

Adventures of the Anti-Dialectic

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Résumé

Certaines des voies antidialectiques de la pensée contemporaine sont parcourues dans cet article. La dialectique promet en quelque sorte à l'être humain qu'il deviendra un homme authentique et vrai. Elle promet l'homme à l'homme. Se libérer de cette culture signifie ne plus raisonner en terme de morale, de valeurs, de réconciliation. Cela veut dire se libérer de toute une série de postulats qui régissent ce discours : se débarrasser du sujet souverain et du concept de conscience; de celui d'auteur et de l'idée d'une histoire continue. Des éléments tous liés les uns aux autres. Pour réaliser la vraie critique dans le sillage de la philosophie de Nietzsche, il vaut mieux convier toutes les figures antidialectiques capables de détruire les illusions du sommeil anthropologique et de la dialectique : de Marx à Foucault et Althusser, de Stirner à Deleuze, de Bataille à Derrida.

Riassunto

In questo saggio sono analizzate alcune delle vie anti-dialettiche percorse dalla filosofia moderna e contemporanea: da Marx a Foucault a Althusser, da Stirner a Nietzsche a Deleuze, da Bataille a Derrida, il pensiero moderno e contemporaneo ha reagito al miscuglio di sonno antropologico e di dialettica prodottosi nella riflessione post-kantiana e arrivato sino a noi. Esso si è liberato dell'idea di soggetto sovrano, di coscienza, di autore, di storia continua: tutti elementi legati gli uni agli altri. Quali potenzialità ha dischiuso questa nuova traiettoria di pensiero, che sembra oggi dominare le forme attuali di riflessione?

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It would not be exaggerated to say – by paraphrasing Foucault - that if some event of which we cannot at the moment do more than sense the possibility were to cause our modern culture to sever the links with its most recent past, one can certainly wager that the concept of dialectics would be erased from our memory. The fundamental arrangements of contemporary knowledge are so imbued with anti-dialectic issues that we do not know anymore what dialectics is. Our generation is trained, educated, driven to master philosophical machines that are by no means dialectically oriented. Discursive regimes governing our life, our actions, our thought and ways of thinking are nowadays deeply anti-dialectical.

And yet, the transition to an anti-dialectic culture is an invention of recent date. It was the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge that occurred no more than fifty years ago, when the prestige attaching to the dialectic began to fade with the advent of a generation (after 1960) which burned the idol venerated until now: this generation denounced the dialectic as the supreme illusion, from which it sought to free itself through recourse, this time, to Nietzsche, among others. The Nietzsche renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s took place in a climate characterized by the emergence of crucial philosophical and political issues: from the debate around the human sciences to the question of structuralism, from the development of the *nouveau roman* to the diffusion of the cinematographic *nouvelle vague*, from the first signs of the emergence of a new working class to the rise of social and political movements, from the crisis of old ideologies and fundamentalism to new political and existential experimentations.

To some extent, the Nietzschean experience was a radical one inasmuch as it allowed an entire generation to get rid of all forms of bureaucratization, which were dominant even in some political and theoretical orientations such as Marxism and psychoanalysis. Nietzsche's philosophy acted as a powerful machine of de-codification and de-bureaucratization. It allowed people to engage with new political practices and to direct their attention to the emergence of a new economy of power. The interest in Nietzsche's philosophy, among many other literary, artistic, and philosophical experiences, was the only path to get rid of those great philosophical machines, called

Hegelianism and phenomenology, which were dominant after World War II: it was a way to reject Hegelianism and to feel uncomfortable in Existentialism¹.

The 1960s saw some of the most influential interpretations of Nietzsche's work emerge. Authors such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Georges Bataille, Jacques Derrida, Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Klossowski, and Eugen Fink, to only name a few, were the protagonists of a Nietzsche renaissance that fundamentally challenged the configuration of modern thought, the direction of the political and social sciences, and even the form of political activism.

