

Chapter 2

Ontologies of Empire

If it is no longer shocking to think of Disneyland as the fundamental ontology of the American Empire, then the kernel of truth in our culture-industry's ever more ephemeral claim to an ever more eternal fame is, indeed, that unashamed commercialism which everyone knows to be fraudulent already, and is therefore not a truth-claim in that sense, but which signifies instead that very different thing, the mediatic version of the multinational surplus-rent. One of the most striking features of the contemporary media culture is, indeed, its extraordinary speculative drive, light-years beyond the exigencies of the choice so beloved of the existentialists and the Husserlian post-haste pursuit of the things themselves alike: what is at issue is neither concrete situations nor things, but the keys and access-codes to such, i.e. the credit-system by which these are made available to the consumer. The ideology of consumer credit is not simply stamped onto the postmodern commodity, like a manufacturers' certificate or a safety compliance code, but innervated into the innermost aspect of design and production; something registered most acutely by the mass-cultural slang which disparages shoddy or inferior entertainment (which Disney's slick, complexly-choreographed wares are really the furthest thing from) as "Mickey Mouse" productions. Design, as the software engineers are wont to say, is law, and not vice versa, in a phrase Adorno would have delighted in showing to be more diabolically expressive of the logic of late capitalism than such engineers would ever want to know.

It is therefore all the more striking to observe that Adorno's project of a multinational dialectics begins not with the culture-industry per se (the predominant strategy of the 1980s post-modernisms), but with Heidegger and fundamental ontology,

in a situation where both of these things have seemingly been driven from the field by Anglo-Saxon pragmatism and the various Western European existentialisms. One might immediately point to our old friend, the asynchronous development of the productive forces – in particular, the underdevelopment of the Central European culture and ideology industries in relation to those of the American hegemon, acutely visible in Adorno's lack of a theory of film or jazz modernism, and occasional cantankerousness vis-à-vis Brecht's theater – and argue that the ontologies were what Nazi Germany had instead of a Disneyfied film and consumer culture, which comes very close to the mark, but is not quite the whole story, either. For one thing, the consumer cultures of the 1940s and 1950s were hardly engines of cosmopolitanism, but were highly militarized, rationed and nationalistic affairs; more importantly still, asynchrony is hardly a self-explanatory concept, but needs to be fleshed out in the specific context of the political discourse, economic formation, or intellectual field in question.

In fact, it is precisely the displaced or prematurely annulled vocation of the national philosopher (and it's worth recalling Jameson's brilliant insight in his Late Marxism, that Heidegger was the reigning philosopher of the 1930s) which permitted the fundamental innovation of the Frankfurt School – the emergence of a post-national division of intellectual labor – to emerge in the first place. Where Horkheimer navigated the financial and legal details necessary to keep the members of the School not just solvent but out of the hands of the Gestapo, Marcuse did the hands-on marketing and networking for a revitalized (one would like to say, Benjaminized) Marxism, while Pollock and others provided detailed economic and sociological analyses of state-monopoly capitalism, Adorno himself manufactured the conceptual mediations which tied all these things together, i.e. transformed the heritage of national and international philosophy into the building-blocks of multinational theory. Consider, for example,

Adorno's keen dissection of the ontological need, which is by no means the same thing as consumerism, but refers rather to the historical necessity for state-monopoly superstructures explicitly designed to compensate for the crisis of the liberal marketplace via new types of collective or monopoly praxis.

Ontology, then, is not simply a philosophic grounds for debate so much as an occasion to theorize the liquidation of the remnants of the liberal subject by a new set of monopoly-ideologies: "The power-seizure reckons with the anthropological end-products of the bourgeois era," notes Adorno, subtly avoiding any direct reference to the Nazi regime, "and needs them." ND:97 All of which is another way of saying that the savage philistinity of Fascism turned out to be the forerunner of that broader and far more effective demolition job otherwise known as the Americanization and Stalinization of Western and Eastern Europe respectively. Heidegger, to put it bluntly, will be the door through which Adorno ambushes the Disney ideology on the unexpected terrain of the American Empire's ideological prehistory.¹ Witness the deft interweaving of theory, class agency and micropolitical practice in the following gem, wherein the ontologies function as the bridge between Kierkegaard's idealism and the New Age ideolects:

The philosophic leap, Kierkegaard's Ur-gesture, is itself the caprice, by which it imagines to escape the subjugation of the subject under being. Only where the subject is also, in Hegel's words, somehow there, is its bane lessened; it perpetuates itself in that which would be simply different from the subject, just as the *deus absconditus* [Latin: absent god] always bore traces of the irrationality of mythical deities. Light falls on the restorative tendencies of today's philosophies from the kitschy exoticism of cobbled-together world-views, as in for example the astonishingly consumable Zen Buddhism. Similar to this, these simulate a position of thought, which the stored-up history in subjects makes it impossible to assume. The delimitation of the Mind to what is open and achievable in its historical level of experience is an element of freedom; non-conceptual meandering embodies the opposite. Doctrines which unhesitatingly run away from the subject into the cosmos, are along with the philosophies of being far more compatible with the hardened constitution of the world, and the chances of success in it, than the slightest bit of self-reflection of the subject on itself and its real imprisonment. ND:76

Neither the 1960s sublime of the body (the protest against labor, period) nor the bogus rebellions of the enlightenment-industry (the manufactured and regressive protest against the division of labor) escapes the net here; both turn out, on closer examination, to be local manifestations of the Marxian organic accumulation of capital within the subject. But where a Freudian discourse would delimit this process to the internal division of labor in the psyche (that is to say, the sublimation or domestication of internal drives which are palpably threadbare allegories of larger social conflicts), and where a Parsonian sociology would portray the Taylorization or Fordization of the subject as a self-correcting or cybernetic sequence of processes rather than as the violent and compulsory form of alienation which it indeed is, Adorno cannily puts the question of class agency and Marxism back on the front burner – not, as Lukaçs does in the pages of History and Class Consciousness, by positing the national mass party as the thinking or solidarizing subject – but by means of the wondrous abstraction of that “Geist” (mind or spirit) brought into play at the center of the passage. Instead of merely reclassifying a social and intellectual division of labor taken for granted, we are asked to rethink the categories of the corporeal and the nominalistic, the psychological and the realistic, and the individual and the collective from the standpoint of those *thinking bodies* in which all these categories find their content: bodies which collectively labor, and whose thoughts are just as much the historical products of this labor-process as they are the individual and improvised achievements of the subjects involved. Hegel’s Mind, in short, turns into Marx’s Capital, and the veiled master-slave dialectic of late feudalism turns into the unrepentant class struggle of national and international bourgeoisies and proletariats.

By the same token, conservativizing ideologies are characterized not merely by the denial or repression of labor – the straightforward subordination of wage-labor under the currency or credit markets as much as the formal abnegation of intellectual activity in

the face of whatever political, social or cultural marketplace is at hand – but by the substitution or displacement of the laboring body which thinks by something else. For the ontologies, this can be nothing less than the subjectless subjectivity or ultramodern archaicism of the Heideggerian neologism, which yokes the Teutonic populism of the verb to the Fascist power-claim of the qualifying gerund, in much the same way that the WW II propaganda film integrates the montage technique of Surrealism and the mobilized camera of Expressionism into that new aesthetic genre, the newsreel from the front (the faces of ordinary soldiers, pilots and marines interspersed with panoramas of moving tanks, airplanes and transport vehicles, all paced by the stentorian voice of the announcer-qua-drill-sergeant). Just the opposite strategy was employed by the progressive existentialisms, e.g. the Sartre of Being and Nothingness, wherein the exigencies of wartime occupation and the life-and-death solidarities of the Resistance had their terminus in the existential conditions of the choice, the commitment, and the project (the subject's attempt to outwit, negate or otherwise rebel against Authority); a not unrelated line of resistance can also be discerned in the great New Deal comedy-dramas, e.g. the Marx brothers' A Day at the Races and Frank Capra's It Happened One Night, in the form of the plebian rebellion against a literally and figuratively discredited 1920s culture of finance capital.

