1. Definitions

Critical Theory

If *theory* is taken to mean an intellectual framework, a problematic that, by the form of its questions even more than by the content of its answers, defines a certain conceptual terrain, then all thought is theoretical. This proposition is, indeed, virtually tautological, since a theory or intellectual problematic is not that which merely shapes or contains thought (as though the latter somehow possessed an unshaped, uncontained earlier existence) but that which gives rise to the possibility of thought in the first place. It may be added that few theories are more narrow and dogmatic than those (like Anglo-American "common sense") that remain oblivious or even hostile to their status as theories. Keynes's aphorism about his colleagues—that those economists who think they dislike theory are simply attached to an older theory—is applicable in other fields as well.[1] *Critical* theory, however, has, or ought to have, a considerably more specific meaning. The term is by no means unfamiliar in current academic discourse; nonetheless, it is not always used with great precision. I shall begin by defining just what difference the adjective makes.

The word *critical* can be etymologically traced to Greek and even Indo-European roots (a tracing that leads ultimately to the concepts of cutting and separation),[2] and the Oxford English Dictionary finds that *critical* in the sense of "involving or exercising careful judgment or observation" is used in English as early as 1650 (by Sir Thomas Browne). With the three *Critiques* of Kant, however, the meaning of the word undergoes a radical, irrevocable transformation. This is not the place for a full-scale rehearsal of Kantian philosophy, which few today would regard in any case as adequate to current theoretical exigencies. But it is important to remember Kant not only as the founder of German idealism and the paradigmatic exponent of a contemplative metaphysics (and aesthetics), but also as the thinker who first clearly establishes what might be called the priority of *interpretation*. The whole concept of the thing-in-itself and the separation of the latter from the phenomenal world of theoretical or scientific investigation (however inadequate and however widely challenged since Kant's own day) is a pioneering attempt to provide an alternative both to theological dogmatism and to the vulgar empiricism that assumes an untroubled adequation of knowing subject to known object. Indeed, it is only with Kant that the affinity between dogmatism and empiricism, as varieties

of an unreflexive philosophical realism, becomes fully visible. The Kantian alternative is to insist upon the active interpretive function of human cognition, whose various components—understanding, judgment, and reason, in Kant's division—regulate the phenomenal world a priori but (in sharp contrast to the subjectivism and irrationality into which so much later idealism has fallen) with a validity guaranteed by the integrity of the phenomenal world, which exists on this side, so to speak, of the thing-in-itself. The thing-in-itself remains strictly unknowable; at the same time, however, cognition achieves genuine knowledge of the phenomena, which cognition plays an active role in constructing. A passage from the introduction to *Critique of Judgment* (1790) is especially pertinent to the status of Kantian critique with regard to theoretical investigation in both the natural and human sciences:[3]

Our cognitive power as a whole has two domains, that of the concepts of nature and that of the concept of freedom, because it legislates a priori by means of both kinds of concept. Now philosophy too divides, according to these legislations, into theoretical and practical. And yet the territory on which its domain is set up and on which it *exercises* its legislation is still always confined to the sum total of the objects of all possible experience, insofar as they are considered nothing more than mere phenomena, since otherwise it would be inconceivable that the understanding could legislate with regard to them. (emphasis in original)

This scheme is vulnerable to materialist refutation because the ineffability of the thing-in-itself ultimately resolves thought into mere contemplation, despite the shaping dialectical vigor that interpretation exercises on the phenomenal plane. The classic analysis here remains that of Lukács, for whom the problem of the thing-in-itself is actually the problem of capitalist reification and the consequent opaqueness of the commodity to bourgeois consciousness; and Lukács's critique of Kant has been interestingly reworked by many more recent commentators[4] Nonetheless, with Kant the notion of critique and critical thought breaks from the problematic of knowing as a merely *extractive* process (the necessary illusion of all philosophical realism and, indeed, precisely the "careful observation" suggested by the *OED*) and is resituated as the project of making visible the absolute presuppositions of any knowledge whatever. With the advent of critique and the critical in the Kantian and post-Kantian sense, theory decisively loses its innocence; henceforth any mode of thought that declines to interrogate its own presuppositions and to engage its own role in the construction of the objects of its own knowledge may appropriately be stigmatized with the adjective *precritical*. Precritical theory has certainly continued to exist to this day, but there is a real sense in which it represents a regression to an intellectual prehistory that ought to have been permanently transcended.

And yet to speak of an intellectual prehistory that "ought" to have been transcended is, in itself, inadequate; just as it is inadequate to describe the moment of critical theory as Kantian and post-Kantian, if such a description is taken to imply that what is solely or mainly at stake are the abstract narratives of intellectual history. A fully concrete historicization of the critical would in the end probably involve nothing less than the reconstruction of modernity itself (using that term both in the conventional sense of the decisively postmedieval and imperialist phase of Western civilization but also in Habermas's sense of a project that remains "incomplete" even in our own "postmodern" era).[5] Among the extremely various historical determinants of the critical moment, however, there are at least two that have special relevance to the particular interests of this essay.

One is the triumph of the natural sciences. It is well known that science was an explicitly pressing issue for Kant himself, who in many ways counts as the last major speculative philosopher for whom the ancient link between philosophy and science remains fully vital: the entire edifice of Kant's critical philosophy rests on the presupposition that the results obtained by natural science are valid, though in ways that pre-Kantian philosophy had not succeeded in formulating with precision. But the relevance of science to the advent of critique has a significance far wider than that particular bit of intellectual "influence." For science—even though many of its practitioners have historically thought their way forward in empiricist and, later, specifically positivist terms—possesses a fundamentally critical, nonempiricist charge in its ceaseless questioning of the given, in its refusal to repose in any material or intellectual status quo. By the late eighteenth century the practical transformations wrought by the scientific project, which had been blessed by official sanction a century earlier in England through the formation of the Royal Society, had become sufficiently urgent to help stimulate and in turn be stimulated by critical theory in the modern sense—theory, that is, engaged in fundamental interrogation and self-interrogation, theory decisively free of conservative epistemological canons of tradition, appearance, or logic in the merely formal sense.

Nor is textual evidence of the link between the natural sciences and critical thought to be located only in academic philosophy such as Kant's. In the current context it is especially pertinent to recall that hardly more than a generation after the appearance of *Critique of Judgement* came Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which has not only been listed in many genealogies of the genre as the first science-fiction novel (a context in which we shall later return to it) but which also probably counts as the first important work of fiction to engage modern science seriously and to feature a scientist as its protagonist.[6] Indeed, the intellectual significance of *Frankenstein* is actually underscored by consideration of an obvious but superficial objection to its status as *science* fiction, in the sense of fiction in some way allied to science: namely, that its ethical stance is ultimately

conservative and hostile to science. So it is: but such hostility by no means cancels the *epistemological* radicalism of the novel, its sense that the most fundamental of material and intellectual categories—condensed into the problem of life itself—can no longer be taken for granted but are now somehow up for grabs and can be challenged and rethought. Victor Frankenstein's experiment is monstrous, to be sure, but its viability amounts to intellectual revolution, to an awareness that what the text itself might designate a moment of "Promethean" critical thought is at hand.

