during Hegel's lectures. They document the influence of Hegel on the French writers who took notice of him, more often poets than philosophers. These writers will constitute in their turn a myth of radical modernity for theoreticians like Barthes or Kristeva, since Mallarmé, Villiers de

l'Isle-Adam, Laforgue, and Breton found endless sources of inspiration in these translations. However, the original sin of the French reception of Hegel was the unexplained omission of the phenomenological beginning of the system, an omission that was repaired with a vengeance by later commentators like Kojève in the 1930s.

The impact of Surrealism and all its splinter groups helped rediscover Hegel in the 1930s, above all because he allowed these writers to engage with history, a concern also heightened by the long flirtation of Hegelianism with Marxism. In 1929 Jean Wahl published *The Unhappiness of Consciousness in Hegel's Philosophy*, a book which explained the *Phenomenology of Spirit* through Hegel's early theological writings. Wahl took into account Kierkegaard's critique of Hegelian scholasticism, which led him to stress the role of alienation and desire and present Hegel as a budding existentialist, almost as the same time as Adorno was confronting himself with Kierkegaard. Wahl saw historical progress as a dialectic of loss and separation, in which immediacy was a model for our wish to recapture objects of desire. Longing would mark subjects all passing through stages of alienation and despair before regaining hope. Hope would be founded upon a belief that history continues its open-ended process. This version of Hegel called up more Ernst Bloch's "principle of hope" than Vera's idea of a scientific system.

Then came the Russian-born Alexandre Koyré, who had also seen the importance of Hegel's early writings but did not oppose them to the totalizing System. Koyré reconciled the dialectics of separation, unhappiness, and striving for reunification with the logical aspect of the doctrine and he stressed the originality of Hegel's conception of time, a time dominated by the future. Time contains the seeds of a knowledge that will expand by establishing links between the future and the past; it is only the present that is experienced as contradictory and full of conflicts. Koyré insisted on the anti-theological aspect of Hegel's philosophy, which he defined not as ontology but as anthropology, elements soon to be dramatically played out by Koyré's friend and disciple, Alexandre Kojève.

Coming like Koyré from Russia, Alexandre Kojevnikoff a.k.a. Kojève, suddenly made Hegel indispensable to a whole generation. His seminars at the École Pratique des Hautes Études delivered yearly between 1933 and 1940 gathered people as diverse as

Raymond Queneau, Georges Bataille, Jacques Lacan, Raymond Aron, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean Desanti, and Jean Hyppolite. Kojève's appeal lay in his uncanny ability to transform Hegel's abstract prose into a lively philosophical novel, to give blood to the notion of a "gallery of images" traversed by the Spirit in the famous image of the penultimate page of the *Phenomenology*. As Descombes puts it:

> Alexandre Kojève was a very talented story-teller. In his commentaries, the austere Hegelian *Phenomenology* turns into a kind of serialized philosophical novel, where one dramatic scene follows another; picturesque characters come face to face, reversals of situation keep up the suspense, and the reader, avid to know the end of the story (or history), clamours for more.[4]

Like Koyré, Kojève first dismisses the religious element in the system so as to stress the anthropological problematic: "According to Hegel – to use the Marxist terminology – Religion is only an ideological superstructure."[5] Kojève's point of departure is the dialectic of the Master and Slave. It is a turning point in the analysis of the discovery of reciprocity between consciousnesses and of the need to be acknowledged by another consciousness that should be free to do so. Thanks to this conceptual lever Kojève brings Marx and Heidegger to bear on the Hegelian dialectic. Starting from the biographical insight that the meeting of Hegel and Napoléon in Jena embodied or allegorized absolute knowledge completed by the writing of the book, Kojève returns to the old historical scandal, well noted by Hegel, that Greek cities invented democracy but never abolished slavery. Such a theoretical contradiction gives fuel to the dynamics of human desire. If man is ready to sacrifice his biological self in order to satisfy his desire for recognition in the fight to death that marked the early times of civilization, one could always find some individuals who accepted servitude rather than lose their life. Thus, after speech, desire, and reciprocity, slavery is the fourth dominant concept in Hegel's anthropology – "the possibility of a difference between the *future* Master and the *future* Slave is the fourth and last premise of the *Phenomenology*."[6] History is put

in motion with the difference between masters and slaves and it will end only when this difference is abolished. There again, the system is geared toward the future: consciousness is caught up between a "not yet" and an "always already" without which the hystericizing machine could not be wound up.

Kojève's analysis develops a little drama: the master has risked death in what might appear as a more authentic relationship to his *Dasein* which echoes with Heidegger's *Being and Time.* In fact it is the slave who is more authentic because he is determined in his very being by his "fear of death." After his victory, the master can bask in his superiority and leave everything material to his slave; he will be content with enjoying the benefits of another's labors. The slave, who owns nothing, not even his desire, since he toils to satisfy the master's least whims, will discover another authenticity through productive work which slowly transforms nature, whereas the master has to satisfy himself with the more and more empty recognition of his peers. The truth of the master is thus in the slave: only he can reconcile work and knowledge.