 Tempting though it is to ascribe cinematic qualities to the ontologies (something displayed in the pop cultural explanation of Fascism as the culmination of a congenital Teutonic militarism, as well as the WW II agitprop films which cast Nazi elites as a lugubrious Cosa Nostra in unusually resplendent uniforms), it should be emphasized that the ontological systems were in no way, shape or form a substitute or replacement for film or any other aesthetic media. Fundamental ontology was, much like the political regime to which it gave its notorious sympathies, deeply hostile to aesthetic expression as

a whole. In this the ontologies carried out a tendency already latent in the phenomenologies which historically preceded them; what little Husserl had to say about aesthetics was geared not towards the great German films of the silent era (whose most underacknowledged theorist was undoubtedly Walter Benjamin) or the fiery meteor-trail of Surrealism but to the fearsomely dull photographic reprints of the 19th century landscape named by the Wesenschau (a.k.a. Neue Sachlichkeit), and Adorno's Jargon of Authenticity meticulously documents the process by which logical absolutisms and the various positivisms sought to rebel against the encroachments of a rising monopoly capitalism by regressing back to the mythical gold standard of an ontologized authenticity.²

Nowhere is the contradiction between a state-monopoly capitalism which required aesthetic mediations to valorize its products and the ultimately self-destructive Fascist censure of mediation more apparent than in the meaning-fundament of Heidegger's oeuvre, the infamous Sein or Being, which is, like the Fuehrer or the NSDAP, invested with absolute powers of authority and authenticity, but is never permitted to be concretely identified with any given policy decision or political event. Rather, the word is supposed to non-conceptually embody the thing, just as the radio broadcasts which spouted forth nonsensical tirades about "Blut und Boden" (blood and soil) were, in the end, the realest thing about that particular ideology: "Being tempts alluringly," notes Adorno devastatingly, "eloquent as wind-blown leaves in bad poetry." ND:83 Ontology consequently ends up reconfirming precisely the trashy and debased mass-culture which it allegedly condemns; the monopoly-commodity is denounced by means of an ontological ground which is at its core nothing but the self-abnegation of thought, the patent refusal to think through the commodity form or its relevant social formations.

Conversely, the social antagonisms of the latter are scapegoated onto dissident intellectuals and indeed any creative intellectual activity whatsoever:

The time-tested hue and cry already being raised in the public opinion against the subversive intellect is combined with the one against what is materially [dinghaft] alienated: both ever played to the other. Heidegger is at once hostile towards things and anti-functional. At no price is being supposed to be a thing and yet, as the metaphor indicates over and over again, the “soil”, something solid.²⁴ Therein becomes apparent, that subjectivization and reification do not merely diverge, but are correlates. ND:97-98

Reification is not merely an indispensable index of the antagonistic development of the intellectual relations of production vis-à-vis the intellectual productive forces, or what might be termed the dialectic between Gramsci’s organic intellectual and Sartre’s engaged writer or playwright on the one hand, and theories of the culture of monopoly capitalism on the other. It is also an essential corrective on the potential fetishization of those productive forces, something which has significant consequences for the project of a global-trending Marxism. “Mediation is however so little to be hypostasized as the poles of subject and object; it is valid solely in their constellation,” notes Adorno. “Mediation is mediated through that which is mediated.” ND:106 This insistence on the historical weight and density of the concept stands in dire contrast to the vast bulk of the post-structuralisms and postmodernisms, whose greatest failing was their inability to ground their concepts either internally, that is to say in the context of what has become in the meantime a clearly global theory-market, or externally, in the workings of the multinational consumer culture. This is not to say that genuinely progressive thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault were completely insensitive to aesthetic issues, as evinced by the former’s meditation on self-disseminating philosophemes schooled in the honorable subversions of Genet and Magritte, or the latter’s utopia of non-surveillance (what might be called the non-opticon of an emancipatory homoeroticism or sphere of countercultural pleasures), but merely to underline the fact that their aesthetic mandate,

much like the political one of the 1970s social democracies and Left movements to which they symbolically corresponded, was fatally limited to a more or less progressive neonationalism. This latter was all too easily absorbed or outflanked by the logic of an American and, somewhat later, European and East Asian multinational capitalism – comparable to the way that the limit-point of Mitterrand regime’s Yuppie socialism was Eurocapital’s drive towards Maastricht monetarism. The critique of the late capitalist totality which does not adequately reflect upon its own particularity, that is to say its historically specific and mediated relationship to the hegemonic social tendencies of the day (it being understood that these latter are not a synonym for the prevailing norms or fashions, but are defined by what they exclude or stigmatize as non-hegemonic, emergent or archaic), ends up as all too totalizing. Though this is most obvious in the work of a Deleuze and Guittari, busily retailing one marketable fragment or glib New Left press release after another across the thousand plateaus of a clearly European capitalism, something similar is at work in the garden-variety post-structuralism of the American scene, where a certain glib marketing rhetoric merely recycles the latest media mantras or sportscaster buzzwords instead of reflecting upon such. The postmodern dissolution of the monumental or ontological in favor of the fragmentary or ephemeral stops precisely where it should start: at the borders of a theory of the totality. Mediation is both the motor of abstraction as well as the valorization of such into the concrete contradiction, i.e. the materialities of global aesthetics as much as the abstractions of theory. The result is that Derrida’s trumping of Heidegger’s ontological difference (the dubious shuttling between the ontologic Sein and the ontic Seiendes, which Adorno diagnoses as the keynote of Heidegger’s system) with the notorious differànce (the no less problematic shuttling between the disseminatory sign-system and the dissemination) preserves precisely that ontological framework Derrida sought, at the outer margins of Glas, to escape; exactly

the same is true of Foucault's thematics of the prison and madness, which continuously reconfirm those disciplines (both punitive and academic) practiced by the archeologies of knowledge supposedly being dismantled.

Dialectics, on the other hand, demands not merely the shuttling or transference of categories, but their analysis and critique by new ones – both as the active intermingling of new concepts with the old, the archeological spadework or reconstructive dig which theorizes the hitherto untheorized, and as the meditation on those theoretical insufficiencies and aporias which are the invaluable and priceless historical symptoms of the non-identity of theory with whatever is being thought. Thus Adorno's canny decryption of the constellation underlying Heidegger's violent suppression of the reality of the commodity form: "Being is the contraction of essences. Ontology ends up due to its own consistency in a no-man's land." ND:85 Because ontology does not permit itself to fundamentally know anything at all, let alone to speculate on what someday might be, it declares war on theoretical cognition in general, by raising the motif of *Stimmung* or latent mass-cultural affect to a regimenting norm. The gesture recalls to mind the fate of the officer caste of the Wehrmacht, who were required at the very beginning of the 1933 Nazi seizure of power to swear a personal oath of allegiance to Hitler. The archaicism of the gesture was the perfect product of Enlightenment modernity: Hitler, as the lowly trench soldier of WW I become absolute ruler, thereby literally and figuratively rendered the emergency solidarity of the trenches a universal condition. Instead of ascribing this universality to the preternatural daemon of German nationalism (whose concentration camps merely systematized that genocide the allegedly arch-democratic Western Europeans had practiced as an entrepreneurial pastime on the indigenous peoples of Africa, Latin America and Asia for centuries), Adorno insists that we return to our earlier point concerning the possible cinematic quality of the ontologies, and to ask our question

in reverse; to consider, in short, what is alarmingly ontological and deeply Heideggerian about the American culture industry:

If one wished to draw up an ontology and thereby follow the basic matter-at-hand, whose repetition makes it into an invariant, then it would be horror. An ontology of culture would above all have to take up, where culture at large failed. Philosophically legitimate ontology would have its place more in the construction of the culture-industry than in that of being; good, only that which has escaped ontology. ND:128

