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The Theory of the Essay:

Lukács, Adorno, and Benjamin

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Comparative Literature

by

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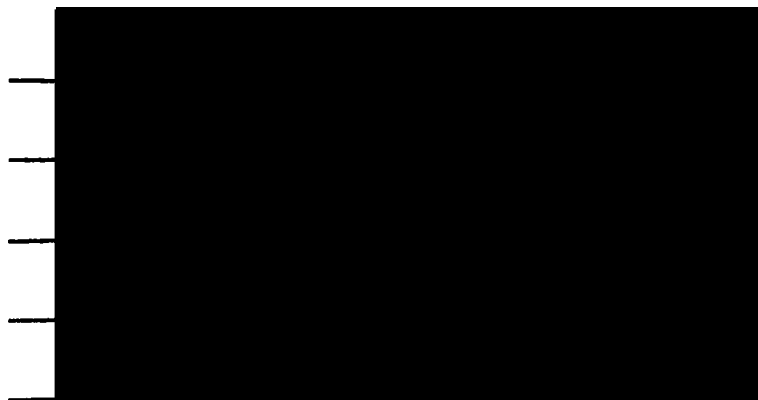　Professor Donald Wesling
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1981

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Theory of the Essay:

Lukács, Adorno, and Benjamin

by

Robert Lane Kauffmann

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, San Diego, 1981

Professor Fredric Jameson, Co-Chairman

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This study treats three German philosopher-critics—
Georg Lukács, Theodor W. Adorno, and Walter Benjamin—whose
theories of the essay, considered together, are the most
comprehensive attempt yet made to define the essay as a cog-
nitive and philosophical form. The introduction envisages a
descriptive-historical poetics of the essay as a methodo-
logical standard by which to evaluate the theories just
mentioned. The aim of such a poetics would be to elucidate
the ways in which particular cognitive projects are actu-
alized in essays through specific literary-discursive devices.

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The central chapters offer a close analysis of the ideas of Lukács, Adorno, and Benjamin on the essay, situating each theory in its historical and intellectual context. (The two main documents here are Lukács' 1910 essay on the essay in his Soul and Form, and Adorno's 1958 "The Essay as Form," in his Notes on Literature. Benjamin left no explicit theory of the essay; his ideas on philosophical method and form—ideas which strongly influenced Adorno— are culled from his study on the baroque Trauerspiel and from his later essays.) These theories are compared with respect to such themes as the historical development of the essay, its dominant aesthetic and philosophical functions (with particular regard to whether the essay is "systematic" or "fragmentary" in nature), and the role of the subject in the act of cognition which is embodied in the essay form. Each theory reflects its author's particular version of Marxist dialectics, his distinct view of the interrelations between aesthetics, cognition, and social reality. Thus, for example, the young Lukács sees the modern essay as an alienated, fragmentary form which strives for an ideal "system" (this ideal being exemplified by the unity and "immediacy" of Plato's essay-dialogues). The nostalgic longing of Soul and Form reappears in the totalizing Marxism of Lukács' History and Class Consciousness (1923). For Adorno, by contrast, the essay registers a utopian protest against such totalizing systems. Adorno considers the essay to be the

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formal enactment of "negative dialectics" (as he named his philosophy); fragmentation is its basic principle.

Whereas Adorno's theory is contrasted to that of Lukács, his _practice_ of the essay is juxtaposed to Benjamin's experiments with the form. The now famous aesthetic dispute between Adorno and Benjamin of the thirties is re-examined in terms of the rhetorical strategies evidenced in their critical writings. It is argued that Benjamin was more attentive than Adorno to the cognitive responses of readers, and that in some ways his essays came closer to satisfying the normative aims of "negative dialectics" than did the essays of Adorno himself.

Each of these theories is a "cognitive utopia," a kind of philosophical wish-fulfillment, in that each theorist projects his own ideal Essay as the solution to the most basic problems of modern culture and society. While none of these theories gives an entirely satisfactory historical account of the essay genre, they still serve as interpretive master-keys to the essays of the theorists themselves.

Or perhaps as clues for a theory of the modern critical essay. Whatever their differences, these thinkers are alike in seeing the essay as a function of the cognitive experience of a writing subject. Thus they belong to a familiar anthropology of discourse which in recent years has been sharply challenged by "poststructuralist" theories. The poststructuralists--among them Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard,

and Barthes--reject the notion of a controlling subject of discourse in favor of the "free play" of the language of the text. The concluding chapter imagines a confrontation between Marxist utopias of cognition and poststructuralist utopias of language--two alternative poetics for the modern critical essay.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. The Essay as a Problem of Genre Theory

One of the first problems to be faced by a theory of
the essay concerns the ontological status of this genre. Does
the essay exist as an observable entity in its own right? Is
it a genre, a mode, a genuine literary type? Are these things
ever more than useful fictions? Clearly, there are essays,
but is there an Essay, an ideal type to which all its empir-
ical instances conform? Is not the existence of such an ideal
type (to push this nominalist line of questioning further)
an optical illusion, a kind of conceptual legerdemain prac-
ticed by essentialist genre theories? Even if one were to
restrict the term to writings designated as essays by their
authors--a restriction which would have the advantage of con-
venience, but which would be highly questionable as a sci-
entific hypothesis--one would still find it difficult to as-
similate, say, an essay by Montaigne and one of Bacon's es-
says, or an essai moral by Nicole and Locke's Essay on Hu-
man Understanding, to the same logical or literary type. But
is every attempt to define the essay as a genre condemned,
then, to reify it, turning into an ahistorical essence what

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is in fact a highly unstable and heterogenous set of phenomena? I will argue that this may be avoided only by remaining aware of the historicity, not only of the essay form itself, but of all <u>theories</u> of the essay as well.

The problems of classification are of course not limited to the study of essays. Whoever undertakes the investigation of a single literary genre will sooner or later encounter the aporias underlying genre theory as a whole. As Karl Viëtor observed, the problem of identifying the members of a genre may be described in terms of a "hermeneutic circle": "How is it possible to write the history of a literary genre, when we do not possess firm generic norms in the first place, but must instead derive those norms from the survey of a multitude of single facts?"[1] In other words, the identification and analysis of individual works belonging to a category such as the essay imply a knowledge of the whole: they presuppose a knowledge of what is and what is not an essay. But is this knowledge of the whole not simply the canon one chooses, guided by one's own interests and assumptions, as representative of the type that one intends to explore? Worse still, the exploration of one literary genre or type cannot be isolated from assumptions about other literary types and about literature as a whole—its autonomy or dependence upon other modes of communication, the rela-

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[1] Notes for this chapter may be found on pp. 29-31.

tion of literary history to general history, etc.

But, it may be asked, is the essay really so mysterious? Is it not simply the occasional form par excellence, the universally accepted form of discursive writing, the convenient vehicle for saying whatever one wants to say about a given subject? The assumed transparency of the essay partly explains why there have been so few rigorous investigations of the genre. But that very transparency, the assumption that the essay is an infinitely flexible and universally adaptable form, is itself a phenomenon which bears examination. When a cutural form has become so naturalized that it no longer calls attention to itself or appears to require explanation, that in itself would be reason enough for looking into it. One of the aims of the present study will therefore be to recall the problematic origins of the essay.

There are other reasons why the essay has only rarely been considered worthy of generic study. Perhaps the most important reason is the widely accepted opposition between mimetic and nonmimetic forms, or, in the usage of the Chicago Aristotelians, between mimetic and didactic literature.[2] Literature proper (creative or imaginative literature) is generally equated with the canon of mimetic forms--chiefly lyric, epic, and drama. The essay is understandably associated with nonmimetic discourse of various kinds--critical, philosophical, historical, scientific. Such nonmimetic discourse has received relatively little formal and generic at-

tention, if only because it is assumed that in it aesthetic form counts for less than propositional content. This traditional opposition between mimetic and nonmimetic receives strong reinforcement from Roman Ingarden's distinction between the "literary" and the "scientific" work in his _The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art_. In Ingarden's view, these two types are absolutely distinguishable according to their different kinds of intentionality and reference. The scientific work claims to make "true judgments" about objective states of affairs, and to further scientific knowledge by conveying its findings to readers who understand and accept the conventions of such discourse. The literary work, on the other hand, makes no such claims. Its statements are merely "quasi-judgments"; it only pretends to refer to real states of affairs; and its true function is to create and embody "aesthetic values." If the literary work happens to display elements which might otherwise be construed as belonging to the scientific type of work, these elements are irrelevant to its nature as a literary work. Conversely, if aesthetic qualities appear in the scientific work, they are "a dispensable luxury."[3] Ingarden's argument is, I think, a sophisticated version of a commonly-held assumption. If one had to place the essay in one category or the other, there would of course be good reason for placing it squarely within the camp of the scientific or nonliterary work. Throughout much of the essay's history, its refer-

ential and didactic functions have been dominant. As the prevalent form of literary criticism, the essay is regarded as a discourse <u>about</u> literature, and therefore necessarily of a different logical and discursive type: a kind of "metalanguage" about the "object language" made up of the various mimetic forms. Yet in another sense, the essay has always been something of a mixed genre, standing on the borderline between literature and philosophy. At certain key moments in its history—the German Romanticists, the late nineteenth-century English art critics—the essay has seemed to defy any neat division between art and philosophy by claiming to be a genuine art form in its own right. And Geoffrey Hartman, in an article entitled "Crossing Over: Literary Commentary as Literature," argues cogently that the modern critical essay often crosses the borderline, creating its own brands of "fiction" (the notion of literary genre may be one of them), and displaying rhetorical energies and strategies no less creative or artistic than those of works conventionally recognized as literary.[4] This study deals with three essayists whose works display a definite creative tension between art and philosophy.

Having acknowledged the essay's affinity with non-mimetic discourse, an argument could also be made that the essay tradition shows a substantial link to mimetic literature as well: think of the Theophrastian "character" in its relation to the essay in sixteenth and seventeenth-century

French and English literature,[5] of the "confessional" aspect of Montaigne's essays, or of the paisajista (landscape) subgenre in nineteenth-century Spanish essays, with their mixture of didactic and mimetic motives. This is not to argue that one cannot distinguish between examples where a mimetic motive is dominant and those where it is not. It is only to say that, as generic criteria, such binary oppositions as mimetic vs. nonmimetic, or literary vs. nonliterary, have no absolute value. One needs a more sensitive historical theory, a more flexible way of correlating the formal, thematic, and intentional aspects of different essay-types.

Let us consider other developments in genre theory which are relevant to a theory of the essay, with particular regard to the problem of historical periodization. In the past half-century or so, classical poetics has to a great extent been modified or displaced by new schools of thought about genre theory and literary history, among them the Formalist and Structuralist schools. Speaking very generally, these two approaches, historically related and often overlapping in their theoretical programs, have advocated the study of genres within a structural typology of discourse. They would not only classify genres according to their structural characteristics (a term that obviously covers a great deal), but would also study the synchronic relationships between specific genres within a given period, as well as the diachronic transition from one poetic "system" to an-

other.[6]

The main problem in applying the structuralist model arises, it seems to me, in connection with the question of historical change, or how to construe the relationship between synchrony and diachrony in a literary system. I will use the arguments of Tzvetan Todorov as a point of reference, as they seem to provide a coherent statement of the structuralist position on this matter. Todorov's conception of the nexus formed by literary history and genre theory may be summarized in the following interrelated propositions. In his survey of models of literary history, Todorov argues for a methodological distinction between literary and social history. "Ce qui ne veut pas dire," he observes, "que les deux séries sont indépendantes: distinguer ne signifie pas isoler; il s'agit plutôt d'établir un ordre hiérarchique dans l'objet d'étude, ordre qui se répercute nécessairement sur la forme de l'étude elle-même."[7] Having made this distinction, he goes on to argue that literary history does not mean the immanent reading or description of individual works. This is so, both because the reading of individual works is primarily a synchronic, not a diachronic, activity, and because, if the notion of a synchronic poetic system is accepted, then one will have to conceive of the object of literary history—that which changes over time—not as the individual works themselves, nor as the isolated literary genres, but as the entire poetic system of which they form

a part. Here Todorov defers to the Russian Formalist models of literary change, particularly to the claim of Tynianov that literary change may be understood as the changing relationship between formes (conceived as the concrete techniques or devices employed in literary works, or what Tomachevski called procédés) and fonctions (the systematic relations between these forms or procedures).[8]

First, it seems essential to preserve the insight that literary genres form a synchronic system: this calls attention to the phenomenon of clusters or "families" of essay-types or subgenres: such as the essays, letters, dialogues, maxims, portraits, and Menippean satires in seventeenth-century French literature; or essays, characters, reflections, Miscellanies, and Anatomies in the same period of English literature. That is to say, the essay may be conceived as a synchronic grouping of essay-types which stands in determinate relationship to the other genres within the general poetic system at any given moment. This also helps to account for the fact that at a given moment in a particular linguistic-literary tradition, the essay may play a rather marginal, peripheral role in the general poetic system (say French classicism), and at another moment may acquire a central place, even becoming the dominant genre, as in the eighteenth-century Spanish Enlightenment. But this is where the explanation of change in the structuralist model becomes problematic. For the notion of systemic change

involves a shift of perspective from the synchronic to the diachronic, and thus automatically raises the question of the _causality_ of literary change. I think this is where the methodological distinction advocated by Todorov between literary and social history breaks down. For the concept of an autonomous literary system, while extremely useful for describing synchronic states, is at a loss to explain changes of the entire system, unless it wants to claim that the system changes according to entirely internal factors--something which I think is demonstrably false.

Consider the rise of the essay in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in France and England. This phenomenon may be partly explained by internal shifts in the general poetic and rhetorical system--the reaction against scholastic philosophy, the Anti-Ciceronian movement in prose style, etc. But these factors in turn require explanation in terms of more comprehensive cultural phenomena, such as the whole development of humanist thought, the rise of a print-culture, and, in Bacon's case, the new scientific epistemology.[9] As Todorov is quite aware, these considerations open up the question of genre to the problems of ideological history[10]--problems which cannot be ignored, it seems to me, without making quite arbitrary decisions about the historical development of literary genres, and about the causality of individual literary works. Thus, the admission of wider, extraliterary factors into the domain of genre study leads

one to the analysis of particular works, for that is where
ideological-historical factors and the norms of a poetic
system intersect most immediately. Despite the incompati-
bility implied by Todorov between the synchronic analysis
of poetic systems and the consideration of the ideological
conditions of individual works, a historical approach to the
essay must try to incorporate both perspectives, reading
particular works both as generic experiments which reflect
and act upon the poetic system to which they belong, and as
ideological speech acts within determinate historical sit-
uations.

Claudio Guillén's essays on genre in Literature as
System are a useful modification of the structuralist ap-
proach to genre. Guillén does not rigidly separate the dia-
chronic-historical aspects of genre from the exigencies of
synchronic analysis, nor, contrary to Todorov's argument,
does he consider the act of creation or the reading of indi-
vidual works to be irrelevant to the tasks of literary his-
tory. This gain in perspective does not sacrifice the favorite
structuralist synchrony/diachrony opposition. Taking into
account the temporality of all perspectives on genre,
Guillén argues that "Looking backward, a genre is a descrip-
tive statement concerning a number of related works. Looking
forward, it becomes above all . . . an invitation to the
matching (dynamically speaking) of matter and form."[11] The
important point in Guillén's argument is that genre is a

structural and <u>compositional</u> model, an "invitation to form," in the sense of a creative stimulus to the actual construction of works. Thus it suggests the structural integrity of works in a way that a mere listing of stylistic or rhetorical norms could not. Guillén distinguishes the category of genre, as a concrete and explicit structural model, from the more general category of "essential modes" or "universals," such as lyric, epic, and drama.[12] What this means, for our purposes, is that such explicit compositional models are available only at the level of specific subtypes of the essay--the familiar essay, the moral essay, the critical or philosophical essay. This study will be concerned primarily with the last two types (which, in the German essayists to be considered, often combine into a single type).

These are some of the methodological problems which would have to be taken into account by a comprehensive theory of the essay. What is needed is a descriptive and historical poetics of the essay, a theory which would attend both to the form and to the function of essays, to the relationship between the essay and other genres within specific historical periods, as well as to the ideological dimensions of individual essays. Such a historical poetics does not exist, of course, except as an ideal norm, and this study certainly does not claim to embody or realize it. The essays that follow are in part an attempt to explore the conditions of possibility of such a comprehensive theory of

the essay. I will focus upon several theories which seem to me to represent the most provocative attempts to date to define the essay as a cognitive form. The idea of a descriptive-historical poetics articulated above will serve as a guideline or standard by which to evaluate those theories. But first, let us briefly consider some of the precedents for studying essays according to their cognitive and philosophical functions.

B. The Essay as a Cognitive and Philosophical Form

"The first major step toward modern composition of nonfiction, a step made necessary by the collapse of the scribal mnemonic order under the impact of typography, was the Ramist method with its nonsyllogistic, synoptic, order and the binary forks which allowed the division and subdivision of topics within a spatial framework. The deliberate disorder of Montaigne's Essays, a disorder which disregarded both the accustomed procedures of topical invention and the decorum of composition, might be considered a transitional strategy, the negative and affirmative functions of which are implicit in the very word essay. Through the essay, new heuristic pathways and novel judgmental procedures were laid down. The innovation is the dialectical aspect of thematic and discursive novelties which we now call inwardness or subjectivity. The dialectic of self-portrayal thus appears to be one of the variants of the tentative genus universum which challenged the claims of poetry in the Renaissance."

Michel Beaujour, "Genus Universum," in Glyph 7 (1980), pp. 28-29.

Whatever their theoretical or historical orientation, modern critics are agreed in considering Michel de Montaigne the creator of the modern essay. His Essais, first published

in 1580, have surely been the most important source of its current literary meanings and associations. The word "essay" derives from the medieval Latin word "exagium," meaning a "weighing," or, figuratively, a consideration or thoughtful judgment upon some matter. Montaigne used the term to mean a search, an investigation, a probing reflection or partial survey of something—but also a trial, test, or mental experiment. In one of Montaigne's essays, the word appears alternately as a noun, a transitive verb, and a reflexive verb.[13] These basic semantic coordinates postulate both a kind of cognitive activity—one which is tentative rather than conclusive—and a subject of that activity, the "essaying" subject. The essay is thus a cognitive probe into some area of experience.

To refer to the essay as the product of cognitive experience is to raise the touchy question of authorial subjectivity, and with it all the controversies involved in dealing with such extra-textual matters (even today one can scarcely write or pronounce the word "intentional" without hearing the automatic echo: ". . . fallacy"). Yet the question is inescapable: with regard to Montaigne's essays, how can one separate the discussion of form from the richly-nuanced personality which we glimpse at work behind those essays, and which seems to be the form-giving power itself? This issue appears inevitably, in one form or another, in all theories of the essay. To be sure, in Montaigne's "con-

fessional" essays the "self" is thematized to a much greater
extent than in many subsequent essayists. This fact has
tempted many to sidestep the question of subjectivity by
simply classifying the essay according to whether it is per-
sonal (as in the "familiar" essay) or formal-impersonal
(Bacon is given as the prototype here). This commonsensical
approach will do for most purposes, but I suspect that it
does not address the real problem: the discursive subject's
manipulation of the speech-devices of subjectivity and ob-
jectivity. This problem is not to be resolved, however, by
simply deriving the subjectivity of the essayist from the
birth of modern individualism. In this regard, Alfred Kazin's
definition of the essay represents a fairly common view of
the status of subjectivity in this genre.

> It is personal not because it is necessarily <u>about</u>
> the self, but because it is an expression of the
> self thinking. The beauty of the form is that it
> allows the writer, as himself, the freedom to dis-
> cover and develop his individual statement on things.
> . . . That is why the essay is so peculiarly modern
> a form, for it expresses the individual's wholly un-
> determined and freely discovered point of view. Im-
> agination, in the pure sense, is much older; but
> newer in history and actually less familiar is the
> kind of literally self-conscious individuality that
> made the essay possible.[14]

Kazin's affirmation of the freedom and autonomy of the es-
sayist seems historically and philosophically naive. His
unproblematic conception of the modern individual overlooks
the cultural and ideological constraints operating on the
essayist's supposedly "wholly undetermined and freely dis-

covered point of view." Michel Beaujour suggests that the individual, as discursive and cognitive subject, was as much the product as the producer of the rhetorical revolutions of the sixteenth century: "The textual subject came into being as a side-product of the humanist's gathering, deciphering and classifying of ancient textual fragments in order to make them operative in the new culture of print."[15] A theory of the essay must conceptualize the role of the essayist in relation to linguistic and cultural conventions, to ideological formations, and to the cognitive activity of readers of essays. These themes are elaborated in later chapters of this study.

That the essay coincides with the rise of philosophical relativism is another commonplace of modern criticism. Walter Pater was perhaps not the first to have advanced this view, but his statement of it was one of the most elegant and influential. In many of Pater's works, notably in Plato and Platonism and in his essays on Browne and Lamb in Appreciations, one finds a subtle, if unsystematic, theory of the essay.[16] In his essay on Plato, Pater speaks of the essay as one of three "distinct literary methods" or "forms of composition" which have prevailed at different periods in the history of philosophy. The earliest is the philosophical "Poem," as represented by Parmenides and Empedocles, used when "philosophy was still a matter of intuition . . . " Next came the formal treatise (as in Aristotle, Aquinas, or

Spinoza), which came into being "when native intuition had

shrunk into dogmatic system . . . " Then came the essay:

> the perfected philosophic temper being situate mid-
> way between those opposites, in the third essential
> form of the literature of philosophy, namely the es-
> say; that characteristic literary type of our own
> time, a time so rich and various in special appre-
> hensions of truth, so tentative and dubious in its
> sense of their ensemble, and issues. Strictly appro-
> priate form of our modern philosophic literature,
> the essay came into use at what was really the in-
> vention of the relative, or "modern" spirit, in the
> Renaissance of the sixteenth century. 17

Pater's typology of philosophical form is intriguing, but

too primitive and historically unanchored, one feels, to be

reliable. Its value lies rather in the questions that it

raises. Does the essay display an affinity for certain epis-

temological positions over others? More particularly, is it

closely linked historically with philosophical scepticism

and relativism? What relevance have epistemological criteria

for a theory of the essay?

Montaigne fits the paradigm of the sceptical essayist

well enough (after Plato, Montaigne is Pater's chief exam-

ple).[18] But the impression of "modernity" in Montaigne's

essays is probably less a result of his flirting with sys-

tematic (Neo-Pyrrhonian) scepticism, as in his Apologie de

Raimond Sebond, than of his playful strategies of digression

and indirection.[19] It is the literary and rhetorical quality

of his style that gives Montaigne's essays their air of

epistemological "openness" and indeterminacy. Bacon's essays,

by contrast, are short, pithy, and moralistic; they have

nothing informal, sceptical or unsystematic about them,
notwithstanding Stanley Fish's provocative reading of them
as an attempt by Bacon to reorient the reader's thinking in
a relativist direction.[20] As for Descartes: while some of
his discourses and meditations, arguably within the essay
tradition, thematize the method of doubt and thus exhibit
at least a methodological connection to scepticism, their
ultimate intention is to establish a method for arriving at
epistemological certainty rather than to debunk philosoph-
ical systems. They could thus be cited (perhaps in company
with many of the treatise-like "Essais" of the French
philosophes, such as those of Condorcet and Condillac) as
evidence of an anti-sceptical tradition within the history
of the essay. One could of course argue that, on the
strength of the essay's semantic connection with tenta-
tiveness and incompleteness, the name "essay" should be re-
served for works which, like Montaigne's, practice the scep-
tical virtues, but that would be to set the semantic asso-
ciations of the word against the weight of many empirical
counter-examples.

Let us look at another attempt to classify essays
according to cognitive or philosophical type. Aldous Huxley
advocates a three-poled typology, according to the cogni-
tive method practiced by essayists: the pole of the "per-
sonal-autobiographical," that of "the objective, the factual,
the concrete-particular," and that of the "abstract univer-

sal."[21] Essayists of the first kind, clearly, are those who "write fragments of reflective autobiography and who look at the world through the keyhole of anecdote and description" (Charles Lamb is Huxley's example). The second kind (e.g., MaCaulay) are those "predominantly objective essayists who do not speak directly of themselves, but turn their attention outward to some literary or scientific or political theme, setting forth, passing judgment upon, and drawing general conclusions from, the relevant data." And finally, there are essayists (Bacon, Emerson, Gracián and Valéry are mentioned) who "do their work in the world of high abstractions, who never condescend to be personal and who hardly deign to take notice of the particular facts, from which their generalizations were originally drawn." Montaigne is invoked as the consummate essayist who combines all three poles into "multiform hybrids" using a language and style appropriate to the facts of lived experience.[22]

This may at first seem only slightly more elaborate than the personal/impersonal dichotomy criticized earlier. But Huxley's categories point not only to the different objects and areas of experience "intended" by the essayist in each case; they also evoke (if rather schematically) the different cognitive methods and operations involved in each type of essay. Huxley's simplified scheme is interesting, it seems to me, not because he succeeds in establishing a definitive typology of essays according to cognitive acts or

intentions, but because it suggests the potential usefulness of such a typology.

The epistemological differences mentioned earlier between Montaigne, Bacon and Descartes should be sufficient warning against simply identifying the essay form with any particular ideological or philosophical position. The essay belongs to no absolute or primordial kind of cognitive experience, because there is no a priori, immutable <u>subject</u> of cognitive experience. But it may turn out that the essay is associated with certain predominant or recurring types of cognitive or philosophical experience, and it would seem profitable to explore that possibility. To argue for the study of essays according to dominant cognitive intentions and functions is not to abandon the criteria of language, style, or structure in the analysis of form. On the contrary, it is to recognize that there is a definite relationship between the stylistic and rhetorical structure of an essay and the way it is cognitively experienced (both by the author and the reader). Clearly, the cognitive project of an essay can be effected, and perceived, only in specific linguistic configurations. We may affirm that essays, like other literary forms, are to be understood as particular ways of using language, as determinate correlations, ultimately, between language and experience.

C. Lukács, Adorno, and Benjamin
on the Theory of the Essay

It is at first glance surprising that the two most comprehensive attempts to define the essay as _form_--and to respect the full aesthetic and philosophical import of that term--should have been made by two philosopher-critics steeped in the German philosophical tradition. For with few exceptions, that tradition has been decidedly distant from the French and English contexts to which the modern essay owes its origins and much of its subsequent development. Was it perhaps that very otherness of the German tradition which allowed those critics to see the essay from a new perspective, and thus to make it out as a properly philosophical form? This is the cultural paradox with which one must come to terms when dealing with Georg Lukács' essay, "Über Wesen und Form des Essays," from _Die Seele und die Formen_ (1911),[23] and with Theodor W. Adorno's essay, "Der Essay als Form," from _Noten zur Literatur_ (1958).[24] Both writers take the essay as a serious form, subject to rigorous philosophical and aesthetic constraints, and not--as is implicitly the case with many previous and contemporary references to the essay-- as a mere container, loose vehicle or occasion for expressing established contents and intentions. I will try to show in the present study that their theories of the essay, as expressed chiefly in the works mentioned above, may be seen as

distinct individual responses to their common German philo-

sophical heritage.

Both Lukács and Adorno played important roles in

what has come to be known as "Western Marxism"--the westward

geographical and cultural displacement of Marxist theory

since the first World War and the Russian Revolution.[25]

Lukács is best known for his collection of essays, History

and Class Consciousness (1923)[26], a work which did much to

reactivate the Hegelian strain of Marxist theory, and for

his wide-ranging critical essays on European literature,

particularly the novel. Adorno, a musician, philosopher and

critic who began his career in Weimar Germany and Vienna,

emigrated, after the rise of Nazism in the thirties, to the

United States, where he joined other exiled European intel-

lectuals at the Frankfurt School of Social Research.[27] Ador-

no's influence upon European and American Marxism, which has

been felt largely since World War II, has come by way of

such works as Dialectic of Enlightenment (1947, coauthored

by Max Horkheimer), Negative Dialectics (1966), and various

critical essays in philosophy, sociology, literature and

music.[28]

Both authors had read widely in German literature

and philosophy, and a comparison of their intellectual biog-

raphies would show many common stopping-points along their

respective paths to Marxism: the German Romantics, Kierke-

gaard, the Neo-Kantians (especially Georg Simmel), and Hegel.

Their Marxism was strongly shaped by their interests in aesthetics and literary theory. But their ways of synthesizing those concerns--their particular views, their sensibilities and individual styles--could hardly have been more divergent. In a word, Lukács' Marxism remained essentially Hegelian, as seen in his predilection for the values of reconciliation, identity and totality, both in epistemology and in works of art. By contrast, Adorno's anti-Hegelianism is evident in his advocacy of "negative dialectics" (a philosophy based on nonidentity and nontotality), and in his preference for fragmentary, nonholistic forms in art.[29]

Despite their different versions of Marxism, both Lukács and Adorno were inclined to approach literary and cultural phenomena through philosophical, sociological and historical--rather than purely formal--categories. And there are enough parallels in their positions to permit a systematic comparison of their views on the essay form to emerge. Both authors' theories of the essay follow consistently from their views on cognition and aesthetics. While both theories offer general hypotheses to account for the historical evolution of the essay, each theory is colored by the author's ethical and ideological responses to his historical situation, and thus it may be said that both theories are ultimately normative, rather than purely descriptive, in nature. Both theories hinge upon an overdetermined opposition between "system" and "fragment"--although the conceptual and ideo-

logical resonances of that opposition differ sharply from one theorist to the other. The two positions may be broadly outlined as follows. For the early Lukács, the essay strives for an ultimate unity of system as the source and guarantor of its validity, but is unable, finally, to overcome its inherent fragmentariness. Contrarily, for Adorno, not only is the essay intrinsically unsystematic, but this very absence of system--which Lukács felt to be a limitation upon the essay--becomes in Adorno's theory a dialectical virtue, the essay's source of truth. In its fragmented, discontinuous nature, the essay embodies a utopian protest against systems. Thus, for both theorists, aesthetic form is determined by cognitive experience. But as we will see, their respective models of cognitive-philosophical experience, and their corresponding aesthetic forms, are fundamentally opposed.

One of the chief difficulties in comparing the two theories stems from the fact that each theory represents a different stage of development in the author's work. There are attending terminological differences. When Adorno speaks of the "subject" and "object" of cognition, for example, he is using the Hegelian-Marxist terminology--taken over from German Idealism--which Lukács helped to popularize with History and Class Consciousness. But the dominant vocabulary of Soul and Form (1911) was drawn not from Marxism, nor from Hegelianism, but from Platonism, Neo-Kantianism, and fin-de-siècle aestheticism. If, as many of Lukács' commentators

have pointed out, Soul and Form anticipates many of the
themes and concerns of his later Marxism--particularly, the
crucial theme of "totality"--we will see that the nature of
the continuity between Lukács' early and later work is more
problematic than has often been assumed.

Adorno's critique of Lukács in "Der Essay als Form"
is symptomatic of this problem. Adorno develops a central
motif of Lukács' essay on the essay, that of the tension
between part and whole, or fragment and system. In keeping
with his philosophical position, Adorno turns that tension
into a polemical opposition in which he affirms the values
of fragment and partiality, and characterizes Lukács as
having advocated those of system and totality. But in his
early essay Lukács did not unequivocally plead for totality
over fragmentariness. One feels that much of Adorno's argu-
ment is directed against the later Lukács, and against the
particular brand of Marxism he came to represent in Adorno's
eyes.

In order to elucidate the contrasts and valencies
of their positions, one must introduce a third figure into
the discussion--that of Walter Benjamin, Adorno's friend and
mentor from the early twenties. Unlike Lukács and Adorno,
Benjamin developed no explicit theory of the essay. But as
I will show, his writings contain a number of suggestive
passages on philosophical form which clearly influenced
Adorno's thinking on the essay. The intellectual relations

among these three figures were complex. Although Lukács' History and Class Consciousness influenced both Benjamin and Adorno in their conversion to Marxism in the late twenties, it was Benjamin's work, particularly his idiosyncratic study of the origins of German tragedy, which made the more lasting impact on Adorno's thought. Specifically, Benjamin provided the initial stimulus for the philosophical aesthetics which Adorno would later call "negative dialectics," and which was conceived in part as a refutation of Lukács' model of Marxist dialectics.

Before evaluating the theories of the essay of Lukács and Adorno, it is necessary to undertake a critical reconstruction of those theories in their historical contexts. In Chapter II, I will analyze Lukács' theory of the essay, as expressed in Soul and Form. In Chapter III, an essay in intellectual history, I will discuss the major influences upon Adorno's theory of the essay, focusing in particular upon the figures of Benjamin, Schoenberg, and Lukács. Chapter IV is a close reading and commentary of Adorno's main theoretical statement on the essay, "Der Essay als Form." I argue there that his theory of the essay is essentially the formal-aesthetic counterpart of his philosophy of negative dialectics. In the course of these three chapters, which are devoted primarily to Lukács and Adorno, I will contrast their respective models of philosophical experience and show how in each case that experience is related to form, compare

their views on the historical evolution and pragmatic func-
tions of the essay, and attempt to show how both theories
bear upon a general theory of the essay.

My point in establishing the comparison between
Lukács and Adorno on the essay is not to prove that one was
"right" and the other "wrong." Both theories deserve con-
sideration for the light they shed on the modern essay as a
cognitive form; both have significant limitations as theories
of the essay genre as a whole. Even so, it will be clear
that Adorno occupies a pivotal position in this study. The
reasons for this may be stated briefly: Adorno's theory of
the essay is more fully articulated; it is internally more
consistent; and it is richer in aesthetic and philosophical
implications than that of Lukács. In Chapter V, I undertake
a two-part critique of Adorno's theory, first from an em-
pirical standpoint, and then from a normative one. In the
first part I try to show, drawing briefly upon Montaigne,
Bacon, and Descartes as examples, that Adorno's theory does
not adequately account for the early history of the essay
form. In the second part I argue that Adorno's essays fall
short of the "cognitive utopia" attributed to the essay form
by his own theory. My contention is that the rhetorical
strategy of his essays, when considered from the point of
view of the reader's reception, leads to the kind of closed
cognitive experience which is proscribed by negative dialec-
tics. Here it is Benjamin's writings, rather than those of

Lukács, which offer the most revealing contrast to Adorno's essays. In this context (and to a lesser extent in Chapter III), I touch upon the controversial theoretical dispute between Adorno and Benjamin in the thirties. This matter has been treated rather thoroughly, although from a different angle, by Susan Buck-Morss in her study of Adorno, The Origin of Negative Dialectics.[30] Indeed, her study is so central to my concerns that on more than one occasion I have taken it as a point of departure for my own arguments. I will acknowledge my debts to her scholarship, as well as point out my differences with her conclusions, when appropriate. As a measure of those differences, suffice it here to say that, on the issues of the Adorno-Benjamin dispute of the thirties, Buck-Morss and I arrive at almost diametrically opposite evaluations of the two writers.

The first five chapters of this study proceed by a gradual narrowing of focus, moving from the general historical poetics of the essay envisaged by the first two sections of the present chapter to an analysis of the works and ideas of three philosophical essayists. My original intention for this study was to elicit from these three theorists a general hypothesis or theoretical model of the essay as a cognitive form, which I would then test against the works of essayists from several literary-cultural traditions—Montaigne, Bacon, and Ortega y Gasset. Not surprisingly, I found that the theories of the three German writers were so diverse that they

could not be used to generate a unified, homogeneous model of the essay form. Indeed, I began to feel that their theories were less interesting for what they said about the history of the essay than for the insights they provided into the writings of the theorists themselves. While none of these theories is entirely satisfactory as a comprehensive account of the essay genre, each theory illuminates the work of its respective author as a kind of "cognitive utopia," and all of them raise interesting utopian questions about the modern critical essay.

However, I am far from suggesting that these theorists offer the only serious or interesting models for the modern critical essay. In the first section of the conclusion (Chapter VI), I argue that the theories of Lukács, Adorno and Benjamin all fall within a particular, if still dominant, "discursive formation" (Michel Foucault's expression). In the final section, I offer some speculative comments on how this dominant discursive formation differs from another, more recent theory of critical discourse—that of the French Poststructuralists.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I (INTRODUCTION)

[1] Karl Viëtor, <u>Geist und Form</u> (Bern, 1952), as paraphrased by Claudio Guillén, "On the Uses of Literary Genre," in <u>Literature as System</u> (Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), p. 129.

[2] See Paul Hernadi, <u>Beyond Genre</u> (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1972), p. 35.

[3] Ingarden, <u>The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art</u>, trans. Ruth Ann Crowley and Kenneth R. Olson (1968; rpt. Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 146-67. This is obviously a simplification, though I hope not an unfair one, of Ingarden's rather complex argument.

[4] Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Crossing Over," in <u>Comparative Literature</u>, 28, No. 3 (Summer 1976), pp. 257-76.

[5] See William G. Crane, "The Essay and the Character," in <u>Wit and Rhetoric in the Renaissance</u> (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1937), pp. 132-61.

[6] Tzvetan Todorov, "Genres littéraires," in Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov, <u>Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage</u> (Paris: Seuil, 1972), pp. 193-201.

[7] Todorov, "Histoire de la littérature," <u>Dictionnaire encyclopédique</u>, p. 188.

[8] Todorov, "Histoire de la littérature," pp. 189-91.

[9] See Michel Beaujour's discussion of the complex factors leading to the appearance of the essay, in "Genus Universum," in <u>Glyph 7</u> (1980), pp. 15-31.

[10] Todorov, "Histoire de la littérature," p. 189.

[11] Guillén, "On the Uses of Genre," p. 111. Form is conceived by Guillén as ". . . the presence in a created, man-made object of a 'cause'"; whereas matter is defined as ". . . language already shot through with formal elements, elaborated by the ages" (pp. 110-11).

[12] Guillén, "On the Uses of Genre," pp. 114-20. Guillén considers these "universals" to be on a level of generality comparable to that of what Northrop Frye calls the "radical of presentation," or the form of address internally established as the communicative relationship between author and reader. Frye takes the radical of presentation to be the

most essential criterion of generic classification: "Words may be acted in front of a spectator; they may be spoken in front of a listener; they may be sung or chanted; or they may be written for a reader." Frye, "Rhetorical Criticism: Theory of Genres," in The Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 247. These distinctions lead Frye to a fourfold division of literature into drama, epos, lyric and fiction. But according to Guillén, "Within the process of writing, the 'radicals' and the 'universals' fulfill their function at a very early stage; . . . and only the generic model is likely to be effective at the crucial moment of total configuration, construction, composition" ("On the Uses of Genre," p, 120). Still, it is important to preserve the implications of Frye's insight that "The basis of generic criticism is rhetorical, in the sense that the genre is determined by the conditions established between the poet and his public" (p. 247). This is relevant to my comparison of the rhetorical strategies of Benjamin and Adorno in Chapter V.

[13] Montaigne, "De la ressemblance des enfants aux peres," Essais, II, 37, in Oeuvres complètes, ed. Maurice Rat and Albert Thibaudet (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), pp. 736-66.

[14] Alfred Kazin (ed.), Introd., The Open Form (New York: Harcourt, 1961), p. x.

[15] Beaujour, p. 26.

[16] Pater, Plato and Platonism (1893; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1912).

[17] Pater, pp. 174-75.

[18] Pater, pp. 175-76, 187, 194-95.

[19] This is not to minimize Montaigne's important role in the revival of Pyrrhonism; see Richard H. Popkin, The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes (New York: Harper, 1964), pp. 44-66, et passim.

[20] Fish, "Georgics of the Mind: The Experience of Bacon's Essays," in Self-Consuming Artifacts (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972), pp. 78-155.

[21] Huxley, Pref., Collected Essays (1923; rpt. New York: Harper, 1971), p. v.

[22] Huxley, pp. v-ix.

[23] Georg von Lukács, "Über Wesen und Form des Essays: Ein Brief an Leo Popper," in Die Seele und die Formen (Berlin: Egon Fleischel, 1911), pp. 1-39; published originally as A lélek és a formák (Budapest, 1910). Lukács dropped the titular "von" from his name after 1918. In this study I will refer to the English edition, Soul and Form, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1974), pp. 1-18.

[24] Theodor W. Adorno, "Der Essay als Form," in Noten zur Literatur (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1958), pp. 9-49. This collection was later printed as Book I of the four-part Noten zur Literatur (see Chapter V, note 20 of this study.

[25] Perry Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism (London: New Left Books, 1976), p. 25.

[26] History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1971).

[27] See Martin Jay, The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973). This important group of exiled scholars pioneered the incorporation of psychoanalytic concepts into Marxism, while establishing important points of contact with empirical methods of social research.

[28] Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972); Negative Dialectics, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury, 1973). See also Philosophy of Modern Music, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley W. Bloomster (New York: Seabury, 1973); and Prisms, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967).

[29] See Susan Buck-Morss, The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute (New York: The Free Press, 1977), pp. 25-62, et passim.

[30] For the complete reference, see note 29.

CHAPTER II

LUKÁCS' THEORY OF THE ESSAY

A. Historical and Intellectual Background
of Lukács' Soul and Form

A few words are necessary to evoke the historical background of Soul and Form, the collection in which Lukács' essay on the essay first appeared.[1] Born in Budapest in 1885, Lukács was the son of a wealthy Jewish family of high social standing. Disaffected with the bourgeois values of his banker father, Lukács devoted his time to reading Romantic and avant-garde poetry and drama. He was briefly a member of a student socialist club organized by Ervin Szabó, a leading anarcho-syndicalist theoretician whose ideas influenced the young Lukács. In 1904 Lukács helped to found the "Thalia" dramatic society, an experimental group which tried to reach the Budapest working class.[2]

According to István Mészáros, one of Lukács' most perceptive commentators, Lukács was particularly influenced by the great Hungarian poet Endre Ady, in whom he admired "the elemental passion of a democratic revolutionary."[3] Lukács felt an affinity to Ady's uncompromising, if lyrical, denunciation of the stifling social conditions of contemporary

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[1] Notes to this chapter appear on pp. 91-96.

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Hungary.[4] But the very hopelessness of those conditions, and the apparent absence of effective social or political means for changing the situation, meant that for Lukács the protest was to remain, at least for the moment, an idealistic and Romantic rebellion. "Ady's sombre prophetic Messianism, with its dramatic appeals formulated in terms of 'either salvation or total disaster', expressed with the highest lyric intensity the dilemmas of those who, in their efforts to find a solution to their problems on a European scale, had to perceive the deepening crisis of the social order on a global scale." Thus, the perspectives of Ady and Lukács "were essentially the same in a fundamental respect: in that the solution could appear on the horizon only in the form of an 'ought' articulated in alternatives of the utmost dramatic intensity."[5] Lukács' preoccupation with this universalizing moral imperative seems to have been something more than youthful idealism; Mészáros argues persuasively that ". . . his original confrontation with 'Sollen', with 'ought', has remained a fundamental structuring dimension of Lukács' entire thought."[6] But before considering the implications of this overriding ethical concern in Lukács' work we must first turn to the other dominant intellectual influences on the young Lukács.

After his initial Neo-Kantian training in Budapest, Lukács continued his studies in Berlin and Heidelberg, where he became involved in the major currents of contemporary German philosophy: the spread of phenomenology, the division

of Neo-Kantianism into its several schools, and the rise of a vitalist, intuitionist movement known as <u>Lebensphilosophie</u>.[7] In Berlin (1909-1910), he studied under Georg Simmel, and was influenced by the ideas of Wilhelm Dilthey. In Heidelberg (from 1912), he came under the influence of Max Weber and Emil Lask, who introduced him to Husserlian phenomenology. In the <u>Geisteswissenschaft</u> of Dilthey and Simmel--a holistic approach to cultural and historical phenomena, which advocated the hermeneutic method of <u>Verstehen</u>, or empathetic interpretation--Lukács seems to have found an approach more compatible with his own speculative aesthetics than the rather dry positivism of the Marburg Neo-Kantians.[8] During this period Lukács was also associated with the esoteric circle of the lyric poet Stefan George. This stage of Lukács' philosophical development reflects a general reaction within German philosophy against the prevailing ethos of scientific rationalism.

This much of Lukács' biography is widely known. Less well-known is the extent to which Lukács' early thought, at least since 1908, already reflected a serious attempt to come to terms with the dominant ideas of historical materialism. Recent studies have begun to demonstrate the significant impact of Marxist ideas upon Lukács' early writings.[9] To mention only the most striking example, Lukács' <u>History of the Development of Modern Drama</u> (1911), influenced by Simmel's interpretation of Marx, explores the historical situation of modern drama in terms of such central Marxist categories as

alienation, division of labor, and class conflict.[10]

Such findings have led contemporary critics and historians to reconsider the relationship between Lukács' early and later writings. Earlier Lukács scholarship had for the most part taken for granted a clear demarcation between his "pre-Marxist" works and those written after his entrance into the Hungarian Communist Party in 1918.[11] Thus, Fredric Jameson refers to an operant "biographical myth" of Lukács' development[12]--the notion that his thought developed in a linear series of relatively coherent "discontinuous periods," moving from the Neo-Kantianism and Platonic aestheticism of Soul and Form to the Hegelian period represented by the Theory of the Novel (1916),[13] and finally to the Marxist period exemplified by History and Class Consciousness. The prevalence of such a linear myth, along with the circumstance that nearly all of Lukács' writing prior to 1911 was published in Hungarian (and much of it remained untranslated and therefore relatively inaccessible to the Western public), have made it easier to overlook the importance of Marxist themes in Lukács' works of that period.

Is the relationship between Soul and Form and his later work to be characterized as one of continuity or discontinuity? One must evidently confront this historiographical problem, stark and simplistic as the choice may seem, since the presupposition of one or the other of these alternatives will greatly affect one's interpretation of Soul and Form.

The bewildering diversity of Lukács' early influences and concerns (Neo-Kantianism, aestheticism, Platonism, Lebens-philosophie, mysticism, Marxism) indicates that Lukács' early thought was anything but monolithic or uniform, and suggests that it would be futile to reduce his thought to a single position or convenient label. The question, then, is whether one may find in Lukács' early work an underlying principle of unity, whether his works may be seen, in spite of their apparent heterogeneity, as "a progressive exploration and enlargement of a single complex of problems."[14] I think the evidence suggests that there was such an underlying unity in Lukács' early thought, although it must be sought less in the answers and solutions proposed by Lukács than in the kinds of problems that he raised, and the framework in which he formulated them.[15] The deep unity of Lukács' early work may be described as a dissatisfaction with the alienating conditions of modern life, and as an attempt to overcome those conditions--both dissatisfaction and attempt being formulated within the framework of a reflection on culture and its relation to life. This is the "problem of culture" which, according to György Markus, constitutes the "one and only thought of Lukács' life," the "hidden line of continuity" in Lukács' work, from his early aesthetic writings to his later Marxist positions.[16]

The problem of culture is expressed in a variety of contexts and in varying terms. It is formulated now as a

purely aesthetic problem, now as an ethical or metaphysical one; the "solutions" proposed often appear inconsistent or contradictory.[17] The persistence of rich dualistic oppositions in Lukács' early work--dualisms which seem to call out for a choice, but which often remain unresolved even within the same work--may be taken as an indication of the constancy of the underlying cultural problematic. Mészáros' study of Lukács remarks the "dialectical bipolarity" of his perspectives,[18] and the "unresolved duality"[19] running throughout his works, a duality which Mészáros traces back to the (above-mentioned) ethical tension between "is" and "ought." Without denying the ethical aspect, Markus deepens this analysis of Lukács' dualism by identifying two discrete modes of analysis which appear simultaneously--sometimes parallel, sometimes overlapping or conflicting--in Lukács' early works: the "metaphysical-existential" mode on the one hand, and the "historical-sociological" mode on the other.[20] While this observation is not yet an _explanation_ of Lukács' dualism, it does allow one to posit a unified complex of problems in Lukács' early writings, while at the same time helping to account for the impression of heterogeneity and discontinuity one receives from those writings. As we will see, both modes of analysis are present in _Soul and Form_. Lukács' Platonizing essay on the essay seems methodologically slanted toward the metaphysical-existential mode, but one may discern a definite shift, near the end of the essay, toward a more historically-oriented per-

spective.

Thus, the underlying unity and continuity of Lukács' early aesthetic writings resides in a certain complex of ethical and ideological concerns--concerns which would continue to inform his later Marxist writings. As Dennis Crow puts it in his article "Form and the Unification of Aesthetics and Ethics in Lukács' Soul and Forms," Lukács' early collection of essays "represents a series of struggles to come to grips with both the aesthetic and the ethical aspects of the concept of 'form.'"[21] While I think this is basically correct, I will try to show that in Lukács' essay on the essay, there is a fundamental ambivalence about the essay form with respect to the problem of cognition, and that in this sense the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in Lukács' early work is not precisely one of "unification." Lukács' ambivalence is most clearly present in the opposition between system and fragment which emerges in the second half of the essay. According to the ethical reading of Soul and Form, "system" represents the symbolic overcoming, in form and value, of the fragmentation of life in modern society.[22] But when the system-fragment opposition is seen as a cognitive problem, it takes on a somewhat different valency, in which the fragment-system opposition can no longer be read simply as a variant of an ethical is-ought alternative. In this sense, and contrary to what Adorno implies in "Der Essay als Form," Lukács' essay in Soul and Form cannot be taken simply

as a direct or unequivocal foreshadowing of the Marxist positions Lukâcs would later hold. For these reasons I have chosen to concentrate upon the cognitive dimension of form in my reading of Lukâcs' essay, to which we now turn.

B. <u>Soul and Form</u>: A Poetics of the Essay

"Were one to compare the forms of literature with sunlight refracted in a prism, the writings of the essayists would be the ultraviolet rays."

Lukâcs, <u>Soul and Form</u>, p. 7

Such was the background of <u>Soul and Form</u>, an influential collection of essays published when the author was twenty-five, dealing with such diverse figures as Rudolph Kassner, Kierkegaard, Novalis and Schlegel, Theodor Storm, Stefan George, Charles-Louis Philippe, Richard Beer-Hofmann, Lawrence Sterne, and Paul Ernst. They are lyrical essays, laden with impressionist epiphanies, moments of intense insight into the relationship between life and art, soul and form. Throughout these essays appears the leitmotif of nostalgia for an "irretrievably lost simplicity" (p. 61), coupled with an almost palpable sense of longing--for system and order, value and form, certainty and dogma, as he variously describes it. The pathos of this quest for an ultimate system is matched only by the author's frustration at not finding it anywhere in contemporary culture. One finds it least of all in the internal organization of these essays. The following passage from Mêszâros captures this aspect of Lukâcs' bel-

letrism in <u>Soul and Form</u>, and hints at its relationship to
Lukács' later work:

> The compositional principle of these early essays . . .
> is heavily weighed down on the subjective side. The
> chosen topics are more grounds for a "take-off" than
> objective points of reference. Paradoxically it is
> the absence of a sharply defined central theme that
> unites these essays, not its presence. Only the par-
> tial themes are well lit and properly in focus. But
> the dialectic contrasts of the sharply focused par-
> tial themes produce an overall <u>chiaroscuro</u> effect:
> that of a vaguely contoured, unresolved complexity.
> One might say that these essays are "variations on a
> missing theme". The synthesizing theme--which is
> originally there only as a vague intuition, as an
> undefined and inarticulate "longing for objectivity"
> --is being born before our eyes. As it takes shape
> through its partial aspects, bringing into life at
> the same time the challenge of the supersession of
> that partiality, it foreshadows the necessary de-
> struction of the young Lukács' essay form.[23]

The essay which opens the collection, "On the Nature
and Form of the Essay," is a letter to Lukács' friend, Leo
Popper. The essayist/letter-writer asks whether the essays
of the book to be published possess the unity of a "new lit-
erary form":

> To what extent have the really great writings which
> belong to this category been given literary form, and
> to what extent is this form of theirs an independent
> one? To what extent do the standpoint of such a work
> and the form given to this standpoint lift it out of
> the sphere of science and place it at the side of the
> arts, yet without blurring the frontiers of either? To
> what extent do they endow the work with the force nec-
> essary for a conceptual re-ordering of life, and yet
> distinguish it from the icy, final perfection of phi-
> losophy? . . . . What is an essay? What is its intend-
> ed form of expression, and what are the ways and means
> whereby this expression is accomplished? (pp. 1-2)

These portentous questions contain several key assumptions.
They assume, first of all, that form is achieved through the

expression of a standpoint (Weltanschauung, a favorite Dilthey term), that form is "given" to a standpoint. Furthermore, the essay is assumed to be a unique, autonomous form, with its own intention and function. Its mission is to raise life's most essential questions, to provide a "conceptual re-ordering of life." It is not science--though it may, as we will see shortly, partake of a "science of the arts"--and while its mission is thus philosophical, it falls short of the "icy final perfection of philosophy."

Lukács sets aside those writings whose function is merely practical or informational; they are, like science itself, concerned only with "contents." Lukács draws a distinction between art and science, and this dichotomy is the first of a series of binary oppositions employed by Lukács to describe the boundaries of the essay and to delimit its characteristic intentional field of objects. "Science affects us by its contents, art by its form; science offers us facts and the relationship between facts, but art offers us souls and destinies" (p. 3). There may have been "primitive epochs" in which science and art, along with religion, ethics, and other spheres of culture, formed an undifferentiated whole. But in the present age of specialization each follows its separate path--science in search of laws and knowledge, art in its pursuit of aesthetic form.[24]

But what of the status of criticism itself, of essays whose aim is to examine works of art and to explore the na-

ture of artistic form? Lukács was well aware of the tendency
of the German Romantics to think of art criticism as itself
a creative art form, and he alludes to Winckelmann's Greece
and Burckhardt's Renaissance as examples of critical inter-
pretations of lasting artistic value (p. 2). The works of the
English essayists Ruskin, Pater, and Wilde did much to estab-
lish the art essay as a prestigious genre, and must have
reinforced Lukács' view of the critic as artist. But if cri-
ticism is a valid art form, Lukács is quick to point out that
it is not strictly an autonomous one, in that it necessarily
relies upon other works of art and literature. To the writ-
ings of critics Lukács therefore opposes the works of the
"greatest essayists"--Plato's Dialogues, the writings of the
mystics, Montaigne's Essays, and Kierkegaard's imaginative
writings. Unlike criticism, these writings did not need the
mediating occasion of works of art in order to raise life's
most essential questions, but were able to direct those ques-
tions immediately to life itself (p. 3).

The issue of autonomy plays an essential role in
Lukács' reflection on the essay form. As indicated above,
it is first introduced in a historical context: the dependent
status of the modern essay is contrasted with the autonomy
of the form as practiced by the great essayists of the past.
Before elaborating on the historical dimension of this prob-
lem, Lukács will first attempt to define the essay in aes-
thetic and philosophical terms, and in that context the es-

say's lack of autonomy will appear primarily as an atemporal, indeed an ontological, problem. These two different ways of looking at the issue of autonomy correspond to the two modes of analysis in Lukács which Markus designated the "metaphysical-existential" and the "historical-sociological." In each case, the question of autonomy generates a fundamental antinomy regarding the essay, an antinomy which is unfolded through a series of lesser binary oppositions. I will treat these problems in the approximate order in which they appear in Lukács' text.

What is the relationship between "soul" and "form" in the writings of the essayists? The Platonic dualism of the title of Lukács' collection is overlaid with the Neo-Kantian opposition between life and form—life conceived as *Erlebnis* (Dilthey), the lived experience of a conscious psychological subject; form as the cultural objectification of that experience.[25] Lukács' aesthetics posits two essential kinds of psychological experience, or "realities of soul" (*seelischer Wirklichkeiten*): "life" and "living" (p. 4).[26] These two types are "equally effective, but they can never be effective at the same time. Elements of both are contained in the lived experience of every human being, even if in always varying degrees of intensity and depth . . ." (p. 4). According to Lukács, the struggle for primacy between these two orders of experience had traditionally taken place in philosophy. The clearest expression of the polarity was the

medieval battle between Realists and Nominalists, "the ones maintaining that the _universalia_--concepts, or Plato's Ideas if you will--were the sole true realities, while the others acknowledged them only as words, as names summarizing the sole true and distinct _things_" (pp. 4-5). Although Lukács gives no unequivocal definition of them in this essay, the two concepts may be said to represent, on the one hand, life as immediate lived experience of things and appearances, and life as a Platonic essence, on the other. Elsewhere in Lukács' early works, these two concepts become more explicitly polarized in a hierarchy of "soul" over "life." As Markus has shown, in Lukács' idiom "life" is often synonymous with "inauthentic being" and the alienation of ordinary life, whereas "soul" takes on the meaning of "authentic" existence: "In effect, then, soul means the highest possible intensification and unfolding of will powers, abilities and 'psychic energies' characteristic of every particular individual. Soul is that which man can become and which he should become, if he hopes to realize his authentic self."[27] But this hierarchy of authentic and inauthentic existence is not fully spelled out in the essay under consideration; it is at most latent in the Platonic opposition between essences and phenomenal reality.

To each type of experience--"life" and "living"--corresponds an ideal type of literary form, each of which in turn has its own means of expression. Life as immediately lived is the experiential mode of Poetry (_Dichtung_, or imag-

inative writing), whereas life as idea or essence is typically the experience of Platonism--or the essay. "For one there exist only things, for the other only the relationships between them, only concepts and values" (p. 5). Thus, poets (Dichter) employ images to render sensuous experience into form, while Platonists or essayists eschew images for the rarefied atmosphere of concepts and ideas. If the types thus contrasted are abstractions, as Lukács readily admits to an imagined objection by his reader, they are necessary to define what Lukács calls "the two poles of possible literary expression" (p. 6). If the essayist sometimes writes of art and works of art, it is only by way of translating the lived experience which is embodied in artistic form into the experience of ideas and values for their own sake. Lukács elaborates as follows upon this basic opposition between Poetry and Essay (or "criticism"):

> Poetry in itself knows of nothing beyond things; for it, every thing is serious and unique and incomparable. That is also why poetry knows no questions: you do not address questions to pure things, only to their relationships. . . . But in really profound criticism there is no life of things, no image, only transparency, only something that no image would be capable of expressing completely. (p. 5)[28]

From this passage one may infer that for Lukács, the difference between these two ways of experiencing life is, in a general sense, a difference of cognitive attitude.

Lukács describes the characteristic experience of the essayist as one of "intellectuality, conceptuality as

sensed experience, as immediate reality, as spontaneous prin-
ciple of existence: the world-view in its undisguised purity
as an event of the soul, as the motive force of life." Be-
cause of the intangible nature of such experience, it cannot
be represented by outward images or gestures. This problem
is expressed, somewhat paradoxically, by a visual analogy:
"Were one to compare the forms of literature with sunlight
refracted in a prism, the writings of essayists would be the
ultraviolet rays" (p. 7). How, then, Lukács asks, can such
experience be captured in form?

The answer is complex. It involves restating the op-
position between "life" and "form" as a relationship between
"form" and "destiny": "All writings represent the world in
the symbolic terms of a destiny-relationship; everywhere,
the problem of destiny determines the problem of form"
(p. 7).[29] Lukács perceives a subtle difference in the way in
which this problem is felt by the poet and the essayist:
". . . poetry receives its profile and its form from des-
tiny, and form in poetry appears always only as destiny; but
in the works of essayists, form becomes destiny; it is the
destiny-creating principle." For the poet, in other words,
form is the final result of the artistic process; for the
critic, form is the starting point. The poet experiences
destiny as something concrete and immanent: it can be sug-
gested by images. He sees destinies from within, or as a pro-
cess which comes to rest in poetic form. The Essayist-Plato-

nist needs the life-experiences objectified in works of art, but he needs them only in order to go beyond them in his own project of "re-ordering" life:

> That is why such writings speak of forms. The critic is one who glimpses destiny in forms: whose most profound experience is the soul-content which forms indirectly and unconsciously conceal within themselves. Form is his great experience, form--as immediate reality--is the image-element, the really living content of his writings. This form, which springs from a symbolic contemplation of life-symbols, acquires a life of its own through the power of that experience. It becomes a world-view, a standpoint, an attitude vis-à-vis the life from which it sprang: a possibility of reshaping it, of creating it anew. The critic's moment of destiny, therefore, is that moment at which things become forms--the moment when all feelings and experiences on the near or the far side of form receive form, are melted down and condensed into form. It is the mystical moment of union between the outer and the inner, between soul and form. (p. 8)

What this cryptic passage suggests, among other things, is that Lukács' theory of the essay depends to a great extent on his conception of the subjective experience of the essayist. One may justly consider this experience to have an important cognitive dimension--taking cognition in the broadest sense as having to do with ways of knowing, perceiving and apprehending the world. To be sure, one does not find a precise theory of cognition in Soul and Form but rather an eclectic and impressionistic mélange of ideas and intuitions. But it is precisely because the author is not deliberately constructing a theory of cognition that the cognitive aspects of his theory stand out all the more sharply. To take an important example, consider the role played

by the concept of <u>Weltanschauung</u> in Lukács' theory of the
essay. <u>Weltanschauung</u> is the principle of unity which deter-
mines the form of a work; life-experience acquires form only
through the adoption of a cognitive standpoint or world-view.
It must be acknowledged that the cognitive associations of
this term do not originate with <u>Soul and Form</u>. Indeed, Claudio
Guillén has shown that the idea of "perspective"--and <u>Welt-
anschauung</u> is one of its modern guises--has functioned as a
visual metaphor of cognition throughout much of the Western
tradition.[30] <u>Weltanschauung</u> is clearly linked to cognitive
experience in the work of Dilthey, who was largely responsible
for the contemporary resonance of the term.[31] Lukács wrote
<u>Soul and Form</u> at a time when Dilthey's influence on German
philosophy was at its peak. In this connection, one may note
an even broader parallel between the two philosophers: in
their aesthetics as well as in their general models of his-
torical experience, both philosophers give a decisive place
to the conscious experience of a psychological subject.[32]
In this light one may better appreciate Lukács' reference
to "the world-view in its undisguised purity as an event of
the soul, as the motive force of life."