A convenient literary index of the hegemony that science attained sometime between the turn of the eighteenth century and that of the nineteenth is the contrast of Mary Shelley's hostility to science with that of Swift in book 3 of *Gulliver's Travels,* published ninety-two years before *Frankenstein.* In 1726, it was still possible for a serious mind (though, admittedly, Swift's mind was intellectually reactionary even by the standards of the time) to refuse to take science seriously, to lampoon it as a series of frivolous, self-referential games in which no authentic intellectual activity was taking place and no practical consequences were at issue.[7] This attitude is inconceivable in the mental universe of *Frankenstein.* From Mary Shelley—perhaps from Goethe—onward, serious objections to science must be based on the assumption that the latter is not trivial but *dangerous;* and such a sense of danger is inseparable from the awareness that fundamental questions are at stake, questions that demand the dialectical reflexivity of critical theory in the strongest sense. Indeed, although, as we shall see, many later versions of critical theory have remained as friendly to natural science as Kant's, it is striking that a rather post-Mary-Shelleyan unease with science is central to the most prominent instance of critical theory as a named movement: the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School (another matter to which we shall return).

In the emergence of critical thought, however, probably even more important than the rise of the physical sciences was the invention of political modernity in the French Revolution and its aftermath. Here, of course, there is little question of direct influence on Kantian critical philosophy; the third of the great critiques was published only one year after the fall of the Bastille and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. It is nonetheless appropriate to consider critique as representing, on the philosophical plane, what T. S. Eliot might have called an "objective correlative" to the almost contemporary innovations of sociopolitical revolution. Revolution might be understood as enacting a reduction of inherited sociopolitical categories from the noumenal to the phenomenal level, as inaugurating a transformative (as contradistinguished from contemplative) stance toward social reality as irrevocably as science was performing much the same operation with regard to natural reality. The great events effected or announced in 1789—not only the Declaration itself but also the Tennis Court Oath, the repeal

of social class as a legal category, the demotion of the king from sovereign to first magistrate, and the expropriation of the church—effectively destroyed the status quo as a self-legitimating mechanism and made it necessary to retheorize the most fundamental categories of social and political life. As in the sphere of nature, what had been settled was now capable of being put in question and practically altered: so that 1789 (building on the precedent of 1776 in America) enabled not only the development of liberal and revolutionary political thought but also conservatism itself, since the latter is strictly unthinkable unless not conserving the given is somehow on the agenda. Though this sociopolitical matrix did not give rise to critique in the textual sense, it did create a situation in which critical thought possessed immediate political urgency.

The general importance of the French Revolution can also be expressed—and here the philosophical objective correlative becomes less Kantian than Hegelian—by crediting it with the invention of *history* itself, or (what in critical terms amounts to the same thing) the enabling of radically historical thought. Here Lukács's account is definitive: "It was the French Revolution, the revolutionary wars and the rise and fall of Napoleon, which for the first time made history a *mass experience,* and moreover on a European scale" (emphasis in original).[8] Prior to 1789 (and with the immense but finally ambiguous exception of the English Revolution of the 1640s) the political history of Europe had constituted a *(relatively)* unimportant narrative and one of indifference to the great majority of the population. But revolution necessitates that the masses be "invited" into history, as the leaders of the French Revolution did; their successors and enemies were virtually compelled to follow suit, particularly with regard to the mass (often conscript) armies that replaced the small mercenary and professional bands of the prerevolutionary era. For the first time, significant historical change took place not only during the lifetime but within the actual lived experience of the average (especially male and adult) person; it is this greatly accelerated and expanded pace of events that amounts to history in the sense that has been known ever since. As Lukács puts it: "Hence the concrete possibilities for men to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned, for them to see in history something which deeply affects their daily lives and immediately concerns them" (*Historical Novel* 24). In this context, critical theory inevitably takes a historical turn, as the historical dialectics of Hegel (who was of course concerned with justifying the "necessity" of the French Revolution) supersede the essentially static conception of human nature assumed by Kant and other earlier thinkers. If, then, the Kantian invention of critique constitutes the priority of interpretation, of the dialectical "interinanimation" (to adapt Donne's useful coinage) of subject and object, then the Hegelian moment may be defined as the recasting of critique into the radically historical form it has taken ever since the age of the democratic revolution. The historicization of dialectical critique, it should be added, also

means that henceforth social formations must be seen not as inherited collections of natural habits but as systemic and mutable totalities (though for Hegel, of course, such mutability is wholly idealist in character).

Natural science and the French Revolution: it is worthwhile to consider the political connotations that attach to these two crucial determinants of the critical moment. Both innovations are of course fundamental to modernity itself, and in particular to the hegemony of the Western (though no longer only the Western) nation-state organized on the economic basis of industrial capitalism (or, until recently, Stalinist socialism). In that sense, science and the traditions of 1789 would seem to be virtually unassailable; and so they are on the levels of economic or, to a lesser degree, political production. And yet (in a case of "uneven development" whose significance Habermas has been almost alone among current thinkers in estimating) the matter falls out rather differently on the ideological or cultural plane, where modernity *as a concept* (or, in Raymond Williams's sense, as a structure of feeling) has never attained complete security. Indeed, the contemporary cultural landscape is littered with antimodern protests and in particular with instances of ideological resistance to natural science and to the politics of 1789. Consider, on one educational level, the persistent campaigns against evolutionary biology in the public school curriculum, or, on a somewhat different educational level, the journalistic acclaim often granted to any treatment of the French Revolution that recycles neo-Burkean platitudes (for example, Simon Schama's *Citizens* [1989]). Such attacks are generally made from the political right, as these examples suggest, though more complex variations on the antimodern thesis have sometimes been attempted from the left (by far the most powerful such attempt being Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1947], which identifies Auschwitz as the culminating and paradigmatic project of enlightened modernity). There would seem, then, to be something in the very nature of modernity with which the modern world is never completely comfortable, and which can hardly be satisfactorily explained as mere regressive nostalgia (as though the actual restoration of a Catholic feudal past were an even apparently viable option).