The military Keynesianisms and national security states of the Axis powers thus paved the way for the permanent military and scientific mobilizations of the superstates, in the same way that Hitler set the unwitting precedent for those other plebian soldier-politicians who would formally manage the American and Soviet superstates, i.e. Eisenhower and Brezhnev, both of whom would seal the non-identity of their respective respective Empires by means of the identical threat of thermonuclear annihilation at their fingertips. Such elective affinities extend even to the characteristic 1950s ideogeme of an anxious or claustrophobic prosperity, spawned by the dizzying upwards mobility of white-collar engineers, technicians and scientists in the context of Government-funded research laboratories and civil engineering projects, and financed by a monumental flood of public and private debt backed by the full faith and credit of Governments rather than individual banks or a long-vanished gold standard. The narrative of upscaling expressed in concentrated form the tremendous geographic expansion of monopoly class relations into every nook and cranny of the world-system, from Eastern Europe to China, and from the semi-autarkic Latin American regimes to the future export-platform economies of the Pacific Rim. The archaic aspect of Fascism was therefore not its policy of expansion per se, which merely echoed the imperative of the total system to constantly enlarge its markets, but the unprofitable and ultimately suicidal reinstatement of liberal-era primitive accumulation (slavery and the plunder of the death-camps) onto the semi-peripheries of

the world-system, precisely where the US underwrote a spate of New Deal-style monopoly accumulation strategies in Japan, South Korea, Italy and West Germany, and where the Soviet Union and post-revolutionary China installed autarkic military-industrial regimes in the true peripheries of Eastern Europe and rural China. Considered as the prehistory of the Cold War, therefore, the ontological systems can be mapped out as follows:

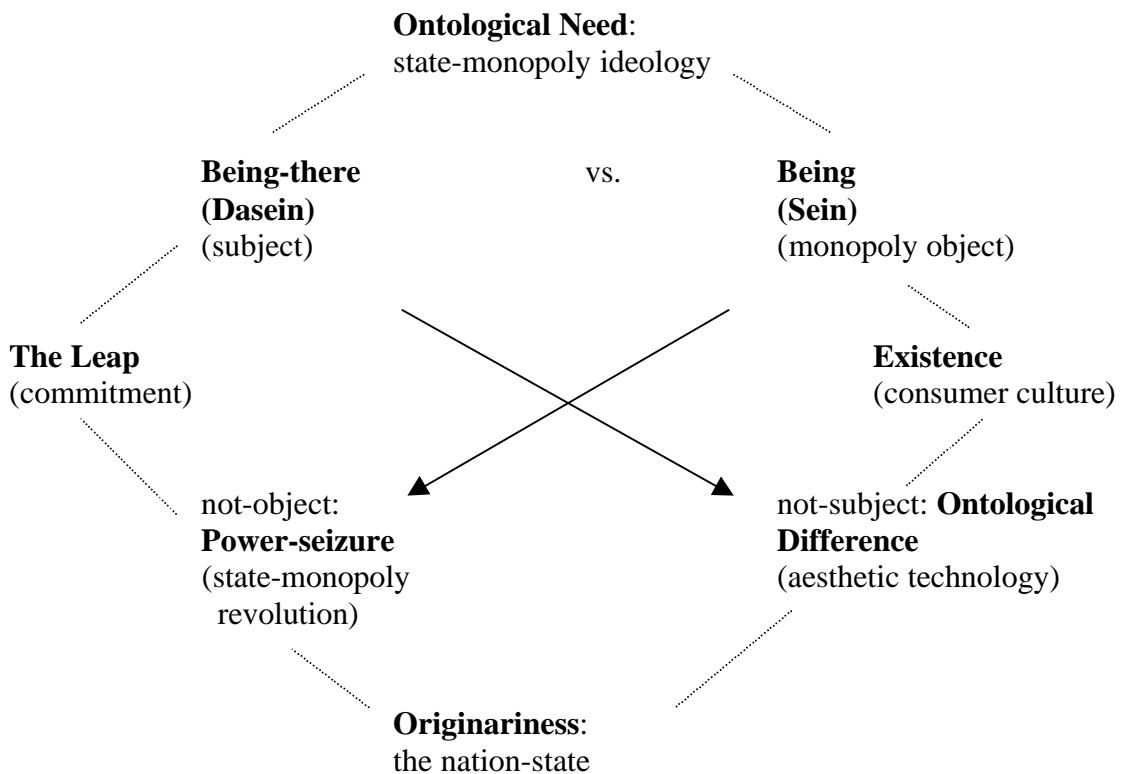


FIGURE 2. Antinomies of the ontological system.

Adorno will turn this prehistory against the realized constellations of state-monopoly capitalism using two key bridge mediations. First, the thinking bodies of laborers are conjoined to the notion of expressivity, or what amounts to a rewriting of the earlier Frankfurt School concept of a well-nigh anthropological mimesis transduced by national

bodies of capital (conservative mythologies of patriotism and imperialism as much as the progressive ones of the general strike or the scientific inevitability of socialism) in an international turn. The expressive serves the same function vis-à-vis the philosopheme of a hegemonic or Cold War American culture-industry as the technician-hero or scientist in the nuclear war films and science fiction spectacles of the 1950s, i.e. the interpretive key or code of a mediating technocracy, which is meant to reconcile the interests of a top-level manager or executive (the social space of corporate marketing or innovation) and those of the field-agent of the Cold War bureaucracy in question (the social space of an administered production and distribution apparatus).³ Such actants did not simply certify that broader post-WW II division of global labor between the raw materials neocolonies of the Third World, the cheap skilled labor of the Second World, and what US elites presumed were the permanent high-technology rents and credit surpluses of the Anglo-American metropolises, but rather mediated the surplus-rents of globalizing American firms in a variety of creative and occasionally even progressive ways, everywhere from the informed pacifism of The Day the Earth Stood Still to clever retakes of the postwar occupation film such as the The Teahouse of the August Moon (what might be termed the global and local poles of resistance to a worldwide American Occupation).

Adorno's second key mediation will refunction one of the central tropes of the existentialisms, namely that abstract or serialized collectivity which stands in an antagonistic relationship with the thinking individual, in a materialistic vein: "No being without existents." ND:139 These latter are not to be confused with existential conditions or situations, but with existents, i.e. that multiplicity of objects or object-experiences not yet stamped and shelved away in the bustling psychic supermarket of the late capitalist subject, but not quite subsumed under the academic discipline or philosophical methodology, either. The existent, put simply, is Adorno's scansion of what theorists

term nowadays the global consumer culture: it is that omnipresent and unavoidable matrix of mediations which confronts the subject in late capitalism at every step, from automobile traffic to shopping malls, and from air pollution to the mass media. All this in turn drives what Bourdieu calls the social accumulation of capital from within the subject, a process which begins with toilet training and language acquisition and later extends to the formal demands of the educational system and the quest for professional qualifications.

It is precisely such local mediations which form the building-blocks of those larger and far more complex abstractions otherwise known as gender, ethnic and national identities, and not the other way around; indeed, class identity, far from being the simple fact or received stereotype trumpeted by Diamat dogma, is the most complex, subtle and polyvalent abstraction of them all. Adorno's indispensable point here is that inasmuch as this abstraction is also and everywhere the realest and most concrete thing imaginable – as concrete as the ubiquitous commodity form itself, and yet just as uncannily impalpable and abstract as the global stock, currency and credit markets – both poles of the analysis need to be thought through simultaneously, without privileging one over the other. Hypostatizing the concreity would be as disastrous as fetishizing the abstraction; while the former dead-ends in a dessicated positivism and the mere cataloguing of what already exists, the latter sinks into the trackless ontological swamps: “The concept of the existent pure and simple is merely the shadow of the false one of being.” ND:142 All this chimes well with Sartre's famous definition of Marxism as that untranscendable horizon of intellectual discourse, beyond which only a society free from the ravages of capital could go; conversely, reactionary ideologies will attempt above all else to block or extirpate such horizons, either through the crude censorship of the Eastern bloc or the ideological ghettoization practiced by the ontologies, which banish the non-identical to the purgatory of the ontical (or what amounts to Husserl's facticity divested even of the thinly extenuating materiality of the investigative subject). What has not already been annexed into the totalizing demesne of Sein is not permitted to exist – whether as the innermost core of the concept, or as the inmates of the railroad cars destined for Treblinka.