We may speak, then, of the cognitive function of
aesthetic form in Lukács' theory of the essay. Taking the
long passage cited above as a description of the cognitive
process undergone by the essayist, we may distinguish two
moments in this process, corresponding to a static and a

dynamic sense of form. The critic first perceives form pas-
sively, as something fixed, static; he apprehends form through
the "symbolic contemplation of life-symbols," as these are
given in art works. As the critic appropriates these forms,
the second, dynamic stage begins. Form becomes a dynamic
principle, "acquires a life of its own" (note the echo of a
Platonic-Romantic notion of organic form). This is the mo-
ment of active cognition in the essayist's experience--the
moment of knowing life through form and of feeling "a pos-
sibility of reshaping it, of creating it anew." It is in
keeping with this second, active mode of cognition that
Lukács, in his 1910 essay, "Remarks on the Theory of Literary
History," defines aesthetic form as

> . . . the form that orders life in a work by bringing
> parts of life into a completed whole. It is the form
> that prescribes speed, rhythm, fluctuation, density
> and liquidity, hardness and softness; that accentu-
> ates what is deemed important while removing what is
> deemed unimportant; that places some things at the
> center, others into the background, structuring each
> group within itself.[33]

It should be clear that the structuring function ascribed to
form in this passage implies the mediation of a <u>Weltanschauung</u>,
the working of a cognitive subject. In this we see the inter-
action of the cognitive and aesthetic functions of form. For
it is through this interaction that form acquires its capac-
ity to order life, and thereby to give it meaning. As Markus
puts it, "For Lukács, form has the function of constituting
meaning. The many facts and elements of life can be arranged

and combined into <u>meaningful</u> structures (<u>Sinngebilde</u>) by
means of form."[34]

Although not stated explicitly in <u>Soul and Form</u>, it
is implicit in Lukács' aesthetics of this period that form
has a communicative function as well, that literary form is
able to evoke in the reader a response that corresponds in
a cognitive sense to the writer's own <u>Weltanschauung</u>. In the
same essay on the theory of literary history, Lukács under-
scores this aspect of literary form: "Form is what is funda-
mentally social about literature. . . It is a kind of link,
the only true connection between the creative artist and his
public, and therefore the only category of literature that
is both social and aesthetic."[35]

What motivates the essayist, and to what end? What
is the purpose, the function, the goal of the essay? What
the essayist seeks to express, according to Lukács, is, to
put it most simply, truth. Lukács' poetics implies that the
essayist is committed to a Platonic notion of truth, with its
strict hierarchical distinction between ideal forms and em-
pirical phenomena. But Lukács' essayist finds it by no means
easy to leave behind the prosaic world of facts and circum-
stances, to achieve the Platonist's sublimation of concrete
sensory experience in the contemplation of universal essences.
It will be recalled that the essay does not typically create
forms <u>ex nihilo</u> but remains tied to the lived experiences
expressed in other art forms. Likewise, the reader of essays

must return to the work of art in order to approach the conceptual experience of the essayist; ". . . the experiences which the writings of the essayists were written to express become conscious in the minds of most people only when they look at the pictures or read the poem discussed and even then they rarely have a force that can move life itself" (p. 9). As criticism, the essay is obliged "to speak the truth" about its objects; what essayists create "must be science, even when their vision of life has transcended the sphere of science" (p. 13). This obligation would seem to place the essayist in the subordinate role of commenting upon the works of others.

But as a Platonist, the essayist has higher aspirations; he aims at a truth beyond mere propositions or descriptive statements about other works. In Lukács' theory, irony becomes the sign and agent of this higher aspiration. Irony provides a kind of bridge between the "accidental" and the "necessary"; it allows the essayist to appear to be concentrating on minor issues or artifacts, while all the time he is really commenting on ultimate questions:

> Yet this relationship is profound and necessary, and it is precisely the indivisible and organic quality of this mixture of being-accidental and being-necessary which is at the root of that humour and that irony which we find in the writings of every truly great essayist . . . And the irony I mean consists in the critic always speaking about the ultimate problems of life, but in a tone which implies that he is only discussing pictures and books . . . and even then not their innermost substance but only their beautiful and useless surface. (p. 9)

Montaigne's essays and Plato's Socrates are given as examples
of this irony. Montaigne's choice of the word "essays" to
refer to his writings—"the simple modesty of this word is
an arrogant courtesy"—is for Lukács an indicator of the es-
sayist's attempt to reach the ultimate in life by ironically
adapting himself to "the eternal smallness of the most pro-
found work of the intellect in the face of life" (p. 9).
And so it is with Plato's Socrates: the details and petty
contingencies of real life, which occasionally interrupt
Socrates' conversation, set off all the more sharply the
underlying conceptual project of the dialogues.

Thus Lukács draws upon Romantic irony to justify the
essayist's paradoxical position. For the German Romantic
Schlegel, irony was a variant of the comic, a way of bridg-
ing the gap between the finite and the infinite. Schlegel
considered irony "a succession of contrasts between the ide-
al and the real, a technique by which the 'transcendental
ego' was capable of mocking its own convictions and its own
productions."[36] K. W. F. Solger saw irony as "the creative act
by which idea or essence steps into the place of and anni-
hilates phenomenal reality. It is the translation of the
world of experience into the artist's ideal dream. The idea,
expression of the infinite, surpasses the poverty of its
medium."[37] In "Crossing Over: Literary Commentary as Litera-
ture," an interpretation of Lukács' theory of the essay,
Geoffrey Hartman stresses Lukács' debt to the German Roman-

tics in this way: "The essay form is a secret relative of the Romantic 'fragment': it acknowledges occasionalism, stays within it, yet removes from accident and contingency that taint of gratuitousness which the mind is always tempted to deny or else to mystify."[38] But to associate the essay with romantic irony, as Lukács does; to say that the essay is a form which attempts to say all by saying only a part--is only to express an ideal. It does not by itself satisfy that desideratum. For by its very nature, romantic irony must constantly aim at transcending any sort of fixed position; whenever it claims to have immediately embodied the absolute, it falls back into arbitrariness and relativity.[39] Hence the "taint of gratuitousness" which clings to the essayist, despite his ultimate aspirations.

This line of inquiry leads Lukács to touch upon the question of representation. Lukács compares the paradoxical nature of the essay with that of the artist's portrait. In the essay, as in the portrait, "there is a struggle for truth, for the incarnation of a life which someone has seen in a man, an epoch or form; but it depends only on the intensity of the work and its vision whether the written text conveys to us this suggestion of that particular life" (p. 11). Both forms attempt to capture "true life," yet both are condemned to remain arbitrary in their choice of some aspects and exclusion of others. What both the portrait and the essay suggest, finally, is an _effect_ of resemblance, a "feeling of

likeness," not an exact correspondence between work and model. Once again, the essay is blocked from any total representation of truth. For the early (Platonic) Lukács, mimetic representation is only an analogy, a pale approximation of truth (this view of representation contrasts sharply with the central place given to mimesis in Lukács' later aesthetics).

Understandably so; for it would be quite un-Platonic to embrace a notion of truth that could be represented in visual images. So it is not surprising that Lukács calls for poets and critics to "give us life-symbols and to mould the still-living myths and legends in the form of our questions" (p. 12). For the "truth" embodied in such myths was supposedly of a kind that could not be tested or verified, checked against merely "pragmatic reality." In this connection, Lukács gives us what must surely be one of the earliest examples of his life-long scorn for the banality of naturalism: "We are not speaking here of ordinary truth, the truth of naturalism which it would be more accurate to call the triviality of everyday life, but of the truth of the myth by whose power ancient tales and legends are kept alive for thousands of years" (p. 12). In this sense, then, the essay's vision of truth is similar to that of poetry; neither can be verified or falsified by comparison to an existent model: "The hero of the essay was once alive, and so his life must be given form; but this life, too, is as much inside the work as everything is in poetry. The essay has to create from

within itself all the preconditions for the effectiveness
and validity of its vision. Therefore two essays can never
contradict one another . . ." (p. 11).

But for all that, the essay is, as we have seen,
criticism; it is a "science of the arts." It must deal in
"facts." It is indeed this "mixed" nature of the essay which
so complicates Lukács' theory--the rich nuances often border
on self-contradiction--and which Lukács seems constantly
compelled to explain:

> Sometimes its free flight is constrained by the unas-
> sailable facts of dry matter; sometimes it loses all
> scientific value because it is, after all, a vision,
> because it precedes facts and therefore handles them
> freely and arbitrarily. The essay form has not yet,
> today, travelled the road to independence which its
> sister, poetry, covered long ago--the road of devel-
> opment from a primitive, undifferentiated unity with
> science, ethics and art. (p. 13)

This passage would suggest--contrary to Lukács' earlier in-
dications that ideas and concepts are the essay's exclusive
vocation, and contrary to his efforts to distinguish its
factual, artistic and philosophical motives--that the essay
is, for Lukács, a fundamentally heterogeneous genre, combining
motifs from science, ethics and art; that it displays an un-
resolved tension between factual rigor and free speculation,
between "relative" and "absolute." It might indeed be pos-
sible to build a theory of the essay on such a premise--this
is not far from what Adorno does--and there are other passages
in Lukács' essay which might support this reading. Although
Lukács' ambiguity in this regard is not dispelled in <u>Soul and</u>

<u>Form</u>, the remaining part of Lukács' essay presents a strong argument that the essay <u>does</u> in fact have a privileged vocation. That vocation is precisely the attempt to overcome the relativism and undifferentiation referred to above.

One may suggest that the portion of Lukács' essay with which we have dealt until now is conducted predominantly in the "metaphysical-existential" mode of analysis to which we alluded earlier. This way of approaching the essay genre is characterized by what Markus calls an "aprioristic-aesthetic" concept of form.[40] It is an ahistorical perspective: "Poetry" and "Essay" are said to represent two essential types of "realities of soul" (or <u>geistige</u> experience), and the aesthetic qualities of each are described as though they belonged to an atemporal poetic system. The second type of approach discerned by Markus is the "historical-sociological" mode, with its corresponding historicized concept of artistic form. It is this second, more historical mode of analysis which predominates in the second half of Lukács' essay.[41] This is not to imply that the binary oppositions already discussed--soul and form, "life" and "living," relative and absolute, etc.--disappear completely from the second part of Lukács' essay. Rather, they are carried over, further elaborated, and subsumed in an overarching opposition between "fragment" and "system." If I have briefly alluded to the cognitive dimension of the leading dichotomies of the earlier section, it is because this cognitive dimension takes on a

new significance in the "system-fragment" opposition of the
remainder of Lukács' essay.

C. System and Fragment:
the Problem of Cognition in Lukács' Theory

> "Strange! Out of the practical cautions of Socrates
> for the securing of clear and correct and suffi-
> cient conceptions about one's actual experience,
> for the attainment of a sort of thoroughly edu-
> cated common sense, came the mystic intellectual-
> ism of Plato--Platonism, with all its hazardous
> flights of soul."
>
> Walter Pater, Plato and
> Platonism, p. 85

At the beginning of the last section we noted the
pervasive sense of nostalgia--of longing for wholeness, for
an "irretrievably lost simplicity"--which one encounters in
the essays of Soul and Form. Lukács locates the object of
his longing in the culture of classical Greece, with its
alleged harmony and wholeness, and the supposed immanence
of meaning and value in Greek life. A nostalgic view of
Greece has of course been present, in one form or another,
at various moments in Western culture since the Renaissance.
In German letters, it goes back to the classical period, but
it has been revived at crucial moments since then. The nos-
talgic myth of Greece has often served to compensate for a
difficult present. Thus the Graecophiles who "rediscovered"
Hölderlin in the early twentieth century saw in Hölderlin
"a preacher of integration in a world of fragmentation."[42]

Here we are concerned with the specific function of the myth of Greece in Lukács' theory of the essay.

Lukács uses the myth of the perfected wholeness of Greek culture to contrast the problematic experience of the modern essayist with the harmony of life which supposedly informed the writings of Plato, "the greatest essayist who ever lived or wrote." So Lukács returns, this time in a historical vein, to the question of the essay's lack of autonomy, its inability to formulate life's questions immediately, its dependence on other works of art. At this stage of his essay, however, Lukács gives a fuller account of the utopian conditions which allowed Plato to do what was denied to the modern essayist:

> I speak, of course, of Plato, the greatest essayist who ever lived or wrote, the one who wrested everything from life as it unfolded before his eyes and who therefore needed no mediating medium; the one who was able to connect his questions, the most profound questions ever asked, with life as lived. This greatest master of the form was also the happiest of all creators: man lived in his immediate proximity, man whose essence and destiny constituted the paradigmatic essence and destiny of his form. (p. 13)

Plato was able to achieve a strong "concordance of life and form" because "The Greeks felt each of the forms available to them as a reality, as a living thing and not as an abstraction" (p. 14). Thus, according to Lukács, Plato "was able to give form to the myth of Socrates, to use Socrates' destiny as the vehicle for the questions he, Plato, wanted to address to life about destiny. The life of Socrates is

the typical life for the essay form." Of the "great essayists" mentioned by Lukács, Plato is the only example discussed at length in his essay (Kierkegaard and Kassner are treated at length in separate essays). The example of Socrates is important, not only because Lukács uses Plato's Socrates to underscore the problems faced by the modern essay, but also because this example reflects the central value-judgments of Lukács' theory.

In Socrates' life, everything was subordinated to concepts; all the contingent facts and feelings of ordinary experience were only an ironic pretext for his pursuit of ultimate questions: "The concepts into which he poured the whole of his life were lived by him with the most direct and immediate life-energy; everything else was but a parable of that sole true reality, useful only as a means of expressing those experiences" (pp. 13-14). But if the life of Socrates was the "typical" life for the essay form, it was evidently not the typical life of harmonious Greece. For it was filled with a problematic longing which Socrates sublimated into a quest for concepts:

> His life rings with the sound of the deepest, the
> most hidden longing and is full of the most violent
> struggles . . . . But despite everything the longing
> which seems to fill that life is not the essential
> thing about life, and neither Socrates' life nor
> his death was able to express those life-and-death
> struggles. If this had been possible, the death of
> Socrates would have been a martyrdom or a tragedy--
> which means that it could be represented in epic or
> dramatic form.

The form of Socrates' life (as represented in Plato's dialogues or "essays") is therefore contrasted to epic or dramatic forms. The meaning of Socrates' life could only be expressed by a process, such as dialogue; a quest—not an ending, as in those other forms. "For a tragic life is crowned only by its end, only the end gives meaning, sense and form to the whole, and it is precisely the end which is always arbitrary and ironic here, in every dialogue and in Socrates' whole life." It is in this problematic, ironic character of Socrates' experience that Lukács sees the typicality of Socrates' life for the modern essay. Socrates represents "a new kind of man, profoundly different in his elusive essence from all other Greeks who lived before him" (p. 14). Socrates "expressed his deepest life-sense: the primacy of the standpoint, the concept, over feeling; and in saying it he formulated the profoundest anti-Greek thought" (p. 15). In this sense Lukács takes Socrates as the prototype of the modern essayist.

One may suspect that this aspect of Lukács' theory reveals more about the malleability of the Platonic tradition, and about the possible literary-mythical uses of Socrates, than about any real historical connection between Plato and the modern essay. But that is hardly the point here, since the mode of Lukács' reflections is after all more lyrical than empirically historical. Nevertheless, Lukács uses the example of Plato's Socrates to suggest a

contrast between the conditions of experience of the modern essayist and those of past ages.

In this regard, as in others, I am struck by the similarity between Lukács' ideas and those of Walter Pater. In _Plato and Platonism_ (1893), Pater thinks of Plato and Socrates as forming a kind of watershed moment in Western thought, dividing the immediate, concrete experience of the Greeks from the abstract, generalizing experience typical of the modern world:

> We may contrast generally the mental world we actu-
> ally live in, where classification, the reduction
> of all things to common types, has come so far, and
> where the particular, to a great extent, is known
> only as the member of a class, with that other world,
> on the other side of the generalising moment to
> which Plato and his master so largely contributed--
> a world me might describe as being under Homeric
> conditions, such as we picture to ourselves with
> regret, for which experience was intuition, and life
> a continuous surprise, and every object unique, where
> all knowledge was still of the concrete and the par-
> ticular, face to face delightfully.[43]

What this passage has in common with Lukács' theory of the essay is a nostalgia for the "Homeric conditions" which supposedly existed in classical Greece, as well as a recognition of Socrates and Plato as predecessors of what Pater calls "the mental world we actually live in." Pater's passage brings out the cognitive--or more technically, the epistemological--aspect of the historical contrast in question. There is, however, an important difference in the way in which Pater and Lukács view the cognitive experience of the modern essayist. Although the above passage seems to

valorize the earlier period over the modern one, Pater was in fact quite sympathetic to the "generalising movement" initiated by Plato and Socrates, a movement which continues, according to Pater, into our own time. Pater offers an analogy which is worth quoting at length, both because it provides an illustration of the difference between Pater and Lukács on the question of cognition, and because it is a remarkable passage in its own right:

> Think , for a moment, of the difference, as regards
> mental attitude, between the naturalist who deals
> with things through ideas, and the layman (so to
> call him) in picking up a shell on the sea-shore;
> what it is that the subsumption of the individual
> into the species, its subsequent alliance to and
> co-ordination with other species, really does for
> the furnishing of the mind of the former. The lay-
> man, though we need not suppose him inattentive, or
> unapt to retain impressions, is in fact still but a
> child; and the shell, its colours and convolution,
> no more than a dainty, very easily destructible toy
> to him. Let him become a schoolboy about it, so to
> speak. The toy he puts aside; his mind is drilled
> perforce, to learn about it; and thereby is excer-
> cised, he may think, with everything except just the
> thing itself, as he cares for it; with other shells,
> with some general laws of life, and for a while it
> might seem that, turning away his eyes from the
> "vanity" of the particular, he has been made to sac-
> rifice the concrete, the real and living product of
> nature, to a mere dry and abstract product of the
> mind. But when he comes out of school, and on the
> sea-shore again finds a fellow to his toy, perhaps
> a finer specimen of it, he may see what the service
> of that converse with the general has really been
> towards the concrete, towards what he sees--in regard
> to the particular thing he actually sees. By its
> juxtaposition and co-ordination with what is ever
> more and more not it, by the contrast of its very
> imperfection, at this point or that, with its own
> proper and perfect type, this concrete and partic-
> ular thing has, in fact, been enriched by the whole
> colour and expression of the whole circumjacent
> world, concentrated upon, or as it were at focus in,

> it. By a kind of short-hand now, and as if in a
> single moment of vision, all that, which only a
> long experience, moving patiently from part to part,
> could exhaust, its manifold alliance with the entire
> world of nature, is legible upon it, as it lies there
> in one's hand.[44]

For Pater, then, there is no irreparable split between con-

crete and abstract, particular and universal: if we "no

longer" have the happy immediacy of the Greek experience,

where "all experience was intuition," we may nevertheless

have recourse to the attitude of the scientist or natura-

list, whose aesthetic faculties are sharpened by generali-

zation and abstraction. Pater writes: "Generalisation, what-

ever Platonists, or Plato himself at mistaken moments, may

have to say about it, is a method, not of obliterating the

concrete phenomenon, but of enriching it, with the joint

perspective, the significance, the expressiveness, of all

other things beside."[45]

Pater is less of a Platonist than the young Lukács.

For it is clear that when Lukács speaks of concepts and

"ideas," he does not mean the practical abstractions or

exercises in classification of the scientist, but rather

ideas in a higher metaphysical sense, as Platonic essences,

as something by definition superior to concrete sensory

experience. Moreover, the lost unity lamented by Lukács was

not simply a physical immediacy, a feeling of being at one

with objects and external nature, but also and primarily

an identity between life and essence. In Lukács' utopian

conception of Greece, meaning was "immanent" in life. There
was no conflict between art (form) and value: aesthetics
coincided with ethics.[46] In such conditions, the artist's
natural experience was the "concordance of life and form."
For the loss of such harmony Lukács was not likely to be
consoled by the naturalist's aesthetic experience--in which
abstract and concrete interacted without conflict--however
pleasing in itself Pater might have shown that experience
to be.

The modern essayist's longing for ultimate meanings
compels him to ask questions, but those questions seem to
bear no intrinsic connection to life as immediately lived.
He may borrow or refer to the experiences he meets in books
and works of art, but then he risks subordinating his own
concerns to those of the work he is considering, thus los-
ing sight of his own pressing questions. "The modern essay
has lost that backdrop of life which gave Plato and the
mystics their strength; nor does it any longer possess a
naive faith in the value of books and what can be said of
them" (p. 15). Lukács characterizes the problematic freedom
of the modern essay--once again, stressing the cognitive
issue with a visual analogy--as follows:

> It stands too high; it sees and connects too many
> things to be the simple exposition or explanation
> of a work; the title of every essay is preceded in
> invisible letters, by the words "Thoughts occasioned
> by . . . ." The essay has become too rich and in-
> dependent for dedicated service, yet it is too
> intellectual and too multiform to acquire form out

of its own self. Has it perhaps become even more
problematic, even further removed from life-values
than if it had continued to report faithfully on
books? (p. 15)

Conditions have changed; life's meanings are no longer given

but must be produced. The Platonist-essayist longs for the

reconciliation of "life" and "essence"--the two kinds of

"realities of soul" discussed earlier. But that reconcilia-

tion is present only as a distant possibility on the critic's

horizon: there is no available standpoint from which to

make life immediately meaningful. But the attempt at such a

reconciliation must be made, and it can only be made through

aesthetic form.[47] Form is the locus of the problematic es-

sayist's attempt to embody all of life's conflicting forces

in a single necessary unity. But in the absence of immanent

meaning, form can only express life's meaning in a negative

sense, as the absence of meaning or essence.[48] The critic's

role is then to reflect upon this "relative" experience of

life (as given in works of art) and thereby to bring it to

awareness of its insufficiency when judged by its own idea.

For the critic holds fast to the standard of the idea over

lesser empirical reality:

The critic has been sent into the world in order to
bring to light this a priori primacy over great and
small, to proclaim it, to judge every phenomenon by
the scale of values glimpsed and grasped through
this recognition. The idea is there before any of
its expresssions, it is a soul-value, a world-moving
and life-forming force in itself . . . The idea is
the measure of everything that exists, and that is
why the critic whose thinking is "occasioned by"

> something already created, and who reveals its idea,
> is the one who will write the truest and most pro-
> found criticism. Only something that is great and
> true can live in the proximity of the idea. When
> this magic word has been spoken, then everything
> that is brittle, small and unfinished falls apart,
> loses its usurped wisdom, its badly fitting essence.
> It does not have to be "criticism": the atmosphere
> of the idea is enough to judge and condemn it. (p. 16)

But for Lukács this is only the beginning of the

problem. For, once having grasped the force of the idea,

the essayist must still anchor his judgments in some coherent

system of values if they are not to be dry and axiomatic,

or mere arbitrary opinions. The essayist "is delivered from

the relative, the inessential, by the force of the idea he

has glimpsed; but who gives him the right to judge?" (p. 16).

In one sense, inasmuch as the essayist remains open to new

forms and experiences, he must improvise, forming his cri-

teria out of his own sensibilities. But Lukács is not en-

tirely satisfied with that: he must posit a grand redeeming

system which would satisfy the essayist's longing and de-

liver him from the relativity of his fragmented judgments.

Lukács sees the essayist as a problematic individual in

need of "salvation" (p. 15). This salvation, as Lukács'

analogies reveal, would seem to require a Messiah figure:

the one who whispers the absolute criteria of judgment in-

to the essayist's ear is described as

> the great value-definer of aesthetics, the one who
> is always about to arrive, the one who is never
> quite yet there, the only one who has been called
> to judge. The essayist is a Schopenhauer who writes
> his <u>Parerga</u> while waiting for the arrival of his

own (or another's) <u>The World as Will and Idea</u>, he
is a John the Baptist who goes out to preach in the
wilderness about another who is still to come, whose
shoelace he is not worthy to untie. (p. 16)

Lukács asks the logical next question: is the essay
not then a mere means to an end, an intermediate step to
be discarded following the arrival of the system or "great
aesthetic" (p. 17)? Lukács is ambivalent on this point, and
his ambivalence is crucial. On the one hand, the essayist
"is the pure type of the precursor, and it seems highly
questionable whether, left entirely to himself--independent
from the fate of that other of whom he is the herald--he
could lay claim to any value or validity" (pp. 16-17). On
the other hand, the very force of the essayist's longing
is a source of value, for it provides resistance to false
immediacy and premature synthesis. If, as precursor, the
essay is somehow fragmentary or incomplete, it is also true
that the essay "can proudly and calmly set its fragmentari-
ness against the petty completeness of scientific exactitude
or impressionistic freshness . . ." (p. 17). With respect
to its pragmatic function, the essay's value is relative;
its occasional, provisional results become superfluous once
the grand system has arrived. But Lukács claims a value for
the essay beyond this instrumental, accessory one. For the
longing embodied in the essay

is a fact of the soul with a value and existence of
its own: an original and deep-rooted attitude towards
the whole of life, a final, irreducible category of

possibilities of experience. Therefore it needs not
only to be satisfied (and thus abolished) but also
to be given form which will redeem and release its
most essential and now indivisible substance into
eternal value. That is what the essay does.

Lukács recalls the example of Schopenhauer's Parerga:

The Parerga written before the system create their
pre-conditions from within themselves, create the
whole world out of their longing for the system,
so that--it seems--they can give an example, a hint;
immanently and inexpressibly, they contain the sys-
tem and its connection with lived life. Therefore
they must always occur before the system; even if
the system had already been created, they would not
be a mere application but always a new creation, a
coming-alive in real experience. (pp. 17-18)

The essay and system are ontologically separate: so much
so that their temporal relationship is seen as a "symbol"
of their essentially different natures. "The essay is a
judgment, but the essential, the value-determining thing
about it is not the verdict (as is the case with the sys-
tem) but the process of judging" (p. 18). These are im-
portant qualifications to Lukács' search for system,
amounting almost to a vindication of the essay as a neces-
sarily incomplete and fragmentary form.

So it is that the major binary oppositions set
forth by Lukács earlier in his essay--life as immediate
reality versus life as essence, relative versus absolute,
Poet versus Platonist--lead up to his final opposition be-
tween fragment and system. It is a highly overdetermined
opposition in Lukács' theory, appearing for the most part
as a dilemma with ethical, aesthetic, and historical im-

plications. Thus, "fragment" refers to the essay's lack of formal autonomy, its inability to order life or to give it unequivocal meaning, its failure to express the essayist's questions in any complete or satisfying form.[49] But it also implies the fragmentation of modern life as felt by the essayist, in contrast to the harmonious existence which Lukács attributes to ancient Greece. "System" is a wish-fulfillment of sorts, a projection of what an absolute reconciliation of value and form, of life and essence, would be like. Lukács does not simply equate the essay with system. The conditions of modern experience are such that the system can not be represented—yet—in sensuous form.

The system-fragment opposition comes to stand for the whole "problem of culture" which, as Markus pointed out, was the central preoccupation of Lukács' early writings. Whether the problem appears as a static, ontological one, or as a historical dilemma which might allow a future solution, depends on whether Lukács employs the "metaphysical" or the "historical" mode of reasoning in any particular case.[50] The fact that Lukács offered no clear-cut resolution of the problem, in this essay or in the collection of essays as a whole, but instead restated the problem in countless formulations, is responsible for that pathos of frustration and longing which is characteristic of Soul and Form. This has led more than one critic to speak, with some justification, of the "tragic" view of life presented in Lukács'

work. Referring to "The Metaphysics of Tragedy," the last essay in Soul and Form, Dennis Crow remarks that "Soul and Forms culminates in the revelation of the failure of form and the inadequacy of its aesthetic expression to represent life."[51] Going further, in a way which obviously looks forward to Lukács' later work, Crow interprets Soul and Form as a "criticism of nihilism and aesthetic individualism":

> As a whole, the work gives expression to a herme-
> neutic enterprise directed toward the critique of
> aesthetic forms which promised to reintegrate the
> need for self-development and fulfillment within
> the flux of cultural and social history. Confront-
> ing the continuing fragmentation of bourgeois soci-
> ety, Lukács searches for vital forms of living which
> will transcend the fragmentation and reunite per-
> sonal and interpersonal life in a humanistic man-
> ner. Forms of bourgeois culture, Lukács concludes,
> only function to further the isolation and alien-
> ation of individuals. Commitment to a form of
> living which has been raised to the level of a
> transindividual ethic overcomes the failed promise
> of aesthetics.[52]

Without denying the importance of the ethical-exis-
tential dilemma presented in Soul and Form, I think it may
be interpreted in a less tragic sense, as in part a cog-
nitive problem. I have paraphrased (and quoted) Lukács'
argument at some length in this study in order to convey
the movement of thought in his essay on the essay, and es-
pecially to convey that "chiaroscuro effect . . . of a
vaguely contoured, unresolved complexity" which Mészáros
observed in the essays of Soul and Form. Now I suggest that
the persistent dualism, the unresolved binary oppositions
in Lukács' theory of the essay stem partly from what Lukács

felt to be the conflicting demands of two discrete kinds
of cognitive operations, each of which laid claim to char-
acterize the essayist's imagination: the attention to syn-
thesis, the systematizing impulse, on the one side, and the
dwelling in concrete particulars on the other. In one sense,
of course, this conflict was simply Lukács' response to the
age-old philosophical question of the relation between the
particular and the universal. But the problem for Lukács
was to see how each type of operation could be given its
rightful place in the cognitive experience which ultimately
gives shape to an essay. Lukács was probably familiar with
Pater's remarks in praise of generalization--the study of
the general type enriched the experience of the particular--
but he was not completely satisfied with this comfortable
solution, at least as it could be applied to the formal
problem of the essay.

It is likely that Lukács learned respect for the
empirical qualities of specific objects from his Neo-Kantian
mentors. Dilthey's notion of lived experience (Erlebnis)
must have trained him not to overlook the quiddities of
individual psychological experience. And Lukács doubtless
learned more from Simmel than the latter's speculative use
of the vocabulary of life and forms; Simmel's style of
thinking was also notable for its close scrutiny of unique
and transitory objects and experiences.[53] Still, there is
abundant evidence that Lukács at times felt this necessary

attention to particulars to be a restriction on his perception. In his essay on Kassner, "Platonism, Poetry and Form," Lukács comments approvingly on Kassner's method of observation: "Everything else falls away as soon as Kassner looks at an artist. The suggestive power of his <u>not seeing</u> is so great that his glance strips off the husk, and we feel at once that the husk is mere chaff and only what Kassner sees as the kernel is important. One of his main strengths is that there is so much he does not see" (p. 20). Here vision serves, once again, as a metaphor for cognitive understanding. In an even more telling passage from the same essay, Lukács describes Kassner's method as follows:

> Kassner sees syntheses, as it were, with his eyes closed; when he looks at anything, he sees so many minute details that every summing-up must appear as a lie, a deliberate falsification. Nevertheless he follows his longing, he closes his eyes in order to see things as a whole—as values—but then his honesty immediately forces him to look at them again, and they become once more separate, isolated, floating in a vacuum. The fluctuation between these two poles determines Kassner's style. (p. 24)

This analogy also serves, I think, to describe Lukács' ambivalence regarding the essay as form. Here one may recall the cognitive function of aesthetic form in Lukács' theory. Markus, paraphrasing Lukács on aesthetic form, puts it this way: "Through this process of formation the amorphous chaos of life becomes, in the work, an ordered cosmos. It becomes a new life, which in contrast to ordinary life is now unequivocal, lending itself to being encompassed by the human

eye. Every art work entails a kind of glancing at and through life."[54] But before life may be ordered in form, it must first be "seen" and known in a cognitive sorting; and here Lukács' eye was hardly unequivocal. Metaphorically speaking, the early Lukács has a kind of "double vision": like Kassner's, his cognitive imagination wavers between synthesis and chaos, making no final choice between them.

So Lukács oscillates between system and fragment in his view of the essay as philosophical form. Something of his desire for synthesis, for "summing up," is evident in his very use of the phrase "the essay"--as though it were an archetype or idea superior to its empirical manifestations. Lukács would like to affirm that the essay is fully autonomous, that it is ultimately coincident with system. But his empirical encounters with actual essays force him to conclude, against his Platonist inclinations, that it is not. A passage from his essay on Kierkegaard, "The Foundering of Form Against Life," will serve as an example, not of any final position, but of the important empirical moment of Lukács' thinking on system in Soul and Form:

> And so there is no system anywhere, for it is not possible to live a system; the system is always a vast palace, while its creator can only withdraw into a modest corner. There is never any room for life in a logical system of thought; seen in this way, the starting point of such a system is always arbitrary and, from the perspective of life, only relative--a mere possibility. There is no system in life. In life there is only the separate and individual, the con-crete. (p. 32)

D. Critique of Lukács' Theory

"We have invented the creation of forms: and that
is why everything that falls from our weary and
despairing hands must always be incomplete."

Georg Lukács, Theory of the
Novel, p. 34.

Lukács' theory of the essay appears to be motivated
by his frankly subjective Platonism. Lukács does not dis-
guise his own desire for the system, order and certainty of
the Platonist, nor does he hide the role of that desire in
that part of his theory which tries to define the essay as a
timeless Platonic archetype. What I find most objectionable
about his theory is the abstract and ahistorical quality of
his leading categories: it is difficult to see how something
as complex as the history of the essay can be treated ade-
quately by such oppositions as life and essence, destiny and
form, poet and Platonist, and so on. As Lukács himself wrote
in "The Metaphysics of Tragedy," "That which is general,
that which encompasses all things yet has no colour or form
of its own, is too weak in its universality, too empty in its
unity, ever to become real" (p. 162). Part of the problem,
of course, is that the categories in which Lukács' theory is
framed simply no longer possess the same urgency for the
modern reader that they held for Lukács' own generation
(witness the impact of Soul and Form upon Lukács' German
contemporaries).[55] Thus, if such galactic terms as "life"
sound somewhat naive or strange in the present period, it

should be remembered that Lukács wrote at a time when vitalist philosophers saw it as their essential vocation to stake out the concept of life--Bergson's _élan vital_, Dilthey's _Erlebnis_--as a validating principle of aesthetic and cultural criticism, against what they saw as the reductive and de-spiritualized notion of life in various kinds of positivism. But even granting that historical difference, or perhaps as a further indication of it, it may also be objected that Lukács' philosophical idealism led him to concentrate too exclusively upon the subjective aspects--the authorial and "creative" side of essays--and not enough upon the formal aspects of the work itself, nor upon the reader's reception of essays. If the essay is a cognitive form--and I have claimed that Lukács' theory implies that it is--then we might expect him to attempt to show how the reader responds cognitively to the essay, how the reader's reactions are shaped by the particular linguistic or discursive devices and structures. Perhaps the absence of such considerations in Lukács' essay on the essay indicates that to this extent he ignored his own observation that form is both an aesthetic and _social_ category.[56]

In a sense, of course, these criticisms only register the different methodological expectations which the contemporary reader has of genre theory. Yet the profoundly ahistorical character of Lukács' Platonism remains, even where he is ostensibly making a historical distinction. Lukács' main

historical observation in the essay we have examined is that there has been some kind of radical loss of unity or harmony since the time of Plato. He thus establishes a simple binary opposition between present and past, one which is conceptually similar to T. S. Eliot's notion of a "dissociation of sensibility" between the seventeenth century and the modern age. Setting aside for a moment the ideological functions of Lukács' nostalgia for Greek harmony, it is clear that such a dualistic scheme is bound to distort or falsify the historical evolution of the essay genre. This may be seen in Lukács' choice of examples: Plato, Montaigne, and Kierkegaard are mentioned as instances of "great essayists" who were able, unlike the modern essayist, to raise life's ultimate questions directly, without reference to other works of art or literature. Does this mean that the enabling conditions of Plato's time somehow lingered on until the sixteenth, or even the nineteenth, century? If we consider Lukács' theory to be a hypothesis about the essay form _in general_, then clearly there is something missing in a theory which does not even mention the relation of the essay to scientific, rationalist or Enlightenment thought--i.e. the French and English essayists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (I will touch upon this historical problem in my discussion of Adorno, Chapters IV and V).

It is perhaps more interesting to ask whether, in spite of its shortcomings as an overall historical account

of the essay genre, Lukács' theory does not raise issues and problems relevant to the modern critical or philosophical essay in particular. In this respect I would argue that Lukács' theory, and especially the system-fragment opposition, does in fact touch a sensitive nerve for theorists of the modern essay. The proof of this lies in the suggestiveness this opposition has for Adorno's theory of the essay.[57] But before turning to Adorno's theory, we must first comment briefly on the relation between Soul and Form and Lukács' Marxist works, for it is the nature of this relation which will be at issue in assessing Adorno's reaction to Lukács' theory of the essay.

The central question here is whether Lukács' longing for system and wholeness in Soul and Form may be interpreted as anticipating his later Marxist concept of "totality." Lukács does not, to be sure, use the term "totality" in Soul and Form--it is a concept of Hegelian inspiration, not yet part of Lukács' conceptual terminology in 1910--but in view of the longing for wholeness and the will-to-system which we observed in his early essay, it seems logical to ask whether the system motif in his early essays does not in some way foreshadow the role to be played by totality in Theory of the Novel (written 1915-16, of Hegelian orientation) and the famous Marxist work, History and Class Consciousness. Those commentators of Lukács who take serious notice of Soul and Form tend to interpret that early work in the light of the

later, better-known ones, thus seeing the Platonizing essays of <u>Soul and Form</u> as an adumbration of his later Marxist position.[58]

Part of the problem is that it is difficult to gauge whether the concept of "system" in Lukács' theory of the essay has a genuine methodological status or whether it expresses a purely psychological need on the part of the author. One should not overlook the presence of a certain period atmosphere in Lukács' longing for the harmony of past ages. Lukács' thematics of wholeness, of <u>Ganzheit</u>, doubtless owes much to the intellectual influences already mentioned in this essay--Ady's messianic vision, the lyrical mysticism of the George school, the climate of <u>Lebensphilosophie</u>, the holism of the <u>geisteswissenschaftliche</u> school.[59] And one is tempted to see Lukács' desire for a system, together with his nostalgia for past harmony, as at least in part the author's frustrated response to the bleak conditions prevailing in the Austro-Hungarian empire just before World War I--the collapse of liberalism, the disintegration of bourgeois cultural forms, and the lack of institutional means for expressing the resulting alienation.[60]

If this appeal to historical conditions will not do as a total explanation of Lukács' nostalgia and longing, I think a purely psychological interpretation of the problem should be resisted as well.[61] For one thing, Lukács himself clinically discusses the psychological dimension of his

longing in Soul and Form. He sees modern aestheticism as
"sentimental" in the Schillerian sense, condemned to remain
unsatisfied and problematic. In his essay on Theodor Storm,
"The Bourgeois Way of Life and Art for Art's Sake," Lukács
remarks the "impotent nostalgia" of contemporary bourgeois
aestheticism (which he sees as in fact a "form of asceti-
cism"):

> This nostalgia is the Rousseauism of the artist's
> consciousness—a Romantic longing for the unattain-
> able blue flower, glimpsed in dreams, insubstan-
> tially fashioned from visions of form; a longing
> for the thing most opposite to ourselves; a longing
> for the great, holy simplicity, the natural, holy
> perfection to be born out of the birth-pangs of an
> ever-growing awareness, to be forced into life by
> the ultimate, gasping energy of a sick nervous
> system. (p. 55)

If, despite the critical self-consciousness evinced by this
diagnosis of nostalgia, Lukács held on to the topos of nos-
talgia in the form of a longing for system, one may assume
that the desire for system was not a mere symptom of some
psychological malaise, but that it played a basic methodo-
logical role in his thinking.

That Lukács continued, after Soul and Form, to enter-
tain a nostalgia for past wholeness, is evident from the
opening passage to his Theory of the Novel, in which Lukács
laments the "homesickness" of the problematic modern philos-
opher who yearns for the inherent meaningfulness and whole-
ness of "integrated civilizations."[62] This work is an attempt
at a historical and philosophical typology of the novel, in

which the historical forms of the novel are taken as symptomatic of the relationship between the individual protagonist and the external social world. Finding that the modern novel registers the obstacles created by that world to the problematic hero's attainment of an integrated and meaningful life, the work carries an implicit judgment against the fragmentation of experience in modern capitalist society. Despite the more elaborate historical typology of forms in Theory of the Novel, Lukács still relies on the contrast between Greek and modern experience, with the difference that his nostalgia is now expressed in terms of the concept of "totality":

> Our world has become infinitely large and each of
> its corners is richer in gifts and dangers than the
> world of the Greeks, but such wealth cancels out the
> positive meanings--the totality--upon which their life
> was based. For totality as the formative prime real-
> ity of every individual phenomenon implies that some-
> thing closed within itself can be completed; com-
> pleted because everything occurs within it, nothing
> is excluded from it and nothing points at a higher
> reality outside it . . . Totality of being is pos-
> sible only where everything is already homogeneous
> before it has been contained by forms . . . [63]

Because Theory of the Novel links the utopian longing for wholeness with an explicit concern for totality (though not yet totality in the Marxist sense), this work may be seen as an intermediate or transitional work in Lukács' development. Thus, Mészáros sees Theory of the Novel as the pivotal moment, both formally and ideologically, between Soul and Form and History and Class Consciousness:

The full potentiality of the early essay form is
brought to its fulfilment and stretched to its ex-
treme limits in The Theory of the Novel, due to the
qualitatively higher complex of problems it sets
out to solve as compared with the earlier volumes.
In the course of its fulfilment, however, this ear-
ly essay form is also made to burst, and thus it is
permanently transcended in Lukács' develoment. The
element of objectivity--in the Problematik of "total-
ity" inherited from The Soul and the Forms--floods it
and proves to be far too massive for its fragile
structure. . . . The Theory of the Novel is no longer
within the bounds of a (disciplined) subjectivity,
and not yet the conscious acceptance of the methodo-
logical impersonality that follows from the recog-
nition of the ultimate determining power of "objec-
tive totality". (This means also the conscious sub-
ordination of one's compositional aspirations to the
task of tracing the chaotic intricacies and "order-
less" complexities of the objective order.) . . . .
The unique appeal of this work is that the contra-
diction is "transcended" in it--if only subjective-
ly--through formal accomplishment, compositional
rigour, poetic imagery and passionately heightened
style. Ideologically it is situated in some sort
of a "limbo" immediately at the confines of the
vision of a capitalistic hell.[64]

In History and Class Consciousness, the concept of
"totality" comes to the fore; it is the central category of
Lukács' Hegelian Marxism. It describes both the universality
of the Marxist vision of a classless society and the cog-
nitive-conceptual means of attaining it. According to Lukács'
statement of the Marxist dialectical method, "Concrete total-
ity is . . . the category that governs reality."[65] Specifi-
cally , totality is seen as the antidote to what Lukács calls
"reification": the mystification of reality brought about by
the pervasiveness of the commodity form of production in
capitalist society.[66] In philosophical terms, Lukács conceives
the problem of reification as the illusory division between

"subject" and "object" in all spheres of human activity. The only way to overcome the resulting fragmentation of experience at all levels of society was through the unification of subject and object--which in Kantian thinking had remained irreconcilably opposed. Only by using the dialectical method, Lukács argued, could one hope to understand history as a "unified process."[67] This in turn required a standpoint or perspective from which to grasp the socio-economic whole in relation to its parts. "The totality of the object can be posited only if the positing subject is itself a totality; and if the subject wishes to understand itself, it must conceive of the object as a totality."[68] According to Lukács, such a totalizing perspective could only be attained by a social class with universal interests: thus, the proletariat was destined to become the (Hegelian) self-knowing subject, the self-identical "subject-object" of history.[69] For the author of History and Class Consciousness, the proletariat came to know history at the same time that it created it. Martin Jay points out that, unlike Hegel and Dilthey, who thought that "universal history" could be known only at the end of a historical process, Lukács believed that "the constitutive role of subjectivity in creating the totality and the cognitive process of knowing it were essentially the same."[70]

But this is not the place to explore or evaluate the dialectical intricacies of History and Class Consciousness

(see Chapter III, Sec. C for a fuller discussion of this work). My brief summary of this work is intended only to suggest certain structural parallels between Lukács' Soul and Form and the later Marxist work. For it is significant that the dialectical method set forth by Lukács in History and Class Consciousness is first and foremost a theory of cognition. Without obscuring the differences between the two works in question, one may nevertheless note in both the primacy granted to a cognitive subject. We pointed earlier to the importance of consciousness in Lukács' essay on the essay (the Platonist's privileging of concepts and ideas), as well as to the pervasive notion of a cognitive standpoint or Weltanschauung. Although Lukács did not speak in terms of a "subject" or "object" of cognition in Soul and Form, Andrew Arato has shown that as early as 1910, Lukács was concerned with Georg Simmel's distinction between "subjective" and "objective" culture. Arato observes that Lukács' "subsequent investigations of both subjective and objective culture sought to locate the possibility of a 'unification' of subject and object." Arato adds that until 1919, Lukács conceived of the subject-object antinomy essentially as an aesthetic problem, susceptible of resolution only within the sphere of culture.[71]

But more important than this terminological parallel is the more general formal similarity between Lukács' "Platonist" and his Marxist argument. It is in this sense that

Soul and Form prefigures the cognitive problematic which receives its full--and transformed--expression in History and Class Consciousness. The fragmentation of experience, the absence of "immanent" meaning in life, the essayist's inability to create meaning or to achieve autonomous form, all of these are symptoms of the problem which Lukács would later diagnose as the historical separation between subject and object, and to which he would attribute the specific historical causality of reification. The essayist's fragmented experience, reflected in form, was also a cognitive fragmentation, an inability to grasp the true relationship between subject and object, between knower and the known world. To realize the "system" would mean to overcome the subject-object split, to attain the standpoint of totality. As Mészáros puts it, in History and Class Consciousness Lukács "formulates the task of the supersession of the theoretical-intellectual-artistic fragmentation as a necessary dimension of the practical unification of 'Subject and Object.' "[72] A further similarity between the early and the later work lies in the way in which the cognitive problem is linked to ethical concerns. Thus, the ethical idealism of Soul and Form is carried over into the Fichtean "voluntarism" of History and Class Consciousness: in both, one finds the attempt of a conscious subject to bring the world into line with his own ethical values.[73]

But if one may thus see a definite parallel between

the "problem of culture" as formulated in Lukács' early

works and the problem of reification as stated in History

and Class Consciousness, one must also stress the irreducible

differences between the two positions. For one is based on

extreme aesthetic individualism, while the other aims at

collective action within the socio-economic sphere. For our

purposes, the chief difference resides in the fact that for

the young Lukács, the system was only an ideal goal. There

is no suggestion that the system is present anywhere in real-

ity, nor is there any indication of how it may be realized.

For the Lukács of Soul and Form, art itself may provide a

brief glimpse of meaning and purpose in life, but it cannot

begin to provide any sort of lasting solution to fundamental

problems. As Markus puts it, paraphrasing Lukács' early aes-

thetic writings, "Art transcends the alienation of ordinary

life without abolishing it."[74] For all that Soul and Form

anticipates Lukács' later Marxism, one should not lose sight

of the specific role played by the concept of system in the

early work. In this regard it is worth re-emphasizing that

Lukács' Platonic yearning for system is strongly qualified

by his awareness of the problematic character of the modern

essayist's experience (thus implying that the essay form is

not a timeless Platonic archetype after all, but is subject

to the vicissitudes of history). Insofar as the essay is said

to have independent value as a process, it is not made ob-

solete by the advent of a definitive system. Indeed, it is

the very pervasiveness of the longing for system in Soul and Form which underscores the lack of any operative totality for the young Lukács. Such a persistent desire for totality may be taken as the best indication of its absence.

I have stressed the cognitive dimension of Lukács' theory of the essay, both because it allows us to see the theory of the essay in its relationship to his other philosophical work, and because it will permit us to compare his theory to Adorno's theory of the essay, which is based even more explicitly upon a theory of cognition. But as I will show in the next chapter, Adorno's reading of Lukács' theory concentrates on the latter's lament over fragmentation, in such a way as almost to equate that lament with Lukács' later defense of "totality" in History and Class Consciousness. Adorno does not sufficiently acknowledge the extent to which his own defense of "fragment" was anticipated, albeit in a Platonic context, by Lukács' essay on the essay in Soul and Form.

Prior to his Marxist conversion in 1918, Lukács had sought wholeness primarily in the realm of art and culture. Because he did not find any way of showing how aesthetic form alone could furnish wholeness, and because his essays were themselves fragmentary and "incomplete," posing questions rather than finding solutions, critics have designated this pre-Marxist period of Lukács' writings his "essay period"[75]--taking into account Lukács' own characterization

of the essay's incompleteness and fragmentariness. This label is implicitly contrasted to Lukács' later Marxist writing, in which he was able to fashion something of a "solution" by transferring his ethical preoccupations from the aesthetic sphere into the wider political realm. How one evaluates this transition in Lukács' work will obviously depend upon the evaluator's own ideological presuppositions. In the long passage quoted earlier, Mészáros suggests that Lukács' Marxist works represent, both formally and philosophically, a "transcendence" of the positions taken in Soul and Form and Theory of the Novel.[76] I will not take up here the issue of the philosophical merits of Lukács' Marxism, for it seems to me that this issue lies outside the scope of the present study. Instead, I will conclude by commenting briefly upon the transition in Lukács' aesthetics and the concomitant shift in the formal aspects of his own writing. In this context, I will outline a view of Lukács' evolution which is more critical than the view of Mészáros, and which is in essential agreement with Adorno's stylistic objection to the later Lukács.

Lukács' political commitment to totality marked a turn toward the aesthetics of socialist realism. From the 1930s onward, he would judge works of art and literature according to whether they accurately represented the world—their accuracy to be judged by the criterion of "typicality" rather than by any criterion of naturalistic or naive real-

ism.[77] Works of art would be expected to possess a unity of form based on a unity of content, both unities being determined, ultimately, by a unified cognitive method of understanding the world (Marxist dialectics, as Lukács understood it). If Lukács looked to literature at all, after 1923, for the fulfillment of totality, it was—as Fredric Jameson has shown—in narrative form, in the novel, rather than in the essay, that Lukács sought that totality (or at least the artistic reflection of it).[78] In keeping with his interest in the novel and its mimetic possibilities, Lukács apparently lost interest in the essay as an autonomous literary form. One must add that, formally considered, his subsequent Marxist essays are less interesting than his earlier endeavors in Soul and Form and Theory of the Novel. To say this is of course to make a rather impressionistic—and for Marxists, a scandalous—generalization, and one which is by its nature difficult to prove. Yet I think it is an assertion to which even Marxists, if they put it to the test, would be compelled to assent. This is not the place to attempt a complete explanation of this phenomenon. Suffice it to say of Lukács' Marxist essays that they accept only too readily what Mészáros called the "methodological impersonality" that comes from recognizing "the ultimate determining power of 'objective totality,'" which in turn entails " the subordination of one's compositional aspirations to the task of tracing the . . . complexities of the objective order."[79]

In the same passage, Mészáros praises the "formal accomplish-
ment" of the earlier works. In another context, while de-
fending Lukács' Marxist works for their theoretical-philo-
sophical advance over the early writings, Mészáros remarks
of Lukács' literary essays of the thirties that they are
"as to their structure . . . much closer to the systematic
monograph than to the traditional essay."[80] Now it is pos-
sible to agree with this perceptive description of Lukács'
Marxist essays, and at the same time to regard them with
less approbation than Mészáros intended to confer upon them.
This is only to claim that the essay, as opposed to the
"systematic monograph," comes closest to fulfilling its es-
sential nature, so to speak, when it moves within a certain
scepticism about its own presuppositions. Whatever conclu-
sions it reaches must therefore be highly tentative in
kind--temporary syntheses entertained by a mind ever ready
to dissolve them so as to avoid reifying its own products
and reflections. This would seem to be the implication of
Lukács' early theory of the essay, if one draws out the
cognitive assumptions of that theory. What such a charac-
terization of the essay would mean specifically as regards
the formal and structural devices of particular essays--
in short, how such cognitive experience is embodied in
literary form--will be discussed in further chapters. At the
moment I am only suggesting that Lukács' early theory of the
essay, and the form in which that theory is expressed in

<u>Soul and Form</u>, not only are not "transcended" in his later
essays, but actually provide a point of reference from which
to criticize those essays. For insofar as one can infer an
attitude toward the essay genre from those later essays,
they seem to claim the kind of unity and apodictic certainty
which follow from a closed deductive system, and therefore
often deserve Adorno's rebuke that they sound as if their
author had found the philosopher's stone.[81]

   This last reflection raises a broader question. For,
if the example of Lukács indicates that the formal-aesthetic
qualities of essays will be diminished by the essayist's
observance of a fixed propositional system—or indeed, that
such writings will be transformed into something other than
essays—does it follow from this that the essay is formally
incompatible with Marxist dialectical thinking? Adorno's
theory answers this question in the negative, and, in doing
so, proposes an alternative view of Marxism. For Adorno holds
the essay to be the appropriate form for Marxist dialectics,
and his theory carries the claim that the essay, and dialec-
tical thinking in general, are the opposite of a closed
system.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1] Lukács, Soul and Form, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1974). In this chapter, page references to Soul and Form will be given parenthetically in the text.

[2] For biographical information on Lukács I have consulted István Mészáros, Lukács' Concept of Dialectic (London: Merlin, 1972); George Lichtheim, George Lukács (New York: Viking, 1970); Béla Királyfalvi, The Aesthetics of György Lukács (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 3-19; Rodney Livingstone, Introd., Tactics and Ethics: Political Essays 1919-1929, by Georg Lukács, trans. Michael McColgan (London: New Left Books, 1972, rpt. Harper, 1972), pp. vii-xxi; G. H. R. Parkinson (ed.), Introd., Georg Lukács: The Man, His Work and His Ideas (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970, rpt. Random House, 1970), pp. 1-33.

[3] Mészáros, p. 24.

[4] Mészáros, p. 22: "The belated development of Hungarian Capitalism, the enormous inertia of feudal and bureaucratic-statal interests, the contradictions between the two major partners of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the special complications of Jewish emancipation, the increasing resistance of national minorities under Hungarian domination, these were the major factors in Lukács' situation."

[5] Mészáros, pp. 24-26.

[6] Mészáros, p. 30.

[7] Lichtheim, p. 2.

[8] Lichtheim, p. 4; Livingstone, pp. ix-x.

[9] See especially Andrew Arato, "Lukács' Path to Marxism," Telos, No. 7 (Spring 1971), pp. 128-36; and György Markus, "The Soul and Life: The Young Lukács and the Problem of Culture," Telos, No. 32 (Summer 1977), pp. 95-115.

[10] Markus, pp. 110-14; Arato, p. 134. Lukács' study of modern drama, published originally in Hungarian (1911), was a re-elaboration of a work written in 1908 (see Mészáros, pp. 118, 154-55).

[11] Livingstone, pp. xii-xiii.

[12] Fredric Jameson, "The Case for Georg Lukács," in Marxism and Form (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971),

pp. 161-63.

[13] Georg Lukács, The Theory of the Novel, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1971).

[14] Jameson, p. 163.

[15] Markus, pp. 98-99.

[16] Markus, pp. 96-97.

[17] Markus, p. 99: "The development of his thought at this time is difficult to trace, mainly for the reason that while his basic problems and intentions remained constant, the positive answers and solutions kept changing kaleidoscopically."

[18] Mészáros, p. 39.

[19] Mészáros, p. 93.

[20] Markus, pp. 98-99, 114.

[21] Dennis Crow, "Form and the Unification of Aesthetics and Ethics in Lukács' Soul and Forms," New German Critique, No. 15 (Fall 1978), p. 162.

[22] Crow, passim.

[23] Mészáros, p. 48.

[24] Lukács' distinction between science and art recalls the Neo-Kantian distinction between "nomothetic" or law-oriented sciences, and "idiographic" (cultural) sciences.

[25] See, for example, Georg Simmel, "The Conflict of Modern Culture," in Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms, ed. and introd. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 375.

[26] The terms are distinguished in German as "das Leben" and "das Leben." (Lukács, Die Seele und die Formen, p. 10).

[27] Markus, p. 102.

[28] Lukács borrows his distinction between Platonist and poet from the critic Rudolph Kassner, the subject of the second essay in the collection, "Platonism, Poetry and Form." According to Kassner, "poetry has laws, prose has none" (quoted p. 20). Lukács elaborates: "The poet writes in verse, the Platonist in prose. The one lives within the strict security of a structure of laws, the other in the thousand

hazards and vagaries of freedom--the one in a radiant and enchanting perfection-within-itself, the other in the infinite waves of relativity . . . . The poet can learn nothing because his vision is rounded and complete. . . . [the Platonist] can never wholly surrender himself to anything; his forms are never completely filled, or else they cannot encompass everything he wants them to encompass. Analysis, prose, is his form." (pp. 20-21).

[29] By destiny (Schicksal), Lukács does not mean only "fate" as something fixed or predetermined, something which one receives passively. Rather, it is a dynamic principle: it refers to subjective experience, life on the way to becoming form. Roy Pascal has pointed out that Lukács used the concept of destiny to mean "the dialectical law that embraces teleology and causality, individual purpose and choice, and social and natural laws" ("Georg Lukács: The Concept of Totality," in Parkinson, ed., Georg Lukács: The Man, p. 151).

[30] Claudio Guillén, "On the Concept and Metaphor of Perspective," in Literature as System, pp. 285-371.

[31] Rudolph Makreel, Dilthey, Philosopher of the Human Studies (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 346-ff.

[32] Buck-Morss, pp. 78-79.

[33] Quoted in Markus, p. 105.

[34] Markus, p. 105.

[35] Quoted in Markus, p. 106.

[36] William K. Wimsatt, in Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: A Short History (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1957), II, 379.

[37] Wimsatt, p. 380.

[38] Hartman, "Crossing Over," p. 259.

[39] Wimsatt, pp. 379-80.

[40] Markus, p. 114.

[41] The term "historical-sociological" should be accepted with some hesitation in this case, since it has connotations of modern social science and its terminology--something

which is far from the belletrist tone of <u>Soul and Form</u>. I am using the term here in the specific sense that poetic form (the essay) is seen to respond to historical conditions, and hence to change over time, rather than being derived from a constant or timeless poetics.

[42] Peter Gay, <u>Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider</u> (New York: Harper, 1968), p. 58.

[43] Pater, p. 156.

[44] Pater, p. 158.

[45] Pater, p. 159.

[46] Guy Haarscher, "Postface: Approche des écrits de jeunesse de Lukács," in <u>L'Ame et les Formes</u>, by Georges Lukács, trans. Guy Haarscher (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. 285-92.

[47] Haarscher, p. 286; Markus, p. 105.

[48] Haarscher, p. 289.

[49] Crow, pp. 162-63.

