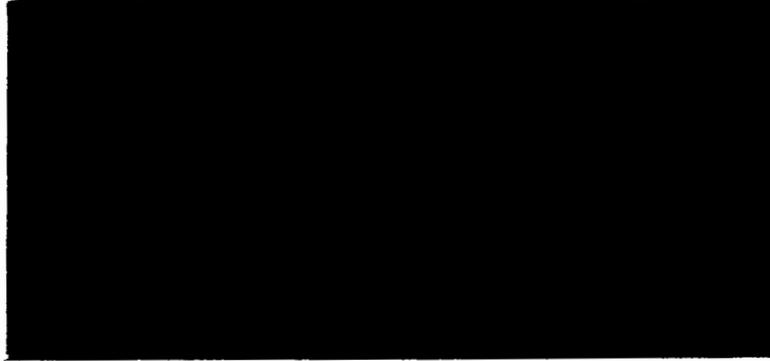




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"Posthumous Critique"

Marjorie Levinson

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Posthumous Critique

I start with a well-known quotation from Wittgenstein. "A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably." This little fable about the treachery of representation puts the captivity in a particular picture, in the past, and outside the reflective consciousness of the narrator. This is to say, it is a trap. It is also something of a disciplinary in-joke and update, scripted for an audience that reads "Wittgenstein" as a synonym for posthermeneutics and that is wise to the ways of Cretans who say that all Cretans are liars. It was Wittgenstein who made the argument that beyond, beneath, behind the pictures there are more pictures: pictures and stories all the way down. The claim was not that reality is nothing but words and word-practice, only that the experience of a reality unmediated by the codes that define human societies cannot be considered any kind of experience, not even the experience of nothingness or of nonsense, much less of the gap between the real and our knowledge of it. Phenomena that are not presented in our languages are not susceptible to our sense-making practices. These practices -- irreducibly perspectival and also public events, or, language games -- are experience, by another, more analytic name. And, at once closing the language loop and opening onto grammatology, the Investigations carry us back to the root of the word phenomenon: from the Greek "phanein," to show. Phenomena that are not constructed in representation are not even phenomena: by definition, "observable fact[s] or event[s]...susceptible to...description and explanation."

Derrida's famous pronouncement, "il n'ya pas de hors-texte," makes the point more economically. What Wittgenstein gains through the excess of his anecdote is a wickedly reflexive twist. "A picture held us captive." One can see that the sentence is itself a picture, an image of knowledge production. It is also, as it happens, a picture of that kind of knowledge we call mimesis, which casts mind as the mirror-image, the picture, of nature. The technical name for this sort of piggyback or exponential metaphor is catachresis. Once launched, it unravels

reference and multiplies intertextuality until nothing but language is left and of language, nothing but swerves and substitutes. In its form, the sentence embeds an ineluctable narrative of captivation. Like all anecdotes, it is a little story standing in for a bigger one.

The long version might take the following form. In order to recognize the picture you inhabit -- to see it as a picture and yourself as its captive -- you must have entered another picture and become captive again: which is to say, blind to its constructedness and horizons and illiterate in the languages of other pictures, including the one whose frame you now perceive. The recognition is not, therefore, the reflexive thing it imagines itself to be: namely, a knowledge of the conditions of one's own picture. It is instead (and this is a best-case scenario) a sort of boundary perception of some other picture: the inferentially generated awareness of a place one cannot enter. Nor does this awareness have available to it a language that could name it or even sensualize it without in the same stroke dissolving it into the codes that make up the new picture.

It would seem that knowledge of any particular world (which is also agency within it, beginning with the act of making sense), occurs only so long as the bounding outline and internal grammars of that world remain invisible. Once you discern them you know that you are no longer in that world and that your critical understanding of it is factitious. Or, knowledge of a world, restricted to its citizens, can never produce a consciousness of itself and its conditions that is anything but another kind of language game belonging to the set of games composing that world.

If these are the paradoxes attending the pursuit of reflexive knowledge, without which empirical knowledge cannot achieve scientific certainty about itself and its object-relations (and therefore its objects), then the possibility of underived knowledge -- knowledge of otherwise worded and pictured worlds, or of realities that are not transcendental in any metaphysical sense but that are also not always already "for us" -- is literally out of the question. To posit a possible awareness just of the existence of other worlds is to propose something like an epiphenomenal byproduct of a limit-case perception of one's own world. But again, the linguistic argument could readily deconstruct that Kantian (and also aesthetic) postulate.

This paper is about what happens to critique, defined as a hermeneutic practice descending from Kant and Hegel (one could also say, Enlightenment and Romanticism) when the sort of thinking represented by Wittgenstein's allegory

becomes axiomatic for scholarship in the humanities, the social sciences, and even the physical sciences. The names, Kant and Hegel, mark the moment in our intellectual histories when the primacy of metaphysics and ontology is displaced by epistemology and its immanent critique: or, Hegel doing to Kant what Kant did to everyone else. [FN:namely, calling the question in a critical and empirically situated way on the self-determination, transparency, or givenness of the foundational terms for that particular discipline of knowing, that science; establishing the conditions of possibility of the experience on which that critical exercise operates.] In Kant and Hegel, first philosophy's privileged and inscrutable questions of being and its transcendental conditions are referred to the study of experience and consciousness, and of the worldly conditions of those events. Both experience and consciousness are conceived as active and constitutive processes, or what we would call today practices of knowing. In this very important respect, Wittgenstein is heir to the Kant-Hegel legacy.

At the same time, and this is where Wittgenstein parts company, both critical philosophies struggle at some logical cost to maintain the objective, dogmatic, or unconstructed element in knowing and to make it internal to the process, not a feature of the object. In Kant, that role is played by the regulative categories that deliver intuition in the form of experience and by the "in itself" presupposed by those categories. In Hegel, this underived otherness resides in the arche and telos of his system (plenitude and totality), and in that initial scission which entails the movement from one to the other, the movement of externalization and reappropriation that is history. Something of this primordial otherness spills over into the nonidentity term within each dialectical moment. I refer to the fact that for Hegel, what determines any positive existent, any form, is the self-differing or negation within it. This reflects the original antinomy of an infinite Geist that realizes itself through its ceaseless overcoming of the finite conditions it posits.

These openings to otherness, positioned by both philosophies at the logical and genetic core of things and our experience of them, remain outside of language. In Kant, this is for structural, quasi-spatial reasons (metaphysical reasons) and in Hegel, for phenomenological and temporal reasons: reasons of history. This contradictory belonging-together-in-opposition of identity and difference, intuitions and concepts, representation and the sublime, culture and nature, history and something else, is claimed as the inner structure of experience, which is claimed as the reality of "what is," for all practical purposes. Philosophy's mission,

henceforth, is to advance the understanding of this paradox which generates the form and content of the domains of the knowable. (Maybe at this point in the narrative, we should call say "theory" rather than "philosophy" out of respect for the troubled and topically central reflexivity of the enterprise.) The mark of the enlightened reason is a consciousness that reflects on the intractable paradoxes of knowing even as it knows itself and those very reflections caught up in those paradoxes. The freedom and the torment of this awareness are directly proportional.

By contrast, agony and aporia have no place in the Wittgensteinian universe. There, any claim which pertains to the constitutive other or outside to experience is incoherent. Such claims describe an artifact of our grammars: a metaphysical origin. And, as against Hegel's postulate of the identity of identity and difference, the linguistic argument holds that any difference one can articulate within a code has already been assimilated to it. If the difference is in the identity, then it has lost the salient, the externality, that made it a difference.

Both critical projects, Kant's and Hegel's, posit an unknowable element that founds the very materials, methods, and motives of knowing. Rather than kick it upstairs, both try to factor this puzzle, this horizontal effect, into their practical, critical labors. Both, along with the Marxian and Freudian critiques that derive from them, are logocentric in form but heterological in their content, and they stand behind many of the premises that drove our decade's suspicion hermeneutics.