Adorno's pulverizing conclusion: "The ontological difference is removed by virtue of the conceptualization of what is non-conceptual into non-conceptuality." ND:123 Ontology certifies stupidity to be the highest form of reason and crowns inhumanity as the culmination of humanity, in a dire formulation which a future half century of repressive ideologies, from Zhdanovism to the Latin American comprador militarisms, and from the Chinese Cultural Revolution to McCarthyism, would not hesitate to raise to their ruling principle: the symbolic affirmation of untrammelled class domination.

This may explain why non-identity becomes so crucial for the resistance to that domination: the fate of what the early Frankfurt School called critical reason, and what Adorno will identify as the thinking subject, is also the fate of real bodies, bodies which labor and which think. Just as the laboring body cannot ultimately be separated from the cognizing body, nor the individually-mediated labor of cognition from the socially-mediated labor of the production and reproduction of the subject, so too is the work of theory not to be separated from the practical matter of organizing trade unions, waging political campaigns and building Left parties: both are forms of thinking labor. Nor is this latter to be glossed by a rhetorical sleight of hand, i.e. in the injunction to a specifically multinational class praxis, presumably conjoined to the specific constellation of whatever contradiction (the local versus the global, the concrete and the abstraction, appearance as against essence, the empirical as opposed to the nominal) is at hand. Where the thought overshoots its material, i.e. does not touch base with the larger constellation in which it is embedded or dogmatically takes such for granted, the analysis runs aground on the speculative abstraction; the argument becomes just that – an argument, an aesthetic presentation or a mere point of view devoid of theoretical stringency. Where the thought undershoots its material, i.e. subordinates itself to an existing thought-structure or discipline without bothering to think the details of the latter through in relation to what is

being investigated, the result is an empiricism run wild, a.k.a. the conceptual fetishism of the Lockean tabula rasa or the up-to-the-minute market-report.

Adorno's ingenious way out of this dilemma is to historicize both of these antipodes in the context of the classically Hegelian problem of the relation of *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung* (crudely translated, "presentation" and "representation", with the proviso that the former is an empirical depiction and the latter a realized imagining or thought-portrayal). But where Hegel offered up the dubious synthesis of that mediating Geist which, by knowing and representing everything in advance, thus served as both the Napoleonic actor and English-nobilitarian playwright of the theater of History, and ended up delimiting the historical process to the static commemoration of the French and American national-bourgeois revolutions, Adorno will strategically deploy Marx's notion of that great-grandmother of all global mediations, namely Capital, against such. The point is not simply to countermand Hegel, but to think the Hegelian system of national mediations all the way through to Marx's indisputably international world-court of History, wherein the various modes of production battle it out before the proletarian jury with all the raging fury and spiraling violence of the American Civil War, the Italian and German wars of national unification, and the wars of the Latin American independence movements. Far from merely applying a certain 19th century Marxism onto an external cultural field, or substituting the class struggle of aesthetics for the class struggle in the streets, as both conservative and radical detractors of the Frankfurt School are wont to aver, Adorno is rethinking the world-market and monopoly capital as a new kind of narrative form and content respectively. Or, put more concretely, the Marxian prosecution of the liberal-era commodity-form provided the historical model and forerunner for Adorno's decryption of the twists and turns of the monopoly-commodity, a.k.a. the identity-principle. "Identity," says Adorno bluntly, "is the Ur-form of

ideology.” ND:151 No translation can do justice to the full flavor of “Urform”, which connotes a kind of prehistorical realm or an activated geological eternity, suspended deftly between the overinflated Charybis of “Identity is the primal scream of ideology” and the underdone Scylla of “Identity is the forest primeval of ideology”. One of the most important aspects of the project of a negative or multinational dialectics, as we shall see, will be the inception of a retrospective or restitutive dialectic, a kind of reverse time-machine designed not to build vast syntheses or draw the usual sweeping conclusions, but to disassemble such into their constituent microhistories.

The result might almost be taken for the spatialized or asynchronous version of what Benjamin criticized as “dialectics at a standstill”, if not indeed the prototype of that self-indulgent theodicy of despair which so many critics have accused the Frankfurt School of practicing, were it not for the materialist bedrock upon which the entire critique is anchored: “Its [negative dialectics] logic is one of disassembly [Zerfalls]: of the prepared and objectified form of concepts, which the cognizing subject immediately faces at first. Their identity with the subject is untruth.” ND:148 Not the merely untrue, but the universal condition of untruth itself will be the providential corrective upon the truth-seeking element of cognition generally, and not just in the Goethean sense of the Mephistophelean lie, i.e. the productivities of a marketplace of belief no longer tied to the liturgical verities of faith but not yet reduced to the free-floating class ideologies of the postmodern period. Identity is not simply a matter of reconciling conflicting superstructural claims, i.e. those of science versus those of culture, or sociology versus psychology or what have you; rather, inasmuch as every late capitalist superstructure is an ideological, cultural and juridical instance (read: battleground) in that vast machinery of repressive collectivization and expropriation otherwise known as global capitalism, identity functions as the bearer of equivalence between subjects locked into furious

competition with one another – or something like the money-form of the subject’s claim to autonomy, a.k.a. Bourdieu’s cultural capital. It is precisely the high-tech Internet speculation and the merchandising endorsement which ultimately vouches for the culture of the high-tech information specialist and the professional sports athlete (e.g. the small business letter of credit at a local bank and the multi-year NBA contract) and not the other way around; the speculation precedes the anticipated return on the investment. This is not to say the exigencies of the former always outweigh those of the latter, or that speculation can run riot with no regard to economic fundamentals, but merely to underline the fact that the movement of capital is not merely spatial, but temporal as well. Time, after all, is money, both in terms of the competition between the various capitals (the unceasing struggle to accelerate the turnover of capital and reduce the time required for its valorization) as well as the competition of entire modes of production in their own right (e.g. the weekly rhythms of the print periodicals characteristic of the 19th century, as compared to the daily newspaper and radio broadcasts of the monopoly era, or indeed the well-nigh continuous updates of the Internet).

It follows that one of the key aspects of the resistance to capital will derive from the non-identity of market time with the temporality of lived experience. The suburban automobile owner who drives aimlessly up and down the countryside, the TV viewer who counters the fifteen-second attention span of the mass media with the ten-second urge to channel-click, and the link-hopping Internet search are only the most mundane examples of this; Adorno seems to have a specifically aesthetic strategy in mind here, namely the Proustian discourse of a time lost and improvisationally regained. All this resonates suggestively in Adorno’s use of the term *Zerfall*, whose usual English translation, “disintegration” or “decay”, does not come even close to the intriguing patina of the German word, which is wreathed in an almost sumptuous aura of Venetian decadence

and decline, and is something like the objective-sociological equivalent of the more subjective-immanent “Verfall”. Zerfall connotes an explicit and conscious alternative to the regressive and militaristic mythos of temporality purveyed by the Spenglerian “Untergang” or “Niedergang”, and bespeaks the patient excavation of an archeological dig or else the slow aging of a superb wine, wherein the accretion of small additive abrasions gradually tempers and wears away the repressive apparatus in which the subject is encased, or else leaches out the primordial structures of violence internalized into the subject proper without doing harm to the surrounding tissue. The spell of prehistory cannot be broken by the violent recourse to posthistory, but only by the re-making of history itself: the nurturing, in the midst of and with the best part of the old, of the fragile possibility of the historically new. Hope resides not in the expectation of a totalizing Revolution – totalization is the essence of capitalism, namely the incessant expansion of the relations of capitalist production at the expense of the potential solidarities of the laboring subjects and the potentialities of the productive forces alike, punctuated by the demolition of whatever stands in the way of this process – but in a plurality of micrological revolutions against the totality, or what in retrospect is clearly a cipher for the civil rights movements, human rights protests, and nonviolent direction actions of the New Left.