The "something" in question may, at least to a considerable degree, be identified with critique, or critical theory, itself. Inseparable from the foundation of modernity, critical theory can nonetheless expect no dependable gratitude from it; for the critical refusal of all repose must call into question the structures of "actually existing" modernity itself—and this is equally true whether one is thinking of structures in the economic sense (the capitalist mode of production) or in the psychological sense (the unified bourgeois ego). Accordingly, the persistence of precritical thinking cannot be understood as mere atavism, nor as ineffectual error to be remedied by a course of reading in Kant, Hegel, and their successors, nor even, exclusively, as expressing a fully serious wish for prescientific modes of

knowledge and predemocratic political organization. Precritical thought is rather the "intellectual equivalent" (to invert Plekhanov's famous formulation of the "social equivalent" of the work of art) of *any* status quo. It is a nonirritable condition of mental ease to which *every* mind is highly susceptible, and the inevitable Other with which critique must dialogically contend in any arena however modern. (The real force of *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* as well as of the celebrated opening essay "Cultural Criticism and Society" in Adorno's *Prisms* [1955], depends on understanding that the Frankfurt School critique of modernity —crucially a critique of critique—is thus also an implacable *self*-critique and in that sense thoroughly modern after all.) Critical theory, to use a currently fashionable term, is unswervingly *oppositional.*[9]

The various definitional strands suggested thus far may now be woven, at least provisionally, into a more extensive definition of critical theory. Critical theory is dialectical thought: that is, thought which (in principle) can take nothing less than the totality of the human world or social field for its object. And yet, not only does critical theory regard the latter as a *historical* process, constantly in material flux; it also conceptualizes its own methodology as deeply involved in that flux rather than as a passive intellectual instrument by means of which an unproblematic (as-if-Cartesian) subject extracts absolute knowledge from pregiven objects. Furthermore, by dissolving the reified static categories of the ideological status quo, critical theory constantly shows that things are not what they seem to be *and* that things need not eternally be as they are. Thus it maintains a cutting edge of social subversion even at its most rarefied and abstract.

It is not my present purpose to suggest an inventory of those theories since Kant and Hegel that can be regarded as genuinely critical. Such discriminations will be made ad hoc throughout the current study, but a full-scale catalogue would be far too cumbersome (even leaving aside the difficulties of undialectical genre theory— to be discussed in the following section of this chapter—that a merely *classificatory* approach would entail: critical and precritical elements may well coexist even within the same text, to say nothing of the same "school"). Nonetheless, I do want to discuss briefly three areas of theoretical discourse that seem to me privileged.[10]

Marxism remains the central instance of post-Hegelian critical thought. I admit at once, however, that Marxism is undergoing a certain crisis today, though not precisely in any of the ways that it is currently fashionable to maintain. For example, the neoliberal notion that the totalizing intellectual dynamic of Marxism is somehow obsolete can hardly be taken seriously save as a symptom of how the increasingly pervasive regime of commodification and exchange-value makes it increasingly difficult to resist the empiricist splintering of knowledge into monographic "specialities." Indeed, the ever more thorough penetration of the social field by exchange-value is itself a function of the progressive globalization of capital, which in turn renders a perspective capable of grasping social

formations as totalities more urgent, though doubtless also more difficult, than ever. It is important in this context to remember that, as Ernest Mandel and others have frequently pointed out,[11] capitalism today resembles Marx's abstract or "pure" model of the capitalist mode of production much *more closely* than did the capitalism that actually existed during Marx's own lifetime; the increasingly "totalitarian" character of capitalism as a world system paradoxically makes it increasingly difficult to feel or even to theorize either capitalism in general or particular capitalist societies as wholes (just as fish, for instance, presumably do not feel wet and, even if endowed with rational faculties, would have great difficulty in producing the concept of wetness).

Still, the neoliberal objection to totalizing thought looks almost sophisticated compared to the conservative assumption that Marxism is invalidated by the collapse of Eastern European and Soviet Stalinism. The real point here is not simply that authentic critical Marxism has always been antithetical to Stalinism, but also that the long-term incoherence and unworkability of the latter have since the 1920s constituted an object of trenchant Marxist analysis, especially within the Trotskyist tradition (probably the richest variety of Marxist thought insofar as specifically political and political-historical writing is concerned). The actual crisis in Marxism is, however, distantly related to the false problems posed by conservatism and neoliberalism: it is the extremely problematic status of the Marxist theory of *revolution*. Although Marxism has always maintained an internationalist perspective, and although the world market occupies a crucial place in Marx's construction of the capitalist mode of production, the late twentieth century does seem to have produced a perhaps fatal incommensurability between the extent of the globalization (or multinationalization) of capital and the economic primacy of the nation-state assumed by the classic model of socialist revolution. Exactly how the proletariat can seize control of the means of production when the latter are, to an ever-growing extent, organized on a transcontinental basis is a problem yet to be seriously addressed. It may prove solvable, and the current crisis is perhaps best seen as one of Marxism-*Leninism* rather than Marxism proper. Still, if Marxist critical theory is understood as the combination of a science (historical materialism), a philosophy (dialectical materialism), and a politics (scientific socialism), then it must be conceded that the current blockage of the third element is a serious symptom indeed.

At the same time, however—and any paradox here is apparent rather than real —the fact that capitalism has proved much stronger and more resilient than Marx envisaged also renders the method of critical analysis that bears his name more rather than less pertinent. What Marx achieved (primarily in the three volumes of *Capital* [1867–1894]) by recasting the historical dialectics of Hegel into materialist form—and whether one understands this recasting in Lukácsian terms, as development, or in Althusserian terms, as rupture—was the method needed for

genuine critique of the social field as the latter is defined by the production and reproduction of capital. This is not to suggest that *Capital* or subsequent critical analysis in the tradition of that founding text are at all contaminated by the economic determinism or economic reductionism traditionally associated with "vulgar Marxism." But the reproduction of capital does, "in the last instance," establish the arena in which human activity in a capitalist society takes place, in the sense, that is, that the theory capable of authentic critique of capitalist society as a radically heterogeneous whole must be able to construct and account for the motions of capital. This is the real sense of Sartre's famous assertion that Marxism is "the one philosophy of our time which we cannot go beyond,"[12] a maxim too often taken to be a voluntaristic (hence, finally, metaphysical) slogan. But Sartre's point is that Marxism, as the critical analysis of capital and class, cannot be genuinely transcended *during the capitalist era* (though he was certainly well aware that it is possible to repackage a pre-Marxist idea as the hottest new theory "after" Marxism).[13] Accordingly, the currently irresistible expansion, both spatial and temporal, of the regime of capital, with all the intolerable self-contradictions attendant thereto, creates greatly enlarged theoretical terrain for the methods of dialectical-historical-materialist analysis. The unprecedented "cunning" that capital now displays on the global stage renders Marxism more urgent than ever. Indeed, the very impasse confronted by Marxist politics demands creative new elaborations of Marxist critique—a demand by no means unmet.[14]

Second only to Marxism as a variety of critical theory I would name psychoanalysis. The two discourses have, indeed, long been felt to be analogous to one another. Both are materialisms oriented toward praxis; that is, toward theoretically informed political or therapeutic work. Both, as Althusser has suggestively maintained, can be understood as "conflictual sciences," as theoretical discourses of unprecedented critical rigor in areas previously dominated by ideologies more or less in harmony with the rule and general outlook of the bourgeoisie.[15] Furthermore, there has been a whole series of interesting attempts to integrate psychoanalysis and Marxism with one another, beginning with the pioneering social psychology of Wilhelm Reich and attaining most advanced form mainly in work done within the Frankfurt School or by the Althusserians. Though no particular version of Freudo-Marxism can yet claim to be definitive, the hyphen of the term is, I think, indelibly inscribed on the critical agenda: there is now something inevitably archaic in a Marxism that does not somehow try to enlist Freudian theoretical resources to develop the potentially powerful but extremely embryonic concept of subjectivity implied by both the description of commodity fetishism in *Capital* and the analysis of political representation in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852). Equally, it is difficult to take with full seriousness any version of psychoanalysis that does not somehow (whether in the manner obliquely suggested by Lacan in *The Four*

Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis [1973] or otherwise) attempt to historicize the Freudian ego and to go beyond Freud's own suggestive but sketchy notions as to how the subject of psychoanalysis is formed with respect to the economic and political relations of modern class society.