> The Master appears only for the sake of engendering the Slave who "overcomes" or "sublates" (*aufhebt*) him as Master, while thereby "overcoming" himself as Slave. And this Slave who has been "overcome" is the one who is satisfied by what he *is* and will understand that he is satisfied in and by Hegel's philosophy, in and by the *Phenomenology*.[7]

An original element brought forward by Kojève's reading has been revived by Francis Fukuyama in the 1990s[8] and is the most counter-intuitive for common sense: it is the thesis of the end of history, glossed by Descombes as our irrepressible wish to know whether we reach the novel's happy ending (or not) as the end, in short as a purely literary closure. Indeed, if one stresses from the start an anthropological reading which will never lose sight of the problem concretely posed by the realization of Absolute Knowledge posed as the last stage of the progression of Spirit through Time, it seems inevitable to conclude that the attainment of Absolute Knowledge would result in the elimination of anthropology qua anthropology – that is, in the "end of man." A long footnote to

Kojève's 1938–9 seminar states almost off-handedly that this is not an apocalyptic vision, quite the contrary:

> The disappearance of Man at the end of History, therefore, is not a cosmic catastrophe: the natural World remains what it had been from all eternity. And therefore, it is not a biological catastrophe either: Man remains alive as animal in *harmony* with Nature or given Being. What disappears is Man properly so-called – that is, Action negating the given, and Error, or in general, the Subject *opposed* to the object.[9]

In this Edenic reverie, wars and revolutions will slowly but surely disappear, along with Philosophy as the discourse that accompanied them, while all the arts, passions, and the elements of superfluity will be needed so as to fill in an empty time, since we will all be happily enjoying an endless "Sunday of Life" (to quote Queneau's witty novel). Snobbism and the "Japanese" model of polite rituals will play an exemplary role in such a scheme, which will not be lost on Foucault's subsequent Nietzschean musings on the "end of man," even if they appear couched in an anti-Hegelian epistemology.

It would be idle to try to prove that Hegel never entertained such a fantasy of universal idleness: the end of history belongs to the Hegelian legends critically dissected by Jon Steward and his collaborators.[10] For, as Kojève writes in 1948, he did not wish to explain what Hegel himself had meant but to think with him, through him and at times against him. He readily acknowledges that he has unduly stressed the role of the master and slave dialectic because he wanted to "strike people's minds" and offer new propaganda. As Lacan and many others who have approached Kojève testify, he had only contempt for those who satisfied themselves with the role of pure intellectuals, and stubbornly refused all academic honors while most of his life was spent as a high civil servant working on international relations between European states and their former colonies, devising and implementing an original system of aid and compensation. Kojève stands out as a fascinating figure in the present context because he saw globalization loom larger as a consequence of a Hegelian system which would be identical with

a society dominated by technology and capital; this is why he perceived in potential conflicts between North and South or between the "first" and the "third" worlds more fundamental issues than class conflicts still thought of in terms of industrialization and infrastructure versus superstructure in classical Marxist theory. For him, the Chinese revolution was not a new departure but just the sign that "the provinces were toeing the line" – and, no doubt, he would have said the same of the fall of the Berlin wall – that it fulfilled a scheme already provided by Hegel's all too rational system.

Curiously, the same starting point would lead an eager disciple of Kojève like Bataille in an opposite direction, since he took expenditure and waste as counter-levers in a negative economy of spending – an economy leading to the assertion of death, sacrifice, and excess by which, hopefully, capitalist rationality would meet its undoing or its "othering." The young Bataille was nevertheless completely Kojèvian, as one can see in the mimetic and adulatory tone of his "Letter to X., lecturer on Hegel."[11] His analyses only make sense if one translates "Hegel" as "Kojève's vision of Hegel." Like Kojève, Bataille would be marked by a Romantic Hegel and he never tires of quoting the famous description of man as a "night," "a night that one perceives if one looks a man in the eyes; then one is delving into a night which becomes terrible; it is the night of the world which then presents itself to us."[12] One could say that the whole of Maurice Blanchot's extraordinary novel *Thomas the Obscure* (especially in the first version of 1941) is a gloss on these dense and startling lines. In light of this pervasive Romanticism, it would be useful to compare Bataille's text with an early essay by Althusser, "Man, That Night" (1947), actually a critical review of Kojève's Hegel notes. Althusser is obviously impressed by Kojève's anthropological developments of Hegelian dialectics, even if he is not convinced by Kojève's presentation of an "existentialist Marx" (by which he means a Hegel filtered by Heidegger), a "travesty in which Marxists will not recognize their own."[13] However, the general assessment is generous, which is quite striking in view of Althusser's later position: not Heidegger, but Hegel "is the mother-truth of contemporary thought. Reading Kojève, one might say that this holds for Marx too – that Marx emerges from Hegel fully armed with the dialectic of master and slave."[14] And in a more

ominous whisper, Althusser suggests that this dialectic is where Kojève soon meets his limits.

