

**Norman O. Brown, Herbert Marcuse
and the Romantic Tradition**

By David Greenham, B.A. Hons., M.A.

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—Abstract—

This thesis presents the work of Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse as responses to a romantic problematic obtained first and foremost from the legacy of Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy, and, secondly, from the first significant American realisation of this inheritance in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. The importance of this romantic reading is that it escapes the usual interpretations of Marcuse and Brown in terms of Marxism and Psychoanalysis, instead tracing the significance of their thought to an earlier philosophical foundation in Europe and America. Kant and Emerson remain touchstones throughout; and it is through them that, in Chapter 1, I have determined what I shall be calling romanticism in an American context, reading Emerson's essay 'Experience' (1844) as an exemplary occasion. In Chapter 2, two of the major works of Marcuse and Brown, *Eros and Civilization* (1956) and *Life Against Death* (1959) are examined philosophically in terms of their dialectical rethinking of narcissism, showing how they begin to respond to the romantic question set out in Chapter 1. In Chapter 3, I examine the use of myth and aesthetics, paying particular attention to the integrity of the failings of Marcuse's aesthetic theory, which stem from its romantic origins in Kant and Schiller. Chapter 4 is a reading of Brown's *Love's Body* (1966), presented against Marcuse's criticisms (1967), in which I establish the importance of symbolism and originality for Brown, tracing them again to themes present in Kant and Emerson. Chapter 5 interprets Brown's *Closing Time* (1973) through an extensive reading of that book's primary source, the proto-romantic Giambattista Vico's *New Science* (1744). The Conclusion locates Brown and Marcuse within the myth and symbol tradition of American Studies, showing how they re-vision America as a romantic ideal.

—Acknowledgements—

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—Preface—

Romanticism, as Isaiah Berlin observes in his 1965 Mellon Lectures, is best left undefined. ‘Indeed,’ he writes, ‘the literature on romanticism is larger than romanticism itself, and the literature defining what it is the literature on romanticism is concerned with is quite large in turn.’¹ Consequently, I recognise his trepidation in embarking on a project to which romanticism is central. Nevertheless, during my research I have been able to glean a few broad conceptions of this vast topic, and have distilled these to the particular positions set out in Chapter 1. I will not anticipate those points here, but rather, following Berlin, state the most general case for the importance of romanticism. He argues that more than being a literary or a philosophical movement—as I treat it here—romanticism is the ‘greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred’ (*Roots*: 30). Even assuming that he means subsequent to the Reformation (which is by no means clear) Berlin is asserting that romanticism is more significant to *consciousness*, than, say, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the two World Wars of the last century. The simple reason for this is that romanticism breaks with the most ancient preconception that Western civilization inherited from the Greeks and from early Christianity, namely the principle of an ordered universe (*Roots*: 2-20). Everything else flows from this, because after the romantic revolution the West is plagued by what I would call a ‘secular irrationality’: the inability to locate any values with regard to anything greater than subjective consciousness. This shift is the key to this thesis, and to what Richard Eldridge has recently called, ‘the *persistence* of romanticism.’²

¹ Isaiah Berlin (Henry Hardy ed.), *The Roots of Romanticism* (London: Pimlico, 2000), p. 1. Hereafter referred to as *Roots* in the text.

² Richard Eldridge, *The Persistence of Romanticism: Essays in Philosophy and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

These claims are lofty and broad, and they will inevitably be narrowed in what follows. They hold, however, as the broadest context for my interpretation of particular works by Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse, which must be differentiated by this from what has gone before. When these thinkers have been understood at all—and with Brown my attempt is the first on this scale—it is in terms of either or both of Marxism and psychoanalysis. With Marcuse this has been done most successfully by Douglas Kellner in his exemplary *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (1984). This work sympathetically traces Marcuse’s development as a response to the various trends and hiatuses in Marxism throughout the twentieth-century. More critical is Morton Schoolman’s *The Imaginary Witness: The Critical Theory of Herbert Marcuse* (1980). He sees Marcuse’s early and late periods as too romantic (my word), clearly favouring the work achieved under his allegiance to the Frankfurt School in the 1930s. Most critical is Alasdair MacIntyre’s short *Herbert Marcuse* (1970), which was written as a reaction at the height of Marcuse’s fame, and which dismisses him on all counts. In terms of a Freudian/Marxist crossover reading there is Sidney Lipshire’s clear and sympathetic *Herbert Marcuse: From Marx to Freud and Beyond* (1974). There are more or less Freudian readings in shorter pieces by Paul Robinson (1969), Richard King (1972), Jean Laplanche, and more recently by Joel Whitebook (1996), that I will refer to where necessary.³ The romantic position has not been taken up at length apropos of Marcuse’s more broadly, though references to it are made with regard to his aesthetics and the general ‘feel’ of his brand of utopian critical theory. But here the ‘romantic’ is more often than not regret-

³ Paul Robinson, *The Freudian Left: Wilhelm Reich, Geza Roheim and Herbert Marcuse* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 147-244. Jean Laplanche, “Notes sur Marcuse et la Psychanalyse,” *La Nef* (Vol. 26, 1969), pp. 111-138. Richard H. King, *The Party of Eros: Radical Thought and the Realm of Freedom* (New York: Delta, 1973), pp. 116-172. Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 24-41.

fully alluded to—it is of the sentimental persuasion, rather than Berlin’s major shift in the consciousness of Western modernity.

With regard to Norman O. Brown, the useful bibliography shrinks dramatically. There has yet to be a full-scale monograph produced on his work that treats it from any perspective. The most sympathetic treatment is Richard King’s chapter in 1972. Since then, there have been articles discussing Brown with reference to, for example, performance art (Herbert Blau, 1988) or the body (E. F. Dyck, 1989). There are a few more consequential works that treat Brown alongside Marcuse, those already mentioned by King and Robinson contain useful comparisons. One particularly good essay on both is Nancy Chodorow’s ‘Beyond Drive Theory: Object Relations and the Limits of Radical Individualism’ (1989), which I discuss in Chapter 2. With Brown, then, the particularity of the romantic position is less important than the fact that such a vital and engaging figure is being written about at all.

This thesis is an attempt to reclaim at least a part of Marcuse’s oeuvre from the Marxists and the psychoanalysts (and is in debate with the latter in particular), giving him a broader philosophical basis in romanticism. This thesis is also a recuperation of the thought of Norman O. Brown. One of the major obstacles to overcome in this dual interpretation is the discussion of two ostensibly European figures within a largely European framework, romanticism, which yet belongs to the intellectual climate of post-World War II America. In the end, I decided to yield historical specificity in favour of achieving clarity of ideas; after all, the claims I am making in the thesis are about the *intellectual* location of the thinkers. Consequently, the following has become something of a transatlantic endeavour, based on the circulation of problems in an intellectual rather than a social history. An instance of this is that, in the terms of this thesis, Brown is

closer to Ralph Waldo Emerson, the exemplar of American Romanticism, than to say, Lionel Trilling, his historical contemporary. Indeed, as Chapter 1 makes clear, Emerson is the American touchstone of romanticism, and remains so throughout the later chapters. Chapter 1 goes on to narrow Berlin's claims to the particular epistemological problems of romanticism. I locate their expression in the fragmentary form of the Emersonian essay, which prefigures the formal devices used by Brown in *Love's Body*, examined in Chapter 4. Chapter 2 brings the problem of history into the foreground, arguing that the idea of 'history' itself is unsettled; thus providing a specific 'historical' context for Brown in particular, but also for Marcuse, is in question on these thinkers terms. In particular, this chapter explains their Hegelian readings of Freud's instinct theory and the subsequent reinterpretation of narcissism. Chapter 3 opens Marcuse and Brown up to two more key romantic tropes, the mythical and the aesthetic. The mythical is addressed in terms of both thinkers, then Marcuse's aesthetics are related to their romantic origins in Kant and Schiller. The major question for Chapters 4 and 5 is the romantic demand for the 'new' or the 'original.' Here there is a marked difference between Marcuse and Brown, the former taking a stand on determinism, the second on the origin of the new in a mystical poetics. Chapter 4 discusses this in terms of *Love's Body* and symbolism; Chapter 5 is centred on Giambattista Vico's poetic logic as the prototype of a romantic creativity. The Conclusion returns me, briefly, to the problem of America in American Studies. Here I briefly pursue it as an 'idea' or 'myth,' in the Emersonian tradition ('America is a poem in our eyes'), that is, America as a romantic possibility that persists in Brown and Marcuse.

—Chapter One—
**Locating an American Romanticism: Ralph Waldo Em-
 erson's
 'Experience'**

To define and to locate an American romanticism that could bequeath an identifiable tradition to both Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse is the task of this chapter. Almost immediately, this claim needs qualification, since it may be misunderstood as doing something I am expressly not doing. The qualification hangs on the implied 'location' of the rubric—this is not something about which I can be precise. It is not necessarily America and it is also not necessarily Emerson's early nineteenth century that I am discussing. However, this is both the time and the place where certain ideas that interest me and prefigure the main themes of my thesis can be said to hold together. Perhaps this potential for confusion is best answered by asserting that it is not the political or historical situation of New England at that time that draws me there. Rather that this was a location where certain ideas were received from Europe and given new expression in and through the work of the Transcendentalists, specifically Ralph Waldo Emerson. What I am looking to express is a melting pot of 'ideas' not of 'social history.' Having identified this problem, I want to lay it aside for now and outline the ways in which I intend to approach romanticism.

The romanticism that forms the spine of my reading can be traced to the early German romantics who wrote and thought in Jena in the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth century. Theirs was not a literary romanticism *per se*—indeed, its avowedly literary output was minimal—but a form of romanticism which responded to Friedrich Schlegel injunction that 'poetry and philosophy

should be made one.¹ What was to be established by this unification was a new relation between a way of, say, *expressing* the world, poetry, and a way of *understanding* it, philosophy; and what happens when expression and understanding become one.

A particular derivation of this that I have in mind, and which sets out my first working definition of the romantic, is the domestication of the claims of philosophical systems in an ostensibly ‘poetic’ (meaning literary or creative—*poiesis*—rather than ‘poetry’ *per se*) transformation of the everyday. Here the unity of poetry and philosophy means using language in a specific way to register profane experience. Novalis expresses the transformation thus:

By giving the commonplace a higher sense, the usual a mysterious appearance, the known the dignity of the unknown, the finite an infinite appearance, I romanticise it—The operation is the other way round for the higher, the unknown, the mystical, the infinite—it is logorhythmised by this connection—It gains an everyday expression.²

I take the self-conscious neologism ‘logorhythmised,’ as Andrew Bowie suggests, to mean a re-locating of the divine in the ‘music’ of ordinary language (*logos* and rhythm—poetry). That is, as a translation of the burden of the divine into the creative powers of everyday speech. This begins to express an idea of the romantic reversal which I want to carry forward and continue to develop in what follows: the spiritualisation of the everyday and the secularisation of the divine. This also means the recollection of the mystery of the simple, and the ordinary, perhaps a kind of animism.³

¹ Friedrich Schlegel (trans. Peter Firchow), *Philosophical Fragments* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1991), p. 14. Hereafter referred to as *PF* in the text.

² Cited in Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 80. Hereafter referred to as *RCT* in the text.

³ Cavell makes this point in his *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), pp. 45, 53. Hereafter referred to as *IQO* in the text. The idea of animism is a point of discussion in Chapter 5, on Brown’s use of Vico.

However, I do not want to look at this in an expressly poetical way, which, for example, might correspond to the aesthetics of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Rather, I hear in it a call to test the ‘higher’ claims of philosophy, corresponding to Emerson open challenge at the close of ‘Experience’: ‘the true romance the world exists to realise, will be the transformation of genius into practical power.’⁴ For, as I shall unfold it below, what Emerson attempts in this essay and in related journal entries is to measure the claims of philosophy. In particular those pertaining to ‘the infinite and the unknown,’ by using the scale of lived experience, examining their discrepancies to find the right path to overcome them. Also to move the other way, to test everyday life by the questions philosophy asks of it, questions demanded by the mind’s progression to infinity, what might be called ‘reason.’ So when Emerson writes in and of ‘Experience,’ ‘Life is not dialectics’ (*Essays*: 236), I hear in this a criticism of life, say the everyday, as much as of dialectics, say philosophy, and observe that he is plotting a course between them. For Emerson, philosophy has to be lived; or rather, it has to answer to experience. In this, I am in part following the contribution to Emerson studies put forward by Stanley Cavell. For whom, in the words of Simon Critchley, ‘romanticism is the discovery of the exceptionality of the everyday or...the uncanniness of the ordinary.’⁵

A second, and perhaps more familiar, working through of romantic theory is presented by M. H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp*. The title of which is an elegant summation of the epistemological shift the book covers: the historical development of critical theories from metaphors of mimetic reflection to those of expressive creation.

⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays* (London: Everyman, 1971), p. 252. Hereafter referred to as *Essays* in the text.

⁵ Simon Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing: Death, Literature, Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 120. Hereafter referred to as *VLAN* in the text.

That is, from the subject (here the poet) passively reflecting light, to the subject actively emitting light, illuminating the object. Abrams argues that this shift takes place around the end of the eighteenth century, primarily as a response to the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Indeed, Abrams' argument is based on the consequences of Kant's 'Copernican revolution.' Briefly, this revolution describes the new understanding of subjectivity in which knowledge corresponds not to the object's influence on the subject, but to the *a priori* faculty to actively determine an object through our built-in faculties. The outcome of this is that 'the perceptual mind [projects] life and passion into the world it apprehends'⁶ as a *lamp*, not as a passive receiver of objective impressions—a *mirror*—as the previously dominant empiricist theories had argued. I will have more to say on this later and in subsequent chapters.

The third aspect of my definition of romanticism takes into consideration its form, in particular the exemplary form of the Jena romantics, 'the fragment.' Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, in their study of Jena romanticism *The Literary Absolute*, describe the fragment as 'the romantic genre *par excellence*.'⁷ And they place it in contradistinction to the systematic working through of philosophical problems most easily identified in German Idealism.⁸ The fragment comes from a tradition of writing, Montaigne and Pascal, for example, which

can be characterized by three traits: the relative incompleteness (the 'essay') or absence of discursive development (the 'thought') of each of its

⁶ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Norton, 1958), p. 68.

⁷ Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy (trans. Phillip Barnard and Cheryl Lester), *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), p. 40. Hereafter referred to as *LA* in the text.

⁸ In addition see Karl Ameriks ed. *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Hereafter referred to as *CCGI* in the text. In particular Ameriks, 'Introduction: Interpreting German Idealism' (pp. 1-17) and Paul Franks, 'All or Nothing: Systematicity and Nihilism in Jacobi, Reinhold, and Maimon' (pp. 95-116).

pieces; the variety and mixture of objects that a single ensemble of pieces can treat; the unity of the ensemble, by contrast, constituted in a certain way outside the work by the subject that is seen in it...

(*LA*: 40)

This is, of course, a manner of describing the work that goes on in Emerson's essays that will be familiar to readers of his critics: an absence of systematic and consistent development, and an often heterogeneous mixture of subjects (occasionally prefiguring Whitman's lists). What is more complicated is the fact that the formal unity of the work is 'described externally,' that is, given by the reader rather than the writer, a point I shall take up toward this end of this chapter. In one way, as Maurice Blanchot acidly observes, 'the fragment often seems a means for complacently abandoning oneself to the self rather than an attempt to elaborate a more rigorous mode of writing,' and thus 'simply to welcome one's own disorder.'⁹ Such criticisms of Emerson are amongst the most persistent in the scholarship. But on another level, as we shall see, this is an important consequence of the new subjectivity inadvertently announced by Kant's Copernican revolution.