The new historicisms, to the extent that they incorporated the Marxian or Freudian paradigms, or insofar as they retained some equivalent to nature or the unconscious, can be conceived as the last of the confidently hermeneutic engagements with the literatures of other worlds -- in this case, past worlds. This is, possibly, the last critical practice to figure the relation between the text and its reading as objectively determined, the reading solicited by the structures and provenance of the object itself. The new historicisms that fit this description, can be taken to represent the constructively skeptical phase of the Kant-Hegel project: inquiry into the logical and/or dialectical contradictions that generate the seeming immediacy of experience. The goal of analysis is to reread the object in such a way as to trace its achieved cultural identity to its historically conflictual conditions. The picture of a finished or final world is replaced by a narrative of that world's coming into being and of its coming to assume the look of a picture.

I use that characterization only as a reasonably solid platform from which to launch some thoughts about the opportunities for critical work today, now that the field of cultural studies has grown so crowded and complex and the new histories neither so new as they once were, nor, in a way, so historical. [FN: A question of resistance to the symbolic and transformative praxis that constitutes subjects and objects. The chiasmic thinking so marked in cultural and historicist studies -- e.g., the subject in history/the history in the subject -- indicates a reciprocity, balance, and symmetry that would seem to dissolve the tension which is integral to a dialectically materialist and dynamic understanding of history.] This paper is not about the life and death of academic movements. It is a practical effort to review the options such as they are for persons who share the kind and degree of awareness embodied in the Wittgenstein parable, and whose stake in reading -- whose intellectual, political, and libidinal attachment -- has been and remains in some sort materialist. My inquiry will not hold much interest for those who consider themselves pragmatists, relativists, or Rortian hermeneuts. Nor will those who equate facts with information and information with knowledge (as is sometimes the case in textual studies, literary history, and canon revision) be alive to the themes I will be considering.

That phrase, "in some sort materialist," means in one way or another: 1) committed to the picture of texts and readings as products of and participants in the forces and relations that bring about the ceaseless reproduction of physical and social life. (Before proceeding, let me say that these features do not add up to an all-purpose or normative definition of materialism. I merely spell out the meanings of the word as I use it in this paper.) Materialist, by this working definition, also entails: 2) a critical practice that repositions the text in any of the force fields that concretely defined it at any given moment in the past, and (and this is crucial), in the present, one field that a materialist critique cannot afford to ignore. That caveat harks back to the Kantian theme I mentioned. Even as you accept the explanatory status of certain categories and the validity of the moves that bind them to the problem at hand (that is, even as you accept the content and form of the materialism specific to your time and place), you also stick to the Kantian program of trying to establish the conditions of those categories and procedures. This is the reflexive dimension of the exercise. It is always incomplete and deluded and it knows and tries to signify that fact.

In addition (and here is the Hegelian strain: 3) materialist critique associates meaning with determinate negation, a prolific incursion on the seeming

immediacy and presence of the real (as in, for example, reflection, repression, truncation, circumscription). The re-production of that meaning in the form of knowledge entails a second, more deliberated rupture of the object's self-presentation at the point of inquiry. This for some technical reasons having to do with the machinery of semiotics, but more important, on account of a view of textual production as determined by a multitude of factors, many of them drawn from domains defined by that culture as incompatible or mutually exclusive. The introduction of those domains into the critical field thus assumes the character of an assault upon the formal integrity of the work. Moreover, because the otherness of those domains is often a function of a determinative relation the text cannot acknowledge -- for example, the relation between the economic and the aesthetic -- those orders may occupy the discourse as a kind of unconscious, what we call a political unconscious. Again, the raising up of this material and these relations will challenge the work's self-representation.

There is a fourth element, a wildcard, in my definition of materialism, and that is (for want of a better word), heterology: the study of what exists at some sort of tangent to the identity principles of the culture in question. This is the element deriving from Kant and Hegel by way of Marx, Freud, and among others, Althusser, Lacan, Bataille, Levinas, Deleuze, and Lyotard, all of whom posit a dimension beyond representation but somehow implicated in it: what Lyotard calls "an immanent sublime." In Marx, for example, it is "the fixed framework within which the subject forms a substance that it encounters." In Freud, it would be the pre-economic, pre-structural workings of repression and also the negativity that drives through and beyond the pleasure principle. In Althusser, it is the magic of structural causality, the (nonmechanical, nonexpressive) effectivity of the whole in its parts: a whole that is "neither an unknowable thing-in-itself, nor...a string of events or set of facts...[but] rather an asymptotic phenomenon, an outer limit, which the subject approaches in the anxiety of the moment of truth..." [FJ, F. of Ag.12,13]. For Lacan, it is the gaze "to which I am subjected in an original way" -- that is, in such a way as to originate the subject as lack, in the sense of inability to grasp its conditions of being or to see itself seeing. (Four Funda. Conc. of Psych). When the citing of this dimension is coupled with a discourse or stylistic performance of its ineffability, it is the marker of critique as such. It locates the point where, historically, critical theory split off from first philosophy, and also where aesthetic modernity came into being. By that I mean first the Romantic and then the avant-garde project of representing the unrepresentable (or, borrowing

once again from Lyotard, presenting that there is something unrepresentable): namely, the medium and the frame of the particular artwork, of the category of the aesthetic, and of the subject- and origin effects engendered by both.

Unlike metaphysics, heterology treats this unspeakable otherness as a special feature of the social-historical constructedness of things, not as their transcendental ground. Through some peculiar position or embodiment within the dominant codes, this otherness resists symbolization absolutely. It thus assumes an effective or what might be called a virtual materiality: under certain conditions or in certain contexts, an irreducibly thing-like character. The materialist reading tries, with complete and completely conscious illogic, to display, preserve, and even to share in that quality.

"Material," in this context, means unreadable. It means a text or some part of a text that is either transparent or opaque and thus not exactly or not completely a text. Because of its closure and self-presence -- that is to say, its success in realizing those effects -- the material object does not absorb. It fascinates. It is the effect or the reading some poets hope for: not the one that exclaims "'Heavens, I recognize the place, I know it!'" but the reading that says, "'Hell, I don't recognize the place or the time or the 'I' in this sentence. I don't know it.'" [Bernstein] The meaning of this object will not take shape as a narrative, the form of an intention, no matter how troubled, repressed, or dispersed. Instead, meaning here amounts to something like action potentials or adhesive surfaces, and because these intensities cannot break free and assume some form of equivalence, the object cannot circulate. To that extent, which is far from total, it generates no value. The economy to which it relates is not the "restricted economy of accumulation but the general economy of meaning as unusable flow and unrecompensed loss. One could say that the object releases a meaning that has no meaning. It is just something else in the world.

"Material" proposes an event neither reflecting nor yielding to a human interest, except of course, the interest in otherness as such once it gets objectified through the critical or aesthetic discourses. Heterology would like to avert this interest (nothing would make it happier), but it never can.