Nietzsche's philosophy had been accepted in France through a close *Auseinandersetzung* with Hegel. After World War II French philosophical debate was characterized by the resurgence of political activism associated with the existentialist-phenomenological trajectory of the interpretation of Hegel's philosophy.² The question of negativity was emphasized by Jean Wahl in his existentialistic reading of Hegel, through specific references to those sections of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* respectively consecrated to the self-consciousness (for the Lordship and Bondage) and to religion (for the question of the death of God).³ In a similar vein were Alexandre Kojève's lectures delivered at the École des Hautes Études in Paris between 1933 and 1939. Kojève put a specific emphasis on the question of negativity, by also exploring the dimension of finitude, which was at the core of Heidegger's philosophy. He established important connections between topics such as anxiety, nothingness, human beings, time, and being in his interpretation of the master-slave dialectic.⁴ Kojève's reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* importantly contributed to the transformation of French academic culture, which was concerned with abandoning its Kantian and spiritualist character. The Kierkegaardian and Heideggerian echoes of his reading of Hegel were to play an important role in the thought of his turbulent disciple Georges Bataille.

¹ The two international conferences held in France in 1964 (colloque philosophique international de Royaumont) and 1972 (colloque de Cérisy-la-Salle) marked the importance of this revival and testified to the emergence of a new approach to Nietzsche's work. See G. Deleuze (ed.): 'Cahiers de Royaumont': Nietzsche, Paris 1964 (Éd. de Minuit); De Gandillac / Pautrat (eds.): Nietzsche aujourd'hui. Vol. 1: Intensité; Vol. 2: Passions, Paris 1972, 2011²: (Hermann, coll. "Cérisy archives"). See also G. Deleuze: "Pensée nomade", in Id.: L'île déserte et autres textes, Paris 2002 (Les éditions de Minuit), 351–364.

² Vincent Descombes: *Modern French Philosophy*, Cambridge 1980 (Cambridge University Press), esp. ch. 1.

³ Hegel: *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford 1977 (Oxford University Press), 104–137; 410–477. Jean Wahl: *Le Malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel*. Paris 1951 (PUF). See also Roberto Salvadori: *Hegel in Francia. Filosofia e politica nella cultura francese del Novecento*, Bari 1974 (Dedalo), 196 and ff.

⁴ See Alexandre Kojève: *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, New York 1969 (Basic Books), esp. lectures of the academic year 1937–38.

Bataille's reading of Nietzsche might be considered both a turning point and the attempt to link Hegelian negativity with Nietzschean sovereignty.⁵ Jacques Derrida, who made seminal comments on the relation of Bataille to Hegel, remarked that Bataille reflected unceasingly on Hegelianism, knowing very well that one should not misconstrue or treat Hegelianism and its immense enveloping resources lightly. In order to reach the form of awakening that allows someone to laugh at philosophy (at Hegelianism), Bataille calls for an entire 'discipline', an entire 'method of meditation'.⁶

According to the outline sketched here, we should not forget the importance of the work of the French translator of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Jean Hyppolite, one of the leading figures of Hegelianism in post-war France and master of Foucault, among others.⁷ In a tribute to him at the École Normale Supérieure in January 1969, Foucault, who, after Hyppolite's death in 1968, took over his post at the Collège de France, remarked: "Khâgne students from immediately after the war remember M. Hyppolite's course on *Phenomenology of Spirit*: in this voice that kept on stopping, as if meditating was part of its rhythm, we heard not just the voice of a teacher, but also something of Hegel's voice and, perhaps, even the voice of philosophy itself."⁸

While undoubtedly a tribute to Jean Hyppolite, Foucault's words also allow us to better understand how Hegel's philosophy embodied the spirit of the time. In his inaugural lecture delivered at the Collège de France in 1970, Foucault affirmed: "I think I am greatly indebted to Jean Hyppolite. I know that, in many people's eyes, his work is under the reign of Hegel, and that our age, whether through logic or epistemology, whether through Marx or through Nietzsche, is attempting to flee Hegel [...] But truly to escape Hegel involves an exact appreciation of the price we have to pay to detach ourselves from him."⁹

Foucault's remark makes even more sense if associated with other overviews he gave of the years of his philosophical apprenticeship. In an interview given in the 1980s that casts a retrospective glance at the '40s and the '50s, Foucault says: "The interest in

⁵ Georges Bataille: *On Nietzsche*. New York 1992 (Paragon House). See also J.-M. Besnier: *Un disciple de Kojève très turbulent*, in 'Magazine Littéraire', no. 243, June 1987, 42 and ff.

⁶ Jacques Derrida: *From Restricted to General Economy: An Hegelianism Without Reserve*, in Id. *Writing and Difference*, London and New York 2001 (Routledge Classic), 319.

⁷ See Jean Hyppolite: *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Evanston, IL 1974 (Northwestern University Press).

⁸ Foucault: *Dits et écrits*, Paris 1994 (Gallimard), vol. 1, 779.