In spite of Kojève's obvious brilliance and seduction, there was a need for a more scholarly examination of Hegel, which was soon provided by Jean Hyppolite. He began by translating into French the whole *Phenomenology of Spirit*, only available in fragments until then, to which he added a systematic running commentary. He then attempted a synthesis between the earlier and the later Hegel in *Logic and Existence*, a collection that brought about a reversal of perspective leading to the increased stress on science and logic associated with the emergence of structuralism in philosophy. Theory as we know it today is inseparable from this momentous philosophical transformation of Hegelianism. Hyppolite's impact may be gauged when one observes how Lacan slowly moved from a Kojevian version of Hegel stressing desire, mirror images, and aggressivity, to a more complex vision in which negativity, language, science, and a pervasive Otherness seem to be generated by direct discussions with Hyppolite who regularly participated in his Seminar in the 1950s. When Lacan states that "Man's desire is desire of the Other," he is in fact glossing Hyppolite's use of "The Other" for the object of desire understood as pure alterity or just "Life." Unlike Kojève, Hyppolite does not see in desire one of the most fundamental concepts in Hegel. And of course, very early in his commentary, he refuses the idea that history might have an end, for him a very naive belief that the system is in a position to freeze history. Hegel famously asserts in the Preface to his *Philosophy of Right* that it is "just as absurd to fancy that a philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as it is to fancy that an individual can overleap his own age," an idea echoed at the end of André Breton's *Nadja*. Accordingly, Hyppolite stresses the experience of joy and pain in the present, and the awareness that the consciousness progressing through various stages in the *Phenomenology* implies both a singular and a universal consciousness.

Hyppolite, who knew the *Phenomenology* by heart as it were, never forgot the systematicity of Hegel's thought. If Hegel's thought forms a system, what is the function of the introduction to knowledge constituted by the *Phenomenology*? Why do we have to follow all the divisions and illusions of a consciousness on its way to

absolute knowledge, if absolute knowledge is presupposed from the start? This was Lacan's recurrent worry, as we have seen: can we reach absolute knowledge as a true intellectual goal without sacrificing absolute *jouissance*? On this account, one may say that while the *Phenomenology* is the most literary of Hegel's texts, it is caught up in a tension between "panlogicism" on the one hand and "pantragicism" on the other. Wahl had chosen to stress the tragic, even pathetic elements in the young Hegel, as did Georges Bataille, who sees Hegel as the philosopher of a personal struggle with death and pure negativity. Hegel also looks at real history and its "slaughter-bench" without flinching, as the young Marx had noted with admirative approval. Unlike earlier Hegelians who looked to the German philosopher as a springboard from which they would gain a fresh understanding of History, Hyppolite does not downplay the theoretical risks incurred by a philosophy of history which identifies the Real and the Rational: one may soon fall into a history of the legitimization of political power, and tragic negativity will eventually be sublated or subsumed by the patience of an overarching concept corresponding to the absolutization of the status quo. This explains why Hyppolite sees the core of the *Phenomenology* not in the master and slave dialectic but in Hegel's interpretation of "Terror" during the French Revolution.

A new critical step was reached when Hyppolite published *Logic and Existence* in 1952[15] to tackle the problem of the relationship between the genesis of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* and the structure of the concept contained in the *Logic*. This text is a watershed because it marks a break with the anthropological readings of Hegel that had dominated before World War II, and opts resolutely for an almost Heideggerian version of Hegel. If the Logic presupposes the experience of the phenomenon, and if the phenomenology presupposes the concept, none can be reduced to the other, both are related to the fact that Man is "the dwelling of the Universal and of the Logos of Being, and thus becomes capable of Truth."[16] Hyppolite is at his most Heideggerian here and seems to have read Heidegger's 1930–1 lectures on *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*[17] when he writes: "The Logic's dialectical discourse will be the very discourse of Being, the *Phenomenology* having shown the possibility of bracketing man as natural *Dasein*."[18] The Logic

bequeaths us a fundamental insight into the function of sense: Being is thought absolutely, but only through our existence. An essential difference will therefore constitute the very core of Being: Being projects constantly its own Other, unfolds and generates an inner self-differing. Alert as he was to the Nietzschean and Heideggerian echoes of this thesis, Hyppolite paves the way to Derrida's and Deleuze's different philosophies of Difference. However, Hyppolite will not follow to its logical end the implications of Heidegger's displacement, which consists in asserting that in striving for absolute knowledge Hegel never believes that he has reached it, as Kojève tended to think, but forces thinking to think differently by suggesting an experience of rigorous thinking. The shift is mostly grammatical, changing an adjective into a pronoun, which is not "dialectical" in itself: in transforming thinking into a process and an experience, we should not forget to think *absolutely*. This solves the riddle by which Lacan was apparently baffled in the text I have quoted in the last chapter.

Grammatical difference thus sends us to ontological difference, but on a path that forces us to consider the equivalence between being and difference. Deleuze immediately noted this point in a famous review of Hyppolite's work, in which he claimed that, for Hyppolite, "Being is not *essence* but *sense*," which allows him to see how Hegel "transforms metaphysics into logics, and logics into a logics of sense."[19] Which entails that the Absolute is *here*, or in other words, that there is "no secret." This move resembles the strategy that marks Derrida's earlier essays, in which the influence of Husserl is mediated by readings of Heidegger and the impact of Hyppolite's revisionist readings of Hegel. If one examines these essays, one sees how, by taking his bearings in Husserl's attacks on a historicism still identified with Hegelianism, he points out important similarities in Husserl's and Hegel's treatment of language. This is how Derrida sums up Husserl's theses on the ideality of words – I will quote the text and its footnote so as to highlight the complexity of Derrida's strategies, which both assert and undo the thesis of the Husserlian ideality of meaning in the name of a Hegelian theory of language:

> Thus, the word has an ideal Objectivity and identity, since it is not identical with any of its empirical, phonetic, or graphic

materializations. It is always the *same* word which is meant and recognized through all possible linguistic gestures. Insofar as this ideal object confronts language as such, the latter supposes a spontaneous neutralization of the factual existence of the speaking subject, of words, and of the thing designated. Speech, then, is only the practice of an immediate eidetic.⋆