Baudrillard has written of the "dream of the status of the object and consumption beyond exchange and use, beyond value and equivalence." "Dream" is the operative word here, but just as crucial is the fact that dreams are socially made and coded and thus both real and shared experience with real consequences. This particular dream, which classically comes under the heading of the aesthetic

(and also, within related discourses, under the rubric of nature), is perhaps capitalism's special and in some ways sustaining fantasy. Unlike the commodity, which is paradigmatically readable due to the sharpness of its form-content contradiction, the object enjoys an effective self-identity which opens no space for intervention. Thus, it "never completely gives up its secret," which is, of course, that it has none. (Probably: one can never really know.) The object, a word one must bracket so as to keep foregrounding its character as a social (in the manner of anti-social) Imaginary and as the effect of particular histories of cultural production, affords nothing to do. It offers no contradictions to resolve, no interior to penetrate, no gaps to outline and then, by way of a metadiscourse, suture -- in short, no resistance to reading and therefore no payoff. To this extent, it challenges the work model of activity grounding those philosophies of the subject that engendered the aesthetic as such -- that is, as a critique of that work model -- in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. And, because the object (so-called) does not mount its challenge as an oppositional, libidinal, or even critical project, it undermines that aesthetic, its autotelic hedonism, from the other side, exposing its negativity as another value-form. In other words, the an-aesthetic signature of the object highlights the complicity between on the one hand art and interpretation as forms of value- and subject-production, and on the other, the particular model of humanness specified by the capitalist modes of production.

Then again, one cannot help noticing that the mysterious self-possession of the object and the passivity of its reception are also the effects of the commodity, that elementary unit of capitalist production and exchange, when it is working most efficiently, or when it most thoroughly erases its social and its labor content. In other words, the object's thwarting of a productive, semiotic consumption can on the one hand offer itself as a critique of those processes of abstraction, instrumentality, and equivalence that rule the world of exchange. By calling the question on that particular system of value, however, and no matter how artlessly, the object generates another discourse of value, one that comes to be synonymous with ideology itself or its inverting and obscuring of actual social processes. Over and above its material dividends, the object produces an illusion of escape from the political economy of the sign, an illusion essential to the healthy functioning of that economy.

But then again (what I am tracking by these turns is the dialecticity of this would-be postdialectical object), the rational, skeptical conquest of such illusions -- as outlined in the paragraph above -- is the very telos of economic reason. It is

realized when thought is so thoroughly formalized as to be "robbed of that for the sake of which men [and women] think." That phrase is Adorno's, as is the general approach to these paradoxes of progress.

From this dialectical tangle, familiar to students of Romanticism, the Frankfurt School, and the avant-garde, we may conclude that to read the myth of the object -- to expose its founding material and social conditions -- is not to exhaust the reality of that myth. It is, rather, to release the myth from the unreality of its reified form. Possibly, it is to change its sign from a cultural practice that is on balance affirmative to one that exerts more critical force. What we do next, however, to keep that reality (in philosophical terms, that posit; in a Marxist idiom, that second nature) from getting reified all over again, is the question that drives heterology. It is a question to ask now, now that through the work of the past ten years, the dead are awakened.

Michael Taussig, a cultural anthropologist, proposes a mode of analysis that works its way free of various notions of contradiction in order to capture the "decided undecidability that could so clearly, so mistily, be seen in Marx's statement regarding the fetish quality of commodities" -- the "flip-flop from spirit to thing and back again." Throughout his recent collection, *The Nervous System*, Taussig juxtaposes what Paul Ricoeur identified in Freud as on the one hand, a suspicion hermeneutics, and on the other, a restorative mimesis. Taussig calls this a critical practice that both "demystifies and reenchants." It reenchants because it knows that alongside the mystery of why, when, and how--questions of motive, manner, and meaning--there remains the stubborn and deeply disquieting question of what, aimed at the webs of contingency and mere combination that render the disenchanted world, the place of either empirical self-certainty or analytically produced evidence, such a twilight zone. Those epistemic boundary paradoxes I traced at the beginning of this essay, having to do with the logical impossibility of ever accounting for the conditions of one's knowledge within that knowledge paradigm help to explain this phenomenon. A more concrete explanation, the kind Taussig favors, would look to the always ironic and punctually terrible history of the advanced capitalist societies, many of whose crises foreground the internal limits of Enlightenment and its practices of knowing and ordering, its domination of nature.

[FN: I refer very schematically first to the decisive and ideologically marked shifts from absolutist to bourgeois regimes in the early 19th century. As we know,

this emancipation entailed the reification and essentialization (i.e., mystification) of class, race, and gender, without which the exploitation of particular groups, and the self-representation of the bourgeoisie as the universal and consummate class, could not have proceeded. A second flashpoint in that history: the demonization of those essentialized Others to the western male bourgeois norm, peaking with the military-industrial nation states of the mid-thirties through the sixties, and their genocidal and quasi-colonial wars of attrition.

The special and highly visible compact between on the one hand the advanced theoretical, technological, industrial, and social sciences of these eras, and on the other, their peculiarly atavistic excesses, led many students of the human sciences to search out the mystifying potentials of intellectual practices that had seemed in some absolute sense emancipatory. The reflexive turn was unavoidable; the critique of analytic reason (regarded as a subset of instrumental reason) entailed a more skeptical, more locally, topically, and politically attentive appraisal of the techniques and even the objectives of such classically liberatory and post- or even anti-Enlightenment exercises as ideology critique, social-historical reconstruction, and canonical intervention. What survives as a methodological point of departure is the question of immanence: is the method immanent to its object when the object is understood to be the actuality of its social history up through the present of its interrogation.]

Heterology, when it is understood as part of a self-undoing and therefore self-renewing materialist project, might at this point take its bearings from Taussig's observation that "context as explanation is the fixed screen" onto which many of our histories from below are projected. It is this screen, Taussig argues, "that poses the greatest resistance to change, [and all] the forgotten and oppressed voices we cast upon it," he says, do not alter that surface. He cites our "profound and self-constituting entanglement" in that screen of interpretation as "the great arena where world history...folds into rules of customary sense." Heterology reminds us that once that fold between history and custom disappears, once a paradigm of knowing starts feeling like the form of the real, once the screen becomes a transparent medium -- the wall of the cave -- we must "work harder not to understand," knowing all the while we will never reach that place of intelligent indifference [FN: i.e., a sort of cognitive and also recursive parallelism to our objects of study; not intersubjectivity, to be sure, and not mimesis; something rather on the order of Spinoza's double-aspect model of materialist

explanation] and that if we did, we would not recognize ourselves. That is because we would not be ourselves.

Heterology, a useful waste product (or, a byproduct) of the capitalist economies, is the thought behind Baudrillard's symbolic exchange and Bataille's nonproductive expenditure, both of them fantasies (precapitalist, primitivist, Maussian) of a state of loss which is not the prelude to possession. These states imply picturing without devouring and being devoured, a rejection, this, of the no-win language game of supplements (Derrida's semiotic elaboration of the commodity and the money forms). They suggest a Deleuzian or Nietzschean dream of affirmation without negation; or, production without consumption at either end. They project a place beyond economic reason and by the same token, antiOedipus. Alongside "investment, desire, passion, seduction ...expression and competition -- the hot universe," they set "ecstasy, obscenity, fascination,...hazard, chance and vertigo -- the cold universe."

[FN: A more contemporary version of this fantasy takes incorporation as its model of embodiment which is not paid for by the domination of both internal and external otherness. In place of recuperative self-alienation, this incorporative model proposes combination, machinic assemblage, and transcategorical affinity as its formal principles. One can discern in this most recent, postmodern but still Marxist critique of the subject an extension of Adorno's great and tragic campaign against the triumphalism of the emancipatory materialisms of the 18th and 19th centuries. What is new and radical about the effort to rethink cultural critique by reference to a technologically and sociohistorically reinvented nature is its drive beyond the state-approved playground of the aesthetic: its work on the productivist paradigm itself, something that Adorno in the 1940s through 60s, ages of industrial monopoly capitalism, could not begin to accomplish. In place of the mastery models of materialization and individuation and their productive consumption of nature, these social critics propose a model of embodiment "understood as a complex, labile, overtone structure, neither dependent upon nor reducible to, an organic substrate or historical object..." [Zone]]

The business of cultural materialism when oriented toward that frigid zone is neither contextual rewriting nor ideology critique, actions that must, however, precede or accompany it. Lacking that, heterology is indistinguishable from phenomenology or ontology, pragmatism, pluralism, or any other readout of spontaneous subjectivity. Heterology begins only after the apparent self-identity and givenness of the object has been negated, replaced by a narrative of its

participation in the historical and social formations and projects of its own time and that of the critic. Once, that is, the work's objective character, consisting in its functional relations within the social whole or wholes, has been established.