What needs to be stressed in the current context, however, is the extent to which the major categories of psychoanalysis—above all the unconscious, of course, but also the drives, the transference, and the Oedipus and castration complexes—are profoundly dialectical. The psyche for Freud, like the social formation for Marx, is a complexly structured whole: neither an assemblage of reified particulars nor a centered unity monocausally determined by some single essence, but a formation governed by the dialectical process of *overdetermination* (to invoke the term invented by Freud but, significantly, appropriated by Althusser in order to theorize the Marxist dialectic itself); that is, by the causative conjuncture of radically heterogeneous factors, few of which are fully conscious and none of which can be inferred from or reduced to any of the others. Furthermore, what might be called the epistemology of psychoanalysis is radically critical and antirealist. The analyst is engaged in a process of interpretation, a reading of signs (dreams, parapraxes, symptoms, and the like); and these signs must finally be understood as raw material out of which, in that dialectical process of knowing which Freud designates the transference, psychic meaning is (in quintessentially post-Kantian fashion) constructed. It is the *de-centering* of the subject—this critical interrogation of the human psyche that forever renders unacceptable the notion of the latter as the unproblematically knowable conscious unity of the older precritical psychology—that remains the enduring "scandal" of psychoanalysis, far more than the much advertised emphasis on sexuality (just as, according to D. H. Lawrence, bourgeois taste in painting can welcome any number of conventionally sentimentalized nudes but finds the postimpressionist apples of Cézanne to be profoundly immoral). Though Freudian vocabulary can certainly be appropriated for precritical purposes (for example, a kind of vulgar-Freudian one-dimensional sexual determinism that is the rough equivalent of the economic determinism of vulgar Marxism), psychoanalysis in full dialectical rigor is a critique of almost unsurpassed richness and subtlety.

Though less important in my view than either Marxism or psychoanalysis, one other area of critical theory deserves attention: that body of work—heavily indebted to Nietzsche, mainly of French provenance, and extremely influential during the past three decades—most strongly instanced by Jacques Derrida's analyses of cultural, especially linguistic, sedimentation and by Michel Foucault's investigations of the microtechnologies of power. The common term for such work is, of course, poststructuralism, a designation that is accurate from the viewpoint of intellectual history as narrowly constructed and is in that way superior to such increasingly meaningless rubrics as "postmodern discourse." A more adequate

term for such theory, however, might well be *postdialectical*. In many ways, poststructuralism, at least in its stronger forms, continues the classic dialectical project. Its approach is generally interpretative and antirealist in the post-Kantian way, and is frequently radically historical as well. The latter point is quite obviously true of Foucault (who in disciplinary terms can be considered, as he sometimes considered himself, a historian) but is really no less true of Derrida as well. For Derrida, deconstruction is not an ahistorical property intrinsic to writing itself (though Paul de Man's domesticated American version of deconstruction does come close to this position). Rather, it is a critical operation enabled by a certain moment in the *history* of writing, a moment defined by such diverse developments as the rise of cybernetic technology and the growing awareness by Western of non-Western cultures.[16] Indeed, in some cases the basic strategy of *post*structuralism can be understood as the restoration of a dialectical (and temporal) dimension to the increasingly claustrophobic static structures of classical or "high" structuralism: witness, paradigmatically, Derrida's critique of the Saussurian sign, a critique that in many ways parallels Bakhtin's (or Volosinov's) explicitly dialectical and dialogic "deconstruction" of structuralist linguistics.

If, however, this body of thought must be considered postdialectical rather than dialectical proper, it is not only because of the strategic distance that figures like Foucault and Derrida have usually maintained from Marx and Freud (and even leaving aside that, in the particular French intellectual formation relevant here, the names of Marx and Freud have often served as code words for Althusser and Lacan). More important, though not unrelated, is the suspicion that virtually all versions of poststructuralism have cast on the indispensable dialectical category of totality. This is the point of contact between poststructuralism and neoliberalism (or, sometimes, neoconservatism), a contact grotesquely illustrated in, for example, the editorial history of *Tel Quel*.[17] Still, it must be stressed that much poststructuralism has remained faithful to the principle of *relationality,* which is a crucial component of totality as dialectically understood, and which is partly detachable from the issue of an overdeterminationist dynamic that would guarantee the integrity of totality as such. It should also be stressed that, in general, the attitude toward totality of thinkers like Foucault and Derrida is a great deal more complex than the vulgar slogans about "wars on totality" fashionable in much weaker varieties of poststructuralism. It is possible to maintain irreducible reservations about even the most rigorous versions of contemporary postdialectical thought while nonetheless appreciating the intellectual creativity and usefulness of the latter.

Such, then, is my understanding of critical theory—not exhaustive, of course (such an attempt would be preposterous), but sufficient to provide some conceptual mapping for the study that lies ahead. In what follows I shall be

concerned with critical theory mainly in its cultural and, still more, its literary contexts. But any Procrustean disciplinary division is of course profoundly contrary to the spirit of critical theory itself.

Science Fiction

It is symptomatic of the complexity of science fiction as a generic category that critical discussion of it tends to devote considerable attention to the problem of definition—much more so than is the case with such superficially analogous genres as mystery fiction or romance, and perhaps even more than with such larger categories as epic or the novel itself. No definitional consensus exists. There are narrow and broad definitions, eulogistic and dyslogistic definitions, definitions that position science fiction in a variety of ways with regard to its customary generic Others (notably fantasy, on the one hand, and "mainstream" or realistic fiction on the other) and, finally, antidefinitions that proclaim the problem of definition to be insoluble. Indeed, not only the question of definition proper but even the looser matter of *description*—of deciding, even in the most rough-and-ready way, approximately which texts are to be designated by the rubric of science fiction—is a matter of widespread disagreement. We may begin the definitional task by considering the two poles of opinion in the matter of simple description.