In one of the most provocative passages in all of Negative Dialectics, Adorno lays his cards on the table, and elaborates not merely the complex linkages between the identity-principle and late capitalism (something which in any case is never decided for once and for all, but must be rethought in the context of each historical period, each work of art, and each psychological case study in question) but the unforeseen ways in which the identity-principle, as much a product of the rule of capital as the proletariat itself, actively resists capital’s rule:

The exchange-principle, the reduction of human labor to an abstract general concept of average labor-time, is Ur-related to the identification-principle. It has its social model in exchange, and it would not be without it; through it, non-identical particular essences and achievements become commensurable, identical. The spread of the principle remits the entire world to the identical, to totality. If the principle meanwhile was abstractly negated; if it was proclaimed as an ideal that, for the greater honor of the irreducibly qualitative, things should no longer go according to like for like, this would create an excuse for regressing into age-old injustice. For the exchange of equivalents was based since time immemorial exactly on this, that something unequal was exchanged in its name, that the surplus-value of labor was appropriated. If one simply annulled the measurement-category of comparability, then what would step into the place of the rationality, which was indeed ideological yet also inherent as a promise in the exchange-principle, is immediate expropriation, violence, nowadays: the naked privilege of monopolies and cliques. Critique of the exchange-principle as the identifying one of thought wishes that the ideal of free and fair exchange, until today a mere pretext, would be realized. This alone would transcend the exchange. ND:150

Here at last a genuinely multinational Marxism emerges from its Central European chrysalis to beat its fledgling wings in the gale force winds of history, setting all our usual received categories of micropolitics, the global market and multinational class struggle into motion – not by virtue of any internal subjective caprice or scheme of ideals, but by revealing such categories to be, in their limited and fragmentary way, allegories of that collective praxis which may yet someday work humanity's weal out of its continuum of woe. Among the startling reversals Adorno stages here, note first that the exchange-principle is not the model for the social continuum of exchange; rather the process of exchange is literally the "social model" or mediated instance of the generalizing abstraction of capital.⁴ Second, that capitalist posthistory posited by the various monopoly capitalisms (the utopia of the new consumer ideologies) turns out to be the most savage prehistory, with the Soviet nomenklatura merely replicating the rule of the US Cold War Establishment, or what might be termed the GM autoklatura. Third, the very notion of the totality, that is to say the exchange-net of the global market, is not identical to a simple logic of accumulation, any more than multinational capital might be reduced to the machinations of a single multinational corporation or the dynamics of the

financial market to simple greed. Rather, the totality *moves*, not in a single direction but via multiple and antagonistic logics.

All this is powerfully confirmed in a field of human endeavor which may seem at first sight to utterly confound Adorno's particular brand of dialectics, and that is that favored avatar of a revamped capitalism, the information industry. It is not merely that the triumphalism of the Silicon Rentiers in a global economy where the US is running enormous trade and current account deficits with the new metropolises is a contradiction even on its own dubious terms, or simply that the neoliberal notion that, even if humble proles will never get the chance to run the latest telecom or software startup, let alone codetermine the conditions of their workplace or receive the full value of their day's labor, they can at least speculate on the shares of such (the value of which, as mutual funds punters constantly reassured US investors at the peak of the Wall Street Bubble, will grow thirty percent a year for at least the next thousand years), is sheer economic insanity, which of course it is; rather, the aporia runs deeper still, and touches upon the underlying contradiction between an American-inspired cultural and ideological neonationalism and the financial and industrial multinationalism of the Pacific Rim and the European Union. The rentiers trumpet their stock returns because, in a very real sense, they have nothing else left to trumpet; East Asia and the EU are the hegemonic industrial powers of the day and dominate almost every industrial and financial category one could name, ranging from autos to trucks, electronics to food processing, and energy to heavy electrical equipment. What this means, in a nutshell, is that the much-ballyhooed "information culture" to emerge in the 1990s is directly linked to the new metropolises, in the form of publicly-funded or otherwise socialized networks of industrial investment and innovation, everywhere from Japan's semiconductor consortium to the Singapore public

holding companies to the EU's lush undergrowth of regional, national and EU-wide innovation networks.

This begs the crucial question, of course, of the specifically political vectors of this transformation: what, to be blunt, do the business practices of SAP, Intel and Sony really have to do with the emergent political practices of newly multinational human rights, environmental and labor movements, aside from the mushrooming telecommunications infrastructure or global markets in which both can be said to operate? A significant clue to the answer is contained in the classic invention of Gibson's Neuromancer, namely the "matrix" of cyberspace. This fascinating re-appropriation of a technocratic or mathematical term (a matrix is simply a data-set organized in a certain pattern or relation) by a mass-cultural one is replicated in the subterranean etymology of the term "logic", which, in one of the rare boons proffered by an otherwise astringently pragmatic English language upon the discourse of theory, has lost its original meaning of a dustily dry epistemology or formalized mathematical procedure and acquired the holographic sheen of an upstart silicon industrialism, thanks to the "core logics" of constantly-redesigned memory chips and microprocessors. The informatic metaphor becomes even more suggestive given the fact that hardware infrastructures, as expert users will attest, are only as efficient as their superstructural software and that the needs of software codetermine the latest hardware advances; the superstructural version of this dialectic of overtly self-propelling and covertly socialized productive forces is probably most apparent in the Pacific Rim economies, where powerful developmental states and gigantic keiretsu financial structures turned out to be far more entrepreneurial in the auto, electronics and electrical industries than the supposedly world-beating Anglo-Saxon entrepreneurs themselves.

From an ideological perspective, all this may explain why the myth of the entrepreneur has become one of the crucial mediations which enables the multinational corporation to rule as handily over a worldwide sea of less competitive, technologically dependent and exploitable subcontractors as it does; it is precisely because entrepreneurs are so obviously *not* in control of the world-system that they provide the perfect foil for the rule of the multis. That is, the entrepreneur is supposed to automatically embody the free, creative labor and independent spirit which large corporations just as automatically exclude; they are thus the official non-identity of corporate identity, in much the same sense as those 19th century British Liberals who styled themselves as Her Majesty's loyal opposition. Dialectics, warns Adorno, must avoid hypostatizing the non-identical as much as identity itself:

The mere attempt, to turn philosophical thought towards the non-identical instead of identity, would thus be nonsensical; it would a priori reduce the non-identical to its concept and thereby identify it. All these sorts of considerations are too radical and for that reason, like most radical questions, not radical enough. The form of the untiring recourse, in which something of the lash of the work-ethic rages, veers ever further from what is to be seen through, and leaves it unquestioned. The category of the root, of the origin itself is dominating, confirmation of what came first, because it was there first; of the chthonic against the immigrant, of the settled against the mobile. What is alluring as the origin, because it does not want to be assuaged by what is derived, by ideology, is for its part an ideological principle. The conservative-sounding sentence of Karl Kraus, "Origin is the goal", also expresses something scarcely meant in its own time and place: that the static delinquency [Unwesen: bad state of affairs] of the concept of the origin must be removed. The goal would not be to find its way back to the origin, to the phantasm of a good nature, but rather the origin would devolve to the goal, would constitute itself out of the latter. No origin except in the life of the ephemeral. ND:158

What is ephemeral in late capitalism is, indeed, the life-cycle of the average consumer commodity, whose accelerated obsolescence is merely the flip side of the unimaginably complex and interlocking set of supply, transport and distribution networks which form the circulatory system of the planetary economy. Such networks are tied in turn to production-centers of what the mainstream economics literature has variously termed, with its usual tendency to uncritically ratify whatever capital happens to be doing at the

moment, regimes of post-Fordism, flexible accumulation, lean production, or simply Toyotism, all of which are said combine entrepreneurial agility and engineering skill with unmatched guarantees of product quality and long-term customer service. Such glowing accounts of high-tech Nirvana need to be tempered, to be sure, with the less newsworthy but far more accurate Marxist cognition that global capitalism has meant intensified exploitation – union-busting, declining real wages, and outright social decay and economic collapse – for workers in the Anglo-American zones, Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe and much of Asia, as well as the creation of enormous pools of footloose speculative and financial capital controlled by a narrow strata of rentier and keiretsu elites.