Since, however, neither the social whole nor, therefore, the objective character of the discourse can ever be definitively established (particularly since it involves the everchanging variable of the critic's position), one must ask what it is that curtails this exercise and initiates heterology. (And, a question I consider below: what happens to the oppositional and cognitive force of sociohistorical reinscription if heterology is refused.) In large part, the answer to the question of what prompts a heterological phase will turn on the current conditions of knowledge production for the field and object at issue, conditions in one way of another organized by the economic and social whole. One wonders, however, whether the two actions, critique of textual production and heterology, might enjoy a more integral relation. I want to venture an imagination of the way those two critical actions, both of them materialist, but one in an anthro- or sociopocentric way, the other in a way that verges on metaphysics, might summon each other.

First, though, I have to say why I belabor a point that must remain speculative (and in passing, explain what I meant when I said that the new historicisms are somehow not as historical as they once were.) It seems to me that a present-day materialism wanting to hold onto the tension between on the one hand the Wittgensteinian or constructivist picture, and on the other, the hermeneutic, heterological, critically reflected strain, will have a hard time of it. This for reasons that concern the recent history of literary studies in our country and on account of larger, more determinant tendencies in the culture. In the academy, there is the fact of the long awaited and much deserved prestige of the sociohistorical rewriting of literature and other cultural icons. By that I mean the work of restoring the artifacts that make up our cultural canons to their condition as social practice, conceived as irreducibly historical and as both driven and mediated by specific and conflicting interests. These interests are shown to be underwritten by more compelling, pervasive, and obscure, but no less constructed pressures. The work of disclosing these dynamic patterns has come to be synonymous with critique as such and also with a liberationist as opposed to a liberal set of values. It is grouped with the resistance literatures it often studies, and with the anti-hegemonic strains it discerns within many of the high cultural discourses and many more of the popular ones.

Ranked on the other side, the reactionary side, are resources associated with both the formalist movement, prominent here in the 1940's and 50's, and the historical scholarship that preceded it, the paradigm of literary study before the war. Both were rejected for their objectivism, or for their way of masking their own political investments as well as the politics (cultural and topical) embedded in the "data," the aesthetic or the historical record which they manipulated. Also on that losing side: the ontological and linguistic preoccupations of "theory," or of the Continental traditions revived in this country in the 1960's. What was rejected there was the general argument that being and language, and also their aporetic or antinomial relation to each other, have an objective and fixed reality independent of cultural practice. The essentialist and universalizing form of the proposition -- again, its false objectivity -- marked it as an idealism.

I offer this overview so as to highlight the institutional problems faced by a materialism that has not withdrawn its investment in objectivity: or, to use a less burdened and binary word, Adorno's word, "nonidentity." It conceives this order of things as a thoroughly mediated phenomenon that may at certain points exceed the causalities that brought it into being. Nor does a materialism of this kind repudiate theory -- borrowing again from Adorno, a striving by the concept to transcend the concept. Or (and this is Jonathan Culler's recent definition of theory), "a critique of the natural" through "investigation of the mode of study in which you have some experience." When it sees that critique of the natural has become the natural, it takes that as its problem, along with the matter of finding a mode of study that is not wholly -- or rather, not evenly -- enmeshed in that problem. The element of theory is, among other things, a line of defense against the tendency of stories, however dialogic or dialectical, to become facts, and of facts, however constructed and contingent, to become fetishes. Theory interferes with the self-witnessing authenticity of narrative and factual presentment (of everything, one might hazard, but poetic presentment, and that too, eventually). It counters, if only by foregrounding, the tendency of all knowledge practices, including itself, to remake the other into a version of the self; and of all such versions to recapitulate the self-aggrandizing but also ultimately self-defeating philosophy of the subject, as built up by the four great critiques of the modern period, that of Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Freud. A materialist critique maintains these commitments because it is alive to the fact that knowledge, no matter how antinomial, has no defenses against the form of the system, and that the system, "the form of presenting a totality to which nothing is extraneous, absolutizes the

thought against each of its contents and evaporates the content in thoughts. It proceeds idealistically before advancing any arguments for idealism." [Adorno, Neg.Dials]

As little as five years ago, it seemed that a postproductivist but still Marxist materialism could satisfy these dual commitments. It could puncture the constructivist paradigm by positing some version of both nonidentity and the whole -- nature and history -- the two poles of a dialectical objectivism. At the same time, it could make a problem of the status of labor, production, and the economic, the textbook mediations between those poles. (By status, I pinpoint the conception of these practices as singular or unified functions within a systematic account of social practice.) While it challenged the primacy of those moments and elements, along with the "ontological centrality of the working class," the notion of prehistory, and the postulate of antagonism between the human and the natural, Marxism's epistemological field was still ordered by the figure of contradiction. The content of objectivity might have been abandoned but the differential structure which produced it as a scientific form remained. The mechanism of dialectics in history and its workings in the relation between critique and its object and critique and the dominant subject forms of its own moment, commanded belief in a way that seems no longer the case. By contrast, the work that has been done on the politics of identity as opposed to class -- work in gender, race, and postcoloniality -- has redrawn our pictures of the relation between material conditions and labor on the one hand, and consciousness, ideology, and agency on the other, with the general effect of making such two-handed formulations and even the more dynamic and recursive versions thereof obsolete. The very notion of structures, relations, and forces which exist in some sort of generative and scientifically explanatory tension with one another is no longer standard even for Marxist analysis. Contamination, hybridity, subalternity: these are not the handsomely structured and dynamic differences-in-identity that support the Freudian and Marxian hermeneutics. In fact, these shape-shifting and semi-permeable formations are more like a usurpation of that function, just as transgression tends to squeeze out the classical forms of negation and opposition.

The more general and also technical obstacles to a materialism that is curious to entertain hyper- or countertextual worlds -- worlds that are, for different reasons, incommensurable with the given codes -- come into play at the point of reception, where our critical studies enter the larger cultural marketplace. Here they are subjected to the routine defensive mechanisms of late capital, where

cultural recognition, approving or critical, does the work of absorption. (This is not to say that the processing begins at this point; the setting of goals and the availability of methods are also determined.) This is what Adorno meant, or anticipated, by his phrase, "the form of the system" in the passage quoted above. The attacks on the academy's revisionist pictures turn out to be yet another way to reproduce and circulate them, a way in short to commodify and thus neutralize opposition. Attack at this level proceeds mechanically and therefore inexorably.

As many have noted, the once disturbing exposures of the historically determined and (more disturbing) overdetermined particulars that generate the reality of cultural appearances at given moments have lost their edge. More precisely, they have lost their immanence, the quality that distinguishes critique from criticism, or historical from criteriological analysis. Through no fault of their own, our stories of cultural production have become episodes in capitalism's masterplot: the transformation of matter into value, suffering into meaning, givenness into necessity, nature into culture. It is as if the gap in the phrase, "historical materialism" (at best a negotiated coupling) has closed over. A redemptive logic has come to embrace the initially estranging, counterintuitive, and for those reasons, materially realizing rewritings of the closures that made up our canons, and those of us who do this work are the hapless agents of that redemption. Naturally, the subject we celebrate is no longer the autonomous individual nor is it the autotelic text. Instead, we have groups, genders, and races (the elements of an identity politics) as well as disciplines, discourses, and practices of consumption (a more impersonal but no less coherent and creative set of agencies). The new subject's labors of self-making are constrained, opposed, and even thwarted, but the heroic story of bourgeois reproduction remains. That story is objectified in our critical performances, through which history's contingencies are woven into a pattern of conflicting, unself-conscious, but individually coherent intentions. At the same time, the effrontery of these patterns (often a function of the dissonance which organizes them) establishes the reader who reveals them as a bold and original producer, clearing a space in a crowded market. One is reminded of the competitive subject of capital, who takes real risks that cannot help but ensure the stability of the system they appear to threaten. In addition, in waging these warfares against the inertias that govern our present and our uses of the past, we realize ourselves as virtuous citizens of an enlightened society, acting out that great theme from the repertoire of bourgeois liberalism: free speech, internal opposition, consensus by way of dissensus.