[50] Markus, p. 99: "Concealed behind the problem of methodological 'parallelism' which Lukács never managed to solve in his early period, there lies a deeper ideological dilemma which differs from the methodological one. It concerns the question as to whether the actual state of things at the time was an expression of the existential-ontological tragedy of culture or simply an expression of its historical and therefore resolvable crisis."

[51] Crow, p. 171.

[52] Crow, p. 174.

[53] Buck-Morss, p. 74.

[54] Markus, p. 106.

[55] See Arato, "Lukács' Path," p. 129.

[56] Quoted in Markus, p. 106. See p. 50 of this study.

[57] The system-fragment opposition also proves to be sug-

gestive for Geoffrey Hartman's treatment of the modern critical essay in "Crossing Over: Literary Commentary as Literature."

[58] This is true of Markus, Mészáros, Crow, and Hartman. It is also true of Martin Jay in his article, "The Concept of Totality in Lukács and Adorno," in Telos, No. 32 (Summer 1977), pp. 117-37. The only commentator who stresses the discontinuity between Soul and Form and Lukács' Marxist work is G. H. R. Parkinson, who considers Soul and Form "not so much a step forward on Lukács' road to Marx as an obstacle to be surmounted" (Introd., Georg Lukács: The Man, p. 4).

[59] Martin Jay argues that the category of totality figured prominently on Lukács' intellectual horizon, for it played an important role in the works of such historicist thinkers as Dilthey, Simmel, Troeltsch and Mannheim ("The Concept of Totality in Lukács and Adorno," p. 119).

[60] This is the picture of pre-war Austria-Hungary which emerges from Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, Wittgenstein's Vienna (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

[61] See, for example, Victor Zitta, Georg Lukács' Marxism: Alienation, Dialectics, Revolution (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964). Zitta sees Lukács as a poet manqué, and interprets his aspirations to wholeness as symptomatic of Lukács' frustrated personality (pp. 23-ff.). Zitta's book attempts to trace Lukács' thought from his early period through his Marxist writings, and therefore deals with many of the themes which interest me here. But his account is vitiated by an unremitting hostility toward Lukács and Marxism, a hostility which often lapses into crude psychologism.

[62] Lukács, Theory of the Novel, pp. 29-39.

[63] Lukács, Theory of the Novel, p. 34.

[64] Mészáros, pp. 50-51.

[65] Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 10.

[66] See Lukács' long essay, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in History and Class Consciousness, pp. 83-222.

[67] Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 12.

[68] Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 28.

[69] For an extended discussion of the subject-object problem in Lukács' early thought, see Andrew Arato, "Georg Lukács: The Search for a Revolutionary Subject," in The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism since Lenin, ed. Dick Howard and Karl Klare (New York: Basic Books, 1972), pp. 81-106.

[70] Jay, "The Concept of Totality in Lukács and Adorno," p. 121.

[71] Arato, "Lukács' Path," pp. 131, 135. See also Arato, "George Lukács: Search for a Subject," passim.

[72] Mészáros, p. 62.

[73] Arato, "Georg Lukács: Search for a Subject," pp. 83-95. Arato shows that the subject-object problem in Lukács' work derives partly from his awareness of Kant's Third Antinomy in Critique of Pure Reason, ". . . i.e. the contradiction between inner freedom and outer necessity, between 'voluntarist subjectivism' and 'deterministic objectivism' " (p. 83).

[74] Markus, p. 106.

[75] Markus, pp. 99, 101; Mészáros, pp. 48-51.

[76] Mészáros, p. 50. This is also Arato's view, in "Georg Lukács: Search for a Subject," p. 95.

[77] Királyfalvi, pp. 78-83.

[78] Jameson, pp. 187-ff.

[79] Mészáros, p. 51

[80] Mészáros, p. 56.

[81] Adorno, "Der Essay als Form," pp. 38-39.

CHAPTER III

INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND OF ADORNO'S THEORY

OF THE ESSAY

A. Philosophy in a Minor Key

"Philosophy serves to bear out an experience which
Schoenberg noted in traditional musicology: one
really learns from it only how a movement begins
and ends, nothing about the movement itself and
its course. Analogously, instead of reducing phi-
losophy to categories, one would in a sense have
to compose it first. . . . The crux is what hap-
pens in it, not a thesis or a position--the tex-
ture, not the deductive or inductive course of
one-track minds. Essentially, therefore, philos-
ophy is not expoundable. If it were, it would be
superfluous; the fact that most of it can be ex-
pounded speaks against it."

Adorno, Negative Dialectics,
pp. 33-34.

As early as 1931, in his polemical inaugural lecture,
"The Actuality of Philosophy," given when he joined the Phi-
losophy department of the University of Frankfurt, Adorno
claimed that the essay should be considered the proper for-
mal vehicle of contemporary philosophy.[1] It was entirely
characteristic of Adorno's manner of thinking that he should
thus place as much stress on the formal and aesthetic aspects
of philosophical discourse as on its thematic content, which
is more commonly held to be primary. For Adorno may be said

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[1] Notes to this chapter appear on pp. 160-77.

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to belong to that category of philosophical essayists--
Montaigne, Ortega y Gasset, Walter Benjamin, and Jacques
Derrida come to mind as other examples of this type--for
whom style is not some extraneous or ornamental addition to
thought, but an integral part of the thinking process.
Adorno drew upon his own musical experience for parallels
and analogies to philosophical experience and form. It was
a constant in his thinking that musical composition--here
the influence of Schoenberg was decisive--provided a model
for philosophical cognition and aesthetic form.[2] Whether
Adorno's essays actually reproduce in any consistent way the
structure of Schoenberg's compositions, as Susan Buck-Morss
has argued,[3] it is not my intention to determine. But there
can be little doubt that his essays have a distinctive aes-
thetic shape and texture. It is often as though the philo-
sophical argument or propositional content--which is unde-
niably present in his essays--were being used as raw materi-
al in the service of a more fundamental aesthetic motive.
In this sense, Gillian Rose is quite right to claim that
Adorno "turned Marxism into a search for style."[4] It might
be added that his theory of the essay is the terrain on which
this search is conducted.

In designating the essay as the appropriate vehicle
of philosophy, and in making it the privileged form of his
own philosophical and critical endeavors, Adorno was asser-
ting a break with the systematic tradition in German philos-

ophy, for which the essay could only appear as a minor genre, too frail and occasional to sustain the weight of serious philosophical thought. In this sense, Adorno's essays belong to a distinguished line of German fragmentary writings which includes the critical works of Friedrich Schlegel, as well as the aphoristic writings of Lichtenberg and Nietzsche. But in this concern for the aesthetic dimension of philosophical method, Adorno was in another sense continuing the tradition of Hegel himself, who was in many respects the greatest "systematizer" of them all. For in German philosophy, it was Hegel above all who believed that philosophical exposition should not be the mere representation of conclusions reached through a separate process of thought, but that the method of arriving at philosophical judgments should be at one with their mode of presentation. As George Steiner put it, Hegel's Phenomenology "had made of philosophical discourse a self-unfolding, dramatic process inseparable from the characteristics of individual style."[5]

There was thus no lack of precedent in the German tradition for Adorno's preoccupation with the formal aspects of philosophical thinking. But his immediate precursor in this, as in so many of his most basic concerns, was his friend and mentor, Walter Benjamin, with whom Adorno carried on a productive, if at times troubled, intellectual dialogue from the mid-1920s until Benjamin's suicide in 1940. In an essay on Adorno, Jürgen Habermas points out that Adorno's

essays may be read in terms of Benjamin's comments on the treatise (<u>Traktat</u>). With his penchant for exotic metaphor, Benjamin had noted a structural resemblance between the treatise (of Arabic origin according to Benjamin) and the filigree design in Islamic architecture. Like the filigree network, the treatise "opens itself from within," as it were, by its very organization:

> . . . the surface [of the treatise] is not animated with painting, but is rather covered with continuously interwoven nets of ornamentation. In the dense interweave of this presentation, the distinction between thematic and excursive argument is irrelevant.[6]

Habermas claims that "with this code many of Adorno's own essays—and precisely the most cryptic and profound ones—can be deciphered as secret treatises." To which Habermas cannot resist adding, perhaps in homage to his subject, another cryptic analogy: Adorno's essays are said to "resemble labyrinths which, for the sake of inner clarity, have been turned inside out."[7]

As emblems of Adorno's essays, each of these analogies is apt in its own way, yet neither should be taken as definitive. Benjamin's description of the "dense interweave" of the treatise might well have captured Adorno's attention; he used the same phrase in comparing the essay to a tapestry in his main statement on the essay genre, "Der Essay als Form."[8] The filigree image is appropriate, furthermore, in that it suggests the absence of any dominant pattern or motif: where there is no conceptual or representational "center,"

all parts get equal attention. This was consistent with a central aim of Adorno's essayism: that of overthrowing conceptual and thematic hierarchies. As for Habermas' dictum, the labyrinth image does indeed convey the "hermetic intricacy"[9] of Adorno's essays, as well as something of the frustration the reader may feel while reading them. The problem with both analogies, suggestive as they are, stems from the fact that they are primarily spatial and visual metaphors of a static kind, implying contemplation rather than development. They give no inkling of the dialectical motion of Adorno's essays. Music was always closer than visual art to his sensibilities, and it therefore provides a better clue to the peculiarities of his style.[10] Adorno proposed Schoenberg's "dialectical" compositions as a model for the development of philosophical ideas, and there can be little doubt that he considered the parallel an exact one. Schoenberg's procedure was dialectical precisely in its avoidance of dominance and hierarchies, as seen in its overthrow of traditional tonality. The task of philosophy, as Adorno began to make clear in his earliest essays on music, was to accomplish something similar in the medium of language.[11] Regarding this parallel, Adorno later wrote in Negative Dialectics: "Even in music--as in all art, presumably--the impulse animating the first bar will not be fulfilled at once, but only in further articulation. To this extent, however much it may be phenomenal as a totality, music is a critique of phenome-

nality, of the appearance that the substance is present here and now. Such a mediate role befits philosophy no less."[12] Adorno strove to observe this principle in his own writings, as well as in his evaluations of the works of others. But his efforts were not entirely successful, as we will have occasion to observe in a later chapter. His essays were not finally able to avoid becoming static and reified themselves, and through them his whole philosophy--contrary to its own idea--began to solidify into a set of propositions, thus taking on the appearance of a rigid "substance."

The passage just quoted suggests another reason, related to the aesthetic one, why Adorno felt the essay to be the proper form for philosophy, and why it was the form most suited to his own style of thinking. For Adorno, criticism was philosophy's most essential function, and the essay was the most appropriate means for fulfilling that function.[13] The open, inconclusive nature of the essay was best suited to the negative, critical moment of thought--the moment in which, for the sake of some ultimate but as yet inaccessible realm of truth, one engages in accusing the elements of untruth in the positive constructions of other people. Something of this critical, polemical motive in Adorno's thinking is captured by the title of his most comprehensive philosophical work. Negative dialectics--which may be briefly defined as dialectics without synthesis--is not so much a positive alternative to traditional philosophical thinking as it is the

name of Adorno's relentless critique of the systematizing
use of dialectics in previous philosophies--specifically in
classical German Idealism, though Adorno's critique reaches
back as far as Plato. Indeed, Adorno's polemic against "tra-
ditional philosophy"--as he often somewhat loosely referred
to it--was the underlying concern of all his philosophical
works. It appears as a leitmotif even in his apparently non-
philosophical writings. This polemic usually took the form of
a critical dialogue with what he saw as the undialectical
elements in the systems of such philosophers as Kant, Hegel,
Marx, Heidegger and Lukács. Although during most of his career
Adorno chose to associate his thinking with Marxist philoso-
phy--or "Critical Theory," as the Frankfurt School called its
own version of it--it should not be thought that Marxism es-
caped his criticism. If Adorno helped to deepen and extend
many of Marx's insights, he also came to revise or reject many
of Marxism's most basic tenets.[14] His relationship to Marxism
was itself in this sense a dialectical one, and it cannot be
adequately described by such positive terms as "contribution."

Although it goes against Adorno's nonthetical prin-
ciples--his strictures against announcing one's intentions
and dominant themes in linear fashion--it seems necessary to
attempt here a brief summary of Adorno's philosophical views
as they relate to his theory of the essay. What Adorno found
most objectionable about traditional philosophy were its un-
dialectical and authoritarian norms of totality, identity,

and system—with their explicit or implicit hierarchies of universality over particularity, the eternal over the transient, stasis over process, continuity over discontinuity, and completeness over incompleteness. Adorno considered all philosophical systems to be guilty of "identity thinking," which he defined as "the presupposition that all things in being are identical with the cognitive principle," or, in other words, the idealist assumption that the "subject" and the "object" of cognition were ultimately identical.[15] Hegel was a central example for Adorno, since Hegel's system had furnished the model for Marxist dialectics. Hegel had rightly made negation (nonidentity, differentiation) the moving principle of his system in Phenomenology of Mind; but according to Adorno, the dialectical movement thus initiated was stifled by Hegel's ultimate identity assumption, which sought validation in the affirmation of a positive entity—the Absolute Spirit or Idea.[16] Such philosophies of identity led to a kind of "closed thinking" by cutting off the subject's "spontaneous" relation to the object of experience. In advance, the subject made all things equal to and commensurate with itself. In a late methodological essay, "Subject and Object," Adorno traced this tendency back to the problem of "constitution" in idealist philosophy, arguing that the primacy which Kant had accorded to a "transcendental subject" led to a truncated view of reality: "Once radically parted from the object, the subject reduces it to its own

measure; the subject swallows the object, forgetting how much it is an object itself."[17] Thus, in Hegel the subject-object identity was in fact achieved by positing the subject's a priori supremacy over the object. "Identity is the primal form of ideology," Adorno argued in Negative Dialectics. "The duality of subject and object must be critically maintained against the thought's inherent claim to be total."[18] The proper relationship between subject and object would be one of "distinctness without domination."[19] This is why Adorno chose to formulate an oppositional model of philosophical cognition—that of negative dialectics—and it is why he based that model upon the notion of "nonidentity" rather than identity. The ideal subject of this cognitive activity was the essayist who, aware of the incommensurability between his own cognitive process and the objects of his attention, gave up the pretension to any totalizing system based on identity. But at the same time, the essayist became the spokesman for a kind of truth which escaped the hypostatizing tendencies of systematic thinking.

Adorno did not conceive of the mental operations of this mode of cognition as separable from its formal manifestations. The above opposition between traditional and negative-dialectical cognition thus found its proper formal and aesthetic symbol in Adorno's opposition between the essay and the Hauptwerk (chef d'oeuvre, or masterpiece).[20] Large, holistic constructions which pretended to grasp or exhaust an area or

subject seemed to Adorno to exemplify the ideology of total-
ity and identity by claiming to be wholly adequate to, or
identical with, their objects. To such systematic, holistic
forms Adorno opposed the discontinuous, unsystematic form of
the essay. Just as totalizing forms would be the expression
of a "transcendental subject" (or, ultimately, of a subject-
object identity), so the essay's fragmented form became the
sign of the nonidentity between subject and object, of the
subject's perpetual need to be mediated by its object.

One may be tempted to see Adorno's theory of the
essay as mere scepticism, raised to a principle of form. Yet
this would be to overlook the important utopian dimension
of his thought. As in the case of Lukács, the system-fragment
opposition in Adorno's thinking is an overdetermined one which
reflects the thinker's deepest ethical and ideological con-
cerns. Adorno's view of the proper relationship between the
subject and the object of cognition--one of "distinctness
without domination"--echoes his remark on utopia in Negative
Dialectics: "Utopia would be above identity and above contra-
diction; it would be a togetherness of diversity."[21] It will
be a principal aim of this study to show how much Adorno's
theory of the essay depends upon his utopian model of cogni-
tion.

Adorno's theory of the essay may thus be interpreted
as his attempt to delineate the formal and aesthetic aspects
of his general theory of philosophical cognition. The essay

is the formal correlative of negative dialectics. I do not attempt to prove this in any systematic way in the present study. Rather than using Adorno's remarks on the essay to illuminate his philosophy of negative dialectics, I am more interested in eliciting from his philosophical writings the general theory of cognitive experience which underlies his views on the essay. Clearly, one could point to other aspects of Adorno's philosophy which are relevant to his theory of philosophical form--his ethics and politics, for example-- and I will refer to these aspects as the need arises. But it seems to me that the emphasis given to the question of cognition in the present study is justified by the primacy of cognition--and especially of the subject-object problematic--throughout Adorno's works, and in his theory of the essay in particular.[22] Moreover, it is primarily the theme of cognition which permits comparison of Adorno's theory of the essay to the theories of Lukács and Benjamin.

Because of the length and diverse aims of this study, I will comment briefly here upon the corpus of texts to be discussed, and upon the strategy I intend to follow. In the above summary of Adorno's philosophical views, I have drawn chiefly upon Negative Dialectics as the most complete statement of his philosophy. But Adorno's theory of the essay, like negative dialectics itself, is in fact adumbrated throughout his earlier writings. His earliest theoretical justification of the essay appears in his 1931 lecture, "The

Actuality of Philosophy," in which he explicitly associates

the essay form with his own philosophical method. As Susan

Buck-Morss has shown, the philosophical program sketched out

by Adorno in that lecture was to remain remarkably consistent

over time; many of its themes were to be picked up in his

subsequent writings, culminating in Negative Dialectics.[23]

Buck-Morss demonstrates convincingly that the main concerns

of Adorno's thinking were already in place by 1931, and that

an understanding of the early influences on Adorno is there-

fore indispensable for comprehending his works. In the re-

mainder of this chapter I will survey the major intellectual

influences on Adorno's early thinking--focusing in particular

upon the ideas of Walter Benjamin, Arnold Schoenberg, and

Georg Lukács--in an attempt to present the necessary back-

ground for understanding Adorno's theory of the essay. Trac-

ing the general features of Adorno's view of philosophical

cognition as it evolved in contact with those figures, I

will also explore the development of the important opposition

between "system" and "fragment" in Adorno's early works.

This is not to say that Adorno's theory of the essay

underwent no important changes between 1931 and 1966, nor

that there are not other important intervening texts. There

are suggestive passages in Minima Moralia (1951) on style and

method which are relevant to his views on the essay.[24] Other

key texts are "Cultural Criticism and Society" (1949) and

"A Portrait of Walter Benjamin" (1950).[25] The most explicit

and important text for our purposes is of course "Der Essay
als Form" (1958), with which we will deal at length in
Chapter IV.

B. Benjamin, Schoenberg, and the Origins
of Immanent Criticism

Since Adorno's theory of the essay is so intimately
linked to his overall philosophy, it might be useful here to
sketch in broad outline the experiences and influences which
contributed most to the shaping of that philosophy. A few
biographical observations are necessary to explain the con-
vergence of aesthetic and philosophical interests in Adorno's
early thinking, and to prepare the way for a discussion of
the major intellectual influences upon his development.

Adorno was born Theodor Adorno Wiesengrund in Frank-
furt am Main in 1903, into an upper-middle-class family.[26]
His father was an assimilated Jew and a wealthy banker; his
mother was a professional singer of German, French, and Cor-
sican ancestry. Adorno grew up in an atmosphere that fostered
his interests, and allowed him to develop his considerable
talents, in music and philosophy. His deepest sympathies were
with avant-garde art and aesthetics. His interest in expres-
sionist music led him to Vienna in 1924, where he studied
with Alban Berg, a practitioner of Arnold Schoenberg's serial
method of composition. The moment was propitious for someone

of Adorno's sensibilities: a modernist by training and in-
clination, his aesthetic radicalism and polemical impulses
were quickened by the volatile cultural climate of Vienna,
where the order of the day for avant-garde artists was the
overthrow of already decaying norms in the visual arts,
music, literature and philosophy.[27] Not yet a Marxist,
Adorno already identified with the iconoclastic and anti-
bourgeois impulses of much expressionist art. But Adorno's
own cultural radicalism was tempered by his awareness that
the relationship between art and society was a highly prob-
lematic, mediated one. Schoenberg's music taught him that
progressive music, in its very refusal of the facile grati-
fications of following established norms and conventions,
could play at once a critical and utopian function with re-
spect to society. But the example of Schoenberg suggested
the further lesson that works of art could fulfill this crit-
ical promise only if the artist or composer adhered strictly
to the "inner logic" of the artistic or musical material,
independently of the tastes and ideologies of the contempo-
rary public.[28] This principle of "immanence" in Schoenberg's
aesthetics did not of course arise in a vacuum: in Wittgen-
stein's Vienna, Allan Janek and Stephen Toulmin demonstrate
Schoenberg's debt to the cultural criticism of Karl Kraus,
who advocated a "creative separation" between "facts" and
"values," "reason" and "fantasy," in all areas of cultural
endeavor.[29] The thrust of Kraus' criticism--which had an

important influence not only on Schoenberg but also upon the
work of Adolph Loos in architecture and Ludwig Wittgenstein
in philosophy--was against the inauthentic, ornamental and
culinary aspects of contemporary Viennese art, language and
culture.[30] Kraus' own "immanent critique of language" in his
attacks on Viennese journalism succeeded in "turning the ex-
pressions of Viennese society against itself." His concern
for clarity of expression stemmed from his belief that the
strict, accurate use of language--and by extension, of aes-
thetic presentation (<u>Darstellung</u>) in general--could achieve
the representation of truth.[31] Kraus and his followers be-
lieved that, through a heightened sense of discipline and
technical rigor in the actual composition of the work of art,
the artist enabled the work to express an objective truth
about the culture and society in which the work was situated.

For Schoenberg himself, the individual musical com-
position was the product of a creative tension between self-
discipline and self-expression; only by schooling himself
in the strictest musical logic and "language" of composition
could the composer develop the technical means necessary
both for expressive "freedom" and for the representation of
truth.[32] In this sense Schoenberg's technical innovations--
the overthrow of tonality and the later twelve-tone row--
were not so much ends in themselves as part of his attempt
to enrich the expressive possibilities of musical language.
In another sense, however, Schoenberg's technical rigor and

his emphasis on developing the "objective potentialities"
within the musical material constituted a critique of the
Wagnerian conception of music as the expression of subjective,
often irrational, emotion[33]--an aspect of Schoenberg's aes-
thetics which dovetailed with Adorno's incipient critique of
the autonomous subject in art and philosophy. As a corollary
to the Krausian emphasis on the rational, objective devel-
opment of material in the execution of the work of art, the
question of the aesthetic validity of a work was for Schoen-
berg entirely divorced from its actual effect upon the audi-
ence.[34] Since the aim of Schoenberg's music was not to com-
municate or provide immediate gratification, but rather to
achieve truth and authenticity--and in doing so, to embody
a critique of inauthentic culture--its alienation from the
contemporary public followed almost inevitably.

The emphasis on technical rigor in aesthetic pres-
entation, the refusal to pander to the taste and conscious-
ness of the contemporary bourgeois public, and the conception
of the work of art as a creative tension between subject and
object (or composer and material)--these are the Krausian
principles which, through Adorno's training in the Schoen-
berg school, found their way into Adorno's own aesthetics.
These principles would come to inform Adorno's conception
of "immanent criticism," as may be seen from Adorno's pro-
grammatic essay, "Cultural Criticism and Society." In that
essay, Adorno states his conviction that "A successful work,

according to immanent criticism, is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure." The function of the critic--whose relationship to the work he is discussing is roughly analogous to that existing between the artist and his material--is then to make explicit the immanent structure of the work, to pursue "the logic of its aporias," for "in such antinomies criticism perceives those of society."[35]

Meanwhile, Adorno's philosophical studies had led him to similar conclusions. His earliest philosophical training had been Kantian. From his Kantian studies as a boy with Siegfried Kracauer, and with his friend Max Horkheimer in the seminars of Hans Cornelius at the University of Frankfurt, Adorno had learned a respect for empirical realities and a scepticism toward _prima philosophia_ (first principles) and closed systems.[36] Adorno was dissatisfied both with positivistic philosophy--whether of the Neo-Kantian or the Viennese school--and also with the prevailing currents of idealist philosophy--_Lebensphilosophie_, phenomenology (despite a considerable admiration for Husserl), and Heideggerian existentialism. Whereas positivism seemed to him too narrow and hostile to speculation, removed from the living individual, Adorno saw most idealism as one-sided, subjectivist, lacking a grounding in material reality. To sim-

plify considerably, Adorno felt that positivism neglected the subjective, while idealism slighted the objective dimension of experience. Nevertheless, Adorno was more conversant with idealism than with positivism, and his philosophical works were an attempt to dialectically transcend bourgeois idealism through an "immanent" critique of its central categories. In his 1931 address, Adorno defined his program as this dialectical "liquidation" of traditional idealist philosophy.[37]

His friend Walter Benjamin was by far the most influential figure in Adorno's philosophical development. Intellectually and temperamentally, there were remarkable affinities between them. Adorno shared Benjamin's disenchantment with academic philosophy (Benjamin is said to have termed the jargon of official philosophy a "procurer language").[38] Like Benjamin, Adorno was attracted to the "utopian" Marxist thought of Ernst Bloch, whose Geist der Utopie (1918) had impressed Adorno as a young student.[39] Bloch's was a non-determinist Marxism which respected the subjective no less than the objective factors in history and society. What impressed Adorno above all was Bloch's concern for the utopian moment of possibility to be found in existing things. Bloch detected utopian "traces" (Spuren) of future fulfillment, both in religion and in the small, mundane objects of everyday life.[40] And Benjamin--whose thinking had been influenced by the messianic philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig, as well as by the research on Jewish mysticism of Benjamin's

friend Gerschom Scholem--reinforced Adorno's attraction to
the possibility of a utopian hermeneutic.[41] But what inter-
ested Adorno about Benjamin's experiments in messianic and
mystical philosophy were not the positive truth-claims of
Jewish religious doctrine, but rather the way in which, as
Benjamin demonstrated, theological and mystical motifs could
be mobilized in a certain mode of cognition to yield insights
of great dialectical subtlety. It was strictly in their ca-
pacity as "negative" or "inverse" theology that the works
of Bloch and Benjamin interested Adorno, and influenced his
own negative dialectics.[42] Adorno's thinking was like nega-
tive theology in that it criticized all forms of false tran-
scendence. Adorno preferred to concentrate on empirical real-
ity, criticizing the false or repressive aspects of that
reality, while at the same time detecting within it those
critical or utopian tendencies which, in their very dif-
ference or nonidentity with existent reality, suggested a
possible future transcendence. Although he criticized all
present claims to transcendence (including contemporary phi-
losophies for their various ways of making peace with the
status quo), Adorno refused to give any positive definition
of a utopian future. As several critics have noted, that
refusal may have been a secular version of the Jewish theme
of Bilderverbot, the prohibition against representing God
in images.[43] In this regard, the negative theology which
Adorno first observed in the work of Bloch and Benjamin was

to have a decisive influence upon his own later conception
of negative dialectics as "secularized metaphysics."[44] The
empirical intention behind Adorno's utopian urge required
an unswerving attention to the unique details of heteroge-
neous reality; he found the model for this cognitive method
in Benjamin's "microscopic gaze," with its uncanny ability
to interpret the general significance of concrete phenom-
ena.[45]

   To understand the nature of Benjamin's influence on
Adorno's theory of cognition we must consider Benjamin's
first major work, The Origin of German Tragic Drama (Ur-
sprung des deutschen Trauerspiels).[46] This remarkable work—
originally submitted as the author's Habilitationsschrift
to the University of Frankfurt—was known, for nearly thirty
years after its publication in 1928, only to a handful of
critics and philosophers, mostly acquaintances of the author.
It has begun to receive much acclaim with the revival of
Benjamin's work after the war, and it is rapidly becoming a
classic of modern criticism. Although the significance of
this book within Benjamin's entire work, and the precise
nature of its influence on the work of Adorno and others,
do not seem altogether clear, it is beyond question that
the Trauerspiel essay contained the seeds of many of Adorno's
later thematic and methodological concerns. The difficulties
in identifying and tracing the strands of influence from
Benjamin's work to Adorno's stem from the arcane nature of

the _Trauerspiel_ essay itself, which combines motifs from Platonism, Kantian idealism, mysticism and theology, and whose ostensible purpose is to illuminate the allegorical nature of some rather obscure, if not totally forgotten, German baroque dramatic works. The problems are increased by the abstruseness of Benjamin's style in this work. It says much about the tenor of Adorno's early intellectual development that he chose this esoteric work of Benjamin, rather than the works, say, of Hegel, Marx, or Lukács, as the initial model for his own version of dialectical philosophy. Buck-Morss has shown that Benjamin's _Trauerspiel_ essay, and the subsequent conversations based on it between Adorno and Benjamin at Königstein in the late twenties, played a determining role in their mutual adoption of Marxism as a philosophical framework.[47] The proof of this is that Adorno's 1931 lecture, "The Actuality of Philosophy," his manifesto calling for a genuinely dialectical and materialist philosophy, couched its program in terms and concepts borrowed largely from the language of Benjamin's work on the baroque _Trauerspiel_. Although Adorno's program for dialectical philosophy was not in fact an uncritical adoption of the methodological scaffolding of Benjamin's _Trauerspiel_--we shall discuss some of the differences shortly-- the influence of Benjamin's method and terminology can be seen throughout Adorno's later works, from the 1931 lecture to _Negative Dialectics_. What concerns us here are those

aspects of Benjamin's work, and especially of its introductory methodological essay, "Erkenntniskritische Vorrede" (translated "Epistemo-Critical Prologue" in the English version), which seem to have had a significant impact upon Adorno's view of cognition, and indirectly upon his theory of the essay.

In this methodological introduction Benjamin addressed himself to questions of burning interest to Adorno: What are the proper forms of philosophical discourse? What is the relationship between form and method? Benjamin began by making a distinction between "knowledge" and "truth." What one aims to do with knowledge is to acquire and possess it; whereas truth, which cannot actually be possessed, must instead be represented. "For knowledge, method is a way of acquiring its object--even by creating it in the consciousness; for truth it is self-representation, and is therefore immanent in it as form."[48] In making this distinction between knowledge and truth, Benjamin was in effect protesting the tendency in German philosophy, at least since the time of Kant, to take mathematical reasoning as the only legitimate model for valid knowledge. The prestige thus conferred upon mathematical reasoning led to the nineteenth-century ideal of "system" as the paradigmatic form of knowledge. With the advance of the positive sciences and the apotheosis of scientific method, philosophy of the traditional, speculative kind had come to be regarded by many as

obsolete metaphysics. Benjamin shared with many intellectuals

in the twenties, including Adorno, a dissatisfaction with

that state of affairs, and something of his anti-positivist

sentiment comes through in his remark on system in the

Trauerspiel introduction: "Inasmuch as it is determined by

the concept of system, philosophy is in danger of acommo-

dating itself to a syncretism which weaves a spider's web

between separate kinds of knowledge in an attempt to en-

snare the truth as if it were something which came flying

in from outside."[49] As a corrective, Benjamin posits a non-

acquisitive ideal for philosophy: truth as the representa-

tion of ideas. He sees in the treatise or esoteric essay

(which according to Benjamin derives from medieval scholas-

tic doctrine) the proper form for his alternate mode of

philosophy. Benjamin's defense of this form must have im-

pressed Adorno, for several key terms and insights of

Benjamin's argument would resurface later in Adorno's theory

of the essay. Benjamin's reflections on the treatise are

worth citing at length:

> Its method is essentially representation. Method is
> a digression. Representation as digression—such is
> the methodological nature of the treatise. The ab-
> sence of an uninterrupted purposeful structure is
> its primary characteristic. Tirelessly the process
> of thinking makes new beginnings, returning in a
> roundabout way to its original object. This contin-
> ual pausing for breath is the mode most proper to
> the process of contemplation. For by pursuing dif-
> ferent levels of meaning in its examination of one
> single object it receives both the incentive to be-
> gin again and the justification for its irregular
> rhythm. Just as mosaics preserve their majesty

despite their fragmentation into capricious parti-
cles, so philosophical contemplation is not lacking
in momentum. . . . The value of fragments of thought
is all the greater the less direct their relation-
ship to the underlying idea, and the brilliance of
the representation depends as much on this value as
the brilliance of the mosaic does on the quality of
the glass paste. The relationship between the minute
precision of the work and the proportions of the
sculptural or intellectual whole demonstrates that
truth-content is only to be grasped through immer-
sion in the most minute details of subject matter.[50]

Apart from the esoteric allusions and recondite analogies--

traits of Benjamin's style which held no little fascination

for Adorno--what strikes me as most important in this pas-

sage is Benjamin's intuition that the contours of philo-

sophical form are determined by the actual process of cog-

nition.[51] Here Benjamin's defense of the "new beginnings,"

digressions, and irregular rhythm of "fragments of thought"

prefigures Adorno's justification, in "Der Essay als Form,"

of the discontinuous, anti-systematic nature of the essay.

Benjamin's advocacy of "immersion in minute details"

alludes to his methodological principle of "unintentional

truth"[52]--a principle which was developed by Benjamin else-

where in the Trauerspiel study, and which came to play a

central role in Adorno's own cognitive method. Benjamin's

notion of unintentional truth is partly exemplified by the

statement that "the value of fragments of thought is all

the greater the less direct their relationship to the under-

lying idea." If truth, unlike knowledge, cannot be portrayed

in an uninterrupted continuum (such as the system), it is

because truth is not determined or exhausted by intention. "Truth is an intentionless state of being, made up of ideas. The proper approach to it is not therefore one of intention and knowledge, but rather a total immersion and absorption in it. Truth is the death of intention."[53] Long before the New Critics formulated their "intentional fallacy" doctrine, Benjamin had written, "No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener."[54] Benjamin took it as axiomatic that texts yielded up their most profound truths to the interpreter who posited "different levels of meaning" in the object, and who penetrated to the most minute textual details until, through imaginative interpretation, they crystallized in an unexpected "constellation" or idea. This practice, no doubt partly inspired by Benjamin's interest in cabalism, had the effect of charging even the apparently most insignificant phenomena with something of the resonance which esoteric writings had possessed for the mystics.[55] As Adorno wrote in his "Portrait of Walter Benjamin," "his 'essayism' consists in treating profane texts as though they were sacred."[56] Benjamin later referred to his method of interpretation as one of "profane illumination."[57]

Benjamin's axiom of unintentional truth confirmed what Adorno had already observed in his own musical experience. Indeed, music was an ideal test case for the concept of unintentional truth, because of its lack of any overt

representational meaning. Adorno held that music, no less
than other forms of art, was potentially a valid form of
cognition. In its own particular mode, music could articu-
late a critical response to society, even though its rela-
tionship to society remained indirect and problematic. But
as we have seen, Adorno believed that music could fulfill
this cognitive function only if the composer proceeded im-
manently, in strict observance of the demands of the musi-
cal material itself, without catering to contemporary
tastes and ideologies. As Adorno wrote in his 1932 essay,
"On the Social Situation of Music,"

> Music will be better, the more deeply it is able to
> express--in the antinomies of its own formal lan-
> guage--the exigency of the social condition and to
> call for change through the coded language of suf-
> fering. It is not for music to stare in helpless
> horror at society. It fulfills its social function
> more precisely when it presents social problems
> through its own material and according to its own
> formal laws--problems which music contains within
> itself in the innermost cells of its technique. The
> task of music as art thus enters into a parallel
> relationship to the task of social theory.[58]

For Adorno, the key to valid cognition--in music as well as
philosophy--was the integrity of the subject-object rela-
tionship. In the case of music, this was represented by the
relationship between the composer and the "sociohistorically
produced" material. Once again, Schoenberg was Adorno's
privileged example. At a time when Brecht and others as-
serted that art must ultimately be subordinated to the aims
of revolution, Adorno defended Schoenberg's experimental

music for remaining aloof from any form of instrumentaliza-
tion; for refusing to subordinate musical composition to any
a priori conscious intention.[59] In his 1932 essay on the
social function of music, Adorno argued that, in the current
conditions, in which music tended to be co-opted by the market
and made into a commodity, music had to remain "alienated"
from the public if it was to preserve its proper critical
function. He contrasted Schoenberg's music to certain kinds
of contemporary music which in different ways compromised
the integrity of the relationship between composer and
material--either by aiming at the immediate satisfaction of
contemporary audiences (Gebrauchsmusik, a precursor of to-
day's "musak"), by "quoting" musical forms from the past
without regard for the inner historical logic of the material
(e.g., Stravinsky's "objectivism"), or by placing music in
the service of some political or ideological intention.[60]
Adorno saw these attempts as so many kinds of aesthetic vol-
untarism: to subordinate composition to intention was to
falsify the subject-object relation inherent in musical com-
position, thus blocking the technical and social development
of music upon which music's genuine cognitive function de-
pends. Schoenberg was, by contrast, the more "dialectical"
composer: he "never behaved 'expressionistically,' super-
imposing subjective intentions upon heterogeneous material
in an authoritarian and inconsiderate manner." Instead,
Schoenberg worked upon and developed the formal problems

presented to the composer by the musical material itself: material which revealed, immanently, "the problems of the society which had produced that material and which presented in it social contradictions as technical problems."[61] In other words, he treated the musical material as though it revealed the "unintentional truth" about the society which had produced it.

Thus, both Benjamin's notion of unintentional truth and Schoenberg's approach to music reinforced Adorno's commitment to "immanent criticism," and confirmed his view of the nonidentity between the subject and the object of cognition. For, to immerse oneself in the concrete particulars of the object of interpretation, as urged by the principle of unintentional truth, or to compose music by following stringently the inner logic of the material, as suggested by Schoenberg's immanent approach, was--in the context of philosophical discourse--to break the spell of identity which arose from philosophies of consciousness which took the primacy of the subject for granted. As Adorno would argue in Negative Dialectics, the "dismantling of systems" (philosophies of identity) entailed treating the object as something more than an instance of the concept produced by a sovereign subject. "Carried through, the critique of identity is a groping for the preponderance of the object."[62] "Truth as concreteness," Adorno argues elsewhere in the same work, "compels our thinking to abide with minutiae. We are not to

philosophize about concrete things; we are to philosophize, rather, out of these things."[63]

But Adorno's attempt to recast the insights of Benjamin's <u>Trauerspiel</u> prologue within the framework of a dialectical, materialist philosophy was not without its problems. Benjamin's syncretic blend of Platonic, Kantian and theological motifs would not go neatly into Marxism without leaving a metaphysical residue. In retrospect there is much reason to believe that when Adorno and Benjamin undertook to transform the idealist theory of cognition of the <u>Trauerspiel</u> study into a Marxist theory of cognition—beginning with their Königstein talks in 1929—they were seriously underestimating the difficulties of that undertaking. While Adorno's lecture went far toward revising many of Benjamin's central concepts, divesting them of their theological implications, some ambiguities remained. The latent theoretical differences between Benjamin's <u>Trauerspiel</u> prologue and Adorno's 1931 program would come to the surface in the Benjamin-Adorno correspondence of the mid-thirties, in which Adorno—his earlier revisions now sharpened into outright criticisms—invoked the "original" <u>Trauerspiel</u> program (that is to say, his own interpretation of it) against the "positive-theological" tendencies of certain writings of Benjamin which had been commissioned by the Frankfurt School of Social Research.[64] The early differences between the two thinkers are relevant to their differing views on philosoph-

ical form, and we must give some attention to them here in order to anticipate our comparison of Benjamin and Adorno in Chapter V.

These differences may be illustrated by comparing Benjamin's remarks on "constellations" in the <u>Trauerspiel</u> work to the use Adorno made of this concept in his 1931 address. The concept of constellations had both a methodological and an aesthetic-formal significance in Benjamin's work, as well as in Adorno's adaptation of it. It must be understood in the context of Benjamin's unique and idiosyncratic attempt to establish a Kantian empirical grounding for a quasi-Platonic theory of ideas. Constellations--a term with mystical and astrological connotations in Benjamin's use of it--were Benjamin's answer to the question of how concepts, phenomena and ideas were related to one another. His answer is suggested in the rather cabalistic analogy: "Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars." Ideas, in Benjamin's conception, were related to phenomena as "their objective, virtual arrangement, their objective interpretation." Ideas were thus, in an almost spatial sense, "the representation of phenomena."[65] But the phenomena could not be represented directly, "in their crude empirical state, adulterated by appearances, but only in their basic elements, redeemed."[66] It was the mediating role of concepts to effect this division of phenomena into their basic elements prior to their representation in ideational patterns or configurations. Benjamin's

notion that ideas were the representation of phenomena was meant to confer upon the empirical particulars of experience an ontological "dignity" which was in marked contrast to the inferior status reserved for them in strict Platonic ideal-ism.[67] Indeed, the Kantian respect for empirical reality often merges in Benjamin's prologue with the theological urge of "redeeming" phenomena, as may be seen in Benjamin's statement that the construction of constellations "brings about two things at a single stroke: the salvation of phenomena and the representation of ideas."[68]

The suggestiveness of Benjamin's methodological reflections for Adorno may be gauged by the latter's statement, in a 1934 letter to Benjamin, that "you have in the Baroque book redeemed induction."[69] By this Adorno apparently meant that Benjamin's method based itself on the observation of empirical reality while preserving, unlike the prevailing positivism, an interest in questions (such as "truth") traditionally reserved for the province of metaphysics. In her study, The Origins of Negative Dialectics, Susan Buck-Morss rightly stresses the importance of constellations for Adorno's own method: the construction of constellations was, for him, tantamount to the writings of essays.[70] In "The Actuality of Philosophy," Adorno described the task of dialectical philosophy in terms remarkably similar to those used by Benjamin to describe constellations, with the difference that Adorno now placed the function of constellations within a Marxist

framework: "Interpretation of the unintentional through the juxtaposition of elements isolated by analysis and the illumination of reality by the power of such interpretation; that is the program of every genuine materialist knowledge."[71]

Ironically, however, Benjamin's _Trauerspiel_ theory of cognition was in fact based on a mystical theory of language which was fundamentally incompatible with Adorno's empirical and materialist intentions.[72] The representation of truth in ideas or constellations was inseparably linked to Benjamin's theory of "naming," a theory which he developed in several early essays prior to the _Trauerspiel_.[73] According to Benjamin, normal perception, like language since the Fall, was corrupt; the primordial harmony (identity) between word and thing, percept and object, had disappeared. The representation of ideas was meant to recapture such a prelapsarian mode of perception. "Ideas are displayed without intention, in the act of naming, and they have to be renewed in philosophical contemplation. In this renewal the primordial mode of apprehending words is restored."[74] Such a renewal could only be accomplished through the medium of language, and only by dint of the "mimetic" capacities inherent in language. For Benjamin, mimesis was a central feature not only of language, but of cognition in general. He understood mimesis, not as the direct verbal copy or representation of reality in words, but as the power of language to evoke the

"nonsensuous correspondences" between things.[75] Benjamin understood naming as the heightened power of language to lift phenomena out of the realm of mute appearances, mimetically "transforming" them into a new verbal modality (that of constellations) in which their true relationships could be perceived.[76] Naming achieved "the translation of the language of things into the language of man,"[77] thus approximating the "primordial form of perception" referred to above. Clearly, this restorative view of language was closely related to Benjamin's urge to "redeem" material reality. In the early essays, Benjamin's own language was at times frankly theological: "In naming the mental being of man communicates itself to God."[78]

From the standpoint of Adorno's "materialist" reinterpretation of the Trauerspiel program there was a twofold epistemological problem, concerning both the status of the constellations and the role of the cognitive subject in creating and observing them. Were the constellations—as Buck-Morss claims—"historically specific" ideas to be constructed by the cognitive subject, who used concepts to arrange phenomena into meaningful patterns, thereby opening them up for interpretation?[79] Or were they rather, as Benjamin's text often suggests, "essences," "timeless constellations,"[80] given once and for all to the passive contemplation of an enraptured observer? Benjamin's prologue was equivocal. However, to the extent that Benjamin saw the

function of language as that of restoring the alleged harmony between word and thing, his theory tended to de-emphasize the contribution of an active subject in the construction of constellations.[81] Whereas Benjamin implied that constellation-ideas were pre-established essences, Adorno stressed that these constellations--which he also called "groupings," "historical images," "models," "figures," and "trial-configurations"[82]--were "not magically sent by the gods to be taken in and venerated," but were rather "instruments of human reason," which "must be produced by human beings and are legitimated in the last analysis alone by the fact that reality crystallizes about them in striking conclusiveness."[83] Adorno's conception of constellations was similar to Max Weber's notion of "ideal types"--heuristic models constructed from the elements of observed phenomena and used by the observer as hypothetical explanations or interpretations of those phenomena.[84]

In Adorno's view, constellations were the essayist-philosopher's means for "the manipulation of conceptual material." Adorno advocates the use of them as an _ars inveniendi_, a method of discovery or "invention" of thematic material. But the relationship of the philosopher to the material was not only rhetorical in nature; it was also cognitive. Adorno, characteristically, saw this relationship as the dialectical interaction between the philosopher and his conceptual material (subject and object), and his term for

this interaction was "exact fantasy": "But the organon of
this _ars inveniendi_ is fantasy. An exact fantasy; fantasy
which abides strictly within the material which the sciences
present to it, and which reaches out beyond them only in the
smallest aspects of their arrangement: aspects, granted,
which fantasy itself must originally generate."[85] The oxy-
moron "exact fantasy" may be said to represent Adorno's the-
ory of dialectical cognition in a nutshell: it suggests the
subject's respect for the precise empirical qualities of the
objects of experience, while at the same time conveying the
spontaneous, active moment of cognition which is no less
necessary for the interpretation of unintentional truth.[86]

Moreover, Adorno's 1931 address placed far less em-
phasis on the representational function of constellations
than did Benjamin's _Trauerspiel_ prologue.[87] To be sure,
Benjamin's influence was apparent in Adorno's use of the
term "historical images" (_geschichtliche Bilder_) as a syno-
nym for constellations. The term implies some kind of ade-
quation between the philosopher's conceptual-linguistic con-
structions and the phenomena they describe. But the rela-
tionship between them was, Adorno insisted, ultimately a non-
identical one. Adorno denied that the philosopher's "images"
could provide a concrete picture of the world, for any at-
tempt to represent the world positively, as in an image,
would be

> to portray reality as "meaningful" and thereby jus-
> tify it. Every such justification of that which

> exists is prohibited by the fragmentation in being
> itself. While our images of perceived reality may
> very well be <u>Gestalten</u>, the world in which we live
> is not; it is constituted differently than out of
> mere images of perception.[88]

Adorno therefore stressed the negative (what Derrideans would now call the "deconstructive") function of constellations. The materialist interpretation of reality through constellations was a kind of "riddle-solving." The phenomenal world posed problems to the interpreting philosopher--much as, in Schoenberg's compositions, the musical material posed immanent problems to the composer--whose solution could only come by working through the material in such a way that the problem itself was finally dissolved and transcended. Adorno's argument--directed, in context, against the Kantian "dualism of the intelligible and the empirical"--may be taken as his response to Benjamin's representational view of constellations. The following passage should dispel the notion that Adorno saw the function of constellations as one of mimesis or representation:

> He who interprets by searching behind the phenome-
> nal world for a world-in-itself (<u>Welt an sich</u>) which
> forms its foundation and support, acts mistakenly
> like someone who wants to find in the riddle the
> reflection of a being which lies behind it, a being
> mirrored in the riddle, in which it is contained.
> Instead, the function of riddle-solving is to light
> up the riddle-Gestalt like lightning and to negate
> it (<u>aufzuheben</u>), not to persist behind the riddle
> and imitate it. [89]

The aim of riddle-solving, like the aim of materialist cognition itself, was not to imitate the world but to change it. For Adorno, however--contrary to what Marx had said on

the subject in his "Theses on Feuerbach"[90]--interpretation

was itself a way of changing the world. As he put it in what

was perhaps the most sanguine statement he ever made concern-

ing the relationship between theory and praxis:

> The interpretation of given reality and its aboli-
> tion are connected to each other, not, of course,
> in the sense that reality is negated in the concept,
> but that out of the construction of a configuration
> of reality the demand for its [reality's] real change
> always follows promptly. The change-causing gesture
> of the riddle process--not its mere resolution as
> such--provides the image of resolutions to which
> materialist praxis alone has access. Materialism
> has named this relationship with a name that is phil-
> osophically certified: dialectic.[91]

Although Adorno did not, in this early address, give any

developed examples of the dialectic at work, he left no doubt

as to the materialist intention of his program: the concepts

to be employed in the interpretation of reality were the key

categories of Marxist theory--ideology, class, and commodity

fetishism.[92] Whereas, in Benjamin's pre-Marxist formulation,

constellations were to enable a sort of theological "redemp-

tion" of phenomena through the restorative power of naming,

in Adorno's view the constellations were critical tools for

the diagnosing, and changing, of social reality.

Such was the paradoxical influence of Benjamin's

Trauerspiel prologue upon Adorno's first formulation of his

program for dialectical philosophy. It seems surprising in

retrospect that Adorno should have taken as a paradigm for

Marxist dialectics what was, after all, the thoroughgoing

idealism of Benjamin's approach. I think the explanation

lies in Adorno's dissatisfaction with the crude epistemol-
ogy of the prevailing Marxist orthodoxy--for which Benjamin's
esoteric Trauerspiel study must have seemed to furnish a dia-
lectical antidote. Buck-Morss is no doubt right to consider
Adorno's 1931 lecture an attempted Aufhebung or transcendence
of Benjamin's Trauerspiel methodology--a transformation
which would annul the theological aspects and preserve the
dialectical aspects of Benjamin's theory of cognition.[93] But
that transformation was less smooth, and more problematical,
than Buck-Morss implies; as I have tried to show, the dif-
ferences in substance between the two theories somewhat
overshadow their terminological parallels. In any case, the
contrasts we have mentioned here are consistent with the
differences which arose in the theoretical dispute between
the two thinkers several years later, and in many ways these
theoretical differences shed light on the different formal
and rhetorical strategies practiced by Benjamin and Adorno
in their respective writings. Adorno was undeniably the su-
perior philosopher and theoretician, and when it comes to
evaluating the two positions, his 1931 program articulates
a more rigorous and less mystified philosophical program
than did Benjamin's earlier Trauerspiel study. But it is one
thing to formulate a program for dialectical philosophy,
and quite another thing to live up to it in practice. In a
later chapter it will be argued that Adorno's essayism fell
short of the normative standards he set for philosophical

form in his theory of the essay, and that, in some ways, Benjamin's writings came closer to fulfilling the ideals of Adorno's theory than did the essays of Adorno himself.

C. Some Variants in Marxist Dialectics and Aesthetics

"The whole is the false."

> Theodor W. Adorno, Minima
> Moralia, p. 50.

It is not mere coincidence that the three theories of the essay with which this study is principally concerned should in each case reflect, to a great extent, the particular version of Marxist dialectics which each theorist forged for himself. Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno belonged to a generation of German leftist intellectuals whose backgrounds were similar (many of them came from middle-class, assimilated Jewish families), and who, trained in idealist philosophy, found themselves "well-placed," as Irving Wohlfarth has put it, "to mediate between idealism and materialism, and to effect the junction between the political and the aesthetic avant-gardes." Thanks largely to the efforts of such intellectuals in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, Wohlfarth argues, "a historically unprecedented alliance was formed between Marxism and aesthetics, upper-bourgeois origins and post-bourgeois aspirations."[94]

Lukács' work practically inaugurated this "transi-

tion from idealism to materialism" which marked the efforts of Marxist aestheticians in the twenties and thirties. His _Theory of the Novel_ (publ. 1920), an elaboration of Hegel's ideas on the historicity of aesthetic form, in many ways laid the groundwork for subsequent Marxist theories of literature.[95] In that work Lukács demonstrated that the form of the contemporary novel reflected the general fragmentation of experience in modern society--as registered in the novel's "problematic hero." And Lukács' _History and Class Consciousness_, by far the most important Marxist work of the generation, had a lasting influence upon Benjamin and Adorno, as well as upon the other members of the Frankfurt School, with which both were eventually associated.[96]

Despite these lines of influence, there were important differences among the thinkers as well. It would be difficult to imagine two more opposite versions of Marxism--politically, aesthetically, epistemologically--than those of Lukács and Adorno. It is necessary, in the context of the present study, to situate Adorno's theory of the essay with respect to the Marxist work of Georg Lukács. For if Adorno's "Der Essay als Form" responded explicitly to Lukács' essay on the essay in _Soul and Form_, it was also, implicitly, a response to Lukács' later Marxism. In this section I will therefore compare the Marxist view of Lukács and Adorno, attempting to show that their philosophical differences correspond to their different views of the essay form. It will

be seen that here, as elsewhere, the figure of Walter

Benjamin plays an important mediating role in Adorno's work:

Adorno's reaction to Lukács was strongly conditioned by the

ideas he shared with Benjamin and, in particular, by his

reading of Benjamin's study of the baroque Trauerspiel.

The most important theoretical advance of History

and Class Consciousness, besides the markedly Hegelian ori-

entation of the work,[97] was Lukács' treatment of the concept

of "reification" (Verdinglichung). Lukács' treatment of this

concept was essentially an extrapolation from Marx's ideas

on commodity fetishism, but it also relied upon Max Weber's

thesis of the rationalization of experience in modern soci-

ety.[98] Marx had used the notion of commodity fetishism to

analyze the alienated social and economic relations of soci-

ety under capitalism. Under the commodity form of production,

Marx claimed,

> the social character of men's labour appears to them
> as an objective character stamped upon the product
> of that labour; because the relation of the pro-
> ducers to the sum total of their own labour is pre-
> sented to them as a social relation, existing not be-
> tween themselves, but between the products of their
> labour. This is the reason why the products of
> labour become commodities, social things whose qual-
> ities are at the same time perceptible and imper-
> ceptible by the senses. . . . There it is a definite
> social relation between men, that assumes, in their
> eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between
> things.[99]

Marx argued that bourgeois economists were unable to de-

mystify the commodity form of production because they began

their analysis "post festum," once the categories of bour-

geois economic theory had already come to appear inevitable.

> The characters that stamp products as commodities,
> and whose establishment is a necessary preliminary
> to the circulation of commodities, have already ac-
> quired the stability of natural, self-understood
> forms of social life, before man seeks to decipher,
> not their historical character, for in his eyes
> they are immutable, but their meaning.[100]

Generalizing from Marx's analysis of commodity fetish-
ism, Lukács designated commodities "the central, structural
problem of capitalist society in all its aspects," and
called upon the analysis of reification "to yield a model
of all the objective forms of bourgeois society together
with all the subjective forms corresponding to them."[101]
Whereas Marx had analyzed commodity fetishism primarily
within the sphere of political economy and economic theory,
Lukács argued that reification manifested itself even at
the highest and most abstract levels of bourgeois thought.
Taking Kantian "Critical Philosophy" as his privileged
example, Lukács argued that bourgeois science and philos-
ophy were prisoners of their own reified categories. Thus,
Kantian philosophy could not go beyond the dualistic
"antinomies" of bourgeois philosophy--form and content,
subject and object, fact and value, theory and practice--
because these rigid distinctions were themselves the symp-
toms of the increasing "rationalization" of existence
under capitalism. As all areas of social and economic life
became increasingly rationalized and calculable, the very

categories of thought took on the mystified appearance of commodities. They became thing-like, "second nature," setting "structural limits" to the knowledge and experience of people living in capitalist society. "The impossibility of comprehending and 'creating' the union of form and content concretely instead of as the basis for a purely formal calculus leads to the insoluble dilemma of freedom and necessity, of voluntarism and fatalism."[102] According to Lukács, passive "contemplation" became the predominant mode of cognitive experience in philosophy, science, and industry. Such reified thinking was incapable (to employ Lukács' Hegelian-Marxist terminology) of grasping the "dialectical" process in which "subject" and "object" interacted in history to produce the "totality" of social life. Marx had claimed that the material conditions of social reality determined human consciousness; Lukács seemed to confirm this by showing that bourgeois thought displayed the same ahistorical, distorted structure as the commodity mode of production. Susan Buck-Morss summarizes this point as follows:

> Just as commodities in the realm of production took
> on a reified form, became "fetishes" which appeared
> cut off from the social process of their production,
> so bourgeois theory's reified conception of the
> "object" as an immutable "given" obscured the socio-
> historical process through which it had come to be.
> And just as the reified commodities took on an ab-
> stract exchange value, divorced from their social
> use value, so the reification of bourgeois logic was
> manifested in its abstract separation of form and
> content.[103]

The influence of Lukács' History and Class Con-
sciousness upon the cultural criticism of Benjamin and Adorno
--and, through their works, upon the Frankfurt School as a
whole--may be partly explained by the wide range of phenom-
ena to which it could be applied. Not only did the Marxist
dialectics expounded by Lukács provide a comprehensive cri-
tique of classical German philosophy; it also suggested a
way of transcending the positivistic tendencies of "mechani-
cal Marxism" as it had developed during the Second Interna-
tional and, implicitly, under the Comintern as well.[104]
More specifically, the concept of reification enabled Benjamin
and Adorno--although in different ways, and with some dis-
agreements in the thirties--to sharpen their aesthetic theo-
ries, to formulate their respective theories of cognition,
and to refine their concrete analyses of works of art.[105]
Thus, for example, Adorno would employ the concept of rei-
fication in his analysis of contemporary music, demonstrating
the effects of reification on music at several distinct
levels: in the sphere of circulation, which turned art-works
into commodities to be consumed, in the internal structure
of works, and in the audience's reception of them.[106]

But the differences between Lukács and Adorno were
more telling than their affinities. These differences, both
political and philosophical in nature, become apparent when
one turns from the descriptive, diagnostic side of Lukács'
argument in History and Class Consciousness, to its prescriptive

aspect. This was the thesis that correct knowledge of reality, and consequently correct praxis, was possible only if one adopted the historical standpoint of the proletariat. Lukács' argument went back to Hegel and Marx, who shared Vico's principle that history was a self-creating process: the human subject came to know history by making it.[107] The bourgeoisie, mystified by the capitalist mode of production, possessed an economic and ideological interest in maintaining the status quo. It could therefore not attain the perspective of a universal class or self-creating subject of history. Only the proletariat, by virtue of its role in the process of production, had a cognitive and practical interest in changing the course of history. Only this social class could hope to discover "the Archimedean point from which the whole of reality can be overthrown," thereby becoming "the indentical subject-object" of history.[108] Lukács did not equate this ideal perspective with the empirical consciousness of the contemporary proletariat, which he knew to be less than ideal, but with an "imputed" class consciousness, to be embodied and safeguarded by a vanguard--then the Communist Party.[109]

For various reasons, Lukács' argument was anathema to Adorno's way of thinking. The most obvious reason was political: Adorno did not share Lukács' confidence in the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, nor did he accept the Leninist theory of the Communist Party as the van-

guard of the working class. Adorno considered theory, rather than praxis, to be the arbiter of truth. Truth was not the reified possession of a particular social class or its representatives.[110] But this political disagreement between Lukács and Adorno reflected philosophical differences which are more important for understanding their conflicting views on cognition and, ultimately, their theories of the essay as well. These differences may be illustrated by contrasting their positions with respect to the categories of subject, totality, and identity.

It may be said (as I argued in Chapter II) that Lukács found in Marxism the total system he had been seeking in his early essays. Lukács' dialectical method--which he claimed was the basis of "orthodox Marxism"--took the concept of "totality" as its guiding principle.[111] In the central essay of History and Class Consciousness, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," Lukács construed totality in a Fichtean sense, as the creation of a conscious subject.[112] The primacy of the conscious subject was the philosophical thread connecting History and Class Consciousness to his earlier works, Soul and Form and Theory of the Novel.[113] Both the hermeneutic method of the early Lukács and his later use of Marxist dialectics posited history as something which could be created, known, and represented by a sovereign conscious subject--although the two methods differed radically over the nature of that subject and of its

ultimate task. For Dilthey and the early Lukács, the rele-
vant subject had been the individual psychological subject;
for the Marxist Lukács, it was the proletariat itself.