The fourth definition brings together the common source of three foregoing moments: the everyday, the lamp and the fragment, and is based on Cavell's work on Emerson and romanticism, largely presented in lectures in the 1980s.¹⁰ It boils down to the fact that romanticism is a response to or dissatisfaction with, the conclusions drawn from Kant's critical philosophy. Indeed, to paraphrase a famous comment from A. N.

⁹ Maurice Blanchot (trans. Susan Hanson), *The Infinite Conversation* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993), p. 359. Hereafter referred to as *IC* in the text.

¹⁰ Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden* (Exp.Edn.), (San Fransisco: North Point Press, 1981), hereafter referred to as *SW* in the text; *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989), hereafter referred to as *NYUA* in the text.

Whitehead's *Process and Reality*,¹¹ romanticism can be described as a series of footnotes to Kant. Though on first glance this definition may seem to place the origin of Romanticism at a specific point, it actually broadens the definition of the romantic because of the centrality of Kant to the Western tradition.

What is at issue in this dissatisfaction is, according to Cavell, the continuing achievement of Kant, his 'settlement,' (*IQO*: 28-29) which doubles as the location of romantic philosophical unease. Ostensibly, Kant's critical philosophy sought to disabuse (to *critique*) dogmatic theories about god, knowledge, aesthetics and morality by showing, in a series of transcendental deductions, that what we had taken thus far to be 'reality' was in fact a consequence of our subjectivity.¹² Also, and this is where the crux of the romantic problem lies, he severely circumscribed the ability of humankind to know either the universe or its place in it. This is because Kantian idealism locates knowledge of the world subjectively and, as such, the world of the 'object'—the famous thing-in-itself—becomes unknowable. Thus, Kant refuted a mode of access to the world. And, perhaps more critically for his own epoch, in the same movement he crushed any unmediated access to god via revelation: if we can only know our own experiences, we cannot *know* god, but only our experiences. The problem was, then, that in keeping with the radical Protestant rationalism of his era, faith and knowledge became

¹¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (Corrected Edn.), (New York: The Free Press, 1978), p. 39. If it would not have proved too much of a digression, it would have been fertile to have considered the possibility of congruence between Whitehead's philosophy of organism and the clear organic tendencies of the theory of the fragment.

¹² I must stress that Kantian subjectivity does not point to 'individuality' or to the 'merely subjective,' but rather to a set of shared human faculties which delineate universal human limitations—i.e., none of us can see infra-red or hear dog whistles, but, we all share the same five-senses to a significant degree, and we all share, Kant argues, the same *a priori* faculties. This does not mean that we have to *understand* them in the same way, though Kant does try to provide a normative platform for such an understanding in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and elsewhere. Some of the complexities of the Kantian subject will be an issue for Chapter 4.

sundered. No longer could god be proven to exist by the understanding, no longer could reason support a faith that became literally blind. Instead, the understanding is limited to a horizon of subjective *a priori* experience that holds to determinate knowledge (e.g., cause and effect). Whilst reason is given over to abstractions—the ‘ideas’ of god, immortality, the infinite, the sublime, which exceed the powers of the understanding.

Even so, this did not stop Kant from believing in god. One aim of his philosophical critique of established metaphysics was actually to *protect* faith by deliberately limiting the cognitive realm, which was being expanded dangerously in that direction by the burgeoning sciences. Thus, Kant gave strict parameters for the ‘new sciences,’ setting their horizon off from another, unknowable but he argued, rationally believable, ‘space’: god’s world of the thing-in-itself, of freedom and of moral imperatives. This division has come down to us as that between the phenomenal and the noumenal or the sensible and the intelligible. What begins as a move to protect knowledge from dogmatic assertions about things-in-themselves (the determinism of Spinoza), and from a scepticism in which we may not be able to have any knowledge of objects at all (even subjective knowledge—Hume), ends up ‘sundering’ the universe, and seemingly leaving humans with the poorer part at that—the world of ‘appearance.’ This resulted in what Cavell calls a dissatisfaction, and to which he responds, with some irony, ‘Thanks for nothing’ (*IQQ*: 31). Consequently the romantics and the later idealists were caught in the ambivalent position of trying to refute something in Kant, usually his denial of access to the thing-in-itself, whilst remaining true to his insights, particularly the new subjectivity. This two-world problematic, as I shall show, is played out in the central drama of Emerson’s ‘Experience.’

Returning with this duality in mind to what I said above, I do not want to locate romanticism in a ‘place,’ say America, and in a time, say ‘the first half of the nineteenth century,’ but rather in this state of unsettledness—‘between worlds’ as Cavell puts it (*IQO*: 32)—that emerges from Kant’s ‘two-world’ theory. Romanticism is, by these lights, a condition of unreconciled unhappiness, a restless awareness that things should be otherwise, but with a structural impossibility of bringing this otherness to the surface. (This tension will become an important issue that I want to think through in this thesis.) Such a dissatisfaction may not seem to resonate at first glance with Emerson’s renowned ‘optative’ mood, his geniality and general affirmative spirit. But hope can only exist where there is, on some level, discontent; hope is always the desire for something better, which must mean that what is extant is somehow worse. Cavell locates this initial sense of despair in the mid-world inhabited by Emerson as a more or less successful interpreter of Kant, at least as someone who is willing to take on the inheritance of the critical philosophy. But this general sense of dissatisfaction, I would argue, also pervades Cavell’s own sense of skepticism, where the skeptical is located in an inability to believe—or rather to sustain belief—in the way the world is given to us (in criteria). Skepticism and romanticism have, then, a utopian aspect, if, that is, the optative can be taken to chime with the utopian. Though perhaps a better way of expressing it would be to recognise that this space between the two worlds, where I have located romanticism, is the no-place that is named by utopia.

This trope of location is taken up explicitly by Emerson in one of his most famous questions, from the opening line of what is generally recognised as his greatest essay, ‘Experience’: ‘Where do we find ourselves?’ (*Essays*: 228). I would like to suggest, tentatively, that ‘we’ find ourselves between worlds, between ‘appearance’ and ‘reality,’

able to acknowledge them both, but not to escape their difficulties. I also hope to show, that this initiates an answer adequate to the complexities of ‘Experience’; in particular, to ‘Experience’ as a work of mourning that works through the sense of disappointment with the epistemological limitations of Kant’s critical philosophy.

Emerson’s answer to his question follows immediately upon it: ‘In a series, of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none’ (*Essays*: 228). The imagery of the answer, borrowed from Piranesi, suggests that he ‘finds’ himself attenuated, drawn out across a spectrum, which disappears into infinite regress in front and behind. But, a philosophical analogue is provided by Friedrich Schlegel, in the *Athenaeum Fragments*: ‘Viewed subjectively, philosophy...always begins in medias res’ (*PF*: 84). Wherever philosophical speculation begins, it has always already originated somewhere else, sometime earlier, and is always already being pursued, projected. Emerson phrases this compromised subjectivity in a poetic fragment that he adapts from Sophocles’ *Antigone*, inserted in ‘Experience.’ ‘Since neither now nor yesterday began/These thoughts, which have been ever, nor yet can/A man be found who their first entrance knew’ (*Essays*: 244).¹³ In this sense, then, the philosopher is always trying to catch up with history. The point is that each thinker only provides an incomplete fragment—is a fragment, as we shall see. This, also, is disappointing, dissatisfying. It is why I agree with Critchley when he writes, ‘Where does philosophy begin? It begins, I believe, in an experience of *disappointment*’ (*VLAN*: 2). In addition, equally important for a reading of ‘Experience,’ is Cavell’s grim conclusion, inspired by ‘Experience,’ that ‘[p]hilosophy begins in loss, in

¹³ It comes from a passage where Antigone is accusing Creon of breaking the immutable and god given laws with regards to the death rights of her brother Polynices. A modern translation by Andrew Brown reads: ‘I did not suppose that your decrees had such power that you, a mortal, could out run the gods’ unwritten and unfailing rules. For their life is not of today or yesterday but forever, and no one knows when they first appeared’, ll. 455-460, *Sophocles: Antigone* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1987). *Antigone* seems a most appropriate choice here as, like ‘Experience,’ it dramatises an incomplete work of mourning.

finding yourself at a loss' (*NYUA*: 114). It begins, then, with Emerson, in the middle of a series of essays, striving to locate meaning in and from the loss of his son.¹⁴

I

But why locate Emerson as a philosopher within romantic philosophy at all when so many critics seem to have gone to the trouble to contain him in a more literary matrix? I think this depends on whether you want from Emerson either the birth of a literary tradition in the American Renaissance, or the birth of the American Thinker (the Man Thinking of the 'American Scholar'). It also depends on what you want from philosophy, that is, what you want it to look like. The majority of critics seem to have angled toward the former, hoping to find in Emerson early signs of America's literary independence. If they examine Emerson philosophically, they find him wanting methodologically and stylistically: he is too poetic.¹⁵

¹⁴ This seems to dismiss the idea of philosophy beginning in wonderment. But, it may be argued that the feeling of wonderment or the sublime is rather a reaction to the initial loss of meaning and place that occurs in the reception of the world as such—the reassertion of the sureties of reason against the limitations of cognition. A parallel occasion is discussed in Chapter 4.

¹⁵ For Santayana, Emerson did not know what he meant by his philosophical terms, was unable to pin them into a reality which 'eluded him' (G. Santayana, 'Emerson,' in Milton R. Konvitz and Stephen E. Whicher eds. *Emerson: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1962), p. 32. Hereafter referred to as *CCE* in the text. Also, he claims, Emerson was largely ignorant of German philosophy, coming to similar conclusions, but through exaggerating the omnipotence of the imagination, usurping the power 'which had belonged to god' and then establishing 'the supremacy of mind over matter' (*CCE*: 33). Ultimately this collapsed back into a Puritan mysticism, failing the reality test, giving up on evil (a common complaint against Emerson), and thus on 'manhood.' In truth, for Santayana Emerson's work was an unsatisfying 'genteel' mix of 'religion expressing itself as a philosophy and veiled, as at its setting it descended the heavens, in various tints of poetry and science' (*CCE*: 37).

René Wellek, in contrast to Santayana, does not consider Emerson a mystic, as he recognises Emerson's extreme scepticism toward the 'supernatural implications of the occult'. ('Emerson and German Philosophy,' *New England Quarterly* (XVI, March 1943), p. 44; hereafter referred to as *EGP* in the text) He also pays a great deal of attention to just how much German philosophy Emerson is likely to have read or come into contact with, noting, for example, that he did have a copy of the 1838 translation of the Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, that there were pencil markings in the margins and that he had read a number of more or less adequate summaries and glosses on German thought. But, he concludes that, firstly, Emerson was misled about philosophy by first generation English interpreters, in particular Col-

The earliest systematic monograph on Emerson is by Henry David Gray, published in 1917. Whilst Gray argues that '[t]here is no need to remind the philosophic world that Emerson was primarily a poet',¹⁶ he qualifies this position, saying 'that Emerson had a right conception of philosophy, and worked it not as a literary dilettante but with the seriousness of one concerned with the problems themselves' (*EST*: 26). And he goes on to give a coherent, if limited, account of Emerson's philosophical 'system'—which, as he points out, is not an architectonic but is rather an application of philosophy to problems.

The most prominent figure to give an unabashed welcome to Emerson as a philosopher is John Dewey, in 1929, and in many ways Cavell's reading of Emerson can be seen here in miniature. For Dewey Emerson is, or is not, *only* a philosopher or *only* a poet depending on whether you mean to denigrate or praise him with either title (*CCE*: 24-25). He places Emerson in a category that covers both without diminishing either, and which overcomes the attempts to fence in literature or philosophy, to keep them apart. Somewhat akin to Gray, Dewey finds the importance of system in Emerson's philosophy not to be in any systematic approach to metaphysics, or the desire or

eridge and Carlyle. Secondly that the Transcendentalist 'faith' was 'deeply rooted in their minds and their own spiritual ancestry.' (*EGP*.: 62) Thus, Transcendentalism has a Puritan heritage, and finds both its roots and its fruits there in such figures as Jonathan Edwards.

Stephen Whicher's canonical, *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971; hereafter referred to as *FF*) sees Emerson as rather a clumsy thinker, spilling as much as he sips from the cup of 'Modern Philosophy,' (*FF*: 17) and, moreover, deciding that, philosophically, Emerson was a naïf, whose conclusions were not obtained through study, rigorous or otherwise, but in 'a fresh insight of his own, whose nature, he worked out initially by inspection without much regard to precedent. Its effect is not unlike that of a primitive painting' (*FF*: 31). This elicits a repetition of the most damning criticism of Emerson as a philosopher—which goes right back to Arnold—'the absence of logical structure' (*FF*:31).

Quentin Anderson's *The Imperial Self An Essay in American Literary and Cultural History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), attempts both to deny Emerson the title of philosopher, and secondly, to make the less usual claim that he is not in fact a romantic. The only way I can understand Anderson's claim is that it belongs to his larger literary thesis of the 'imperial self,' according to which there is no socially or philosophically engaged understanding in Emerson's thought.

¹⁶ Henry David Gray, *Emerson: A Statement of New England Transcendentalism as Expressed in the Philosophy of Its Chief Exponent* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1917), p. 26, hereafter referred to as *EST* in the text.

failure to match such an approach, but in ‘the fact that he takes the distinctions and classifications which to most philosophers are true in and of and because of their systems, and makes them true to life, of the common experience of the everyday man’ (*CCE*: 27). Emerson puts his thoughts to work, does not rest them in any self-sustaining algebraic or architectonic formulation, but tests them, ‘systematically,’ in and through his life experiences. This, in fact, is what I shall argue ‘Experience’ is. It is an *essay*, a ‘trying out’ of philosophical positions. Of course, the term ‘essay’ comes from Montaigne’s ‘*essais*’ or ‘trials’; it is well known that Montaigne was amongst Emerson’s ‘representative men.’ Because of this, Dewey sees Emerson as different from the other ‘Transcendentalists, say Bronson Alcott, because the truths of his philosophy, its ideas, are not ‘otherworldly,’ but are ‘versions of the here and now and flow freely’ (*CCE*: 28). Emerson, then, is not an essentialist, and perhaps, from what Gray and Dewey say about him, it is apparent why he is often associated with the origins of pragmatism.¹⁷

One of the most recent attempts to place Emerson’s philosophy occurs in David Van Leer’s *Emerson’s Epistemology: The Argument of the Essays*,¹⁸ published in 1986. His book provides an extremely detailed and rigorously argued reading of Emerson as an epistemologist in the Kantian tradition (*EE*: 1-19), and as foreshadowing some of the insights of Wittgenstein. One thing that Van Leer observes in his own critique of Emerson’s reception is the unusually high standards that Emerson is supposed to have failed to reach, in particular by Santayana and Wellek. It is as if in the 1830s and 1840s there were consistent readings of Kant to which Emerson could be compared and found

¹⁷ This is not something I want to pursue here, my engagement is with romanticism; but it is taken up by Cornel West in his *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 9-41 and *passim*.

¹⁸ David Van Leer, *Emerson’s Epistemology: The Argument of the Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Hereafter referred to as *EE* in the text.

wanting. Van Leer tends to find that where Emerson is inconsistent, Kant himself was inconsistent, or at least unclear; for example, his use of the distinction between transcendent and transcendental, which I shall be discussing below. Also, he points to the futility of trying to put Emerson's points next to Kant's points to find out where they are similar or whether a misreading has occurred. And, again, for Van Leer, it is where Emerson puts philosophical ideas to work that is important; not if he could state their place in Kant's architectonic, but how he could locate them in his experiences—and what his experiences might mean if reflected through Kantian, or idealist, or romantic lenses. In the end, though, I am not sure that Van Leer reads Emerson *as* a philosopher, or whether he reads him as someone who can be read *through* philosophy—the distinction is important, but often very hard to maintain.