There is in other words a certain truth to the perception of a tyranny of the politically correct. Institutional and therefore coercive approval -- correctness -- is what happens to difference and more emphatically, dissidence, in a society like ours. The particular founding impulses of the critical action are erased, its techniques abstracted, standardized, and taught, its productivity harnessed and enhanced, and the affront made over into a normative position.

I want to be very explicit about the fact that a turn toward heterology is not an attempt to revive either a metaphysically referenced picture or an infrastructurally reflective one, nor is it a return to the predialectical materialisms. It is only to try to embody in a way that produces some sort of distance effect qualities that do not add up to the human as currently constituted, without at the same time dissolving those qualities into a mystique of otherness, another orientalism. It is to do this, acknowledging in both the form and substance of one's practice the futility of the thing but the value of the effort. Ideally, one performs this impossible practice without romanticizing it. You try not to imagine that the wish or capacity to sustain these contradictions springs you from the trap of normal science, or, returning to Wittgenstein's model, releases you from your picture.

Still: a heterology that arises from and remains in a cranky and fitful way within a sociohistorical practice may well be a different kind of normal science, a different way of occupying the picture. Very few of our knowledge models try to justify their aims and methods by reference to external criteria, but most want to project some sort of logical consistency, or validity within their own terms. Heterology, by contrast, declares itself internally inconsistent without going on to devise a metalogic to rationalize its practice. The justification occurs concretely, performatively, within each exercise and cannot be generalized from one to the next. If it takes the form of a concept, its relation to the practice is figured as a relation, constructed for the purposes of the exercise. Nonetheless, a more regulative and objective notion of validity in interpretation survives in the very postulate of an outside or other to representation, albeit a historically constructed and changing outside. [FN: Althusser's discussion of the necessity for symptomatic reading may illuminate this paradox. He explains the existence of certain lapses and inconsistencies, a certain hollowness within particular discourses of knowledge as signs of a concept unable to be produced within the discourse that it founds and, in its present-absent or nonnormative way, occupies. 29,30:Lenin and Philosophy.] It seems possible that heterology, just by materializing the longing for effects that

are empirically unavailable may conjure the bounding line of those interests and practices that make up the writer's human nature, at this time, in this place. To take an interest in these effects is also to maintain a critical and a utopian attitude toward the conditions of contemporary life: It is to hold faith with some older ideas, Enlightenment and Romantic ideas, about knowledge as social transformation that does not short-circuit radical transfiguration. Let me add that the technical, conceptual, and political problems facing a heterological critique are both legion and insurmountable. Still, for persons possessed of certain values, the staging of these problems seems a good thing -- at certain times, the best thing -- to do.

I return to the question of how the two strains of the materialism I have been constructing might be related. Sociohistorical rewriting of the work will, if it is effective, do violence to the self-understanding and professed values of the work. This will persist until such time as the community's concept of textual and cultural nature expands to absorb the antithetical element. (In a formalist idiom, until such time as the work manages to intentionalize the orders of difference visited upon it.) Up to that point, however, critical reconstruction of the work in its social habitats will take apart its given integrity. This for many reasons, some of which I mentioned in reference to the relation between a critical negativity and the political unconscious of the text in question. If we narrow the field to texts that descend to us under the sign of literature or the aesthetic or even just "culture," high or low, then the violence of a materialist reading is explained by the fact that whatever those discourses do or did in the way of affirming or denying their material conditions of being, whatever their idealizing intentions or effects, their re-production as literature or art, or their social ontology as symbols of the cultural whole in one way or another effaces the material facts of their life. This may not be the case for cultural production in the present, but it does seem to apply to works produced from the Enlightenment through the high modern period. And it is also true for works that have been or currently are reproduced by methods invented during that span. This has to do with distinctions between the aesthetic and the practical (broken down, the cognitive, ethical, and juridical), a diacritics hammered out in the late 18th century. The breach of that decorum must involve a rupture at the level of self-representation.

At the same time, the self-representations involved in the critical act are also put at risk. One violence breeds another. In mounting an antithetical but immanent critique of the identity principles of the past, our words enter into an

altered relation to present day discourses of dominance, inevitably engaged during the process of writing. The work of articulating the blindness-insight ratios linking the discourse to its moment may outline the traces of a similarly implicated relation between our own technologies of knowing and the identity principles of our time and place. This chain reaction may be a function of the highly contained field in which the demystifying exercise takes place. And it may happen only in cases where the study-text emerged from the conditions, however uneven, of capitalist production and ideology, where the aesthetic is granted its own self-regulating domain. The text's discovered bondage to the conditions of its time and place, juxtaposed against our own critical autonomy may put that freedom of ours in question. (Remember: critique is classically figured as the most liberated and citizen-defining action available to members of enlightened, democratic societies.)

Or, the ideological distancing, whereby we come to perceive the constructedness of our forms of knowing, may have to do with more technical matters. I am thinking of the relative speed and intimacy that characterize the circulation of academic discourse today, or within what has been called the information society. In very short order, we see our language cited, framed, used, abused, and so forth. The reproduction of our arguments happens so fast and so close at hand that its reality as reproduction rather than response or commentary emerges. The individual producer-critic is positioned to see how little she controls the meanings she writes. She sees how public and also unpredictable an event her argument is; or, how her argument includes its effects, its readings and misreadings. She sees what is typically concealed by capitalist relations: the social production of meaning. (This is a good thing.)

There may also be something like a dialectical logic that helps explain the punctual availability of heterology as a materialist operation. In rewriting the myths of the past, we cast them in the new body of present-day enlightenment discourse. By the same token, thus do we mingle our own distinctive error, our myths, with an alien body, that of the texts upon which we enact our enlightenments. One possible result of this miscegenation is a sensuous excess at the level of textuality, an order, or rather a disorder, that highlights the dissonance within our own practices of knowing: something like the ideological distantiation Althusser attributes exclusively to art. I associate these effects with the violent juxtaposition of two different social formations in the confined space of a textual exercise, a reading, performed upon any sort of discourse. The aesthetic then becomes a name for the results of this clash, not for the work or category

that enables it. I call these results excess because while they will not submit to totalization or translation, they owe their occurrence to those actions, to which they are related as a byproduct and horizon.

This excess exerts an oppositional force, but its style of resistance is peculiar. Dispersed, disorderly, noncumulative, it prevents the formation of an equal and opposite subject- or identity form. The style of attack is more like terrorism than orchestrated warfare. Like Kant's sublime, these uncoordinated points of reference bring us up against the inadequacy of our cognitive codes and in so doing, they make us feel the presence of those codes. They crystallize the medusan tangle of knowledge and falsehood, freedom and confinement, that structures our subjectivity but whose contents must remain a blank to us. Then we know that we cannot know the condition of our knowledge, only, and this is a best-case scenario, its aporetic form.