All this sheds significant light on the aporias of that more generalized rentier ideology of the 1990s, a.k.a. the multinational successor to Anglo-American Thatcherism, or neoliberalism. It is the very unfreedom of the market, namely the totalizing impulse of the exchange-net which subordinates the field of action of even the most powerful firms and financiers to the narrow dictates of accumulation, upon which neoliberal ideology stakes its utopian claim. This may explain why the central narrative of neoliberalism is not really an unthinking panegyric to the market, but in fact its canalized critique: what the global rentiers and their henchpersons in the IMF and World Bank consistently demand, aside from the usual ritual obeisances in the general direction of US capital markets, is “fiscal accountability”, “prudence” and, above all, “transparency” – goals which can only be realized, of course, by the selfsame state machinery and governmental agencies neoliberals have taken such painstaking care (via direct military interventions in Central America, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and so forth, as well as IMF structural adjustment policies and debt embargoes) to utterly demolish. The brutish neocolonization of Latin America, which has followed rentier

orthodoxy to the letter, illustrates the paradox quite well: accountability has meant in practice guaranteed bailouts for irresponsible First World speculators; prudence, cuts in education, social funding and wages; transparency, the auctioning off of state assets to multinationals at firesale prices. The result has been horrific social polarization, a selective boom for well-connected elites and raw materials exporters, and the impoverishment of the vast majority, accompanied by an ever-increasing dependency on global financial markets. True booms have occurred not in neoliberal countries, but in precisely those Southeast Asian and Eastern Europe countries which most fully regulated and controlled their markets via powerful developmental states or nascent social democracies. The conclusion is inescapable: the global rentiers' concept of accountability is unaccountable, their concept of prudence is the sheerest recklessness, and their concept of competition is the most nakedly self-interested monopoly imaginable.

Something similar is at work in the typical rentier argument that the US can afford to ignore the decline of its currency, because of the hitherto unquestioned role of the dollar as world reserve currency, when in fact the long-term slide of the dollar is simply the flip side of equally long-running US trade, capital and productivity deficits vis-à-vis its East Asian and Central European competitors. The point is not that the ideology is untrue, but that there are very good reasons indeed why Anglo-American rentiers could not help but believe in their own mythology. Japanese-style export-platform development was never an option for US elites given the autarkic industrial structure and Iron Triangle pork-barrel spending of the US military-industrial complex; the European solution, of an expansive welfare state and a heavily regulated financial sector, was equally unpalatable to a ruling class unwilling to grant workers even the most basic economic rights to organize unions and collectively bargain, let alone provide the sort of universal health insurance coverage, national pensions, and electoral systems of proportional

representation now commonplace throughout the entire EU. In fact the rentier position makes sense only when one considers the financial dependence of the contemporary American economy on its own former postwar semiperipheries: this is the shocking fact that in 1985, the US became a net global debtor for the first time since the late 19th century. The slide accelerated during the Wall Street Bubble, with the US borrowing roughly \$150 billion a year from Japan and the future EU to finance its sizeable current account and trade deficits; according to the IMF, the net US international investment position reached minus \$2 trillion as of December 1998. Amazing as it sounds, the US ruling-class is, globally speaking, just another brutish and degenerate comprador bourgeoisie.⁵

Yet if the myth of the entrepreneur really is a kind of ideological placebo or symbolic wish-fulfillment designed to assuage still deeper anxieties about the market – the luxurious anxiety of the global rich, fretting over the latest take-over attempt, as much as the material scarcities burdening the global poor, who dream of consuming the global commodities they produce but are not permitted to afford – this is not, surprising as it may seem, entirely to the thing's discredit. Ideologies are oftentimes never truer than when they are most false; i.e. where the thing momentarily contradicts, however briefly, what truly exists and thus opens the door to alternatives. The mythology of the entrepreneur is thus no mere fiction or passing episode of bad faith, it is a powerful identity-politics tied to a truly utopian piece of cultural praxis: the flip side of the quite understandable desire to be a free agent in a world owned and operated by multinational corporations and banks is the corresponding and logically inevitable fetishization of those quintessentially capitalist agencies of ownership and investment, the stock and credit markets.

The entrepreneur is, in short, the cultural avatar of the Wall Street stock and real estate bubbles: a regressive speculation grounded on the earnings-stream of futures past

(a return to the glory days of the 19th century robber barons) rather than present-day market share, only with the Internet instead of the railroad, junk bond buyouts instead of robber baron scams, and the electronic colonialism of the IMF instead of the Great Game of Victorian Britain. This aporia can be traced back to the very dawn of the world-market, when the trading ventures of small-scale entrepreneurs were at the mercy of the weather, scurvy and disease, not to mention the colonizing bureaucracies of the mercantilist states: just as the utopian moment of Robinson Crusoe is the shipwreck which cuts him off from a repressive civilization, and not necessarily that subsequent toil which attempted to reproduce English commercial society in the tropics, so too does Rousseau's tale of the noble savage stake its claim to authenticity on the colonial citizens of a virginal Nature, as opposed to the national-metropolitan naturalized citizen. The contemporary version of Defoe's tale would probably be the mythology of the bootstrap globalizer, the entrepreneur who builds a powerhouse multinational corporation from scratch, a la Hewlett and Packard, Bill Gates, or Konosuke Matsushita; while Rousseau's Romanticism might have its counterpart in the Third Way ideology propagated by the progressive foundations set up by billionaire hedge fund speculator George Soros, wherein the institutional heritage of the civil society and welfare bureaucracies devised by the various monopoly-national capitalisms is refurbished and renovated much like the historical museums, opera houses and public parks established by the enlightened robber barons of a bygone era.

But things really start to get interesting only when we move from the rarefied eyrie of the entrepreneur to the gritty realities of the multinational corporation or multi. Two of the most innovative forms of anti-market resistance, namely the multicultural and ecological movements, do not simply discard the entrepreneurial narrative as a form (i.e. critique the greed of the business leaders involved) but push beyond this to the central

internal contradiction of the multi: the antagonism between an explicitly transnational managerial culture on the one hand, and the multinational workplace culture of the average employee on the other.⁶ Whereas the mythology of the entrepreneur is a patent wish-fulfillment of managers who dream of ascending, Gates-style, into the upper ranks of the bourgeoisie, but who will for the most part remain forever locked into the lower and middle ranks of the corporate hierarchy, the culture of the employees runs in the opposite direction, towards the egalitarianism of the engineer-tweakers and software hackers so evident in the Unix-culture of the Internet or the free-floating groups of volunteers who produced the Linux operating system. Something similar is at work in the polarization of the environmental movement between corporate-funded national foundations or mainstream lobbying groups such as the NRDC, the World Wildlife Foundation and the Sierra Club on the one hand, and the environmental justice, sustainable development and Green political movements on the other. Whereas the former are generally located in the neo-national habitus of national and international regulatory agencies, the latter tend to be rooted in specifically multinational social ecologies (e.g. the favelas, Fourth World movements and radicalized professional-class workers).