In my view, the relationship between Emerson and the philosophy of Kant must be seen as important, perhaps even vital, yet it remains necessarily oblique. Emerson complements Kant, occasionally challenges him, but it is impossible to mistake Emerson's philosophy for a full-blooded critique of, or advancement upon, Kant's own positions. Indeed, to read Kant into Emerson is something of a speculative endeavour, as it has been with much of Cavell's fine work in this direction. To make any further claims is fraught with danger. Therefore, if I draw out a common thread from these criticisms, I would repeat that what is important for Emerson is that philosophy should answer to as well as ground experience. It should not be cut off from the questions of the everyday.

To overcome the problem of whether Emerson is a philosopher what needs to be refuted is the idea that philosophy is located either in the reception of prior philosophers and in the working out of *their* problems on *their* terms, or, more controversially, in

a particular version of orthodox systematic rigor. This is precisely the perspective from which Cavell engages with Emerson: as someone who is not a ‘professional philosopher,’ in the sense of academic arguments ‘about philosophy.’ Indeed, he sees Emerson living in a time and in a country where such titles do not yet exist, or rather are only just coming into being—the unique position of America still being ‘between worlds.’ Cavell, and this is significant, wants both to counter the position that Emerson is *not* a philosopher, but also to preserve in some way Emerson’s distance from how philosophy has come to be understood *such that* Emerson is not considered a part of it.¹⁹ Throughout the 1980s, this re-thinking of Emerson was at the heart of Cavell’s work. It is this period that interests me here.

In *This New Yet Unapproachable America*, Cavell takes up the problem of Emerson as philosopher, and in doing so reflexively implicates his own earlier work.

I can think of no one else in the history of thought about whom just this gesture of denial is characteristic, all but universal, as if someone perversely keeps insisting—perhaps it is a voice in the head—that despite all appearances, a philosopher, after all, is what Emerson is.... But what is the state in which the claim of philosophy is refused and yet a claim upon philosophy is entered? It might be quite as remarkable, or rare, as the state of philosophy itself, so to speak, and no less urgent to deny.

(NYUA: 78)

This preserves the tension between admitting that Emerson is a philosopher and wanting to test that claim by, perhaps, finding out what it is that maintains, consistently, Emerson’s distance from philosophy. I think what Cavell is working toward is the fact that

¹⁹ It is perhaps significant that Cavell is responding in part to his own, self-admittedly partial, reading of Emerson in the 1971 edition of *The Senses of Walden*, where, next to Thoreau, Emerson is seen, familiarly enough, as misunderstanding Kant. The two essays appended to *The Senses of Walden* in the later 1981 edition, are in part reflections on and refutations of this earlier dismissal. For a reading of Cavell’s literary ‘conversion,’ see Barbara Packer, ‘Turning to Emerson,’ *Common Knowledge* (Vol. 5, No. 2, Fall 1996), pp. 51-60.

if Emerson is a philosopher, then a lot of those who have previously been considered philosophers and what has long been considered philosophy, might not be, might be denied that title in turn. In this way, Emerson, for Cavell, joins such people as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein, in changing the shape and the goal of philosophy.²⁰

The determination of just what philosophy is, then, is at stake here. Cavell argues that it comes down to an understanding of what constitutes philosophical rigor, or rather, what is acceptable as philosophical rigor, and what constitutes a threat to *that kind* of philosophical rigor. That Emerson is threatening, or at least embarrassing, to the orthodoxy is something that Cavell does not doubt; in fact he is relying on it to make his point for him. This is, broadly, to do with the way philosophy is written, and the way philosophy is read. It is the *style* in which Emerson writes and thus how he demands to be read that holds him outside the philosophical canon.²¹ There is an assumption, then, that philosophical argument has to look a certain way, follow a certain method of ‘logical’ and accretive argument, in order to be philosophy (at least, in the Anglo-American academy which Cavell is addressing). Emerson clearly does not do this; in fact, he famously denies its efficacy:

If we consider what persons have stimulated and profited us, we shall perceive the superiority of the spontaneous or intuitive principle over the arithmetical or logical. The first always contains the second, but virtual and latent. We want in every man a long logic; we cannot pardon the absence of it; but it must not be spoken. Logic is the procession or proportionate unfolding of the intuition; but its virtue is as silent method:

²⁰ It is true, however, on a more mundane level that much of Cavell’s circling around this problem arises in that he was trying to deliver lectures to orthodox philosophy departments, and consistently needed to attempt to pre-empt their forebodings about admitting Emerson into a canon, whilst, of course, maintaining the position that he does not want Emerson *to* be admitted to any particular canon.

²¹ Similar problems can be seen to have been faced by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida, but it rarely stops them from being considered as ‘philosophers.’ This may be to do with the difference between European and American receptions of philosophy, which I shall come to shortly.

the moment it would appear as propositions, and have a separate value, it is worthless.

(*Essays*: 179-182)

Emerson's privileging of the intuitive over the systematic or logical,²² contradicting much of the analytic tradition, has not endeared him to their ranks. And the further fact that in the same essay, provocatively entitled 'Intellect,' he writes 'A true man never acquires after college rules' (*Essays*: 182) is only going to add to the embarrassment felt by those who are establishing university syllabi. Emerson, then, could be both an embarrassment and a threat to 'logical' traditions of philosophy—but has tended to be seen (or not) as something of an irrelevance.

Unfortunately, he seems to have made it all too easy for the orthodox to ignore and repress him, categorizing him as a 'poet,' an 'aphorist,' a 'mystic'—banishing him to Literature departments (where, incidentally, he sits rather well). Nevertheless, Cavell is determined to reach out and include Emerson, to recognise in him a method of philosophising worthy of inheritance, and to argue that he embodies 'a mode of thinking, a mode of conceptual accuracy, as thorough as anything imagined within established philosophy, but invisible to philosophy because based on an idea of rigor foreign to its establishment' (*IQO*: 14). What Cavell recognises, which others have not—even the favourable responses of Dewey and Van Leer—is that the way Emerson writes is a *method of philosophy in itself*. It is, however, a way of 'doing' philosophy that is threatened by drowning in the mid-Atlantic, based as it is upon a dual participation in and rejection of

²² In his day this meant: 'The great distinction between teachers sacred or literary, between poets like Herbert, and poets like Pope; between philosophers like Spinoza, Kant and Coleridge,—and philosophers like Locke, Paley, Mackintosh, and Stewart; between men of the world who are reckoned accomplished talkers, and here and there a fervent mystic, prophesying half-insane under the infinitude of his thought, is, that one class speaks *from within*, or from experience, as parties and possessors of the fact; and the other class, *from without*, as spectators merely, or perhaps as acquainted with the fact on the evidence of third persons' (*Essays*: 161).

the American and the Continental traditions. The American tradition (say, pragmatism and Anglo-American analytic philosophy) is located, Cavell argues, in the answers to certain sets of *problems* to be solved or clarified, squirrels running round trees and the like.²³ The continental tradition is based on certain books that must be read, that is, *interpreted*—this has come down to us as hermeneutics. Emerson and Thoreau stand, or fall, somewhere between these two positions. They are ‘continentals’ as far as they demand to be *read* and make reading them in turn, through the style of their writing, a philosophical claim in itself. But they are ‘Americans’ in that they do not advocate ‘book learning,’ in fact are very often hostile to it (though with the measured irony of the well-read), instead only accepting philosophy on the basis of *experience*. Writing, however, and how it inspires or deflects reading, becomes the most important thing of all. The bridge that they create across the traditions, their essentially ‘foreign rigor,’ *‘is the task of endless responsibility for one’s own discourse’* (*IQO*: 14; emphasis added).

Writing becomes *the* essential experience. And philosophical writing can only bear this weight, this weight of responsibility, if it is weighed against experience, is responsible for experience, and if the textual responsibility of philosophy as a way *into* life is not merely intertextual, ‘intellectual or critical, but sturdy’ (*Essays*: 237), as Emerson puts it in ‘Experience.’ Alternatively, even more clearly in ‘Spiritual Laws,’ which may reveal Cavell’s own source:

We have yet to learn that the thing uttered in words is not therefore affirmed. It must affirm itself, or no forms of grammar and plausibility

²³ See William James, ‘What Pragmatism Means,’ in Louis Menand ed., *Pragmatism: A Reader* (New York: Vintage, 1997), p. 93.

can give it evidence, and no array or arguments. The sentence must also contain its own apology for being spoken.²⁴

(*Essays*: 90)

Words, in and as themselves, affirm nothing. Only as they belong to experience, giving and receiving their shape therein, do they gather meaning to themselves. That this derives from a romantic conception of philosophy, if it is not clear already, should become more so when placed next to Schlegel's injunction that 'In true prose everything has to be underlined' (*PF*: 80).²⁵ The weight of words is the burden of experience.

II

'Experience,' then, does not just name the Emerson essay in question. Following through what this word means (the weight it carries) becomes crucial for an understanding of how Emerson relates to the romantic thought that I wish to inherit in this thesis. The problem to overcome, however, is that the paper trail of Emerson criticism leads in the opposite direction, away from romanticism, with its debt to idealism, and towards empiricism. Transcendentalism has been seen as a denial of experience, or at least a certain understanding of 'experience.' This criticism is analogous to Santayana's argument that reality eluded Emerson. Experience and reality are not put into question, but in-

²⁴ Though this is published in 1842, Emerson's journal reveals that it had been a consideration as early as 1831: 'Every composition in prose or verse should contain in itself the reason of its appearance. Thousands of volumes have been written & mould in libraries of which this reason is yet to seek—does not appear. Then comes Adam Smith, Bacon, Burke, Milton, then comes any good sentence & its apology is its own worth. It makes its pertinence.' Ralph Waldo Emerson (Joel Porte ed.), *Emerson in His Journals* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 80. Hereafter referred to as *Journals* in the text.

²⁵ Emerson cites this passage twice in Journal entries from October 27th 1831 and 12th April 1834. In William H. Gilman *et al.* eds., *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Vol. III* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 271 and William H. Gilman *et al.* eds., *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Vol. IV* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 273.

stead form a presumed irreducible kernel, usually of ‘hard knocks’ (Dr. Johnson’s stubbed toe) by which to measure philosophical thought. But, I shall argue, what experience is and how it shapes reality are the very things at stake in Emerson’s essay. But, if his debt to idealism is mistaken for a hard learned empiricism, which it is by Stephen Whicher, Barbara Packer, and Sharon Cameron,²⁶ for example, then the lessons of his essay are not worked through to their more challenging conclusions.

Just what is and is not being ‘transcended’ in Transcendentalism, and just what Emerson means, or strives to mean, by ‘idealism,’ need to be investigated in order to understand the Kantian inheritance in Emerson’s philosophy, which is, I am arguing, one of ‘experience.’ As we have seen, Kant formulates a negative philosophy in order to protect metaphysics from the extremes of empiricist skepticism (Hume’s threat). His cognitive restriction makes a large part of what had been understood as the available world off limits. The forbidden knowledge that Kant calls, variously, the noumenal, the supersensible, the *transcendent*, is unavailable to *a priori* subjective intuition—that is, to subjective *experience*. The un-experienceable realm corresponds, as I said earlier to the thing-in-itself, to the divine, to moral autonomy, to freedom and to immortality (the pure ideas of reason or ‘regulative ideas’; Kant’s interpretation of Plato), which Kant believes reason can assume, but that the understanding cannot prove. They are the end result of a rational faith and form regulative rather than determinate (or legislative) principles.

²⁶ Whicher, *FF*, pp. 111ff; Barbara L. Packer, *Emerson’s Fall: A New Interpretation of the Major Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1982), pp. 156ff, hereafter referred to as *EF* in the text; Sharon Cameron ‘Representing Grief: Emerson’s “Experience”,’ *Representations* (15, Summer 1986), p. 23, hereafter referred to as *RG* in the text. Though much good work is done by each of these people, on the vital issue of idealism and empiricism they remain inadequate, stemming from the repression of philosophy diagnosed by Cavell.

What, then, can the subject *know*, what ‘objects’ are available to the understanding and to experience *qua* knowledge of those objects? The realm of experience is based upon the ‘transcendental’ (not to be confused with ‘transcendent’) which corresponds to the manner in which the subject must exist in order to be able to intuit, i.e., perceive objects through the senses. Kant concludes, that the way in which the subject has *access* to an object must be equivalent to the *conditions for the possibility* of that object. Objects can only emerge because of how they are intuited, and Kant asserts that these are the *same* as the ‘conditions for the possibility of experience,’ which consist, after all, only in judgements made about objects.²⁷

To recapitulate, experience is conditioned not by the incoming object reflected, or ‘impressed’ upon the empty passive mind (empiricism), but by the way the ‘mind’ itself is ‘transcendental,’ actively determining and synthesising the world. In Emerson’s words: ‘We animate what we can, and we see only what we animate. Nature and books belong to the eyes that see them’ (*Essays*: 24). What we learn from Kant is that the objective world is *a priori* subjective, and what we understand as the ‘mere’ appearance of the world is the way it is *real* for us because experiences are what allow for knowledge. The ‘real’ world, then, is everything that is knowable in this way. Thus, his critical philosophy claimed to be both a critical or transcendental idealism *and* an empirical realism. In this sense only is ‘Experience’ empirical. Kant did not believe that the world was ‘all in the mind’ like interpretations of Berkeley (an influence on the early Emerson), nor that our perceptions could give us access to absolute reality like the rationalists. Kant straddled a very fine line between the two. But, as Cavell has pointed out, this balance

²⁷ This is obviously a very condensed and inadequate reading, but I return to these points in more depth with regard to time, space and the creative imagination in chapters 3 and 4.

has remained relatively settled into the twentieth century, and the major works of philosophers like Heidegger and Wittgenstein are still contending with this Kantian ‘settlement’. Indeed, the difference between the transcendent and the transcendental—which Emerson interprets rather than misunderstands—is another way of expressing the romantic discontent with Kant, which leads philosophy, in its romantic phase, toward poetry: the attempt to (re-)enchant the everyday and to a secularisation or disenchantment of the sacred.²⁸

We can easily see how this influences the early Emerson’s idea of transcendentalism in the 1836 monograph *Nature*. Indeed, it gives us perhaps his most infamous passage: ‘Standing on the bare ground,—my head uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God’ (*SE*: 39). The transparent eyeball is the perfect circle of subjectivity, where Emerson’s ‘I’ exactly correspond to his ‘eye,’ and which is not mere egotism but a way of being that discloses the world. And it is not surprising that Emerson is generally understood to have missed the nuances of what Kant is doing in constructing his division. That is, as Wellek puts it, to have confused the transcendent claim of reason with the transcendental claim of the understanding, and so to have appropriated the transcendent where only the transcendental is possible (*EGP*: 43-44). Emerson oversteps Kant’s epistemological limits—we might say he becomes a romantic—when he becomes part and parcel of God, that is unifies his experience with the divine.²⁹ In addition, he is said to use Kant as a ‘support’ for his own beliefs (*EGP*: 60-61). There are at least two reasons why I think this is mis-

²⁸ See Stanley Cavell, *IQO*: 43-44 and *passim*.

²⁹ I shall return to this point in the Conclusion.

taken. Firstly, for all its complexity, the distinction between reason and understanding in Kant, where he famously ‘denies knowledge in order to make room for faith’ can be interpreted as a crutch for Kant’s *own* beliefs (and thus Emerson reads him better than Wellek knew). Secondly, and more significantly, Emerson is responding to Kant’s negative philosophy, and utilising its own momentum, turning it into a positive philosophy. In this he, almost certainly inadvertently, answers the call put out by Friedrich Schlegel in the third *Athenaeum Fragment*: ‘Kant introduced the concept of the negative into philosophy. Wouldn’t it be worthwhile trying to introduce the concept of the positive into philosophy as well?’ (*PF*: 18).