⁹ Foucault: *L'Ordre du discours. Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970*, Paris 1971 (Gallimard), 74 (translated by Rupert Sawyer as *The Discourse on Language*, appendix in Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 235).

Nietzsche and Bataille was not a way of distancing ourselves from Marxism or communism – it was the only path toward what we expected from communism. [...] We were looking for other ways to that utterly different reality we thought was embodied by communism. That's why in 1950, without knowing Marx very well, rejecting Hegelianism and feeling uncomfortable in existentialism, I was able to join the French Communist Party. Being a 'Nietzschean communist' was really untenable and even absurd. I was well aware of that."¹⁰

These remarks help us to understand the complexity and richness of the new climate of intellectual inquiry that took root in France in the first decades after World War II. At the beginning of the 1960s works that were to have a major impact on the new philosophical and political debates were published within a few years of each other, from Heidegger's *Nietzsche* to Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, from Koyre's *Newtonian Studies* to Vernant's *Greek Myth and Thought*. Moreover, these works interacted with those of Althusser, Lacan, Derrida, Canguilhem, to name only a few. This was the *Kampffplatz* in which the new interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy emerged.

Most approaches to Nietzsche's philosophy at this time emphasized the anti-academic function of his work: Nietzsche's experience of thought allowed one to deviate from the prevailing academic culture and to cast off one's personality.

The reference to this intellectual context leads to a better understanding of the issues involved in the discussion of this topic. In fact, when we talk about dialectic, some misunderstandings should be avoided. Dialectic has probably been the highest form of argumentation our western culture has elaborated since the times of Heraclitus or Plato. The dialectical method has existed in different forms for 2500 years and still keeps a profound vitality. When we speak of dialectic and anti-dialectic culture today, however, we refer to a particular episode of modern culture that started in the 19th century with the philosophy of Hegel and came to an end with the emergence in the 1960s of an anti-dialectical orientation. What is at stake in this discussion is a mixture of dialectic and anthropology that gave rise to a slumber from which only the hammer of the philosopher would have awoken us.

In the 19th century Hegel brought the dialectical method to such a high point of elaboration that it was identified with philosophy *tout court* and with the becoming of the Real. Hegel's philosophy impregnated the soil of our modern culture to such an

¹⁰ Foucault: Interview with Michel Foucault, in Hurley/Faubion, Rabinow (eds.): *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, New York 1997 (New Press), 249.

extent that no one should misconstrue or treat Hegelianism and all its immense enveloping resources lightly. If our age, at some point of its history, started struggling to disengage itself from Hegel, if our age attempted to flee Hegel, this means that it was deeply trapped in the resources of Hegelianism.

To truly appreciate the legacy of Hegel's philosophy in modern culture, we could also refer here to the words Maurice Merleau-Ponty was able to write in 1946: "All the great philosophical ideas of the past century – the philosophies of Marx and Nietzsche, phenomenology, German existentialism, and psychoanalysis – had their beginnings in Hegel; it was he who started the attempt to explore the irrational and integrate it into an expanded reason, which remains the task of our century."¹¹

This remark of Merleau-Ponty's is of twofold importance. On the one hand it stresses the pivotal role of Hegelian philosophy in our modern and contemporary culture. On the other it also highlights what is at stake in the Hegelian dialectical method, that is to say the attempt to explore the irrational and to integrate it into an expanded reason. One should not ignore that the Hegelian dialectical method was the most powerful form of analysis and interpretation of the historical process. Dialectic focuses on history as a process, as a becoming, as a development that occurs through conflicts, antagonisms, and contradictions.

Although my effort here consists in outlining how influential Hegel's philosophy was in our modern culture, what pivotal and hegemonic role it has played since the 19th century, we should not go, however, too easily into the temptation of thinking that it enjoyed an undisputed supremacy over all other forms of knowledge throughout the 19th and the 20th Century until the Sixties. Already in the 19th century the triumph of Hegelian philosophy underwent the hammer blows of many philosophers. Among them, Marx played surely one of the most important roles, since he overturned the Hegelian method by simultaneously using all its potentialities. Marx knew very well that Hegel's dialectical method is a powerful machine resting upon rationality and mystification. As he pointed out: "I should greatly like to make accessible to the ordinary human intelligence, in two or three printer's sheets [32-48 pages], what is *rational* in the method which Hegel discovered but at the same time enveloped in