⋆The linguistic neutralization of existence is an original idea only in the technical and thematic signification that phenomenology gives it. Is not this idea the favorite of Mallarmé and Valéry? Hegel above all had amply explored it. In the *Encyclopedia* (one of the few Hegelian works that Husserl seems to have read), the lion already testifies to this neutralization as an exemplary martyr: "Confronting the name – Lion – we no longer have either an intuition of such an animal or even an image, but the name (when we understand it) is its simple and imageless representation; in the name we think" (§462). This passage is cited by Jean Hyppolite in his *Logique et Existence: Essai sur la Logique de Hegel* . . . p. 39, a work which, on many points, lets the profound convergence of Hegelian and Husserlian thought appear. // Hegel also writes: "The first act, by which Adam is made master of the animals, was to impose on them a name, i.e., he annihilated them in their existence (as existents)" (System of 1803–1804). Cited by Maurice Blanchot in *La Part du Feu* . . . p. 325.[20]

In this clever montage of references, Hegel and Husserl converge when affirming the idea that the word is the death of the thing, even if the dramatized idiom of Hegel is foreign to the technicality of Husserl's analysis. Derrida's deconstructive project implies from the outset a patient rereading of Hegel in order to prevent Hegelianism from creeping back into philosophy without warning. He says as much when introducing a critical discussion of Bataille by meditating on a remark by Bataille that Hegel is too "self-evident": "Misconstrued, treated lightly, Hegelianism only extends its historical domination, finally unfolding its immense enveloping resources without obstacle. Hegelian self-evidence seems lighter than ever at the moment when it finally bears down with its full weight."[21] Derrida's assessment of Bataille is harsh: his wish to

replace "mastery" by "sovereignty" or to undo servile knowledge in the peals of a laughter capable of shattering metaphysical ghosts seems even more Romantic than Kojève, and downplays both the function of writing and Hegelian negativity.

On the whole, this strategy sketches Derrida's attitude facing Levinas: he plays the devil's advocate, that is the Hegelian figure of a negativity which is so cunning that it has pervaded even the material basis of writing. It's then child's play to demonstrate that one cannot just "leave" the system of philosophical language and "Greek" concepts behind. To leave one's words or work behind, one has to inscribe oneself willy-nilly in a language whose very roots (including basic terms like "Same" and "Other") have been contaminated by dialectical negations and negations of negations. Even the effort to change the whole ground of thinking by presenting us with the face of the other, in a radically new and ethical encounter, has been thought in advance: "The other, for me, is an ego which I know to be in relation to me as an other. Where have these movements been better described than in *The Phenomenology of the Mind*?"[22] There is therefore no possibility of promoting a radical phenomenology of the other's face that would free itself from the encroachments of a Logic whose circle seems all but unbreakable.

Logic and Existence staged an apparent recantation of its author about the respective merits of Hegel's Phenomenology or his Logic, significantly rendering obsolete previous anthropological readings of Hegel, like Kojève's dramatization of the confrontation between Napoléon and the Philosopher of Absolute Knowledge. As we have seen, in 1953 Hyppolite's decision was to return to the loaded relationship between Hegel's logic, a "logic of sense" or pure relations, without leaving behind the stages in the progression of the consciousness sketched by the phenomenology. The new stress on logic and language eventually relegated the ontology of existence or essence to a previous horizon of thought. What mattered then was less ontological difference than the conditions by which sense could be produced, as Deleuze would point out in his groundbreaking review of Hyppolite's new work. Philosophy would not only turn into an ontology of sense, but sense itself would be defined, in Deleuze's words, as "the absolute identity of being and difference."[23] The new generation that included Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze

would take bearings in this intelligent repositioning of Hegel's thought.

We notice that Blanchot was quoted by Derrida in the same passage of his *Introduction* to Husserl's essay on Geometry, although Blanchot seems to belong to a different world, closer to Bataille's or Kojève's readings of Hegel. In his commentary on Husserl's *The Origin of Geometry* Derrida refers decisively to Blanchot's famous essay on "Literature and the Right to Death" which closes *La Part du feu* (1949), a piece providing a theoretical core and largely based upon a reading of Hegel. If Kojève is still felt to be an authority on Hegel (he is quoted as having shown how Marx and Hegel agree fundamentally, and he has demonstrated that "understanding is the equivalent of a murder"),[24] Blanchot also relies heavily on Hyppolite's *Genesis and Structure of the Phenomenology of Spirit* to point out that the main political discovery in Hegel is not the issue of slavery but that of the Terror during the French Revolution: the Marquis de Sade becomes a paradoxical hero who had confronted death and Terror directly.

Fundamentally, Blanchot starts from Hegel to explore some paradoxes that any writer will have to face, and the first is, typically, the impossibility of really beginning (as Hegel had significantly complicated the issue of "beginning" the discovery of knowledge).

> From his first step, as Hegel says more or less, the individual who wants to write is blocked by a contradiction: in order to write, he needs the talent to write. But in themselves, talents are nothing. So long as he has not sat at a table and written a work, the writer is not a writer and he does not know whether he has the ability to become one. He has talent only after he has written, but he needs talent to write.[25]

Caught between two impossibilities the writer becomes, following another Hegelian phrase, a nothingness working with nothingness. This is the kind of Hegelian paradox Blanchot relishes – they are less glib than it seems for they will soon lead to Roland Barthes's concept of an "intransitive" writing understood as pure process, without any consideration of talent or even of creating an *oeuvre*.