Adorno was much less sanguine than Lukács about the
claims of an autonomous knowing subject or its ability to
grasp the totality of existence. For one thing, Adorno ap-
preciated more than Lukács the challenge presented by
Freudian psychoanalysis to the notion of a fully conscious,
rational subject.[114] Furthermore, Adorno's commitment to
the notions of nonidentity and unintentional truth was ul-
timately incompatible with the theory of cognition expressed
in History and Class Consciousness. He agreed with Lukács'
cognitive premise that the most important thing, the "most
vital interaction," was the "dialectical relation between
subject and object in the historical process."[115] But if
Lukács' dialectics successfully challenged the prevailing
orthodox "materialist" theory of cognition, it was only by
reinserting into the dialectic a central premise of the
Hegelian idealism which it had pretended to transcend--the
premise of identity. In Adorno's view, to reduce the rela-
tionship between subject and object to the unmediated, un-
dialectical one of identity was to cut off the very basis
of valid cognition. Adorno's non-totalizing cognitive method,
influenced by Benjamin, projected at once a more modest and
more spontaneous role for the cognitive subject. In this
regard Adorno's theory was more Kantian than Hegelian, even

though he believed it was necessary to go beyond the idealist limitations of Kantian thought. Whereas Lukács assumed that a collective subject could transcend the reified consciousness of bourgeois individuals, Adorno held that the concrete, situated, individual subject, whatever its class position, was the only genuine subject of cognition.[116] Moreover, he considered the Kantian "antinomies" to be authentic problems of consciousness, grounded in historical reality. They were not merely ideological chimeras induced by reification, nor could they be dispelled by revolutionary will power. For Adorno, then, the correct approach was to preserve the tension between subject and object, not to assume a standpoint which would prematurely liquidate that tension between them. From Adorno's "Kantian" perspective, Lukács' projection of a subject-object indentity could only appear to be a metaphysical leap of faith. As Lukács himself admitted in his preface to the 1967 edition of History and Class Consciousness: "Thus the proletariat seen as the identical subject-object of the real history of mankind is no materialist consummation that overcomes the constructions of idealism. It is rather an attempt to out-Hegel Hegel, it is an edifice boldly erected above every possible reality and thus attempts objectively to surpass the Master himself."[117] It was as though the proletariat were to become the historical embodiment of Hegel's Absolute Idea.

Adorno was no less sensitive to the metaphysical

implications of Lukács' use of the concept of history.

Lukács' argument in <u>History and Class Consciousness</u> resembled Hegel's notion of "universal history" as a progressive, meaningful totality, produced by consciousness, and moving toward the reconciliation of contradictions and antagonisms.[118] Adorno, like most members of the Frankfurt School, was suspicious of all attempts to define history as linear "progress."[119] His strategy for debunking the metaphysics of universal history was to employ the concept of nature as the necessary dialectical counterpart of the concept of history. Lukács had followed the example of Rickert and Dilthey in understanding historical phenomena as something produced by human beings rather than by inert "nature." But Lukács had neglected those aspects of natural being which did not fit his view of history as something entirely produced by a rational subject. In his efforts to secure the identity of subject and object--and perhaps to correct Engel's positivistic attempt, in <u>The Dialectics of Nature</u>, to bring nature under the laws of materialist dialectics--Lukács had minimized the distance between immediate, physical, surd nature, on the one hand, and rational human activity on the other. He claimed, for example, that "Nature is a societal category."[120] In his 1932 address, "The Idea of Natural History," Adorno argued that "nature" and "history" were critical concepts which should not be used in isolation but only in dialectical counterpoint to each other.[121] Used in isolation,

apart from their "concrete unity" in a given analysis, either concept, nature or history, was in danger of turning into an ontological first principle.[122] Characteristically, Adorno's argument was inseparable from the language in which he expressed it. He used the figure of chiasmus to stress the dialectical interdependence of the two concepts, arguing that it was necessary "to understand historical being at its most specifically historical as natural being," and conversely "to grasp nature as historical being, even where it seems most grounded in itself."[123]

Lukács' insistence upon the methodological and ontological primacy of totality, "the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts,"[124] presupposed that history was a continuous whole, moving toward a meaningful unity--the positive utopia of a classless society. This utopian assumption was the ethical determinant of the relation between theory and practice in History and Class Consciousness.[125] The problem with this assumption, from Adorno's point of view, was that it came very close to being a kind of theodicy.[126] To identify with the totality, and to posit the inherent rationality of its movement, was tacitly to justify individual suffering in the name of the harmonious whole. Adorno was more sensitive to the irrational tendencies of history, and this was a feeling he shared with Walter Benjamin and Max Horkheimer. Contrary to Hegel and Lukács, Adorno believed that history did not constitute a

"structural whole" but was, rather, "discontinuous."[127] There-
fore Adorno's cognitive method was designed to focus upon
the gaps and discontinuities in the historical process, the
transitory, "one-time-only" configurations of present phe-
nomena which tended to be crushed or left behind in the ir-
rational movement of history.[128] Adorno's historical pes-
simism, although present to some degree in his earlier writ-
ings, increased after Benjamin's death and the catastrophic
events of the forties. In his last writings, "Theses on the
Philosophy of History," Benjamin had lamented, "There is no
document of civilization which is not at the same time a
document of barbarism."[129] In the same vein Adorno wrote
later in **Negative Dialectics**, not without hyperbole, "Uni-
versal history must be construed and denied . . . No univer-
sal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there
is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb. . .
It is the horror that verifies Hegel and stands him on his
head."[130] Although one may find in Adorno's later writings
an occasional hint of hope for reconciliation between nature
and history, for the most part he used the concepts of to-
tality and universal history in a critical and negative,
rather than affirmative, way.[131] Lukács' endorsement of to-
tality in **History and Class Consciousness** must have reminded
Adorno of Hegel's "Ruse of Reason"--the universal or idea
which sends the particular (the individual) out to fight its
battles and to carry out its grand design, while remaining

itself unharmed through it all. "The true is the whole," Hegel said in the "Preface" to the Phenomenology of Mind.[132] Perhaps we are now in a position to understand the sense in which Adorno's entire philosophy of negative dialectics is contained in Adorno's aphoristic response: "The whole is the false."[133]

Thus, Adorno's philosophical positions are in many respects antithetical to Lukács' views. At each level we have examined--epistemological, political-ideological, and ethical--Adorno polemically opposed what he perceived as Lukács' privileging of the whole over the part, the general over the particular phenomenon. As we will see, this basic opposition between Lukács and Adorno holds true both for their aesthetic views and for their theories of the essay. But Adorno's theory of the essay did not spring full-blown from his reaction to the Hegelianizing tendencies of Lukács' History and Class Consciousness. Once again, it was Walter Benjamin who provided Adorno with the stimulus and first working model of a nontotalizing cognitive method. As Adorno described Benjamin's methodological intention in his later "Portrait of Walter Benjamin" (1950),

> He sees his task not in reconstructing the totality of bourgeois society but rather in examining its blinded, nature-bound and diffuse elements under a microscope. His micrological and fragmentary method therefore never entirely integrated the idea of universal mediation, which in Hegel and Marx produces the totality. He never wavered in his fundamental conviction that the smallest cell of observed reality offsets the rest of the world.[134]

The influence of Benjamin's "micrological method" on Adorno, as well as the ethical significance it held for him, may be inferred from his 1931 address, "The Actuality of Philosophy." Adorno began by rejecting

> the illusion that earlier philosophical enterprises began with: that the power of thought is sufficient to grasp the totality of the real. No justifying reason could rediscover itself in a reality whose order and form suppresses every claim to reason; only polemically does reason present itself to the knower as total reality, while only in traces and ruins is it prepared to hope that it will ever come across correct and just reality (emphasis added).[135]

Traces and ruins: it is worth emphasizing the resonance of this image, with its unmistakeable echoes from Benjamin (and Bloch), for Adorno's theory of the essay. We noted earlier that Benjamin's methodological prologue to the Trauerspiel study suggested to Adorno a crucial mediating link between cognitive method and aesthetic form. But Benjamin's work had an even more profound influence upon Adorno than has previously been suggested. The key to this influence is to be found, this time, not in the explicit methodological statements of the Trauerspiel introduction—whose legacy for Adorno's theory was ambiguous and problematic, as we have seen—but in the final section of the book, "Trauerspiel and Allegory," and particularly in Benjamin's polemical defense of the baroque allegory in contrast to the "classical symbol."[136] Benjamin's remarks in that context strongly prefigure Adorno's theory of the essay. A brief examination of Benjamin's ideas on allegory should also help

to understand the differences between Lukács and Adorno on aesthetic matters.

Benjamin's elaborate argument, interspersed with esoteric and scholarly quotations, is too complex for us to attempt more than a schematic summary of the relevant points. In "Trauerspiel and Allegory," the third and final section of The Origin of German Tragic Drama, Benjamin sets out to rescue baroque allegory from the disfavor and misunderstanding into which this form of expression had fallen due to the post-romantic bias in favor of "the primacy of classicism as the entelechy of baroque literature."[137] According to Benjamin, the significance of baroque allegory--as expressed primarily in the baroque emblem-books and in the Trauerspiel genre ("mourning play," which Benjamin distinguishes from baroque Tragödie, or tragedy proper)--had been eclipsed, since the eighteenth century, by the romantic appropriation of the "classical symbol."[138] For the poetics of classical humanism, the plastic, artistic, "profane" (i.e. not religious or mystical) symbol was the ideal form for expressing the "apotheosis of existence in the individual who is perfect . . ."[139] It expressed the "will to symbolic totality venerated by humanism in the human figure."[140] This was overlaid historically with the romantic aesthetics of the symbol, in which "the beautiful is supposed to merge with the divine in an unbroken whole."[141] Thus, for classicism, the artistic symbol was "the image of organic totality."[142]

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The baroque allegory develops as its "speculative counter-part."[143] Benjamin articulates the poetics of baroque allegory in contrast to classicism:

> In the field of allegorical intuition, the image is
> a fragment, a rune. Its beauty as a symbol evaporates
> when the light of divine learning falls upon it. The
> false appearance of totality is extinguished . . . .
> By its very essence classicism was not permitted to
> behold the lack of freedom, the imperfection, the
> collapse of the physical, beautiful, nature. But be-
> neath its extravagant pomp, this is precisely what
> baroque allegory proclaims, with unprecedented em-
> phasis. . . . It is as something incomplete and im-
> perfect that objects stare out from the allegorical
> structure.[144]

In Benjamin's view the formal, semiotic difference between the classical symbol and the "amorphous fragment" of baroque allegory not only reflects two distinct modes of aesthetic perception, but also reveals a more general opposition between the Weltanschauung of classicism and that of baroque. Thus, the baroque allegory distinguishes itself from the integration and harmony of classicism by its more pessimistic, melancholic vision of history, in which the harmonious relation between history and nature, between human action and divine creation, can no longer be taken for granted.

> Whereas in the symbol destruction is idealized and
> the transfigured face of nature is revealed in the
> light of redemption, in allegory the observer is con-
> fronted with the facies hippocratica of history as a
> petrified, primordial landscape. . . . This is the
> heart of the allegorical way of seeing, of the
> baroque, secular explanation of history as the Passion
> of the world; its importance resides solely in the
> stations of its decline.[145]

Benjamin coins the term "nature-history physiognomy" to con-

vey the metaphysical meaning of baroque allegory. Its formal

principle is one of fragmentation. In the semiotics of the

Trauerspiel play itself, the fragment corresponds allegori-

cally to the "ruin":

> In the ruin history has physically merged into the
> setting. And in this guise history does not assume
> the form of the process of an eternal life so much
> as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby de-
> clares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are,
> in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm
> of things.[146]

This is the ultimate meaning of baroque allegory for

Benjamin: history as destruction and decay. "Nature remained

the great teacher for the writers of this period," Benjamin

remarks. For the baroque writers "saw in nature eternal tran-

sience, and here alone did the writers of this generation

recognize history."[147] And one might add, it was in this

aesthetically coded historical-philosophical message that

Benjamin recognized the relevance of baroque allegory for

his own generation. The situation of baroque literature

after the Thirty Years War seemed to offer certain parallels

to the situation of contemporary German literature "after

the collapse of classical German culture." The allegorical

mode was appropriate for such periods of historical and ar-

tistic "decadence," which often give rise to artistic exper-

iment and innovation. Like the baroque writers, the modern

expressionists displayed "an unremitting artistic will,"

which manifested itself above all in exaggeration, in "the

desire for a vigorous style of language, which would make it

seem equal to the violence of world-events."[148]

Benjamin's _Trauerspiel_ theory might seem like an implausible source for Adorno's theory of the essay, until we discover that many of the characteristics attributed by Benjamin to the baroque allegorical fragment--its "eccentric and dialectical movement between extremes,"[149] its eschewing of "beauty" and harmonious totality as aesthetic norms, its concentration on the overdetermined detail, its ability to counter the claims of "universal history" by juxtaposing to it the signs of suffering nature; in short, its paradoxical capacity to evoke the problematic state of the world by its very unfinished and problematic character as fragment--all of these will be attributed by Adorno to the essay form itself. Whether Benjamin's argument can in fact be defended as an accurate historical account of the baroque allegory is beside the point here. Nor would one have to probe far to uncover significant differences of detail and emphasis between Benjamin's theory of allegory and Adorno's theory of the essay. What matters here is the general suggestiveness of Benjamin's argument for Adorno's thinking, its impact upon the fundamental insights and dichotomies from which his theory of the essay is constructed. It is likely that Benjamin's polemical defense of the baroque fragment reinforced Adorno's objections to Lukács' philosophy of totality and identity. For if Lukács posited history as something immanently meaningful for the sovereign rational subject,

this was not unlike Benjamin's characterization of classical symbolism, with its "will to symbolic totality," its veneration of the human subject, and its idealized view of history. On the other hand, Benjamin's vindication of the allegorical fragment--with its intimations of the problematic nature of art and of history--could easily have inspired Adorno's "logic of disintegration," with its assumption of nonidentity between the human subject and the object world.[150]

These alliances and polarities seem confirmed when one compares Lukács' "classicism" to the "modernism" of Benjamin and Adorno. Adorno was right to characterize Lukács' aesthetics as a kind of classicism.[151] Even Lukács' earliest essays, which reveal their author's interest in a variety of minor and nonholistic forms such as essay, fragment, and dialogue, are marked by a longing for the lost harmony and totality of classical Greece. Lukács' holistic tendencies became even more pronounced in his later theory of realism, with its dominant categories of mimesis, totality and "typicality."[152] It is significant that in his later essay, "The Ideology of Modernism," Lukács credited Benjamin's _Trauerspiel_ theory of allegory with having formulated the definitive aesthetics of modernism.[153] According to Lukács, Benjamin had proven that, by rejecting the assumption of "an immanent meaning to human existence" ("the basis of traditional art," according to Lukács), modernist allegory led to "the negation of art."[154] The basic error of the modernist-allegorical ap-

proach, argued Lukács, was "to raise the individual detail in its immediate particularity (without generalizing its content) to the level of abstraction."[155] To the "abstract particularity" of modernism Lukács opposed the notion of "typicality"--"that fusion of the general and the particular which is the essence of realistic art."[156] Thus, Lukács' defense of realism essentially repeats the classical preference for symbol over allegory.[157]

Just as Benjamin's <u>Trauerspiel</u> study had challenged the classical elevation of symbol above allegory, so Adorno's aesthetics were polemically opposed to Lukács' updated classicism. Both Lukács and Adorno believed that art had an intrinsic cognitive function.[158] But for Lukács, that function was predicated on art's ability to depict the "whole" of reality; hence his preference for narrative, representational forms. For Adorno, the cognitive function of art was essentially "negative": its value lay in its ability to illuminate the particular, while resisting the temptation to impose upon reality the illusion of harmony and totality. Adorno's was an aesthetics of fragmentation ("dissonance" and "discontinuity" were other bywords).[159] The principle of fragmentation in his aesthetics paralleled the principle of nonidentity in his cognitive theory. Modernist fragments were at once a cognitive assessment of, and a utopian protest against, the society which had produced them. "A successful work is not one which resolves objective contradictions in

a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure."[160] This was the central premise of Adorno's "immanent criticism," which he applied, in a spate of brilliant essays, to many of the authors and works which Lukács had dismissed as examples of modernist decadence.[161] In "Reconciliation under Duress," his 1958 critique of Lukács' aesthetics, Adorno put it simply: "Art is the negative knowledge of the actual world."[162]

Thus Adorno's aesthetic theory, influenced by Benjamin, provided a Marxist alternative to Lukács' anti-modernist aesthetics. As one commentator notes: "Adorno's essays were not so much a Marxist defense of modernism as the expression of a distinctively modernist Marxism: his positions were, mutatis mutandis, those of modernist ideology itself."[163] What was original about Adorno's aesthetic theory was its attribution of the modernist principles of fragmentation and dissonance to the form of the critical essay itself. Adorno was aware that Benjamin's elliptical, esoteric style in the Trauerspiel study in some ways constituted a modernist pastiche of the allegorical texts he was illuminating. The same was true of Benjamin's later use of the surrealist technique of montage in his writings on Baudelaire and nineteenth-century Paris.[164] Although Adorno never equated the cognitive functions of art and philosophy, his theory of the essay lent some support to Benjamin's formal

experiments by the emphasis it placed upon the aesthetic moment of philosophical presentation. If it was in their formal structure that works of art expressed their most valid cognitive insights, then criticism must attempt to recapture something of that insight through its own construction. Immanence and "unintentional truth" governed the commentary upon works of art no less than the works of art themselves. As it pursued the "logic of the aporias" of the art-work, the critical essay simultaneously described, in a sense, its own formal contours.

In this essay I have tried to reconstruct, in approximate chronological order, the intellectual background to Adorno's theory of the essay. This has necessarily involved a certain amount of extrapolation from hints and references given in the works of Benjamin, Lukács, and Adorno themselves, as well as from their commentators. Clearly, such a speculative reconstruction runs the risk of imposing rigid symmetries upon positions which were less neat and symmetrical in their original formulation. However, several points may, I think, be sustained. Both Lukács and Adorno--and Benjamin, too, at least in his Trauerspiel work--were essentially dualistic in their thinking. Throughout their works runs an overdetermined binary opposition between part and whole, fragment and totality. This opposition was central to their views on subjects ranging from history to cognition and aesthetic form. Although their designations for the two poles of the

opposition varied, the basic polarity remained constant in the philosophical evolution of both Lukács and Adorno. In Lukács' 1910 essay, "On the Nature and Form of the Essay," the opposition appeared in the form of a question as to the relative values of "fragment" and "system." Although the early Lukács showed a preference for "wholeness," it was not until his conversion to Marxism that he cast in his lot, once and for all, with totality and system in every sphere—politics, epistemology, and art. Understandably, Adorno perceived Lukács' 1910 essay in the light of Lukács' later position. Indeed, he saw Lukács' dialectics as the epitome of philosophical systems, and he devoted his career to the debunking of such systems. Informed by Benjamin's nontotalizing method, and by his own modernist preferences in aesthetics, Adorno's theory of the essay was an attempt to reverse Lukács' valorization of "system" over "fragment." This polemical reversal of values had historical implications as well, as was already evident in Adorno's 1931 address, "The Actuality of Philosophy." For just as Benjamin had proposed to restore allegory to its rightful place among baroque literary forms, and thereby to reveal its contemporary relevance as well, so Adorno sets out, at the end of his programmatic lecture, to reinstate the essay as the proper medium of philosophical discourse. In doing so, he reclaims the heritage of radical empiricism which had been lost in the nineteenth-century idolization of systems. Here the security

of systems is opposed to the essay's "risk of experimenta-
tion":

> . . . I gladly put up with the reproach of essayism.
> The English essayists called their philosophical
> writings essays, as did Leibniz, because the power
> of freshly disclosed reality, upon which their
> thinking struck, continuously forced upon them the
> risk of experimentation. Not until the post-Kantian
> century was the risk of experimentation lost, along
> with the power of reality. Thus from a form of great
> philosophy the essay became an insignificant form of
> aesthetics . . .[165]

To give up the stale security of systems meant, for Adorno,

to discard the premise of "autonomous reason," and to rely

instead upon interpretation--that is, upon the dialectical

encounter between a thinking subject and concrete historical

reality. This encounter would be fragmentary and undogmatic.

Adorno's endorsement of the essay was at one with his inten-

tion to practice a radical ("dialectical" and "materialist")

cognitive approach to reality. That he saw the essay not as

an "insignificant form of aesthetics" but as a form of genu-

ine praxis may be inferred from the concluding statement of

his 1931 address: "For the mind [Geist] is indeed not capa-

ble of producing or grasping the totality of the real, but

it may be possible to penetrate the detail, to explode in

miniature the mass of merely existing reality."[166]

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1] Delivered on May 7, 1931, "Die Aktualität der Philosophie" was first published in Adorno, <u>Gesammelte Schriften</u>, I, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973). References will be to the English translation in <u>Telos</u>, No. 31 (Spring 1977), pp. 120-33.

[2] Buck-Morss, <u>The Origin of Negative Dialectics</u>, pp. 11-17, 37-41, 129-31.

[3] Buck-Morss, p. 131.

[4] Gillian Rose, <u>The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno</u> (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1978), p. 139. According to Rose, "If Lukács has turned Marxism into method, Adorno has turned it into the search for style."

[5] Georg Steiner, Introd., <u>The Origin of German Tragic Drama</u>, by Walter Benjamin, trans. John Osborne (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 12.

[6] Jürgen Habermas, "Ein philosophierender Intellektueller," <u>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</u>, 11 Sept. 1963, rpt. in <u>Über Theodor W. Adorno</u>, a collection of articles by Kurt Oppel et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968), pp. 36-37 (my trans.). Habermas is the most important "second-generation" member of the Frankfurt School, in which Adorno figured prominently.

[7] Habermas, p. 37.

[8] Adorno, <u>Noten zur Literatur</u>, pp. 28-29.

[9] Irving Wohlfarth, "Hibernation: On the Tenth Anniversary of Adorno's Death," <u>MLN</u>, 94, No. 5 (December 1979), p. 966.

[10] Buck-Morss, p. 134.

[11] See Buck-Morss, pp. 37-41, 129-31. Adorno developed the parallel between Schoenberg's music and critical thinking explicitly in his 1932 essay, "Zur gesellschaftlichen Lage der Musik," which appeared in the Frankfurt Institute journal edited by Max Horkheimer, <u>Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung</u>, 1, Nos. 1-2 (1932); translated as "On the Social Situation of Music," <u>Telos</u>, No. 35 (Spring 1978), pp. 128-64.

[12] Adorno, <u>Negative Dialectics</u>, p. 16.

[13] For an analysis of the concepts "critique" and "criticism" in German intellectual history, and in Frankfurt School critical theory in particular, see Paul Connerton (ed.), Introd., <u>Critical Sociology</u> (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1976), pp. 13-22.

[14] For example, Adorno never shared the Marxist faith in the proletariat as the necessary revolutionary subject of history (see Buck-Morss, pp. 24-42, and Sec. C of this chapter). Furthermore, Adorno paid more attention to the "superstructural" realm of art and culture than did orthodox Marxism, which tended to regard such phenomena as "mere" ideology (see Jay, <u>The Dialectical Imagination</u>, p. 179). Indeed, in at least one place Adorno rejected the hierarchical metaphor of "base" and "superstructure," which is, in a sense, the central premise of Marxism ("Der Essay als Form," p. 41). Finally, both Adorno and Horkheimer felt that Marx had overstressed the concepts of labor and technical progress (see Jay, p. 57); their critique of positivism and "instrumental reason" in <u>Dialectic of Enlightenment</u> was also implicitly a reproach to the Marxist philosophy of history. Adorno and Horkheimer shifted the critique of oppression from the Marxist analysis of class struggle to a critique of the technological domination of nature.

[15] <u>Negative Dialectics</u>, p. 25. See Jay, <u>The Dialectical Imagination</u>, pp. 46-48, on Max Horkheimer's critique of Hegel's identity theory.

[16] <u>Negative Dialectics</u>, pp. 156-61.

[17] Adorno, "Subject and Object," trans. E.B. Ashton, in <u>The Essential Frankfurt School Reader</u>, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Urizen, 1978), p. 499. Published originally as "Zu Subjekt und Objekt," in <u>Stichworte. Kritische Modelle 2</u> (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969).

[18] Adorno, <u>Negative Dialectics</u>, pp. 148, 175.

[19] Adorno, "Subject and Object," p. 500.

[20] Adorno, "Der Essay als Form," p. 37; see also Habermas, "Ein philosophierender Intellektueller," p. 37.

[21] Adorno, <u>Negative Dialectics</u>, p. 149.

[22] The centrality of cognition in Adorno's thinking is underscored by Gillian Rose: " . . . Adorno regards the antinomies of philosophy and of theory as real and powerful,

to be redefined, but not to be circumvented or abrogated except on pain of contradiction. Adorno interprets these antinomies as arising from the misrecognition of the relationship between thought and social reality, between subject and object. For all philosophy--and all sociology and art--is interpreted by Adorno as cognitive activity which gives form to such a relationship, as epistemology, even when the philosophy in question consists of a radical attempt to abjure epistemology" (Melancholy Science, p. 142).

23 Buck-Morss, p. 69 et passim.

24 Adorno, Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974), especially pp. 66-75, 80-81, 98-100, 124-27.

25 Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society" and "A Portrait of Walter Benjamin," in Prisms, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (1955; rpt. London: Neville Spearman, 1967), pp. 17-34, 227-41.

26 Adorno signed his early publications "Theodor Wiesengrund-Adorno," which he modified, apparently as a defense against anti-Semitism, to "Theodor W. Adorno" after emigrating to the U. S., and joining the Institute for Social Research (see Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, p. 34). For this biographical sketch I am relying chiefly upon Buck-Morss, pp. 1-23.

27 Buck-Morss, pp. 3-7, 11-14; see also Janek and Toulmin, Wittgenstein's Vienna, passim.

28 Buck-Morss, p. 13.

29 Janek and Toulmin, pp. 87-89.

30 Janek and Toulmin, pp. 67-119, passim.

31 Buck-Morss, pp. 12-13.

32 Janek and Toulmin, pp. 108-11.

33 Buck-Morss, p. 13.

34 Buck-Morss, p. 13; and Adorno, "On the Social Situation of Music," passim.

35 Adorno, "Cultural Criticism," p. 32.

36 Jay, Dialectical Imagination, pp. 21-22; Buck-Morss, pp. 7-8.

[37] Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," pp. 129-30. See Buck-Morss' account of Adorno's method of "liquidating idealism" in his study of Kierkegaard's aesthetics (Origin of Negative Dialectics, pp. 111-21).

[38] Adorno, "A Portrait of Walter Benjamin," in Prisms, p. 232. In spite of this distaste, both men sought positions in the German university system. Benjamin's efforts failed, whereas Adorno obtained a position at the University of Frankfurt in 1931, where he taught until Hitler came to power in 1933.

[39] Buck-Morss, p. 4.

[40] Buck-Morss, p. 76.

[41] Buck-Morss, pp. 5-7.

[42] Buck-Morss, pp. 6-7, 140. For a discussion of the difference between "positive" and "negative" hermeneutics in modern philosophy see Jameson, "Versions of a Marxist Hermeneutic," in Marxism and Form, pp. 119-20.

[43] Habermas, pp. 40-41. In The Dialectical Imagination, Martin Jay notes the influence of the Jewish Bilderverbot in the work of Adorno's friend, Max Horkheimer. Of Adorno, Jay writes: "Adorno's decision to choose music, the most nonrepresentational of aesthetic modes, as the primary medium through which he explored bourgeois culture and sought signs of its negation indicates the continued power of this prohibition." However, speaking of the relatively minor influence which Jewish themes had upon the thinking of the Frankfurt School as a whole--most of whose members were Jewish--Jay goes on to say: "Whether or not the Jewish taboo was actually causal or merely a post facto rationalization is difficult to establish with certainty" (p. 56). Whatever the force of this last caveat, Adorno makes clear the parallel between theology and materialism in this pasage from Negative Dialectics: "The materialist longing to grasp the thing aims at the opposite: it is only in the absence of images that the full object could be conceived. Such absence concurs with the theological ban on images. Materialism brought that ban into secular form by not permitting Utopia to be positively pictured; this is the substance of its negativity. At its most materialistic, materialism comes to agree with theology" (p. 207).

[44] Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 28.

[45] Buck-Morss, pp. 74-76.

[46] Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, trans. John Osborne (written 1924-25, first published in Berlin, 1928; rpt. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963; English ed. London: New Left Books, 1977). While notes will be to the English edition, I will henceforth refer to it as Benjamin's Trauerspiel study when mentioning it in the text.

[47] Buck-Morss, pp. 22-23, 90-95, et passim.

[48] Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, pp. 29-30.

[49] Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, p. 28.

[50] Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, pp. 28-29.

[51] Benjamin's comments on the digressive method of the treatise recall the passage cited by Habermas, in which Benjamin likened the treatise to the chiastic pattern of filigree ornamentation--which also displayed the "absence of an uninterrupted purposeful structure." Both passages exemplify Benjamin's penchant for exotic metaphor. One should note, however, that the two passages are not wholly congruent in their implications for the nature of the treatise. For one thing, the filigree design is essentially nonrepresentational--which would have made it more appealing to Adorno--whereas the mosaic image is chosen partly for its representational character, as Benjamin's comments suggest. In the first case, Benjamin likens the form of the treatise to the external appearance of the filigree pattern. But the vehicle of the second, more complex analogy, is not the finished design or outward form of the mosaic, but the process of composition: specifically, the indirect and fragmentary nature of artistic construction in both the treatise and the mosaic is used to suggest a certain mode of philosophical cognition.

[52] This is the term used by Buck-Morss for Benjamin's critique of the concept of intentionality. For Adorno's adaptation of the notion of unintentional truth, see Buck-Morss, pp. 77-81.

[53] Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, p. 36.

[54] Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" (1923), in Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. and introd. Hannah Arendt (1968; rpt. New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 69.

[55] In her influential introduction to the English edition of Benjamin's Illuminations, Hannah Arendt writes: "Whatever theoretical revisions Benjamin may subsequently have made in these theological-metaphysical convictions, his basic ap-

proach, decisive for all his literary studies, remained un-
changed: not to investigate the utilitarian or communicative
functions of linguistic creations, but to understand them in
their crystallized and thus ultimately fragmentary form as
intentionless and noncommunicative utterances of a 'world
essence'" (p. 50). Her emphasis here is consistent with her
intent to situate Benjamin almost exclusively within the
traditions of Jewish mysticism on the one hand, and Heideg-
gerean existentialism on the other, while downplaying the
Marxist dimension of Benjamin's work. That Benjamin's early
approach did not remain unchanged, that indeed he became
increasingly interested in the "communicative functions of
linguistic creations," is shown in the fifth chapter of the
present study.

[56] Adorno, "Portrait," p. 234.

[57] Benjamin first used the phrase "profane illumination"
in his 1929 essay, "Der Sürrealismus; Die letzte Momentauf-
nahme der europäischen Intelligenz," collected in Angelus
Novus (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966); translated
as "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelli-
gentsia," in Benjamin, Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Auto-
biographical Writings, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter
Demetz (New York: Harcourt, 1978), p. 179. See Buck-Morss,
pp. 125-26.

[58] Adorno, "The Social Situation of Music," p. 130.
Adorno's claim that the musical material itself reflected the
dynamics of society was not a new idea. As Buck-Morss points
out, Lukács had argued in History and Class Consciousness
that in the modern period all intellectual and artistic prod-
ucts were conditioned by the prevailing commodity form of
production, to such an extent that "'ideological' and 'eco-
nomic' problems lose their exclusiveness and merge into one
another" (quoted in Buck-Morss, p. 26).

[59] It should be noted that Adorno was in sympathy with
the ideas of Brecht and others in the Berlin circle, in which
Adorno participated in the late twenties. In particular,
Adorno shared their view that art was a valid sphere of pro-
duction in its own right, as opposed to the vulgar Marxist
notion of art as a mere ideological reflection of socio-eco-
nomic conditions. If artists were not merely alienated intel-
lectuals but "workers" and "producers"--a view expressed by
Walter Benjamin in "The Author as Producer," an address to
the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris, 1934 (Eng-
lish translation in Reflections, pp. 220-38)--then this
clearly implied that they (the artists) needed the relative
autonomy of the aesthetic sphere in order to accomplish their
task. Along with Benjamin, Adorno shared Brecht's definition

of that task as one of "refunctioning" (umfunktionieren) traditional artistic techniques, transforming them from ideological into revolutionary instruments. But beginning around 1930, Brecht argued that artistic work should ultimately be subservient to the practical and political aims of revolution, whereas Adorno continued to insist upon the strict autonomy of aesthetic production (see Buck-Morss, pp. 32-42).

[60] Adorno gave qualified approval to the surrealist compositional techniques used by Kurt Weill in The Threepenny Opera and Mahagonny, and even affirmed the "agitational" value of Hans Eisler's proletarian communal music; but he remained wary of all attempts to make "serious" music conform to the empirical consciousness of the public ("The Social Situation of Music," pp. 143-46; see Buck-Morss, pp. 37-42).

[61] Adorno, "The Social Situation of Music," p. 135.

[62] Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 183.

[63] Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 33.

[64] For an English translation of several of the most important letters of this now famous exchange between the two writers, see "Theodor Adorno: Correspondence with Benjamin," trans. Harry Zohn, in New Left Review, No. 81 (1973), pp. 55-80. See Buck-Morss' detailed treatment of the issues involved in the Adorno-Benjamin controversy in chapters 8-11 of her study, pp. 122-84, passim; see also Chapter V, Sec. B of the present study.

[65] Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, p. 34. Buck-Morss calls this an inversion of Platonism: "For if Platonic ideas were absolute, transcendental forms whose likeness appeared within the empirical objects as a pale reflection of their own eternal truth, Benjamin constructed the absolute from out of the empirical fragments themselves" (Buck-Morss, p. 92).

[66] Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, p. 33.

[67] Rolf Tiedemann, Studien zur Philosophie Walter Benjamins (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1965), p. 23; quoted in Buck-Morss, p. 92.

[68] Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, p. 35.

[69] Quoted in Buck-Morss, p. 94.

[70] Buck-Morss, p. 96.

[71] Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," p. 127.

[72] Cf. Buck-Morss' reading of Benjamin's Trauerspiel prologue in The Origins of Negative Dialectics, pp. 90-95. Once again, I must acknowledge my debt to Buck-Morss' impressive study. Her research is thorough and her discussion of the relationship between Benjamin and Adorno is revealing. But it is precisely because her work is the most complete study in English to date on this important subject—and is therefore likely to be taken as the definitive one—that I must take issue with several points of her interpretation of Adorno's essayistic method. Because she is essentially commited to arguing the correctness of Adorno's position vis-à-vis Benjamin in their later disputes, she does not sufficiently emphasize the problems involved in Adorno's appropriation of the Trauerspiel model of cognition. In particular, she overestimates the "immanent" and "dialectical" potential of Benjamin's Trauerspiel program, while understating its theological and metaphysical inclinations. She claims, for example, that Benjamin's ideas or constellations were "historically specific and changing" in contrast to the Platonic theory of ideas (p. 93). One finds many contrary or ambiguous passages on this point in the Trauerspiel study. Benjamin wrote, for instance, "Whereas the concept is a spontaneous product of the intellect, ideas are simply given to be reflected upon. Ideas are pre-existent" (p. 30). Buck-Morss correctly points out that Adorno did not share Benjamin's theological desire to "redeem" past phenomena (p. 94). But her basic thesis that Adorno succeeded in "translating" Benjamin's theory into a dialectical and materialist one leads her to overestimate the "representational" aspects of Adorno's essays when she discusses Adorno's application of Benjamin's theory of constellations (pp. 96-110). For more on this point see below, and footnote 89.

[73] Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," and "On the Mimetic Faculty," in Reflections, pp. 314-36; and "The Task of the Translator," in Illuminations, pp. 69-82.

[74] Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, p. 37.

[75] "Language," Benjamin wrote in "On the Mimetic Faculty," "may be seen as the highest level of mimetic behavior and the most complete archive of nonsensuous similarity . . ." (p. 336).

[76] See Buck-Morss, pp. 87-90.

[77] Benjamin, "On Language as Such," p. 325.

[78] Benjamin, "On Language as Such," p. 318.

[79] Buck-Morss, pp. 93-94.

[80] Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, pp. 30, 34.

[81] To be fair, it should be noted that Buck-Morss does acknowledge, in a footnote, Benjamin's ambiguity on the role of the cognitive subject (Buck-Morss, footnote 99, 255-56). But she chooses to stress the "inductive" nature of Benjamin's constellations, and to see his position as essentially compatible with, or adaptable to, Adorno's materialist theory of cognition (Buck-Morss, pp. 92-95).

[82] The term "trial-configurations" (Versuchsanordnungen) was originally Brecht's (Buck-Morss, p. 254).

[83] Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," p. 131.

[84] See Negative Dialectics, pp. 164-66.

[85] Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," p. 131.

[86] See Buck-Morss, pp. 85-87.

[87] Toward the end of the Trauerspiel prologue, Benjamin wrote, alluding to Leibniz: "The idea is a monad--that means briefly: every idea contains the image of the world. The purpose of the representation of the idea is nothing less than an abbreviated outline of this image of the world" (p. 48).

[88] Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," p. 126.

[89] Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," p. 127. Here I must disagree with Buck-Morss' interpretation of Adorno's notion of "historical images" (Buck-Morss, pp. 101-10). In her view, the historical images provided a direct "mimetic representation" of social reality: "The notion of the 'visibility' of truth . . . must be taken quite literally: the 'images' were not symbols of the concepts, not poetic analogies for the social totality, but the real, material manifestation of both of them [concepts and totality]" (p. 102). Or again: "Analogies and metaphors only pretended likeness, but historical images were authentic replications" (p. 103). Buck-Morss employs this notion to interpret many of Adorno's critical essays as constellations. In view of Adorno's predilection for hyperbole, it is not difficult to see how one could make the claim that Adorno took his historical images as direct representations of reality. But for the critic to accept these analogies at face value leads to such absurdities as these: "Hence the 'whimpering vibrato' of the jazz instrumentalist was the bourgeois subject's helplessness;

the social irrationality which determined the fate of a pop-
ular song was the irrationality of the stock market" (Buck-
Morss, p. 103); or this: "The [arrangement of seats in a]
theater, then, was society in its historically present form"
(p. 104). On this point, I think Buck-Morss misinterprets
the evidence which she has so assiduously martialled from
Adorno's essays. Although she often quotes contrary passages
from Adorno's writings, Buck-Morss does not seem fully aware,
here, that to take historical images as concrete representa-
tions of reality is to fall into a kind of "identity thinking"
which was sharply at variance with Adorno's philosophical
views. Buck-Morss sees the "riddle-solving" analogy as another
instance of Adorno's representational thinking (pp. 102 ff.).
I would claim rather that the riddle analogy is fundamentally
anti-mimetic in its implications. This is not to say that
there were no ambiguities or contradictions in Adorno's 1931
address; it is only to say that even there Adorno did not
accept the theory of representation implicit in Benjamin's
theory of naming. Adorno would make the criticism more ex-
plicit in Negative Dialectics. In one passage, Adorno asserts
the nonidentity between words and things, criticizes
Benjamin's theory of the name, and describes a more modest
role for constellations: " . . . the words we use will re-
main concepts. Their precision substitutes for the thing it-
self, without quite bringing its selfhood to mind; there is
a gap between words and the thing they conjure. Hence, the
residue of arbitrariness and relativity in the choice of
words as well as in the presentation as a whole. Benjamin's
concepts still tend to an authoritarian concealment of their
conceptuality. . . . The determinable flaw in every concept
makes it necessary to cite others; this is the font of the
only constellations which inherited some of the hope of the
name. The language of philosophy approaches that name by
denying it. The claim of immediate truth for which it chides
the words is almost always the ideology of a positive, ex-
istent identity between word and thing" (p. 53). In another
passage, Adorno restates his critique of "representational
thinking" (i.e. his view that truth could not be captured
by images), as follows: "Representational thinking would be
without reflection--an undialectical contradiction, for
without reflection there is no theory. A consciousness inter-
polating images, a third element, between itself and that
which it thinks would unwittingly reproduce idealism. . . .
The materialist longing to grasp the thing aims at the op-
posite: it is only in the absence of images that the full
object could be conceived" (p. 207). As for the related con-
cept of mimesis, Buck-Morss correctly notes that Adorno's
thinking on it underwent a change. He was most critical of
the notion of mimesis in cognition in the middle and late
thirties, when he saw it as inseparable from the "positive
theology" of Benjamin's writings of that period. After

Benjamin's death Adorno became more sensitive to the utopian
potential of the concept of mimesis, using it in conjunc-
tion with the theme of "reconciliation" (Versöhnung) to indi-
cate the distant possibility of a noninstrumental relation-
ship to nature (see Buck-Morss, p. 89; and Habermas, pp. 41-
42). Thus, in Negative Dialectics, Adorno acknowledged "the
indelible mimetic element in every act of cognition, and of
all human praxis" (p. 150). To this extent, there was a
utopian-mimetic moment in Adorno's theory of the essay as
well. But as we will see in Chapter IV, the mimetic aspect
of thought manifested itself not by coming to rest in a
representational image, but rather in the mobility of con-
sciousness, in a dialectical play of opposites.

90 "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in
various ways; the point, however, is to change it." Marx,
"Theses on Feuerbach," in The Marx-Engels Reader, ed.
Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 145.

91 Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," p. 129.

92 Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," pp. 130-31;
see Buck-Morss, pp. 94-95.

93 Buck-Morss, pp. 94-95.

94 Wohlfarth, "Hibernation," p. 982. Wohlfarth's state-
ment should not be construed to mean that there had previous-
ly been no place for aesthetics in the Marxist tradition.
Aesthetics had held a central place in German philosophy at
least since Kant and Hegel, and the rudiments of a Marxist
aesthetics were already present, if in highly fragmentary
form, in the writings of Marx and Engels. But Maynard
Solomon rightly notes that those writings, while containing
hundreds of scattered discussions of art and literature,
"are not a coherent body of texts which clearly define the
content of a Marxist approach to art or set the boundaries
for such an approach." In this sense, "there is no 'original'
Marxist aesthetics for later Marxists to apply." Solomon
claims that by the nineteen-thirties, "Marxist aesthetics
hovered on the edge of a major integrative breakthrough."
See Solomon (ed.), Preface (pp. xiii-xvii), and "General
Introduction: Marx and Engels" (pp. 3-21), Marxism and Art:
Essays Classic and Contemporary (New York: Random House,
1973).

95 Adorno wrote in a 1958 essay on Lukács that The Theory
of the Novel had "set a standard for philosophical aesthetics
which has been retained ever since." See "Reconciliation
under Duress," in Aesthetics and Politics, a collection of
articles by Ernst Bloch et al., trans. Rodney Livingstone

et al., Afterword by Fredric Jameson (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 151. Adorno's essay on Lukács first appeared as "Erpresste Versöhnung" in Der Monat, 11 (Nov. 1958), rpt. in Noten zur Literatur II (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1961).

[96] Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, pp. 42, 174-75.

[97] Lukács and Karl Korsch (Marxism and Philosophy, 1923) tried to revive the Hegelian legacy of Marxism which had been forgotten or distorted by the positivistic and anti-philosophical bias of the Second and Third International; see Russell Jacoby, "Towards a Critique of Automatic Marxism: The Politics of Philosophy from Lukács to the Frankfurt School," Telos, No. 10 (Winter 1971), pp. 119-46.

[98] Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 96.

[99] Karl Marx, Capital, I, in The Marx-Engels Reader, pp. 320-21.

[100] Marx, Capital, p. 324.

[101] Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 83.

[102] Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, pp. 121-34.

[103] Buck-Morss, p. 26.

[104] Jacoby, passim.

[105] See Jay, pp. 173-218 passim, esp. 174; and Buck-Morss, pp. 26-28. For an analysis of the differences between Lukács, Benjamin, and Adorno on the concept of reification, see Gillian Rose, pp. 27-51.

[106] Adorno, "On the Social Situation of Music," passim.

[107] Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 112; see Lichtheim, George Lukács, pp. 21-22.

[108] Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, pp. 193, 199.

[109] Lukács, "Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organisation" (written 1922), in History and Class Consciousness, pp. 295-342. The essays included in History and Class Consciousness show that Lukács' ideas on the relationship of the proletariat to the Communist Party underwent some important changes during the period 1921-22, evolving toward a Leninist "vanguard" theory. Concerning the subtle issues behind this shift in Lukács, see Jay, "The Concept of

Totality in Lukács and Adorno"; and Andrew Arato, "Georg Lukács: the Search for a Revolutionary Subject," in The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism since Lenin, ed. Dick Howard and Karl Klare (New York: Basic Books, 1972), pp. 81-106.

110 Although subsequent events have discredited Lukács' Bolshevist position, it would probably be a mistake to credit Adorno with great political acumen for his rejection of the political argument of History and Class Consciousness, since throughout his life, as is well-known, Adorno consistently rejected all positions involving any real political activity. Lukács had observed that bourgeois thought oscillated between voluntarism and fatalism. If Lukács was guilty of the former--as he surely was--then Adorno was guilty of the latter, especially towards the end of his life, when he was chastised by many German New Leftists for taking Marxism into a dead end of pessimism and resignation (for Adorno's reply, see "Resignation," in Telos, No. 35 [Spring 1978] , pp. 165-68). On the other hand, it should be remembered that when Adorno first read History and Class Consciousness in the late twenties, the revolution was well on its way toward Stalinization, and the worker's movement in Germany was mired in sectarianism--which helped the National Socialists in the 1930 elections (Buck-Morss, p. 29). Moreover, Lukács' own political experiences--the compromises and forced recantations--proved the vicissitudes of being a Party member. These things help to explain Adorno's refusal to identify with the Communist Party or with workers' movements in general. Those who have criticized Adorno's apolitical stance have generally failed to suggest any satisfactory political alternative which might have been available to him, and therefore such criticisms often have a hollow ring. This includes my own remarks on Adorno's politics in "Critical Theory: The Nonidentity Crisis," Diacritics, 6, No. 1 (Spring 1976), pp. 16-22.

111 Lukács, "What is Orthodox Marxism?" in History and Class Consciousness, pp. 1-26.

112 See Lukács on Fichte in History and Class Consciousness, pp. 122-23; see also Jay, "The Concept of Totality in Lukács and Adorno," passim. Referring to this Fichtean notion of totality in Lukács' theory as "expressive," "centered," or "reflective" totality, Jay notes: "This concept rests on the assumption that a totalizer, a genetic subject, creates the totality through self-objectification . . ." (p. 130). Of the five different meanings of totality that Jay detects in Lukács' work ("longitudinal," "latitudinal," "expressive," "decentered," and "normative"), it was to this notion of "expressive" totality, based on an identical sub-

ject-object, that Adorno objected most strongly, according to Jay.

[113] As was seen in Chapter II of this study, both early works were indebted to the geisteswissenschaftliche method of Dilthey and Simmel, for whom "cultural phenomena were 'expressions' (Ausdrücke) of 'life,' the articulation of conscious reflection upon past subjective experience" (Buck-Morss, p. 79).

[114] In 1927 Adorno submitted, as a Habilitationsschrift to Frankfurt University, a study entitled "The Concept of the Unconscious in the Transcendental Theory of Mind" (it was rejected). In that study he argued that Freud's theory of the unconscious was a necessary corrective to the Kantian theory of cognition, and was essentially compatible with a Marxist critique of ideology (Buck-Morss, pp. 18-20). See Martin Jay's chapter on the Frankfurt School's integration of psychoanalytic concepts into Marxism, in The Dialectical Imagination, pp. 86-112.

[115] Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 3.

[116] Buck-Morss, pp. 31, 82-83.

[117] Lukács, "Preface to the New Edition (1967)," in History and Class Consciousness, p. xxiii. Adorno's rejection of Lukács' theory doubtless owed much to the thinking of his friend, Max Horkheimer. For Horkheimer's critique of identity theories, and for the importance of that critique in the "genesis" of Frankfurt School Critical Theory, see Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, pp. 41-85, esp. pp. 46-47.

[118] Jay, "The Concept of Totality," pp. 120-21, 130-31.

[119] Buck-Morss, pp. 46-47.

[120] Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 234; see Buck-Morss, pp. 43-62 passim. Here as throughout this section, my argument relies heavily upon the penetrating discussions of Buck-Morss.

[121] The address, "Die Idee der Naturgeschichte," was not exclusively a response to Lukács; it was Adorno's contribution to an ongoing debate on historicism at the University of Frankfurt (Buck-Morss, pp. 52-53). But Adorno's arguments in that context are clearly relevant to his understanding of History and Class Consciousness, and are symptomatic of his general reaction to Lukács' thought. Adorno's use of the term Naturgeschichte was indebted both to Benjamin's arguments on allegory in the last chapter of the Trauerspiel

study (see pp. 151-52 of this study), and to Marx's use of the expression in his 1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (Buck-Morss, p. 162).

122 Buck-Morss, p. 54.

123 Quoted in Wohlfarth, p. 960. Buck-Morss takes this sentence as an example of Adorno's procedure of using "dialectically opposed concepts" as tools to "demythologize the world and open it up to critical understanding," calling it "the essential mechanism of Adorno's method of criticism as a process of dialectics without identity" (p. 58). On the importance of chiasmus in Adorno's style, see Gillian Rose, pp. 13-14, and Chapter IV of this study.

124 Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 27.

125 Lichtheim claims that Lukács' originality lay in the fact that "he put forward a theory of history intended to solve a moral problem: the relation of theory to practice" (George Lukács, p. 69).

126 Jay, "The Concept of Totality," p. 131.

127 From Adorno, "The Idea of Natural History," quoted in Buck-Morss, p. 47.

128 Buck-Morss, pp. 56-57, and 43-62 passim.

129 Benjamin, Illuminations, p. 256. Adorno and Horkheimer wrote Dialectic of Enlightenment precisely to explain the complicity between civilization ("Enlightenment") and barbarism, and thereby to debunk all philosophies of history based on the idea of uninterrupted progress.

130 Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 320; see Jay, "The Concept of Totality," p. 131.

131 Jay, "The Concept of Totality," p. 134.

132 Hegel, "Preface to the Phenomenology," in Hegel: Texts and Commentary, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (Garden City, New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1965), pp. 32, 82-83.

133 Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 50.

134 Adorno, Prisms, p. 236.

135 Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," p. 120.

136 Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, pp. 159-82.

[137] Benjamin, _German Tragic Drama_, p. 163.

[138] As an example, Benjamin cites Goethe's low opinion of allegory: "There is a great difference between a poet's seeking the particular from the general and his seeing the general in the particular. The former gives rise to allegory, where the particular serves only as an instance or example of the general; the latter, however, is the true nature of poetry: the expression of the particular without any thought of, or reference to, the general. Whoever grasps the particular in all its vitality also grasps the general, without being aware of it, or only becoming aware ot it at a late stage" (quoted in Benjamin, _German Tragic Drama_, p. 161). Benjamin gives Goethe's view as an example of the traditional prejudice against allegory, or the view that "allegory is a conventional relationship between illustrative image and its abstract meaning" (p. 162). It is against this traditional view that Benjamin wishes to set his own definition of baroque allegory.

[139] Benjamin, p. 160.

[140] Benjamin, p. 186.

[141] Benjamin, p. 160.

[142] Benjamin, p. 176.

[143] Benjamin, p. 161.

[144] Benjamin, pp. 176, 186. In a complex argument, Benjamin traces the development of baroque allegory from the attempts of sixteenth-century humanist scholars to decipher the hieroglyphs of Egyptian antiquity (pp. 167 ff.). Something of the humanist exegetes' fascination with the hieroglyphic mode of writing is preserved in the baroque allegory, Benjamin claims, namely in the tendency of baroque allegorical script to move from the "profane" character of strict alphabetic writing toward the graphic form of hieroglyphics, "sacred complexes" (p. 175). Benjamin discerns a dialectic of sacred script and profane content--exemplified, presumably, in the tension between script and image both in emblembooks and in the _Trauerspiel_ play--and it is this dialectic which gives the baroque allegory its enigmatic, esoteric character. Thus, from these problematic origins in sixteenth-century emblematics, from what Benjamin considers a productive "conflict between theological and artistic intentions" (p. 177), the baroque allegory emerges in the form of the "amorphous fragment": "It is not possible to conceive of a starker opposite to the artistic symbol, the plastic symbol, the image of organic totality, than this amorphous fragment which is seen in the form of allegorical script" (p. 176).

[145] Benjamin, p. 166; see Sandor Radnoti, "The Early Aesthetics of Walter Benjamin," in _International Journal of Sociology_, 7, No. 1 (Spring 1977), pp. 109-13.

[146] Benjamin, p. 178.

[147] Benjamin, p. 179.

[148] Benjamin, pp. 53-56. Benjamin's comments in that context also show that he is aware of the limits to the analogy between baroque and expressionist literature. See George Steiner's introduction to _German Tragic Drama_, pp. 14, 24; Buck-Morss, p. 56; Radnoti, "The Early Aesthetics," pp. 92-93.

[149] Benjamin, p. 160.

[150] In _Negative Dialectics_ (pp. 144-46), Adorno uses the expression "logic of disintegration" to suggest the nontotalizing, nonholistic character of his thought (see Buck-Morss, pp. 63-64).

[151] Adorno, "Reconciliation under Duress," p. 166; see Buck-Morss, p. 56.

[152] See Királyfalvi, _The Aesthetics of György Lukács_, pp. 54-87.

[153] Lukács, "The Ideology of Modernism," in _Realism in Our Time_, trans. John and Necke Mander (New York: Harper, 1964), pp. 40-46.

[154] Lukács, "Ideology of Modernism," pp. 40-46.

[155] Lukács, "Ideology of Modernism," p. 45. Kafka is Lukács' chief example of modernist allegory in fiction.

[156] Lukács, "Ideology of Modernism," p. 45. It should be noted that Lukács' argument here is essentially consistent with his position in the "Realist-Expressionist" controversy of the thirties. The polemic between Lukács and Adorno under discussion was one branch of that larger controversy, but it does not entirely coincide with or exhaust its issues. For a fairly complete picture of the ramifications and overall significance of the Realist-Expressionist dispute, see the essays by Bloch, Lukács, Brecht, and Adorno, and Fredric Jameson's concluding reflections, in _Aesthetics and Politics_.

[157] See Királyfalvi (pp. 95-102) on this opposition between symbolism and allegory in Lukács' work.

[158] "Presentation" of Adorno, "Reconciliation under Duress," in Aesthetics and Politics, p. 148.

[159] See Adorno, "Der Essay als Form," p. 35.

[160] "Cultural Criticism and Society," p. 132.

[161] Adorno's essay on Kafka ("Notes on Kafka," in Prisms, pp. 243 - 71) makes an interesting contrast to Lukács' treatment of Kafka. For a discussion of the differences between Lukács and Adorno in their interpretations of modernist literature, see Rose, pp. 114-30.

[162] Adorno, in Aesthetics and Politics, p. 160.

[163] "Presentation," in Aesthetics and Politics, p. 149.

[164] See Chapter V of this study.

[165] Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," pp. 132-33.

[166] Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," p. 133.

CHAPTER IV

THE ESSAY AS FORM

"Diskontinuität ist dem Essay wesentlich, seine
Sache stets ein stillgestellter Konflikt."

Adorno, "Der Essay als Form,"
p. 35.

Adorno's "Der Essay als Form" presents the most complete statement of his theory of the essay. The interwoven style of that essay makes it difficult to give an adequate linear summary of his theory. However, Adorno's argument may, for purposes of analysis, be divided into three general rubrics: 1) the historical situation of the modern essay; 2) method as form; and 3) the function of the essay. My commentary on Adorno's theory will treat these topics sequentially in separate sections. The first section summarizes Adorno's remarks on the contemporary status of the essay and the challenge presented to the essay by the historical circumstances in which Adorno is writing. The second section summarizes Adorno's view of the essay as "anti-method"--that is, his notion that the form of the essay is determined by its reaction to the methods of traditional sciences and philosophy. The third section deals with Adorno's treatment of the essay as a "cognitive utopia," and discusses several of the stylistic-rhetorical devices through which Adorno tries to realize the utopian-cognitive function of the essay in his

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own writing.

A. The Historical Situation of the Essay

"Der Essay als Form" begins with a reference to the contemporary situation of the essay in Germany. According to Adorno, the essay in Germany was regarded as a mixed or ambiguous genre (Mischprodukt) lacking a definite formal tradition.[1] As an example of the low esteem in which the essay was then held, and as though to indicate that his own theory will be in part a response to Lukács' earlier one, Adorno cites Lukács' statement from his 1910 essay, that the essay, unlike poetry, has not yet achieved autonomy, has not yet "travelled the road of development from a primitive, undifferentiated unity with science, ethics and art." On the German scene, this lack of autonomy could only be seen as a reproach to the essay. Despite the achievements of essayists such as the young Lukács, Rudolph Kassner, and Walter Benjamin, Adorno observed, the essay was considered too frivolous, too dilettantish, to be admitted into the academic "guild" (Zunft, p. 10) of official German philosophy. Perhaps in order to dramatize the plight of the essay, Adorno analyzes the resistance of German philosophy to the essay form in psychological terms. The essay's playfulness, its lack of

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[1] Notes to this chapter appear on pp. 220-26.

esprit de sérieux, threatened the solemnity which had been
adopted by Germans to compensate for cultural insecurities.
The essay's flouting of discipline recalled a certain "free-
dom of spirit" which had been glimpsed, but not fully ab-
sorbed, by German culture in the aftermath of its "lukewarm
Enlightenment."[2] Moreover, the phenomenon of the homme de
lettres--upon which the essay's higher prestige in France and
England had been based--was foreign to the German tradition.
Add to this the German predilection for idealist systems and
the more widespread prestige of science, and the stigmati-
zation of the essay in Germany--as portrayed by Adorno--is
complete. The essay offends against the "work ethic" of the
established disciplines. It uses concepts, but in a free-
wheeling way, without trying to ground them in a prima philo-
sophia. In its interpretations of other texts, it does not
aim at reproducing the author's manifest intentions, but
seeks to grasp the latent (unintentional) truth beyond those
intentions. In this it violates the reigning taboo against
subjectivity in interpretation. Adorno defends the essay's
unorthodox procedure: ". . . in order to be revealed, the
objective plethora of meanings that is encapsulated in every
spiritual [geistige] phenomenon demands of the interpreter
precisely that spontaneity of subjective fantasy which is
repressed in the name of objective discipline" (p. 12).

Despite Adorno's partisanship for the essay, he was
aware that, historically speaking, the essay's autonomy was

largely illusory. He gives a more explicit account than did
Lukács of the vicissitudes of the modern critical essay,
and in doing so he widens the scope of his investigation to
include the essay as it appeared in literary traditions
other than the German one. In Adorno's view, the essay shares
the ambivalence and problematic nature of all cultural prod-
ucts in an age of reification. At least since the mid-nine-
teenth century, the artist and the art-work, the critic and
the public have all been implicated in the increasing commer-
cialization of culture. Adorno's remarks on this process in
"Der Essay als Form" recall his 1949 essay, "Cultural Criti-
cism and Society," in which he analyzed the conformist pres-
sures on culture and criticism in more detail. As culture
became increasingly dependent on the marketplace, the essayist
or cultural critic tended to assume the values of the socio-
economic status quo--a process stepped up by the transition
from liberal entrepreneur capitalism to monopoly capitalism
and its "consumer culture." The critic was placed in the po-
sition of middleman; he became the censor, advertiser, and
purveyor of cultural goods. The rise of the press and of a
middle-class reading public conferred upon the critic an
authority, an "aura of objectivity," which was inimical to
culture's genuine truth-value. "The prerogatives of informa-
tion and position permit them to express their opinion as if
it were objectivity. But it is solely the objectivity of the
ruling mind. They help to weave the veil."[3] Since criticism,

like its objects, is dependent upon the division between mental and physical work, and upon the economics of the production and circulation of cultural texts, the status of cultural criticism is as ambiguous as that of art-works themselves.

> Culture is only true when implicitly critical, and
> the mind which forgets this revenges itself in the
> critics it breeds. Criticism is an indispensable
> element of culture which is itself contradictory: in
> all its untruth still as true as culture is untrue.
> Criticism is not unjust when it dissects--this can
> be its greatest virtue--but when it parries by not
> parrying.[4]

One way of "parrying without parrying," and hence of capitulating to the status quo, was to embrace culture as a positive whole, to simply affirm it while ignoring its contradictions. "To accept culture as a whole is to deprive it of the ferment which is its very truth--negation. The joyous appropriation of culture harmonizes with a climate of military marching music and paintings of battle scenes."[5] Yet another way in which the critic-essayist might yield to cultural reification was to accept uncritically the reified categories which bourgeois society used to understand itself --such categories as life, mind, the individual, and culture itself. In "Der Essay als Form," for example, Adorno rebukes the great French critic Sainte-Beuve for relating works immediately to the psychology of the author (p. 14).