Science fiction can be construed very strictly to refer only to that body of work in, or that grows directly out of, the American pulp tradition established in 1926 when Hugo Gernsback founded *Amazing Stories.* This is, of course, an extremely narrow construction of science fiction, one that excludes even such close precursors as Mary Shelley, Poe, Verne, and H. G. Wells (works by the latter three were reprinted by Gernsback in his inaugural issue), not to mention contemporary British work by writers like Stapledon, C. S. Lewis, and Aldous Huxley, as well as the rich Russian and East European traditions. Though obviously deflationary from the viewpoint of anyone, like myself, who wishes to make large literary and theoretical claims for the genre, the strict construction of science fiction does have two merits. One is popular currency. For the general public (as well as for the commercial marketing system employed by publishers, bookshops, and the vendors of the newer electronic media), the name of science fiction has always suggested the pulp tradition, today largely as the latter has been transmogrified into such filmic and televisional equivalents of pulp as *Stars Wars* (1977–onward) and *Star Trek* (1966–onward). The other merit, not unrelated to the first, is philological correctness. It is certainly true that the term, originally in the more cumbersome form of "scientifiction" and then as "science fiction," was invented in the pulps (by Gernsback himself, according to some accounts), and that any wider use involves deliberate semantic change. Mary Shelley never heard the expression; Wells very likely never heard it; and even Lewis, who had some interest in and

sympathy for the American magazines, hardly belonged to the world of pulp, instead taking his inspiration mainly from Stapledon and Wells directly (as well as from the entire tradition of Christian heroic and fantastic literature from *Beowulf* [c. 750] onward). Accordingly, whatever critics like myself may propose, it seems unlikely that the narrow usage will ever completely vanish.

Yet it suffers not only from general critical inutility but from immense self-contradiction: the list of authors who have directly and self-consciously succeeded Gernsbackian pulp includes (to pick only a small fraction of the names that could be adduced) Americans like Alfred Bester, Theodore Sturgeon, Walter M. Miller, Philip K. Dick, Ursula Le Guin, Alice Sheldon, Samuel Delany, Joanna Russ, Joe Haldeman, Thomas Disch, Norman Spinrad, Kate Wilhelm, Vonda McIntyre, and William Gibson, and probably also such British figures as Brian Aldiss, J. G. Ballard, and Michael Moorcock. Accordingly—and unless science fiction is construed not only narrowly but defamatorily, so that by definition only bad fiction can bear the label—the body of work suggested by such names must be science fiction even by the strictest philological standards. But it is ludicrous to consider writers of such caliber as simply and solely the literary sons and daughters of Hugo Gernsback and E. E. "Doc" Smith, as we are logically obliged to do if science fiction is understood purely in terms of pulp. Mighty oaks may grow from tiny acorns, but novels like Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) or Delany's *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (1984) cannot be understood as merely the fulfillment of a promise implicit in Gernsback's *Ralph 124C 41+* (1911) or Doc Smith's *The Skylark of Space* (1928). There is here something of an analogy with the history of novel criticism in general. The latter was able to attain some real seriousness and rigor when it became evident, in the light of the major achievements of the nineteenth-century novel, that the form had a vital lineage—particularly, as Lukács and others pointed out, in epic itself[18]—that far transcended the relatively crude Renaissance prose narratives that supplied the name. Similarly, if the likes of Le Guin and Delany write science fiction, as they incontestably do, then it is clear that current Anglo-American science fiction draws on far more than the pulp tradition that constitutes *one* of its filiations; in that case it may well be both useful and legitimate to employ the term in a much wider sense than mere philology would allow.

Accordingly, we may consider a construction of science fiction as broad as the pulp-centered construction is narrow. The term can be taken to include—to pick just a few examples—the whole tradition of arealistic travel literature from Lucian to Rabelais, Cyrano, and beyond; the classic utopian line from More onward; a modernist and postmodernist tradition of work not actually marketed as science fiction, from Kafka and even Joyce to Samuel Beckett and Thomas Pynchon; and even such world-class epic poets as Dante and Milton. The latter two examples are especially worth pondering for a moment, not least because of their prestige value

(a factor that will not be dismissed by anyone who has struggled to obtain academic recognition for science fiction). The point is not simply that, by the contemporary standards of rationality, Dante offers plausible scientific speculation as to the geography of hell in relation to that of earth (and purgatory), and that Milton does the same with regard to the substance of which angels are supposed to be made. On this level, indeed, one might even argue that Dante and Milton, in the active interest they took in the scientific developments of their own times and places, are considerably more akin to Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke than to Wordsworth and T. S. Eliot. The larger point, however, is that many of the major literary values for which science fiction is generally read are very much at work in Dante's and Milton's efforts to take the reader far beyond the boundaries of his or her own mundane environment, into strange, awe-inspiring realms thought to be in fact unknown, or at least largely unknown, but not in principle unknowable. It is in this sense of creating rich, complex, but not ultimately fantastic alternative worlds that Dante and Milton can be said to write science fiction. The matter can be put the other way around, as it were, by suggesting that if one were to seek, in older literature, qualities similar to those found in the multisecular historic sweep of Asimov's *Foundation* (1951–1953) series or the cosmic awe at the conclusion of Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1954), one would probably do far better to go to Dante and Milton than to Romantic or post-Romantic verse, or to the realistic novel. It would seem, then, justifiable to accept the classification of *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Inferno* (c. 1315) as science fiction.

It would not, however, be difficult to make similar arguments with regard to a great many other texts that do not arrive in the bookshop with the rubric of "science fiction" printed on the dust jackets or back covers. The very ease with which the broadest construction of science fiction can be justified may itself arouse suspicion. As we argue that the qualities that govern texts universally agreed to be science fiction can be found to govern other texts as well, it may be difficult to see just where the argument will stop. It may even begin to appear that ultimately nearly *all* fiction—perhaps even including realism itself—will be found to be science fiction. Does not that conclusion preclude success in defining science fiction as a recognizable *kind* of fiction? In fact, I do believe that all fiction is, in a sense, science fiction. It is even salutary, I think, sometimes to put the matter in more deliberately provocative, paradoxical form, and to maintain that fiction is a subcategory of science fiction rather than the other way around. Nonetheless, the capacity of such formulations to illuminate depends upon a more conceptually specific notion of science fiction than we have suggested thus far. Merely descriptive concepts have proved adequate to expanding the term beyond the narrow pulp-centered notion; having failed to *limit* the category of science fiction by descriptive means, however, we are now in urgent need of a genuinely critical, analytic, definitional principle.

By far the most helpful such principle yet suggested is that of Darko Suvin. Science fiction, he defines, is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (emphasis deleted). He goes on to add that estrangement "differentiates [science fiction] from the 'realistic' literary mainstream," while cognition differentiates it from myth, the folk tale, and fantasy.[19] In this understanding, then—though Suvin does not put the matter in exactly this way—science fiction is determined by the *dialectic* between estrangement and cognition. The first term refers to the creation of an alternative fictional world that, by refusing to take our mundane environment for granted, implicitly or explicitly performs an estranging critical interrogation of the latter. But the *critical* character of the interrogation is guaranteed by the operation of cognition, which enables the science-fictional text to account rationally for its imagined world and for the connections as well as the disconnections of the latter to our own empirical world. If the dialectic is flattened out to mere cognition, then the result is "realistic" or mundane fiction, which can cognitively account for its imaginings but performs no estrangement; if the dialectic is flattened out to mere estrangement (or, it might be argued, pseudo-estrangement), then the result is fantasy, which estranges, or appears to estrange, but in an irrationalist, theoretically illegitimate way.