The part of Kant’s system that Emerson exploits for this positive turnaround is the way the subject *transcends* into the world. The way it exists (from the Latin, *existere*, to step forth or out) and in the way it actively determines the objective world through the transcendental conditions for the possibility of experience. ‘Life is an ecstasy,’ (*SE*: 385) writes Emerson in the essay ‘Fate,’ ecstasy being derived from the same root as existence, and is a standing outside of oneself: ‘the papillae of a man run out to every star’ (*SE*: 384). The self is literally transcendental and, though lyrical, it remains objectively and easily distinguishable from the mysticism it is often mistaken for. Of course, Emerson, more than once, raises this to the level of an epiphany—as with the eyeball—and in doing so elevates his own ecstasy, or ecstasis, in ways that Kant would not have condoned. But this is his ‘turning’ into the positive, which, I shall argue, remains true to the fundamental Kantian insight that knowledge of the world—its objectivity—is dependent on the way we are able to see the world, that is, on our finite intuition.

What remains to be worked through though, and this is one of the main themes of the thesis, is what happens when the authority for creating a world is removed from

the world in itself, as exterior, and given to (received by) the subject who *authors* a world. That is, when the limits imposed by Kant are turned into a positive instruction to *create* the world out of nothing, out of what cannot be known as the ground of possibility. We will see that the imagination, a recognised romantic trope, is the problem here, in that it suggests that creativity is a burden of finitude *and* its transcendence, and as such *the problem* (our finitude) *is the solution* (our creativity). These are the lessons that, in later chapters, need to be learned from Emerson's casual ability to say in 'Intellect': 'the truth was in us before it was reflected to us from natural objects; and the profound genius will cast the likeness of all creatures into every product of his wit'³⁰ (*Essays*: 189). This recalls the critical revolution that Abrams located in the subjective shift from 'mirror' to 'lamp,' but it is turned through its cycle once more, and the objects of the world become reflective of subjective truth.³¹ This is what I mean here by positive idealism,³² and in it is contained a working through of the romantic revolution, which is a revolution of the subject *into* the world.

The subject, though, falls short of this perspective and the revolution seems to fail. How this 'falling' takes place, what it means for Emerson that 'humankind is fallen' again is decisive for my reading of Emerson as a romantic and for romanticism in general. Firstly, I need to establish what it is not. It is not Platonic and it is not recognisably Christian. The Platonic and neo-Platonic traditions—which fed the metaphysical needs of early Christianity—are based on an emanation theory of the fall. That is, a decline from a central point or 'form' corresponding to God or the Demiurge to a less per-

³⁰ A passage which seems to run counter to the Kant of the first *Critique*, but is a positive interpretation of his third *Critique*. See chapter 3.

³¹ The obvious narcissistic qualities of this will be the subject of chapter 2.

³² I would not want this confused with the later philosophy of Schelling, for example, which was also seen as a positive (though critical) response to Hegelian philosophy.

fect realm of appearance: from more-Being to less-Being.³³ Plato's 'Simile of the Cave' is one way that this is interpreted. The movement from the One, the Good, to the corrupted bodily sphere is how it was understood by Plotinus. Almost always in Platonism the human world of appearance, of mere matter, is interpreted as a degraded copy of a purer, more fitting world of forms and spirit. However, Emerson makes a point of saying in his essay 'The Poet' that "There is no doctrine of forms in our philosophy" (*Essays*: 204).³⁴ And he records part of a conversation with the Swedenborgian Sampson Reed in his journal for June 1842, just a few months after the loss that inspires 'Experience': "there is no other world; here or nowhere is the whole fact; all the Universe over, there is but one thing—this old double, Creator-creature, mind-matter, right-wrong" (*Journals*: 286). The idea of Being, or of God, as something elsewhere that can be returned to is quite unacceptable to Emerson's metaphysics (as Dewey pointed out) and to his faith. On the contrary, his *pre*-Socratic tendency is well expressed in his later essay 'Nature.'

And the knowledge that we traverse the whole scale of being, from the centre to the poles of nature, and have some stake in every possibility, lends that sublime lustre to death, which philosophy and religion have too outwardly and literally striven to express in the popular doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The reality is more excellent than the report. Here is no ruin, no discontinuity, no spent ball. The divine circulations never rest nor linger. Nature is the incarnation of a thought, and turns to a thought again, as the ice becomes water or gas. The world is mind precipitated, and the volatile essence is for ever escaping again into the shape of free thought.

(*Essays*: 309)

³³ For a version of a gnostic reading of Emerson see Harold Bloom, *Agon: Toward a Theory of Critical Revisionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 3-18, 145-178.

³⁴ This is a point that seem to have been missed by Stuart Gerry Brown, who writes: "Look where you will in [Emerson's] writings, the point is the same. The statement of any important conclusion will be found to have a Platonic source, either in the canon of Plato's own work or in the Neo-platonists', 'Emerson's Platonism,' *New England Quarterly* (XVIII, 1945), p. 344. Of course, after Whitehead, to say that any philosophical conclusion has an origin in Plato is something of a tautology.

Our difference to the Universe and its guiding principle is not one of kind, but only of degree, which interprets Kant's two-world theory whilst dismissing Platonism. The subject partakes of the circulations of the universe, of Being, of God. There is no decline but instead a resurrection of the mind in an unexhausted possibility, a positive Kantian (almost Hegelian)³⁵ assertion of its shaping powers and the authority of thought in the dialectic of nature and understanding. And the idea of immortality, the sublimity of death is, for Emerson, a remnant of a deeper comprehension of our place in the universe—a return to the vast circulation of its Being.³⁶

I do not want to go into Emerson's rejection of the orthodox Christian version of the Fall story here as it is so well documented elsewhere. It is enough to say with Whicher that 'The Fall of Man was a myth' (*FF*: 23), but not one that could just be discarded, because Emerson still needed to explain why humankind fell short of its 'divine' status. An important part of this, as Whicher goes on to point out, was the spinning of a new myth of the fall, a romantic myth. This myth explains the contradiction in the omnipotence fantasy by Emerson's own counter-claims that man is indeed fallen. As in *Nature's* Orphic poet: 'A man is a god in ruins' and 'Man is the dwarf of himself' (*SE*: 77); or from the *Essays*: 'Man is fallen; nature is erect' (*Essays*: 299) and 'It is very unhappy, but too late to be helped, the discovery we have made, that we exist. That discovery is called the Fall of Man' (*Essays*: 246). These are, as Packer observes, 'the commonest ways of allegorizing the story of Genesis' by equating 'self-consciousness with the Fall' (*EF*: 148), and by measuring the fall not from the divine but from nature into intellect—into understanding as we have seen it in Kant. However, I would disagree

³⁵ Though, of course, Hegel would be deeply critical of Emerson's romantic 'intuitionism.' See Chapter 2.

³⁶ This is suggestive of Freud's famous 'oceanic feeling,' a point to which I return in chapters 2 and 4.

with Packer and take Cavell's position that such a romantic gesture is not allegorising the Fall but showing what the Fall itself was an allegory or an interpretation of (*IQO*: 46-48).³⁷ The Fall is into consciousness, away from 'nature' or rather, into an understanding of nature that is always already alien to nature, into a circle, to use a favourite Emersonian image. Nevertheless, there remains for Emerson only one world, and whether you are fallen in it depends on whether you take Kant's limitations to be positive or negative. Whether absolute contact with 'nature' as thing-in-itself is desirable, or whether such a thing would be a worse punishment than Kantian finitude. For such finitude may be a blessing, in that it allows perception to occur at all:

All persons, all things which we have known, are here present, and many more than we see; the world is full. As the ancients said, the world is a *plenum* or solid; and if we saw all things that really surround us, we should be imprisoned and unable to move. For, though nothing is impassable to the soul, but all things are pervious to it, and like highways, yet this is only whilst the soul does not see them.³⁸

(*Essays*: 334)

The soul in its transcendental ignorance can make of the opaque universe a highway. Moreover, and Emerson is consistent in this, human authority lies in this essential finitude, in the contradiction between an easy transport, which displaces all contact, and an identification with, a yearning toward, Universal plenitude. The consequence of this is Emerson's famous lament that 'I have this latent omniscience coexistent with omnignorance' (*Journals*: 283), when faced with the task of mourning the death of his beloved son.

³⁷ Cavell is actually discussing Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' but the point is clearly meant to stand for Emerson as well. He makes the link explicit in *NYUA*: 81

³⁸ The passage stands comparison with Schelling. See Chapter 2, and Hegel's comment on 'the night when all cows are black.'

III

That ‘Experience’ is a work of mourning is generally, though often reluctantly, accepted. But Emerson’s use of the death of his son as a spur to philosophy, to a questioning of philosophy, has been widely misinterpreted as a callous gesture exemplifying his distant attitude to people and failure to love, or attributed to the numbness caused by the prior loss of father, brother, wife. Yet, if it is read in the wider context of journal entries and as an acknowledgement of the path through philosophy I have been taking here, then there really is nothing else that the death of his son could have been to Emerson except a test to his philosophy—indeed, the highest challenge, against which the claims of philosophy could only fail. He anticipates this position in a journal entry written almost five years before the death of his son.

The event of death is always astounding; our philosophy never reaches, never possesses it; we are always at the beginning of our catechism; always the definition is yet to be made, What is Death? I see nothing to help beyond observing what the mind’s habit is in regard to that crisis. Simply, I have nothing to do with it. It is nothing to me. After I have made my will and set my house in order, I shall do in the immediate expectation of death the same things I should do without.

(Journals: 173)

Here then is the oft cited coldness set next to the failure of his philosophy: a Humean acceptance that only habit will get us through metaphysical crises, and a Stoical admission that what will be will be. So why, then, two years after the death of his son, in 1844, does he forgo ‘habit’ and write the consistently astonishing essay ‘Experience,’ one of the most singular pieces of writing in American letters? Why does he use this ‘essay,’

if that is what it is, to open his philosophy and philosophy in general to the death of his son? In sum, why do I want to read ‘Experience’—or why does it demand to be read—as a work of mourning which enacts a (romantic) working through of idealism?

To use, *explicitly*, the death of an immediate loved one as a call to philosophy is, as far as I know, unique—it is certainly unusual. This is strange on two counts. Firstly, because philosophy is obsessed with death, from Plato’s assertion that philosophy is a preparation for death through to modern times with the influence of Freud’s death instinct—taken up, as we shall see, by both Brown and Marcuse. Secondly, because ‘impersonal’ death, in terms of murder, war and holocaust for example, has been a common impulse for philosophy, or for the end of philosophy, during all its history. Death loiters in the background of philosophy and constitutes one of its most profound questions, but it rarely, if ever, comes to the fore as *personal* loss. The (near) exceptional status and, arguably, hubris this gives to ‘Experience,’ is perhaps another reason why critics have seen it as a breach of taste, as something Emerson surely could not have meant, could not have been in control of—i.e., that he grieved too little or too much. Yet, I maintain that such a gesture of beginning (that is, continuing, pursuing) philosophy with the invocation of Waldo’s death is entirely consonant with Emerson’s thought. It is in no way a diminution of it, but rather brings it to a peak, where the reflection and counter reflection of philosophy upon the everyday and the sacred—what is more everyday or more sacred than death?—reaches a critical mass that enriches all of Emerson’s work. It is, also, to risk bathos, consonant with romanticism.

Preparatory to reading ‘Experience’ as a romantic text, I have to respond to Simon Critchley’s determination that it is not, in fact, romantic. That is, I have to follow through what I consider to be Critchley’s curiously unnecessary misreading of Cavell’s

reading of Emerson's 'Experience' as a romantic text in his otherwise insightful book, *Very Little...Almost Nothing*. Critchley's misreading is at first so difficult to understand that it almost puts the rest of his book into doubt. Until you realise that what he is doing is not so surprising after all, he is merely enacting, once more, the repression of Emerson as a philosopher. I will begin by stating Cavell's position, reviewing how he manoeuvres Emerson alongside the Jena romantics in a way that causes Critchley—and consequently me—such disappointment.

Like Critchley, Cavell's reading of the Jena romantics, and thus what it is to be, or rather to write as, a romantic derives from Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy's influential *The Literary Absolute*. This in turn (as Critchley stresses) is inspired by Maurice Blanchot's short but important essay 'The Athenaeum' in his *The Infinite Conversation* (1969). Both these texts, and consequently Cavell and Critchley, limit their definition of the romantic, initially at least, to the journal *The Athenäum*, the brief run of which lasted from 1798-1800. But, more particularly again, to the sets of 'fragments' that appeared between its covers, the majority of which were in the first volume. So Cavell is dealing with a very narrow, but in its own way exhaustive, definition of romanticism which can be summed up, loosely, as a fragmentary response to Kantian philosophy.³⁹

Cavell, typically, does not put any stress upon whether Emerson has read *The Athenäum*, either in translation, or in his own limited German.⁴⁰ Instead, he assumes, probably correctly, that the ideas contained therein were part of the intellectual ambi-

³⁹ Of course, the fragment does exist in English romanticism, the obvious examples are Coleridge's 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan,' which interestingly are almost exactly contemporary with *The Athenäum*; also, to a lesser extent, his philosophical writings—though they may correspond more to Blanchot's satiric definition of the fragment given toward the beginning of this introduction, i.e., that he was incapable of organising and drawing his thought to a coherent close.

⁴⁰ Though it is apparent, as we saw above, the Emerson had read something of Schlegel's philosophical fragments and copied them into his journals.

ence of the era, both in what came before the journal and in its wake. After claiming an initial correlation between the romantics and a passage from ‘The American Scholar,’ (NYUA: 7-8), he goes on to bring out why he thinks ‘Experience’ should be related to the thinking through of Kant that is happening in *The Athenäum*.

Accepting the thesis presented by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy...that the idea of literature becoming its own theory—literature in effect becoming philosophy while contrariwise philosophy becomes literature—is what constitutes romanticism (in its origin in the *Athenäum*), and beginning to see Emerson’s responsiveness to that material (or to its sources or its aftermath), my wonder at Emerson’s achievement is given a new turn. As if I had, for all my perhaps aggressive satisfactions with Emerson’s work, myself sometimes given in to the weight of opinion that his works leave something (specifiable) undone, as if specifically unaccomplished, as if what I describe as Emerson’s call for philosophy were not already philosophy happening. So I should like to record my impression that, measured against, say, Friedrich Schlegel’s aphoristic, or rather, fragmentary, call for or vision of the union of poetry and philosophy, Emerson’s work presents itself as the realization of that vision.

(NYUA: 20-21)

This, in his extraordinary vacillating prose, is Cavell’s way of saying—by almost trying not to say—that Emerson, and in particular ‘Experience,’ is the ‘realization’ of the romantic project envisioned by the authors of *The Athenäum* (much will come to hang on just what Cavell is taken to mean by ‘realization’).

Let us take this one step at a time. What does it mean for literature to become its own theory, and for this to occur through the integration of philosophy and poetry? To put it somewhat crudely, the aim is to overcome systematic philosophy with the expressive excess of poetry, but to retain them both (the inauguration of a dialectical manoeuvre). Schlegel writes: ‘It’s equally fatal for the mind to have a system and to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two’ (PF: 24). In this there is a rejec-

tion of system for the sake of system (which Jacobi called nihilism),⁴¹ that is, a self-grounding system, such as was attempted, for example, by Spinoza and later by Hegel, but also a recognition that some kind of systematisation is essential to existence. (Perhaps we should also recall Emerson's: 'We want in every man a long logic; we cannot pardon the absence of it; but it must not be spoken.') This remnant of a(n unspoken) system is the fragment. As a literary form, the fragment is said to constitute its own theory through this ambiguity surrounding its system, a process that comes to mean that its very form *is* its theory, or at least strives to be. How this works is what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy spend much of their book explaining, locating the fragment in a complex matrix of radical incompleteness, formal ambiguity and the disparate traits of wit and irony.