Adorno criticizes the tendency of some essayists to indulge in unfettered subjectivity in their treatment of ar-

tistic and cultural matters. Here he alludes to the critique which Karl Kraus had made of the feuilleton writers of late nineteenth-century Vienna. Kraus had claimed that in their hands the feuilleton, or cultural essay--then the privileged form of Viennese journalism--tended to become a mere reflection of the writer's own narcissistic emotional responses. It thereby blurred all distinctions between the subjective and the objective; it mixed fact and fantasy in such a way that it "both reduced the essayist's creativity to the level of word-manipulating and prevented the reader from making any rational assessment of the facts of the case."[6] The feuilleton thus pandered, in Kraus' estimation, to the narcissistic cult of feeling and the "decadent aestheticism" of the Viennese bourgeoisie.[7] Carl Schorske confirms the subjective bias of the fin-de-siècle feuilletonistes:

> The feuilleton writer, an artist in vignettes, worked with those discrete details and episodes so appealing to the nineteenth century's taste for the concrete. But he sought to endow his material with color drawn from his imagination. The subjective response of the reporter or critic to an experience, his feeling-tone, acquired clear primacy over the matter of his discourse. To render a state of feeling became the mode of formulating a judgment. Accordingly, in the feuilleton writer's style, the adjectives engulfed the nouns, the personal tint virtually obliterated the contours of the object of discourse.[8]

But Adorno distinguishes between conformist essays and those which fulfill the essay's genuine critical-cognitive function: "The form itself is not to blame for the fact that bad essays relate the lives of people instead of opening up the

thing or matter [Sache] at hand" (p. 15). In the first third of "Der Essay als Form," Adorno speaks alternately of the essay as an empirical reality and as an ideal type. In the remainder of his essay, Adorno seems to refer to the essay primarily as a normative ideal.

Instead of offering a positive definition of the essay as form, Adorno defines it negatively, distinguishing it from what it is not. He does not base the essay's claim to legitimacy upon its status as an autonomous literary genre. He chides Lukács for arguing that the essay is an independent art form. According to Adorno, the essay is distinguished from art by its use of concepts, and by the fact that it strives for a truth independent of aesthetic appearance (ästhetischen Scheins, p. 13). But Adorno was not as far from the position of the early Lukács as this reproach implies. Lukács had also spoken of the essay as a conceptual project, and his Platonism had implicitly privileged ideas and concepts over the sensuous, image-bound nature of "Poetry." Neither theorist ultimately saw the essay as pure or homogeneous; for each of them, the essay had both aesthetic and philosophical dimensions. The difference lay in the way this heteronomy was resolved in their theories.

If the essay was not to be simply equated with art, Adorno was even more anxious to see that it was not identified with science. Adorno criticized the reigning scientistic outlook as being indifferent to form. This outlook tended

to equate knowledge with science, philosophy with scientific method, and art with illusion and unreason. As against this, Adorno held that art was a genuine mode of cognition in its own right. Such artists as Proust and Schoenberg had proven that art was capable of attaining valid insights into social reality--insights which were not reducible to the "protocol statements" of logical positivism, nor to the language of the positive sciences in general (pp. 19-20).[9] With the general "rationalization" in all areas of life (Vergegenständlichung der Welt), Adorno argued, art and science had become separate and irreconcilable activities: ". . . a consciousness for which intuition and concept, image and sign, were one, cannot be restored with a wave of a magic wand--if such a consciousness ever existed in the first place--and its restitution would be a regression into chaos" (p. 16). But if no magic restoration of unity was possible, neither should the art-science division be absolutely hypostatized, lest it become an apology for the existing division of labor in intellectual disciplines, which organized the world into neat and exclusive little compartments (p. 18). Adorno seems to be saying that the essay, while retaining elements of both art and science, is not reducible to either one, nor is it a synthesis of the two. The essay's mode of cognition is that of philosophy, which--Adorno wrote in a different context--is neither art nor science but "a third thing."[10]

This, then, was how Adorno saw the dilemma of the modern essay: it must find its place in an increasingly specialized, hostile world, without succumbing to conformist pressures or to the lure of false reconciliations and grand syntheses. Conspicuously absent from Adorno's characterization, in contrast to that of Lukács, is the nostalgia for any past harmony or totality, Greek or otherwise. Adorno explicitly rejects any holistic solution or "system" of the sort called for by Lukács in Soul and Form. Instead, the essay must create within itself the formal devices and conceptual strategies for resisting the "repressive order" (repressiver Ordnung) of established disciplines, with their compartmentalization of culture and their demands for neatness and purity. Indeed, by Adorno's account, the essay finds its source of strength in its ability to break through the taboos and injunctions presented to it by "official culture" (p. 18). Hence the essay's gesture of freedom and defiance:

> The essay does not let its sphere of interest be dictated to it. Instead of performing something scientifically or creating something artistically, in its efforts it still reflects the musing of the child [die Musse des Kindlichen], which inflames itself over that which others have already done. The essay reflects the loved and the hated, instead of presenting the mind [Geist] according to the model of an unlimited work ethic, as a creation out of nothing. Luck and play are its essence. It doesn't begin with Adam and Eve, but with that of which it wants to speak; it says whatever occurs to it, and finishes whenever it feels it has reached the end, not where there is nothing left to say. Thus it is situated among the inessential "diversions" [Allotria]. (p. 11)

Before continuing this reconstruction of Adorno's theory, I would like to call attention to a problematic aspect of Adorno's argument—his use of personification. Adorno attributes psychological motives and intentions (e.g., repression and transgression) to what one would have thought were impersonal abstractions: traditional art, science, philosophy, the essay form itself. At first glance, the device of personification seems inconsistent with the Benjamin-Adorno critique of intentionality mentioned earlier. After all, if they were wary of ascribing intentional meanings to a conscious psychological subject, should it not be even less permissible to predicate intentions of abstract notions? Buck-Morss has argued that Adorno's use of personification derives from Benjamin's use of "anthropomorphism," and that this technique was essentially compatible both with Benjamin's tenet of unintentional truth, and with Adorno's postulate of nonidentity. The point of pursuing unintentional truth in a text or artifact was to demystify the subjective side of cognition by emphasizing the determined, reified aspects of consciousness—the blind side of conscious intention—and conversely, to demystify the object-pole of cognitive experience—its mere facticity, or static "givenness" —by relating it to its dynamic context, treating it as if it had life of its own.[11] Benjamin had written in the Trauerspiel study: "Allegorical personification has always concealed the fact that its function is not the personifica-

tion of things, but rather to give the concrete a more imposing form by getting it up as a person."[12] Thus, the technique of personification could be used to achieve an artistic effect not unlike the Brechtian <u>Verfremdungseffekt</u>: by "defamiliarizing" the object-reality (in this case, attributing psychological motives to the <u>products</u> of consciousness rather than to their producers) one could stimulate the reader's attention, inducing him (or her) to take a closer and more critical look at the object in question. In this light, Adorno's use of personification in "Der Essay als Form" may be seen as a rhetorical device for dramatizing the conflict between the essay and traditional thought. But whatever its rhetorical status, Adorno's use of this technique here remains problematic, for it creates a certain confusion with respect to the referent of the term "der Essay." Does Adorno mean it to include all historical manifestations of the essay? Does he mean rather some ideal type of essay? Or is he in fact referring indirectly to his own essays? This vagueness of reference is not always clarified by the context in which it appears in "Der Essay als Form." We will return to this problem at the beginning of Chapter V.

B. Method as Form

"There will always be much of accident in this essentially informal, this unmethodical, method . . ."

Walter Pater, Plato and Platonism, pp. 185-86.

In the last section we noted that Adorno considers the essay to be a philosophical form which rebels against traditional philosophical thinking. This is a provocative idea; but is it a sufficient description of the essay as a genre? In his essay, "On the Uses of Literary Genre," Claudio Guillén proposes, as the logical precondition of a literary genre, that it be "a structural model, an invitation to the actual construction of the work of art." According to Guillén, genre is a compositional principle which determines the "overall form" of a work; it is "a problem-solving model at the level of form."[13] If we accept this useful criterion, it should be evident that Adorno's theory of the essay, as we have summarized it thus far, does not yet meet the minimal requirements of a literary genre. To say that the essay rebels against traditional philosophy is to say something about its practical function, or perhaps about its thematic content, without indicating how that function or content is integrally related to the form of actual essays. In what follows I will try to demonstrate that Adorno's "Der Essay als Form" does offer an explicit compositional model of the essay, and that that model is grounded in his theory of cognitive experience.

It will be seen that the concept of "method" is central to Adorno's generic model; it is, for him, the mediating link between cognition and form. But it is necessary, first, to show how Adorno sets up the comparison between the essay and traditional cognitive methods.

It should be stated at once that Adorno's invocation of the methods of "traditional thought" is often sweeping and imprecise. His two main polemical targets in "Der Essay als Form" are "scientific method" (represented by modern positivism and its precursors, rationalism and empiricism) and "idealist philosophy" (represented mainly by Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger). At times Adorno chooses to distinguish between positivism and idealism (he is generally more sympathetic to the latter), and at other moments he stresses what they have in common, lumping them together under the label of philosophical "systems." His comparison between the essay and traditional thinking is based upon the type of cognitive experience which is envisaged by their respective methods. Predictably, Adorno focuses upon the relationship between the subject and the object of cognition—understood here as the relationship between the logical-conceptual order of the thinking subject, on the one hand, and the phenomenon to be known or understood, on the other. What scientific method and idealist philosophies (also called "philosophies of identity") have in common, Adorno claims, is the assumption that there exists an identity or pre-established harmony between

their own logical-conceptual order and the reality with which they deal--between the <u>ordo idearum</u> and the <u>ordo rerum</u> (Spinoza's terms, p. 23). Thus, Adorno argues, each of the traditional methods in its own way constructs a closed "system" in which the relation between subject and object is predetermined, hypostatized. The a priori character of the subject-object nexus in traditional philosophy eliminates the tension between them which, as we have seen, Adorno takes to be the <u>sine qua non</u> of dialectical thinking. The essay, by contrast, assumes the subject-object relation to be one of nonidentity and discontinuity, and it makes this "pre-established disharmony" between subject and object the very basis of its method. It proceeds anti-systematically, aiming not at some ultimate synthesis, but at creating a more open-ended, dialectical model of experience. "The essay takes into account the awareness of nonidentity, even without expressing it openly; it is radical in its very nonradicalism, in its abstention from reducing everything to a single principle, in its accentuation of the partial as against the total, in its fragmentary character" (p. 22). The essay is, in this sense, an <u>anti-method</u>; its rejection of systems is its form-determining principle.

Adorno's theory of the essay entails both a logic of "content" and a logic of "form." This dichotomy corresponds, in rhetorical terminology, to the distinction between <u>inventio</u> (the adducing of thematic material for a discourse) and <u>dis</u>-

<u>positio</u> (the arrangement of material into discursive form).[14] Adorno's ideas on how the essay determines thematic content are best exemplified by his contrast between the essay and idealist philosophies, whereas his views on the formal-structural organization of the essay are set forth in his comparison between the essay and scientific method.

Let us first consider Adorno's contrast between the essay and traditional thought at the level of content. Adorno objects to the ontological presuppositions of idealist philosophy. According to Adorno, these presuppositions distort thematic content by imposing arbitrary hierarchies upon the objects of experience. He objects in particular to idealism's valorization of the timeless over the transient, to its assumption that truth resides in ideas and concepts, abstractions elevated above contingent historical phenomena. The chronic error of philosophies of identity is a systematic one, Adorno suggests: "The illusion that the <u>ordo idearum</u> is the <u>ordo rerum</u> results from taking the mediated [phenomenon] as immediate" (p. 23). Thus, for example, the Platonist would celebrate ideas and concepts, seeking to purge them of all traces of the mediate or accidental (think of the young Lukács' claim that the greatest essayists were those who displayed an "immediate" relation to life, without the mediation of texts or other cultural artifacts). According to Adorno, idealist philosophy considered concepts to be pure and immediate, untainted by empirical reality. For Adorno,

however, concepts were only determined in reciprocal relationship to other concepts--"In truth, all concepts are concretized through the language in which they occur" (p. 27) --and only in dialectical interaction with the reality to which they refer. "Just as bare facts cannot be thought without concepts, since to think something always means conceptualizing it, neither can one conceive of a pure concept devoid of reference to any facticity" (p. 23). By reifying its concepts, idealism mistook its own abstractions for reality, according more "ontological dignity" (p. 22) to those abstractions than to historically transient phenomena.[15] But in Adorno's view, "Higher levels of abstraction confer upon thought neither higher dignity nor metaphysical content; instead, content evaporates in the process of abstraction, and the essay would like to redeem a samll part of that loss" (p. 24).

Adorno takes Heidegger's philosophy of "Being" as an example of idealism's quest for unmediated origins and absolute "givens" (Urgegebenheit, p. 25). Heidegger sought an original, natural Being beneath the distortions of culture and civilization. Adorno contends that in this search for a primordial "Nature" beneath the trappings of "Culture," all connection to real lived experience is lost. To be sure, the "culture vs. nature" opposition is, according to Adorno, "the proper theme of the essay" (p. 41). But unlike idealist philosophies, Adorno refuses to hypostatize or absolutize

this opposition, choosing instead to relativize it by showing that culture is partly nature, and vice-versa. "For the essay, culture is not an epiphenomenon superimposed upon [natural] Being which one should simply eliminate; rather, even the underlying substratum is thesei, or false society. That is why the essay values the origin [Ursprung] no more highly than the superstructure [Überbau] ." Adorno thus rejects the hierarchical metaphor of "foundation vs. superstructure" which, in one form or another, has dominated Western meta-physics at least since Plato. "The essay's freedom in its choice of objects, its sovereignty in the face of the 'prior-ities' [English in original] of the factual or the theoretical is due to the fact that the essay considers all objects to stand at equal distance from the center: from the principle which bewitches them all" (p. 41).[16]

Adorno's debunking of traditional metaphysics seems to follow a definite rhetorical strategy. Adorno takes an established thematic opposition (e.g., nature-culture, base-superstructure, temporal-atemporal), and attempts to free the opposition from its hierarchical connotations by playing each side of the opposition off against the other, until their conventional meanings are reversed, or at least rela-tivized. Adorno uses this technique to avoid reifying con-cepts by giving them fixed, immutable meanings. "Whatever the axis of the analysis," Buck-Morss says of this technique, "the critical procedure remained the same: dialectically

opposed concepts were used as tools to demythologize the world and open it up to critical understanding."[17] Thus, the essay is said to correct idealism's disdain for historically transient phenomena, not by trying to "distill the eternal from the ephemeral," as in idealist philosophy, but by "eternalizing the ephemeral" (p. 25). And if the essay declines to join idealism in its search for unmediated origins--which Adorno calls "the treasure-hunting obsession with fundamentals" (p. 30)--it does not thereby give up entirely the experience of immediacy in its own procedure: "All degrees of the mediate are immediate for the essay, before it sets about reflecting" (p. 26).

Clearly, these dialectical tropes have both a thematic and a formal function. They not only show that idealism distorts its thematic material by filtering it through reified conceptual oppositions; by actually <u>demonstrating</u> the fluid, interdependent character of concepts, the tropes also provide a formal analogue of the type of unreified thinking which the essay opposes to traditional philosophical method.

Thus, for Adorno, the essay distinguishes itself from idealist philosophies by its refusal to honor the ontological assumptions and hierarchies through which idealism prestructures its objects of experience. The essay's alternative approach to thematic content is consistent with Adorno's rejection of philosophies of "totality": "The current objection to the essay, that it is fragmentary and con-

tingent, thereby postulates totality, as well as the iden-
tity of subject and object, as something given, and behaves
as if one already possessed the whole of reality" (pp. 24-
25).

But it is in the comparison of the essay to scien-
tific method that the fullest implications for the essay as
form emerge. Here Adorno contrasts the essay to the demand
for "system" and "method" in modern positivism and its proto-
types, empiricism and rationalism. Adorno's first reference
is to Cartesian rationalism, with its aspirations to be a
system which unfolds with apodictic certainty from its first
principles. According to Adorno, both rationalism and empir-
icism upheld the primacy of systematic method. Although
Baconian empiricism claimed, in its critique of scholasti-
cism, to give more importance to actual cognitive experience
than to a fixed conceptual order, in practice, Adorno claims,
". . . empiricist doctrines remain systematic insofar as
they analyze conditions of knowledge conceived as more or
less constant and develop knowledge itself in the most con-
tinuous, connected manner possible" (pp. 21-22).[18]

Adorno's chief example of the dogmatic claims of
systems is Descartes' Discours de la méthode, with its fa-
mous four rules for attaining clarity, continuity, complete-
ness and certainty. Descartes' method worked by dividing
reality into its simplest parts, moving gradually from the
simplest to the most complex, thus giving (or pretending to

give) an exhaustive and orderly treatment of its subject mat-
ter. In its demands for completeness and continuity, scien-
tific method, like idealism, assumed an identity between
thought and its object: it presupposed "that the object of
thought may be completely resolved by the concepts of its
treatment . . . . that the object allows itself to be pre-
sented in a unified, uninterrupted deductive process [lücken-
losen Deduktionzusammenhang] : an assumption characteristic
of philosophies of identity" (pp. 33-34). In short, Descartes'
method presupposed a homology between its own conceptual
schema and the structure of reality. The attempt to impose
a systematic order on the object was ultimately repressive,
Adorno believed, for it reflected the cognitive subject's
anxiety and "rage" toward whatever was not identical with it
or fully under its control.[19] In their call for strict a
priori definitions of concepts, scientific systems such as
the one proposed by Descartes betrayed the urge to dominate
and control the reality in question by precluding any possible
dissonance or nonidentity between subject and object. In
contrast, the essay introduces concepts unceremoniously and
"immediately," as the need arises; it thus remains faithful
to "the dangerous and irritating aspect of things which re-
sides in concepts" (pp. 27-28). Adorno suggests the analogy
of learning a language. The essay appropriates concepts like
a person who, when learning a new language, learns the mean-
ings and nuances of words by using them and hearing them

used in various speech contexts, instead of trying to trap
their unequivocal meanings by referring only to a dictionary.
As compared to the security and pedantry of the systemizer
(here the dictionary-user), the cognitive experience of the
essayist is open to risk: "And just as that mode of learning
is open to error, so is the essay as form; its affinity with
open mental experience [geistiger Erfahrung] is paid for by
that absence of security of which established thought is
deathly afraid" (p. 29). In its quest for order and certain-
ty, scientific method, like traditional thought, becomes
closed and inflexible; it forfeits any spontaneous relation
to its object. The essay foregoes order and certainty, the
better to remain open to the "strangeness" of its object
(Befremdenden an der Sache, p. 33).

But the essay does not thereby give up using concepts,
nor does it abandon all claims to rigor. The essay makes up
for the uncertainty and openness of its concepts through the
precision of its exposition. The essay's concepts, instead
of being saddled with unequivocal meanings, are allowed to
receive their meaning through the aesthetic contexts in which
they appear. Adorno describes this process using a weaving
simile, in a passage which is itself a good example of the
kind of exposition he is advocating:

> The essay urges, more than [traditional] definitory
> procedure, the interaction of its concepts in the
> process of mental experience. In this experience
> concepts do not form an operative continuum, thought
> does not go in a straight line, following a single

thread, but rather the moments weave themselves to-
gether as in a tapestry. The fecundity of thought
depends upon the density of the weave. Actually,
the thinker does not so much think as make himself
into the stage [Schauplatz] of mental experience,
without unravelling that experience. While tradi-
tional thought also receives its impulses from men-
tal experience, it eliminates the memory of that
experience in its form. But the essay chooses men-
tal experience as a model, without simply imitating
it as a reflected form; the essay mediates it through
its own conceptual organization; the essay proceeds,
if you will, in methodically unmethodical fashion.
(pp. 28-29)

Methodically unmethodical: this oxymoron recalls Adorno's

expression, "exact fantasy," which he used to describe the

reciprocal determination of subject and object in the cog-

nitive process, both in music and philosophy.[20] Here the

locution "methodically unmethodical" suggests that the es-

say's rebellion against traditional method--both in its

treatment of concepts and in its formal configuration--is

not the merely subjective or arbitrary whim of the essayist.

Rather, "The essay is determined by the unity of its ob-

ject . . ." (p. 37). But the object-reality is itself con-

tradictory, "discontinuous," and the essay is structured

accordingly:

Immanent to the formal construction of an essay is
its own relativization: it orders itself as though
it could be suspended at any moment. The essay
thinks in broken parts [in Brüchen] , just as real-
ity itself is fragmented, brittle [brüchig], and
[the essay] finds its unity through the breaks
themselves, not by smoothing them over. The harmony
of the logical order deceives with regard to the
antagonistic nature of that which it orders. Dis-
continuity is essential to the essay; its matter is
always an arrested conflict. (p. 35)

It might seem that Adorno is making a metaphysical state-
ment about the nature of reality--"reality is fragmented"--
despite his professed anti-metaphysical intentions. If so,
this metaphysical assumption would correspond, aesthetically,
to the so-called fallacy of expressive form: the notion that,
if the world is chaotic and fragmentary, then literary form
(in this case, the essay) must formally imitate or reproduce
that chaos in its own discourse.[21] But this would be to
forget the context and the oppositional character of Adorno's
statements. Here he is polemicizing against logical systems
which impose a spurious order upon reality. According to
Adorno, the essay does not contradict traditional formal
logic in its propositional content; the essay's statements
are coherent and noncontradictory in their ensemble. The
essay simply develops its arguments differently than conven-
tional "discursive thought" (<u>diskursiven Gedankens</u>): "It
coordinates its elements instead of subordinating them; and
is commensurable with logical criteria only in the substance
of its content, not in its mode of exposition" (p. 47). The
essay protests the insufficiency and misleading quality of
formal logic by reflecting the discontinuous and conflicting
nature of reality in its own procedure. Strict formal logic,
removing the appearance of contradictions through its har-
monizing rules of noncontradictoriness, continuity and com-
pleteness, overlooks the contradictions which remain in
reality. The spontaneous ("unmethodical") moment of cog-

nition--the element of "fantasy" in the subject--is necessary to remain receptive to the nonconceptual, nonidentical elements in the object--elements to which concepts, for all their abstractness, still refer.[22] In its discontinuous character, the essay adheres to the complexity and discontinuity of its objects without imposing upon them a deceptive neatness or simplicity. It follows the logic of its object's aporias.

"The awareness of nonidentity between presentation and subject matter [Darstellung und Sache] obliges the essay to take unlimited pains in its own presentation. This alone is what the essay has in common with art . . ." (p. 38). The essay's stringency with regard to expository form renders it at once more "static" and more "dynamic" than traditional discursive method, according to Adorno (p. 47). On the one hand, the essay is a unified aesthetic structure of interdependent elements--"a constructed simultaneity" (konstruiertes Nebeneinander). As such, it approaches the static character of the "picture" or image (Bild). On the other hand, the essay's static quality stems in reality from "relations of tension momentarily arrested." The essay develops temporally, as does music.[23] Once again, Adorno uses the analogy with Schoenberg's musical logic to stress the nonthetic aspect of philosophical presentation. The essay's transitions are said to resemble those of music, in that they explore the "cross-connections between elements"

(Querverbindungen der Elemente), without establishing re-
lations of dominance or hierarchy between those elements.
"Its transitions reject the compulsory deduction in favor
of the cross-connections between elements--connections for
which conventional discursive logic has no place" (p. 46).
Whereas systematic exposition follows a rigid, linear, and
deductive pattern, assuming an unequivocal correspondence
between words and their meanings, the essay attends to the
ambiguities and multiple associations of words, to the lin-
guistic and aesthetic "texture" of its elements. It is in
this sense that the essay "coordinates its elements rather
than subordinating them."[24]

The essay's attention to the aesthetic dimension of
exposition reflects what Adorno considers a basic difference
between the essay and traditional discursive method--their
radically different attitudes toward language, or more spe-
cifically, toward the relationship of language to thought.
Here Adorno distinguishes between "scientific communication"
and the essay. Scientific thought since Descartes and Bacon
has shunned ambiguities, word-plays, and the figural aspects
of language, in favor of exact definitions and unequivocal
meanings. But if science (in Adorno's view) condemns all
rhetorical suasion for its imprecision and subjectivity, the
essay, by contrast, rejects the positivistic ideal of clear
and straightforward communication. Adorno sees the suasive as-
pect of communication as something more than a mere means

for the immediate gratification of an audience or reader.
Knowing that language cannot be purged of all equivocality--
of the multiple connotations of words, the density, the
various levels of meaning and texture--the essay therefore
incorporates those elements into its own rhetorical strategy.
Unlike the "scientific" attitude toward communication, the
essay preserves the inescapable rhetorical play of language,
enlisting it on the side of content.[25] In its authoritarian
rejection of all traces. of rhetorical play, the "scientific"
ideal of communication upholds the stern "reality principle"
of systems against the idea of happiness or pleasure em-
bodied in the essay: "The satisfaction which rhetoric wants
to furnish to the listener becomes sublimated in the essay
and turns into the idea of happiness [Idee des Glücks] of a
freedom before the object--a freedom which still yields
more to the object than when the object is relentlessly
subjugated to the order of ideas" (p. 44). By preserving
the "pleasure principle of thought" (das Lustprinzip des
Gedankens), its ludic aspect, the essay "salvages a moment
of sophistry" (p. 44). Perhaps the clearest example of such
"sophistry" in "Der Essay als Form" is Adorno's personifi-
cation of the essay--a practice I have tried to preserve
throughout this commentary. The cognitive rationale for this
personification was mentioned earlier. By attributing mo-
tives and intentions to the essay, as though it were a
person, Adorno "defamiliarizes" it, challenging our accepted

notions of the form. Adorno's use of this device, while thus flouting the scientific taboo against "anthropomorphic representation" (p. 44), at the same time reminds us of the ultimate nonidentity between thought and its objects.

C. The Essay as Cognitive Utopia

It should be clear now that the "model of mental experience" to which the essay adapts itself, in Adorno's view, is that of negative dialectics itself. Both in its determination of content and in its discursive form—which are of course dialectically intertwined in the actual writing of essays—the essay follows the negative-dialectical mode of cognition. Like negative dialectics itself, the essay is a form of <u>Ideologiekritik</u>: its function is the "immanent critique of mental and cultural formations" (<u>immanente Kritik geistiger Gebilde</u>, p. 39). This is the Marxist intention of Adorno's project. But unlike orthodox Marxist criticism, which decoded cultural products as reflections of economic and class interests, Adorno understood <u>Ideologiekritik</u> as the critique of the illusion of immediacy, totality, and identity as they appeared in works of art and in philosophical systems.[26] This is why the essay rejects the notion of the "masterpiece" (<u>Hauptwerk</u>), which pretends to embody a totality or to create something absolute out of nothing.

> The essay lets totality shine through for a moment
> in a partial trait or object which it encounters,
> but without affirming that the totality itself is
> present. The essay corrects the sporadic and fortui-
> tous character of its observations by making these
> observations multiply, confirm, and qualify one
> another, whether in the development of a single essay
> or in its mosaic relationship with other essays.
> (p. 36)

In contrast to the <u>Hauptwerk</u> or system, the essay's totality
is "the totality of the non-total, a totality which even as
form refuses the thesis of the identity between thought and
matter [<u>Sache</u>] which it rejects with regard to content"
(p. 37).

Through such comments, Adorno points out the con-
trasts between his own conception of the essay and that of
Georg Lukács. Although "Der Essay als Form" begins, as we
have noted, with a reference to Lukács' 1910 theory of the
essay, by the latter part of Adorno's essay the polemical
thrust has clearly shifted from Lukács' earlier theory to
his later Marxist positions. The essay was, for both thinkers,
the chief vehicle of speculative thinking, or "theory"
(<u>Theorie</u>). Adorno acknowledges that the essay takes previous
philosophical theories as legitimate objects of concern (pp.
38-39). Indeed, as a critic of positivism and idealism
Adorno finds himself, in "Der Essay als Form," in a position
not unlike that of Lukács in <u>History and Class Conscious-</u>
<u>ness</u>, in which Lukács had also criticized the reified aspects
of both idealism and positivism. The chief difference is
that, for Adorno, the attitude of the essay toward "theories"

is one of scepticism rather than synthesis. Adorno emphatically refuses any kind of positive, synthetic construction based on a (Hegelian) reconciliation of contradictions. Here Adorno takes the Marxist Lukács to task for his will-to-system: "The essay can neither be neatly derived from theory --the cardinal error of Lukács' later essayistic works--nor can it be a future synthesis to be paid in installments. Cognitive experience is seriously threatened to the extent that it consolidates into theory and takes on its gestures, as though it had the philosopher's stone in hand" (pp. 38-39). Indeed, Adorno denies that the essay's function is to express the unity of a point of view (Standpunkt)--thus denying the cognitive premise of Lukács' theory of the essay. The essay's "unmethodical method" undermines the solidity and immobility of philosophies based on the idea of perspective or point of view. The essay tends toward "the liquidation of all viewpoints [Meinung], including the one from which it begins" (p. 39).[27] In this the essay is true to the open and dynamic character of genuine dialectical thinking: "Geist itself, once emancipated, is mobile" (p. 43).

As though to buttress his case against Lukács, Adorno brings in an unexpected witness in favor of the mobility of consciousness--Hegel himself, whose system had furnished the model for Lukács' dialectics in History and Class Consciousness. Adorno claims that the essay, in its rejection of fixed viewpoints, is consistent with an essen-

tial insight of Hegelian dialectics. After all, Hegel had stressed the necessary movement of consciousness away from any given starting point or "ready-made" abstraction. The task of philosophy in modern times, Hegel had observed in his "Preface" to The Phenomenology of Mind, was "to make fixed thoughts fluid," not to derive them from a preconceived position and thereby to hypostatize them.[28] In "Der Essay als Form," Adorno turns that argument against the Hegelian dialectic itself (pp. 39-41). For if Hegel's system did not **begin** with a fixed viewpoint or substance, it nevertheless **ended up** with one--the self-knowing subject, or Absolute Spirit. "Through this movement," Hegel had said, "the pure thoughts become Concepts and come to be what they are in truth: self-movements, circles, that which is their substance, spiritual entities."[29] This applied, by implication, to Lukács' system in History and Class Consciousness, with its Hegelian ideal of a self-knowing proletariat as the moving force of history. Contrariwise, for Adorno, the essay eschews the positive and appropriates only the **negative** moment of the Hegelian dialectic--the moment of nonidentity, which was the dialectic's principle of motion.[30] In this sense, argues Adorno, the essay "is more dialectical than the dialectic when it [the dialectic] expounds itself" (p. 40). The essay as negative, rather than positive, dialectics: with this critical appropriation of Hegel, Adorno establishes the crucial difference between his own conception of the essay and

that of Lukács. The essay's function is to oppose ortho-
doxy and reified thought of any kind: ". . . the most inti-
mate formal law of the essay is heresy" (p. 49).

Now that we know what Adorno considered the essay's
philosophical genealogy and function to be, several ques-
tions naturally arise: How is that function actualized in
form? Does Adorno practice the method he advocates? Do his
own essays formally enact the principles of negative dia-
lectics, or is the task he sets for the essay in fact an im-
possible ideal, an unattainable cognitive utopia? Given
Adorno's implicit claim that the method of negative dia-
lectics is realized in the essay as form, one ought to be
able to spell out the specific formal qualities of Adorno's
style which body forth that cognitive project.

One may begin with a few general observations on
the formal aspects of "Der Essay als Form" itself. As we
have seen, there is hardly a sentence of that essay which
does not suggest, in miniature, the central opposition be-
tween the essay and traditional ("systematic") thought.
Through the restatement of this opposition in various con-
texts and in varying terms, Adorno creates a dense network
of associations and allusions whose resonance is preserved
in the reading of any particular passage. This redundancy
often gives the impression of surveying the same ground from
several different angles--or, to use a more dynamic analogy,
of a spiral-like development in which the text covers a the-

matic point only to return again and again to the same point, but upon different levels and while moving in different directions.[31] And yet, the "spiral" is a "discontinuous" one, as Adorno's theory of the essay prescribes. There are discrete passages, but few well-marked transitions between them. Considered as a whole, "Der Essay als Form" reveals no "uninterrupted purposeful structure" (Benjamin). In this sense, "Der Essay als Form" is indeed structured "as though it could be suspended at any moment." In this regard, Adorno's stylistic method offers an interesting parallel to that of Friedrich Nietzsche. Both thinkers employed a fragmentary, aphoristic style which Walter Kaufmann, in his study of Nietzsche, called "monadologic": "The elusive quality of this style, which is so characteristic of Nietzsche's way of thinking and writing, might be called monadologic to crystallize the tendency of each aphorism to be self-sufficient while yet throwing light on almost every other aphorism."[32] To be sure, Nietzsche often composed in isolated aphorisms, or slightly longer fragments, whereas Adorno's preferred form was the full-scale critical essay.[33] But his essays typically comprised smaller, relatively self-contained fragments—passages thematically related to the whole essay, but possessing their own inner dialectical rhythm. One is tempted to believe that for both Nietzsche and Adorno, the choice of a form was dictated by a style of thinking. Both thinkers were, to adopt Kaufmann's use of Nicolai Hartmann's

distinction, "problem-thinkers" rather than "system-think-
ers." Both Nietzsche and Adorno typically conducted brief
and polemical investigations into "problem situations" cre-
ated by established modes of thought, attempting to tran-
scend those problems rather than give peremptory solutions
to them.[34] The short, discontinuous form was best suited to
these brief "attempts" (Versuchen) or "thought experiments."
Once again, Kaufmann's comments on Nietzsche are relevant to
Adorno's stylistic method: "The discontinuity or, positively
speaking, the great number of experiments reflects the con-
viction that making only one experiment would be one-
sided."[35] If this parallel is valid, it may account for the
"discontinuities" of Adorno's style in "Der Essay als Form."
In any case, it seems to confirm the impression that Adorno's
style is integrally related to his cognitive method.

But this is obviously only a preliminary hypothesis,
a way of accounting for one's first impression of the over-
all form of Adorno's essay. It does not yet illuminate the
precise mechanics, the specific rhetorical and discursive
devices which make up Adorno's style. Susan Buck-Morss' de-
scription of Adorno's compositional method provides a way
of moving from the general cognitive strategy of Adorno's
essays to the specific techniques of his style. Drawing
upon Adorno's own analogy between musical and philosophical
presentation, Buck-Morss characterizes Adorno's procedure
as follows:

> Adorno didn't write essays, he composed them, and
> he was a virtuoso in the dialectical medium. His
> verbal compositions express an "idea" through a se-
> quence of dialectical reversals and inversions. The
> sentences develop like musical themes: they break
> apart and turn in on themselves in a continuing spi-
> ral of variations. The phenomena are viewed as Freud
> viewed dream symbols: They are "overdetermined," so
> that their contradictory complexity needs to be
> disentangled through interpretation. But there is no
> affirmation, no "closing cadence." The contradic-
> tions are unravelled; they are not resolved.[36]

Buck-Morss observes that Adorno's discursive strategy was to dissolve the appearance of identity through negation and "differentiation," and thereby to lay bare the "contradictory" nature of reality.

> The structure of Adorno's essays was the antithesis
> of commodity structure. The form of commodities, as
> Marx had explained in the first chapter of Capital,
> was governed by principles of abstraction (of ex-
> change value from use value), identity (of all com-
> modities with each other through the medium of
> money), and reification (ossification of the object
> as a mystifying fetish by splitting it off from the
> process of its production). Adorno's constellations,
> in contrast, were constructed according to principles
> of differentiation, nonidentity, and active trans-
> formation.[37]

Adorno's basic rhetorical unit was the antithesis, or juxtaposition of opposites. It was the nucleus of his favorite binary figures—especially chiasmus, paradox, and oxymoron. He used these figures for various purposes: to negate tautologies, to show the difference between apparently similar or identical things, to reveal the similarity between apparently unlike things, or to show that the terms of an opposition were mutually dependent.[38] Let us consider a few examples of Adorno's dialectical procedure. Earlier we men-

tioned the importance of the chiasmus in Adorno's writing (see Chapter III, p. 146 above). The chiasmus inverts both the order of the terms of an opposition and the relationship between the terms. In his lecture on the idea of "natural history" (<u>Naturgeschichte</u>), it will be recalled, Adorno argued that history must be seen as partly nature, whereas nature must be grasped as historical being. In "Der Essay als Form," he asserts that the essay, unlike traditional metaphysics, "seeks not to distill the eternal from the ephemeral, but to make the ephemeral eternal" (p. 25).[39] Both these examples of chiasmus work to demystify an opposition which has been previously reified, but the two examples do not function in precisely the same way. The nature-history opposition had become reified by being taken as absolute, as though each pole had a fixed and unequivocal meaning. But as Buck-Morss points out, Adorno detected in each term (nature and history) both a "positive" and a "negative" aspect:

> Each in itself had a dynamic and a static pole (transitoriness-myth), and their precise meaning depended upon the way in which they needed to be grouped around the particular object analyzed so that its significance could be released. What appeared as "natural" was exposed as "second nature," hence historically produced. And what appeared as "historical" was exposed in terms of the material "first nature" which passed away within it.[40]

In the second example we have chosen, something slightly different is at stake. Once again, Adorno begins with an established antithesis: "eternal-ephemeral." But here,

Adorno's concern is to dispute the hierarchical associations imposed upon the opposition by traditional thought. In a figurative sense, idealist thinking moved <u>away</u> from the particular, transient phenomenon, "distilling" some universal or atemporal meaning from it and leaving the empirical dregs behind. The essay, by contrast, wants to salvage that part of the empirical phenomenon which gets lost in the process of abstraction. Accordingly, the essay reverses the process by "eternalizing the ephemeral"--that is, by making the transient phenomenon into the thematic focus of philosophy (thereby "secularizing" metaphysics). The chiasmic reversal is calculated to give a sense of this shift in the essay's cognitive orientation. In both examples, Adorno employs the chiasmus to illustrate dialectical thinking in motion. The syntactical inversion of terms is both the sign and the instrument of this cognitive operation. As Gillian Rose puts it, Adorno uses the chiasmus "to avoid turning processes into entities."[41]

Paradox is another of Adorno's favorite dialectical figures. His paradoxes occasionally assume the standard form of contradiction: " 'a' is 'non-a.'" More often, his assertions take the form that something is "a" <u>by virtue of</u> "non-a." Thus for example, he claims that "The untruth in which the essay is knowingly ensnared [i.e., its unfulfilled promises] is its element of truth" (p. 41). Elsewhere, he states that the essay is "radical in its non-radicalism"

(p. 22); or that "the essay's totality . . . is that of the non-total . . ." (p. 37). By such paradoxical formulations, Adorno attempts to disclose and preserve the complexities of his subject-matter.

A similar principle is at work in the smaller syntactical unit of the oxymoron. We have already mentioned several examples: "exact fantasy," "methodically unmethodical," "arrested conflict." In each case, Adorno uses the oxymoron to "make fixed thoughts fluid," to avoid any final resolution of a mixed or contradictory state of affairs. At the same time, each of the oxymoronic expressions mentioned above echoes the opposition between system and non-system, between essayistic and systematic thought, which is the central thematic axis of "Der Essay als Form." Chiasmus, paradox and oxymoron in "Der Essay als Form," as in Adorno's other writings, may thus be seen as so many dialectical figures of nonidentity, in which the play of opposites works against the illusion of stasis, identity, or totality.

In the essay's use of language its critical, negative function—its critique of reified thinking—merges with its utopian function.[42] As Adorno said in <u>Negative Dialectics</u>: "It lies in the definition of negative dialectics that it will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total. This is its form of hope."[43] As we have seen, Adorno's rhetorical figures of nonidentity enact the essay's refusal

to let thought "come to rest in itself." Adorno also wrote:
"The cognitive utopia would be to use concepts to unseal the
nonconceptual . . . without making it their equal."[44] This
is precisely what he claims that the essay does: the concep-
tualizing moment of thought interacts with the aesthetic
motives of the essay to open up the nonconceptual, noniden-
tical aspects of the phenomenon in question. But does
Adorno's theory entirely avoid the danger of reification?
Does he not, in a sense, put his own negative-dialectical
tropes in the place of the reified conceptual oppositions
which he was so successful at debunking, thereby reifying
thought anew? By claiming implicitly to embody negative dia-
lectics in the essay as form, Adorno seems to be positing
an objectified cognitive utopia. Several critics have noted
that the utopian thrust of Adorno's thought involved a kind
of "mimesis." Susan Buck-Morss suggests that Adorno's essays
came close to breaking rank with the Jewish <u>Bilderverbot</u>,
or prohibition against images, which in materialist thinking
meant the injunction against positive depictions of a post-
revolutionary society. She asks: "Is this perhaps the hidden,
positive moment in Adorno's 'negative dialectics'? Is each
essay, precisely because of its unrelenting negativity, in
fact a utopian emblem, a secret affirmation?" Stressing the
"mimetic" aspect of Adorno's procedure, Buck-Morss claims
that in a sense, "the structure of his essays could be read
as a mimesis of a social structure free of domination."[45]

And Axel Honneth (in an article which compares Adorno's philosophy unfavorably to the more systematic social theory of Jürgen Habermas) seems to confirm this when he claims that "Against identity theory and its inherent reified nature, [Horkheimer's and Adorno's] critical theory can only offer the alternative of mimetic knowledge reactivated in the form of artwork. . . . Adorno's rigorous form results from the normative notion of a domination-free, mimetic appropriation of reality."[46]

In precisely what sense, then, can Adorno's theory of the essay be said to posit a "mimetic appropriation of reality?" The question is difficult to answer, in part because of the ambiguity of the concept of mimesis in Adorno's own writings. Although he was critical of the mimetic implications of Benjamin's theory of naming in the twenties and thirties, Adorno's later thinking reveals a more nuanced view of mimesis. In the forties, Adorno and Horkheimer began to link the concept of mimesis with their utopian hope for a "reconciliation" (Versöhnung) between history and nature, reason and society.[47] In Dialectic of Enlightenment they distinguished a kind of "natural" mimesis, the natural human propensity to imitate the environment, from "organized" mimesis, which was a kind of regression, and which arose from the instrumental rationality of Western civilization, in its attempts to channel natural impulses into the controlled domination of nature. They

detected this regressive form of mimesis in Fascist anti-
Semitism and in the modern "culture industry." "Anti-Semitism
is based on a false projection. It is . . . probably the
morbid expression of repressed mimesis. Mimesis imitates the
environment, but false projection makes the environment like
itself."[48] This double-edged conception of mimesis carried
over into Adorno's Negative Dialectics. Associating mimesis
with the utopian aspect of philosophy, Adorno acknowledged
"the indelible mimetic element in all cognition and all
human practice . . ."[49] The very capacity of a subject to
experience an object--a capacity which Adorno termed "dis-
crimination"--presupposed a degree of mimetic approximation,
"an element of elective affinity between the knower and the
known."[50] Characteristically, however, Adorno did not use
the concept of mimesis without qualification. Thought could
not be mimetic in any absolute or "positive" sense, he ar-
gued, without reverting to the postulate of an identity be-
tween subject and object.[51] But a qualified, sublimated kind
of mimesis could still be practiced in works of art and in
philosophical presentation. In philosophy, the "integral,
nonconceptually mimetic moment of expression is objectified
only in language."[52] If the point of negative dialectics
was to enable a nondomineering cognitive encounter between
thought and reality, then this was preserved, although sub-
limated, in the "reconciliation" between form and content
in the essay--as in aesthetic expression in general.[53] The

best examples of such reconciliation in "Der Essay als Form" are the dialectical tropes of nonidentity we have already mentioned, tropes which give a sense of negative dialectics in motion.

It should be stressed that this partial mimetic reconciliation does not mean for Adorno that the essay, or works of art, can totally capture or reproduce the nature of the object of experience in a representational image or metaphor. Such an interpretation of the mimesis concept should be ruled out by the very diversity of the analogies which Adorno uses to characterize different aspects of the essay form in "Der Essay als Form." In different contexts, he likens the essay to "mosaic" (p. 36), "tapestry" (p. 28), "constellation" (p. 37), and "force-field" (Kraftfeld, p. 30). Each of these analogies has a specific descriptive value in the context in which it is used, but none of them becomes dominant or final. The essay is not finally identified with a single fixed image. If there is a mimetic dimension in the essay, according to Adorno's theory and practice, it is the process of thought itself which is mimed, crystallized in essay form—not a person or thing, not the subject or object in isolation. In this sense, "Der Essay als Form" is consistent, both in its propositions and its discursive method, with the "cognitive utopia" envisaged by Adorno's negative dialectics.

It may still be asked, however, whether Adorno's

essays succeed entirely in avoiding the effects of stasis and reification. It seems to me that this question cannot be answered on the sole basis of the evidence already assembled. We have noted some of the specific instances from "Der Essay als Form" in which Adorno's style seems to succeed in realizing the cognitive intentions of negative dialectics. But the matter is not so easily settled. What is missing from the above description of Adorno's style is a consideration of the cognitive impact of Adorno's essays upon the reader. The question of the reader's reception must be addressed (and will be addressed in the next chapter) before one can evaluate Adorno's theory, or his practice, as a normative model of the essay genre. But first, we must attempt to answer the more general questions: Does Adorno's theory of the essay provide an adequate empirical description of essays other than his own? Does his view of the essay's historical development correspond to the actual evolution of the genre?

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

[1] Adorno, "Der Essay als Form," in Noten zur Literatur, p. 9. This important essay has not yet been translated into English. For the sake of consistency, all quotations from it in the present study will be given in English (my translation). Page references, however, given parenthetically in my text, will be to the German edition.

[2] Obviously, Adorno's account of this cultural defense mechanism is difficult to test empirically, and it seems likely that Adorno is exaggerating the point for rhetorical purposes. It should be remembered that Adorno's perspective was that of a former exile who had witnessed the "collapse" of German culture with the rise of Nazism.

[3] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism," in Prisms, p. 20.

[4] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism," p. 22. Adorno remarks in the same essay: "The dialectical critic of culture must both participate in culture and not participate. Only then does he do justice to his object and to himself" (p. 33).

[5] "Cultural Criticism," p. 28. Adorno's formulation is probably indebted to Marcuse's notion of "affirmative culture." For the influence of this notion on Adorno and the Frankfurt School, see Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, p. 180.

[6] This paraphrase of Kraus is that of Janek and Toulmin, Wittgenstein's Vienna, p. 79.

[7] Janek and Toulmin, p. 80

[8] Carl Schorske, "Politics and the Psyche in Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Schnitzler and Hofmannstahl," American Historical Review, 66, (July 1961), p. 935.

[9] It will be remembered that Lukács had raised the question, in Soul and Form, of whether the essay belonged to "art" or to "science" (pp. 2-3). Adorno seems to be answering Lukács here, accepting the art-science dichotomy as relevant, while treating the two terms in a more dialectical fashion by playing them off against each other.

[10] Adorno, "Thesen über die Sprache des Philosophen" (n.d.), in Gesammelte Schriften, I (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973), p. 369, quoted in Buck-Morss, p. 133 (q.v.).

[11] Buck-Morss, pp. 77-80. "Describing phenomena as if

they had a life of their own, as if they expressed a truth
of which their human creator was unaware, was a unique fea-
ture of Benjamin's writings. It was a kind of anthropomor-
phism, a modern expression of the archaic, which surfaced
in Adorno's works as well. But instead of robbing nature of
its otherness by identifying it with the subject, this anthro-
pomorphism had the inverse effect of increasing the nonidenti-
ty, the strangeness of the object. Benjamin called this
strangeness "aura," and it was a mystical motif in his writ-
ings" (p. 78).

[12] Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, p. 187.

[13] Guillén, Literature as System, pp. 119-20.

[14] Buck-Morss also discerns two discrete rhetorical oper-
ations at work in Adorno's method of constructing essays.
She calls these the "conceptual" and the "representational"
moments: "There were two moments in the dialectical process
of constructing constellations. One was conceptual-analytical,
breaking apart the phenomena, isolating its elements, and
mediating them by means of critical concepts. The other was
representational, bringing elements together in such a way
that social reality became visible within them" (Buck-Morss,
pp. 101-02). She equates the second of these moments with
Adorno's construction of "historical images," noting that
"the procedure was one of mimetic representation rather than
synthesis" (p. 102). For reasons I have already indicated,
I think the term "representational" is misleading in this
context (see Chapter III, pp. 131-32, and note 89). Once
again, Buck-Morss is probably assuming more continuity be-
tween Benjamin's notion of "constellations" and Adorno's
method of presentation than actually existed. Near the end
of the present chapter I discuss the limited sense in which
Adorno's essays may be called "mimetic."

[15] This would seem to be an instance of what A.N.
Whitehead called "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness"--
the assumption that one's conceptual notions have real or
empirical counterparts. (Science and the Modern World, 1925).

[16] Adorno's rejection of the base-superstructure metaphor
here might also be an indication of the distance he had
travelled from traditional Marxism by the late fifties. In a
1938 letter to Benjamin, he had criticized Benjamin's tend-
ency, in his study of Baudelaire and nineteenth-century
Paris, to relate isolated phenomena from the superstructure
immmediately to the economic base: "Materialist determination
of cultural traits is only possible if it is mediated through
the total social process" ("Adorno: Correspondence with
Benjamin," p. 71). While this criticism reveals that Adorno

had always refused the vulgar Marxist treatment of culture, it also implies perhaps a greater faith in the Marxist base-superstructure dichotomy than is evident in "Der Essay als Form."

[17] Buck-Morss, pp. 57-58. The dialectical pairing of "nature-history" (Naturgeschichte) was another example of Adorno's use of "mutually determining, mutually corrective concepts" (p. 57).

[18] Neal Gilbert has shown in his Renaissance Concepts of Method (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960) that the pre-occupation with method and system in early rationalism and empiricism was strongly indebted to the sixteenth-century Humanist debates on rhetoric and pedagogy. The Humanists were dissatisfied with current "aimless and disorderly pres-entations of subject matter," and sought to increase order and efficiency through method. In the rhetorical manuals and pedagogical works of the period, "method" was synonymous with "system," "art," and "compendium" (p. 112). But both Bacon and Descartes conceived their programs as a break with Humanist rhetoric. Each, in his own way, tried to found a scientific method which would be at once a method of discov-ery and a method of exposition. See Gilbert, pp. 227-31; and Bernard Williams, "Descartes," The Encyclopedia of Phi-losophy, 1972 ed., II, 345.

[19] This compulsion to control reality was something which Adorno attributed both to positivism and to idealism. In Negative Dialectics he wrote: "The system is the belly turned mind, and rage is the mark of each and every idealism" (p. 23). In Dialectic of Enlightenment Adorno and Horkheimer found positivism guilty of the same compulsion in its urge to dominate nature. For Nietzsche's influence on Adorno's use of this idea, see Rose, pp. 22-24.

[20] Adorno used the phrase "exact fantasy" in his 1931 address, "The Actuality of Philosophy," to describe philo-sophical cognition, and again to describe Schoenberg's dia-lectical compositions in his 1934 essay, "Der dialektische Komponist," in Arnold Schoenberg zum 60. Geburtstag (Vienna, 1934). See Buck-Morss, pp. 86, 90, 129.

[21] According to Stanley Edgar Hyman in The Armed Vision (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1948), Yvor Winters used the phrase, "the heresy of expressive form" to characterize "the belief that disintegration can best be expressed by a disintegrated or chaotic form, rather than by an ordered or disciplined form" (p. 71).

[22] Adorno called this attention to the nonconceptual the

"disenchantment of the concept," and saw it as one of the major tasks of negative dialectics (Negative Dialectics, pp. 11-12).

23 For Adorno's views on music and image, and their respective merits as models for philosophical cognition, see Buck-Morss, pp. 133-35. By contrasting the dynamic quality of music to the static quality of images, Adorno is tacitly continuing his dialogue with both Lukács and Benjamin on the "representational" function of philosophical discourse. Cf. Lukács' analogy between essay and portrait in Soul and Form (pp. 2-3), and Benjamin's notion of "dialectical images" as "dialectics at a standstill," in "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century" (Reflections, pp. 157-58). Adorno criticized the static, undialectical nature of Benjamin's images in his letter to Benjamin, 2 Aug. 1935, in "Adorno: Correspondence with Benjamin," pp. 55-63.

24 At the syntactical level, this opposition between coordination and subordination corresponds to the difference between parataxis and hypotaxis (see Chapter V, Secs. B-2 and B-3). But Adorno's remarks on "cross-connections" seem open to other interpretations. One could, for example, point to the similarities between Adorno's theory and the ideas of Jacques Derrida, interpreting Adorno's remarks in this context to mean that the essay embodies the "free play" of autonomous "signifiers"--as opposed to traditional discourse, based on a metaphysics of "presence," which emphasizes the hierarchical dependence of the signifier upon a transcendental "signified" or meaning. See Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (1967; rpt. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 278-93 (originally a lecture given in French, 21 Oct. 1966, at the International Colloquium on Critical Languages and the Sciences of Man, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore). There are other parallels between Adorno and Derrida. Both attempt a radical critique of metaphysics--Derrida's critique of "presence" is often quite close to Adorno's critique of "identity"--and both take the works of Nietzsche and Heidegger as central points of reference. Moreover, both Adorno and Derrida recommend a version of linguistic or rhetorical "play" as a way of challenging traditional theories of discourse (on Adorno's rhetorical "play," see below). Clearly, there are major differences between them as well, both in their individual style and in their intellectual lineage. Adorno's thought is circumscribed almost entirely within the German tradition. Derrida, although conversant with German philosophy, is perhaps more strongly indebted to the French structuralists Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Still, there are enough points of contact between their programs and

interests to warrant further study.

[25] Adorno wrote in <u>Negative Dialectics</u>: "Dialectics—literally: language as the organon of thought—would mean to attempt a critical rescue of the rhetorical element, a mutual approximation of thing and expression, to the point where the difference fades. . . . In dialectics, contrary to popular opinion, the rhetorical element is on the side of content" (p. 56). See Rose, p. 15.

[26] On Adorno's version of Marxist <u>Ideologiekritik</u>, see Buck-Morss, pp. 25-28, 76.

[27] In <u>Negative Dialectics</u> Adorno said of mental experience: "Any standpoint it were asked to have would be that of the diner regarding the roast. Experience lives by consuming the standpoint; not until the standpoint is submerged in it would there be philosophy" (p. 30).

[28] Hegel, "Preface " to the <u>Phenomenology</u>, in Kaufmann, <u>Hegel: Texts and Commentary</u>, p. 52.

[29] Hegel, "Preface," p. 52.

[30] "The nonidentity we find in consciousness between the ego and the substance which is its object, is their difference, the negative in general" (Hegel, "Preface," p. 56).

[31] Buck-Morss notes that Adorno's sentences "develop like musical themes: they break apart and turn in on themselves in a continuing spiral of variations" (p. 101; see p. 211 below).

[32] Walter Kaufmann, <u>Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist</u> (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 75.

[33] The exception was of course <u>Minima Moralia</u>, which, as Gillian Rose has pointed out, was strongly influenced by Nietzsche. Rose provides a fair account of Adorno's debts to Nietzsche, on matters of both style and substance (Rose, pp. 17-26).

[34] Kaufmann, <u>Nietzsche</u>, p. 82.

[35] Kaufmann, <u>Nietzsche</u>, p. 85.

[36] Buck-Morss, p. 101.

[37] Buck-Morss, p. 98.

[38] For a useful list of examples of Adorno's rhetorical procedure, see Buck-Morss, pp. 98-101.

[39] The German reads: "Der Essay aber will nicht das Ewige im Vergänglichen aufsuchen und abdestillieren, sondern eher das Vergängliche verewigen" ("Der Essay als Form," p. 25).

[40] Buck-Morss, p. 57 (and pp. 52-58 for a more detailed exegesis of the nature-history idea).

[41] However, Rose exaggerates the importance of chiasmus in Adorno's style, at one point treating it as that which Adorno "put in the place of" the norms of "standard philosophical argument" (p. 13).

[42] Adorno mentions the "utopian" intention of the essay at several points in "Der Essay als Form" (pp. 25, 30, 36).

[43] Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 406.

[44] Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 10.

[45] Buck-Morss, p. 131. Buck-Morss' claim is prompted by the structural parallel between Schoenberg's "dialectical" compositions and Adorno's development of philosophical ideas. In a 1934 letter to Ernst Krenek, Adorno professed to find in Schoenberg's compositions the "image of a liberated music" (quoted in Buck-Morss, p. 130). Buck-Morss adds: "Schoenberg's music was nonrepresentational, and thus the utopian image it provided was structural rather than pictorial or descriptive."

[46] Axel Honneth, "Communication and Reconciliation: Habermas' Critique of Adorno," Telos, No. 39 (Spring 1979), pp. 50, 54.

[47] Buck-Morss, p. 89; see also Jay, The Dialectical Imagination (pp. 269-70), on the Frankfurt School use of the concept of mimesis.

[48] Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 187 (see pp. 180-87, passim).

[49] Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 150.

[50] Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 45.

[51] "Dialectics alone might settle the Greek argument whether like is known by like or by unlike. If the thesis that likeness alone has that capacity makes us aware of the indelible mimetic element in all cognition and all human practice, this awareness grows untrue when the affinity—

indelible, yet infinitely far removed at the same time--is posited as positive. In epistemology the inevitable result is the false conclusion that the object is the subject" (Negative Dialectics, p. 150).

[52] Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 18.

[53] Fredric Jameson has suggested that in cultural products, ". . . the essential working opposition between subject and object is transposed into terms of form and content . . ." (Marxism and Form, p. 39).

CHAPTER V

CRITIQUE OF ADORNO'S THEORY

"Les petits faits inexpliqués contiennent toujours de quoi renverser toutes les explications des grands faits."

> Paul Valéry, "Choses Tues," in Oeuvres, II (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 498.

It is ironic that a philosopher whose every page speaks of the need to think "concretely" should think so consistently in abstractions and ideal types. "Der Essay als Form" is a good example. The entire essay is governed by the general opposition between two ideal types: "the essay" and "traditional thought." This tendency leads to difficulties in evaluating his theory of the essay. For in order to evaluate it, one must first decide what problems that theory was meant to solve. But because Adorno speaks simply of "the essay," usually without specifying the historical referent of the term, it is not altogether clear to the reader of "Der Essay als Form" whether Adorno's theory is offered as a comprehensive historical model of the genre—as a model or hypothesis, that is, which would begin to account for the essay in all its historical manifestations—or whether his sole concern is to put forth a normative model of the essay,

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one which answers exclusively to the demands of philosophizing in the modern period. These alternative perspectives correspond to two distinct but quite legitimate approaches to the problems of genre. As Claudio Guillén put it, "Looking backward, a genre is a descriptive statement concerning a number of related works. Looking forward, it becomes above all . . . an invitation to the matching (dynamically speaking) of matter and form."[1] It may be said that Adorno's theory combines these two approaches—the empirical-descriptive and the normative-projective—although in unequal measure. While I think his primary intention is normative—to invent a discursive form which corresponds to the "cognitive utopia" of negative dialectics—there is also sufficient cause for believing that Adorno intends, at least marginally, to offer a more general hypothesis on the historical evolution of the essay genre. And just as each of these approaches poses its own questions about genre, in terms of the categories it finds most appropriate, so must each type of approach be evaluated in terms of the criteria proper to it. The first section of this chapter will briefly consider Adorno's implicit claim in "Der Essay als Form" to account for the historical evolution of the essay. Here my criticism will be primarily empirical and methodological. In the following sections I will consider the claim of Adorno's theory to

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[1] Notes to this chapter appear on pp. 322-42.

offer a normatively valid model for philosophical-critical discourse in the modern period. In this context it will be necessary to evaluate his practice in terms of his theory of the essay--to ask whether his essays fulfill their intended function. The primary question will be: does the reader's experience of Adorno's essays conform to the model of cognitive experience suggested by negative dialectics? To answer this question, I will compare the rhetorical strategies of Benjamin and Adorno, suggesting the general ways in which their respective strategies succeed or fail. The concluding section of this chapter is a brief speculation on the ideological determinants of Adorno's style.

A. Adorno's Theory as Historical Model

Adorno's central historical hypothesis is that the development of the essay is characterized primarily by its revolt against systematic method--beginning with the methods of rationalism and empiricism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. "The doubt concerning the absolute primacy of method with respect to thought's way of proceeding has been realized almost nowhere but in the essay" (p. 22). Adorno elsewhere observes: "The essay is, as it was from the beginning, the critical form par excellence . . ." (p. 39). Such assertions add to the impression that he is proposing a comprehensive historical explanation of the essay's de-

velopment. But Adorno's hypothesis involves the questionable assumption that the discursive norms of systematic method against which the essay allegedly rebels have been homogeneous and constant, and have been perceived as such, over the past four centuries. Moreover, even if we suppose that something like a revolt against systems actually existed, it is still not clear from Adorno's theory why that revolt should manifest itself "almost nowhere but in the essay." But let us see more concretely what is wrong with Adorno's hypothesis when it is applied in several specific instances.