This definition seems to me not only fundamentally sound but indispensable. Yet in Suvin's own formulations the concept of science fiction as the fiction of cognitive estrangement involves at least two serious problems—both of which, however, may well be mere inadvertencies and both of which can in any case be solved *within* the basic Suvinian problematic (which can itself thus be enriched).

The first problem is that the category of cognition appears to commit the literary critic to making generic distinctions on the basis of matters far removed from literature and genre. The awkwardness does not transpire so long as we are thinking, say, of Heinlein's *The Man Who Sold the Moon* (1950) as paradigmatic of (cognitive) science fiction and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955) as paradigmatic of (noncognitive) fantasy. The rational connections that link D. D. Harriman's world to our own are clear and direct, while the evident absence of any such connections between our world and that of the hobbits and orcs is equally clear. Yet there is a great deal of literature—some of it commonly labeled science fiction, some commonly labeled fantasy, and some, significantly, labeled both—that is based neither on the careful, straightforward extrapolation of Heinlein's novella nor on the sharp break with known empirical reality of Tolkien's trilogy. Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) is considered science fiction, but few physicists would unhesitatingly affirm that the notion of parallel universes on which Russ's novel depends is a valid cognitive option. Must we wait for a scientific consensus on the matter before deciding whether the text is science

fiction or fantasy? H. P. Lovecraft has been described both as a science-fiction writer and as a writer of horror fantasy. Do "The Shadow over Innsmouth" (1936) and "The Dunwich Horror" (1939) earn the title of science fiction because their monstrosities have their origin not in the admitted supernatural but in vulgar pseudo-Darwinian notions of racial degeneration? What of C. S. Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938) and the following two novels in the Ransom trilogy? If theology is a science (if, to put it bluntly, Christianity is true) then the powerful estrangements produced by Ransom's adventures on Mars are wholly cognitive; if religious dogma, however, is in fact as precritical as most critical theorists would insist, then Lewis's epistemology is not really cognitive at all.

All these examples suggest that cognition proper is *not,* in the strictest terms, exactly the quality that defines science fiction. What is rather at stake is what we might term (following a familiar Barthesian precedent) the *cognition effect.* The crucial issue for generic discrimination is not any epistemological judgment external to the text itself on the rationality or irrationality of the latter's imaginings, but rather (as some of Suvin's language does, in fact, imply, but never makes entirely clear) the attitude *of the text itself* to the kind of estrangements being performed. Comparison between Lewis and Tolkien is especially illuminating in this context, because both trilogies are concerned with conveying almost precisely similar orthodox Christian values. *The Lord of the Rings* is understood as fantasy and *Out of the Silent Planet* and its sequels as science fiction: not because it would necessarily be less rational to believe in hobbits and orcs than in planetary angels and Merlin redivivus, but because of the formal stances adopted by the texts themselves. Tolkien's trilogy proclaims in its very letter a noncognitive disjunction from the mundane world (the kind of disjunction in fact suggested by Tolkien's own central critical category of literary production as "sub-creation"),[20] while Lewis's trilogy considers that principles it regards as cognitively valid cannot exclude events like the action fictionally portrayed from occurring within the author's actual environment. Lewis, accordingly, produces a cognition effect, while Tolkien quite deliberately does not.

Unless the distinction between cognition and cognition effect is kept steadily in view, the definition of science fiction as cognitive estrangement can lead to patent absurdities. For example, one of Asimov's science-fiction mystery stories ("The Dying Night," originally published in 1956) depends for its plot resolution on the assumption that Mercury has a "captured" rotation; that is, that it turns on its axis at precisely the same rate that it revolves around the sun, and therefore that it contains areas where night is permanent. This assumption was faithful to common astronomical wisdom at the time of the story's composition, but was disproved in 1965; the planet, evidently, does rotate much more rapidly than it revolves, and all parts of it are at one time or another exposed to sunlight. In an afterword to one reprinting of the story, Asimov humorously complained, "I wish astronomers

would get these things right to begin with," and he refused "to change the story to suit *their* whims" (emphasis in original).[21] Fortunately, the "whims" of astronomers have nothing to do with the cognition effect of the story (by an author, indeed, who is unusually consistent and insistent in producing the cognition effect), and there is no question of the story's suddenly being reclassified as fantasy nine years after its initial appearance. Once the formal distinction is clear, however, between cognition and cognition effect, we should not exaggerate its practical significance: the readiest means of producing a cognition effect is precisely through cognition itself; that is, through rationality as the latter is understood from a critical point of view. Science fiction of Lewis's or Lovecraft's sort remains relatively atypical of the genre, while the solidity of the cognition effect in Russ or Asimov is by no means unrelated to the fact that Russ's device *may* be cognitively legitimate, while Asimov's once *was*. Science fiction is, overwhelmingly though not necessarily, a genuinely cognitive literature.

The second difficulty with defining science fiction as the literature of cognitive estrangement is rather more complex; it may be approached by noting that, taken literally, Suvin's definition suffers from an immense sacrifice of descriptive to eulogistic force. It is one thing to transcend philology by expanding the concept of science fiction far beyond the largely forgettable pulp texts for which the term was originally invented, and even beyond the texts written in direct succession to pulp. But cognitive estrangement as a definitional principle seems not merely to transcend but to overturn both philology and common usage, largely denying the title of science fiction to most of the pulp tradition while granting it to works produced very far from the influence of the latter. I do not think it can be fruitfully maintained that many very complex or interesting cognitive estrangements are produced in Doc Smith's Skylark series, or in the *Star Wars* films, or in most of that vast galaxy of television programs, films, stories, and novels designated *Star Trek*. Can we really accept a definition by the logic of which such work is not science fiction at all but the plays of Brecht—to take the obvious instance—are? It is true, of course, that for Brecht historical materialism is not only cognitive but scientific in the strongest sense, and Marx just as much the founder of a science as Galileo. Nor is there necessarily any reason (and here an old Kantian problem resurfaces) why the natural sciences should be cognitively privileged over the human sciences—even leaving aside that much of the science fiction that seems most explicitly wedded to the so-called hard sciences (for example, much of Heinlein) often turns out, upon inspection, to involve not science at all but engineering. Nonetheless, Suvin does, in fact, seem to find Brecht a difficult case: well aware of the latter's status as the preeminent theorist and practitioner of literary estrangement *(Verfremdung),* he remarks that estrangement is "used by Brecht in a different way, within a still predominantly 'realistic' context" (*Metamorphoses* 7). The assertion is surely false, for Brecht is in no sense

a literary realist, not even allowing for the quotation marks—as Lukács angrily charged and as Brecht himself proudly admitted.[22] In order to clarify the issues at stake here, it is necessary to clarify the dynamics of genre criticism itself.[23]

Genre has often been considered a suspect category because of the static, merely classificatory intellectual framework that it seems to imply: the various genres are understood as a row of so many pigeonholes, and each literary text is expected to fit more or less unproblematically into one of them (allowing, of course, for the inevitable ambiguous or borderline cases). But it is possible to conceptualize genre in a radically different and thoroughly dialectical way. In this understanding, a genre is not a classification but an element or, better still, a *tendency* that, in combination with other relatively autonomous generic elements or tendencies, is active to a greater or lesser degree within a literary text that is itself understood as a complexly structured totality. In other words: a text is not filed under a generic category; instead, a generic tendency is something that happens within a text.