In this context, multiculturalism is far more than just the logical and necessary antipode to the culture of the multis; it is the strategic bridge between the daily praxis of a multinational workforce still comprised of innumerable national and subnational cultural groups and not yet cognizant of itself as a world proletariat, and the more specialized cultural praxis of the various professional-class workers (programmers, clerical workers, teachers, and so forth). One excellent example of this dynamic is the rise of a multinational hip hop musical culture, wherein peripheralized cultures created by the storm and stress of globalization (the African American, Latino American, African

French and Turkish German communities, among so many others) recuperated a host of neonational and international blues, R & B and jazz materials in the context of a transnational recording and studio technology, conjoining innovative multinational musical forms with spoken texts which were simultaneously entertainment, political protest and educational instruction. Still another would be Saskia Sassen's sociology of mass immigration and urban restructuring, wherein the massive importation of guest-workers in Switzerland and West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s, the internal movement of uprooted farmworkers and rural residents in Japan and France through the mid-1970s, and of course sustained global immigration throughout the entire First World since the early 1980s, is revealed to be an unashamedly economic strategy by which the keiretsu structures and developmental states of East Asia and Central Europe, as well as the rentiers of the US, could counteract the rising real wages of the 1945-75 boom by importing an unskilled, super-exploited labor force (i.e. essentially creating a global reserve army of the unemployed). A third would be the right to asylum and sanctuary movements which emerged in the US in the context of the Pax Americana's brutal counter-insurgency wars in Central America, and in the EU in the context of the Yugoslav civil wars and the terminal economic crisis of the Eastern bloc. This latter is also closely linked to the fact that continuous immigration, far from being a unique attribute of the American national character – a preconception still shared, alas, by all too many Japanese and Europeans themselves – has become a First World norm: in addition to the sizeable numbers of EU citizens living in their non-native countries, France and Italy are host to millions of immigrants from Francophone Africa and the Maghreb, forty percent of present-day Berlin is of Turkish or Near Eastern descent, and of course hundreds of thousands of Eastern Europeans, Africans, and Asians arrive in the EU every year.

Remarkably, it is precisely in the context of the new, multinational Europe, a Europe he did not personally experience and could not directly foresee on that level, that Adorno's thought registers one of its most powerful insights; this is the notion of multiplicity or diversity by which the Benjaminic idea divests itself of its theological residue and embraces a new kind of utopic claim:

They [ideas] are neither ἄλλοθι [Greek: chôris / separate, apart] nor empty sounds but negative signs. The untruth of all achieved identity is the inverted form of truth. The ideas live in the hollows between what the things claim to be, and what they are. Utopia would be beyond identity and beyond the contradiction, a togetherness of what is divergent. ND:153

The identity-principle turns the knife-edge between what things claim to be and what they really are into a space for critical reflection, organization and activity – something which could almost be mistaken for a properly Social Democratic utopia, of an organized workforce taking the reins of national industries, were it not for the subtlety of Adorno's phrasing, which denotes a commingling or togetherness of an unimagineable diversity rather than any compulsory membership. Such a diversity sheds new light on that most notoriously complex of all Adorno's concepts, the constellation. So often misunderstood as a simple conjunction of unrelated concepts or, at best, the systematic mapping of a single concept over a number of topoi, the constellation or conceptual cast is designed above all to differentiate *between* concepts, to reveal each one in its own uniqueness in relation to the forcefield of all the others, and to thereby spring history out of the prison-house of the abstract cognition, ideologeme or representation in question. The process can also work in reverse, of course, such that a given historical process, an aesthetic work or a systemic ideology can be dissolved back into its constituent conceptual and representational building-blocks (this is the usual vocation of Marxist demystification going all the way back to Marx's 18th Brumaire, by the way, i.e. the problematic of diagnosing and decoding specific class identities and projects out of a welter of empirical

materials). What is important to stress here is the degree to which the truth-content of this diversity – the terminus of non-identity – represents a fundamental limit-point of the constellation as well: what is meant is that utopian moment wherein the various aesthetic, political or other concepts bound up in the various constellations cease their primordial antagonism and incessant competition with one another, each seeking to replicate itself at the expense of others like some viral code, but peacefully coexist.

This moment, or what Adorno will call the reconciliation, is neither the positivistic freezing of the contradiction in place, i.e. the utopian sheen of yet another dismal commodity fetishism, nor the purchasable *nunc stans* of global stock market and credit bubbles, but corresponds rather to the Hegelian moment of the transformation of quantity into quality, or what Marx termed class revolution. Reconciliation denotes the cessation of class struggle, the end of class conflict and all its subforms (racism, sexism, and a thousand other oppressions new and old) amidst the dawning of as yet unknowable forms of political cooperation, economic democracy and collective solidarity – not the conclusion, in short, of history, but the winding-up of a properly Marxian prehistory. Strikingly, Adorno immediately grounds this essential insight not, as one might expect, in any rarefied field of philosophy, but in the materiality of language itself:

The unifying moment survives, without the negation of the negation, yet also without delivering itself to the abstraction as the highest principle, not by advancing step by step from the concepts to the general master-concept, but by entering into a constellation. These illuminate the specifics of the object, which the classifying procedure is indifferent towards or uncomfortable with. The model for this is the conduct of language. It offers no mere sign-system for cognitive functions. Where it appears essentially as language, becomes representation [Darstellung], it does not define its concepts. Its objectivity obtains them by the relationship in which it posits the concepts, centered around a thing. It thereby serves the intention of the concept, to wholly express what is meant. Solely constellations represent, from without, what the concept has cut away from within, the “more”, which it wishes to be, as much as it cannot be. By gathering around the thing to be cognized, the concepts potentially determine its innermost core, thinking to attain what thinking necessarily uprooted from itself. ND:164

This wondrously beautiful reflection laments just long enough over the impossibility of the possible to make us realize that the only true impossibility is the permanence of what we have come to blindly accept, on ephemeral appearances only, as “the possible” of late capitalism, i.e. that multinational consumer culture which systematically buries the expressive potential of the subject under a flood of icons, signs and goods, but which at the same time offers an unparalleled storehouse of material for a potentially emancipated subjectivity. In this situation, the concept is far more than just a set of tools for mediating and regulating the accumulation of cultural capital, as the day before yesterday’s positivists, yesterday’s cybernetic technocrats and today’s neoliberal info-ideologues incessantly proclaim; it is also the crucial link between aesthetic content and its subjective reception, that is to say its specialized reading key or interpretive code. In turn, the aesthetic is the essential corrective to the concept, transmitting a content which, precisely because it cannot be abstracted in that sense (i.e. novels are not their own plot summaries and videos are not their own storyboards), provides that index of the concrete by which the hegemony of the abstraction in a society founded on totalizing abstractions of all kinds can be measured and, indeed, resisted.

This is a significant and provocative rewriting of the role of language and linguistic expression sketched out by Adorno’s Three Studies on Hegel, which delimited the constellation to the internal equivalences of one linguistic system with another (what might be termed the problem of translating specific words or phrases across national boundaries, which implies a reasonably standardized or compatible set of cultural fields, if nothing else). What is clearly at issue here is a plurality of constellations, each one of which must be carefully thought out in conjunction both internally, i.e. as a set of contradictory concepts in motion towards and against one another, as well as externally, i.e. as a set of no less mobile and mobilizing constellations. The truly dialectical insight

would therefore be something like the Benjaminic lightning-bolt which flashes from the micrological concept to the macrocosmic ensemble of constellations and back again, illuminating both while consuming neither. But this is not the end of the story either: far from delimiting the insight to the realms of aesthetics and philosophy, Adorno explicitly identifies a third and heretofore unremarked mode of cognition, derived from the fields of the social and natural sciences, which turn out to be one of the most systematically productive (as well as systematically underappreciated!) sources of conceptual innovations of all:

To become aware of the constellations in which the thing stands, means so much as to decode the one which the latter bears within itself, as what is historically become. The chorismos of the without and the within is for its part historically conditioned. The only knowledge which can unleash the history in the object, is that which is aware of the historical positional value of the object in its relationship to others; the updating and concentration of what is already known, which it transforms. Cognition of the object in its constellation is that of the process, which it has stored up within itself. As a constellation the theoretical thought circles around the concept, which it would like to open, hoping, that it springs ajar like the lock of a heavily guarded safe: only not by means of a single key or a single number, but by a number-combination.