Even when considered only in relation to the beginnings of the modern essay, Adorno's conception of the "system" against which the essay allegedly rebels seems empirically reductive. Consider, for example, Adorno's characterization of the typical expository form and discursive norms of rationalism and empiricism--as exemplified in the works of René Descartes and Francis Bacon. As we saw earlier (Chapter IV), Adorno makes little distinction between empiricism and rationalism with regard to method and form. Both were said to be guilty of identity thinking, or the presupposition of identity between thought and reality. This was the source of their demand that philosophical exposition be systematic, continuous, and complete. It is true that both Bacon and Descartes were interested in establishing a unified, coherent system of knowledge, and that each envisaged a method which would be valid both for the discovery and for

the presentation of material. Ideally, for both Bacon and Descartes, the method would not only be continuous, as called for by Descartes' four "rules," it would also provide certain knowledge about any subject one chose to investigate.[2] To this extent, Adorno was correct in seeing Bacon and Descartes as examples of the same will-to-system. But the matter was not that simple. There is evidence that, contrary to what Adorno implies, neither Descartes nor Bacon naively equated his own method of exposition with the structure of reality. In his commentary on Descartes, Adorno quotes part of Descartes' third rule of method: ". . . to conduct my thoughts in order, beginning with the objects which are simplest and easiest to understand, ascending little by little, as if by degrees, to the knowledge of the most complex ones . . ."[3] What Adorno does not quote is the last part of this rule: ". . . even assuming an order among those objects which do not naturally follow one another."[4] While this part surely confirms Descartes' intention to proceed systematically, it also suggests that his method was heuristic rather than dogmatic: Descartes understood the order he was positing to be hypothetical, and not simply "given" ontologically.[5]

Adorno's treatment of Bacon is even more reductive. That Bacon shared Descartes' desire for continuity and order is evident from this passage of the <u>Novum Organum</u>: "For experience, when it wanders in its own tracks, is . . . mere groping in the dark, and confounds men rather than instructs

them. But when it shall proceed in accordance with a fixed law, in regular order, and without interruption, then may better things be hoped of knowledge."[6] However, what this passage also reveals is the fact that Bacon considered his ideal system a thing of the future, yet to be realized (When experience shall proceed in an orderly way, then may better things be hoped . . .). Bacon was aware that his utopian ideal of systematic knowledge was not yet at hand, and that diverse forms of method were necessary to accomplish the reform of philosophy which would bring it into being. Bacon actually recommended aphorisms and fragments--which he also called the "initiative" method of presentation--as a more suitable philosophical form than the more polished, systematic, "doctrinal" method then in vogue.[7] Indeed, Adorno's defense of aphorisms in fragment LXXXVI of the Novum Organum anticipates, by three centuries, Adorno's critique of systematic exposition. Here Bacon reproaches "those who have handled and transmitted science" in the past:

> For they set them forth with such ambition and parade,
> and bring them into the view of the world so fash-
> ioned and masked, as if they were complete in all parts
> and finished. For if you look at the method of them
> and the divisions, they seem to embrace and comprise
> everything which can belong to the subject. And al-
> though these divisions are ill filled out and are but
> as empty cases, still to the common mind they present
> the form and plan of a perfect science. But the first
> and most ancient seekers after truth were wont, with
> better faith and better fortune too, to throw the
> knowledge which they gathered from the contemplation
> of things, and which they meant to store up for use,
> into aphorisms; that is, into short and scattered
> sentences, not linked together by an artificial meth-

od; and did not pretend or profess to embrace the entire art. But as the matter now is, it is nothing strange if men do not seek to advance in things delivered to them as long since perfect and complete.[8]

In practice, Bacon employed a number of different styles of exposition, according to his purpose, his audience, and the nature of the material.[9] It should be clear, then, that Bacon will not fit comfortably the facile mold of "systematizer" which Adorno's theory holds out for him. All of this is not to claim that Adorno's remarks on Bacon and Descartes, or his critique of system, are totally unfounded. But according to Adorno's own principles of immanent criticism, one would have to examine the texts of Bacon and Descartes themselves, and not only their programmatic statements, to see whether their actual exposition was consistent with their aims regarding "systems." An examination of the key philosophical writings -- Descartes' Discourses and Meditations, and Bacon's New Organon, for example--would reveal that their writings are in this regard less uniform and systematic, and more "essayistic," than Adorno suggests.

Adorno's historical model of the essay seems equally reductive when applied to early practitioners of the essay form itself. As we have seen, in "Der Essay als Form" Adorno construed the confrontation between the essay and systematic thought in psychological terms. The essay was said to rebel, both in form and in content, against the discursive economies it felt as having been imposed upon it from the

outside by systems. The essay preserved the "pleasure principle" of thought, as against the authoritarian "reality principle" of systems. Clearly, this implies a psychological subject, an empirical locus of subjectivity to which such anti-systematic impulses could be attributed. Earlier we noted that Adorno's personification of the essay form may have been a rhetorical device for "defamiliarizing" the essay in the eyes of the reader, and for dramatizing the conflict between the essay and systems (Chapter IV, pp. 187-88). In keeping with the principle of unintentional truth, Adorno attributes intentionality (anti-systematic impulses) not to a human subject but to the essay form itself, so as to avoid deriving the essay form from the conscious intentions of the individual essayist.[10] But whatever Adorno's intention may have been, the result of this procedure is to give the reader of "Der Essay als Form" the impression of a disembodied subjectivity whose referent is difficult to grasp.

The notion that the essay is always somehow linked to a radical consciousness, an instinctive opposition to the discursive norms of systems, is in some ways an intriguing hypothesis. It is one way of developing the idea that the essay is always a cognitive project of some sort--a central premise of this study--and it begins to suggest a psychological explanation for what have often been considered the fragmentary, unsystematic features of essays. But as a historical explanation, the notion is profoundly mystifying, for it

implies a psychology of form while refusing to posit a psychological subject or agency.[11] Even if we make allowances for Adorno's technique of personification, interpreting his remarks on the psychological motives of the essay to stand metonymically for the cognitive experience of the essayist, we are still left with the unsatisfying, ahistorical postulate that the root cognitive experience of the essay has remained essentially constant over a period of four centuries. But empirical evidence, not to mention common sense, tells us that the essay has accommodated a great number of kinds of cognitive experience--a diversity arising from the variables of historical circumstances as well as from the diverse temperaments of individual essayists. True, one can usually find some correspondence between Adorno's model and the cognitive projects of earlier essayists--so broad are the terms of the essay-system dichotomy--but there are invariably important areas of difference as well. If Montaigne's playful and digressive style seems to adhere to some kind of "pleasure principle," it is also true that his project was one of self-representation: ". . . je suis moy-mesmes la matiere de mon livre . . ."[12] The subject and the object of Montaigne's essays were thus in an important sense "identical." Indeed, in some ways Montaigne anticipates the bourgeois individualism against which the essay, as radical thinking, was supposed to rebel.

Even less do Bacon's _Essayes_ fit Adorno's description

of the cognitive method and discursive form of the essay.
Far from representing the ludic aspect of thought, they are
like methodical sermons--if stylistically brilliant ones.
It is difficult to find in Bacon's continuous and tightly-
constructed meditations a counterpart of the "discontinuity"
which Adorno claims is so essential to the essay. As for their
cognitive strategy and function, Bacon's essays are, as
Stanley Fish has shown, of a piece with his philosophical
program of overturning the "Idols of the Mind," purging the
mind of all traces of subjective fantasy--the same "fantasy"
that Adorno took as the very "organon" of dialectical think-
ing. Fish attributes the absence of a personal voice in
Bacon's essays to the fact that "Bacon is not interested
in the individual mind (it is the enemy, the house of idols),
but in the harnessing of all minds to the method of disin-
terested observation."[13] It should be clear, even from this
cursory glance, that in Montaigne and Bacon we have two quite
different cognitive projects at work, and that the two writ-
ers employ widely differing formal devices to realize those
projects.

Of course, one could always argue, in support of
Adorno's thesis, that the essays of Montaigne and Bacon re-
sponded in different ways to the ideological and discursive
pressures of orthodox humanism, whose canonical rhetorical
models may indeed have been perceived as constituting a kind
of "system." In his illuminating studies of prose style in

the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Morris Croll makes a strong case that both Montaigne and Bacon played important roles in the general cultural reaction against the aesthetic and discursive norms received from classical Renaissance humanism. The literary and rhetorical counterpart of this movement was the rise of "Anti-Ciceronianism" in prose style.[14] Croll argues that practitioners of anti-Ciceronian or "baroque" style--Montaigne and Bacon among them--eschewed the artificial symmetry and polished order of "Ciceronian" style, in favor of an irregular and spontaneous style which they considered more suited to the empirical and sceptical proclivities of the modern rationalist temper.[15] It is also true that this new style was often found in conjunction with the burgeoning essay form during that period. But there is little to be gained from reducing such a complex phenomenon to the single binary opposition of system vs. non-system, or fragmentary vs. systematic, as Adorno implicitly does, and even less to be gained from pretending that the essay is always inherently linked to one side of the opposition. Adorno's dualistic hypothesis offers no way of accounting for the obvious differences in the ways in which Montaigne and Bacon perceived and responded to established rhetorical models. A comprehensive historical model of the essay would need to accomplish at least two major tasks: it would need not only to recognize primary traits of similarity, or "family resemblances," between essays; it would need also to

establish secondary criteria for distinguishing between different variants and subtypes of the genre. Such subtypes-- Montaigne's personal reflections, Bacon's impersonal moral essays, or the topical, journalistic essays of Addison and Steele--would be established not only according to their dominant cognitive functions, but according to the ways in which a given cognitive function is conjoined with specific discursive features. This second function of a historical model can only be accomplished by the close inspection of texts. Adorno's binary opposition, although suggestive as an approach to the first task of a historical model, is not specific enough to be of much help when it comes to comparing concrete textual instances. (It is of course much easier to propose such an ideal historical model than to apply it.)

The rise of rationalist systems, and a consequent tension between methodical and unmethodical exposition, may have influenced the development of the essay at certain moments in its history, but it seems unlikely that the influence of systems was constant or uniform throughout that history. Insofar as Adorno's theory suggests anything at all about the factors conditioning the essays's evolution, its view of causality is one-dimensional. It implies that essayists were all times in direct communication with, and equally antagonistic towards, the history of philosophical systems. Adorno seems to take little notice of other factors operating to determine what theorists of literary reception

call the "horizon of expectations" of both writer and public.[16] His theory largely ignores extraliterary factors which have doubtless had their impact upon the evolution of the essay: the changing compositon and taste of the reading public, the prevailing forms of publication in a given period and the resulting changes in reading conventions (witness the jour- nalistic essay and the newspaper editorial), changes in the social roles of writers and intellectuals, not to mention fundamental changes in worldview.[17] To be fair, Adorno does tacitly admit, in his remarks on the feuilleton and the com- mercialization of culture in the nineteenth century, that the critical essays of that period were affected by factors other than philosophical systems. But in "Der Essay als Form" there is no suggestion that such external factors may have shaped the essay in determinate ways throughout the essay's history. For reasons to be explored in further sections of this chapter, Adorno seems particularly blind to the dimen- sion of reception in the cognitive experience which he at- tributes to the essay genre. He is impervious to the notion that audience reception might figure decisively in the writ- ing of essays, and might thus need to be included among the basic structural determinants of genre.[18]

Even if one accepts the notion that there is something like a constant historical dialectic between "system" and "fragment," or between totalizing and nontotalizing forms, it is difficult to see why the second pole of this dialec-

tic should have been assigned to the essay in particular, and to the exclusion of other short forms--aphorism, _pensée_, thesis, dialogue--or longer forms, such as the Menippean satire. If, following Guillén and Todorov, we posit that literary genres form a "system," then the task of defining the essay as genre should be to describe the system of relationships obtaining between the essay and various related types of discourse, such as the short forms just mentioned, and not to derive the essay from a single generic opposition or trait ("fragmentary" vs. "systematic"). In this vein, it also seems questionable whether the essay always plays an adversarial or peripheral role in relation to other forms of discourse, as Adorno suggests. Marginal at times, the essay has in other periods been a dominant discursive form--consider the French Enlightenment essay, the essay as practiced by the Spanish writers of the "Generation of 1898," and for that matter, the ubiquitous essay - article in our own time. As for its thematic content and practical function, one may risk the generalization that the essay has served as a vehicle of orthodoxy as often as of radicalism. To Adorno's dictum that the guiding formal principle of the essay is heresy, we may juxtapose Viktor Shklovsky's remark that "New forms in art are created by the canonization of peripheral forms."[19]

Thus, Adorno's theory of the essay does not meet the requirements of a historical-descriptive poetics of the essay genre. His identification of the essay with the polemical op-

position to systems and orthodoxies finally reveals more about his own aesthetics and his own historical context, than it does about the actual history of the essay. That Adorno viewed the history of the essay through the lens of his own modernist aesthetics should not surprise us. His polemical statements on lyric, novel, and drama, although not as fully elaborated as his theory of the essay, are marked by the same "modernist" principles that govern his theory of the essay--fragmentation and discontinuity, the critique of auton- omous subjectivity, and aesthetic distance (the rejection of "immediacy" and audience empathy, etc.).[20] That Adorno's theory is essentially normative rather than descriptive was of course implicit from our earlier observation that his theory projects a kind of cognitive utopia. For utopias are, almost by definition, normative projections--imaginary reso- lutions of present problems, extrapolated into the future from the lines of one's contemporary situation. Adorno's the- ory is no exception. So it is difficult to escape the con- clusion that Adorno's own essays are the ultimate referent of "Der Essay als Form"--as these essays present fragmentary enactments of the negative-dialectical mode of cognition.

B. Adorno's Theory as Normative Model:
Benjamin, Adorno, and the Reader of Essays

One may be inclined to excuse the empirical limitations of Adorno's theory on the grounds that he does, after all, produce an interesting prescriptive model of the essay. A formal model which could challenge the reified aspects of philosophical systems without becoming reified or systematic itself would indeed be a valuable thing. But here, too, there are problems with Adorno's model. Several sympathetic commentators of Adorno have suggested that his negative dialectics became a kind of system in spite of itself. As Irving Wohlfarth puts it, "The later philosophy tends to play endless variations on the earlier, erecting its antisystematic impulses into a closed system, which at its laxest, becomes a system of its diagnosis."[21] And Susan Buck-Morss notes, near the end of her study of Adorno's thought, that the relentless negativity at the heart of Adorno's philosophy gave rise to "a paradox which even dialectics couldn't dissolve." It was a paradox with both political and aesthetic implications. Politically, although Adorno claimed to be continuing the Marxist tradition of critical-revolutionary thinking, his insistence on the intellectual's critical detachment from social reality led to apolitical quietism: "Hence, in the name of revolution, thought could never acknowledge a revolutionary situation; in the name of utopia, it could

never work for utopia's realization." Buck-Morss detects the
same paradox in the immanent structure of Adorno's writings.
She accounts for this paradox by recalling the analogy between
Adorno's cognitive method and the compositional method of
Schoenberg. Adorno himself had remarked that Schoenberg's
atonal revolution became in some ways closed and systematic
in its later phase. By making the twelve-tone technique abso-
lute, Adorno claimed, Schoenberg allowed his method to
dominate the material.[22] Buck-Morss suggests that Adorno's
negative dialectics, which took Schoenberg's method as its
model, "succumbed to the same fate." Adorno's method was
intended to keep thought moving in "perpetual motion," so as
to keep either the subject or the object of thought from
dominating the structure of cognition. But by making the
dialectical method an end in itself, Buck-Morss argues,
Adorno's essays brought about the opposite effect. They
became closed and static:

> the logical structure of his own essays became in-
> creasingly predictable . . . . the staticness, the
> quality of incantation, that he so criticized in
> Benjamin's work was not lacking in his own. Did the
> perpetual motion of Adorno's arguments go anywhere?
> Did they lead out of the bourgeois intérieur or sim-
> ply hang suspended within it like the new art form
> of mobiles?[23]

While I am inclined to agree with Wohlfarth and Buck-Morss
that Adorno's negative dialectics tended to become reified
and static, and that this tendency is manifested in Adorno's
essays, it still seems to me that there is something truly

problematic, and not merely paradoxical, about this claim. For it clearly contradicts my earlier description of Adorno's essays, in which I stressed the dynamic and dialectical nature of his style. In Chapter IV, I observed that Adorno's use of chiasmus, paradox, and oxymoron was in keeping with the dynamic principles of negative dialectics, insofar as those figures preserved contradictions and thus maintained a critical tension between thought and reality. And Buck-Morss herself argues that "the structure of Adorno's essays was the antithesis of commodity structure." Whereas the form of commodities was determined by abstraction, identity, and reification, Adorno's essays (or constellations) "were constructed according to the principles of differentiation, nonidentity, and active transformation."[24] But if this is so, if these characterizations of Adorno's style are accurate, how do his essays manage to become "static" and "closed"? Here the analogy between Adorno's essays and Schoenberg's music, although probably true as far as it goes, does not go far enough. As Buck-Morss acknowledges at one point, the absence of semantic or conceptual content in music places strict limits on its value as an aesthetic analogue to Adorno's essays.[25] Therefore the fate of Schoenberg's compositional technique can not serve as an adequate explanation of rhetorical stasis in Adorno's essays.

The immediate problem is that one cannot decide, solely on the basis of an enumeration or description of iso-

lated stylistic features, whether a given text or style is
closed and static, or not. As Stanley Fish has argued in his
study of seventeenth-century English prose style, there is no
automatic correspondence or "isomorphism" between the for-
mally describable features of a style and its effect upon
the reader.[26] Indeed, the primary lesson of Fish's method of
"affective stylistics" is that it is not possible to give an
adequate description of literary form without taking into
account the reader's actual experience of that form. If this
premise is accepted, the question is no longer whether
Adorno's cognitive method _is_ a system, or whether his essays
reveal a system. The question is, rather, precisely how does
Adorno's style function in such a way as to give the reader
of his essays the impression of system and closure? Given
the closural effects, what are their (stylistic, rhetorical)
causes?[27] Answering this question will require a shift of
attention from the cognitive experience of the essayist--
until now the focus of this study--to the cognitive experience
which essays evoke in the reader. I think this question may
best be approached by comparing the rhetorical strategies of
Benjamin and Adorno, and by contrasting the ways in which
the two writers engage the cognitive experience of readers.
It is not my intention to provide an exhaustive analysis of
style and rhetoric in the writings of Benjamin and Adorno.
Rather, by contrasting Adorno's rhetorical strategy to that
of Benjamin, I will try to show that neither Adorno's theory

nor his practice of the essay is sufficiently sensitive to the problem of reception, and that his essays fall short of the utopian model of cognitive experience envisaged by negative dialectics.

1. Adorno's Critique of Benjamin

To compare the rhetorical strategies of Adorno and Benjamin, one must first understand the issues of the aesthetic dispute which arose between them in the thirties. Earlier, in my discussion of the intellectual background to Adorno's theory of the essay, I noted that Benjamin's Trauerspiel work anticipated many of the main themes of Adorno's theory. I also alluded to the latent differences between Benjamin's Trauerspiel theory of cognition and the philosophical program which Adorno outlined in his 1931 address, "The Actuality of Philosophy." In the mid-thirties it became clear that these differences were not minor or incidental, but were symptomatic of a fundamental disagreement between the two thinkers on matters of philosophical method and form. This disagreement is most clearly expressed in the Benjamin-Adorno correspondence between 1934-38, which has rightly been called "one of the most important aesthetic exchanges of the thirties anywhere in Europe," as well as "one of the most significant documents in the history of Neo-Marxist literature."[28]

The dispute was initiated by Adorno's criticism of several key texts which Benjamin submitted to the Frankfurt

Institute of Social Research, to be considered for publication in the Institute's _Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung_.[29] Adorno's main objection to Benjamin's writings during this period was that they exhibited a static and undialectical mode of cognition. As Buck-Morss notes, the "constant theme" of Adorno's criticism of Benjamin during their running dialogue in the thirties was that "Benjamin tended to eliminate the role of the active, critically reflective subject in the cognitive process."[30] Adorno attributed this tendency to Benjamin's failure to dialectically integrate theology and materialism--the two determining "poles" of his thinking. As a result of this failure, Benjamin's writings oscillated between "positive theology" and vulgar Marxism.[31] What the theological-mystical mode of "illumination" and vulgar Marxism had in common was the absence of mediation: if the former suddenly revealed the meaning of phenomena in a flash of intuition, the latter peremptorily invoked the primacy of the economic infrastructure, deriving cultural phenomena from the base without dialectical interpretation. Both of these modes of cognition were static and undialectical, Adorno felt, and this was reflected in Benjamin's static mode of presentation. The missing mediation--or, in aesthetic terms, the missing dynamics--could only be provided by an active cognitive subject who intervened to interpret and "unravel" the contradictions in the material.[32]

Involved in the Benjamin-Adorno controversy were a

number of interrelated issues, and the complexity of those issues makes it difficult, at times, to separate the aesthetic from the political and ideological aspects of the controversy. This has made it difficult to fairly evaluate the positions of Benjamin and Adorno.[33] Susan Buck-Morss deals at length with the Benjamin-Adorno dispute. Hers is probably the most complete study in English on this subject, and her work may therefore be taken once again as a point of departure. She demonstrates that in their writings and correspondence in the thirties, Benjamin and Adorno were in fact developing two irreconcilable modes of Marxist cultural analysis, which in turn issued in two radically different models of philosophical form. While her account of the facts is for the most part reliable, it seems to me that her interpretation of the facts is open to question at several key points. Although she is attentive to the specifically aesthetic moment of the dispute between the two writers—their different models of the critical essay—she treats their respective styles as derived from, and essentially congruent with, their theoretical positions. Generally she favors Adorno's position over Benjamin's, although she does object to Adorno's elitist and apolitical tendencies, and reproaches him for being insensitive to Benjamin's personal and financial difficulties in the late thirties.[34] Her basic sympathy for Adorno's version of Marxist Ideologiekritik apparently keeps her from asking whether Benjamin's rhetorical strategy

actually functions in the way that Adorno claims it does. In particular, she does not inquire how Benjamin's essays are cognitively experienced by the reader. Because she does not ask these questions, and because she is in essential agreement with Adorno's philosophical position, she tacitly repeats Adorno's misjudgment of Benjamin's rhetorical practice with regard to reader reception, while at the same time glossing over, or at least failing to account for, the rhetorical limitations of Adorno's theory and practice of the essay in this regard. Buck-Morss' account does acknowledge that both Benjamin and Adorno thematized the problem of artistic reception in their works, but she does not treat reception as an immanently aesthetic problem, and she assumes perhaps too readily that their theoretical views on reception are faithfully enacted or reflected in their styles. Consequently, when she remarks in her conclusion that there is something "closed and static" about Adorno's essays, she is unable to fully account for this static effect. As I will show, the contrast between the rhetorical strategies of Benjamin and Adorno allows us to detect what is at once a practical (rhetorical) and a theoretical weakness in Adorno's essayism: his narrow view of the function of the cognitive subject in critical discourse leaves little place for the cognitive experience of the reader. But first let us take a closer look at Adorno's critique of Benjamin, by way of evoking those aspects of Benjamin's writings which suggest a concep-

tion of the essay different from that of Adorno.

It was symptomatic of their different approaches to aesthetic experience that Benjamin chose surrealism, while Adorno took Schoenberg's music, as an aesthetic model for philosophical expression.[35] It will be recalled that in his Trauerspiel work, Benjamin had attempted to ground theological and mystical insights in a materialist theory of cognition.[36] There he had attributed to "constellations" the role of representing ideas, and, through the mediation of ideas, the "redemption" of material reality. In the late twenties he discovered in surrealism--particularly after reading Louis Aragon's Le Paysan de Paris--a way of transforming religious into "profane illumination," and thus of combining his seemingly antithetical interests in theology and Marxism.[37] In particular, the surrealist technique of montage--which "illuminated" the random details of everyday life by juxtaposing apparently unrelated images in dream-like, aleatory fashion--suggested to Benjamin an ideal medium for his own mode of thinking in "dialectical images." Moreover, surrealism's stress upon the aleatory and unconscious aspects of mental life must have provided a neat parallel to Benjamin's notion of unintentional truth--the idea that truth is not a function of conscious intention. How seriously Benjamin took the surrealist mode of cognition as a way of escaping the limits of "normal" (conscious) subjectivity is brought home in a passage from his 1929 essay

on surrealism. In surrealist experience, Benjamin wrote,

> Life only seemed worth living where the threshold
> between waking and sleeping was worn away in every-
> one as by the steps of multitudinous images flooding
> back and forth, language only seemed itself where
> sound and image, image and sound interpenetrated
> with automatic precision and such felicity that no
> chink was left for the penny-in-the-slot called
> "meaning." Image and language take precedence. . . .
> Not only before meaning. Also before the self. In the
> world's structure dream loosens individuality like
> a bad tooth.[38]

Benjamin had first essayed surrealist techniques in One-Way
Street (Einbahnstrasse, 1928), a series of vignettes and
aphorisms on life in Weimar Germany, in which pointed ob-
servations and philosophical insights crystallize around
images and phrases drawn from everyday life--"Filling Sta-
tion," "Standard Clock," "Chinese Curios," "Construction
Site," "Caution: Steps," etc.[39]

Adorno was at first quite receptive to Benjamin's
appropriation of surrealist techniques: he saw Benjamin's
method of "profane illumination" as compatible with his own
view of immanent criticism as a kind of "inverse" or "neg-
ative theology."[40] By the mid-thirties, however, Adorno's
attitude toward surrealism had begun to change, as he began
to see just how the technique of montage actually functioned
in Benjamin's writings. The surrealist model seemed to rein-
force the static, undialectical, and "representational" as-
pects of Benjamin's thinking--aspects of which Adorno had
been only partially aware at the time of his 1931 address.[41]
In Adorno's opinion, what was wrong with surrealism as a

model for philosophy was that it attempted to represent reality immediately, in images drawn from the unconscious, without mediating or interpreting those contents through conscious reflection. In surrealist creations (<u>Gebilde</u>), Adorno wrote in his 1956 "Retrospective" on surrealism, "the content . . . is broken up, regrouped, but not dissolved."[42] As a result, surrealist images lost whatever critical force they might have had: they gave the impression of subjective freedom (i.e., the free associations of a liberated unconscious), while in fact they simply reproduced a situation of "objective unfreedom." Insofar as the cognitive subject of surrealism remained enchained to the unmediated libido, its images were "commodity-fetishes" (<u>Warenfetische</u>) whose most appropriate model was pornography.[43] Thus, the "immediacy of representation" in surrealist works had its counterpart in the passive enthrallment of the cognitive subject. In Buck-Morss' words, "In surrealism an anarchistic, arbitrary fantasy converged with the seemingly opposite tendency of passive duplication of the given, intensifying mystification rather than dispelling it."[44] Buck-Morss points out that the "arbitrary fantasy" of surrealism was opposed, in Adorno's thinking, to the "exact fantasy" which he had taken as the principle of dialectical cognition in his 1931 speech, "The Actuality of Philosophy." As against the static and undialectical character of surrealist montage, Adorno defended the compositional method of Schoenberg, which "developed the

material to the point of a dialectical reversal," as a more suitable model for dialectical expression.[45]

But it was not only that Adorno preferred Schoenberg to surrealism. "Benjamin's intention," Adorno wrote in his "Portrait of Walter Benjamin" (1950), "was to eliminate all overt commentary and to have the meanings emerge solely through a shocking montage of the material. His aim was not merely for philosophy to catch up to surrealism, but for it to become surrealistic."[46] This went against Adorno's conviction that art and philosophy, despite their mutual concern for Darstellung (presentation), were separate and nonidentical cognitive modes. His own analogy between philosophy and music was intended to underscore the necessary aesthetic moment in philosophical expression, and to suggest an alternative to the cognitive methods of traditional philosophy—not to suggest that the methods of music and philosophy were interchangeable. It seemed to him that in taking surrealism as an absolute model, Benjamin was confusing the aims of art with the functions of philosophy. "Adorno believed that Benjamin allowed the tension between cognitive modes to collapse. . . . The result was that Benjamin's work lost the critical negativity which for Adorno lent philosophical interpretation its value as truth, and lapsed back into that positive theology which his choice of surrealism as a model had been an attempt to overcome."[47] As Adorno wrote later in Negative Dialectics, "Common to art and philosophy is not

the form, not the forming process, but a mode of conduct that forbids pseudomorphosis. Both keep faith with their own substance through their opposites: art by making itself resistant to its meanings; philosophy, by refusing to clutch at any immediate thing."[48] This is precisely what Benjamin's use of surrealist montage was guilty of, in Adorno's view: in attempting to reveal the nature of reality directly, by representing the contents of the unconscious through juxtaposed and uninterpreted images, Benjamin was in effect grasping at immediate things.

As early as 1934, Adorno began to detect in Benjamin's writings the static effects of the surrealist model.[49] In 1935 Benjamin submitted to the Frankfurt Institute an "exposé" of his _Passagenarbeit_, his work on Baudelaire and nineteenth-century Paris.[50] In order to anticipate Adorno's criticism of that exposé, let us consider the following passage, in which Benjamin develops the notion of "dialectical images" in connection with Baudelaire's poetry and its social context:

> Modernity is a main accent in his poetry. He shatters the ideal as spleen (_Spleen et Idéal_). But it is precisely modernity that is always quoting primeval history. This happens here through the ambiguity attending the social relationships and products of this epoch. Ambiguity is the pictorial image of dialectics, the law of dialectics seen at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectic image therefore a dream image. Such an image is presented by the pure commodity: as fetish. Such an image are the arcades, which are both house and stars. Such an image is the prostitute, who is saleswoman and wares in one. [51]

In a letter full of painstaking criticisms, Adorno objected

that Benjamin's "dialectical images" were undialectical in various ways. On a theoretical level, Adorno objected to Benjamin's suggestion that the dialectical images were equivalent to "dream images"--that is, immanent contents of what Benjamin elsewhere in the exposé referred to as the nineteenth-century "collective unconscious."[52] Benjamin spoke of these images as though they were simply the mental reflection of the commodity form of production. But according to Adorno, "the fetish character of the commodity is not a fact of consciousness; rather, it is dialectical in the eminent sense that it produces consciousness." He claimed that Benjamin "psychologized" the images by attributing them to a collective unconscious which dreamed of a "classless society." Instead, Adorno argued, the images should be used to demystify the "alienated bourgeois subjectivity" of individuals which was generated by the commodity form of production. By treating the images as dreams, Benjamin was confusing the immediate contents of nineteenth-century social life with the critical concepts (dialectical images) which the observer used to decipher that social reality.[53]

Adorno's theoretical criticisms were in keeping with his reservations about Benjamin's mode of presentation. If Benjamin's images were undialectical, so, in Adorno's view, were his sentences.[54] In the passage cited above, the montage technique appeared in the form of brief declarative sentences which succeeded each other without connecting ele-

ments or explanation. Disparate images were brought together by simple copulatives. A variant of this montage technique may be found in the closing passage to the section entitled "Grandville, or the World Exhibitions":

> The world exhibitions build up the universe of commodities. Grandville's fantasies extend the character of a commodity to the universe. They modernize it. Saturn's ring becomes a cast-iron balcony on which the inhabitants of the planet take the air in the evening. The literary counterpart of this graphic utopia is presented by the book of the Fourierist natural scientist Toussenal. Fashion prescribes the ritual according to which commodity fetish wishes to be worshiped; Grandville extends fashion's claims both to the objects of everyday use and to the cosmos. By pursuing it to its extremes he discloses its nature. This resides in its conflict with the organic. It couples the living body to the inorganic world. Against the living it asserts the rights of the corpse. Fetishism, which is subject to the sex appeal of the inorganic, is its vital nerve. The cult of commodities places it in its service.[55]

The key to the style of such passages is again the succession of terse sentences. Themes are introduced without elaboration or commentary. Benjamin's montage technique tended toward paratactic constructions: the relative absence of coordination and subordination between sentences and clauses. This often gave Benjamin's texts a condensed, elliptical effect. The paratactic aspects of passages such as the above must have reinforced Adorno's main objection to the method and style of Benjamin's exposé--namely, that "the simple juxtaposition of contradictory elements made the dialectical images merely reflect contradictions instead of developing them through critical argumentation."[56]

Benjamin's long essay, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," met with a similar critical response from Adorno when he submitted it to the Frankfurt School in 1938 as the second part of a three-part book on Baudelaire.[57] Once again, Adorno took issue with Benjamin's static way of presenting material. In terms which recall his earlier objections to Benjamin's use of montage in his Passagenarbeit exposé, Adorno complained that in the Baudelaire essay, "Motifs are assembled but not elaborated."[58] He singled out the following passage for special criticism:

> The arcades were a cross between a street and an intérieur. If one can speak of an artistic device of the physiologies [nineteenth-century portraits of figures or "types" from everyday Parisian life], it is the proven device of the feuilleton, namely, to turn a boulevard into an intérieur. The street becomes a dwelling for the flâneur; he is as much at home among the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him the shiny, enamelled signs of business are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his salon. The walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; news-stands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done. That life in all its variety and inexhaustible wealth of variations can thrive only among the grey cobble-stones and against the grey background of despotism was the political secret on which the physiologies were based.[59]

Adorno felt that Benjamin's "metaphorical" procedure in such passages did little to illuminate the phenomena in question. He detected in Benjamin's compositional technique an "ascetic refusal of interpretation" which resulted in the accumulation of "impenetrable layers of material." Referring to Benjamin's

compositional method, Adorno asked: "Panorama and 'traces',
flâneur and arcades, modernism and the unchanging, without
a theoretical interpretation--is that a 'material' which can
patiently await decipherment without being consumed by its
own aura?" When Benjamin's essay did move from a poetic to
an explanatory mode, it was in order to explain the thematic
contents of Baudelaire's poetry by direct reference to the
political and economic conditions of the period (a notable
example was Benjamin's explication of Baudelaire's poem,
"Le vin des chiffoniers," in terms of the contemporary wine
tax).[60] Thus, even when Benjamin's text could not be said
to be stylistically undialectical, it was, in Adorno's opin-
ion, methodologically so. He criticized Benjamin's method
of presentation in more theoretical language:

> Unless I am very much mistaken, your dialectic lacks
> one thing: mediation. Throughout your text there is
> a tendency to relate the pragmatic contents of
> Baudelaire's work immediately to adjacent features
> in the social history of his time, preferably eco-
> nomic features. . . . I regard it as methodologically
> unfortunate to give conspicuous individual features
> from the realm of the superstructure a "materialistic"
> turn by relating them immediately and perhaps even
> causally to corresponding features of the infrastruc-
> ture. Materialist determination of cultural traits
> is only possible if it is mediated through the total
> social process.[61]

The "mediation" sought by Adorno was that of "theory" it-
self--that is, the critical reflection of the cognitive sub-
ject upon the phenomena being investigated. But instead of
asking Benjamin to adhere more closely to orthodox Marxism,
he called for Benjamin to engage in the more speculative and

esoteric theory of his earlier works, claiming that his use

of Marxism in the Baudelaire essay was essentially facti-

tious and motivated by interests which were external to the

study itself:

> . . . you have denied yourself your boldest and most
> fruitful ideals in a kind of pre-censorship according
> to materialist categories (which by no means coincide
> with the Marxist categories) . . . . Your study of
> Goethe's <u>Elective Affinities</u> and your Baroque book
> are better Marxism than the wine tax and the deduc-
> tion of phantasmagoria from the behavior of the
> feuilletonists.[62]

It seemed to Adorno that what survived of Benjamin's earlier

theological interests in the Baudelaire essay was his faith

in "naming"--which he detected in Benjamin's positivistic

"invocation" of data and his refusal to interpret those

data. But without theoretical reflection and interpretation,

Adorno argued,

> the theological motif of calling things by their
> names tends to change into a wide-eyed presentation
> of mere facts. If one wished to put it very drasti-
> cally, one could say that your study is located at
> the crossroads of magic and positivism. That spot is
> bewitched. Only theory could break the spell--your
> own resolute, salutarily speculative theory. It is
> the claim of this theory alone that I am bringing
> against you.[63]

It should be emphasized that in his correspondence

with Benjamin, Adorno was defending not only his own con-

ception of proper philosophical form, but also the particular

theory of cognitive experience upon which his theory of form

was based. It will be recalled that Adorno's theory of cog-

nition was premised on the notion of "exact fantasy," or

dialectical tension between the subject and object. The subject of cognition at once respected the object of experience and actively interpreted it. Adorno felt that Benjamin's essays lacked this active moment of cognition. It seemed to him that Benjamin's "ascetic" refusal of interpretation reflected the subject's passive absorption in the material. Benjamin once wrote that he was not interested in people, only in things.[64] As Adorno wrote later in his "Portrait of Walter Benjamin," he saw "the culmination of [Benjamin's] anti-subjectivism" in his desire to write a book composed exclusively of quotations.[65] To Adorno this ideal no doubt epitomized the abdication of the cognitive subject in Benjamin's work. Adorno might have been thinking of Benjamin when he wrote, in "Cultural Criticism and Society," that "the spontaneous movement of the object can be followed only by someone who is not entirely engulfed by it."[66] After Benjamin's death, Adorno began to interpret the passivity of the subject in Benjamin's writings as symptomatic of a general decline in the capacity for critical experience in modern society.[67]

There was, of course, an ideological-political rationale for Benjamin's method of composition, and for Adorno's criticism of that method. From the early thirties on, Benjamin's work had begun to display an open identification with the proletariat as the true revolutionary subject of history. Adorno attributed this tendency to Benjamin's

friendship with Bertold Brecht, and it was a tendency which Adorno, despite his early sympathy with Brecht, did his utmost to resist.[68] Brecht's influence no doubt helped to radicalize Benjamin's aesthetic views, particularly on such issues as the autonomy of the art-work and the role of the subject in aesthetic experience. His 1934 speech, "The Author as Producer" (given at the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris), shows how far his thinking had shifted from his position of the early twenties, when he had believed in the noninstrumental nature of art, toward the Brechtian position of placing art in the service of revolution. Using Brechtian language and pointing to Brecht's "epic theater" as an example, Benjamin defined the task of the progressive writer as the "functional transformation" (Umfunktionierung) of the literary means of production, in solidarity with the proletarian revolution. Benjamin even suggested that in the long run, the technically most advanced art would necessarily coincide with the politically most progressive: "The more completely he [the writer] can orient his activity toward this task, the more correct will be the political tendency, and necessarily also the higher the technical quality, of his work."[69] One may thus see Benjamin's experiments with surrealist techniques as an attempt to transform the means of philosophical-literary production, and thereby to transform its practical function as well. Benjamin's mode of presentation had changed in keeping with his altered view of art and aes-

thetics in the social and political situation of the thirties.

Further evidence of these changes in Benjamin's thinking is to be found in his famous 1935 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." There Benjamin argued that modern techniques of reproduction--from lithography to film--had brought about a qualitative change in the nature and function of art. The traditional work of art had possessed what Benjamin called "aura" or "authenticity"-- the uniqueness which the work held by virtue of being integrated in ritual and tradition. By detaching the art object from the "fabric of tradition," thereby liquidating the aura of the art work, mechanical reproduction "emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. . . . But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice--politics."[70] Most importantly, the techniques of mechanical reproduction changed the function of the work of art by establishing a different relationship between the viewer and the work. Benjamin's primary examples were taken from the visual arts; film was seen as the most advanced representative of this development. He compares painting and film with respect to the way in which each was perceived by the viewer. Whereas painting had traditionally been viewed by individuals in an attitude of contemplation, films were viewed by the masses in a "state of distraction."

Rather than being absorbed by the work, as in painting, "the distracted mass absorbs the work of art." In this the film is like architecture, which "has always represented the prototype of the work of art the reception of which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction."[71] Benjamin saw this distraction as less pernicious than the mindless diversion which we have come to associate with popular culture; through the editing process, which subjected the viewer to a barrage of constantly changing images, the film achieved a "shock effect" which "mobilized the masses," and trained them in new modes of perception which would be appropriate to the new technological and political realities.[72] In his conclusion, Benjamin speculates on the political implications of these technological advances in art. The film makes possible a new relationship between art and politics. Benjamin eschews the autonomous (i.e., bourgeois) work of art, with its attachments to "cult value" and tradition. According to Benjamin, in the modern period autonomous works of art necessarily invite a reactionary mode of response; l'art pour l'art becomes compatible with Fascism. By contrast, film creates a collective mode of reception more suitable to the proletarian revolution. If Fascism aestheticizes politics, "Communism responds by politicizing art."[73]

In retrospect, Benjamin's optimism with regard to technological progress in art seems in many ways mistaken.

He seriously misgauged the extent to which film could become
simply another vehicle of mass culture, or indeed, an in-
strument of ideological mystification. His political argument,
which aligned Fascism with autonomous art and film with the
proletariat, seems no less naive. But whatever the flaws of
his argument, the importance of his essay resides, for our
purposes, in the fact that he was proposing an aesthetics
of reception which challenged the central categories of
classical bourgeois aesthetics. Irving Wohlfarth aptly sum-
marizes the significance of Benjamin's argument in this
respect: "Aesthetic autonomy is as untenable as its medium,
the bourgeois subject. Both are to be dropped."[74]

Adorno, predictably, was not amused by these develop-
ments in Benjamin's theory. Writing from London in 1936, he
protested that Benjamin's essay on the technical reproduc-
tion of art was undialectical both in its exaltation of con-
temporary film and in its summary dismissal of autonomous
art. Benjamin had suggested that modern film was progressive
insofar as it liquidated the aural and "mythical" elements
of traditional art, while claiming that the autonomous work
of art (the so-called "high" art of bourgeois culture) was
inherently reactionary in that it preserved those elements.
Adorno agreed that the aural element of art was in a period
of decline, but he added that not all autonomous art was
unequivocally aural in character.[75] Adorno insisted that "the
autonomy of the work of art, and therefore its material form,

is not identical with the magical [i.e., aural] element in it." Instead, he argued, autonomous art is "inherently dialectical," containing both aural elements and elements of "freedom." He appealed to his own musical experience, which convinced him that "precisely the uttermost consistency in the pursuit of the technical laws of autonomous art changes this art and instead of rendering it into a taboo or fetish, approximates it to the state of freedom, of something that can consciously be produced and made." In this sense, Schoenberg's compositions were less aural and reified than most contemporary film, which was, after all, aimed at satisfying the needs and tastes of the existing public. For one thing, modern films were not as technically sophisticated as Benjamin claimed: in them, Adorno said, "reality is everywhere constructed with an infantile mimetism and then 'photographed'" (it should be noted that Adorno's chief reference here is to Chaplin, Benjamin's own example, and not to Eisenstein, which would have made Adorno's argument more tenuous). Furthermore, Adorno doubted whether the laughter of the distracted audiences in the movie-houses was anything more revolutionary than "the worst bourgeois sadism." Thus, in Adorno's opinion, neither mass film nor the autonomous work should be enshrined as an ideal:

> Both bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change . . . Both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up. It would be romantic to sacrifice one to the other, either as the bourgeois romanticism of the

> conservation of personality and all that stuff, or
> as the anarchistic romanticism of blind confidence
> in the spontaneous power of the proletariat in the
> historical process--a proletariat which is itself a
> product of bourgeois society.

Therefore Adorno recommended that Benjamin make his essay more dialectical through

> the complete liquidation of the Brechtian motifs . . .
> above all, the liquidation of any appeal to the
> immediacy of interconnected aesthetic effects, how-
> ever fashioned; and to the actual consciousness of
> actual workers, who have absolutely no advantage over
> the bourgeois except their interest in the revolu-
> tion, but otherwise bear all the marks of mutilation
> of the typical bourgeois character.[76]

Despite his disparaging comments on bourgeois sub-jectivity in this passage, one may detect in Adorno's response to Benjamin the beginnings of his later conviction that the critical subject of autonomous art, for all its associations with romanticism and bourgeois idealism, was still preferable to the conformist subject engendered by mass culture. This conviction was fully apparent by 1938 in his article, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening." Noting the marked decline in the listener's "praxis" in the reception of popular music, Adorno linked the commercial standardization of music with "the liquidation of the individual." He concluded that "only individuals are capable of consciously representing the aims of collectivity."[77]

Thus, Adorno clung to the principles of immanence and aesthetic autonomy--the idea that the truth-function and

aesthetic value of the work of art stemmed from the immanent dialectic between the artist and the artistic material (subject and object), without regard to the effect of the work upon the audience. The consciousness of the contemporary proletariat was as reified as that of the bourgeoisie itself, and therefore could not legitimately be made the criterion of aesthetic validity. Benjamin's affirmation of the empirical consciousness of the proletariat as the sufficient subject of aesthetic experience must have struck Adorno as no less romantic than Lukács' celebration of the proletariat in History and Class Consciousness.

It should by now be clear that there was more at stake in the Benjamin-Adorno controversy than simply whether the critical essay was to take its inspiration from surrealism or from Schoenberg's music. Although it touches on a wide range of issues whose immediate relevance to our subject is not obvious, the dispute raises a number of questions which are crucial for a theory of the essay as a philosophical-cognitive form. What, for example, are the proper cognitive and aesthetic functions of the critical essay? Is the essay to express a cognitive experience, or to induce one in the reader? Are some literary devices more suitable than others for fulfilling the proper functions of the essay? What is the appropriate rhetorical relationship between author and reader, between reader and text? Does this relationship remain constant, or does it change according to the changing

conditions of literary production and reception? The problem
of reception as it relates to the Benjamin-Adorno debate has
perhaps not been given the attention it deserves.[78] I would
suggest that the entire dispute may be reinterpreted in
light of this problem. For the category of reception is
clearly at the heart of the aesthetic, cognitive, and poli-
tical issues of the Benjamin-Adorno dispute, and must there-
fore figure in the answers one gives to the questions just
raised. In the next two sections I will indicate the general
direction such a reinterpretation might take.

2. Benjamin's Rhetorical Strategy

It seems to me that if one fully accepts the pre-
mises of Adorno's immanent criticism and his defense of
absolute aesthetic autonomy, one will be led to concur with
his stylistic and methodological objections to Benjamin's
writings in the thirties. As we have seen, Adorno's view of
criticism and philosophy was derived from his theory of aes-
thetic experience. The key to both art and criticism was the
structure of cognition. In each case the cognitive value of
a work depended on the integrity of the dialectic between
subject and object, artist (or critic) and material. The
point of immanent criticism, as Adorno adapted it from
Schoenberg and Benjamin, was to avoid the arbitrary imposi-
tion of the subject's intention upon the material. In Adorno's

view, however, Benjamin's essays of the thirties went too far in the opposite direction: in them the cognitive subject was absorbed entirely into the material, thereby abandoning the critical, reflective moment necessary to the dialectical encounter between subject and object. Thus, Adorno's theory is concerned almost exclusively with the production of artistic or critical works. If one considers Benjamin's works only from the point of view of production, then Adorno's criticisms of them appear to be on solid ground. But Adorno's aesthetics seems one-sided insofar as it neglects the important dimension of reception. Even texts whose production obeys the principles of immanence and autonomy must still engage the reader's perception in specific ways. While there is evidently a close relationship between the immanent structure of an essay and the way it is experienced by the reader, it is also clear that the factors governing the reception of texts cannot be entirely foreseen or controlled by the principles and forces which guided its production. In his consideration of Benjamin's writings in the thirties, Adorno was inattentive to the variety of ways in which Benjamin's texts could be read. If Benjamin's writings appeared static and undialectical, this was partly because he was judging them as isolated and self-contained aesthetic-critical objects.[79] What if, when considered for their effect on the reader, Benjamin's surrealist techniques act as spurs to critical and dialectical responses? And what if Adorno's

own essays, when viewed in relation to the reader's reception of them, begin to look static, closed and reified?

The question of reception had been paramount in Benjamin's aesthetics as early as his _Trauerspiel_ essay, although the question was not conceived there in Marxist terms. As Sandor Radnoti has observed, "Behind every question of Benjamin's [_Trauerspiel_] study is the problem of community. From a historical-philosophical point of view, the projection of this in the aesthetic sphere is reception."[80] It is true that Benjamin was never interested in the psychology of the individual artist or his intentions. His early aesthetics was governed by the idea that "No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener."[81] But he was always implicitly concerned with the transmission and reception of works of art, and more particularly with the manner in which works of art could transcend their immediate historical context. In his discussion of baroque allegory, Benjamin showed how the artistic form of a work, by changing "historical content" into a "philosophical truth," enabled the work to be reborn in later periods:

> Philosophy must not attempt to deny that it reawakens
> the beauty of works. . . . The object of philosophical
> criticism is to show that the function of artistic
> form is as follows: to make historical content, such
> as provides the basis of every important work of art,
> into a philosophical truth. This transformation of
> material content into truth content makes the de-
> crease in effectiveness, whereby the attraction of
> earlier charms diminishes decade by decade, into the

> basis for a rebirth, in which all the ephemeral beau-
> ty is completely stripped off, and the work stands
> as a ruin. In the allegorical construction of the
> baroque <u>Trauerspiel</u> such ruins have always stood out
> clearly as formal elements of the preserved work of
> art.[82]

Thus, criticism of the kind conceived by Benjamin would en-

sure the continued reception of past works. It need only be

added that one of his chief strategies for renewing the per-

ception of works of art was to employ, in a kind of pas-

tiche, the very formal devices which had given the work he

was discussing its originality--allegorical fragment in the

case of the <u>Trauerspiel</u> study, and, in the case of Baudelaire

and nineteenth-century modernism, the dream imagery and sur-

realist montage which Benjamin saw as the modernist equiv-

alent of baroque allegory.

For obvious reasons, Benjamin's concern with modes

of reception was intensified by his turn to Marxism, and es-

pecially by the influence of Brecht, whose aesthetic theory

was strongly oriented toward audience reception.[83] As we

saw earlier, Benjamin's programmatic statements of the thir-

ties--notably, "The Author as Producer" and "The Work of Art

in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"--are concerned pre-

cisely with the changes in audience reception brought about

by technological developments in mass art.[84]

In this context, it is worth considering Benjamin's

reply to Adorno's criticism of his long essay, "The Paris

of the Second Empire in Baudelaire." Responding to the

charges levelled by Adorno (the absence of mediation, the passivity of the cognitive subject, etc.), Benjamin pointed out that the essay was meant as the second part of his work on Baudelaire, written before the first part, and that therefore it needed to be judged in its larger intended framework. Benjamin also answered Adorno's more explicit criticism that the Baudelaire essay engaged in "the wide-eyed presentation of mere facts."[85] It is significant that Benjamin's defense of his method at this point is phrased in terms of the reader's perception of his text. "When you speak of 'wide-eyed presentation of mere facts,'" Benjamin wrote, "you characterize the true philological attitude. . . . Philology is the examination of a text which proceeds by details and so magically fixates the reader on it."[86] Benjamin admitted that the "philological" aspect of his procedure gave to his exposition a moment of stasis. Accepting Adorno's characterization of that moment as a mixture of "magic and positivism," Benjamin acknowledged that this mixture had to be "preserved and surpassed [aufzuheben] in the Hegelian manner by dialectical materialists." But contrary to what Adorno had implied, Benjamin claimed that the "astonished" presentation of facts was not necessarily incompatible with the dialectical treatment of thematic material. He suggested that the moment of astonishment in the interpretation of material was to be transcended in the very thought-process which it provoked in the interpreter.[87] Moreover, this as-

tonishment anticipated the initial stage of the reader's

cognitive experience of his essay. Benjamin's peculiar ar-

rangement of material--such as the surprising juxtaposition

of motifs from Baudelaire's poetry to elements from the

wider material and social context of Baudelaire's Paris--

might indeed begin by "magically" fixating the reader upon the

details of Benjamin's text. But it also provoked the reader

to look further into the reasons for Benjamin's unique com-

positional arrangement--and hence, into the meaning of

Baudelaire's poetry--by inviting the reader to view both

Baudelaire and Benjamin's interpretation in "historical per-

spective": "The appearance of closed facticity which attaches

to a philological interpretation and places the investigator

under its spell, fades to the extent that the object is

construed in an historical perspective. The base lines of this

construction converge in our own historical experience."[88]

Whereas Adorno found Benjamin's procedure open to the charge

of vulgar Marxism--"direct inference from the wine tax to

[Baudelaire's] 'L'Ame du vin'"--Benjamin countered that such

a connection was legitimate because "it gives to the poem

the specific gravity which it assumes in a real reading of

it--something that has so far not been practiced widely in

the case of Baudelaire."[89] The mediation which Adorno thought

to be lacking from Benjamin's method in the Baudelaire essay

was to be supplied in part by the reader himself. By setting

up the thematic material in such a way as to encourage the

reader to experience the historical meaning of Baudelaire's poetry from the vanishing point of the present, the "magical" element of Benjamin's text provided, in a sense, for its own dissolution. The process of dispelling this magical element would be continued in the third and final part of Benjamin's Baudelaire study.[90]

While I would not try to vindicate Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire in every particular, it seems to me that by further developing the theme of reception, Benjamin could have made an even stronger case than he did for the aesthetic-formal principles of his construction. His project was, in the strictest sense, a formal experiment. Its purpose was to see whether some of the formal devices of imaginative literature itself—allegory, ellipsis, montage, etc.—could be used in the interpretation of literary texts. His defense of "astonishment" as a legitimate moment in the interpretative process parallels the Russian Formalists' insight that "defamiliarization"—the renewal of perception by making the familiar or everyday seem strange—is one of the most basic devices of all imaginative literature. By employing these devices in a critical rather than a literary text, and by eschewing the normal devices and conventions of critical discourse, Benjamin may have been attempting to provoke a kind of Brechtian critical "estrangement" of the reader, both from the textual object and from its thematic content. That this attempt was not entirely successful in

the Baudelaire essay did not completely invalidate the
experiment.

For our current purpose, the most important aspect
of Benjamin's formal experiment was that the reader's ex-
pected response became an actual determinant of the formal
structure of Benjamin's essays. Seen in this light, Benjamin's
montage technique, with its syntactic correlative of para-
taxis, was not an end in itself. The aim of Benjamin's writ-
ings in the thirties was not to make philosophy surrealistic,
as Adorno later wrote, nor even to make surrealism philosoph-
ical, but to provoke determinate cognitive and critical
responses in the reader--not an abstract reader, but a reader
who shared the historical perspective of the author, and who
was therefore likely to be familiar with the aesthetic and
political issues prevailing in the thirties. The preponder-
ance of paratactic construction in the essays largely accounts
for the impression they give of passive astonishment, and
of the apparent absence of a controlled cognitive subject
who interprets and synthesizes the material. I suggest that
the corrective was to be found not in the text itself as an
isolated artifact, but in the reading experience of it: in
his or her practical relationship to the thematic content of
the essay, the reader is provoked into forging his own syn-
thesis of the material. The ellipses, the elaborate cross-
referencing between Baudelaire's poems and nineteenth-cen-
tury Paris, and the crescendo effect of the whole--all of

these combined to give Benjamin's text a strangely magical, "incantatory" quality.[91] In this, Benjamin's writing comes close to literary language. But I doubt whether the poetic qualities of Benjamin's texts, which may give those texts the appearance of "closed facticity," are necessarily experienced by the reader in the mesmerized way that Adorno's criticism suggests. Texts which call attention to their principles of construction, as do Benjamin's, thereby reveal their own ultimate arbitrariness, and in doing so, they suggest the possibility of ordering them otherwise. It is in this sense that Benjamin's essay on Baudelaire remains incomplete, open to further speculation on the part of the reader. For what it offers is not so much a definitive interpretation of Baudelaire's poetry as an invitation to the reader to <u>complete</u> the essay: to respond to it in a critical manner, to question it, perhaps even to challenge the principles of construction themselves.

This is not to defend Benjamin's essay in every respect, nor to acquit him of every criticism raised by Adorno. The political content of his arguments was occasionally naive, hortatory and voluntaristic. This is especially true in the <u>Passagenarbeit</u> exposé, where Benjamin implicitly identifies with the "collective unconscious" of the nineteenth-century proletariat, and in his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in which he does indeed romanticize working-class audiences, as

Adorno pointed out. And in the long Baudelaire essay dis-
cussed above, Harry Zohn correctly discerns residues of
Benjamin's earlier mysticism in his avoidance of argument
and interpretation. According to Zohn, "Adorno was not mis-
taken in detecting a deeper aversion in Benjamin to systema-
tic theoretical exposition as such, an innate reluctance to
decant the mysterious elixir of the world into any trans-
lucent vessel of ordered discourse."[92] From a strictly phil-
osophical point of view, many of Adorno's criticisms were
incontestable.

Even so, Benjamin should be defended for the variety
of formal experimentation in his writings and for his sensi-
tivity toward the reader's reception of critical form. These
qualities were already evident in One-Way Street (1928),
his first experiment with the technique of montage. Signif-
icantly, these short prose pieces, which Adorno described as
"a series of thought images," were first published in daily
newspapers and magazines.[93] According to Bernd Witte, the
fact that Benjamin structured his personal recollections of
Weimar Germany in the form of "loosely juxtaposed feuilleton
texts," which were more suited to the newspaper medium than
the traditional memoir or essay form, anticipates his later
theory of the revolutionary potential of the mass media.[94]
In one sense Benjamin's use of this form recalls Antonio
Machado's Juan de Mairena, short prose reflections which ap-
peared serially in Spanish newspapers of the thirties. Al-

though Machado employs the fictional device of attributing
his reflections to an apocryphal professor, they resemble
Benjamin's One-Way Street pieces in their attempt to place
occasional meditations of high philosophical caliber in a
non-elitist journalistic mode more accessible to popular
audiences.[95]

Despite Benjamin's choice of the journalistic medium
(a choice determined largely by financial necessity, it is
true), it can hardly be said that his work simply accommo-
dated the contemporary reading public. Benjamin was clearly
aware of the subversive potential of surrealism, and his own
experiments with surrealist methods were meant to harness
that potential.[96] Not the least significant aspect of his
efforts was the attempt to challenge the perceptual habits
of the reading public. In his 1928 review ("Philosophy as
Cabaret") of the book form of Benjamin's One-Way Street,
Ernst Bloch tried to articulate the nature of this subversive
potential. He placed Benjamin's work in the context of
Weimar Germany in the late twenties, in which dying forms of
bourgeois culture appeared incongruously alongside the ex-
perimental forms of modernism. Bloch likened Benjamin's One-
Way Street ("which can stand as the very type of surrealist
thought") to cabaret, using drama as a metaphor to describe
the displacement of bourgeois cultural forms by the carni-
valesque forms of modernism:

In our time alone could such a book appear, other
than as a mere irrelevancy. Only in our day do in-
ward yet concrete whims cease being solitary, incom-
municable and intangible, to become taken seriously.
For to a great extent large-scale forms have grown
stale. Traditional bourgeois culture with its court
theatre and humanist education cannot even be said
to have the vitality of decadence. But from the
street, the fairground, the circus and cheap fiction
new forms--or forms associated with despised corners
--emerge and take possession of the traditional
stage. A clown has burst in upon the dying ballet,
the light and airy dwelling-machine usurps the
place of architectural styles long dead, and the old
harmonious stage-drama is replaced by the open-work
cabaret. In itself, it is true, there is little
enough in the cabaret besides its open structure
(which can easily become rigid). . . . Indirectly,
however, cabaret may be employed as one of the most
open and--contrary to its own intentions--most
honest forms of the present: it then becomes the
mirror of that empty space in which nothing can be
made whole without a lie and where only fragments
can still meet and intermingle. This indirect effect
had its source in the sensuous vigour and mobility
of unconnected scenes, in their fluidity and inter-
pretation, in their proximity to the world of dreams.
Hence cabaret became a form that could enter into
art of a very different kind, from Piscator to the
Threepenny Opera; such experiments could even incor-
porate improvisations, impromptu acts. With Benjamin
these acts became philosophical: as a mode of dis-
ruption, a form for improvisation and sudden insight,
for details and fragments which do not even aim at
constructing a system. . . . [Thus], Cabaret assumes
a very different shape in Benjamin's experiments with
miniature forms: a considered improvisation, debris
from an exploded totality, a sequence of dreams,
aphorisms and catchwords linked at most by a variety
of oblique associations. If cabaret is a journey
through a disintegrating culture, Benjamin's essay
gives us snapshots or rather a photomontage of the
trip.[97]

Although Bloch's testimony does not prove that

Benjamin's formal experiments in One-Way Street actually ful-

filled their subversive intentions, it may give some idea

of the provocativeness of those experiments for the contem-

porary German reading public.[98] That did not, of course, make Benjamin's surrealist fragments automatically suited to the purposes of his longer essays of the thirties. The devices of parataxis and montage were less successful in sustained critical discourse, as in the first Baudelaire essay. But the example of One-Way Street, when considered in the context of his other writings, allows us to see in the evolution of his work a continuous attempt to overhaul the traditional conventions and devices of critical exposition, and thereby to transform the perceptual and cognitive responses of the reader.