The fragment, they argue, is the romantic genre par excellence (*LA*: 40). It responds to the denial of system through the impossibility of completion, the exigency of incompleteness—its icon is the ruin, the sign of instability, impermanence, and transition. That certain philosophical texts have only come down to us as fragments, such as those of Heraclitus and Parmenides,⁴² also provides a clue to the fragment. It is a remainder, or remembrance (Cavell points out the significance of the 'member' in re-remembrance—and dis-membering [*NYUA*: 21]), that indicates our limited perspective. This was referred to above as our fallen state. Here it is the fall into *individuality* into *division*, into fragments. This formulation of the impossibility of the system is the first, 'historical,' step that the fragment takes to its own theorisation.

⁴¹ See Andrew Bowie, *RCT*: 31ff and *passim.*, also Franks in *CCG*: 95-116.

⁴² Schlegel: 'Many of the works of the ancients have become fragments. Many modern works are fragments as soon as they are written' (*PF*: 21).

The second, and more important step, is the restless momentum of the project: the future. Incompletion, they argue entails completion, or at least suggests as a *possibility* (a key word) the relentless surge into the future where such a completion may take place. In this open-ended quest for a closed-circle, the fragment locates itself as essentially progressive. This idea of the fragment as a cat chasing its own tail⁴³ corresponds to the observable difference between idealism and romanticism, the circularity of their pursuit of philosophy. As Andrew Bowie puts it, after Manfred Frank, ‘The difference of the Romantic view from the Idealist view...lies in the Romantics’ eventual conviction that a self-grounding system of philosophy is impossible: the aim of German Idealism is such a system’ (*RCT*: n312).

Why I believe it to be circular is simple enough. If the romantics can recognise that a closed system is impossible, then they must have been searching for it, must have tried to assert it, in order to fail to do so. If the idealists feel the need to search for such a system they must have found it lacking, or continue to be unable to assert it, to fail to provide the system. The one position is the crisis of the other. The fragment, in all its paradox, is content to take on both perspectives—but at the cost of never ‘*realising*’ itself. This then, is why I think the fragment, as literature and as the call for a literature, is said to provide its own theory. Its very limitation—its finitude, we might say with Critchley—always points elsewhere, to the possibility and the impossibility of the sys-

⁴³ I chose this image because it recalls an image used wittily (or rather, tragicomically) by Emerson in ‘Experience’ to figure the extraordinary state of subjectivity: ‘Do you see that kitten chasing her own tail? If you could look with her eyes, you might see her surrounded with hundreds of figures performing complex dramas, with tragic and comic issues, long conversations, many characters, many ups and downs of fate,—and meantime it is only puss with her tail. How long before our masquerade will end its noise of tambourines and laughter, and shouting, and we shall find it was a solitary performance?’ (*Essays*: 248-249). The solitary is, of course, the fragmentary, rather than, say, the solipsistic.

tem, to the possibility and impossibility of its own conditions for existence as a fragment—a phrase which deliberately recalls Kant and the disappointment with his legacy.

To take up his next point, in what way does Cavell see Emerson as responding to this romantic material? Firstly, he is clearly surprised, and somewhat abashed, to see so much of what he finds in Emerson foreshadowed in Jena romanticism. His own prior work, in *The Senses of Walden* and *In Quest of the Ordinary* had already been on the Kantian trail, but through the familiar Coleridge, rather than *The Athenäum*. So it is not the spectre of Kant that surprises him, but that he has a second frame of reference for Emerson's romanticism—a happy confirmation. What Cavell can do now in his reading of Emerson's 'Experience' is bring together Kant and the idea of the fragment, and produce an understanding, or rather begin to understand, how Emerson's essay actually works. For Cavell an Emersonian essay partakes of the fragment's (compromised) insularity and self-reflexive theorisation in that it 'announce[s] and provide[s] conditions of its own comprehension' (*NYUA*: 20) (in more Kantian terms, announces the conditions for its own possibility, that is its own experience. Cavell says as much later on [*NYUA*: 103]) which, he argues, is the 'realization' of Schlegel's call 'for a vision of the union of poetry and philosophy.' How this works out, or how I want to work it out, I will leave in abeyance for now, because it is this word, 'realization,' that constitutes the whole mistaken contretemps between Critchley and Cavell.

As may have already become apparent, romanticism, if we take the fragment as its form, cannot 'realize' itself. Indeed its very essence (or as Blanchot puts it, 'non-essence' [*IC*: 359]) is this incompleteness. Very much hangs, then, on what one takes 'realization' to mean. Critchley clearly takes Cavell to mean 'completion,' some kind of closure or arresting of movement. Whilst he does not intend that Cavell's Emerson is in

any way systematic (i.e., nihilistic) in the sense described above, he does take it to mean that Cavell believes Emerson to have resolved—realized—the relationship between poetry and philosophy and to have fulfilled the romantic genre. For Critchley this is a fatal mistake that oversteps the bounds of romanticism, indeed, is fundamentally unromantic.

He attributes this error to a claim made by Cavell in his *In Quest of the Ordinary*, garnered, apparently, from Thoreau. Philosophy, or a good philosophy book at least, ‘would be written with next to no forward motion, one that culminates in each sentence’ (*IQO*: 18). Critchley takes this to mean that Emerson realizes the fragment because his sentences enact this type of closure, this denial of forward momentum. He uses two expressions for this, one, borrowed from Stephen Mulhall, is ‘lack of momentum,’ the second, his own, is ‘inertia’ (*VLAN*: 123). It is, I think, important to point out that these concepts are not the same, and thus he is mixing his metaphors and misreading Cavell’s own ‘next to no forward motion.’ It is important because texts do not ‘move’ on their own, quickly or slowly. There is someone next to—i.e., reading—them (‘at a bent arms length,’ as Cavell says of Thoreau. An image both of strolling arm in arm, and of holding a book),⁴⁴ and their inertia, their constancy, is no aid to the reader; it just keeps step. It is the reader, then, who overcomes the periodic inertia, not the diminishing momentum of the text. It is the reader who turns the text into a progression (succession), makes it progressive, and not the writer. It is the writer, the *text*, that is ‘warped out of its orbit,’ recalling ‘The American Scholar’ (*SE*: 88), and opened to its

⁴⁴ The whole passage reads: ‘The reader’s position has been specified as that of the stranger. To write is to acknowledge that he is outside the words, at a bent arm’s length, and alone with the book; that his presence to these words is perfectly contingent, and that choice to stay with them continuously his own; that they are his points of departure and origin. The conditions of meeting upon the word are that we—writer and reader—learn how to depart from them, leave them where they are; and then return to them, find ourselves there again. We have to learn to admit the successiveness of words, their occurrence one after the other; and their permanence in the face of our successions’ *SW*: 62-63.

future. As Emerson famously writes in the same essay: ‘One must be an inventor to read well.... There is creative reading as well as creative writing’ (*SE*: 90).

Perhaps this becomes clearer if we read the appropriate pages of *The Senses of Walden*, where Cavell first talks about this. It suggests that from the beginning, Emerson’s text as well as Thoreau’s, that he cites, is not an inadequate romanticism, but is a successful interpretation of it—a ‘realization.’

Writing, at its best, will come to a finish in each mark of meaning, in each portion and sentence and word. That is why in reading it ‘we must laboriously seek the meaning of every word and line; conjecturing a larger sense....’

(*SW*: 27-28)

Where writing stops, reading begins—reading as writing again, as an essential response: a responsibility—to the written text. Realization does not mean completion, it means *putting to work*, the romantic fragment. And it establishes the fragment’s place in a dialogue—as one side of an ongoing dialogue. Now, this might just sound like a definition of reading, but what sets it apart is that certain texts (fragments) are more open to interpretation, are in fact *deliberately* open to it. It is also related to the ‘birth’ of self-reflexive literature with romanticism—literature that talks to itself about its own failure. For one of the debts of *The Athenäum* fragments is to the Socratic dialogue and to its irony, and thus to the complex location of answerability, the demand of responsibility in the response. Blanchot observes: ‘the fragment, in monologue form, is a substitute for dialogical communication since “a dialogue is a chain or garland of fragments.”’ (Schlegel) and, more profoundly, an anticipation of what one could call plural writing; the possibility of a writing that is done in common,’ (*IC*: 358; Blanchot’s emphasis). I want to suggest that this writing in common, rather than being the anonymous collective of the Jena ro-

mantics, can correspond to the practice of proper reading, of reading being part of a creative collective act which is *responsible to and for* the written text, 'laboriously seek[ing] the meaning of every word and line'.

This has to be augmented by Cavell's claim, cited above, that philosophical writing is the 'responsibility for one's own discourse.' Cavell uses an important Emersonian word for the coming together of these two ideas: 'condition' (*IQO*: 37-38; *NYUA*: 81). He plays with the etymology, 'con-dition,' or speaking together. Suggesting that it points to the conditions 'under which we can say anything at all to one another, the terms or costs of each of our terms; as if philosophy is to unearth the conditions of diction altogether' (*NYUA*: 81). Cavell's insight is that this condition, this confluence of voices emerging from the written text, is a way of interpreting Kant's use of the word condition, in 'conditions for the possibility of experience.' Here, then, language as an ongoing dialogue between writing and reading, as a response that demands a responsibility, provides the *a priori* conditions for experience. The responsibility for one's own discourse, one's fragmentary part in the garland of dialogue is always a response to and a call to an open-ended *realisation* of experience. Emerson's 'call' for philosophy is, then, the initiation of a dialogue, the announcement of a fragment, the 'happening' of philosophy as the question of, the *questioning* of, experience.

Cavell, in fact, is working through this in *This New Yet Unapproachable America*. It just seems frustrating that Critchley did not read him sufficiently, did not follow the Cavellian injunction of responsibility to the 'conditions' of the text. Cavell writes, quite categorically, immediately after claiming Emerson's essay is a realization of the fragment:

I do not mean that Emerson's work is not 'fragmentary.' Indeed it seems to me that the puzzle of the Emersonian sentence must find a piece of its

solution in a theory of the fragment: *maintaining fragmentariness is part of Emerson's realization of romanticism.*

What presents itself to me as its completion of a call for a certain work is epitomized in taking 'Experience' as a contribution to, or presentation of, precisely a theory of the fragment.

(*NUYA*: 21; emphasis added)

And a page earlier:

In claiming an Emersonian essay to announce and provide conditions of its own comprehension...*I am not claiming that these conditions are presented as complete and as realized, but that their completion and realization are questions for each essay*—otherwise the description of an Emersonian essay as constituting a theory of what it is to be an Emersonian essay would not be a description of its essential work but of an ungrounded selection of some images and figures for the whole.

(*NYUA*: 20; emphasis added)

Cavell, writing as he does, could not have made it clearer that the Emersonian essay is a *working through of the realization* called for by Schlegel, *not, in fact its 'realization.'* It is transitive not substantive. Moreover, it is the very question of what stops an essay from realising itself—what surpasses its conditions of possibility, say the (missed) confrontation with his son's, Waldo's death, which is the occasion for 'Experience.' And which emerges paradoxically, as the conditions for its own possibility, which we might call language, *and* in its final impossibility, which we might call death. A conversion—Cavell might borrow Emerson's word and say 'aversion'—of Kant, which, I continue to show, is romantic.

So, now we can begin to overturn Critchley's reading of Emerson and see where it *agrees* with, rather than contradicts, one of the points he makes—namely, that 'romanticism fails' (*VLAN*: 94, 105). Jena romanticism fails, he argues, because it cannot control the divergent manner of its creation, the paradoxical framings of wit and irony that are typical of the perfect fragment, that are demanded by its form. Wit is already dou-

bled in the romantic conception in that it means both humour and knowledge, and it is an attempt to combine the two, one in terms of the other (the pun stands in the German etymology, *Witz*, *Wissen*, and in English). But wit is to be distinguished from the understanding; it is un-systematic knowledge that brings together two distinct thoughts in a flash *ex nihilo*. Schlegel writes, ‘Many witty ideas are like the sudden meeting of two friendly thoughts after a long separation’ (*PF*: 23). These thoughts, though, never quite come together, cannot overcome their initial distance from each other, because they should also be pervaded by *irony*.

Irony holds apart the two thoughts and does not allow their satisfactory completion. It is, Critchley argues, something of a negative dialectic, in that it refuses the identity of the ideas brought together in the fragment. Schlegel writes: ‘An idea is a concept perfected to the point of irony, an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, the continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts’, and again, ‘Irony is the clear consciousness of eternal agility, of an infinitely teeming chaos’ (*PF*: 33, 100). This type of irony, hardly surprisingly, is not funny; it is, rather, arch, elitist, often driven by philological puns and occasionally supercilious. An example of such a fragment was given above, when Schlegel writes, ‘It’s equally fatal for the mind to have a system and to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two.’ As an exemplification of the essence of the fragment, this stands up well. It is witty in that it brings together two different, even opposed, ideas, that of system and non-system, and ironic in that it holds them in an un-reconcilable duality—how can the mind decide to combine the two? Moreover, where is this common ground for ‘decision’? The fragment eludes its own answer, and is contained only in its own incompleteness, its own negativity—the scepticism that disbelieves in absolutes.

One of the dominant themes of *The Athenäum* fragments is to play out this negativity in the relationship between poetry and philosophy (as non-system and system respectively) and to assert, whilst refusing, their claims upon each other. Though Critchley sets this up in opposition to Cavell's Emerson, his point can now be made with Emerson in mind:

on my account, Jena Romanticism is rooted in the acute self-consciousness of its unworking or failure, the exploration of the lack of final synthesis in a continual process of self-creation and self-destruction and the quasi-dialectics of wit and irony.... Jena Romanticism is rooted in essential ambiguity, which is the ambiguity of the genre of the fragment itself. The ambiguity of the fragment is continually directed and open to the future, a future underwritten by a lack of final synthesis. I would argue that it is the very futuricity of fragments that explains why we carry on reading them, and why their reading is not, as Cavell suggests, characterized by lack of momentum or inertia, but rather by a relentless and vertiginous forward motion without destination.

(*VLAN*: 124)

That last point can now be turned around and the futuricity of the fragment can be directly linked to the 'next to' of the 'next to no momentum'—i.e., the reader. The relentless forward motion (which could still be inertia) is directed toward the reader, and it is the reader who produces the vertigo, who experiences the pull forward, is directed indeterminately onward by the demands of reading the Emersonian word, sentence, essay, fragment. This is the 'relentless' force of romanticism's failure.

IV

Romanticism fails for Emerson (fails Emerson) because it cannot answer the questions that practical experience puts to genius—this ‘romance’ still remains, unfulfilled, at the end of the essay. That romanticism is this need to think the everyday through the categories of philosophy and to call those categories into question in the question itself is announced in the self-reflexive open gesture of the fragment. That it fails to put together the pure and practical, to reclaim the everyday in the light of the transcendental—that is to locate the transcendent—is, tragically, exemplified in Emerson’s attempt to ‘romanticise’ the death of this son. Or, more precisely, in that his attempt to *realise* it ends up romanticising it. What follows is the foremost of many crucial passages from ‘Experience’ which describes this problematic. It is where Emerson infamously announces the death of this son.

People grieve and bemoan themselves, but it is not half so bad with them as they say. There are moods in which we court suffering, in the hope that here, at least, we shall find reality, sharp peaks and edges of truth. But it turns out to be scene-painting, and counterfeit. The only thing grief has taught me is how shallow it is. That, like all the rest, plays about the surface, and never introduces me into the reality, for contact with which, we would even pay the costly price of sons and lovers. Was it Boscovitch who found out that bodies never come in contact? Well, souls never touch their objects. An innavigable sea washes with silent waves between us and the things we aim at and converse with. Grief, too, will make us idealists. In the death of my son, now more than two years ago, I seem to have lost a beautiful estate,—no more. I cannot get it nearer to me. If to-morrow I should be informed of the bankruptcy of my principal debtors, the loss of my property would be a great inconvenience to me, perhaps, for many years; but it would leave me as it found me,—neither better nor worse. So it is with this calamity: it does not touch me: something which I fancied was a part of me,—which could not be torn away without tearing me, nor enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me, and leaves no scar. It was caducous. I grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature. The Indian who was laid under a curse, that the wind should not blow on him, nor water flow to him, nor fire burn him, is a type of us all. The dearest events are summer rain, and we the Para coats that shed every drop. Nothing is left to us now but death. We look to that with a grim satisfaction, saying, there at least is reality that will not dodge us.