¹¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *Sense and Non-sense*, Evanston 1964 (Northwestern University Press), 63.

mysticism.”¹² In Marx’ wake the explosion of the Hegelian system became possible and the overturn of the dialectical method into an anti-dialectical pattern could emerge for the first time. On Marx’ account, it clearly appeared that the Hegelian dialectical method was irremediably stained by a teleological movement aiming at constantly unifying the opposites through a continuous process of synthesis. Negativity is the word allowing the whole dialectical movement to move towards more encompassing syntheses. In Hegel’s dialectics, negativity is always integrated into the rational movement of the Spirit; it is what allows the rational development of the Spirit. In Hegel’s philosophy there is no room for radical negativity, for absolute negativity, for negativity without reserve, for an antagonism without conciliation. The entire socialist and communist tradition has forgotten that Marx was the first post-Hegelian anti-dialectical thinker. They have anthropologized him, transformed him into a historian of the totality, rediscovered him as a proponent of humanism, in order to check the decentering he had effected. But Marx was the first to use the dialectical method to materialistically interpret the becoming of history, while getting simultaneously rid of all those elements of conciliation, synthesis, teleology that irremediably stained Hegel’s philosophy.

On the same path, albeit from very different standpoints, we should add to this Marxian anti-dialectical practice, all those experiences of thought that emphasized the role of the autonomy of negativity, such as the philosophies of Kierkegaard, Stirner, Schopenhauer, to only name a few.

In particular, in the history of dialectic, Stirner has a place apart, because he was able to reverse the conceptual question ‘What is Man’ into the essential one ‘Who is Man.’ As Deleuze points out, Stirner was able to explain the illusion of the dialectical movement, consisting in replacing God by Man. Feuerbach foretold Man in God’s place. Man and God have been exchanged; but the labor of the negative is here to tell us: ‘it is still not You.’ Man represents only another Supreme Being, nothing in fact has taken place but a metamorphosis in the Supreme Being. Stirner penetrates yet again to the truth of the dialectic in the very title of his great book, *The Ego and His Own*.¹³

These remarks on Stirner are all the more important in that they echo another hugely influential interpretation and problematization of the same topic, discussed,

¹² Marx to Engels, 14 January 1858, in Dona Torr (ed.): *The Selected Correspondence of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: 1846-1895*, transl. Dana Torr from the German edition edited by Vladimir V. Adoratsky, New York 1942 (International Publishers), 102.

¹³ See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, New York 2006 (Columbia University Press), 150–151.

however, from a different standpoint: Althusser's discussion of Marx's theoretical anti-humanism. Althusser referred to Feuerbach's philosophy to make clear that Feuerbach's attempt to resolve the problems of German idealism by going beyond Kant and overturning Hegel ended up as an anthropology; a kind of reflection in which man takes the place of God, in Max Stirner's words. By the same token, Althusser emphasized the important impact that the reading of Stirner's work produced on Marx.¹⁴

Marx (and Engels) had been profoundly impressed by the reading of the influential work appeared at the end of 1844 under the signature of Max Stirner. In his book, Stirner developed a critique of all universals inasmuch as universal notions are abstractions, which means that they are fictions. Stirner was meaning (although this became much more clear later through Nietzsche's critique) that the death of God signals the end of metaphysics and implies the death of all universals (be in the form of God, Man, Church, Socialism, Revolution, or Christianity...). According to Stirner, these fictions, i.e. abstractions, are perverse dominations since they are used to substitute for individuals and the thought of individuals.¹⁵

Marx will respond to this critique through an analysis that highlights where resides the power of such abstractions. So, he poses a question unprecedented in philosophy: the question of ideology and provides an answer in terms of class. The division of society into classes is a condition to also understand the structure of thought and how ideas become dominant. Marx connects the question of production of ideas with the question of domination. By doing so, he does not take away the production of discourses from the field of struggles and practices in which they are constituted. As Balibar stresses: "Marx, for his part, was seeking rather to effect a critical distinction within the very use of the concept of 'truth' by relating every statement and every category to the conditions of its elaboration and the historico-political stakes

¹⁴ See Louis Althusser: *For Marx*, London/New York 1996 (Verso). This book, first published in 1965, is a collection of texts published elsewhere between 1960 and 1964. See in particular the texts on Feuerbach, on the young Marx, and 'Marxism and Humanism'. See also, Id., 'The Humanist Controversy' (1967), in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, edited by F. Matheron, translated by G. M. Goshgarian, London/New York 2003 (Verso), 221–305. See also Etienne Balibar, "L'objet d'Althusser," in *Politique et philosophie dans l'œuvre d'Althusser*, edited by Sylvain Lazarus, Paris 1993 (PUF: Pratiques Théoriques), for the discussion of the Althusserian problematic but also for what is at stake in the debate around the anthropological question in modern French and contemporary thought. See also, by the same author, "Le Structuralisme: une destitution du sujet?," in 'Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale', no. 1 (2005): 5–22.