These considerations on the reception of Benjamin's essay may enable us to throw light on the type of cognition which lay behind their production. Adorno claimed that Benjamin's essays reflected a passive subject who remained in thrall to the object of cognition--thereby simply reproducing the immediate aspects of both subject and object, instead of transforming both through critical reflection and interpretation. I would argue that Benjamin's essays represent not so much an abandonment of the critical subject as a new conception of that subject and its role in critical discourse. In Benjamin, the subject no longer appears as the relatively autonomous subject of classical idealism. Paradoxically, Benjamin was more radical than Adorno on that score: his essays enact formally and immanently what Adorno had called for thematically--the critique

of the autonomous thinking subject who assumes a de facto

primacy over the object. Referring to the configurations of

subjectivity in One-Way Street, Bloch wrote:

> Ever new selves . . . materialize and then dissolve.
> Indeed, strictly speaking there is no one in person
> in the streets at all--only their possessions, which
> seems to subsist on their own. Inmost premonitions
> are expressed only in external fragments, which as-
> sume the shape of signs and showcases, of a one-way
> street--not as an arbitrary structure, as an empty
> locality, such as we see in our dreams, but as a
> philosophical primer and bazaar. The result is the
> strangest form in which ideas have ever been cast.[99]

Benjamin's avoidance of the autonomous critical subject did

not entail the loss of all discrimination or spontaneity in

cognition. Far from displaying the merely passive enthrall-

ment of subjectivity, even his apparently most subjectless

texts (One-Way Street, the Passagenarbeit exposé, and the

long Baudelaire essay) affirm in advance the freedom and

spontaneity of the cognitive subject by the very nonconform-

ist peculiarity of their principles of construction. One

critic suggests that Benjamin's most important critical

achievement was precisely to validate the individual sub-

ject's "phenomenological" experience of both works of art

and everyday life: "The subject is preserved and everyday

life becomes a domain which can potentially be transvalued.

Critical reflection based on experimentation, even experi-

mentation with the method itself, thus becomes part of the

method. This is, perhaps, the most radical thrust of

Benjamin's thought."[100]

The fruitfulness of Benjamin's cognitive method was attested by Adorno himself in his essay, "A Portrait of Walter Benjamin" (1950), which to some extent rectified his earlier judgments on Benjamin's writings of the thirties. Pointing out that the conventional notions of creativity, originality, and spontaneity were inappropriate epithets to apply to the work of Benjamin, who regarded such categories with profound suspicion, Adorno yet pays homage to Benjamin's unique cognitive strategy:

> The impression he left was not of someone who created truth or who attained it through conceptual power; rather, in citing it, he seemed to have transformed himself into a supreme instrument of knowledge on which the latter had left its mark. . . . The sub-jectivity of his thought shrank to its own specific difference; the idiosyncratic moment of his mind, its singularity--something which, according to conven-tional philosophical mores, would have been held for contingent, ephemeral, utterly worthless--legitimized itself by giving his thought its compelling charac-ter.[101]

One should not minimize the problematic aspects of Benjamin's writings. What Adorno called the "idiosyncratic moment" of Benjamin's mind corresponded to the strongly eidetic character of his thinking. It was Benjamin's tend-ency to evoke a rich "sphere of images" (as he put it in his essay on surrealism), while remaining unwilling or unable to "unravel" those images by translating them (thereby, he feared, reducing them) into conceptual or discursive lan-guage. Although he was not impervious to the appeal of Benjamin's eidetic thinking, Adorno was never able to accept

it without reservation. On the one hand, Benjamin's reluc-
tance to fully decipher his "thought images" gave his essays
their peculiarly enigmatic quality. But this reticence was,
on the other hand, symptomatic of a fatal ambivalence which
he was never able to resolve in his writings. Benjamin
sought to initiate the reader into the mysteries of his per-
sonal image-field--in which concrete and historical particu-
lars took on utopian resonance--but ironically, he could not
bring himself to decide whether his own attitude toward those
mysteries ought to be one of initiation or demystification.
In Adorno's view, that ambivalence was at one with the pas-
sivity of the subject in Benjamin's essays, and it left its
trace in their static and undialectical quality. But Adorno
was sensitive to what he saw as Benjamin's deviation from
their common philosophical program, and this may have led
him to overlook the sense in which Benjamin's writings could
preserve a dialectical function **despite** the ambivalence of
his theoretical position. In my view, neither the eidetic
moment of Benjamin's thinking nor the unresolved tension be-
tween theology and materialism deprived his writings of their
most productive impulse: their formal anticipation of the
cognitive responses of those who read them. Benjamin's
images characteristically draw the reader within range of
their influence, but they do not provide any definitive
model for resolving them. This rhetorical procedure was provoc-
ative and unorthodox--it is perhaps why the conventional

term "essay" does not seem to adequately describe the nature of his texts--but it is not, I think, inherently undialectical. In their capacity to inform the way in which they are received without fully predetermining the reader's cognitive responses, Benjamin's formal experiments came close to suggesting a new poetics of the critical essay.

Where these experimental tendencies would have led him, had circumstances left him free to pursue them, is of course impossible to say. The Baudelaire project remained unfinished; the subsequent "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939) so closely reflected Adorno's interests and viewpoint that it can scarcely be considered either an integral part of Benjamin's original conception or a genuinely representative stage in the evolution of his writings. Benjamin's suicide the following year while fleeing from Nazi persecution doubtless had the effect of overshadowing the purely formal and aesthetic aspects of his later writings by heightening the significance of their political and philosophical content. His "Theses on the Philosophy of History," which were intended as the methodological introduction to the Passagenarbeit, have understandably been regarded as Benjamin's final philosophical statement.[102] The "Theses," which evidence their author's mastery of parable and vivid metaphor, reveal yet another stage in Benjamin's formal experiments with the essay.[103] They are surely among the richest historical meditations of this century. What is

remarkable about these theses, from our point of view, is that they thematize and make explicit that ethical and philosophical tension between theology and materialism which, while remaining for the most part under the surface of Benjamin's writings during his Marxist period, had perhaps not ceased to function as the creative source of his formal experiments. Benjamin's work, "unfinished" in both the formal and the existential senses, must await a more conclusive treatment than the present one to fully illuminate the connections between his philosophical concerns and the formal characteristics of his style to which I have alluded. But what we have seen is perhaps enough to warrant taking his writings as a heuristic model of the critical essay: in their decisive formal experimentation Benjamin's essays, no less than Adorno's, demonstrate the important aesthetic dimension of critical writing. But in their preoccupation with the reader's reception, they offer a significant counterpoint to Adorno's theory of the essay.

3. Adorno's Rhetorical Strategy

Adorno's main criticism of Benjamin was that his essays reflected an undialectical mode of cognition. The essential passivity of the cognitive subject was said to result in a static mode of exposition. But as we have seen, the apparently static character of Benjamin's texts was miti-

gated by their dialectical anticipation of the reader's reception. His essays were structured in such a way that the reader would not simply assimilate or reproduce the cognitive experience of the critic, but would rather be led to an active reformulation and synthesis of the thematic material. By contrast, it may be argued, Adorno's own essays, although ostensibly dialectical in structure, lend themselves to relatively static and undialectical cognitive responses. This may be partly explained by Adorno's undialectical conception of the relationship between the production and the reception of essays. His approach to cognitive experience was always determined by the principles of immanence and autonomy. His position was that, both in art and in criticism, the subject-object dialectic must be left free to develop immanently, without concern for the practical effects of a work upon the public. As Buck-Morss points out, Adorno's "concept of experience did not include or even imply a theory of intersubjectivity."[104] This was also true of his theory of the essay, which for the most part excluded considerations of the pragmatic effects of form. The problem with this "immanent" position--to state it in terms of Adorno's own theory of cognition--is that the cognitive experience of the reader of essays is not necessarily identical to that of the essayist. Adorno's methodological refusal to anticipate the relationship between the work and its reception tacitly posited an identity between the cog-

nitive experience of the producer of essays and the cognitive responses evoked in the receiver. This tacit identity assumption, insofar as it shaped Adorno's rhetorical strategy, may account for the static effects of his essays, which often strike the reader as self-contained objects with an impenetrable aura of their own. In the final section of this chapter I will argue that Adorno's insistence upon the autonomy of aesthetic production was ideologically related to his desire to preserve the autonomy of the individual thinking subject.

It would of course be an exaggeration to say that Adorno did not concern himself with the problem of reception. His numerous studies of music and mass culture were concerned precisely with the relationship between modes of production and types of reception.[105] His diagnosis of modern music convinced him that the reified perceptual habits of individual subjects left them increasingly less capable of reproducing the disciplined aesthetic and cognitive experience which genuine works of art embodied.[106] This situation was reflected in Schoenberg's music:

> The purity and sovereignty with which Schoenberg always entrusts himself to the demands of his subject-matter has restricted his influence; it is precisely because of its seriousness, richness and integrity that his music arouses resentment. The more it gives its listeners, the less it offers them. It requires the listener spontaneously to compose its inner movement and demands of him not mere contemplation but praxis (emphasis added). 107

Accordingly, said Adorno, "Schoenberg's music honours the listener by not making any concessions to him."[108] This statement suggests the rationale behind Adorno's rhetorical strategy. Just as Schoenberg's austere compositions, with their dissonance and atonality, resisted the trend toward perceptual reification in the consumption of music (Adorno used the phrase "culinary listening"), so Adorno's essays, in their formal enactment of negative dialectics, were designed to provide a refuge for autonomous and unreified thinking. As in Schoenberg's music, the very difficulty of access to Adorno's texts becomes an index of his uncompromising position with respect to reception.[109] However, Adorno's methodologically rigorous observance of aesthetic autonomy may have kept his work from achieving its intended effect. Aware that the relationship between cultural-intellectual and political praxis was a highly "mediated" one, Adorno had assumed that the artist or critic best served the interests of revolution when he worked strictly within his own cultural sphere, developing the immanent logic of the material according to its own aesthetic and technical demands, without subordinating any aspect of his production to the external realities of political struggle.[110] But in order for his works to have this critical or progressive effect, even within the cultural sphere, they would first have had to reach readers who might benefit from his critique of reification. Whatever Adorno's critical intentions,

his difficult and hermetic style would seem to have limited
his readership to a sympathetic few--presumably those least
in need of anti-reification therapy. A writer is hardly
serving the cause of de-reifying the cognitive experience of
individuals, when the only ones who can read his writings are
those whose cognition is already (implicitly) de-reified.
Adorno's error lay in the assumption that the only possible
intentional relationship between the essayist and the reader
was one of conformist adaptation to the reader's "regressive"
perceptual habits. Buck-Morss has repeatedly stressed the
elitist implications of Adorno's position, claiming that
"Adorno's theory never squarely faced the problem of the re-
lationship between cultural revolt and political revolution.
. . . in failing to articulate the connecting link between
the individual experience of intellectual revolt and the
transformation of social reality, Adorno here again leaves
us with the question, precisely whom were the avant-garde
leading?"[111] But I am less interested here in pursuing a
sociological analysis of the actual reception of Adorno's
essays than in providing a phenomenological description of
the reading experience implied by the structure of these es-
says.[112] Adorno's writings must be dealt with on their own
terms: that is, immanently. If my argument that Adorno's
rhetorical strategy led to a static mode of reception is to
be sustained, then it must be shown that his style was likely
to have such an effect even upon the bourgeois intellectuals

for whom his writings were implicitly intended. We have already remarked that to a great extent Adorno's style did manage, through certain rhetorical devices and figures of nonidentity, to break through the reified conventions and assumptions of traditional thinking. But this accomplishment was not equivalent to the reader's experience of Adorno's style. According to Adorno's own analogy between Schoenberg's "dialectical" compositions and philosophical form, genuinely dialectical essays would require the reader's active and spontaneous cognitive "performance" of them; they would require of him "not mere contemplation but praxis." But do Adorno's essays really lead to such a critical performance by the reader?

It seems to me that, by remaining methodically indifferent to the reader's reception for the sake of the immanent integrity of his essays, Adorno was in effect creating the conditions for his essays to be experienced as reified objects. They became, in a sense, closed "performances," intricate dialectical incursions, often into a number of distantly related fields at the same time, to be followed and consumed by a reader whose response was more likely to be one of dazzlement than of active critical participation. In themselves, Adorno's essays leave the reader with a narrow range of cognitive responses. It is not that no genuine cognitive response to them is conceivable--it is always possible to disagree with Adorno's premises and conclusions--but that

response is likely to take the form of an attempt to free oneself from the aura of his style, to shake off the mesmerizing rhetorical apparatus in which his thought takes place. In this respect, Adorno's essays seem to reduce the role of the reader to the essentially passive one of observing the critical performance of the essayist, or at best of receiving the critical insights to be gleaned from that performance. Rather than stimulating the reader to think dialectically for himself, Adorno's essays offer the reader dialectical exhibitions. To the extent that Adorno's essays put dialectics on display, they run counter to his theory of the essay, which claimed that the form was strictly nonrepresentational. In a sense, Adorno's anti-representational protestations may be belied by a metaphor he employs in "Der Essay als Form," according to which the essayist "does not so much think as make himself into the stage [Schauplatz] of mental experience. . . ."[113] That Adorno's thought possesses these mesmerizing qualities is of course testimony both to his ability as a stylist and to his intellectual powers, but this is damning praise to a critic who expressly rejected passive astonishment as a valid cognitive mode.

It could be objected that the above says nothing about the truth or falsehood of Adorno's critical judgments, and that it is the correctness of such individual judgments that matters in criticism in the long run. But it is Adorno's own insistence upon the nonthetic aspects of philosophical

form which authorizes us to judge his essays for their pragmatic and cognitive effects, and not only for their propositional content. What matters in philosophy, as in music, according to Adorno, "is what happens in it, not a thesis or position—the texture, not the deductive on inductive course of one-track minds."[114] But to ask what happens in a text is already to go beyond considering the text as an autonomous and complete object; it is to inquire into the reader's way of experiencing the text. It is by now axiomatic for most theories of aesthetic response that one cannot conceive the full "meaning" of a given text without positing the reader's actualization or performance of the semantic possibilities of the text.[115] Such theories only update Lukács' earlier observation that form is both an aesthetic and a social category; for it implies an intersubjective relationship between the production and the reception of texts.

In the act of reading, the reader becomes the subject of an experience which, ideally, does not simply reproduce that of the essayist, but rather takes it as a point of departure for a cognitive experience of a second order. In Adorno's essays, however, the dialectician-composer places strict limits on the reader's performance of an essay by spelling out all the proper mediations and connections for him in advance. This may at first seem to contradict our earlier observation that Adorno's essays were organized "discontinuously," in broken fragments. In "Der Essay als Form,"

it will be recalled, Adorno argued that the essay defies the
logical and compositional neatness of systems by structuring
itself ". . . as though it could be suspended at any moment."
In its observance of discontinuity and fragmentation, the
essay was said to be more faithful to the "antagonistic"
nature of its object than were the formal harmony and logical
continuity of philosophical systems. Regarding the composi-
tional technique of his later work, Ästhetische Theorie,
Adorno remarked in letters to his editor that the work was
constructed ". . . concentrically, in equally weighted, para-
tactic parts which are ordered around a middle point which is
expressed by the constellation of the parts." Adorno justi-
fied this "paratactic" procedure by arguing that ". . . from
my theorem that there are no philosophical first principles,
it follows that one cannot construct a continuous argument
with the usual stages, but one must assemble the whole from
a series of partial complexes . . . whose constellation not
[logical] sequence produces the idea."[116] In one way, this
accurately describes the compositional method of Adorno's
essays. As we noted in our discussion of "Der Essay als Form,"
his arguments and themes do not develop linearly from one
"partial complex" to another. Rather, these complexes--para-
graphs often several pages long--are relatively discrete
wholes in which a central thematic problem is restated and
reworked in terms of varying theoretical contexts and allu-
sions. These discrete complexes are then like musical move-

ments which relate to the whole essay by virtue of their internal thematic and structural organization rather than by their linear sequence or by the transitions between them. In this sense, the principle of construction of Adorno's essays is one of discontinuity and parataxis. But in a narrower sense, to call Adorno's essays paratactic is misleading. While the larger units (or "partial complexes") of Adorno's essays may be paratactically related, Adorno's sentences-- both in their internal structure and in their logical relationship to one another--are predominantly hypotactic in nature. They are characterized, in other words, by a preponderance of subordinate constructions. In Adorno's essays the typical function of hypotactic constructions is to qualify a point and thereby to indicate the writer's position on a given issue. Once again, it is Benjamin's prose which offers the most instructive comparison. The montage effect of Benjamin's essay, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," with its predominantly paratactic construction, seemed to Adorno to reveal the absence of mediation by the cognitive subject. By contrast, Adorno's hypotactic sentences show the cognitive subject's intervention and control of the material at every turn. One may posit a connection between Adorno's stylistic practice and his view of correct cognitive procedure. The prevalence of hypotaxis in Adorno's prose registers his attempt to perform in his essays what he found lacking in Benjamin's: the "mediation" of cultural phenomena

through the "total social process." In Adorno's texts, this "mediation" appears in the form of subordinate clauses which situate a thematized trait or phenomenon by referring it to its wider social context, while at the same time interpreting and evaluating it in terms of the theoretical categories and aesthetic norms which make up the presuppositional framework of Adorno's critical theory. To take only one example, consider the opening passage to his 1951 essay, "Arnold Schoenberg, 1879-1951." Here Adorno employs a series of subordinate constructions which perform several functions at once. They describe the historical evolution of Schoenberg's music in terms of the public response to it, while gradually exposing that response as being determined by the manipulative forces of the "culture industry":

> In the public mind of today Schoenberg appears as an innovator, as a reformer, even as the inventor of a system. With grudging respect it is admitted that he prepared the way for others, a way, it is true, which they had no great desire to travel; yet this concession is linked to the implication that he himself was a failure and has already become obsolete. The one-time pariah is repressed, neutralized and absorbed. Not merely his early works but those of his middle period as well--which at the time earned him the hatred of all culture-lovers--are dismissed as 'Wagnerian' or 'late Romantic', although in forty years few have learned how to perform them properly. The works he wrote after the First World War are appraised as examples of the twelve-tone technique. In recent years, it is true, numerous young composers have taken up this technique again, but more in the search of a shell behind which to take refuge than as the necessary result of their own experience, and hence without troubling to worry about the function of the twelve-tone method within Schoenberg's own work. Such repression and dressing-up is provoked by

the difficulties that Schoenberg poses to a listening
public which has been kneaded into shape by the cul-
ture industry.[117]

Here Adorno does not present bare facts in a linear fashion,
but constantly interprets phenomena according to his own crit-
ical categories . One effect of this technique is that the
reader is led to reflect upon, and perhaps to re-evaluate,
his own historical relationship to Schoenberg's music, as
well as to what Adorno calls the "public mind of today." But
the outcome of that reflection is partly decided in advance
by Adorno's rhetorical strategy; it is pre-conditioned by the
value-laden terms in which Adorno defines the historical pro-
cess in question. The reader is persuaded to accept Adorno's
view of the matter, and his positive evaluation of Schoenberg's
music, if only to avoid thinking of himself as belonging to
that philistine public which is manipulated by the "culture
industry." In this sense, it is the reader's responses which
are "kneaded into shape" by Adorno's hypotactical mediations.

In his essay, "Cultural Criticism and Society,"
Adorno explained the cognitive rationale for this active
intervention of the subject in critical discourse, defending
the dialectical mobility of the subject--that is, its right to
move back and forth between the specific cultural object and
its social context, thus mediating both through the immanent
structure of the critical essay:

> The less the dialectical method can today presuppose
> the Hegelian identity of subject and object, the more
> it is obliged to be mindful of the duality of its mo-

>ments. It must relate the knowledge of society as a
>totality and of the mind's involvement in it to the
>claim inherent in the specific content of the object
>that it be apprehended as such. Dialectics cannot,
>therefore, permit any insistence on logical neatness
>to encroach on its right to go from one <u>genus</u> to
>another, to shed light on an object in itself hermet-
>ic by casting a glance at society, to present society
>with the bill which the object does not redeem.[118]

As this passage makes clear, Adorno's conception of immanent

criticism was not a kind of formalism; it did not mean that

the essayist restricted his attention to the formal features

of the work under discussion. To respect the immanent "logic"

of thematic material did not mean to place limits on the

critic's field of reference; it meant precisely to articulate

the full social meanings of cultural objects, meanings which

appeared in particular texts or works of art only in struc-

turally "coded" fashion.[119] More specifically, the above

passage suggests the theoretical and practical motivations

for the predominance of hypotactic constructions in Adorno's

essays. Hypotaxis was the rhetorical means by which the es-

sayist attempted to grasp not only the object in itself ("as

such"), but also the way in which it was related to the

entire social world of which it formed a part. It was an in-

strument for laying bare the socio-historical mediations which

gave the phenomenon its specific conceptual and ideological

density. The stylistic contrast between Adorno and Benjamin--

it should be understood that I am referring to relative tend-

encies, not absolute distinctions--may be characterized ac-

cording to the different cognitive operations which their

texts structurally induce the reader to perform. Benjamin's
paratactic prose in a sense impels the reader to construct
for himself the conceptual links between different aspects
of the material thus presented in a montage-like manner. In
Adorno's essays, as if to remedy the reader's alleged incapac-
ity to think critically for himself, the subject's conceptual-
cognitive responses are virtually programmed into the text
by its explicit syntactical links and categorical frame-
work.[120]

But one cannot stop at the observation that Benjamin's
prose is characteristically paratactical, while Adorno's is
predominantly hypotactical, as though this stylistic dif-
ference were enough in itself to explain the different prag-
matic effects their writings have upon the reader. For nei-
ther parataxis nor hypotaxis is _intrinsically_ static or dia-
lectical, any more than any other stylistic or rhetorical
device can be said to possess such an inherent function in
isolation. The function of such devices depends on their use
and disposition within the entire aesthetic context of indi-
vidual essays. Therefore, it remains to be shown how hypo-
taxis interacts with other features of Adorno's general rhe-
torical strategy, and how that general strategy leads to what
I have described as the static qualities of his essays.

Adorno wrote in _Minima Moralia_ that "the value of a
thought is measured by its distance from the continuity of
the familiar."[121] This observation is consonant with his

theory of the essay as a form which preserves and highlights the basic nonidentity between the subject and the object of cognitive experience. Adorno argued that dialectical cognition had its formal-aesthetic counterpart in discontinuity and fragmentation, which immanently disrupted the "continuity of the familiar" represented by systems. Adorno's own style aimed at preserving the contradictory nature of reality through such figures of nonidentity as paradox, chiasmus, and oxymoron. But even figures and devices which may work locally and individually against identity, familiarity, and stasis, can become part of a stable and familiar structure of argumentation, a predictable pattern. This is what happens in Adorno's essays. When one considers the reader's reception of Adorno's essays (as that reception is structurally conditioned by the rhetorical strategy and form of those essays), it may be seen that their actual effect is in some ways contrary to the function attributed to the essay by Adorno's theory. It is true that this impression presupposes the reader's familiarity with the general corpus of Adorno's writings; it does not derive from a reading of any particular essay. But the reader who is familiar with Adorno's oeuvre will be able to discern a relatively stable and predictable rhetorical pattern in individual essays as well. And as the reader "learns" the underlying structure of Adorno's thought and rhetorical strategy, that structure becomes a source of closure, in that the reader feels his own cognitive responses

to be predetermined in familiar and predictable ways.

As was suggested in the last chapter, Adorno's rhetorical strategy was shaped chiefly by his philosophy of negative dialectics. In Adorno's essays, the leading concepts and categories of negative dialectics were cogently applied to a wide range of phenomena. According to Adorno's theory, concepts were to have a heuristic rather than a defining function. Instead of dominating the thematic material, as in traditional philosophy, the essays's concepts were to follow the lead of the object being investigated. The concepts "interacted" with the object in the cognitive process, which was in turn mediated through the aesthetic context of essays; the moments of thought would thus ". . . weave themselves together as in a tapestry."[122] However, not only did Adorno's cognitive method tend to crystallize in an established network of concepts and categories; his use of these concepts and categories was increasingly subordinated to and determined by the pervasive dualism of his thought. Thematically, Adorno's essays were typically structured around central binary oppositions. These were not always neutral or descriptive oppositions arising from the subject matter itself, but were often polemical oppositions which reflected the author's views on wider issues, polarities overdetermined by positions worked out previously in his general philosophical aesthetics. For example, the system-fragment opposition upon which Adorno's theory of the essay is based is derived less from

empirical observations of the history of the essay form than from his running critique of totality and systems. Nor is the binary structure of "Der Essay als Form" limited to the thematic level. The central opposition between system and fragment, totality and non-totality, has a decisive structuring effect on the rhetorical figures of chiasmus, paradox and oxymoron. By serving as the thematic axis around which the local antithetical tropes are constructed, the central opposition acquires a formal function as well.

This is not to say that Adorno's binary oppositions are always brought in from the outside, or imposed upon the material in a totally arbitrary manner. In many polemical pieces Adorno deals with already existing controversies, choosing one side of a polemical opposition which is not of his own making. In a previously discussed essay on Shoenberg, the latter's "dialectical" compositions are defended against the works of various undialectical or "voluntaristic" composers.[123] In his penetrating critique of Lukács, entitled "Reconciliation under Duress," Adorno challenges Lukács' opposition between "realism" and "modernism," reversing Lukács' negative judgment upon "modernism" by systematically vindicating the aesthetic techniques of such writers as Proust, Kafka, Joyce and Beckett--whom Lukács had collectively condemned for their modernist "formalism" and "decadence." Again, in "Commitment," Adorno argues for his own apolitical doctrine of immanence in art, against the aesthetics of com-

mitment in Sartre and Brecht.[124]

In other essays Adorno employs the ostensibly more
dialectical procedure of setting up a pivotal opposition
without choosing one side over the other. In such cases,
each side of the opposition is used to reveal the limitations
of the other. Thus, in "Cultural Criticism and Society,"
Adorno deploys the opposition between "transcendent" and
"immanent" cultural criticism in such a way as to show the
insufficiencies of each type:

> The abstract categorizing and, as it were, adminis-
> trative thinking of the former corresponds in the
> latter to the fetishism of an object blind to its
> genesis, which has become the prerogative of the
> expert. But if stubbornly immanent contemplation
> threatens to revert to idealism, to the illusion of
> the self-sufficient mind in command of both itself
> and of reality, transcendent contemplation threatens
> to forget the effort of conceptualization required
> and content itself instead with the prescribed
> label, the petrified invective, most often "petty
> bourgeois", the ukase dispatched from above.[125]

And in "Valéry Proust Museum," an essay which I will discuss
in more detail below, Adorno contrasts Valéry's and Proust's
attitudes towards museums by way of establishing a dialectic
between, and pointing out the inadequacies of, two distinct
contemporary reactions to art.[126] However, in neither of the
two essays is the central dialectical antinomy left to stand
intact, entirely without resolution. In both "Cultural Crit-
icism and Society" and "Valéry Proust Museum" (explicitly
in the first and implicitly in the second), what appears as
the dialectical __Aufhebung__ or resolution of the fundamental

opposition in question, absorbing the insights and correcting the defects of each pole, turns out to be Adorno's own method of dialectical criticism.

Let us briefly consider the overall rhetorical structure of one of Adorno's essays. "Valéry Proust Museum" is a useful example, not only because of its overtly dualistic structure, but also because it is about the reception of visual art in the modern period, and may be taken as Adorno's answer to Benjamin's early essay on this question, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." The question of museums serves Adorno as the occasion for a reflection on the general fate of art works and their enjoyment in an age of reification. "Museums," he writes in his initial statement of the problem, "are like the family sepulchres of works of art. They testify to the neutralization of culture. Art treasures are hoarded in them, and their market value leaves no room for the pleasure of looking at them. Nevertheless, that pleasure is dependent on the existence of museums" (p. 175). In Adorno's view, museums are symptomatic of the problematic relationship between the contemporary viewer and the "cultural tradition." Museums represent the alienation of works of art from their original context, a process which, as Benjamin had shown, destroyed the "aura" of traditional art. However, the situation is irreversible, for it is impossible to recapture a more authentic experience of art by

exhibiting it in its original setting, without creating an even more intolerable effect. Adorno presents this situation as an apparently insoluble dilemma:

> Anyone who thinks that art can be reproduced in its original form through an act of the will is trapped in hopeless romanticism. Modernizing the past does it much violence and little good. But to renounce radically the possibility of experiencing the traditional would be to capitulate to barbarism out of devotion to culture. That the world is out of joint is shown everywhere in the fact that however a problem is solved, the solution is false. (p. 176)

Valéry and Proust, who wrote separately on the problem of museums, are chosen by Adorno to represent the two sides of this antinomy.[127] Both Valéry and Proust assumed that art was meant to produce aesthetic pleasure or enjoyment. But their attitudes toward individual works of art, their ways of deriving pleasure from a given work, are fundamentally opposite. Valéry, the poet and master craftsman, values the individual work of art for its own sake. But his enjoyment is contingent on the work's position "in the immediacy of life, in its functional context"--that is, on the integrity of its physical and intellectual setting (p. 180). Valéry is appalled by the "cold confusion" of the Louvre, where works of art stand reified, wrenched from their living context and thus, in a sense, killed off. His frayed "aesthetic nerves" register the "over-accumulation" of works of art in the museum. Adorno makes Valéry's economic metaphor explicit: "When he speaks of the accumulation of excessive and therefore unusable capital, Valéry uses metaphorically an

expression literally valid for the economy. Whether artists produce or rich people die, whatever happens is good for the museums" (pp. 176-77). Proust, however--who, in Adorno's depiction, displays subtle but unmistakable parallels to Benjamin--feels more at home in museums than Valéry; his concern is less for the intrinsic formal aspects of the work of art, or its context of production, than for "the afterlife of works of art," their effects upon the viewer. Proust does not share Valéry's "unconditional fetishism" toward the work: for Proust, works of art ". . . are part of the life of the person who observes them; they become an element of his consciousness. He thus perceives a level in them very different from that of the formal laws of the work. It is a level set free only by the historical development of the work, a level which has as its premise the death of the living intention of the work" (p. 181). Whereas Valéry's relationship to art is that of the "expert and producer," Proust's is that of "an admiring consumer, an amateur" (p. 180). If Valéry subordinates the subjective moment in creation and perception to the realized work in its vital context, Proust sacrifices the contextual integrity of the work for the subjective inspiration to be derived from it.

However, Adorno finds the unconditional faith in aesthetic enjoyment shared by Valéry and Proust to be a "questionable matter":

> For anyone who is close to works of art, they are no
> more objects of delight than is his own breathing.
> Rather, he lives among them like a modern inhabitant
> of a medieval town who replies with a peremptory
> "yes, yes," when a visitor remarks on the beauty of
> the buildings, but who knows every corner and portal.
> But it is only when the distance necessary for enjoy-
> ment to be possible is established between the ob-
> server and works of art that the question of their
> continuing vitality can arise. (p. 179)

Although he thus introduces a third perspective on art into
the discussion--his own perspective--Adorno is careful not
to dispel the dialectical tension set up by the Valéry-
Proust opposition, by affirming one side of this opposition
over the other. Rather, each position is said to possess a
"moment of truth," and Adorno elaborates that moment until
the limitations of each position also become clear. On the
one hand, the conservative Valéry was right to affirm ". . .
the objective character, the immanent coherence of the work
in contrast to the contingency of the subject . . ." Here
Adorno uses Valéry as a mouthpiece for his own convictions
on the autonomy of culture:

> Only what exists for its own sake, without regard to
> those it is supposed to please, can fulfill its
> human end. Few things have contributed so greatly to
> dehumanization as has the universal human belief that
> products of the mind are justified only in so far as
> they exist for men--the belief itself bears witness
> to the dominance of manipulative rationality. (p. 182)

On the other hand, Adorno detects something naive and "quix-
otic" in Valéry's fetishizing of the work of art and his
repulsion toward museums. Valéry overlooks that "What eats
away at the life of the art work is also its own life. . . .

Works of art can fully embody the promesse du bonheur only
when they have been uprooted from their native soil and set
out along the path to their own destruction. Proust recognized
this" (pp. 184-85). But then Proust, whose attitude is that
of the "spectator" or "dilettante," is shown to be undialec-
tical in the opposite sense. In contrast to Valéry's un-
swerving devotion to the objectified work of art, ". . . the
primacy Proust assigns the flux of experience and his refusal
to tolerate anything fixed and determinate have a sinister
aspect--conformity, the ready adjustment to changing situa-
tions which he shares with Bergson." Proust's "philistine
attitude" towards art is the undialectical counterpart of
Valéry's purism. In Adorno's antinomian logic, however, such
traits rarely possess a fixed value: a weakness, pushed to
its extreme, turns into its dialectical opposite. Just as
Valéry's position contained both a moment of truth and a
moment of rigidity, so Proust's excessive subjectivism be-
comes a source of strength: "Proust, in his unfettered sub-
jectivism, is untrue to objectifications of the spirit, but
it is only this subjectivism that enables him to break through
the immanence of culture" (p. 183). Through such inversions
Adorno preserves the symmetry of the initial antinomy.

Adorno sums up the controversy:

> In the litigation implicitly pending between them,
> neither Proust nor Valéry is right, nor could a
> middle-of-the-road reconciliation be arranged. The
> conflict between them points up in a most penetrating
> way a conflict in the matter itself, and each takes

the part of one moment in the truth which lies in the unfolding of contradiction. The fetishism of the object and the subject's infatuation with itself find their correctives in each other. Each position passes over into the other. (p. 183)

This passage could well be taken as a description of Adorno's own method. It reflects the central tenet of negative dialectics, that contradictions should be "unfolded" but not resolved; that no final synthesis or reconciliation is possible or desirable. Unquestionably, this is good dialectical policy. "Valéry Proust Museum" is one of the finest examples of negative dialectics in action, and of the cognitive insights to which Adorno's use of this method could lead. But it must be added that, to the reader of Adorno's essays, there is, after all, something like a resolution of the problem it poses. It consists precisely in the implicit affirmation of Adorno's cognitive method as the only possible solution--even if it remains a hypothetical and <u>mental</u> solution, rather than one to be realized in any concrete sense--the only way of transcending the opposition represented here by the Valéry-Proust "litigation." Adorno concludes by returning to the historical situation of museums. Here his remarks confirm earlier hints in the essay that "Valéry Proust Museum" is in some ways an epilogue to the aesthetic debates between Benjamin and himself in the thirties. "The museums will not be shut, nor would it even be desirable to shut them. The natural-history collections of the spirit have actually transformed works of art into the hieroglyphics of history

and brought them a new content while the old one shrivelled up." This sentence, with its echoes of Benjamin's Trauerspiel work, is in one sense a tribute to his former friend, but it also sets the tone for Adorno's rejoinder to Benjamin's theory of aesthetic reception in the latter's 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Proust's casual way of experiencing paintings by "strolling through exhibitions" (p. 180) will now be associated with Benjamin's figure of the flâneur. Adorno has the last word. His concluding passage spells the obituary to the flâneur's mode of aesthetic reception, and in the process proposes a surprisingly quietist solution (even for Adorno) to the Valéry-Proust issue. Here Adorno leaves the reader with an aftertaste of the resignation which is never entirely absent from his later writings:

> Yet museums certainly emphatically demand something of the observer, just as every work of art does. For the flâneur, in whose shadow Proust walked, is also a thing of the past, and it is no longer possible to stroll through museums letting oneself be delighted here and there. The only relation to art that can be sanctioned in a reality that stands under the constant threat of catastrophe is one that treats works of art with the same deadly seriousness that characterizes the world today. The evil Valéry diagnoses can be avoided only by one who leaves his naivete outside along with his cane and his umbrella, who knows exactly what he wants, picks out two or three paintings, and concentrates on them as fixedly as if they really were idols. (p. 185)[128]

Several factors contribute to the sense of closure which emerges from our reading of Adorno's essay. First, there is a strong tone of inevitability: one might infer

that Adorno's way of experiencing art is perhaps the only alternative to barbarism and "catastrophe." Moreover, the effect of closure is heightened by the binary structure of Adorno's argument, the rhetorical equilibrium maintained between the two opposing sides. By the end of the essay one has the impression that the problem of museums is laid bare in all its contradictory aspects, that all viable options have been exhausted—"however the problem is solved, the solution is false"—all, that is, except for the resigned perspective of the critic who practices negative dialectics and thereby avoids the pitfalls of embracing any definitive position. Indeed, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that Adorno's central theme, the opposition between Valéry and Proust on museums, has been chosen and organized rhetorically in such a way as to illustrate and confirm the author's own cognitive method and his views on art and aesthetics.

It is, of course, to be doubted whether an essayist can ever entirely avoid imposing prior categories of experience upon his subject matter. Adorno's critique of systems in one sense recalls Montaigne's eschewal of scholastic formalism and of the slavish imitation of classical rhetorical models in thematic presentation. Adorno's defense of "unmethodical method" echoes Montaigne's justification of the essayist's spontaneity, of his right to digress from a given theme, to think extemporaneously rather than in accord with

some preordained scheme.[129] But just as Montaigne was unable to do entirely without topical thinking, so, in Adorno's essays, the dominant binary oppositions have the function of topoi or rhetorical places, sources for the discovery (inventio) of thematic material and arguments. Characteristically, it is Adorno himself who formulates the strongest possible critique of such "topological thinking": "Topological thinking, which knows the place of every phenomenon and the essence of none, is secretly related to the paranoic system of delusions which is cut off from experience of the object. Dialectics must guard against this no less than against enthrallment in the cultural object."[130] Yet, as we have seen, the subject matter of Adorno's essays is referred to and filtered through a pre-established network of categories and oppositions. Instead of "opening up" the thematic object --the function assigned to the essay form by Adorno's theory --his own essays in a sense contained the object within the binary system of oppositions which underlies his thinking. To this extent, Adorno's method violated his own prohibition against "identity thinking"--thinking which mistakes its own categories for reality itself. From the reader's point of view, the objects of experience thematized in Adorno's essays are partially occluded by the rhetorical pattern and categorical framework imposed by the essayist.

It is in this sense that Wohlfarth and Buck-Morss are essentially justified in claiming that Adorno's negative

dialectics became a system. That Adorno was aware of the

danger of reifying aesthetic "models" and turning them into

systems is clear from these remarks from his essay on

Schoenberg:

> The element of delusion shared by both technical-aes-
> thetic and cognitive systems does, it is true, assure
> them of their suggestive power. They become models.
> But in denying themselves self-reflection and making
> themselves static, they become moribund and cripple
> the very impulse that produced the system in the first
> place. There is no middle way that avoids the alter-
> native. To ignore the insights that have coalesced
> into the system is to cling impotently to what has
> been superseded. Yet the system itself becomes a
> fixed idea and universal recipe. It is not the meth-
> od itself that is false--no one can compose any
> longer who has not sensed with his own ears the grav-
> itational pull towards twelve-tone technique--but
> rather its hypostasization, the rejection of all that
> is otherwise, of anything not already analytically
> assimilated. Music must not identify its methods, a
> part of subjective reason, with the subject-matter,
> which is objective. The pressures to do just this,
> however, increase . . . the magic formula replaces
> the comprehensive work which prohibits itself. To be
> true to Schoenberg is to warn against all twelve-tone
> schools. Devoid of experimentation as well as prudence,
> these schools no longer involve any risk, and hence
> have entered the service of a second conformity. The
> means have become ends.[131]

But this was a danger which Adorno's own essays did not en-

tirely avoid. As we have seen in "Valéry Proust Museum,"

Adorno comes close to identifying the subject matter with

his own cognitive method; this suggests that the method had

become an end in itself. The problem of reception adds an-

other dimension to the paradox of Adorno's essays. To have

a chance of succeeding, a protest against reification must

itself be externalized, objectified in form. But as Adorno

points out, the very objectification of a formal model makes

it susceptible of familiarization and habit. To avoid hypos-
tatizing his own model, Adorno intensified the negative aspects
(which are at the same time the utopian aspects) of his
writings. This intention is evident in the difficulty and
complexity of his style, which shunned facile communication
with a complacent public in order to preserve the promesse
du bonheur which modern culture, in Adorno's view, was al-
ways on the verge of betraying. This utopian negativity in-
forms the rhetorical strategy of his essays at all levels,
including the dominant thematic oppositions, the pervasive
hypotaxis of sentence structure, and the frequent binary
tropes. But that strategy was self-defeating insofar as it
took on a reified, formulaic quality. Negative dialectics
became "second nature" both to the author and to the reader
of Adorno's essays; it thus became an undialectical reflec-
tion of the positivity and harmony of systems, against which
Adorno had intended to rebel.[132] If in Adorno's view Lukács'
Marxism fetishized the positive, synthesizing moment of dia-
lectics, it may be said that Adorno made a fetish out of the
negative.

C. Rhetorical and Ideological Closure

"In every philosophy there is a point at which
the 'conviction' of the philosopher steps upon
the scene."

Nietzsche, Beyond Good and
Evil, Aphorism 8.

In the foregoing sections I have attempted to de-
scribe the underlying rhetorical structure of Adorno's essays.
I have argued that, while this recurrent structure is propo-
sitionally consistent with the cognitive strategy of neg-
ative dialectics, it is nonetheless a source of closure when
considered from the point of view of the reader's reception
of his essays. That this closure is not a mere surface phe-
nomenon in his essays, that it reflects basic closural ten-
dencies within Adorno's work, is suggested by the already-
mentioned claims of Irving Wohlfarth and Susan Buck-Morss
that negative dialectics became a "closed system" despite
Adorno's anti-systematic intentions. Now I will briefly
argue that the rhetorical closure which we have observed in
Adorno's essays has its source in a deeper ideological level
of closure operating in Adorno's work--namely, his commit-
ment to a bourgeois form of consciousness.

It is at least ironic that a philosopher whose en-
tire production is presented as an attack upon the auton-
omous subject of bourgeois individualism (a subject which
had received a kind of philosophical legitimation by clas-
sical German idealism) should nevertheless devise a phi-

losophy of discursive form which champions precisely that subject and its claims to autonomous reason. To be sure, Adorno's own theory of negative dialectics provides some theoretical justification for his ambivalence toward the cognitive subject. His insistence upon the nonidentity between subject and object meant that, in contrast to Hegelian idealism, the subject of consciousness was not to be accorded final primacy over the object of cognition. Yet neither could the subject be suppressed altogether, since valid cognition depended above all upon the mutual tension and mediation between subject and object. "To use the strength of the subject to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity--" as Adorno wrote in his 1966 preface to <u>Negative Dialectics</u>, "this is what the author felt to be his task ever since he came to trust his own mental impulses . . ."[133] But the fact is that Adorno's thinking on this matter underwent a sea change from his early (pre-exile) writings to his later work. As Wohlfarth has noted, Adorno's early pronouncements on the autonomous bourgeois subject were characterized by a "destructive élan," a militant tone which became muted in his later writings.[134] In his 1931 lecture, "The Actuality of Philosophy," Adorno had advocated the "liquidation" of traditional philosophy based upon the assumption of a subject who embodied autonomous reason.[135] And his 1933 study of Kierkegaard aimed at demystifying the image of the bourgeois <u>intérieur</u> in the latter's work--an image which

Adorno took to exemplify the solipsistic immediacy and irrationality of the subject in bourgeois idealism.[136] By the mid-nineteen-thirties however, Adorno's position on the subject had mellowed. In a 1935 letter to Benjamin he cautioned: "The 'individual' is a dialectical instrument of transition that must not be mythicized away, but can only be superseded."[137] This note of reticence became more pronounced after Adorno's emigration to the United States in 1938. Faced with the rise of authoritarianism and the conformism of mass culture, he became convinced that the real danger was not the prolongation or the pretentious claims of the bourgeois individual, but rather the "liquidation of the individual"--the disappearance of the individual's capacity for critical and autonomous reason.[138] Adorno's empirical studies on popular music convinced him that the standardization and "pseudo-individuality" of mass culture turned the individual subject into a passive consumer and rendered him incapable of active critical experience. This was, as we noted earlier, one of the reasons why Adorno chastised Benjamin for the apparent passivity of the cognitive subject in his writings.[139]

Although it is always difficult to determine the precise influence of personal and contingent factors upon philosophical theories, it seems likely that Adorno's pleas on behalf of the disappearing individual were to some extent an ideological defense mechanism, a way of rationalizing his

own class bias. His defense of immanence and autonomy in art,
his argument on the necessity of preserving the critical
subject, his rejection of voluntaristic positions of all
kinds--all of these converged with his elitist tastes and
class interests in too many ways to be entirely coinciden-
tal. Wohlfarth has put it succinctly: "His critique of bour-
geois selfhood was careful not to jeopardize the dialecti-
cian's own self."[140] In a detailed comparison of the polit-
ical philosophies of Benjamin and Adorno, Wohlfarth brings
out the ideological nuances of their respective positions.
He contrasts Benjamin's willingness to "betray" his class
by sacrificing the intellectual's privileged distance from
the political struggles of the proletariat to Adorno's in-
sistence that the value of the intellectual's productions
stood in direct proportion to that distance.[141] Although
Adorno claimed, in his correspondence with Benjamin, to be
defending "our old method of immanent criticism" against
Benjamin's deviation from that method, it could be argued
that Adorno's position was, in at least one important sense,
the more revisionist of the two. Whereas the original intent
of immanent criticism had been to ensure the full experience
of the object of cognition, unobstructed by the conscious
intentions of the interpreter, in Adorno's later works im-
manent criticism was frequently invoked to safeguard the
autonomy of the cognitive subject itself.

    To put it differently, one may say that at some

point in Adorno's theory, the category of the subject ceases
to be a purely theoretical and neutral one--an "empty" cat-
egory, in the same way that, in language, deictic "shifters"
(such as personal pronouns) are said to mark a place for the
subject of a discourse while remaining in themselves devoid
of reference to any specific person--and takes on the fea-
tures of a <u>particular</u> ideological subject, which Adorno then
mistakes for the objective and necessary subject of dialec-
tical cognition. If this is the case, then what Wohlfarth
refers to as the "hermetic intricacy" of Adorno's prose, or
what I have called the rhetorical closure of his essays,
would be the formal-aesthetic correlative to the sealed-off,
private consciousness of the bourgeois individual. It is
precisely this implicit commitment to a particular ideolog-
ical subject--and its exclusion of alternative forms of sub-
jectivity, such as Benjamin's--which makes Adorno's theory
and practice of the essay finally unacceptable as an abso-
lute normative model for the critical essay. One must ac-
knowledge that, in a time of reified systems and conformist
thinking, Adorno's case for critical subjectivity retains
an undeniable moment of truth. But it does not follow that
there is only one proper way of representing the interests
of individual subjects in critical discourse, and there is
even less reason to suppose that Adorno possessed any "mag-
ical formula" for such a representation.

The ideological moment in Adorno's work is insep-

arable from the utopian aspects of his thinking. I have al-
ready commented upon the motif of utopian negativity in his
philosophy, and its bearing upon his theory of the essay (see
Chapters III and IV). But the full personal and ethical im-
plications of that motif come through less clearly in his
formal essays than in the aphorisms and fragments of Minima
Moralia, subtitled "Reflections from Damaged Life" (written
between 1944-1947, first published in 1951). In this, his
most personal work, the ethical dimension of Adorno's social
and philosophical criticisms is revealed in brief incisive
essays--"x rays," one might say, of contemporary society,
and of the intellectual's role within it. In many passages,
the author reflects upon the ethical grounds of philosophical
method and style (some headings: "On the morality of think-
ing," "Briefer expositions," "Morality and style"). One
section--entitled, significantly, "Gaps"--is of particular
relevance here, for it anticipates the major themes of "Der
Essay als Form," written ten years later. The title of this
fragment alludes to the discontinuous nature of cognitive
experience. Adorno argues that philosophical exposition
should not be "a discursive progression from stage to stage,"
since in reality ". . . knowledge comes to us through a net-
work of prejudices, opinions, innervations, self-corrections,
presuppositions and exaggerations, in short through the
dense, firmly-founded but by no means uniformly transparent
medium of experience." This insight is formulated, at first,

as a critique of the Cartesian doctrine of orderly procedure, on the one hand, and of the conception of knowledge as the "intuition of essences" in Husserlian phenomenology, on the other. But Adorno shifts soon enough from technical to existential considerations. He draws a parallel between cognitive experience and life itself, in a way which hints at the ethical motive underlying his theory of philosophical form:

> If the latter [i.e., the doctrine of "intuition of essences"] denies logic its rights, which in spite of everything assert themselves in every thought, the former [Cartesian doctrine] takes logic in its immediacy, in relation to each single intellectual act, and not as mediated by the whole flow of conscious life in the knowing subject. But in this lies also an admission of profound inadequacy. For if honest ideas unfailingly boil down to mere repetition, whether of what was there beforehand or of categorical forms, then the thought which, for the sake of the relation to its object, forgoes the full transparency of its logical genesis, will always incur a certain guilt. It breaks the promise presupposed by the very form of judgement. This inadequacy resembles that of life, which describes a wavering, deviating line, disappointing by comparison with its premisses, and yet which only in this actual course, always less than it should be, is able, under given conditions of existence, to represent an unregimented one. If a life fulfilled its vocation directly, it would miss it.[142]

Such was the ethical-utopian onus which Adorno would later transfer to the essay as form. The formal principle of discontinuity must carry the burden, not only of representing "unregimented" cognitive experience, but also of preserving the hope of an unregimented existence. Indeed, to the extent that Adorno's theory of the essay reflects this

sense of guilt and this utopian burden, it may be seen as a disguised metaphor for his own "damaged life."

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

[1] Guillén, "On the Uses of Genre," in Literature as System, pp. 110-11.

[2] Bernard Williams, "Descartes," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (New York: Macmillan, 1967, rpt. 1972), II, 345. For Bacon's remarks on the universal applicability of his method, see Aphorism CXXVII, Book I of The New Organon, in The Works of Francis Bacon, IV, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Heath (London, 1875), p. 112.

[3] Quoted in German by Adorno in "Der Essay als Form," pp. 31-32. My English translation is based on the original French version as presented in Étienne Gilson, ed., René Descartes. Discours de la méthode: Texte et Commentaire (Paris: Vrin, 1930), pp. 1-78.

[4] Translated from Descartes, Discours de la méthode, in Gilson, pp. 18-19.

[5] As Étienne Gilson put it in his commentary upon Descartes' Discours, "Le troisième précepte de la méthode nous impose donc moins une vérité abstraite à admettre qu'une habitude intellectuelle à acquérir" ("Commentaire Historique," p. 208).

[6] Bacon, New Organon, Aphorism C, in Works, p. 95. Bacon also claimed that ". . . a method rightly ordered leads by an unbroken route through the woods of experience to the open ground of axioms" (New Organon, p. 81)--not a bad metaphor for a representative of "scientific" discourse, which according to Adorno had always shunned figurative language.

[7] See Bacon, Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning (Book VI, Ch. 2), in Works, IV, 449-51.

[8] Bacon, New Organon, p. 85.

[9] See James Stephens, Francis Bacon and the Style of Science (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 121-36, et passim.

[10] Buck-Morss distinguishes between Adorno's approach to cultural phenomena and the method of Geisteswissenschaft, as practiced by Dilthey and others: "For Dilthey, it was the artist which hermeneutics tried to understand; for Adorno it was the artwork" (Origin of Negative Dialectics, pp. 78-79.

[11] Perhaps one should say that he does not, in "Der Essay als Form," posit any _particular_ subject. But since cognitive experience is the basis of Adorno's distinction between essay and system, and since, as we know, he considered the individual conscious subject to be the sole locus of cognitive experience, we may assume that he understands the essay's opposition to systems to be anchored, ultimately, in the intentionality of the individual essayist.

[12] Michel de Montaigne, "Au lecteur," preface to the 1850 ed. of _Essais_, p. 9. See Hugo Friedrich, _Montaigne_, trans. from the German by Robert Rovini (1949; rpt. Paris: Gallimard, 1968), especially Ch. 5, "Le Moi," pp. 220-70.

[13] Stanley Fish, "Georgics of the Mind: The Experience of Bacon's _Essays_," in _Self-Consuming Artifacts_, p. 132.

[14] Morris W. Croll, "Attic Prose: Lipsius, Montaigne, Bacon," in _Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm_, ed. J. Max Patrick et. al. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), p. 195 and pp. 167-202, passim.

[15] Croll, "The Baroque Style in Prose," in _Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm_, pp. 207-33, passim. Croll discerned two main variants of the baroque style: the "stile coupé" or "curt" style, of Senecan and Stoic inspiration, on the one side, and the "loose" or "libertine" style, on the other. "The seventeenth century, as we are here considering it, is equally and at once Stoic and Libertine; and the prose that is most characteristic of it expresses these two sides of its mind in easy and natural relations one with the other" (p. 230).

[16] For a discussion of the concept of "horizon of expectations" in the work of Hans Robert Jauss and in other theories of reception, see D. W. Fokkema and Elrud Kunne-Ibsch, _Theories of Literature in the Twentieth Century_ (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), pp. 149-50.

[17] In "Critical Mass," _College English_, 41, No. 4 (Dec. 1979), pp. 383-89, Philip Stevick discusses some of the extra-literary causes of the apparently uniform length of the modern critical essay: "The forces that have contributed to the uniformity of the critical unit include the nature of the dominant literary journals and their editorial policies, the nature of graduate training in literature, the nature both of the university classroom and the guest lec-

ture (most critical essays could be read aloud in about an hour), and some old exemplary figures, less constrained by the above, whose minds worked best in the space of an essay and who have left us a body of classical models" (p. 383).

[18] The journalistic essay is an obvious example. Discussing the background of The Tatler and The Spectator, Robert J. Allen notes: "The creation of fictitious authors for the two periodicals . . . suggests that they [Addison and Steele] recognize the interest to readers of an understood personality engaged in reflections that were in some measure capricious and self-indulgent. In an age when emotional modesty was a part of good manners, the essayists were embarrassed to speak in their own persons, as Steele said plainly in the essay which brought The Spectator to a close on December 6, 1712." Allen (ed.), Introd., Addison and Steele: Selections from The Tatler and the Spectator, 2nd. ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1970), p. vi.

[19] Shklovsky, quoted in Susan Sontag, On Photography (New York: Dell-Delta, 1973), p. 95.

[20] Adorno's major literary essays are contained in Noten zur Literatur (I-IV), Vol. XI of his Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974). See, on the novel, "Standort des Erzählers im zeit-genössischen Roman" (Noten I, pp. 41-48), and "Erpresste Versöhnung (Zu Georg Lukács: 'Wider den missverstandenen Realismus')" (Noten II, pp. 251-80); on lyric poetry, "Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft" (Noten I, pp. 49-68); and on drama, "Versuch, das Endspiel zu verstehen" (Noten II, pp. 281-321). On Adorno's defense of modernist aesthetics and experimental forms in literature, see Gillian Rose, "The Dispute over Modernism" (Ch. 6), in The Melancholy Science, pp. 109-37. That Adorno's arguments were subtle and often persuasive does not alter the fact that he approached questions of genre from the standpoint of contemporary aesthetic issues, and that his positions on generic matters were normative and polemical.

[21] Irving Wohlfarth, "Hibernation," p. 979.

[22] Buck-Morss, pp. 187-90. See Adorno, The Philosophy of Modern Music, pp. 61, 67-68; and "Arnold Schoenberg: 1874-1951," in Prisms, pp. 166-67.

[23] Buck-Morss, pp. 186-90.

[24] Buck-Morss, p. 98.

[25] Buck-Morss, p. 134.

[26] Fish discusses this problem in "Epilogue: The Plain Style Question," in "Self-Consuming Artifacts, pp. 374-82, passim. The disparity between the formal features of a text and the reader's responses to it is the basis for his notion of "affective stylistics," as explained in his appendix to the same work, "Literature and the Reader: Affective Stylistics," pp. 383-427.

[27] The best study of literary closure is probably that of Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968). She shows that, in poetry at least, a given structural device (such as repetition or antithesis) may function closurally or anticlosurally, according to its precise deployment within the total structure of a work (pp. 155-57). Smith defines closure as a function of the reader's perception of structure: "Whether spatially or temporally perceived, a structure appears 'closed' when it is experienced as integral: coherent, complete, stable" (p. 2). Thus, like Stanley Fish, Smith practices a reader-oriented stylistic approach. Especially relevant to my interests here is her demonstration that closure, as a structural or organizing principle in modern poetry, strongly conditions the cognitive experience (including moral and epistemological attitudes) of the reader (see in particular her Ch. 5, "Further Aspects and Problems of Closure," p. 233 and pp. 196-271, passim). Although her chief object of study is poetry rather than prose, it seems to me that her central premises are sufficiently well-grounded in a general theory of language and literary perception to serve as guidelines in my consideration of rhetorical closure in Adorno's style (see Sec. B-3 of this chapter).

[28] Harry Zohn, "Presentation of Adorno-Benjamin [Correspondence]," in New Left Review, No. 81 (1973), p. 46; Buck-Morss, p. 139. Zohn introduces a translation of four of the most important letters of the Adorno-Benjamin exchange (three letters from Adorno and one reply from Benjamin—these letters hereafter referred to as "Correspondence"). See also Andrew Arato, "Introduction: The Antinomies of the Neo-Marxian Theory of Culture," in International Journal of Sociology, 7, No. 1 (Spring 1977—an issue devoted to "Walter Benjamin and the Sociology of Art"), pp. 3-24. Arato situates the Benjamin-Adorno dispute within the wider context of contemporary Marxist aesthetic theory.

[29] Benjamin was first commissioned in 1935 by the Frankfurt Institute—which, under the direction of Max Horkheimer, had already moved to New York in 1934—to complete the study of Baudelaire and nineteenth-century Paris which he had begun in the late twenties. Adorno became an Institute member

only in 1938, but because he was a close friend of Horkheimer, and because his own interests were so close to those of Benjamin, Adorno had considerable influence in editorial decisions concerning the writings submitted by Benjamin. For Benjamin's relationship to the Frankfurt School, see Buck-Morss, pp. 136-84, passim; and Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, pp. 201-12. For a critique of the Frankfurt School's editorial handling of Benjamin's writings for the School, see the articles devoted to this matter in the German review Alternative, Nos. 56/57 (Oct.-Dec. 1967) and 59/60 (April-June 1968). The position of the Alternative circle is that the Frankfurt School, and Adorno and Horkheimer in particular, censored Benjamin's writings, exploiting his financial difficulties by pressuring him to accept major editorial changes which would make his writings ideologically more palatable from their point of view. Buck-Morss and Jay present a more balanced view of Benjamin's relations with the Frankfurt School, and of Adorno's role in the editing of Benjamin's texts. On this matter I agree with Harry Zohn: ". . . the refusal of the Institute of Social Research to publish the Baudelaire texts, for which Adorno was inevitably in large measure responsible, was a heavy and heedless blow to inflict on Benjamin. The correct course for the Zeitschrift was, surely, to publish the manuscript and then proceed to a critical discussion of it in the journal. It can only be regretted that a public debate, rather than informal exchanges by correspondence, was not allowed to appear in its pages" ("Presentation of Adorno-Benjamin," p. 50; the "Baudelaire manuscript" referred to here is Benjamin's "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," discussed below). In what follows I will be primarily concerned with the intrinsic themes of the Adorno-Benjamin correspondence. Although Adorno's objections to Benjamin's texts were doubtless motivated in part by their political differences, one cannot simply dismiss his criticisms of Benjamin as politically biased. Much has been written about the political and ideological aspects of the controversy, but perhaps not enough about its strictly aesthetic and cognitive implications.

[30] Buck-Morss, p. 171.