(Essays: 230-231)

If romanticism, as I have named it here, is the attempt to bridge the gap between the pure and the practical, to recognise in the transcendental conditions of the possibility of experience the transcendent ‘experience’ in itself, to make them answerable to each other, responsible for each other, then this passage is a *dramatic recognition of this failure*. Death here is quite literally transcendence, the movement from the realm of intuitable experience to its other side, the unknowable, the noumenal. The experience of death is ineluctably ideal; death itself is impossibly real.

‘Grief, too, will make us idealists.’ A phrase usually associated with a tragic—but homely—wisdom, can on this reading be elevated to its full philosophical height. Grief *too* will make us idealists (we always already were idealists, grief) or rather the impossibility of grief’s object—just brings a new clarity to human finitude, both in mortal and in transcendental terms. This leads to a bitter ironic reflection in the romantic sense of the duality of wit: the comparing of his son to a beautiful estate—how are we to take that? It is usually what appals the critics, perhaps understandably so. I take it as a fragment, as a concept that cannot grasp its object. An estate is an empty signifier (after Marx we might call it a fetish) which corresponds to the essential absence of Waldo, the absence of his name, from ‘Experience.’ He cannot be named, only the failure to name him, to understand him as an estate, is testament to this. We can compare this to the more positive Emerson of *Nature*:

The charming landscape which I saw this morning is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. This is the best part of these men’s farms, yet to this their warranty-deeds give no title.

(SE: 38)

In *Nature* Emerson holds on to the integrative power of the ‘eye.’ In ‘Experience’ the poet misses his object, which *was* a subject, Waldo; and who, without even the properties of an estate to which he may have title, slips over the horizon. The irony, then, is that in the drawing together of the two ideas, the estate and Waldo, an innavigable abyss opens up, and he explains, ‘I cannot get it nearer to me.’

Grief, then, exposes Emerson to the truth of idealism: it fails, and its failure becomes romanticism, which in turn fails. ‘I grieve’ he writes, ‘that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me a step into real nature.’ It teaches him nothing that he does not already know—which is, the lesson learned from death, that despite—or maybe because of—the notorious epiphany of the ‘transparent eyeball,’ nature is elsewhere. We are left with the subjective illusion of ‘Temperament,’⁴⁵ and the overblown image of the eyeball, transcending the body, illuminating and integrating the world, becomes tragic when its shaping power ossifies with grief. And Emerson realizes that ‘Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and, as we pass through them, they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what is in its focus’ (*Essays*: 231). Grief colours the world, shows how the power invested in the transparent eyeball, the creative romantic image, has a hard edge that pushes nature away, and leaves the subject untouched by the object, insular. As Barbara Packer grimly observes, ‘the price you pay for invulnerability is invulnerability’ (*EF*: 170).

So, the lesson of ‘Experience’ is not a retreat from idealism into empiricism, but from idealism into romanticism, into the failure of experience to grasp its object, the

⁴⁵ Which, as Cavell points out, foretells Heidegger’s ‘epistemology of moods’ (*SW*: 125).

unhandsome ‘lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest’ (*Essays*: 231). There is a series of familiar philosophical puns here. To clutch hard is to grasp, in German *Griff* (which gives *ergreifen*: to seize, and *begreifen*: to comprehend—as in ‘prehensile’), from which comes *Begriff*, which translates back into English as concept, in the Kantian sense of applying experiences to rules in the understanding—in the sense of having ‘a grasp’ on something, say an object.⁴⁶ Our concepts fail us when we clutch hardest, objects really do slip away and philosophy as idealism and romanticism is the disclosure of this ‘evanescence’ (*Essays*: 231). The secret of this, as Cavell points out, is that we must learn not to clutch too hard. But, in acknowledging the absence, we emerge wiser from the disjunctions of irony.

This, then, is another lesson of grief for which Emerson has paid the ‘costly price of sons and lovers.’ Philosophy, which begins in loss, fails and ends, too, in the tragic acceptance of loss. In his journals, Emerson is even more explicit about the role of grief. As early as 1823, Emerson writes, in the youthful voice of his dramatised solitude, that ‘the yell of their grief—it touches no cord in me’ (*Journals*: 38). The death of his first wife Ellen Tucker in 1831, was indeed a cause of much ‘grief,’ the bitterness of which is more typical, less philosophical. But the fact never was that Emerson does not

⁴⁶ Cavell responds to the same passage somewhat differently: ‘Look at the first connection between the hand in unhandsome and the impotently clutching fingers. What is unhandsome is I think not that objects for us, to which we seek attachment, are as it were in themselves evanescent and lubricious; the unhandsome is rather what happens when we seek to deny the standoffishness of objects by clutching at them; which is to say, when we conceive thinking, say the applications of concepts in judgements, as grasping something, say synthesizing. The relation between thinking and the hand is emphasized in Heidegger’s *What is Called Thinking?* as when he writes “Thinking is handicraft,” by which I suppose he means both that thinking is practical (no doubt pre-industrial), fruitful work, which must be learned, and also to emphasize that it is work that only the creature with hands can perform—and most fatefully perform as a mode of necessary, everyday violence. (I assume that Emerson wants the autoerotic force projected with this connection of hand and objects; and, I guess, that Heidegger does not. I let this pass for now.)’ *NYUA*: 86. Cavell sets this next to the type of thinking that allows objects to come to us, passively, as we receive and acknowledge them. See also Martin Heidegger (trans. J. Glenn Gray), *What is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper Collins, 1968), ‘Lecture 1, Summary and Transition,’ p. 16.

grieve over the death of his son. It is that he can *only grieve* over the death of his son. This is as much to say that he can only write and that we can only read his grief from which Waldo is absent. Grief, as a mood or temperament, shows through as illusion because of its inadequacy to its object; ‘moods in which we court suffering, in the hope that here, at least, we shall find reality, sharp peaks and edges of truth’ deliver only an increased awareness of subjectivity that touches the edges of solipsism.

In a conversation with Jones Very recorded in 1838, he writes, ‘I saw clearly that if my wife and child, my mother, should be taken from me, I should still remain whole with the same capacity for cheap enjoyment from all things. I should not grieve enough, although I love them’ (*Journals*: 204-205). And stronger still, eight months after Waldo’s death: ‘Intellect always puts an interval between the subject & the object. Affection would blend the two. For weal or for woe I clear myself from the thing I contemplate: I grieve but I am not grief: I love, but I am not love’ (*Journals*: 288). This, in turn, must be thought of next to the famous letter to Caroline Sturgis written just days after Waldo’s death:

Alas! I chiefly grieve that I cannot grieve; that this fact takes no more deep hold than other facts, is as dreamlike as they; a lambent flame that will not burn playing on the surface of my river. Must every experience—those promised to be dearest and most penetrative,—only kiss my cheek like the wind & pass away?

(RG: 20)

The textual echo and reversal between ‘I grieve that I cannot grieve’ and ‘I grieve but I am not grief’ is I believe, important in figuring the lessons of grief, what grief is supposed to do, what it may actually do, and certainly what it fails to do. To give oneself over to grief, to public grief, is to lose, in a sense, the responsibility for grieving, to fail (in) it, to refuse its work and to miss its lesson. This is not a lesson of attachments lost,

but of ineluctable distance. There are, Cavell observes (*NYUA*: 107), at least two ways to make this mistake, one is religion; another might be called philosophy. Both of them, as ‘Experience’ makes all too clear, are illusions: grief as a temperament is not sustainable (save through the deeper illusion of melancholia). Philosophy, at least in its romantic form, however, provides an answer (which is, deliberately, no answer) by opening itself up to what refuses it, its own completion, a completion which could only take the form, or at least the name, of Waldo.

V

At the beginning of this introduction, I referred to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s contention that the unity of the fragment was ‘constituted in a certain way outside the work by the subject that is seen in it’. I now want to explain what is meant by this—and how I see Waldo as this central subject, this absent romantic subject described in *the Literary Absolute*.

For the romantics, the work never ceases to imply the fundamental motif of completion. Indeed, they raise this motif to a peak of intensity [as] fragmented ‘poetry and philosophy,’ whose very completion remains incomplete. The work in this sense is absent from works—and fragmentation is *also* the sign of this absence. But this sign is at least ambivalent, according to the constant logic of this type of thought, whose model is negative theology. The empty place that a garland of fragments surrounds is a precise drawing of the contours of the Work.

(*LA*: 47)

This passage condenses what I want to put forward here, that the centre of the work, its point of negativity or absence—its incompleteness, is also the circumference of the work, its limit—the ideality of its completion. The tension between the two is the work’s *reali-*

zation. The image is abyssal, paradoxical: a central hole that also provides the shape and extent of the essay. This ambivalence provides the contours of Waldo's shadow as it is cast across the essay.

The absence of Waldo is something that has challenged other critics, in particular Cavell, in his 'Finding as Founding' (*NYUA*: 77-118) and Sharon Cameron in her 'Representing Grief: Emerson's "Experience"', but I shall draw substantially different conclusions here. For Cavell, and I barely understand what he means when he says this, Waldo's absence is overcome in that, a close reading of the imagery of 'Experience' reveals that Emerson is using the essay to give birth to his son (and through him to a new America), to found him and to find him. Cameron, on the other hand, uses a sophisticated psychoanalytic reading to locate Waldo in the very text of the essay. For her, writing is mourning, writing is disavowal of loss and, finally, there is satisfaction derived from the interment of Waldo in the text. These readings, both profound and complex, miss for me the work that the essay is doing, in exploring the genre of the fragment and engaging with its failure to realize its impossible object: death. Death as the absence of that which keeps us from the world. Both birth and disavowal seem to repeat themselves in a secondary disavowal of the task of the essay, *the impossibility of death's experience as a working through of experience itself*.

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy go on, and this sums up much of the foregoing discussion:

The fragment figures—but to figure, *bilden* and *gestalten*, is here to work and to present, *darstellen*—the outside-the-work [*hors d'oeuvre*] that is essential to the work. It functions as the exergue in the two sense of the Greek verb *exergazōmai*; it is inscribed outside the work, and it completes it. The romantic fragment, far from bringing the dispersion or the shattering of the work into play, inscribes its plurality as the exergue of the total, infinite work.

This is no doubt also because the infinite is presented only through its exergue and because, if the *Darstellung* of the infinite after and despite Kant, constitutes the essential preoccupation of idealism, then romanticism, through literature in the fragment, forms the exergue of philosophical idealism.... Purely theoretical completion is impossible...because the theoretical infinite remains asymptotic. The actual infinite is the work of art.

(LA: 48)

If by the infinite we understand, as we have been doing thus far, death—that which is on the other side of human finitude, rather than a numerical or quantifiable infinite—then Waldo's death figures the exergue, the limit and the completion, sought for in idealist philosophy which strives to answer Kant, but which eventually falls into the essential failure, or non-essence of romanticism. By this I mean that if Emerson's essay, as a work of mourning, strives to (re)present (*darstellen*) Waldo's death, through its observable impact, then this accounts for the failure of idealism. The placing of its limits such that Waldo can *only* be represented—stood in for—by the very representation of failure, which is the essay itself. The impossibility of Waldo, the absence of his name in the essay, is disseminated into the work as a 'whole,' unifying the *ensemble* without completing it.

But there is another reading of the infinite, that would appeal more to Cavell, and that is the infinite responsibility that is elicited by the fragment's incompleteness as *writing*. On the one hand the pseudo-sublime failure to name his son (if we recall Kant's reading of the Hebrew injunction on the representation of God). But more concretely the appeal to the reader to pursue Emerson's fragmentary response to the impossibility of Waldo, through philosophy—idealism, romanticism, empiricism—and thus, in the act of reading, engage with philosophy's failure as a *call* to philosophy and as a work of

mourning, which calls from somewhere ‘deeper’ than philosophy itself. In this way, romanticism is *realized*, philosophy domesticated, grounded in its continuing struggle to register the everyday. A process that could be described as Emerson’s (un)working of Kant’s critical enterprise, ‘from how we are such that we *can* experience,’ to ‘how we are because of what we *cannot* experience’; from idealism to romanticism.

Is Waldo’s death, through its representation, a failure to experience ‘experience,’ a work of art, or is it a work of art because on these terms the representation falls short of its object? That depends very much on what the work of art is taken to be, and moreover, how it is said to represent the infinite. Cavell, for example (and it is a statement that Critchley should never have missed) says that ‘an Emersonian essay is a finite object that yields an infinite response’ (*NYUA*: 101). Is this an adequate definition of the work of art? Art discloses the infinite, say death, through an appeal to the limits of finitude, which are the conditions for the possibility of experience and which are also the limits of representation, of meaningful disclosure—Kant calls this the ‘aesthetic idea.’⁴⁷ Emerson’s work of mourning is a work of art because his appeal is to grief as the expression of the unworking of grief, as its radical disjunction from its object in Waldo’s death. Thus a reading of the essay as a work of art is entirely consonant with the Kantian problematic of reason and the understanding. Reason will evoke ‘ideas’ by crossing the boundaries of sense, reason will not answer to the understanding, and nor will the work of art, which is here also a work of mourning. This represents the very failure of philosophy given the limitations placed on it by Kant. (This is why in the early romantic manifesto, the anonymous ‘Earliest Systems Programme,’ [c. 1796] ‘the highest

⁴⁷ See the discussion of Marcuse’s aesthetics in Chapter 3.

act of reason...is an aesthetic act.')⁴⁸ The finitude that is at stake, then, is not Waldo's, but Emerson's (who was also called Waldo). His reason is attaching itself to the impossibility of the infinite (its non-identity) through the completion of the fragment, but his understanding—his idealist subjectivity—is bounded.

Waldo, then, figures both the absent archē and telos of the fragment of Emerson's own finitude, its place in an open series, which can be received but not accounted for. The empty image of Waldo as an estate is reprised by Emerson, precisely on these terms, toward the end of essay, but is shifted into the economy of the gift. And consider the irony that envelops the word 'Fortune.'

All I know is reception; I am and I have: but I do not get, and when I have fancied I had gotten any thing, I found I did not. I worship with wonder the great Fortune. My reception has been so large, that I am not annoyed by receiving this or that superabundantly. I say to the Genius, if he will pardon the proverb, *In for a mill, in for a million*. When I receive a new gift, I do not macerate my body to make the account square, for if I should die, I could not make the account square. The benefit overran the merit the first day, and has overran the merit ever since. The merit itself, so-called, I reckon part of the receiving.

(*Essays*: 250-251)

There is no simple 'equivalence' to the dead or to their life, and his reception, Cavell might say acknowledgement, is the wisdom gained through the ongoing work of mourning. With this in mind even Emerson's assertion, cited earlier, that 'Nothing is left us now but death. We look to that with grim satisfaction, saying, there at least is reality that will not dodge us', must not be taken to mean a levelling of the account, but rather an end to his part in the dialogue, his fragmentary role. 'I am a fragment,' he writes, 'and

⁴⁸ Though it is often attributed to either or both of Schelling and Hegel. Translated by Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity from Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 266.

this is a fragment of me'⁴⁹ (*Essays*: 250), 'this' denoting the essay 'Experience,' but connoting, that is failing to denote, Waldo.