Beyond the Hegelian references that structure the logical form of the argument, one sees another reference looming larger in Blanchot's text: it is Levinas, who provides not so much a way out as another terminology to move out from the pathetic mazes of negativity. Levinas introduces an abyssal foundation linking Hegel's "Man as Night" to a "there is" in its matt neutrality. Levinas's thought is obsessed by the wish to exceed the circle of consciousness, by an attempt to leave the entire language of phenomenology behind, a "step beyond" whose difficulty and aporia have been stressed by Derrida. Levinas finds an unexpected ally in Sartre, who criticized Hegel's "ontological optimism" which made him trust Totality too easily. In fact, the Whole had already been given at the outset. Sartre then remarked ominously: "But if Hegel forgets himself, we cannot forget Hegel."[26]

The same obsession with Hegel returns in the later Merleau-Ponty. In his posthumous *Lecture Notes* as well as in the unpublished essay he had called *An Introduction to the Prose of the World*, one can see how Merleau-Ponty's initial debt to Husserl paves the way to a systematic confrontation with Hegel (the very title of "prose of the world" is borrowed from Hegel) and Heidegger. Both thinkers pose the question left unsolved in Husserl of the link between language and historicity, a concern that would also mark Derrida's starting point. It looks as if Husserl and Heidegger had been indispensable mediators helping Merleau-Ponty find how "Hegel and his negativity entered the Flesh of the World."[27] At that time, however, a new French Marxism dominated by Althusser would reject any trace of Hegelianism in the name of the scientific character of Marx's thought. Althusser had remarked, as we have seen, in his 1947 review of Kojève, that the latter's merit had been to show that "without Heidegger . . . we would never have understood the *Phenomenology of Spirit*";[28] the coupling of two of the three H's, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, would soon suffice to brand them as idealist, thus unfit to enter the realm of strict "theory."

After a few false starts (passing through radical Catholicism and Hegelianism) Althusser came into his own as a philosopher by showing how Marx had been able to come into his own as a philosopher. His deduction is almost syllogistic: we know that Marx derives his dialectical method from Hegel and the left Hegelians,

that he overturns an idealist way of thinking by putting material determinations first and inverting the inversion. If there is a continuity between the "young Marx" and the mature Marx, Marx himself wants to disentangle scientific theory from ideology. He therefore only reaches scientific rigor when he breaks with the ideological tradition he has inherited from the Hegelians. The "young Marx" is not yet "truly Marx," he is a Fichtean, a Feuerbachian, or worse yet, a humanist. In the name of Bachelard's concept of the "epistemological break," Althusser projects a radical break with the past in Marx, a break that would be situated around 1845. It is hard to understand today why Althusser needed to deploy so much intellectual *savoir-faire* in establishing what looks either like a tautology (Marx is "scientific" when he puts "science" first) or an arbitrary chronological divide (since there might be more than one "jump" or "break" in Marx's discovery of economic rationality). It would be snide to refer this obsession with purity to an undigested Catholicism suggesting a violent and radical conversion, the need to separate the Old dispensation from the New gospel of science and theory, and the rejection of contested texts like *The 1844 Manuscripts* because they would be ideologically suspect. It is more relevant to see how such a theoretical fervor could only spread in a heavily charged political context: after the denunciation of Stalinism by Khrushchev, the official ideology of the Communist Party had tried to become more open by embracing humanism. In France, this seduction operation promoted a weak form of Marxist humanism as less threatening for the new middle class. Althusser's rigorous distinctions were instrumental in providing the rising group of the French Maoists with a new philosophy in which scientism and Stalinism could go hand in hand; meanwhile, Althusser would stay on the margins of the Communist Party.

Baltimore 1966 and After

We are now reaching the fatidic date of 1966 – a turning point or a high tide marked by the publication of theoretical bestsellers: Lacan's *Ecrits* and Foucault's *The Order of Things*, both of which followed hard after the success of Althusser's *For Marx* a year earlier.

In order to knot together all these historical loose braids, I will focus on the conference of the same year which launched French theory in America. One more link with Hegelian sub-plots consists in the fact that the Baltimore meeting of October 1966 in which Barthes, Lacan, Derrida, Goldmann, Vernant, and Todorov were active participants, was partly organized (from the French side) by Jean Hyppolite. The two successive volumes published from these proceedings mark this important debt by dedicating the contents to Jean Hyppolite, "scholar, teacher and friend of scholars."[29] Indeed, the 1970 collection pays a double homage by adding to the translation of Hyppolite's intervention the original French text in an appendix. In his presentation, Hyppolite sketches the problematic of *Logic and Existence*, showing how Hegel's legacy was double: first an analysis of ordinary language starting from a phenomenology of perception, then an investigation of the structure and architecture of languages with the *Logic*.[30] One can see why Hyppolite is the linchpin or the cornerstone of the whole gathering: not only does he mediate between Derrida and Lacan because of personal ties, but he talks to the issues discussed by American presenters like Richard Macksey, who in his opening address quotes at length Wittgenstein and Peirce, and relates to the main concern coming from the structuralist camp, namely the need to found an architecture of discourses on some stable epistemological basis. Finally, he opens philosophical discourse to literary criticism when he compares the *Phenomenology of Spirit* with Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, or Balzac's *Human Comedy*.[31]