It is a priori likely that most texts display the activity of numerous different genres, and that few or no texts can be adequately described in terms of one genre alone. Genre in this sense is analogous to the Marxist concept of the mode of production as the latter has gained new explanatory force by being contrasted, in the Althusserian vocabulary, with the category of social formation—a term that is preferred to the more familiar notion of society, because the latter connotes a relatively homogeneous unity, whereas the former is meant to suggest an overdetermined combination of *different* modes of production at work in the same place and during the same time. Though it is thus impossible simply to equate a given social formation with a given mode of production, it is nonetheless legitimate to affirm that (for instance) the United States "is" capitalist, so long as we understand that the copulative signifies not true equation or identity but rather conveys that, of the various and relatively autonomous modes of production active within the U.S. social formation, capitalism enjoys a position of *dominance*. In the same way, the dialectical rethinking of genre does not in the least preclude generic discrimination. We may validly describe a particular text as science fiction if we understand the formulation to mean that cognitive estrangement is the dominant generic tendency within the overdetermined textual whole.

Accordingly, there is probably no text that is a perfect and pure embodiment of science fiction (no text, that is to say, in which science fiction is the *only* generic tendency operative) but also no text in which the science-fiction tendency is altogether absent. Indeed, it might be argued that this tendency is the precondition for the constitution of fictionality—and even of representation—itself. For the construction of an alternative world is the very definition of fiction: owing to the character of representation as a nontransparent process that necessarily involves not only similarity but *difference* between representation and the "referent" of the latter, an irreducible degree of alterity and estrangement is

bound to obtain even in the case of the most "realistic" fiction imaginable. The appearance of transparency in that paradigmatic realist Balzac has been famously exposed as an illusion;[24] nonetheless, it is important to understand the operation of alterity in realism not as the failure of the latter, but as the sign of the estranging tendency of science fiction that supplies (if secretly) some of the power of great realistic fiction.[25] Furthermore, just as some degree of alterity and hence estrangement is fundamental to all fiction, finally including realism itself, so the same is true (but here the limit case is fantasy) of that other dialectical half of the science-fiction tendency: cognition. The latter is after all an unavoidable operation of the human mind (however precritical, and even if clinically schizophrenic) and must exercise a determinant presence for literary production to take place at all. Even in *The Lord of the Rings*—to consider again what is perhaps the most thoroughgoing fantasy we possess, by an author who stands to fantasy rather as Balzac stands to realism—cognition is quite strongly and overtly operative on at least one level: namely that of the moral and theological values that the text is concerned to enforce.[26]

It is, then, in this very special sense that the apparently wild assertions that all fiction is science fiction and even that the latter is a wider term than the former may be justified: cognition and estrangement, which together constitute the generic tendency of science fiction, are not only actually present in all fiction, but are structurally crucial to the possibility of fiction and even of representation in the first place. Yet in more routine usage, the term of science fiction ought, as I have maintained above, to be reserved for those texts in which cognitive estrangement is not only present but dominant. And it is with this dialectical understanding of genre that we may now reconsider the apparently difficult cases of Brecht, on the one hand, and *Star Wars* on the other.

Brecht is indeed an author in whose work the science-fiction tendency is often not only strong but dominant. Masterpieces like *Mother Courage* (1941) and *The Good Person of Szechwan* (1943) are essentially thought experiments that may well recall that most famous slogan of pulp science fiction during the Campbellian "Golden Age" of the 1940s and 1950s: the idea as hero. (Brecht might well have added, recasting one of his own most famous maxims: unhappy is the fiction or drama that *needs* heroes beyond ideas.) Only tenuously or hardly at all anchored in their nominal settings of seventeenth-century Germany or twentieth-century China, these works evoke arealistic loci alternative to the author's mundane environment in order to enforce not only cognitive but critical Marxian estrangements of Western capitalist society with regard to such fundamental issues as war, love, family, commerce, and morality. What distinguishes Brechtian estrangement from the estrangements more familiar in texts explicitly marketed as science fiction is not that Brecht is more closely allied to literary realism but simply that he is relatively uninterested in those specifically *technological* versions

of estrangement that have traditionally figured (though to a decreasing degree since the 1960s) in science fiction that derives directly from the pulp line. Conversely, *Star Wars* (and its sequels) might be understood as activating the science-fiction tendency only weakly and fitfully in most regards—in cognitive terms, the diachronic sequence from John W. Campbell, or even Doc Smith, to George Lucas is a narrative of regression—but with a spectacular hypertrophy of the specifically *visual* dimension associated with science-fictional tales of space travel. (Given the centrality of the visual dimension to film as a medium, it might even be argued that this one factor establishes the generic dominance of science fiction in the filmic text.)[27] Both Brecht and Lucas, then, might be described as producers of science fiction, but in quite different ways, which a dialectical generic approach allows us to specify with some precision.

It is this basically Suvinian definition of science fiction as the fiction of cognitive estrangement—but modified so as to emphasize the dialectical character of genre and the centrality of the cognition effect—that will enable further such discriminations to be made throughout the remainder of this essay. Having thus defined, at least provisionally, my two central categories of concern, I will now, in the following and necessarily much longer chapter, articulate the two categories together. My aim is not to read science fiction "in the light of" critical theory (itself a suspiciously positivistic metaphor), but to articulate certain *structural* affinities between the two terms. Although critically informed readings of particular science-fictional texts will inevitably play a part in the following chapters (especially chapter 3), my chief intent is to show that the conjunction of critical theory and science fiction is not fortuitous but fundamental.

1. An excellent demonstration of this principle (which I deliberately choose from a context far removed from any of my immediate current concerns) is provided by Garry Wills's brilliant deconstruction of the orthodox political liberalism of Arthur Schlesinger, particularly in the latter's revealing opposition of "ideas" to "ideology"; see Wills, *Nixon Agonistes,* exp. ed. (New York: New American Library, 1979), 311–326.

2. My authority here is, of course, the *American Heritage Dictionary.*

3. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment,* trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 13; translation modified.

4. See Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), esp. 114–140. Some interesting neo-Lukácsian remarks on Kant may be found in Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 248ff. Terry Eagleton incisively rewrites Lukács's analysis in somewhat deconstructive terms: "The thing in itself is thus a kind of empty signifier of that total knowledge which the bourgeoisie never ceases

to dream of, but which its own fragmenting, dissevering activities continually frustrate"; Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 77.