How objects are to be disclosed through constellations is to be gathered less from philosophy, which is disinterested in such, than from scientific investigations of merit: in many cases the achieved scientific work was ahead of its scientivistic, philosophical self-understanding. ND:166

The metaphor of the safecracker, with its echo of the existential films and of Beckett's prison-camp dialogues, accedes to the James Bond-style information hijacker, who unlocks the potential of the scientific concept by means of its own stored-up historicity. Such potential is not merely a question of expanding the frontiers of science, but also of enlarging the inner realm of the subject: Adorno uses the word Wissen (literally, "knowledge") instead of Wissenschaft ("science"), and thereby invokes the entire scientific revolution handed down by the Enlightenment in all its theoretical, experimental and practical complexity, as opposed to the relatively narrower phenomena of the rise of the scientific profession or its attendant discourses. This suggests that the

constellation functions very much like Bourdieu's field of cultural or symbolic capital, that is to say a transnational discourse organized around a neonational class fraction or multinational niche market; something supported by Adorno's subsequent citation of Weber's concept of ideal types, as a kind of bridging mediation which can vitally enrich the Marxian concept of class, fleshing the latter out with a whole new set of sociological tools and heuristic registers, but which also needs to be analyzed in the context of the insights and aporias of the sociological field in general (as with the newly spatial dimension of the urban sociology of a Mannheim or Simmel, or the Dialectic of Enlightenment's own initial foray into the sociology of mass-culture).

There remains the intriguing problem of the analysis of ensembles of constellations, which at first sounds like a dead ringer for the space of our own contemporary global theory-market; in fact, Adorno has something more complicated in mind than the trafficking of the concept per se. The field of constellations will provide the strategic staging-grounds for a rethinking and reappropriation of the henceforth globalized commodity form from a qualitatively new perspective; not quite that of the multinational corporation, but something strongly associated with its emergence, which we will need to identify in the pages ahead.

Notes

1. This is not to say Adorno was not concerned with the local or German pole of the critique of the ontologies; this takes place elsewhere, in Adorno's short study Jargon of Authenticity, written in the early 1960s and designed, as Adorno notes in the preface to that work, to be more of a public and sociological intervention in the prevailing conditions of the Bundesrepublik – characterized at that time by a truly dreadful and stifling conformity on both sides of the Berlin Wall – than a full-fledged philosophical meditation. Indeed, part of Jargon of Authenticity was published in the *Neuen Rundschau* in 1963. With typical subtlety, Adorno makes the obligatory bow to Marx's own notorious journalism in his subtitle: "On the German Ideology"!

2. This lack of aesthetic registers tends to undercut even Husserl's most progressive moments, e.g. the visual moment of the *Wesenschau* or apperception: "On the other hand the apperception names the physiognomic gaze at intellectual matters-at-hand. It legitimates the fact that the intellectual is not constituted by means of the cognizing consciousness directed at this, but is objectively grounded in itself, far beyond the individual prime mover, in the collective life of the Mind and according to its immanent laws. That objectivity of the Mind is adequate to the moment of the immediate gaze. As something already preformed in itself, it can look at itself just like at sensory things. But this intuition is so little absolute and irrefutable as that of sensory things. Husserl has no qualms ascribing that which flashes from the physiognomy, like the a priori Kantian synthetic judgement, to necessity and universality, as in science. What however the categorical intuition, fallibly enough, contributes to, would be the comprehension of the thing itself, not its classificatory preparation. The *pseudos* [Greek: falsity] is not the non-scientificity of the categorical intuition, but its dogmatic scientificization. Under the ideational gaze, stirs the mediation which was frozen in the appearance [*Schein*] of the immediacy of the intellectually given; therein the apperception is close to the allegorical consciousness. As the experience of that which has come to be in what presumably merely is, it would be almost the exact opposite of what it is used for: not the trusting acceptance of being, but its critique; the consciousness not of the identity of the thing with its concept, but of the rift between both. What the philosophy of being swears by, as if it would be the organ of the pure and simple positive, has its truth in negativity." ND:89-90 What is not wished to be seen by the ideolect in question – physiognomy is a secret synonym for Genet's cinematic close-ups and the American actors displayed on cinematic wall-posters – is deemed unviewable.

3. Aesthetics becomes thus something like the objective working-out or emancipated content of those social contradictions which philosophy would otherwise render as abstract concepts or ideas, and which a reigning positivism (or today's postmodern consumerism) would reduce to a politically neutralized and unthinking nominalism: "Philosophy is neither scientific procedure nor the thought-poetry to which positivism, with a ludicrous oxymoron, would like to degrade it, but is a form just as mediated by what it is divergent from as by what it sublates. What is suspended is nothing other than the expression of the inexpressible in itself. Therein it is truly the sibling of music. That which is suspended is scarcely capable of being put into words; this may have caused the philosophers, with the partial exception of Nietzsche, to gloss over it. It is more the prerequisite for the comprehension of philosophic texts than its definitive characteristic. It originated historically and may yet fall silent, just as music threatens to do." ND:115-116

4. This is nicely anticipated in a comment on positivism: "In certain respects dialectical logic is more positivistic than the positivism which condemns the former: it respects the object which is to be thought, as thought, even there, where it does not follow the rules of thought. Its analysis is

tangential to the rules of thought. Thought need not remain content with its own juridicality; it has the capacity to think against itself, without sacrificing itself; were a definition of dialectics possible, this might be one worth suggesting.” ND:144

5. This casts a revealing light on the trajectory of arch-marketeers such as Jeffrey Sachs from rabid partisans of an unrestricted neoliberalism in the early 1990s to staunch defenders of a decidedly non-market civil society which is supposed to ameliorate the worst excesses of capitalist accumulation: the civil society in question is a polite euphemism for the social and economic infrastructure of the new metropolises, i.e. the keiretsu creditors of the global economy, to whom US capital must swear financial but not yet ideological fealty, at least until the euro arrives. For the institutionalized version of the same phenomenon, see the 1998 report of the World Bank: “...Weak economic growth in Japan and Europe since the early 1990s led to accommodating monetary policies and low interest rates. These factors, combined with international investors’ aggressive search for high returns in emerging markets, led to a situation in which not only more investment flowed into the region’s economies than could be profitably employed at a reasonable risk, but also inefficient allocation resulted from structural weaknesses in countries’ financial system.” World Bank Annual Report 1998: East Asia & Pacific. Washington DC: The Bank, 1998 (2). A year earlier, the World Bank was praising East Asia’s sound management of its economies to the skies and recommending the further deregulation of capital flows; a year later, the darlings of the market can suddenly do no right and, anyway, the disasters of deregulation are all Japan and Europe’s fault. The World Bank is not this stupid, of course; they would like the EU and Japan to socialize Asia’s losses in order to further pad the profit margins of US multinationals in the region – something the EU and Japan, being much smarter than the flacks of the World Bank could ever possibly know, are indeed preparing to do, but in the context of padding their *own* profit margins.

6. This chimes nicely with Adorno’s comment, “Dialectics means, objectively, the bursting of the compulsion of identity through the stored-up energies of such, of the energies bound up in its objectifications.” ND:159 This theme of the subversive power or historical (that is to say, history-making) potential stored up in the embodied labor of the commodity form will form the basis for a later meditation on the preponderance of the object, that is to say the form that the hegemony of the commodity form takes in late capitalism, i.e. the division of labor and the sociological spaces of the multinational corporation.