What was at stake was the possibility of a unifying method that would correspond to a single field of discourse. Peter Caws had the courage to note, in one of the conference's discussions, that he was disappointed to hear so many "metaphysical" presentations instead of the "methodological" clarifications he was expecting,[32] by which he refers to a seemingly endless debate as to whether language created man or man created language. His worry appears as one of the pervasive symptoms of these times – the wish to bracket off foundational speculation and reach for hardcore methods, whether they apply to myth, literature, language, or society. I too can confess to a similar moment, when as a young student in one of the seminars on linguistics that flourished in post-1968 Paris, I helped expel

from the group one Heideggerian dissenter who insisted that we had to ponder why "language speaks" before engaging in any other study. What we requested from our tutor was simply a concise breakdown of Saussure's main concepts and an introduction to Benveniste's conception of "enunciation." Even if we guessed that Heidegger's meditation on language was more fundamental than binary categories, what we craved for was *that* technical rhetoric and not the other.

Before engaging in more detail with the 1966 conference itself, it may be useful to remark on the surprising chiasmic reversal one observes between the first and the second title: the decision to use the subtitle as a title not only demotes the philosophical problematic consisting in the articulation between two plurals – "the Languages of Criticism" and the "Sciences of Man" – but promotes a more political or sociological debate, the singular of a "Structuralist Controversy." The new preface written in 1971 spells out what was palpable in 1966, although not clearly perceived by the American public: the lack of a firm agreement between most French theoreticians about the most fundamental issues. But in 1971 it was urgent to recall that structuralism had been questioned or abandoned by some of its alleged practitioners. The 1971 preface quotes Deleuze, who takes Foucault as an example to point out some commonalities of thought that would nevertheless bypass superficial divergences or last-minute mood swings: "A cold and concerted destruction of the subject, a lively distaste for notions of origins, lost origins, recovered origins, a dismantling of unifying pseudo-syntheses of consciousness, a denunciation of all the mystifications of history performed in the name of the progress of consciousness and the unfolding of reason."[33] Foucault had been notoriously absent from the 1966 conference, although quoted here and there, and his genealogical project could still appear as structuralist enough in *The Order of Things*, at least in the concluding remarks presenting the current "human sciences" as obsessed with the notion of structure and structuration – if only with the aim of showing how "man" was less a subject than a vanishing object in these "sciences."

In 1971, however, it was impossible to miss the strictures publicized with *The Archeology of Knowledge* in 1969. Foucault acknowl-

edged that he had unduly stressed discursive synchronicity at the expense of human agency, reducing the "structuralist controversy" to the level of mediatic hype in his unique way:

> So I did not want to carry the structuralist enterprise beyond its legitimate limits. And you must admit that I never once used the word "structure" in *The Order of Things.* But let us leave our polemics about "structuralism"; they hardly survive in areas now deserted by serious workers; this particular controversy, which might have been so fruitful, is now acted out only by mimes and tumblers.[34]

The 1971 preface of the conference proceedings explains the onset of a general dissatisfaction with a model heretofore considered universal, the epistemological paradigm provided by structural linguistics. Two factors not necessarily linked, the "declining methodological importance of linguistics" and "the paradoxical displacement of the role which Hegel had previously occupied,"[35] are adduced by Macksey and Donato to account for the transformation. Hyppolite's untimely death sounded the death knell of Hegelian synthesis, then replaced by a general Nietzscheism quite visible in Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze.

In fact, even if there is a sort of knee-jerk anti-Hegelianism in Foucault and Deleuze, the deep impact of Derrida's meditation on language and death not only takes up the legacy of a Blanchot but rewrites the Hegelian hesitation between consciousness and logics (as pointed out by Hyppolite) in slightly different terms. It is the extent of this critical difference that I will try to measure here, and the almost ineluctable Hegelian inflection given to any discourse that presents itself as "literary Theory." Moreover, if one examines the proceedings of the 1966 Baltimore conference without any preconceptions, one can see that the most revealing tensions and faultlines do not follow the broad ideological division already mentioned between "methodological" (or structuralist if not scientist) and "metaphysical" (read, if you want, Hegelian) discourses. In fact, the science which is brought to the fore from the start is mathematics, much more than linguistics or generalized semiology seen as global theory of signs. This was due to the impact of the historian Charles

Morazé's presentation, which focused on the "differences between mathematical and literary invention."[36] In a brilliant anticipation of the Sokal debate of the 1990s, Lacan was quick to take his cue: Morazé's introduction of "the root of minus one"[37] described as a completely irrational symbol nevertheless provided an adequate solution to specific problems. Returning to the need for arbitrary symbols invented in moments of crisis or of passionate decision, Lacan poses the question of the distinction between the subject and the living individual: "What is the order of passions around which this event will or will not occur, whatever it may be, this algorithm, invention of a new sign or of a new algorithm or a different organization of some logical systems?"[38] It is evident that what Lacan and most theoreticians invited to the conference insist upon is less the universality of semiotics understood as the science of all signs, than the logical construction of signifying systems in which we are caught and from which the exact function of the subject can be calculated.