5. See Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," trans. Seyla Ben-Habib, in *The Anti-Aesthetic,* ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay, 1983), 3–15.

6. Goethe's *Faust* (whose composition extended from 1770 to 1831) might be mentioned in this context; the transformative power of science is certainly in many ways a powerful presence in the text. Yet Goethe's project is curiously overdetermined by his choice of a medieval legend as its source, so that Faust exhibits many of the attributes of the modern Promethean scientist without wholly ceasing to be a general "scholar" of the medieval type. The great opening monologue invokes the four medieval faculties of philosophy, law, medicine, and theology—in dissatisfaction, to be sure, but a general orientation is nonetheless implied from which Victor Frankenstein is quite free.

7. It may be noted in passing that the stance that in Swift's day could be adopted by a man of towering literary genius has now sunk so low on the intellectual scale that it is almost never encountered in life-forms higher than the sort of politicians and journalists who sometimes ridicule the titles of scientific research projects supported by public funds.

8. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel,* trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin, 1962), 23. Though I am indebted to Lukács for this discussion of the intellectual consequences of the French Revolution, the far larger debt that the current work owes to The *Historical Novel* will gradually become evident.

9. Cf. Horkheimer in the founding text of the Frankfurt usage, "Traditional and Critical Theory": "The hostility to theory as such which prevails in contemporary public life is really directed against the transformative activity associated with critical thinking. Opposition starts as soon as theorists fail to limit themselves to verification and classification by means of categories which are as neutral as possible, that is, categories which are indispensable to inherited ways of life"; Horkheimer, *Critical Theory,* trans. Matthew J. O'Connell et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 232.

10. By far the most noteworthy absence in what immediately follows is the lack of any discussion of feminism—a theory (or constellation of theories) that presents special problems, with which I grapple in the third section of chapter 3.

11. See, for example, Mandel's introduction to Karl Marx, *Capital,* trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 1:82–83.

12. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method,* trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Vintage, 1968), xxxiv.

13. "As soon as there will exist *for everyone* a margin of *real* freedom beyond the production of life, Marxism will have lived out its span; a philosophy of freedom

will take its place. But we have no means, no intellectual instrument, no concrete experience which allows us to conceive of this freedom or of this philosophy" (ibid., 34; emphasis in original). This suggests, incidentally, one of the fundamental errors in any assimilation of Marxism to religion: whereas the religious believer desires the categories of his or her religion to be of *eternal* relevance, the Marxist desires nothing so much as a state of affairs in which the categories of Marxism will finally be obsolete.

14. In the field of cultural studies, Jameson's immense critique of postmodernism (cited above) seems to me an important instance. Although Jameson, in my view, exaggerates the extent to which postmodernism (in both aesthetic and other terms) can usefully be considered the "cultural dominant" of the current age, his study is nonetheless a pathbreaking attempt to coordinate current cultural production with the dynamics of what Mandel has analyzed as late capitalism.

15. See Louis Althusser, "On Marx and Freud," trans. Warren Montag, *Rethinking Marxism* 4 (Spring 1991): 17–30.

16. See, for example, the opening pages of Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

17. The "negative dialectic" of Adorno is a rather different matter. Adorno is not so much epistemologically suspicious of totality as he is hostile to the social phenomenon of total administration, which he sometimes silently conflates with totality as a Marxist and Lukácsian category; see Carl Freedman and Neil Lazarus, "The Mandarin Marxism of Theodor Adorno," *Rethinking Marxism* 1 (Winter 1988): 85–111.

18. See especially Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel,* trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971).

19. Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 7–8.

20. See J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams,* ed. C. S. Lewis (London: Oxford, 1947).

21. Isaac Asimov, *The Best of Isaac Asimov* (London: Sphere Books, 1973), 274.

22. The terminological situation here is complicated, since Brecht, when arguing *against* Lukács, did occasionally call himself a realist. He used the term tactically, however, and meant it not in any literary or generic sense but in the sense of one concerned with reality—a concern, in Brecht's view, that necessitated a sharp break with the literary realism praised and prescribed by Lukács. For a useful summary of the Brecht-Lukács controversy, see Henri Arvon, *Marxist Esthetics,* trans. Helen Lane (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 100–112. Some of the relevant documents in the controversy are collected, along with some related

material and a retrospective analysis by Fredric Jameson, in *Aesthetics and Politics,* ed. Ronald Taylor (London: New Left Books, 1977).

23. In the following discussion of genre I am indebted to Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), esp. 103–150, and equally to Etienne Balibar, "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism," in *Reading Capital,* by Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1979), 201–308. It is something of a mystery why Balibar's pathbreaking reconceptualization of the crucial Marxist category of mode of production (surely one of the most original, fruitful innovations in critical theory during the past few decades) has never, in my view, received quite the celebrity that it deserves.

24. The reference, of course, is to Roland Barthes, *S/Z,* trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

25. Consider the following Samuel Delany anecdote, concisely summarized by Paul K. Alkon: "A historian gradually stopped reading anything but science fiction in his spare time. Finally he began to doubt that he could ever again read anything else. Worried, he picked up an old favorite, *Pride and Prejudice,* to see what might happen. To his relief, he enjoyed it more than ever. But he saw it in a different way: whereas before he appreciated Austen for her masterful portraits of human nature acting as it might in the real world, now, as he read he asked himself what kind of world must be postulated in order for the events of her story to have happened as she relates them. The answer, somewhat to his surprise as an expert in early nineteenth-century history, was that for the tale of Elizabeth and Darcy to unfold as it does in *Pride and Prejudice* one must assume a world quite different from that in which Jane Austen actually lived"; Alkon, "*Gulliver* and the Origins of Science Fiction," in *The Genres of "Gulliver's Travels,"* ed. Frederik N. Smith (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 163. In my terms, what happened to Delany's friend is that, trained by reading a great deal of literature in which science fiction was the dominant generic tendency, he was able to appreciate its presence in a text where it played a subordinate but significant role. The relation of science fiction to realism will be discussed further in the third section of chapter 2.

26. Cf. C. S. Lewis, who maintains that, while in *The Lord of the Rings* "the direct debt … which every author must owe to the actual universe is here deliberately reduced to the minimum," it is nonetheless true that "as for escapism, what we chiefly escape is the illusions of our ordinary life"; Lewis, *On Stories,* ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt, 1982), 84–85.

27. Cf. John Rieder, "Embracing the Alien: Science Fiction in Mass Culture," *Science-Fiction Studies* 9 (March 1982): 26–37. Rieder persuasively argues that the *Star Wars* films are superior to most other blockbuster Hollywood science-fictional

films of the recent past in the *totalizing* (as opposed to epiphanic) role that visual and auditory special effects play—a role, he maintains, that enables the special effects to convey considerable utopian energy despite the banality of the narrative line. For a somewhat different analysis of special effects in science-fiction film, see Carl Freedman, "Kubrick's *2001* and the Possibility of a Science-Fiction Cinema," *Science-Fiction Studies* 25 (July 1998): 300–318.