VI

So, romanticism fails. Its hubris and naïveté, its over extension of idealism through the very working of idealism, is the essence of its failure. Romanticism is a dialectic without synthesis, an art form without works, only fragments. For Blanchot, 'this is because it is essentially what begins and what cannot but finish badly: an end that is called suicide, madness, loss forgetting' (*IC*: 352-3). The burden of its idealism, the objectivity of subjectivity, falls short of the disclosure of the world—the very attempt, through art, is seen to be naïve. The transparent eyeball gives a finite horizon, which cannot illuminate death and cannot locate an origin. This sounds dissatisfying, disappointing, as if we are back where we began, on a step, in the middle of 'a series, of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none.' As if the Lethe Emerson says is given us to drink on entry into the world was a kind of poison. But it seems pertinent to recall here the lesson of Borges story 'Funes the Memorius,' that extraordinary and tragic parody of Proustian memory. Lethe relieves our subjectivity of the burden of absolute objectivity, the limitations it places on knowledge are what allows knowledge to come into being and for there to be any kind of world at all. It should also recall Emerson's words on the *Plenum* that is the universe, its oneness: if our subjectivity were infinite, were not of a

⁴⁹ Cf. Blanchot's citation of Schlegel: 'When with great frankness he writes, *'I can conceive for my personality no other pattern than a system of fragments, because I myself am something of this sort; no style is as natural to me and as easy as that of the fragment,'* he declares that his discourse will not be a dis-course, but a reflection of his own discordance' (*IC*: 359).

different degree to it, it would be opaque; it would *be the universe*. So romantic failure, its fragmentation, is something of a blessing. From it comes the possibility of creativity, in fact, of possibility itself.

Fragmentary romanticism entails what Blanchot calls an unworking (*désœuvrement*) at the heart of itself, the constant brushing up against its internal and external limits. This is, in fact, its strength, not its weakness, and ‘romanticism has the keenest knowledge of the narrow margin in which it can affirm itself’ (*IC*: 356) within an ongoing, open-ended, clearly naïve dialogue with what is not itself. Critchley sums this up when he writes:

The fact that romanticism does not work, rather than being a proof of weakness, will be interpreted instead as a sign of its strength. Its very weakness is its strength.... Such a romanticism will still be naïve, but it will be rooted in self-conscious naïveté. That is, an acute awareness of failure and the limitedness of thought.

(*VLAN*: 98)

For Critchley, whose stress is also on ineluctable finitude, romanticism’s power is that because of its failure to ‘absolutise’ its object (its failure to work itself) it always leaves it open for reworking, for a novel interpretation—for it to be otherwise. So ‘where we find ourselves,’ to answer Emerson’s question, is in the middle of a dialogue, of which we do not know the extremes, but can only bear the responsibility for our fragment. Which returns me to the point I made earlier about the location of romanticism, in the mid-world, the no-place of utopia (Cavell’s skepticism). Romanticism is the no-place named by utopia, the possibility of possibility, of otherness, of non-identity, of the new, of the imagination, of the aesthetic, of Eros—it has been called many things, often in the name of political hope. But utopia has, for me, no physical space just as I cannot locate romanticism in New England or America, or Europe but only in a dialogue be-

tween them, of which they are fragments (monologues). This, then, is what Emerson might mean by ‘this new, yet unapproachable America’ that he has ‘found in the west’ (*Essays*: 244): the impossible receding object of philosophical hope and of romanticism’s deepest naïveté.

That I should want to see this as a location worthy of inheritance by Brown and Marcuse may seem odd. But their naïveté is romanticism’s naïveté, their failure romanticism’s failure, and their success is romanticism’s possibility, its continuity. This is not to say that romanticism *tries* to fail. Quite the contrary, it is rather that it plays with its own failure to meet its claims because these claims are the impossible other to the way the world *is*—thus the structure of hope in the midst of despair. Romanticism necessarily oversteps itself, which is why Cavell says that ‘for each one who wants to be a romantic, there is someone else who wishes him to out grow it’ (*QO*: 44). My reading of Marcuse and Brown will turn on this open-endedness of romantic philosophy’s bequest in crucial ways: the centrality of Kant’s finite subject and how this opens up a creative subjectivity of the imagination; indeterminacy and essential incompleteness; responsibility as a praxis both in reading and in writing; authority and autonomy of artworks; formal experimentation (the fragment); the everyday; and finally, the space opened up by romanticism in which all these are located: the in between of *poiesis*, of creation, that may or may not be named America.

—Chapter Two—
**The Dialectics of Eros: *Life Against Death* and
*Eros and Civilization***

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Freud's analytically pessimistic essay 'Beyond the Pleasure-principle' (1920), is that it has given rise to such a distinctive body of utopian speculation. In situating the origin of neurosis in the very instinctual biology of humanity—the ambivalent struggle between life and death—Freud's metapsychology displaced psychoanalysis from a method of cure to one of mere damage limitation and adjustment. A pessimistic shift that ultimately led to a widespread rejection of, or bland lip service to, his revolutionary theories by the normative schools of 'ego-psychology' and 'neo-Freudianism.' Karen Horney and Erich Fromm, for example, rejected biology in favour of an aetiology of social conditions; and even the otherwise revolutionary extremist Wilhelm Reich was grateful that he had received 'permission' from Freud to discount his instinct theory. Reich, unusually, is typical here. His Freudian reading of Marx and Engels recognised the oedipal structure of family life as the beginning of both sexual repression and authoritarianism—for Reich the family was a potential fascist state in miniature.¹ Thus, it was always the social, based on the pattern of the authoritarian family, which created the destructive impulse in humanity. It was imposed as a secondary process through Oedipal tensions and sexual repression (psycho- and actual-neuroses respectively)—it was never primary or instinctual. The ideas brought to psychoanalysis by Freud's 'speculative' Thanatos left the analytic community 'fighting' unbeatable instincts rather than material social causes. For Reich this was simply a return to metaphysics, it seemed to stand Hegel back on his 'head' and displace all of Marx's achieve-

¹ See *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983, pp. 104-114 and *passim*.

ments.² He went so far as to see Freud to ask whether the death instinct was vital to clinical theory: ‘It was “merely a hypothesis,” [Freud] said. It could just as well be omitted.’³ However, Reich’s casual elision between himself and Freud in those two sentences is perhaps misleading. Nevertheless, Freud’s waiver gave Reich the self-confidence—the approval of the Father—to proceed with his research outside of the metapsychological instinct paradigm. Destructiveness, he could then conclude, is not a matter of instincts because ‘*the destructiveness bound in the character is nothing but the rage the person feels, owing to his frustration in life and his lack of sexual gratification*’ (FO: 148; Reich’s emphasis).

In addition to Marcuse and Brown, a welcome to Freud’s instinct theory was given by the utopian theorist and educationalist Paul Goodman. He criticised Horney and Fromm for dismissing the instincts and accused Reich of being naïve and Rousseauvian. As Richard King observes:

Goodman...was not ‘asserting that the liberation of instincts will of itself produce a heaven on earth.... But...the repression of the instincts makes good institutions unattainable.’ In other words, instinctual liberation was a necessary though not sufficient condition for a new society.⁴

This was the dichotomy that Brown and Marcuse inherited: either an outright rejection of Freud’s speculation or a qualified acceptance of its role. However, neither of them deals with either Reich or Goodman, and they dismiss neo-Freudianism out of hand⁵ as

² The metaphysical basis of his own ‘scientific’ work was not something he dwelt on.

³ Wilhelm Reich (trans. V. R. Carfagno), *The Function of the Orgasm* (London: Souvenir, 1983), p. 128. Hereafter referred to as FO in the text.

⁴ Richard H. King, *The Party of Eros: Radical Thought and the Realm of Freedom* (New York: Delta, 1973), p. 85. King’s book provides a good critical account of the relationship between Marcuse and Brown and Freud which is a useful adjunct to the philosophical dimension I pursue in this chapter. See pp. 116-172.

⁵ Marcuse does provide a fairly extensive critique of neo-Freudianism in an epilogue to his *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 238-274. Hereafter referred to as EC in the text.

a timorous and conventional reading of psychoanalysis appropriate to the trend of conservatism and conformity in post-war American social thought.

In this chapter I am not going to pursue these therapeutic readings of Freud; rather, having articulated in the last chapter how I see utopian spaces emerging from romantic dissatisfaction, I want to show how Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown occupy this speculative no-place, through readings of Freud and of idealist philosophy. In section one, I shall present the case for my reading of utopia in this context, and then, in section two, examine Freud's metapsychology. I shall spend the next two sections developing the way Marcuse and Brown respectively try to re-read Freud's instinctual dualism through Hegel, as a dialectic of desire (Eros). In the last section, I shall critically appraise what this means in terms of their deliberate rethinking of narcissism.

I

My strategic diminishment of utopia to a dialogue between philosophy and place—in this context between European philosophy and America as a romantic location—is both appropriate and inappropriate to Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1956) and Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (1959). It is appropriate because the cultural origins of both Marcuse and Brown are European. Marcuse absorbed the very best from a German philosophical education, eventually studying for his *Habilitation* under Martin Heidegger at Freiburg im Breisgau from 1928-1932. The difficult work he produced in these years, *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, published in 1932, went un-submitted: the political cli-

mate was no longer appropriate for a Jewish academic.⁶ However, it remains an important touchstone for his subsequent development. Eventually Marcuse made his way to America with the relocation of the Frankfurt School to Columbia.⁷ He remained there in various universities for most of the next fifty years. Brown, though born in Mexico, was educated in England, and studied classical philology and history at Oxford. In 1936, he came to America to do his graduate work at Wisconsin.⁸ His first book was a sociological interpretation of the Hermes myth, *Hermes the Thief: The Evolution of a Myth* (1947), followed by a translation of Hesiod's *Theogony* (1953). These works gave little clue, aside from 'hermeticism,' to what was to come.

Here there is a clear process of the translation of European philosophy and culture to a new 'space'—a no-space or not-yet-space. That which had happened for Emerson a century earlier occurred in the inter-war years with Brown and Marcuse. However, this is why my reading of utopia is inappropriate, because it restricts it to a kind of abstraction. There is no process of concrete realization, the no-place does not *become* some-place, say America—it remains held in abeyance, 'in theory,' in both the everyday

⁶ Herbert Marcuse (trans. Seyla Benhabib), *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1987). Hereafter referred to in the text as *HO*. Benhabib comments on the fate of the dissertation on pp. ix-x of her 'Translator's Introduction.' Though I have drawn extensively on this work in writing this chapter, due to its technical density I have been reluctant to cite from it; in preference I shall merely point to parallels and supporting remarks in footnotes. Much of the work is itself paralleled in Marcuse's much more accessible 1941 book *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Humanity Press: Amherst, 1999; hereafter referred to as *RR* in the text), so I have quoted from this source instead. For an intelligent reading of Marcuse's relationship to Heidegger and Hegel and of *HO* to *RR* see Robert B. Pippin, 'Marcuse on Hegel and Historicity,' *The Philosophical Forum* (Vol. XVI, No. 3, Spring 1985), pp. 180-206. Hereafter referred to as *MHH* in the text. Pippin argues that Marcuse's reading of Hegel is heterodox, but not out of keeping with trends in Hegel's thought (*MHH*: 185). See also, Marcuse's early 1928 article, 'Contributions to a Phenomenology of Marxism,' *Telos* (Vol. 4., Fall 1969), pp. 3-34; also Paul Piccone and Alexander Delfini, 'Herbert Marcuse's Heideggerian Marxism,' *Telos* (Vol. 6, Fall 1970), pp. 36-46; and Paul Piccone, 'Phenomenological Marxism,' *Telos* (Vol. 9, Spring 1971), pp. 3-31.

⁷ For more on Marcuse's biography see Barry Kätz, *Herbert Marcuse and the Art of Liberation* (London: Verso, 1982). For his early years in America see pp. 111-139.

⁸ There is very little biographical information on Brown. See the interview in Sam Keen ed. *Voices and Visions* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 25-41, hereafter referred to as *VV* in the text, and the two late pieces collected in Brown's *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 'Revisioning Historical Identities,' pp. 158-178 and 'Dionysus in 1990,' pp. 179-200.

and the technical senses of that phrase. America as a concrete historical location is largely wiped out.⁹ In the 1960s, when Marcuse develops a more committed relationship to America, it is not immediately related to what was going on in *Eros and Civilization*; indeed, his political stance disavows much of what goes on in that book. And Brown, moving in the opposite direction, will go so far as to write his fragmentary work, *Love's Body* (1966), in order to distance himself from any involvement with the youth movements of that decade.¹⁰

At least two things need to be taken into consideration if we are to take their speculative, occasionally troubling, books seriously. Firstly, that in the European tradition, as Marcuse makes clear, theory precedes and dominates practice. In his first major work in English, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (1941), he writes: 'In Germany, idealistic philosophy championed the right of theory to guide practice.... The subsequent development of European thought cannot be understood apart from its idealist origins' (RR: 102). There is no doubt that Marcuse understands both Marxism and psychoanalysis as belonging to this trend in European thought and his Hegelianism in particular is something that will be borne out in this and subsequent chapters. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that when Marcuse speaks of Freud in *Eros and Civilization*, it is not a Cold War cipher for Marx, as has been implied,¹¹ but actually means Hegel. On this point at least I must agree with Philip Rieff's generalization that 'No

⁹ I return to this 'idea' of America in the Conclusion.

¹⁰ Indeed, it is fascinating to read in *VV* the way Brown distances himself from the counter-culture (33), from drugs (35) and from the gushing personality of the interviewer in particular.

¹¹ For example: Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter-Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Roszak's essay ('The Dialectics of Liberation: Herbert Marcuse and Norman Brown' pp. 84-123) on Marcuse and Brown is limited most of all by his attention to Marxism. Indeed, it becomes an essay on Marx rather than on Marcuse and Brown. See also, Paul Robinson, *The Freudian Left: Wilhelm Reich, Geza Roheim and Herbert Marcuse* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1990). Hereafter referred to as *FL* in the text. Though Robinson is sensitive to Marcuse's Hegelianism and the trajectory of it in his later work, he still attributes *Eros and Civilization* to Marxism (p. 201).

German ever escapes Hegel; a German Marxist is suspect of saying Marx when he means Hegel;¹² adding only that when Marcuse speaks of Marx *or* Freud he is really speaking of Hegel. Looking at Marcuse's trajectory, it is apparent that his touchstone remains Classical German philosophy, and that he uses whatever discipline is modish to express that position. In the late 1920s, it is phenomenology; in the 1930s, after the re-discovery of the '1844 Manuscripts' it is Marx; and in the 1950s, with the failure of Marxism to posit the revolutionary subject, it is psychoanalysis. They are his ciphers for an unfashionable mode of thought as well as the corollary of his omnivorous, though as will be shown, ultimately negative, dialectics.

The second consideration is that neither Marcuse nor Brown wanted to be 'right' in any conventionally accepted sense of the term. In the preface to *Life Against Death*, Brown quite clearly states:

Eccentricity is unlikely to be 'right'; but neither is this book trying to be 'right.' It is trying merely to introduce some new possibilities and new problems into the public consciousness. Hence the style of the book: paradox is not diluted with the rhetoric of sober qualification. I have not hesitated to pursue new ideas to their ultimate 'mad' consequences, knowing that Freud too seemed mad.¹³

Brown is, of course, disingenuous here. There is, to the modern eye at least, and despite his preference for conclusion over argument, a substantial amount of sober qualification in *Life Against Death*, which proceeds in always tolerable, occasionally brilliant, academic prose, its arguments supported where necessary. This is not to say that Brown's conclusions are not extreme and often paradoxical, as we shall see. Marcuse's work is equally

¹² Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), p. 153.