The calculable or incalculable nature of the subject remains therefore the crucial divide in these discussions. At one point, Lacan quotes Derrida's query to him: "Why do you call *this* the subject, this unconscious? What does the subject have to do with it?"[39] In a quirky and freewheeling improvisation, Lacan proceeds to narrate an anecdote to illustrate his view of subjective agency. He needed his table moved to another part of his hotel room and had to ask the bellman to do it; to which the bellman indignantly replied that this was a job for the housekeeper. When housekeepers came and performed the task, they did this absent-mindedly, paying no heed to Lacan, only mindful of their hierarchical superiors. This showed to him that he would have been deluded to believe that in this set of actions, he was involved as a subject who makes a request and is obeyed. The experience showed on the contrary that a number of communication misfires and infelicities were necessary. It forced Lacan to immerse himself into the hotel's specific regulations, hierarchies, and power grid; in short an entire Kafkaian universe, including the Law, institutions, even the big Other. Facing such a structure, Lacan could dispel the illusion of the subject's direct agency and show how the subject was a function of the lack implied by a disorder no sooner created than negated. What remained of

subjectivity would just be his superfluous impatience in the whole affair.[40]

Lacan's presentation itself did not go down very well: he made the mistake of speaking partly in wrongly accented English and partly in opaque French, the result being that he was poorly understood. Even without these obstacles, the text itself parades its impenetrability from the very labyrinthine title: "Of Structure as an Inmixing of Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever." As Lacan confided, he had worked for fifteen years on these problems and could not hope to convey his findings all at once.[41] He nevertheless provided a few forceful images, all allegorizing his immediate surroundings. For instance, describing the view from his hotel at dawn, with blinking neon signs and heavy traffic, he presented this as a reminder that we live in a man-made chaos controlled by signs in which subjectivity often finds itself at a loss: "The best image to sum up the unconscious is Baltimore in the early morning."[42] Besides numerous allusions to Frege and Russell's logical theories, central tenets of Lacan's doctrine are reiterated and glossed: he explains that his old idea that the unconscious is "structured as a language" is a tautology because "structured" and "as a language" are synonymous.[43] More cryptic is the idea that a sign represents something for somebody while a signifier represents a subject for another signifier.[44] Taking another cue from billboard signs displaying "Enjoy Coca-Cola," Lacan points to the irreducible function of *jouissance* beneath desire. Like the soft-drinks industry, our superego forces us to enjoy always more. But if language structures human desire by representing what is forbidden, one should not forget that without the particular excess of a *jouissance* bordering on pain, life would not be worth living.

When we later hear Rosolato expand Lacan's concepts, it is striking to see him mention the linguistic theory not of Saussure but of Benveniste, who allows him to move from Jakobsonian "shifters" to an opposition between "the subject of the enunciation" and the "subject of the enounced." Like Rosolato and Tzvetan Todorov, who moved skillfully from Bakhtin to Benveniste and the Russian Formalists, Roland Barthes also quotes Benveniste rather liberally. All three agree that a crucial task for linguistics is to describe the formal apparatus of enunciation, that is the set of coded devices allowing

a person to say "I" or write "I." We should not forget that these terms had been introduced systematically in Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, a seminar he gave in 1964. There is a general agreement between Lacan, Rosolato, and Barthes to restrict subjectivity to the simple function of being able to say "I." The linguistic theory to which they all refer hinges on the question of *enunciation*, that is the systemic determinations by which persons, tenses, and voices are expressed in language. The speaking subject will be made and unmade in this linguistic hole through which he or she emerges at the time of a statement before fading away. This development was largely ignored by most Anglo-Saxon commentators, who still tend today to rehash Saussure's basic definitions and binary oppositions (often limited to three: synchrony/diachrony, *langue/parole*, and signifier/signified) as if these alone provided a universal key for the understanding of Lacan, Derrida, and Barthes in the late 1960s. The image of structuralism presented in 1966 to the American public was clearly more complex, sophisticated, and diverse in its epistemologies and strategies than what has often been said.

The really dissenting voices were limited to two: Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida. In retrospect, Paul de Man appears as the most brutal interlocutor facing the French group. He aims his barbs at Barthes, for instance, in quite a scathing way. Embarrassingly, he is almost always right. He tells Barthes rudely: "I must admit, I have been somewhat disappointed by the specific analyses that you give us. I don't believe they show any progress over those of the Formalists, Russian or American, who used empirical methods, though neither the vocabulary nor the conceptual frame that you use."[45] The first accusation is wounding – and touches upon an important fact: much of the French enthusiasm for literary theory had to do with the unleashed energy of recently converted critics who ignored a much longer tradition of critical analysis like that of the Russians or the Americans. The more serious accusation bears on willful distortion of literary history. De Man continues: "when I hear you refer to facts of literary history, you say things that are false within a typically French myth. I find in your work a false conception of classicism and romanticism . . . you distort history *because* you need a historical myth of progress to justify a method which is not yet

able to justify itself by its results."[46] Barthes is forced to a lame retreat, and he admits that for him literary history is another kind of myth. De Man has no difficulty in pointing out that the Romantics and even some classics had already expressed what Barthes identifies with a "modern" sensibility limited to an axis of Mallarmé–Sollers.