[31] Buck-Morss shows that Gershom Scholem, Bertolt Brecht and Adorno found themselves competing for Benjamin's ideological allegiance, and that none of these figures succeeded in winning Benjamin over completely to his position. Scholem, the Kabbalah scholar, tried to coax Benjamin away from Marxism and toward theology; Brecht disapproaved of Benjamin's theological leanings; and only Adorno urged him to combine the two dialectically or, as Buck-Morss puts it, "to extrapolate out of the extremes of theology and Marxism to the

point where they could be shown to converge . . ." (pp. 139-41).

[32] Adorno, Letter to Benjamin from New York, 10 Nov. 1938, in "Correspondence," pp. 70-71. On this point see Buck-Morss, pp. 143, 157; see also below, pp. 255-60. Martin Jay seems to agree with Adorno (and with Buck-Morss) that Benjamin's mode of thinking was essentially static. Comparing the "Critical Theory" of Horkheimer and Adorno to Benjamin's cognitive method, Jay writes: "Their mode of thinking was always more explanatory than his, more concerned with un-covering the discontinuities and mediations among various social phenomena. To Benjamin, the importance of nonidentity was not as great as his colleagues argued. And as a result, he was not as concerned with the salvation of subjectivity as they were. His 'dialectics at a standstill' was far more static and direct than Critical Theory" (Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, p. 203). For a different interpretation of Benjamin's procedure, see Sec. B-2 below.

[33] The problem is further complicated by the fact that Benjamin depended heavily upon the modest stipend he re-ceived from the Institute, as well as upon their ability to provide an important publishing outlet for his work. (Buck-Morss, pp. 158-59). These factors may have prevented him from defending his position as vigorously as he might have done otherwise.

[34] Buck-Morss, pp. 158-59.

[35] Benjamin's literary sensibilities were always closer to visual art than were Adorno's. Benjamin often drew upon painting and photography as a source of imagery. See, for example, his essay on "The Work of Art in the Age of Me-chanical Reproduction," and his comments on Klee's painting, "Angelus Novus" (which Benjamin possessed), in "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in Illuminations; pp. 217-51, passim, and pp. 257-58.

[36] Buck-Morss, pp. 21-23, 124-27. Benjamin's urge to "transform idealist cognition into materialist cognition" (Buck-Morss, p. 22) became more pressing in the late twenties, as he moved closer to Marxism under the influence of Bloch, Lukács, and Brecht.

[37] In "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" (1929), Benjamin wrote: "But the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination certainly does not lie in narcotics. It resides in a profane illumination, a materialistic, anthropological inspiration, to which hashish, opium, or whatever else can give an introductory

lesson" (in Reflections, p. 179). See Buck-Morss, pp. 124-27.

[38] Benjamin, "Surrealism," pp. 178-79.

[39] Benjamin, "One-Way Street (selection)," in Reflections, pp. 61-94; see below, pp. 277-80.

[40] Buck-Morss, pp. 127, 140.

[41] As I noted in Chapter III, Adorno's 1931 address had already put some distance between the representational implications of Benjamin's theory of constellations and Adorno's own program. In Adorno's view, constellations, or "historical images," were the philosopher's means of adducing and deciphering historical material, not a way of representing or redeeming phenomena.

[42] Adorno, "Rückblickend auf den Surrealismus," in Noten zur Literatur (1958 ed.), p. 154 (my trans.). In Buck-Morss' words, "Surrealist montages were random assemblages of existing objects in their immediately given, hence reified form" (pp. 127-28).

[43] Adorno, "Rückblickend auf den Surrealismus," pp. 158-59.

[44] Buck-Morss, p. 129.

[45] Buck-Morss, pp. 129-31. In his 1934 article, "Der dialektische Komponist," Adorno praised Schoenberg's procedure for its dialectical character and its use of exact fantasy (the unresolved tension between "subject and object--compositional intention and compositional material"). According to Buck-Morss, Adorno's article "can be read as a counter to Benjamin's efforts to work with surrealism as a model for dialectical, materialist philosophy" (p. 129).

[46] Adorno, "Portrait," in Prisms, p. 239.

[47] Buck-Morss, pp. 133-34.

[48] Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 15.

[49] Adorno preceived both dialectical and undialectical elements in the method of Benjamin's 1934 essay on Kafka ("Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of his Death," in Illuminations, pp. 111-40). For Adorno's ambivalent response to that essay, see Buck-Morss, pp. 142-43.

[50] With Horkheimer's approval of that exposé, Benjamin began to receive a stipend from the Institute to finish the

Passagenarbeit (Buck-Morss, pp. 143-44). The exposé was later published as "Paris, Die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts," in Benjamin, Schriften, I, ed. Theodor and Gretel Adorno (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1955), pp. 406-22. It appears in English as "Paris: The Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, trans. Harry Zohn (London: New Left Books, 1973), pp. 155-76; and also in Benjamin, Reflections, pp. 146-62. I will quote from the latter translation unless otherwise indicated.

51 Benjamin, "Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in Reflections, p. 157. The original German text reads as follows: "Das Moderne ist ein Hauptakzent seiner Dichtung. Als Spleen zerspellt er das Ideal ("Spleen et Idéal"). Aber immer zittert gerade die Moderne die Urgeschichte. Hier geschieht das durch die Zweideutigkeit, die den gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen und Erzeugnissen dieser Epoche eignet. Zweideutigkeit ist die bildliche Erscheinung der Dialektik, das Gesetz der Dialektik im Stillstand. Dieser Stillstand ist Utopie und das dialektische Bild also Traumbild. Ein solches Bild stellt die Ware schlechthin: als Fetisch. Ein solches Bild stellen die Passagen, die sowohl Haus sind wie Sterne. Ein solches Bild stellt die Hure, die Verkäuferin und Ware in einem ist." From Benjamin, "Paris, Die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts," in Schriften, I, 417-18. Although I have relied upon translations elsewhere in this study, I am giving the original German of this passage—and, later in this chapter, of several other passages of equivalent length—because they are the basis of specific stylistic criticisms made by Adorno, and also because they exemplify certain syntactic traits which I believe to be at the root of the differences between Benjamin's and Adorno's style.

52 Adorno, Letter to Benjamin, 2 Aug. 1935, in "Correspondence," p. 56. Benjamin wrote: "Corresponding in the collective consciousness to the forms of the new means of production, which at first were still dominated by the old (Marx), are images in which the new is intermingled with the old. These images are wishful fantasies, and in them the collective seeks both to preserve and to transfigure the inchoateness of the social product and the deficiencies in the social system of production. . . . In the dream in which, before the eyes of each epoch, that which is to follow appears in images, the latter appears wedded to elements from prehistory, that is, of a classless society. Intimations of this, deposited in the unconscious of the collective, mingle with the new to produce the utopia that has left its trace in thousands of configurations of life, from permanent buildings to fleeting fashions" ("Paris: Capital," p. 148).

[53] Adorno, "Correspondence," pp. 57-58. See Buck-Morss, pp. 143-46. Buck-Morss notes: "Benjamin's affirmation of a collective unconscious was a gesture of solidarity with the proletariat, not a regression to Jung (as Adorno charged). Ironically, however, and here Adorno's criticism was justified, this led him to a less critical presentation of the bourgeois era, skewing the balance away from the original conception of the Passagenarbeit, which was to show the nineteenth-century commodity world as an image not only of utopia but also of hell" (p. 145). The "original conception" mentioned here refers to a slightly different version of the exposé which Adorno had apparently seen as early as 1928 (see Adorno, "Portrait of Walter Benjamin," in Illuminations, p. 238, and Adorno's letter in "Correspondence," pp. 56-57). Even if Benjamin's affirmation of a dreaming collective was in fact a political gesture, Adorno was not wrong to see in that affirmation an undialectical ("developmental") conception of history ("Correspondence," p. 56). As Buck-Morss rightly observes, Benjamin's treatment of nineteenth-century images as utopian anticipations of a classless society was motivated at least partly by his desire to "redeem" the past--a desire which had also been apparent in his Trauerspiel study. In a 1935 letter to his friend Gerschom Scholem, Benjamin characterized the intent of his Passagenarbeit in these terms: "The work presents the philosophical realization of surrealism--and thereby its sublation--as well as the attempt to portray the image of history in the most unpretentious fixations of life, its refuse, as it were" (quoted in Buck-Morss, p. 146).

[54] Adorno, "Correspondence," p. 56.

[55] Benjamin, "Paris: Capital," p. 153. The German text reads: "Die Weltausstellungen bauen das Universum der Waren auf. Grandvilles Phantasien übertragen den Warencharakter aufs Universum. Sie modernisieren es. Der Saturnring wird ein gußeiserner Balkon, auf dem die Saturnbewohner abends Luft schöpfen. Das literarische Gegenstück dieser graphischen Utopie stellen die Bücher des Fourieristischen Naturforschers Toussenal dar. - Die Mode schreibt das Ritual vor, nach dem der Fetisch Ware verehrt sein will. Grandville dehnt ihren Anspruch auf die Gegenstände des alltäglichen Gebrauchs so gut wie auf den Kosmos aus. Indem er sie in ihren Extremen verfolgt, deckt er ihre Natur auf. Sie steht im Widerstreit mit dem Organischen. Sie verkuppelt den lebendigen Leib der anorganischen Welt. An dem Lebenden nimmt sie die Rechte der Leiche wahr. Der Fetischismus, der dem Sex-Appeal des Anorganischen unterliegt, ist ihr Lebensnerv. Der Kultus der Ware stellt ihn in seinen Dienst" (Benjamin, Schriften, I, 413).

[56] This is Buck-Morss' paraphrase of Adorno (Buck-Morss,

p. 144).

[57] Since the 1935 <u>Passagenarbeit</u> exposé, Benjamin had decided to write a separate book on Baudelaire which would be narrower in focus than the original <u>Passagenarbeit</u> project. "This was to be divided into three parts: a study of Baudelaire as an allegorist, a study of the social world of Paris in which he wrote, and a study of the commodity as a poetic object which would synthesize the meaning of poet and capital alike. It was the second section to this tryptich which he completed in 1938 and sent to New York" (Harry Zohn, "Presentation of Adorno-Benjamin," p. 49). "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" appears in Benjamin, <u>Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet</u>, pp. 9-106.

[58] Adorno, Letter to Benjamin, New York, 10 Nov. 1938, in "Correspondence," p. 69.

[59] Benjamin, "Paris of the Second Empire," p. 37. The German text reads: "Die Passagen sind ein Mittelding zwischen Straße und Interieur. Will man von einem Kunstgriff der Physiologien reden, so ist es der bewährte des Feuilletons: nämlich den Boulevard zum Interieur zu machen. Die Straße wird zur Wohnung für den Flaneur, der zwischen Häuserfronten so wie der Bürger in seinen vier Wänden zuhause ist. Ihm sind die glänzenden emaillierten Firmenschilder so gut und besser ein Wandschmuck wie im Salon dem Bürger ein Ölgemälde; Mauern sind das Schreibpult, gegen das er seinen Notizblock stemmt; Zeitungskioske sind seine Bibliotheken und die Caféterrassen Erker, von denen aus er nach getaner Arbeit auf sein Hauswesen heruntersieht. Daß das Leben in seiner ganzen Vielfalt, in seinem unerschöpflichen Reichtum an Variationen erst zwischen den grauen Pflastersteinen und vor dem grauen Hintergrunde der Despotie gedeiht - das war der politische Hintergedanke des Schrifttums, dem die Physiologien angehörten." From Benjamin, <u>Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus</u>, in <u>Gesammelte Schriften</u>, I, 2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), p. 539.

[60] Benjamin, "Paris of the Second Empire," pp. 17-19; see Adorno, "Correspondence," pp. 69-70.

[61] Adorno, "Correspondence," pp. 70-71.

[62] Adorno, "Correspondence," p. 72.

[63] Adorno, "Correspondence," p. 71. There can be little doubt that the theological urge of Benjamin's early works did survive, although modified, in his materialism of the

thirties. His language was no longer esoteric, but a certain "redemptive" tendency, closely linked to the motif of "naming," remained. In this sense, the "dialectical images" which Benjamin likened to surrealist montage were descended from his earlier "constellations," which had also aimed at the representation--and redemption--of phenomena. Thus, it may seem somewhat odd that Adorno should now call for Benjamin to return to his earlier theory, and in the same breath reject the motif of naming which, as was noted in Chapter III, was one of the main underpinnings of that theory. It seems more likely that what Adorno was really asking Benjamin to do was return to the program they had adopted in their 1929 Königstein talks--that is, a "dialectical" and "materialist" revision of the Trauerspiel theory (see Buck-Morss, pp. 139-40, 157-58). But this raises once again the question of continuity in Benjamin's works, and of whether it was Benjamin or Adorno who later misconstrued the Königstein program. Was Adorno right in treating Benjamin's work in the thirties as a deviation from their Königstein position, or had he simply assumed the exclusive right to represent that position, subsequently overestimating Benjamin's willingness to put aside his own deepest concerns for the sake of a more "correct" version of Marxist dialectics? See Benjamin's defense of his position in his reply to Adorno's criticisms, in his letter to Adorno of 9 Dec. 1938, in "Correspondence," pp. 74-80.

[64] "I am interested not in men, but only in things" (quoted in Buck-Morss, p. 250, note 31).

[65] Adorno, "Portrait," in Prisms, p. 239. Hannah Arendt has defended Benjamin's use of quotations as a compositional technique: "When he was working on his study of German tragedy, he boasted of a collection of 'over 600 quotations very systematically and clearly arranged' (Briefe I, 339); like the later notebooks, 'this collection was not an accumulation of excerpts intended to facilitate the writing of the study but constituted the main work, with the writing as something secondary. The main work consisted of tearing fragments out of their context and arranging them afresh in such a way that they illustrated one another and were able to prove their raison d'être in a free-floating state, as it were. It definitely was a sort of surrealist montage. Benjamin's ideal of producing a work consisting entirely of quotations, one that was mounted so masterfully that it could dispense with any accompanying text, may strike one as whimsical in the extreme and self-destructive to boot, but it was not, any more than were the contemporaneous surrealistic experiments which arose from similar impulses" (Introd., Illuminations, p. 47).

[66] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism," in Prisms, p. 29.

[67] On Adorno's interpretation of this question, Buck-Morss writes: " The problem, expressed in philosophical terms, meant that the subject was incapable of sufficient distance from the object to experience it dialectically, that is, critically as a nonidentical other, and identity itself became synonymous with the impotence of the subject and his domination by the social system" (Buck-Morss, p. 171).

[68] See Adorno, "Correspondence," pp. 58, 64, 65, 67, 68; see also note 59 to Chapter III of this study.

[69] Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in Reflections, p. 238. See Buck-Morss, pp. 140-43.

[70] Benjamin, "Work of Art," in Illuminations, pp. 220-24.

[71] Benjamin, "Work of Art," pp. 234-39.

[72] Benjamin, "Work of Art," pp. 240-41.

[73] Benjamin, "Work of Art," pp. 241-42.

[74] Wohlfarth, "Hibernation," p. 974.

[75] Adorno, Letter to Benjamin from London, 18 March 1936, in "Correspondence," pp. 63-68. Since we are following Adorno's critique thematically rather than chronologically, it should be borne in mind that his first reaction to Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay was written before he became an Institute member. After leaving Germany in 1934 Adorno spent four years studying at Oxford University prior to joining the Institute for Social Research in New York. It was in Oxford that he wrote most of his long critique of Husserl and phenomenology, later published as Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie. Studien über Husserl und die Phänomenologischen Antinomien (Frankfurt am Main, 1956); see Buck-Morss, p. 138.

[76] Adorno, "Correspondence," pp. 65-67.

[77] Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in The Essential Frankfurt School Reader, pp. 280-99. Adorno's article was almost a point-by-point rebuttal of Benjamin's essay on the reproducible work of art (see Buck-Morss, pp. 154-55). Adorno's thesis that mass culture threatened to "liquidate" the individual was a basic premise in his later investigations of mass culture, prejudice, and authoritarianism.

78 As I noted earlier, Buck-Morss reports that both Benjamin and Adorno thematize the question of reception in their aesthetic theories. But on the whole she does not treat reception as an intrinsically aesthetic category, nor does she analyze the writings of Benjamin and Adorno in terms of that category. An important exception is to be found in her concluding remarks, where she quotes Adorno's observation that Schoenberg's music, through "indifference to the public," allowed its "truth to wither" (quoted in Buck-Morss, p. 188).

79 This may have been due in part to the fact that Adorno was considering Benjamin's essays for publication in the Institute's Zeitschrift, which was directed to a public different from the one envisaged by Benjamin himself, writing from Paris.

80 Radnoti, "The Early Aesthetics of Walter Benjamin," p. 119.

81 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," Illuminations, p. 69.

82 Benjamin, German Tragic Drama, p. 182. Sandor Radnoti, elaborating on Benjamin's analysis, shows how the "completely new" formal structure of baroque allegory reflected the changing conditions of reception in that period. I would add that Radnoti's account provides a fuller view of what Benjamin himself had seen as the parallel between the historical conditions of reception in the baroque period and those of the modern period: "The structure [of baroque allegory] takes into consideration the emerging uncertain ambiguity of the allegory, the change in the nature of reception, and its increasing difficulties. . . . Here for the first time allegory becomes a conscious product of crisis, and it counts on people who recognize and experience the crisis as its receptors. The typical baroque allegorical genre, the Trauerspiel . . . . appeals to the sorrow of the viewers. The Trauerspiel can be understood from the standpoint of the viewer. Here is the hidden precondition of allegorization, the audience's initiated knowledge of a worldview based on the condition of sadness" ("The Early Aesthetics," pp. 118-19).

83 Jameson, "Reflections in Conclusion," in Aesthetics and Politics, p. 205.

84 See Bernd Witte, "Benjamin and Lukács: Historical Notes on the Relationship between their Political and Aesthetic Theories," in New German Critique, No. 5 (Spring 1975), pp. 17-18, 20-22.

[85] Adorno, "Correspondence," p. 71. In the German original, Adorno spoke of Benjamin's "staunende Darstellung," which Buck-Morss translates as "astonished presentation" (Buck-Morss, p. 157). Buck-Morss' translation is more adequate here than Zohn's, in that it makes clear the connection between Adorno's original comment and Benjamin's reference to the theme of astonishment in his reply (see below).

[86] Benjamin, Letter to Adorno, 9 Dec. 1938, in "Correspondence," p. 76.

[87] Benjamin defends his position by referring in his letter to a passage from Adorno's earlier work on Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard: Konstruktion des Aesthetischen, Tübingen, 1933): "Astonishment, so you write in your Kierkegaard, indicates 'the profoundest insight into the relationship between dialectics, myth and image.' It might be tempting for me to evoke this passage. But instead I will propose to emend it . . . I believe it should say that astonishment is an outstanding object of such an insight" (Benjamin, "Correspondence," p. 76). See Buck-Morss, pp. 157-58.

[88] Benjamin, "Correspondence," p. 76.

[89] Benjamin, "Correspondence," p. 77.

[90] Benjamin, "Correspondence," p. 76. Cf. Buck-Morss' interpretation of Benjamin's letter, pp. 157-59.

[91] See Buck-Morss, p. 169.

[92] Zohn, "Presentation of Adorno-Benjamin," p. 49. In order to properly evaluate Adorno's influence on Benjamin's entire Baudelaire project one would have to go on to discuss Benjamin's second Baudelaire essay, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (in Illuminations, pp. 155-200), which he wrote, at Adorno's urging, to take the place of the first one. This essay incorporated most of Adorno's suggestions, and represents a real reversal on Benjamin's part with respect to the central issues. The difficulties in evaluating the changes from the first essay to the second one are exemplified by the discrepant appraisals of the second essay by Buck-Morss and Zohn. The former sees it as a definite improvement (The Origin of Negative Dialectics, pp. 159-61), whereas the latter finds it to be "a thinner and weaker variant of the original manuscript" ("Presentation," p. 50).

[93] Adorno, "Benjamin's Einbahnstrasse," a review which first appeared in the journal Texte und Zeichen (1955),

rpt. in <u>Über Walter Benjamin</u>, a collection of articles by Adorno et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), p. 55.

[94] Witte, "Benjamin and Lukács," p. 22.

[95] Antonio Machado, <u>Juan de Mairena</u>, in <u>Obras</u>, ed. José Bergamín (Mexico City: Séneca, 1940), pp. 443-848.

[96] See Benjamin's 1929 essay, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," in <u>Reflections</u>, pp. 177-92. "To win the energies of intoxication for the revolution," Benjamin wrote in that essay, "this is the project about which surrealism circles in all its books and enterprises" (p. 189). Speaking of the personal dimension of Benjamin's approach to surrealism, Bernd Witte writes: "Benjamin saw the position of the literary avant-garde as analogous to that of the proletariat. . . . In tracing the politicization of surrealism to the point of commitment to the proletarian revolution, he was also describing the history of his own development towards political consciousness" (Witte, "Benjamin and Lukács," pp. 12-13). Looking back, there seems to be no point in continuing to romanticize the political program of the surrealists. It is now only too clear that surrealism's original endorsement of absolute spontaneity made it seriously inadequate as a model for full-scale revolution. Benjamin himself warns against pursuing only the "romantic" and "anarchic" aspects of surrealism ("Surrealism," pp. 189-90), although elements of mystification are not lacking in his essay. But for all that, there can be little doubt of the liberating influence of surrealism in the realm of aesthetic experience proper.

[97] Bloch's review appeared originally in the <u>Leipziger Zeitung</u> (1928), was reworked and republished in Bloch, <u>Erbschaft dieser Zeit</u> (Zürich, 1934; rpt. Frankfurt, 1962). The English translation appears as "Philosophy as Cabaret," in <u>New Left Review</u>, No. 116 (July-Aug., 1979), pp. 94-96.

[98] To settle the question one would have to look into other contemporary reviews of Benjamin's book, as well as explore the broader subject of the literary conventions and expectations of the German reading public in this period. It is noteworthy that, although German artists were pioneers in expressionism, surrealism itself never caught on in Germany as it did in France and in other countries where French culture was influential (See Buck-Morss, note 16, p. 273). It is not immediately clear whether this means that Benjamin's surrealist texts would have been received by the German public with indifference or animosity, or whether, on the contrary, those texts would not have had an even

greater shock-value for that public (see Benjamin's remarks on the reception of surrealism by the German intelligentsia, in "Surrealism," pp. 177-78).

[99] Bloch, "Philosophy as Cabaret," p. 95.

[100] Stephen Eric Bronner, "The Tapestry Unravels: Considerations on the Structure of Walter Benjamin's Thought," in Colloquia Germanica, 12, No. 3 (1979), p. 214, and pp. 201-19, passim. Bronner sees Benjamin's validation of the freedom of the individual thinking subject as both a challenge to and an advance over the orthodox Marxism of the thirties. "In spite of Benjamin's own later allegiance to the Soviet Union, from his thought it is evident that individual insight cannot be sacrificed to party dogma. From Benjamin's standpoint, real freedom involves freedom for an individual to reflect and experiment with the untested possibilities within the given" (p. 212). Like Adorno--but unlike Lukács-- Benjamin was instinctively unable (despite his occasional paeans to the Soviet Union) to subordinate his particular insights and impulses to the demands of official Marxism.

[101] Adorno, "Portrait of Benjamin," in Illuminations, p. 229.

[102] Benjamin, "Theses," in Illuminations, pp. 253-64.

[103] It might be interesting to study the thesis as a generic sub-type of the philosophical essay. For an interesting comment on the generic uniqueness of Benjamin's "Theses" qua theses, see Timothy Bahti, "History as Rhetorical Enactment: Walter Benjamin's Theses 'On the Concept of History,'" in Diacritics, 9, No. 3 (September 1979) p. 6, and pp. 2-17, passim.

[104] Buck-Morss, p. 85.

[105] For a discussion of Adorno's views on the effects of commodity fetishism upon modes of cultural production and consumption, see Gillian Rose, The Melancholy Science, pp. 109-37, passim.

[106] See Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in The Essential Frankfurt School Reader, pp. 270-99, passim.

[107] Adorno, "Arnold Schoenberg, 1874-1951," in Prisms, pp. 149-50.

[108] Adorno, "Schoenberg," p. 154.

[109] Fredric Jameson notes that in Adorno's writing "the bristling mass of abstractions and cross-references is precisely intended to be read in situation, against the cheap facility of what surrounds it, as a warning to the reader of the price he has to pay for genuine thinking" (Marxism and Form, p. xiii).

[110] Buck-Morss, pp. 37-42.

[111] Buck-Morss, pp. 84-85. Buck-Morss' argument is spelled out more precisely in a passage discussing Adorno's case for Schoenberg's music as a model for cultural praxis: "In reality, access to the 'truth' of Schoenberg's music (or Adorno's philosophy) was open only to the cultured elite from the bourgeois ranks whose economic security gave them the necessary means for acquiring a specialized training. The difficulty was that this group would always remain a 'few' so long as the educational system of bourgeois society remained an institution for the perpetuation of its ruling class. Due to the elitist, class nature of education, then, the connection between avant-garde intellectual praxis and the formation of a 'true collective' was effectively blocked. It must be admitted that there was something immanently democratic in Adorno's conception of the intellectual, something anti-elitist and antihierarchical in the notion that intellectuals acted in concert with the proletariat by revolutionizing their own production process. But this element was more ideal than real. The fact of the matter is that Adorno's talk of the mediation between intellectual praxis and political praxis remained abstract and vague, with no explication of the social medium which might serve as a conduit for this mediation, once the role of the Party was rejected" (pp. 41-42). It is true that many of Adorno's printed articles were originally delivered as lectures or radio addresses, which would have brought his thinking within reach of a wider public. The question is, did Adorno in those instances make any significant "concessions" to his listeners? That is, did he make major changes in his style of presentation which would facilitate the public reception of his thought? This requires further study. Martin Jay tells an interesting anecdote concerning the apparently deliberate abstruseness of Adorno's style. When he was working under Paul Lazarsfeld for a Radio Research Project at Princeton in 1939, he was rebuked by Lazarsfeld for the unwarranted obscurity of a memorandum he had written: "Don't you think that it is a perfect fetishism the way you use Latin words throughout the text? . . . I implored you repeatedly to use more responsible language and you evidently were psychologically unable to follow my advice" (quoted in Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, p. 223).

[112] Here I am relying upon Wolfgang Iser's useful notion of the "implied reader," a notion which, according to Iser, ". . . allow[s] for the reader's presence without in any way predetermining his character or his historical situation. . . . the implied reader as a concept has its roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader." See Iser, The Act of Reading (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), p. 34, et passim.

[113] See Chapter IV of this study, p. 199.

[114] For the context of this quote, see Chapter III of this study, p. 97.

[115] Besides the example of Stanley Fish's "affective stylistics," mentioned earlier, one finds this confirmed in Wolfgang Iser's The Act of Reading: "In this respect, we can say that literary texts initiate 'performances' of meaning rather than actually formulating meanings themselves. Their aesthetic quality lies in this 'performing' structure, which clearly cannot be identical to the final product, because without participation of the individual reader there can be no performance" (pp. 26-27, et passim).

[116] Adorno, Letters to Rolf Tiedemann, published in "Editorische Nachbemerkung," in Adorno, Ästhetische Theorie, Vol. VII of Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main, 1970), p. 541; quoted in Gillian Rose, The Melancholy Science, p. 13.

[117] Adorno, "Arnold Schoenberg," in Prisms, p. 149. The original German text reads: "Dem öffentlichen Bewußtsein heute gilt Schönberg als Neuerer, als Reformator, wohl gar als Erfinder eines Systems. In widerwilligem Respekt räumt man ein, er habe für andere einen Weg bereitet, den zu betreten jene freilich keine große Neigung zeigen, läßt aber durchblicken, er habe es nicht selbst vollbracht und sei bereits veraltet. Der einst Verfemte wird verdrängt zugleich und gefahrlos aufgesogen. Nicht nur die Jugendwerke, sondern auch die der mittleren Zeit, die ihm einst den Haß aller Kulturbesitzer eintrugen schiebt man als wagnerisch und spätromantisch ab, obgleich man sie in vierzig Jahren kaum nur richtig aufzuführen lernte. Was er dann nach dem Ersten Krieg erscheinen ließ, wird als Exempel der Zwölftontechnik gewertet. Wohl haben ihr neuerdings zahlreiche junge Komponisten sich anvertraut, aber eher wie einem Gehäuse, in das man unterschlüpft, als aus der Not der eigenen Erfahrung heraus, und daher ohne Sorge um die Funktion des Zwölftonverfahrens in Schönbergs eigenem oeuvre. Solche Verdrängung und Zurichtung wird herausgefordert von den Schwierigkeiten

die Schönberg einer von der Kulturindustrie gekneteten Hörerschaft bereitet." From Adorno, "Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951)," Prismen, in Gesammelte Schriften, X, 1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), p. 152.

[118] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism," in Prisms, p. 33.

[119] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism," pp. 31-34, passim.

[120] It should be understood that without a close stylistic analysis of the original texts--which is beyond the scope of the present study--my remarks on the specific relationship between the syntactic features of style in Benjamin and Adorno, and the cognitive effects of those features, are proferred only as a general hypothesis, not as a scientific conclusion.

[121] Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 80.

[122] See Chapter IV of this study, pp. 198-99.

[123] Adorno, "On the Social Situation of Music." See Chapter III of this study, pp. 122-24.

[124] Both "Reconciliation under Duress" and "Commitment" may be found in Aesthetics and Politics, pp. 151-95.

[125] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism," p. 33.

[126] Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum," in Prisms, pp. 175-85 (all further page references to this essay will be given parenthetically in the text). Martin Jay offers this explanation for Adorno's tendency to discuss artists in pairs: "The complete reconciliation of subjective imagination and objective materials might be approached in great works of art, but never fully achieved. Thus, even when discussing such artists as Valéry, Proust, George, and Hoffmanstahl [sic], for whom he had great respect, Adorno chose to discuss them in dialectical pairs in order to transcend the inherent insufficiency of individual accomplishments" (Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, p. 178). The second pair mentioned by Jay refers to Adorno's essay, "The George-Hofmannstahl Correspondence, 1891-1906," in Prisms, pp. 189-226 (for a discussion of that essay, see Buck-Morss, pp. 174-75).

[127] Valéry's essay, "Le problème des musées," is from his collection, Pièces sur l'art; the passage from Proust to which Adorno refers is from the third volume of A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur (Adorno, "Valéry Proust Museum," p. 176).

[128] Benjamin had suggested that the old way of looking at
paintings in a state of concentration was obsolete or re-
gressive in the modern period. According to Benjamin, this
mode of visual experience had been displayed by the film,
in which a collective subject "absorbed" the visual phenom-
enon in a state of "distraction" ("The Work of Art," in
Illuminations, pp. 234-39, passim; see above, pp. 262-63).
One may interpret Adorno's defense of concentration, and his
dismissal of "the flâneur, in whose shadow Proust walked,"
as a critical reference to Benjamin's theory of reception in
his "Work of Art" essay, and as an epilogue to their aes-
thetic debate of the thirties.

[129] See Montaigne, "De la vanité," in Essais, Bk. III,
pp. 973-74. On Montaigne's rebellion against the cult of
imitation in early Renaissance humanism, see Hugo Friedrich,
Montaigne, pp. 94-100; on his cult of spontaneity see pp.
348-68 of the same work. Margaret McGowan's study, entitled
Montaigne's Deceits (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1974),
demonstrates that the impression of naturalness and sponta-
neity in Montaigne is achieved through calculated rhetorical
devices. On the importance of rhetorical commonplaces as a
compositional device in Montaigne's essays, see William
Crane, Wit and Rhetoric in the Renaissance, pp. 132-61.

[130] Adorno, "Cultural Criticism," p. 33.

[131] Adorno, "Arnold Schoenberg," in Prisms, p. 166.

[132] This conclusion is implicit in the arguments of both
Buck-Morss, pp. 187-90; and Wohlfarth, "Hibernation,"
passim.

[133] Adorno, Pref., Negative Dialectics, p. xx.

[134] Wohlfarth, "Hibernation," pp. 965, 984 (note 7).

[135] Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," passim.

[136] For a synopsis of Adorno's Kierkegaard study, see
Buck-Morss, pp. 114-21.

[137] Adorno, Letter to Benjamin, 2 Aug. 1935, in "Corre-
spondence," p. 62.

[138] Adorno, "On the Fetish Character of Music," p. 299.

[139] See above, p. 260. On Adorno's critique of popular
music, see Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, pp. 178-93.

[140] Wohlfarth, "Hibernation," p. 977.

[141] Wohlfarth, "Hibernation," pp. 972-78. Wohlfarth's arguments shed light on many aspects of the Adorno-Benjamin controversy, and upon other issues raised in this study. He shrewdly observes, for example, that Benjamin's thought preserved a spontaneous and "destructive" impulse which was in marked contrast to Adorno's later quietism. Unlike Adorno's "aesthetics and politics of retrenchment," Benjamin's thinking "sought to implement the destructive-- instead of the conservative--meaning of Hegelian *Aufhebung*" (p. 978).

[142] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp. 80-81.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION:

REFLECTIONS ON THE MODERN CRITICAL ESSAY

A. Utopias of Cognition: Lukács, Adorno, Benjamin

In my introduction to this study, I noted the reasons
for considering the essay as a cognitive form. I also sug-
gested that a comprehensive historical theory of the essay
must attempt to identify the various ways in which discrete
cognitive projects are actualized through specific devices.
As a first step, this study has analyzed the theories of
three essayists who define the essay in relation to cogni-
tive experience: those of Georg Lukács, Theodor W. Adorno,
and Walter Benjamin. Each of these theories touches upon the
historical development of the essay, its dominant aesthetic
and philosophical functions, and its relationship to other
areas of literature. Each theory bears the stamp of its
author's particular brand of Marxism, which entailed in each
case a different view of the relationship between aesthetics,
cognition and social reality. The overdetermined character of
these theories gives them a certain diffuseness and lack of
congruency which makes precise comparisons among them dif-

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ficult. The most fully developed theories of the essay are those of Lukács and Adorno. Chapter II dealt primarily with Lukács' pre-Marxist theory of the essay. In Chapter III, I reviewed the major influences upon Adorno's theory of the essay, arguing that his theory was in part a polemical reaction against the philosophy of totality presented in Lukács' History and Class Consciousness. Here Benjamin's work played an intermediary role. While both Benjamin and Adorno felt the influence of History and Class Consciousness in their common adoption of Marxism in the late twenties, at the same time Benjamin's early work provided the stimulus for the philosophy of negative dialectics which Adorno would later formulate in opposition to Lukács' totalizing Marxism. Although Benjamin developed no explicit theory of the essay, there are numerous suggestive remarks in his work which imply a definite philosophy of discursive form, and his ideas on the essay would influence Adorno, both by direct transmission and by provoking counter-reactions in the latter's essays. In Chapter IV, I discussed Adorno's theory of the essay as the formal correlative of negative dialectics. In Chapter V, I compared the rhetorical strategies of Benjamin and Adorno by way of showing that Adorno's essays fell short of his normative-theoretical claims for the essay.

Since these theories of the essay were strongly shaped by the personal experiences of our theorists, it was necessary to give some attention to their individual biogra-

phies. The similarity of their backgrounds wa's significant.
All of them were intellectuals from well-to-do Jewish fam-
ilies. All were well-read in German literature and were con-
versant with the main traditions of other European litera-
tures. Each was deeply influenced by classical German philos-
ophy, and it was this above all which placed them within the
same universe of discourse. Despite their differences in
age (in 1920 Lukács was thirty-five, Benjamin was twenty-
eight, and Adorno was seventeen), they were in a sense intel-
lectual contemporaries: the main directions of their think-
ing were in each case established between 1915 and 1930. For
different individual reasons, but under common historical
and cultural pressures, each of them made literary criticism
--the critical essay--his preferred form of expression.
Given the special conditions of the period between the wars
--the spread of an anti-bourgeois avant-garde, the uneasy
interaction of literature and politics, and the existence of
a more or less substantial, if rapidly changing, literary-
intellectual public--the idea that literary and cultural
criticism could be a serious form of political praxis was
perhaps more plausible then than it would seem today in the
United States, where the influence of a leftist intelligent-
sia, and the impact of ideas in general in the public sphere,
have diminished considerably. But even as Marxists, for whom
aesthetic problems are always intimately linked to extra-aes-
thetic matters, Lukács and Adorno invested a remarkable

degree of faith in the essay as a literary-philosophical form. Indeed, it may be said that each of these theorists saw the essay as a kind of cognitive utopia, a form capable of embodying the philosophical realization of solutions to the most basic problems of modern culture and society. Each of them linked the essay as form to the fortunes of a different kind of philosophical subject, which in each case represented the author's view of the paradigmatic historical subject necessary to overcome the problems of the present. This is most clear in the cases of Lukács and Adorno, but it is also to be found, in a less obvious and more complicated way, in Benjamin.

The writings of the young Lukács (<u>Soul and Form</u>, <u>Theory of the Novel</u>) register this dissatisfaction with the disintegration of modern culture, which he takes as symptomatic of the general fragmentation of modern social life. His quest for unity and wholeness finds its symbolic representation in the alleged harmony of life in classical Greece. But Lukács' nostalgic <u>fin de siècle</u> aestheticism masks an awareness that a purely aesthetic response to life is obsolete. The wholeness and "immediacy" of life which he discerns in past essayists--Plato, Montaigne, Kierkegaard--is no longer available to the modern essayist, who is seen as the harbinger of a redeeming "system." This messianic element reappears in <u>History and Class Consciousness</u>. Abandoning the hope for individual solutions in art or politics, in this

work Lukács thoroughly dissects the bourgeois subjectivity represented in classical German idealism, and endorses the proletariat as the collective subject which can alone transcend the reification and fragmentation of modern society. Lukács' utopian expectations for the essay form disappear along with his hope for individual cognitive syntheses. Henceforth, for Lukács, the essay has a merely utilitarian function: it becomes the instrument of a totalizing subject, the discursive vehicle of systematic Marxism.

Adorno's position is diametrically opposed to that of Lukács. He accepts Lukács' diagnosis of the pervasive reification of contemporary society while refusing Lukács' political prescription, which he sees as being itself a symptom of that reification. For Adorno the function of the critical essay is precisely to resist the voluntarism inherent in totalizing systems such as that of Lukács. The essay, for Adorno, becomes negative dialectics, with fragmentation as its formal and cognitive principle.

Here one must acknowledge the historical and generational factors which determine the system-fragment opposition in Lukács and Adorno. Lukács, eighteen years older than Adorno, experienced the breakdown of pre-modern culture and society from within. His contact with the last vestiges of an integrated community in the semi-feudal Austrio-Hungarian Empire partly explains his nostalgia for lost wholeness. If the problem was one of fragmentation and disintegration, the

solution could only come from the unity and order of a system. This new totality was to be effected by a collective historical subject which would transcend the inherent limitations of the bourgeois individual and his cognition. If Lukács' basic worldview was formed in the years prior to 1917, when the revolution was as yet an untried experiment, his political consciousness was shaped during the heroic phase of the revolution, before the onset of Stalinism. The relative political disorganization of the Left in that period would have led him, once again, to posit the need for unity and totalization. It is not coincidental that Lukács' aesthetics should have championed the realistic novel of an earlier historical period, nor that the dominant categories of that aesthetics should have extended his concern for unity and totality to artistic representation.

By contrast, Adorno reached intellectual maturity in a period when the dissolution of prewar society was essentially complete. Feeling no nostalgia for the old order, he indentified from the beginning with avant-garde aesthetics, and relished the rebellious, fragmentary forms of modernism.[1] For Adorno--whose political quietism, admittedly, would probably have made him spurn collective remedies under almost any circumstances--the unity and totality of systems appeared closer to the cause of the problem than to its so-

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[1] Notes to this chapter appear on pp. 365-67.

lution. The most vivid and immediate political realities for him were the advent of Stalinism in the Eastern camp, the failure of Social Democracy and the left in Germany, the rise of Nazism in the thirties and the atrocities of World War II (leading indirectly to Benjamin's death). He was no less alarmed at totalitarian tendencies in postwar society, tendencies which he would evoke in such phrases as "the administered world," "the culture industry," and "the liquidation of the individual." Small wonder, then, that he should embrace the principle of individual critical autonomy, both in the cultural and social spheres. The hope for reconciliation could only be expressed negatively, by the refusal of the premature syntheses and false harmonies of contemporary society. Hence the emphasis on fragmentation and discontinuity in his theory of the essay: having renounced any openly political solution, he pinned his hopes on aesthetic form itself, declaring its independence from every kind of instrumentalization.

Thus, as regards the actual moment of composition of these two theories—Lukács' 1910 essay on the essay in Soul and Form and Adorno's 1958 "Der Essay als Form"—the concept of "system" was in each case the projection of the author's diagnosis of socio-historical reality. It was a privative concept, the "other" of the essay, with opposite values for Lukács and Adorno. For Lukács, this "other" was a desirable thing, a kind of ideal Platonic order which would bring de-

liverance from modern fragmentation and relativity. For Adorno, the concept of system conjured up all the nightmarish totalities of Western civilization, whether it appeared in the reified thought-systems of idealism or in Enlightenment positivism, which led to the domination of nature. Its political counterpart was the authoritarian state. The only potential for resistance to the general reification lay in the aesthetic sphere. In works of art and criticism, at least, the spontaneous "fantasy" of a cognitive subject could still encounter elements of objective, sensuous reality in a noninstrumental context. By providing a haven for genuinely dialectical experience, art kept alive the utopian possibility of a liberated existence. In a sense, then, Lukács and Adorno represent opposite (positive and negative) sides of the same theological-redemptive scheme.[2]

Their different ideological investments in the opposition between essay and system are largely responsible for the distortions which appear in their respective accounts of the history of the essay genre. Lukács' Platonist nostalgia gave privileged status to the essayists whose works seemed to come closest to the ideals of wholeness, immediacy and natural harmony. Not only are such norms ideologically suspect in themselves; Lukács' central opposition between past "wholeness" and present "fragmentation" is too simplistic to be of much value as a historical explanation of the essay's development. Adorno's view of the history of the

essay is empirically reductive in the opposite direction: he imputes to the essay a more or less constant resistance to philosophical systems. The normative-ideological dimension of both theories makes them fall short of the ideal of a descriptive-historical poetics of the essay genre. Such a historical poetics would not ignore the ideological forces inevitably at work in specific essays, but it would recognize the irreducible heterogeneity of the texts which form its object of study. It would identify and classify essays not according to cognitive intentions alone, but would also seek the correlations between rhetorical-discursive devices and their effects in specific instances. It would have to be sensitive to the conditions of reception operating in a given historical period. For it cannot be presupposed that the relation between a particular discursive form and its effects upon the reader remains constant or predictable. The dimensions of this problem are suggested by the ironic contrast between Lukács and Adorno themselves: whereas Lukács (in Soul and Form) longed for a system but wrote in fragments, Adorno denounced systems but wrote essays which were experienced by the reader as emanating from a closed rhetorical system.

The case of Benjamin escapes the neat symmetry of our comparison between Lukács and Adorno. He figures in this study primarily as an influence on Adorno's theory of the essay and as a counterpoise to Adorno's rhetorical practice.

To a much greater extent than in Lukács or Adorno,
Benjamin's politics and aesthetics were at odds. Benjamin
embraced the collective solution recommended by Lukács, but
his political commitment remained in a somewhat abstract
relationship to his literary practice. Unlike Lukács,
Benjamin did not give up the idea of the essay as a relative-
ly autonomous form of cognition. Like Adorno's essays, but
through quite different formal means, Benjamin's writings
attempt to subvert the illusory autonomy of the cognitive
subject from within. Benjamin's essays aim at transcending
the limits of individual cognitive experience, both in a
theological and in a materialist sense. The theological
motif of the redemption of material reality never completely
disappears from his writings, but, as I argued in Chapter V,
the metaphysical implications of that motif are attenuated
through his provocative formal constructions. His essays
are rhetorically more open-ended than those of Adorno, in
that they initiate a dialectic between reader and text,
whereas Adorno's essays present the subject-object dialectic
as an immanent accomplishment of the text itself. In this
sense, Benjamin's rhetorical strategy was more successful at
breaking the illusion of subjective autonomy than was
Adorno's. By ignoring the practical effects of critical form,
Adorno's essays cut themselves off from productive inter-
action with the reader. This was the price paid by Adorno
for his narrow view of reception. I have suggested that

Adorno's rhetorical strategy has an ideological motive: the program of absolute aesthetic autonomy could be maintained only by falling back upon the very bourgeois form of consciousness which was renounced by his theory.

B. Utopias of Language:

Poststructuralist Theories of Discourse

"Modernity--our modernity, which begins at this period--can be defined by this new phenomenon: that utopias of language are conceived in it."

> Roland Barthes, Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, Collège de France, January 7, 1977; trans. in October, 3 (Spring 1979), p. 8.

The theories we have examined were all utopian, both in the sense that they attempted to transcend the limiting conditions of their historical period, and in the sense that they were prevented from doing so by those same conditions. But the ideological and historical particularity of these theories should be seen as something more than a mere flaw in them. All theories of literary genres are implicated in the concerns of their day, and their truth value lies partly in their capacity to reflect a particular historical moment. The theories considered here may be thought of as constituting what Michel Foucault, in The Archeology of Knowledge, calls a "discursive formation"--a group of statements which seem to describe a common object

(here the essay), while in a sense they <u>constitute</u> the object, transforming and modifying it in the very process of describing it. As Foucault sees it, the statements of a discursive formation are not uniform or homologous, but they possess a certain "regularity" which stems from their common problems and thematic preoccupations.[3] The regularity of the theories we have been considering lies in the fact that they all see the essay as a function of the cognitive experience of a subject. To this extent, they remain within a wider discursive formation, an anthropology of discourse which has in fact been dominant in Western culture at least since the Renaissance, and which has conditioned the modern essay from its beginnings. For the success of Montaigne's essays would have been unthinkable without the concomitant valorization of the individual author as the generative subject of discourse. As Roland Barthes puts it in his essay, "The Death of the Author,"

> The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism, and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the "human person." It is thus logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attributed the greatest importance to the "person" of the author.[4]

Thus the notion of the essay as the eminent product of the individual mind persists, though not without significant variations, as long as its supporting ideology of humanist individualism remains in force.

There are signs that the ideology of the autonomous subject is declining. It was already highly problematic in the theories of Lukács, Adorno, and Benjamin, each of whom relativizes to some degree the claims of an autonomous subject of discourse. For the Marxist Lukács, it is no longer the individual but the proletariat which is to be regarded as the sole autonomous subject of experience (and even the proletariat must be "supplemented" by a vanguard). Adorno's theory challenged the supremacy of the subject in works of art and in critical discourse, arguing that the subject is not a self-sufficient entity but something mediated by historical experience.[5] Both Adorno and Benjamin knew that the cognitive subject could not escape the ideological pressures of the social world, and both attempted to incorporate this awareness into their formal strategies for the critical essay. However, none of these three theorists completely abandons the notion of an intentional cognitive subject as something outside or beyond the text itself, a locus of consciousness in which the language of the text is ultimately anchored.

The most radical challenge to the prevailing anthropology of discourse, and to my mind the most interesting attempt to formulate an alternative poetics of the critical essay, has been that of the French "poststructuralists"-- Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes (his later work), and Jean-François Lyotard, to mention only the most

salient examples. Their works, like those of their structuralist precursors, reach across a number of different fields--literary criticism, philosophy, psychoanalysis, anthropology, and the history of ideas--and they do not, strictly speaking, belong to a unified school of thought. The poststructuralists' disdain for doctrine has precluded any clear-cut program or manifesto, and as yet they have produced no explicit theory of the essay. But one may discern in their polemical statements the tacit unity of a discursive formation, as well as the beginnings of a new poetics of critical discourse. They inherit and elaborate the structuralist critique of the subject as found in phenomenology, existentialism, and Marxism. As opposed to those schools of thought, which in different ways accord primacy and autonomy to a conscious subject, the poststructuralists attempt to displace (or "decenter") any humanist conception of the subject by showing that, as the linguist Émile Benveniste put it, the human subject is constituted <u>only in and through language</u>.[6] The relation between subject and discourse (e.g., essayist and essay) is no longer to be conceived as one of cause and effect. The "text" in poststructuralist theory is not reducible to a static entity, but is taken instead as an intersection of multiple ideological forces and discursive practices, of which the writing subject is as much the product as the producer. These theorists do not deny the existence of intentional subjects; they only

say that the subject's intentions are constantly refracted through language. In "From Work to Text," an essay characteristic of much poststructuralist thinking on this question, Roland Barthes calls the text ". . . that <u>social</u> space that leaves no language safe or untouched, that allows no enunciative subject to hold the position of judge, teacher, analyst, confessor, or decoder."[7]

These ideas are registered differently in the works of individual poststructuralists. Jacques Derrida, whose philosophical writings have made him the leading theoretician of the poststructuralist movement in recent years, considers the notion of a writing subject, as something prior and exterior to a written text, to be an instance of the "metaphysics of presence" which he detects behind the "logocentric" and "phonocentric" biases of Western thought. According to Derrida, Western thought has almost always considered writing as the attempt of a subject to communicate with an absent interlocutor. Writing has therefore been regarded as inferior or secondary to spoken language, a derivative or "fallen" form of "full" (i.e. voiced) speech, which in turn is legitimized by the immediate presence of the speaking subject. In terms which are by now familiar to anyone who follows contemporary criticism, Derrida posits a new kind of writing or <u>écriture</u>, waiting on the distant horizon, which will be a radical departure from the Western metaphysics of discourse, ". . . a new

mutation in the history of writing, in history as writing."[8]
In the meantime, the interests of this new form of _écriture_
are to be advanced by a heuristic discourse of "deconstruc-
tion." While deconstruction cannot entirely escape the con-
fines of the metaphysics of presence, it is nonetheless
able to critically dissect, and thus to partly demystify,
its privileged categories--meaning, logos, the conception
of being as presence, and the division of the sign into
"signifier" and "signified" (the latter having precedence
over the former).[9] Elsewhere Derrida proclaims, in oppo-
sition to the metaphysics of presence, a discourse based
on "play": ". . . the joyous affirmation of the play of the
world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of
a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without
origin which is offered to an active interpretation."[10]

In _The Archaeology of Knowledge_, Michel Foucault
notes that traditional historiography, portraying history as
a succession of continuities and totalities, has always
been motivated by the "humanist" desire to conserve the
"sovereignty of consciousness":

> Continuous history is the indispensable correlative
> of the founding function of the subject: the guar-
> antee that everything that has eluded him may be
> restored to him; the certainty that time will dis-
> perse nothing without restoring it in a reconsti-
> tuted 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
> his sway, all those things that are kept at a dis-
> tance by difference, and find in them what might be
> called his abode. Making historical analysis the

> discourse of the continuous and making human con-
> sciousness the original subject of all historical
> development and all action are the two sides of the
> same system of thought.[11]

Foucault's strategy is to dislodge the sovereign conscious

subject by showing that the anthropology of discourse which

sustains that subject is in fact an ideological system of

exclusions and constraints. He exposes the rhetoric of unity

and continuity in conventional historical discourse, choosing

instead to analyze history in terms of its "mutations" and

"ruptures," its displacements and discontinuities. In the

process, the sovereign subject is demoted to the status of

a discursive convention or "function."[12]

Jean-François Lyotard offers an even more radical

critique of the notion of an autonomous subject as the con-

trolling source of discourse. Lyotard characterizes crit-

ical-theoretical discourse in terms of a generalized "libid-

inal economy," arguing that theoretical texts (such as the

critical essay) are themselves "bodies" regulated by all the

authoritarian norms of traditional discourse: the norms of

truth, logic, consistency, meaning, intention, representa-

tion, referentiality, etc. The notion of a stable and co-

herent discourse, capable of generating objective proposi-

tions and truths, presupposes the existence of a stable and

coherent identity, a neutral, impassive philosophical sub-

ject.[13] In the final section of his major work, Économie

libidinale, Lyotard proposes an alternative form of dis-

course, a kind of anti-essay. Unlike the "classical essay" (Montaigne and Hume are mentioned as examples), this new form would be neither a quest for self-representation nor an inquiry into a specific object or area of experience, since both quest and inquiry are intentional projects, and are ipso facto chained to a regulated economy of discourse.[14] Lyotard advocates a discourse of libidinal anarchy, a sensuous, free-floating form based on <u>intensités</u> rather than the intentionality of a controlling rational subject.[15] The question is, of course, whether such an anti-essay has any chance of succeeding, whether any use of language can ever elude altogether the constraints and conventions of meaning, language, and logic, without imposing new constraints and new conventions. The example of Adorno suggests how difficult it is for a radical critique of previous philosophy to avoid becoming an end-in-itself. However, of the poststructuralists we are discussing, it is perhaps Lyotard who comes closest to achieving an anti-authoritarian form of discourse.

Thus, each of these theorists calls for an end to the hegemony of the intentional subject in critical discourse. The politics of poststructuralist criticism, the ideological rationale behind their dismissal of the subject, may be glimpsed in this passage from Roland Barthes' essay, "The Death of the Author":

> Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher
> a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an
> Author is to impose a limit on that text, to fur-

nish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyché, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is "explained"--victory to the critic. Hence there is no surprise in the fact that, historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic, nor again in the fact that criticism (be it new) is today undermined along with the Author. In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be dis-entangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed, "run" (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say writing), by refusing to assign a "secret", an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases-- reason, science, law.[16]

These claims are ambitious, and perhaps a bit optimistic. One wonders whether Barthes, and perhaps the other poststructuralists as well, are not, in a way, making the best of a bad situation. No doubt the "Author" and the "Critic" have fallen on hard times, as Barthes suggests; but one misses a reference to the historical factors contributing to the current state of affairs. The decline in the reading public, and of the "book culture" of the nineteenth-century as it has given way to the mass media of the twentieth; the increasing specialization of knowledge and the relative decline in prestige of the humanities vis-à-vis the sciences; the consequent institutionalization and containment of

serious criticism largely within the universities--all of
these factors militate against the traditional prestige of
the critic as "man of letters."[17] But whether this situation
should be the occasion for optimism or depression, whether
the electronic age will mean the advent of a new écriture or
simply the end of reading, is harder to say. Barthes' im-
plicit scorn for hermeneutic approaches to literature may
in one sense be a healthy rebellion against conservative
canons and stable meanings, but it might also be used as an
apology for the shortening attention spans of readers (one
can hardly accuse Barthes himself of this), as a refusal of
the discipline and concentration required, in the hermeneutic
effort, to weigh the various possible meanings of a text and
to select the most plausible ones. When the poststructur-
alists speak of liberating literature and criticism from the
bonds of traditional discursive norms and assumptions, one
may be permitted a degree of scepticism. Such cultural events
have a way of becoming self-fulfilling prophesies: perhaps
the "man of letters" is to be replaced by deconstructionist
adepts who will spark a cultural revolution by proclaiming
the end of the Author and the beginning of Écriture, all of
this to be carried out safely behind the walls of the uni-
versities. This is not to say that the poststructuralists are
to blame for such institutional recuperation, only that they
are not immune to it. But to be fair, it must be admitted
that, on a less grandiose scale, within the institutional

limits imposed upon the study of literature today, the influence of poststructuralist theory is salutary: it revitalizes literature by inventing new forms of discourse in which to converse about it.

In any case, one ought to be able to see beyond the immediate polemics surrounding the poststructuralist movement, to see it as perhaps another in a series of theoretical and discursive formations which have influenced the evolution of the essay; a formation with its moment of truth as well as its measure of contingency, a phenomenon whose history will also someday be written. Whatever their normative ideals--free play, intertextuality, libidinal intensities, or whatever variant of discursivité sauvage one chooses--the poststructuralist theories of discourse are just as much utopian projections as the theories we have already considered.[18] The notion of a text or discourse based on the autonomous functioning of language seems to me no less ideological, in the long run, than the idea of a discourse based on an autonomous cognitive subject. To borrow a tactic from Adorno, one might say that the Marxist utopias of cognition and the poststructuralist utopias of language balance and correct each other. If the Marxists' stress on the primacy of cognition overlooks the extent to which subjectivity is already mediated and determined through language, the poststructuralists' emphasis on the priority of language tends to forget that essays (including their

own) are always cognitive projects traceable, though not always reducible, to situated ideological subjects.

What emerges from our encounter with these theories is perhaps only another theoretical ideal or utopian project--that of a descriptive-historical poetics of the essay. Its aim would be to describe the interaction of discursive and ideological strategies in essays, the actualization in language of determinate cognitive projects, without presupposing or legitimizing any particular ideological subject or anthropology of discourse. The first task of a comprehensive theory of the essay is to write its history. The present study is no more than a prolegomenon to that task.

¹ The idea that the different aesthetic preferences of
Lukács and Adorno, and the absence of nostalgia in the lat-
ter's worldview, may be due to such a "generation gap" is
attributed by Martin Jay to Eugene Lunn in Jay, "The Concept
of Totality," p. 129.

² For a critique of Adorno which sees his aesthetic
theory as harboring (among other things) a tragic and ascetic
"theology," see Jean-François Lyotard, "Adorno come diavolo,"
in his Des dispositifs pulsionnels (Paris: Union Générale
d'Éditions, 1973), pp. 115-33.

³ Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A. M.
Sheridan Smith (New York: Random House, 1972). "Whenever
one can describe, between a number of statements, such a sys-
tem of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of
statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a
regularity (an order, correlations, positions and function-
ings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of conven-
ience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation--thus
avoiding words that are already overladen with conditions
and consequences, and in any case inadequate to the task of
designating such a dispersion, such as 'science,' 'ideology,'
'theory,' or 'domain of objectivity'" (p. 38).

⁴ Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in Image-Music-
Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977),
p. 143.

⁵ Adorno, "Der Essay als Form," pp. 23-24.

⁶ Benveniste, "Subjectivity in Language," in Problems
in General Linguistics (1966), trans. Mary Elizabeth Meeks
(Miami, Florida: Univ. of Miami Press, 1971), pp. 223-30.
"It is in and through language that man constitutes himself
as a subject, because language alone establishes the concept
of 'ego' in reality . . . . Now we hold that that 'subjecti-
vity,' whether it is placed in phenomenology or in psychol-
ogy, as one may wish, is only the emergence in the [human?]
being of a fundamental property of language. 'Ego' is he
who says 'ego.' That is where we see the foundation of 'sub-
jectivity,' which is determined by the linguistic status of
'person'" (p. 224).

⁷ Barthes, "From Work to Text" (1971), in Textual Strat-
egies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism, ed.
Josué V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), p. 81.
According to Barthes, this new conception of the text breaks

with traditional notions of literary reception: instead of being an object to be passively consumed, ". . . the Text requires an attempt to abolish (or at least to lessen) the distance between writing and reading, not by intensifying the reader's projection into the work, but by linking the two together in a single signifying process [pratique signi-fiante] . . . . The Text . . . asks the reader for an active collaboration" (pp. 79-80).

[8] Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 8.

[9] The signifier-signified dichotomy is now generally associated with Ferdinand de Saussure and structural linguistics, but according to Derrida this distinction goes back to "the Stoic and later medieval opposition between signans and signatum . . ." and is indissociable from the logocentrism of Western thought (Grammatology, pp. 13-14).

[10] Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (1967; rpt. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 292.

[11] Foucault, p. 12.

[12] Foucault, passim.

[13] One cannot help noticing the similarity between Adorno's critique of philosophy and that of Lyotard. They are both sceptical of philosophies based on such concepts as identity, intention, representation, system, and totality. But the resemblance ends there. Lyotard's views are more anarchistic, his attitude and language far more irreverent, than Adorno's.

[14] Lyotard, Économie libidinale (Paris: Minuit, 1974), p. 303.

[15] Lyotard, pp. 287-311, et passim.

[16] Barthes, "Death of the Author," p. 147.

[17] For three interesting views of this and related phenomena, see John Gross, The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: A Study of the Idiosyncratic and the Humane in Modern Literature (London: Macmillan, 1969); Geoffry H. Hartman, "The Fate of Reading," in The Fate of Reading and Other Essays (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 248-74; and George Steiner, "In a Post-Culture," in Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution (New York:

Atheneum, 1971), pp. 155-71.

[18] Witness Barthes: ". . . the Text participates in a
social utopia of its own: prior to history, the Text achieves,
if not the transparency of social relations, at least the
transparency of language relations. It is the space in which
no one language has a hold over any other, in which all
languages circulate freely" ("From Work to Text," p. 80).

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