It would seem that the obvious thing to do with these effects which resist the hermeneutic that released them is to conceive them as a site of encounter with a cultural repressed. What then? The effort to search out whatever it is that we cannot know precisely because that particular ignorance is the condition of our knowing is, naturally, pointless. Only if the search proceeds in some extravagant and unseemly way, a way that falls outside our logical practices, can it perhaps trick us into "other" awareness. Consider the optical illusion (a deep truth, as it turns out) used by Freud to instance the uncanny. The mirrored door suddenly swings open, giving the good doctor a reflection of himself not absorbing his gaze and therefore not abridging the self-alienation of personhood in the way one's mirror image always does. All at once, the objective conditions of his usual gaze, his subjectivity, materialize. For a moment, he is othered, but with a sense of return to an identity that preceded the coherence of his ego-self. [Or: consider what it means for a subject, conceived as nothing but the effects of a repression, to conduct an inquiry into that process. The transference method -- a restorative mimesis -- is Freud's solution to this logical dilemma.]

To reject these visions of excess as a reactionary fantasy of transcendental or reflexive origins is also to betray what should be elementary for materialist critique: namely, that it is only materialist so long as it remains historical, and that means willing to reinvent its form and its content as its own conditions of production change. Lacking that, it is idealism by another name. To persist in a certain kind of cultural critique once it has become second-nature within the age's practices of knowing is to comply with the absorptive tendencies of capital. Or,

since there can be no such thing as a uniformly, universally, or ultimately effective noncompliance, one should say that it is to stop producing the wish to interfere with the machinery that profitably incorporates difference into the mainstream.

More than thirty years ago, Roland Barthes pondered the unbridgeable gap between what he called "speaking the object" and penetrating it: the latter, an act of rendering it, in his words, "permeable to history," a move Barthes rejects. He refers to that, the historicizing operation, as mythology and ideologism, while he terms the other labor poetry: "the search for the inalienable meaning of things." The binary set-up is dated and even at the time, it had to be disingenuous, but the conclusion Barthes draws from this sterile opposition would not be rejected today: namely, that the idea of a critical discourse bound as a subject to an object-text is bankrupt. In its place, Barthes proposes an implosion of the art versus knowledge, speaking versus penetrating binary. The writing he imagines would enact a subject-predicate relation in the world, a practical as opposed to a power relation, reminiscent of Kenneth Burke's proposal of a hyphenated rather than hierarchical relation. This is a view in keeping with the aesthetic turn, so called, taken by some critical work today. That phrase describes a knowledge discourse imitative of collage or montage in its efforts to incorporate but not absorb the material object or effect, nor to erase its categorial difference from the host discourse. What is rejected is the logocentrism (and circularity) of the argument-and-example approach.

And yet, the big, old questions remain. How does the subject-predicate relation, the sentence that is writing, aesthetic or critical, relate to the more dominant or coercive sentences inscribed in the literatures we study? Can it relate to a world of sentences outside our culture, or at its breeding center, interstices, or peripheries? To call this new sentence postmodernism (and it certainly conforms to the profile), is to read it as a declaration that cultural modernity in the sense of a simultaneously oppositional relation to the state and a reflexive relation to its own medium has run its course. What kind of writing can develop under these constraints that will still satisfy the conditions of a materialist critique as I have defined it?

To answer that question and to do it without inviting the absorptions I have been tracking, I will first make some general observations based on the preceding analysis of the problem. Then I will give some examples of work that embraces rather than denies the contradictions that arise for a critique that is both historically and reflexively materialist.

First, a general reorientation. We could make a shift from a practice of knowing conceived along the lines of individual intellectual production to a critical writing that in one way or another disclaims that control. I do not mean, although I also do not exclude collaborative writing, nor am I thinking primarily of coteries or schools. The gesture the writing makes is not toward recognized others, as in partners, opponents, or potential converts. Instead, it finds ways to bring out what is in fact the case -- that is, the social production of meaning -- and to make that fact work not to annihilate difference but to multiply it. The trick is to understand the social not as a monolithic, coherent, or even knowable body, nor as a constituency waiting to be fashioned. Rather, the social could serve as a name for the unforeseeable otherness that comes to occupy our writing as it makes its way in a time-frame that is always more uneven than it seems, including slices of the future not just the past. "Making its way" can mean an open-ended set of encounters between the many agencies and intentions that our critical writing embodies and the many that re-embody it. It can mean the mercy of misreading, a providence it is easy to concede when we are the ones misreading, and doing it upon what would otherwise be the abstract and unreal literatures of the past. It is a harder thing to apply the logic not just to one's own critical work but to present-day reception, where there are no historical differentials to sanctify the violence. It seems worth doing because from the perspective of the individual knowledge producer it must be, following Wittgenstein, pictures and stories all the way down. Some people will find that fact depressing because they will understand that it is always "our" stories and pictures, no matter how wide we cast the content net. From the standpoint of a transindividual discourse production, however -- neither the standpoint of the whole nor of the part, but rather of the series -- "a surplus of the Real over every symbolization that functions as an object-cause" may materialize. This standpoint can never be seized. (One could also say, the series cannot be totalized.) That is why Hegel called the series a "bad infinity." For me, that may be its goodness: the virtue of a standpoint that can only be recognized after the fact or extrapolated from textual encounters. It is always all before us or behind. It resembles what Homi Bhabha has called "a space of 'translation'," where we may construct "a political object that is new, neither the one nor the Other...: (He means, by that phrase, neither the Master nor the Slave.) As Barthes said, "'I' am always powerless to render the wholeness of the object." But part of that may have to do with the way that the very establishment of a knowing, rendering, "I" as against a world of

unconsecrated otherness recapitulates the subject-object divide which "knowing" presumably wants to close. Perhaps the felt gap between poetry and science, speaking the object and penetrating it, would narrow if the writerly "I" could set aside the closures of self-definition. It could, for example, re-invent its concept each time it puts its identity into practice. Instead of purposes and projects, this sort of knowing would have ways of proceeding, different ways and means for each occasion.

Perhaps the one fairly restricted thing that more than any other makes critique so pliable to the regimes of the marketplace is its management of its concepts. The relation between the idea, methods, and materials of any particular critique is always problematic, this for reasons no more profound than the fact that the combinations making up the histories we study are always in flux, that the decision as to where a story begins and ends is just that, a decision, and that the act of deciding the outlines of the story is also an episode in that story, one that can never fully account for itself there. But these particulars get buried as the work takes its place in an institutional economy. If a writing could keep its concept, which is for writing what self-consciousness is for persons, sealed in its practice, it might perform the symbolic act of instancing a subjectivity that is not given in advance and that is more permeable to its textual and social environments than is customary in our critical language games. The embodiment of these possibilities may be the most powerful thing critique can accomplish today. It may clear a space in which the otherness of our language and objects can materialize and alongside it, not above, some understanding of those mysteries.

No kind of writing escapes the loop of recuperative expenditure. But it can circulate in odd and disturbing ways that make it harder to reproduce than the other commodities. It can define orbits that are larger and less predictable than those laid out by capital. As Paul Mann has argued in his book *The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde*, every cultural gesture, no matter how anarchic, ascetic, or densely coded, becomes a value-form: the form of equivalence between unlike things and qualities. In intellectual currency, this equivalence takes the form of the concept. We cannot prevent the concept from emerging alongside the practice nor should we try, because the concept is also, for dialectical reasons, deliverance from the spurious transparencies projected by practice. The wish that drives heterology, however, is to control the possession and use of this value-form. Again, there is nothing like a foolproof or final way to do this. But by making a

problem of the relation between theory and practice, a writer can restrict the possession of her language to those who will do the work of reinventing it in the special circumstances that define their own work. The original will then relate to its reinvention as a version, losing its privileged status as first and definitive. In the play of these determinate but interactively unstable languages, the object of heterology may take shape. What to do with it is another question, but just to ask it is already to have breached (a little) the economy of white writing.