¹⁵ See also Etienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, London 1995 (Verso), 33–36.

involved”.¹⁶ Therefore, one could say that by posing the question of ideology Marx was not putting the question of the metaphysical distinction between error and illusion, neither was he asking for the problematic of consensus. He was raising rather the question of the conditions in which discourses are elaborated and take their form and validity.

However, the most powerful model for the critique of the Hegelian Logos was given to us more than one hundred years ago, when Nietzsche’s philosophy for the first time appeared in its blazing form. The Nietzschean enterprise can be understood as at last bringing that proliferation of dialectics to an end. With his announcement of the death of God, Nietzsche brought about an epistemological break in modern knowledge. The death of God is a grand, noisy, dialectical event; but it becomes entirely understandable only if it is associated with the doctrine of the overhuman. If we accept the death of God as an isolated doctrine without any reference to the overhuman, we are still dwelling on nihilism and dialectic and are unable to find a way out of it. Dialectic foretells the reconciliation of Man and God, the replacement of God by Man. Nietzsche explains that nihilism involves a long chain: it is about morality taking the place of religion, history and progress taking the place of divine values. Nihilism is about values such as evolution, progress, the good, socialism, and happiness, replacing God. However, such a replacement does not imply an important change. It is only a step forward in the desert of nihilism. Man kills God to take the place left behind by an absent God. Values change, while the nihilistic perspective remains. On the contrary, the question Nietzsche asks is: Who overcomes Man? How can Man be overcome? It is important to understand that Nietzsche’s overhuman has nothing of the dialectical. The overhuman may triumph only if s_he affirms and creates new values. Then, Nietzsche too, like Marx, overturned dialectic.

In order to realize the true critique in the wake of Nietzsche’s philosophy, the first step to be accomplished consists in destroying all the illusions of anthropological sleep. Foucault engaged in this trajectory from the late 1950s through his commentary of Kant’s *Anthropology*. Then, the thesis about the death of Man found its meaningful expression in Foucault’s book *The Order of Things*. In the final pages of that work, published in 1966, Foucault announced that man would be extinguished if the fundamental arrangements of modern knowledge were to disappear. Foucault’s thesis

¹⁶ The Philosophy of Marx, 46.

about the death of man extended Nietzsche's proposition, inasmuch as it explained that the death of God implies the death of man. Foucault's concept developed into the space left behind by an absent God and does not call for any coming God.

From the left-wing Hegelians to the Frankfurt school, from Kierkegaard to Nietzsche, from Dostoevsky to Freud, from Weber to Heidegger and Bloch, an experience of thought orbiting the autonomy of negativity emerges. Despair as mortal illness in Kierkegaard, the underground in Dostoevsky, Being-towards-death and finitude in Heidegger, the eternal return in Nietzsche, violence as the maieutics of history in Marx, erotic immoralism in Otto Gross, the neurosis in Freud, but also the insane in Foucault, to only name a few experiences, are all concepts orbiting the emergence of forms of negativity that can no longer be included into the dialectical logic of development, that can no longer be involved in the Hegelian synthesis, in its *Aufhebung* (sublation), interpreted as a teleological-evolutionist process. A form of absolute negativity, of negativity without reserve, of irremediable negativity appears here. An entire discipline, an entire "method of meditation" – to paraphrase Bataille – is called here in order to laugh at philosophy, that is to say at Hegelianism. Negativity becomes a revolutionary break, an interruption without reserve, a pure discontinuity, an exodus without return.

The notion of negativity is the pivotal concept around which the understanding of the transition from a dialectical pattern to an anti-dialectical one is made possible: while being crucial in Hegel's philosophy, it is also what allows the overturn of dialectic. To the extent that negativity partakes in the dialectical movement of the triad (thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis), it fits into the logic of the system. But as soon as it acquires autonomy and radical independence, it breaks the logic of the system. If we got rid of this logic of conciliation, of synthesis, we could have in our hands a powerful tool of analysis resting on a logic of antagonism and of conflict. For sure, not all problems would have been solved. But, in a way, we would be on the pathway leading to the explosion of the logic of the system.