De Man similarly reproaches Hyppolite for having omitted Hegel's meditation on death and negativity: "You didn't speak of the moment of negation, nor of what seems to me to remain central in Hegel, namely the problem of death."[47] In a wonderful extemporized disquisition on death and radical finitude, Hyppolite answers by stating his fundamental disagreement with Hegel on the central issue of the equivalence between death and negativity. For Hegel, death is too glibly transformed into negation, which is how he can fuel the dialectical engine. If we discover on the contrary that negativity is death, death cannot be redeemed as just a "lost meaning" – like the lost passion deployed by the *schöne Seele* who shatters its sanity by fighting against the world, and whose effort is indeed recuperated or thought through by the philosopher. For Hyppolite, in an admission that life resists the process of intellectual sublation, one should acknowledge that "in any case there is something which is not redeemable, and I would not follow Hegel to the end; I can't."[48] A remarkable affirmation coming as it did from one of the best commentators on Hegel, this brought his discussion to a closure.

Symptomatically, Paul de Man inscribed his question in the context of what he took to be Hyppolite's response to Derrida, whereas Hyppolite was answering Georges Poulet. This apparent slip of the tongue[49] reveals a growing affinity; it was a similar issue that had been brought up earlier by Derrida after Roland Barthes's presentation. Returning to an issue brought by Barthes – of the "impossible" utterance of "I am dead" – Derrida refers to Poe's Mr. Valdemar story and uses this argument to question the linguistic foundation of the semiotics displayed in Baltimore. As we have seen, the basis was less Saussure than Benveniste's theories of *discours* and *récit*: the first would be marked by subjective enunciation, while historical narrative tends to suppress subjective markers. Following his own investigations of Husserl and also going back to Saussure,

Derrida refuses the distinction, since for him there is no more a "pure present" than "pure presence": historical time is always implied in the time of enunciation.[50] Some form of writing, therefore of death, is always at play in any first-person discourse. When I repeat "I" – which is necessary for the constitution of subjectivity – I have been "absented" from my speech, there is no experience of the radically singularly new and personally authentic that would not be attacked by such a primary repetition. "If the repetition is original, that means that I am not dealing with the radically new in language. You were reticent about saying 'I am dead.' I believe that the condition for a true act of language is my being able to say 'I am dead.'"[51] This "death" which may be dramatic or quite bland will be a precondition in order to use language. Derrida follows Hyppolite, who had questioned Barthes's idea of a "pact of speech" when applied to writing.[52] For Derrida, the belief in a pure speech is a fantasy, a delusion under which Barthes is still working. What finally links Derrida and Hyppolite is a Hegelianized Freudianism in which death remains unredeemable but nevertheless triggers the work of mourning so central in the constitution of the work of art.

Why is it then that Derrida and de Man emerge as the most trenchant participants in the theoretical debate? They both seem more faithful to an earlier and more radical Hegelianism, and both start from an experience of discourse marked by death and negativity. They also insist on the linguistic materiality which could be glossed away in the name of a logic of sense. They refuse to forget the rhetorical, linguistic, or material status of this experience as conditioned by language. Can one say that they return to Kojève's Hegel, a thinker for whom death is the absolute Master? Not exactly, since here death underwrites a linguistic process underpinning the whole of literature, culture, and the constitution of subjectivity. Theory is thus both aware of the idealizing mechanisms propagating "fantasies" and of the quest for the most hidden materiality, a materiality in which death finally lurks.

The debate has returned in the vehement discussion which has opposed Lacan's theses on the "letter" in his seminar on Poe's "Purloined Letter" and philosophical critiques coming from Derrida,

Althusser, Lacoue-Labarthe, or Nancy.[53] When Derrida and Althusser find themselves in agreement facing what they denounce as Lacan's idealizing gesture, they share an identical suspicion facing the consensus that seems to emerge from the Baltimore proceedings. Nevertheless, despite irreducible divergences, both Lacan and Barthes on the one hand, Derrida and de Man on the other, with Hyppolite somewhere in the middle, testify to the overwhelming power of a Hegelianized Theory at that time. We have seen that it is impossible to define Theory without taking into account its effects in a given historical context. This was also Althusser's position facing a Lacan he did not really "like" but admired for his theoretical effort. In a very illuminating letter to the psychoanalyst René Diatkine, Althusser put forward Lacan's historical role:

> Lacan's claim and his unique originality in the world of psychoanalysis lie in his being a *theoretician*. Being a theoretician does not mean producing a theoretical concept corresponding to an empirical, clinical, practical fact, or even *several* theoretical concepts; it means producing a *general system* of the theoretical concepts, rigorously articulated with each other and capable of accounting for the *total set* of facts and of the field of analytic practice.[54]

Althusser knew from Diatkine and other psychoanalysts that the "character" of Lacan might not be up to scratch or might even provoke violent personal resistances – but, still in the name of sacrosanct Theory, he was ready to make crucial allowances; when Diatkine expressed reservations with Lacan the man, Althusser swept them away:

> You will answer me with the individual Lacan, but that is not what is at stake: it is a matter of his work, and even beyond his work, it is a matter of that which it is the sole extant proof: it is a matter of the *existence* in principle of theory in the field of psychoanalysis. Paris was well worth a mass. . . . the individual Lacan, his "style" and his idiosyncrasies and all the effects they have produced, including the personal wounds –

> all that "*is well worth theory*." There are some goods for which one never pays too much, the very ones that bring more than they cost.[55]

Was Paris then really worth the structuralist mass? In fact the high cost or the subtle danger were indeed not bounded by people's personal flaws or even by the cult of personality lurking in Lacan or others – the real risk was that, as the song says, Paris would remain only Paris.