The impulse is to bring even this thought of a conceptually problematic practice under a concept. For example, de Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactics would seem to explain the disjunctive, decentered, and noncumulative character of a postcritical practice. Strategy is "the calculation...of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power...can be isolated. It postulates a place...delimited as its own and serv[ing] as the base from which relations to an exteriority can proceed." Tactics, conversely, are defined as "calculated action[s] determined by the absence of a proper locus...The space of a tactic is the space of the other...It does not have the means to keep to itself...It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of 'opportunities'...being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position...What it wins it cannot keep."

Tactics punch holes in the fabric of ideology. They do not negate, an action that always seems to affirm somewhere else, if only by lending itself to narratives of progress, purification, or simply change (that is, the value of the new). Since negation has been, for capitalist formations, an important maintenance technique - - legitimation by opposition, staying in place by moving forward -- materialist critique must perhaps find ways to become oblique, interstitial, disorganizing or incorporative or proliferative rather than oppositional. [Blasphemy (Haraway) and cheekiness (Sloterdijk)] Once attack on the institution of art becomes art, or attack on the institutions of culture and capitalism becomes those things, critique must find different ways to embody its drive toward difference. And then too, there is the proverbial bottom line: tactics are what we use when we come up against the radical impossibility of a thing that still seems the best thing to do. That is a good definition of the state of affairs for materialist critique as I have constructed it in this paper.

Still, tempting as it is to block out the field into tactics and strategy, who would submit to another decorum, especially one so comfortably binary as that? One could, however, imagine collapsing the binary into an irregular oscillation

between those mutually exclusive practices of resistance. One would have strategies interrupted by tactics, purposes interrupted by methods, and vice versa, so that which is the law and which the exception, which one dominant which transgressive, which the theory and which the practice, could not be programmatically determined.

To conceive of critique as practice that makes a problem of its concept is to imagine a critical afterlife that is not just the new more inclusive, insidious version of the same dull round. Not necessarily the dying into life accomplished by our discourses of crises and ends. Not the recuperation of critique by a narrative of its failure. It is more like Charles Bernstein's imagination of the different life that is lived after the narrative has reached conclusion. "They all lived happily ever after." End of narrative. The story, however, continues. What Bernstein means is that life goes on, happily, providing examples that never quite clinch the claim because you never know which is the last unit in the series so you never know when the potential for the unhappiness which would disprove that claim has been banished. This is critique imagined as more of the same, but because critique was always, by definition, a dismantling of "the same," an action carried out in unlike terms so that the difference could not be added to the identity, could not make "more" of it, continuation proves to be, in this case, a different kind of difference. One could think of critique carried out under this anti-rule as examples awaiting the law that will reveal them as examples of something. Until that time, they are and are not examples, for what exactly is the status of an instance for which one cannot find the principle? Perhaps it becomes an example of anything and possibly everything. Everything except nothing, that is. That was modernism's rule.

Now: I would like to give some examples.

1. Impenetrable writing, as in some work by the LANGUAGE poets and critics, where the effort is to make language a syntactic or a lexical chaos: a shutout. This writing composes an antigrammar minus the organized presentation of that anarchy, for that would turn it into antithesis. It wants to avoid generating another standard deviation, as in what Bruce Andrews calls the "old chest-busting negativism of the avant-garde." The social signature of this work is that of the coterie or restricted language game, signifying withdrawal from the public sphere.

At the same time, one could observe (by way of radicalizing that LANGUAGE gesture) that the action of publishing these silent forms in places that, no matter how marginal, can become part of the loop, deprives that rejection

of its categorical fixity. Is it a posture or a policy? Is it a means or an end? Is it the postmodern as commercial conservatism or radical resistance? In Fredric Jameson's terms, is it the Bonaventure Hotel or the Gehry House?

This is a technical response to the challenge of writing from the periphery or the interstices. How to do it without at the same time projecting an image of yourself doing it on the screen of interpretation that dissolves difference by representing it, letting the medium do the old, crude work of polemic? How to construct an apartness within a culture where making is automatically making visible and visibility is entry into simulation? The special sort of productivism that characterizes our age easily digests the difference that was alienation.

My opinion is that there is no deep, logically grounded way to contain the thriving life of the afterlife of the philosophy of the subject, because depth, seriousness, and logical rigor are part and parcel of that discipline. Nor, however, should we rush to abandon that discipline with its commitment to rational autonomy and logical fulfillment as opposed to utopian transfiguration. The double gesture of silence and speech, hide and seek -- the impure genre approach -- is a technical and superficial response but it also preserves, albeit in an ironic form, the logocentrism that it resists.

2. A related way for a critical practice to confound rather than contest the metalogic of our sign economies is by proliferating its presentments, themes, and references. By overcrowding the field of meaning, you effectively put all the meanings and the very meaning of meaning in question. Interpret anything and everything so that the act and its products lose their traditional cultural authority. What you want to avoid is the minimalism or blankness that characterized the negative way of modernist critique. That is a language game everyone knows how to win (and in this case, winning is losing). So, instead of that, overproduction as a way of deflating the currency of meaning. The resurgence of interest in Joyce and Byron, the prolifcs of their ages -- or Blake, "Enough! or too much!" -- is something to consider.

3. A book by Malcolm Ashmore, *The Reflexive Thesis: Wrighting Sociology of Scientific Knowledge.* "Wrighting" in the sense of a)crafting b)inscribing c)steadying or correcting, meanings that both mesh and collide. The thesis of the title refers both to the fact that the text of the book is indeed, and as signalled throughout, the author's doctoral thesis, and also that its thesis in the sense of argument is the reflexivity it exemplifies. (A sociohistorical critique would usefully observe that at one time, the two meanings had an integral, practical

unity: before, that is, the publication of the dissertation, that thoroughly situated and process-oriented exercise, became instrumental in the obtaining of tenure and had to be mystified accordingly, reframed as a singular "thought" or thesis: a spontaneous and self-justifying contribution to the march of ideas.) This is a book constructed in the manner of the Escher drawing that illustrates its cover: circuits of self-reflection, so rigorously pursued that the point of reflective departure (the subject-position) and the objectness of the topic dissolve. Once these two poles vanish, the discreteness of the procedures and performance, and the ratio of means to end melt away. The ratio of means to end also evaporates. Ashmore succeeds in avoiding the alternative positivity of the deconstructive method (the "counter" rationality it engenders) by anchoring the method to its highly particular, even unique institutional circumstances. This embeddedness is accomplished by arguments that are fashioned as scholarly and casual correspondence, as examination questions, as transcripts of lectures and the question-answer exchanges that follow. Does the book present (thematize, fictionalize, stylize) certain social acts, or is it just doing what comes naturally in certain academic circles but doing it onstage, which makes it unnatural. Various deformations of the logic of expository presentation (such as, a section entitled "Final Entry" on page 85 of a 250 page book, and also on page 85, a section heading, "The Next Entry") help establish an interesting but not really a valorized reflexivity. It is not as if they are the practice that illustrates the theory; you cannot tell which is which and so you don't know what to do with the effects. Your attention as you read is increased, but to no obvious end, and thus the extra- or counterdisciplinary potential of that increased energy is kept alive. Somewhere, Wittgenstein speaks of value never belonging to the set of things that are valued. In Ashmore's book, value is put exactly there, inside the set, which means that it is and is not value. It withholds the expected dividend of metaconsciousness, of reflexivity as an intellectual and ethical value. It enacts a strictly hedonistic narcissism: not looking at yourself so as to realize, improve, extend, or empower yourself (and not to abstract the imago for symbolic and exchange purposes) but just looking for the pleasure of feeling yourself betwixt and between self and other, the body of sensation and the mirror-image: what used to be called "the pleasures of imagination."