If we keep in mind the broad spectrum of these heterogeneous experiences struggling against the encompassing dialectical method, we can also easily understand why it was no accident that until the 1930s, the term dialectic was understood pejoratively. To further add to the experiences mentioned above, we can also remark that for a neo-Kantian the dialectic was the logic of appearances, whereas for a Bergsonian it could engender nothing but a purely verbal philosophy. The real

hegemony of Hegelianism started after 1930 when the revolt against neo-Kantianism coincided with the decline of Bergsonianism. Starting with the 1930s dialectic became such a lofty concept that it would have been offensive to request a definition. In 1957, Sartre remarked: “the dialectic itself [...] could never be the object of concepts, since its movements engenders and dissolves them all.”¹⁷

It would be highly misleading, however, to interpret the anti-dialectical reorientation of our recent culture as the liberation from an old illusion, the transition into the luminous consciousness of an age-old concern, the entry into objectivity of something that had long remained trapped within beliefs and dialectical philosophies. It was rather the entry of thought into a new form of thinking and practice that called into question the reflection on rationality, continuist representations of history, historical progress, dialectical rationality. Topics inherited from the immediate post-war period, which now mingled with the simultaneous problematization of narrative realism, of filmic realism, as in the Italian Neorealism or in the French Nouvelle Vague.

Contemporary thought was able to muster all the figures which disrupted the system, which struggled against the forms of Hegelianism: Foucault, Deleuze, Artaud, Bataille, Roussel, Blanchot, Antonioni, Godard, Klossowski, to give just a few names. In the experiences of these authors the problem was no more the construction of a system (like in Hegel’s philosophical project), but the construction of a personal experience, that is to say the attempt at reaching a certain point in life that is as close as possible to the “unlivable,” to that which can’t be lived through. Experience has here the function of wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution. The anti-dialectical pathway is a project of desubjectivation, involves an idea of a limit-experience that wrenches the subject from itself.

By mustering some figures which – as we said – disrupted the (Hegelian) system, we summon some authors as if they covered the same empty space of a shared experience. But why associate the names of different authors with the same intellectual undertaking? While there is no question of flattening the existing differences among these authors or, what would be worse, of reducing them by referring to common roots, it is nevertheless a fact that their works refer in different ways to a project of destroying the notion of the foundational subject and system in philosophy. Calling the

¹⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre: *Search for a Method*, transl. Hazel E. Barnes, New York 1968 (Vintage), 171.

subject into question meant that one would have to experience something leading to its actual destruction, its decomposition, its explosion, its conversion into something else. The Nietzschean theme of discontinuity, the theme of an overhuman who would be completely different from the human, or, as in Bataille, the theme of a limit-experience through which the subject escapes from itself, had an essential value for a whole generation. By referring to these authors we understand what was at stake both in dialectical and in anti-dialectical thought, what were the issues involved in such a debate. Why an entire generation since the 1960 came to mistrust 'like the plague' any form of dialectic? How is it possible to have a language stripped of dialectics, if the language of philosophy has been intertwined with dialectics since its beginning?

We could summarize all these topics by saying that the dialectic in a sense promises humans that they will become authentic, true humans. It promises humanity to humans. To free oneself from this culture means no longer to reason in terms of morality, values, reconciliation. This means freeing oneself from a whole series of postulates that govern this discourse: releasing oneself from the sovereign subject and the concept of consciousness; from that of the author and the idea of a continuous history. All these elements are interconnected. Continuous history, as we know it from the experience of historicism, is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded it may be restored to it; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject – in the form of historical consciousness – will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under its sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called its abode.

If it is a question of speaking a language stripped of dialectics, of keeping the presence of Dionysius, the death of God, the overhuman, the discursive and dialectic language can no longer speak: it remains silent. This is the reason why we should acknowledge the sovereignty of experiences resting on extreme forms of language. In a language stripped of dialectics, the philosopher learns that even s_he does not inhabit the whole of h_er language. Next to h_erself, s_he discovers the existence of another language that also speaks and of which s_he is not the master, one that strives, fails, and falls silent, one that s_he cannot manipulate, the language s_he spoke at one time and that has now separated itself from h_er, now gravitating in an increasingly silent space.