4. Write the problem of representation and resistance as it informed a particular historical context and its culturally defining practices: Paul Mann in the moment of the avant-garde and the postmodern; T.J. Clark in the moment of

Impressionism; Henry Louis Gates in the violently juxtaposed moments of Edmund Burke's prosecution of Governor Hastings (a major campaign in Burke's war against the ethos of Enlightenment) and Richard Wright's (surprising) brief for an Africa enlightened by European notions of progressive nationalism. Each of these studies develops the historical and logical paradoxes so richly and clearly that the local emerges as a thoroughly reflected and legible field. However, the reading of that field as such -- a zone delimited by reference to other zones and to the system that embraces them -- is held in abeyance. Not dismissed, devalued, or declared impracticable: just not done. As a result, the particulars do not rise (or sink) to illustrate, instance, or even index the general. This is cognitive and even causal mapping but with the effect of destabilizing the categories of explanation. The authorial perspective is internal and external. [A visual analogy: the famous street and house map of Paris; where the graphic detail, indicating features far more ephemeral and contingent than the natural formations designated by ordinary maps, as well as the iconicity of the actual figures and designs fights against the indexical and abstract conventions of the conventional modern map. A scalar dissonance.]

Another version of this thoroughgoing mediational practice: Houston Baker's work on rap, rape, and the nondialectical enfoldedness of urban planning and urban wildness, Wall Street and Harlem, monopolization of the entertainment industry and the figure of the black independent music producer. Here the aesthetic and the economic, resistance and repression are situational artifacts, called forth by the critical act which displays itself as part of that cultural reality.

5. The land-mine: plant the critique with user-triggered anomalies, similar to Stanley Fish's model of affective stylistics where reader response is written into the script and manipulated so as to ironize the intentional structures of the work, creating parallel or differently coded texts within the same discourse. In the surprised-by-sin model, the ironies add up to a heresy. That counter-instruction is the safety net: the stable relation between well-defined and internally coherent positions. In the example I am imagining, one would have dissonance or inconsistency rather than contradiction or opposition. The integrity of both texts would suffer or change. Overall, the effect might resemble the deterritorialized writing that Deleuze constructs from the example of Kafka's fiction: an example of critique seeming to undergo a process of "becoming minor," perhaps becoming fiction, or more probably dissolving the distinction. The effect is of pleasure, the pleasure of coming to know, as opposed to the finality of knowledge.

6. Cultivate artifice and extremity: an obsessional practice. Impose on the study-text so steadily that you call up a reaction from it and from the reader. Stretch a layer of thought over the surface and pull it so tight that the minute defects in the surface will show through, like the designs children make by chalk-rubbing any mildly uneven surface.

7. The exercise: a hands-off, nonnarrative informational display. Collect facts, beliefs, loosely revolving around an event or problem. Let the material "speak for itself": that is, allow the orders which speak through the materials and combinations to come through with less static than usual. Or, let the arrangement speak with all the puzzling arbitrariness and intimation of pure design. The invented archive, reproduced not indexed or narrativized. Catalogue irraisonne.

8. Assemble symmetrically incompatible facts, beliefs, accounts, and receptions, as in Jerry McGann's reading of the contested chapter arrangement in *The Ambassadors*. McGann advances mutually exclusive but equally justified narratives of textual production, and with them, incommensurable hermeneutic possibilities.

A related practice: Louis Renza's paratactic method in "A White Heron": *The Question of Minor Literature*. Renza offers the full transcript of the Sarah Orne Jewett story and then, specimens of readings, no one of which can speak as a truth discourse because all are put forth as "kinds" rather than cases. The method engages attention without enthralling it. It imitates, or perhaps replicates, the canonical, formal, and rhetorical "minority" of the story it addresses -- its thwarting of the *Voluptas* of literary production.

9. Critique on the model of self-consuming performance-art: Cornel West, for one: performing political theology.

10. Circulation of documents, characterized by time-lags, crossed messages, parallelism, divergence. The model here is definitely not dialogue, which evokes the Eden of orality, presence, the consensus of common language users. Instead, a writing exchange, where you edit and intervene in one another's work, breaching the boundaries of the scriptural and authorial entities but not blurring them into a composite text. E-Mail criticism.

11. Framing: build a context that carries with it fairly determinate hermeneutic norms, or that codes certain affective responses. Present the focal text, the one that should serve to demonstrate the inscribed principles. Read in that text, read around it. Don't, however, do the reading or even coherently intimate it. Show it genuinely outflanking the semiotic apparatus. Show yourself not getting all you

could out of the opportunity and not making a virtue from the restraint. E. Val Daniel, "Is There a Counterpoint to Culture; A Study of Sri Lankan Resistance." 12. Lateral critique, as against the verticality of hermeneutics, the tease of hidden depths, the privileging of a textual inwardness that tropes the writer's interiority and suggests an identical subject-object. This is critique as textual commentary in no way subordinate to the self-presence of the work. One might use the devices of marginalia, gloss, scholia, parallel texts, facing-page translations: the technical inventions of editors turned to cognitive use. Donald Ault's Narrative Unbound. Alexander Kojeve's Hegel. Or, antiquated and highly stylized representational formats: Spinoza's geometrical theorems; Talmudic commentary, Mishnah.

To close, I quote again from Michael Taussig:

Yet I do not think, just as Hegel in his parable of the Master and the Slave did not think, that such scrutiny can be undertaken alone. To assume it could, would be to fly in the face of...the dependence of being on the other...In invoking the presence of images of constructed Others, I have not tried to speak for them...[n]or have I made it my goal to contextualiz[e] and thereby 'explain' them, whatever that might mean. What I tried to allow is for their voices to create in the context of our hearing contradictory images, dialectical images...in which their attempts to redress the use of themselves as mnemonics for the vast project of building other selves...bring our own expectations and understandings to a momentary standstill.

I believe that the moment of dialectical images, when they were pregnant with redemption, is past. And I believe that Taussig, despite the language of the passage above, would say the same. Taussig's phrase, "momentary standstill," is meant to invoke Benjamin's *Jetztzeit*, that shocking and liberating punctum in the bland continuum of history. What we have today, and I use Taussig's own metaphor, is a screen. On it are projected fantastic images, images of (for example) a map of the universe showing the holes where the different eras were imperfectly stitched together. These openings are Benjamin's momentary standstills, Gadamer's horizon warps, Wordsworth's spots of time, and the innumerable ideas of otherness that haunt our writing. In the movie I am invoking, Terry Gilliam's "The Time Bandits," these openings permit whatever is human (and therefore dwarfed) to recover the riches created by other human agents and to steal those riches back from the master-thieves controlling the

environment. We can see, however, that the openings open onto the movie screen, a solid surface, and behind that, the surface of the entertainment industry, and so on.

The regression may be infinite and/or circular but it need not be perfect. I remind myself that it is a mistake, an idealism encouraged by the workings of ideology, to impute to the orders of things a seamless operation. A pragmatic materialism, Kenneth Burke's, cites the virtues of inefficiency, some of which I have explored in this paper. That would appear to be one avenue untried by the great critiques of reason that have guided the heterological and nondominative side of our practice. Not Benjamin's destructive character; not Bataille's radical Other to reason and consciousness; not the monstrous and inverted anti-body of Bakhtinian carnival; not the negativity of a nontriumphalist and micrological dialectics; not the Freudian or the political unconscious. Instead, the inevitable, but with respect to time, place, manner, and effects, unimaginable breakdowns in the machinery of representation.

And yet, one wants to do more in the way of a materialist practice than just recognize these interruptions of our plans and masteries when they come. Further, there seems to me a difference between soliciting effects and logics that interfere with the tendential idealism of every philosophy of the subject, and that means every hermeneutic, no matter how radical its materialism, and suffering them. I cannot say just what this difference is. It is something to work on.