¹³ Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, 2nd edn., (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), p. xx. Hereafter referred to as *LAD* in the text.

determined not to conform—he insists that the very process of philosophy is non-conformity. In *Reason and Revolution* ‘the struggle against common sense is the beginning of speculative thinking, and the loss of everyday security is the origin of philosophy’ (RR: 48), and ‘Knowledge begins when philosophy destroys the experience of daily life’ (RR: 103); but, of course, without leaving the everyday behind. (Both of these ideas are familiar from the preceding reading of Emerson and may be considered romantic tropes.) What arises from this is that the *hopes* of Marcuse and Brown (the ‘hopes of humanity [that] stand against the prevailing reality principle’ (EC: 105) and ‘hoping all things according to St. Paul’ (LAD: 84)) are not attached to any gradual reform of extant society, but on the dream of an epochal or eschatological revolution in sensibility. Nevertheless, as good Freudians, they both know that *dreams* are very real.

It is the limited reach of the word ‘hope,’ however, rather than ‘dream’ that firmly locates them within my restricted sense of utopia. That is, a place of thought rather than of action. There was, certainly at the time of writing their books in the 1950s, little but hope for such ideas. The left had waned since Wallace’s campaign in 1948, exacerbated by the subsequent paranoia of the Red Scares. Though the intensity of the cold war might have diminished by the time the books were published, they were nevertheless composed in a difficult decade. As Joel Whitebook has observed, the timing of *Eros and Civilization*, and by extension *Life Against Death*, ‘is one of the instances of the not uncommon connection between utopian speculation and political despair.’¹⁴ Indeed, it says something about the speculative integrity of these works that the darker the issues investigated, right down to the primal urge to die, the more they see it as a nega-

¹⁴ Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory*, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996), p. 24-25. Hereafter referred to as *PU* in the text.

tion of contemporary existential conditions—and thus as an affirmation of what could be. ‘Nature—or history,’ writes Brown in terms I will explore in detail, ‘is not setting us a goal without endowing us with the equipment to reach it’ (*LAD*: 36), and Marcuse concurs: ‘negativity...remains the source and the motive power of the [dialectical] movement. Every failure and set back...possesses its proper good and its proper truth. Every conflict implies its own solution’ (*RR*: 92-93). In this, they recall an important fragment from Friedrich Hölderlin’s ‘Patmos’ (c. 1800) (lines for which Heidegger expresses great fondness): ‘But where the danger threatens/That which saves from it also grows.’¹⁵ The influence of the romantic idea that utopia emerges from dissatisfaction, that hope is intimate with despair, is preserved in the writings of Marcuse and Brown.

In many respects, then, *Eros and Civilization* and *Life Against Death* share parallel means and ends. Paramount amongst these is the positioning of psychoanalysis as the keystone to modern thought: it can gather and support intellectual pursuits divided by the disciplinary practices of the contemporary university; it can mediate between the social and the individual; and it has, ultimately, located the missing source of happiness in civilization. This bringing together of the micro and the macro, the political and the psychological, the poetic and the philosophical, the soul and the body, occurs to a greater or lesser extent in both their prefaces. Marcuse writes: ‘This essay employs psychological categories because they have become political categories,’ and ‘Psychological problems therefore turn into political problems: private disorder reflects more directly than before the disorder of the whole, and the cure of personal disorder depends more directly than before on the cure of the general disorder’ (*EC*: xi). Brown recognises

¹⁵ Friedrich Hölderlin (trans. Michael Hamburger), *Poems and Fragments* (London: Anvil, 1994), pp. 483, 499.

‘psychoanalysis as the missing link between a variety of movements in modern thought—in poetry, in politics, in philosophy—all of them profoundly critical of the inhuman character of modern civilization, all of them unwilling to abandon hope of better things’ (*LAD*: xx). In this, they confirm their contemporary peer Philip Rieff’s point that the true analyst is not a doctor but an interpreter of culture:

Freud’s physician was to be a student of history, religion and the arts. Subjects having no connection with medicine, and which never enter the physician’s practice, such as ‘history of civilization, mythology, the psychology of religion, and literature,’ were to be storehouses from which the psychoanalyst could borrow select pieces of truth in defining symptoms. *The first and permanent Freudian task was not empirical research but interpretative rearrangement of the intricate jumble of data accumulated by the cultural sciences.* (Emphasis added)¹⁶

As Rieff observes, Freud did not want analysts necessarily to be MDs, a point on which the Psychoanalytic Association vetoed him. For Rieff, as for Brown and Marcuse, psychoanalysis is primarily a *cultural* hermeneutic. Also, for these three figures Freud is a negative or critical spirit, someone whose thought stands against the prevailing idea of reality even whilst explaining it. Even so, as a parallel contribution to the understanding of Freud in America, Rieff’s *Freud: The Mind of the Moralizer* (1960) stands opposed to the radical interpretations of psychoanalysis by Brown and Marcuse on many points.

For example, Rieff does not believe in the continued significance of the romantic dialectic of hope and despair that is at the very core of their utopianism. Though he is well aware of the romantic heritage of psychoanalysis, his own reading aims rather at explaining the contemporary nihilism of ‘psychological man’ who has symptoms rather than beliefs. It is apparent that Rieff here follows the Nietzschean edict that philosophy

¹⁶ Philip Rieff, *Freud, the Mind of a Moralizer* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1960), p. 301. Hereafter referred to as *FMM* in the text.

should become psychology.¹⁷ Thus, Rieff refuses to find in Freud the consolations provided by religion and philosophy—which are at the core of Brown’s reading and attendant upon Marcuse’s revolutionary Hegelianism. He is determined, rather, to probe the conditions of nihilism not to seek its overcoming. In this he is the ‘objective’ (though undoubtedly Nietzschean) sociologist. Nevertheless, there is in his reading of Freud as an un-programmatic moralist, the cold comfort—a kind of consolation—for the loss of faith in modernity, for the dissipation of cohesive cultural forms, for the death of god and for the end of the family: the knowledge that our ‘darkness’ is inevitable. Also, because Rieff’s Freud is the cultural conservative not the instinctual radical, he follows a Hobbesian trend in opposition to the substantively Rousseauvian path of Brown and Marcuse. As such Rieff’s thought does not turn dissatisfaction into hope but merely into toleration (though not apathy). Even so, as I shall show below, Rieff, like Lionel Trilling before him, retains the touch of romanticism in his reading of Freud, a peculiarly American romanticism, perhaps, in the autonomy of the instincts.

The line taken in *Eros and Civilization* and *Life Against Death*, where the mythical and philosophical aspects of Freud are worked through to their radical conclusions, suggests that though Freud’s instinct theory may not cohere within the clinical positivism his metapsychology strove to pioneer, it does cohere within a metaphysical tradition inherited from classical German philosophy and romanticism. It is only with this difficult and often precarious reading of Freud as a philosopher *and* a reading of philosophy through Freud, that Brown and Marcuse can come to many of their conclusions. They take psychoanalysis as a moment in the European philosophical tradition, which, unlike

¹⁷ The direction of this thesis is the opposite: to address the philosophical and romantic origins of psychology, here psychoanalysis.

science, always moves both forwards *and* backwards. That this does a violence to Freud the therapist is indubitable, but that revealing the metaphysical nature of his metapsychology is exciting and important is also indubitable. Thus, despite risk and paradox, these two books strive to unearth Freud's philosophical and mythic substructures—Brown calls it 'the unconscious connection between psychoanalysis and the romantic movement' (*LAD*: 86)—and to bring Freud back from the pessimistic brink, that is, to find the saving power at the heart of his despair.

This gives us the two dominant ways in which Freud is read by both Marcuse and Brown, though with different results. The first way is to read him with Hegel, to bring the philosopher's dialectic of history to bear on Freud's insights, while the second way is to draw out the mythico-poetical foundation of Freud's thought, opening it up to romanticism.¹⁸ Of course, reading Freud with Hegel was *en vogue* in the mid twentieth-century. Roughly simultaneous with their work is that of Jacques Lacan under the influence of Kojève, and in the 1960s, Paul Ricoeur publishes *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*,¹⁹ explicitly engaging with Marcuse. These writers concur that Freud is an appropriate vehicle for philosophical speculation and that Freud is already 'doing' philosophy. Marcuse writes: 'In its most advanced positions, Freud's theory partakes of [a] philosophical dynamic' (*EC*: 124), and Ricoeur argues that: 'Freud's entire work—both the metapsychology and the theory of culture—takes on a very definite philosophical tone' (*FP*: 442). It is his curious position between rationalism and romanticism that, in Whitebook's words, 'sought to do justice to the Other of reason' (*PU*: 8) that gives

¹⁸ This latter way is dealt with at length in the next chapter.

¹⁹ Paul Ricoeur (trans. Denis Savage), *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). Hereafter referred to as *FP* in the text. Given as lectures in 1961 and published in English translation in 1970. I will be drawing on Ricoeur later in this chapter.

Freud his philosophical flavour. It is the middle ground between rationalism and romanticism occupied by much of his more speculative work that ally him, unwittingly, to utopian readings.

II

Freud is quite clear in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that ‘What follows is speculation, often far-fetched speculation’,²⁰ and Ricoeur reminds us that ‘there is an excess of hypothesis compared with [the essay’s] fragmentary and partial verifications’ (*FP*: 282). Freud is following hunches and intuition, flights of fancy into Greek myths and ancient philosophies. Despite the lengthy discourse on the repetition compulsion as seen in migrating animals, and the scientific evidence used to back it up, the essay retains the evocative presence of myth. Perhaps it is the universal and foundational claims made by his drive theory and the Greek names attached to them, Eros and Thanatos. Perhaps it is also the return of fate and necessity, Anankē, to a discourse that has scientific pretensions.²¹ Indeed, as Freud says in his correspondence with Albert Einstein in 1932: ‘But does not

²⁰ Sigmund Freud (trans. and eds. J. Strachey and A. Richards), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991.) p. 243. Hereafter referred to as *BPP* in the text.

²¹ But then, maybe there ought to be no surprise in any of this. For, as Alfred North Whitehead observed in his *Science and the Modern World* (1927): ‘The pilgrim fathers of the scientific imagination as it exists today are the great tragedians of ancient Athens, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides. Their vision of fate, remorseless and indifferent, urging a tragic incident to its inevitable issue, is the vision possessed by science. Fate in Greek Tragedy becomes the order of nature in modern thought.’ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1938), p. 21. So when any science attempts to pursue itself to its own ground, it might well raise the spectre of these pilgrim fathers in whom the idea of determinism is immanent. In this I find it necessary to disagree with Rieff, for whom Freud’s scientific mythology of fate is not tragic but ameliorative, i.e., therapeutic; and is not ‘transcendent,’ i.e., prototypical, but is part of the ‘revolt against transcendence’ (*FMM*: 63, 204). I believe that Rieff’s concern with the contemporaneous in psychoanalysis prevents him from seeing what Freud and Whitehead really mean, that fate and tragedy remain the very prototype of deterministic science.

every science come in the end to a kind of mythology?’²² As further evidence Brown cites Freud’s point that ‘The instincts are mythical beings, superb in their indefiniteness,’ and that Freud goes on to remind us (contradicting Reich) that ‘we cannot for a moment overlook them’ (*LAD*: 66-67). Ricoeur also indicates ‘the quasi-mythological nature of this metabiology’ (*FP*: 312). The instincts then, are mythical, occupying the space between the known and the unknown, the psychic and the somatic; and as a quest of origins, Freud’s drive theory belongs in this ‘romantic’²³ no-place.

How Freud came to his late theory of instincts, as it is set out in *Beyond the Pleasure-principle, The Ego and the Id* (1923)²⁴ and *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930),²⁵ is well known. I shall restrict myself to the barest definitions. In *The Ego and the Id* Freud defines Eros as an energy that ‘by bringing about more and more far-reaching combinations of the particles into which living substance is dispersed, aims at complicating life and at the same time, of course, at preserving it’ (*EI*: 381-382). Freud saw this as a ‘preserving’ instinct, whereas previously Eros has been considered as a force for change. The death instinct, or Thanatos (a term Freud rarely used), strives to bring about the immediate release of tension through death, the return to the inorganic. ‘At this point,’ he writes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

we cannot escape a suspicion that we may have come upon the track of a universal attribute of instincts and perhaps of organic life in general which has not hitherto been clearly recognized or at least not explicitly stressed. *It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of or-

²² Sigmund Freud (trans. and eds. James Strachey and Albert Dickson), ‘Why War?: Letter From Freud’ in *Civilization, Society and Religion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 358.

²³ I discuss Schiller’s theory of *Trieben* in the next chapter.

²⁴ In Sigmund Freud (trans. and eds. J. Strachey and A. Richards), *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991) pp. 339-408. Hereafter referred to as *EI* in the text.

²⁵ In Sigmund Freud (trans. and eds. James Strachey and Albert Dickson), *Civilization, Society and Religion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), pp. 243-340. Hereafter referred to as *CD* in the text.

ganic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life.

(*BPP*: 308-309; Freud's emphasis)

The difficult manoeuvre for Freud is to locate a dualism in the 'hypothesis that all instincts tend toward the restoration of an earlier state of things' (*BPP*: 310). And it is what allows Marcuse's and Brown's theories to appropriate him. If it is conservative to live, to preserve life, and it is conservative to die, to extinguish life, what, then, differentiates Eros from Thanatos? This is where a third term enters, because nature, Anankē, the necessary external forces of sun and earth, interferes with this simple relaxation of organic matter to an inorganic state. The first organic life, Freud hypothesises, would have been so close to its death that its glimmer of life, the tension that arises between it and the external world, would have been barely noticeable. External influences, however, over time obliged these fleeting existences to diverge ever further from their familiar passage to death. Thus Eros emerged as the preserver not of life *per se*, but of a particular route to death, via an intimate and evolving interaction with nature.

This common nature of the instincts is, arguably, a hangover from, or an attempt to rationalise further, Freud's earlier second theory of instincts, the libinidal monism of narcissism. In fact many thinkers, Marcuse and Whitebook for example, choose this point, the 1914 essay 'On Narcissism: An Introduction',²⁶ as the philosophical turning point, or rather *the turning into* philosophy, of Freud's theory. Narcissism is as close as Freud got to abandoning his preference for a dualism and admitting the dominance of a single force or energy from which both the ego and its objects come into being: the libido. The libido, at this stage, is entirely sexual—in Freud's extended sense of the

²⁶ In Sigmund Freud (trans. and eds. J. Strachey and A. Richards), *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991) pp. 59-98. Hereafter referred to as NI in the text.

term—in that it corresponds to the dynamic emergence of the subject's pleasure. In this second instinct theory, the pleasure principle remains the primordial regulator of the subject. The quandary for Freud was how autoerotic or subjective pleasure became objective pleasure, or, rather, how the subject was able to turn outward into the world and confirm itself as an ego among objects. Though, again largely familiar, I want to discuss this in some detail because what Freud suggests is crucial for an understanding of how Marcuse and Brown utilise Hegel in their readings of narcissism.

At its origin, Freud points out, the subject cannot be said to possess an 'ego' that is in any way divided from the world, which is, rather, a monad of autoerotic satisfaction. Something has to disrupt this simple kernel of, Freud assumes, mother or substitute and baby in order to start the ego's formation. This first stage of subjectivity (without a subject) Freud terms primary narcissism. What is important for Marcuse and Brown is that Freud was vague and self-consciously speculative in the answers he provides on the early development of the subject. For it is this point of primary narcissism which forms a nodal point for both their readings of Freud. The evidence for primary narcissism obviously cannot come from direct empirical observation, which for Freud means that it cannot be scientific in the strict sense. Instead it comes from intuitive insight, anthropological studies and the treatment of neurotic patients—it is, in Rieff's sense, a cultural symptom. The conclusions Freud draws run as follows. Firstly, it is suggested that the 'omnipotence of thoughts' (*NI: 67*) in primitive peoples and in children—the connection betrays the prejudice of Freud's time—is a vestige of the primal pleasure of the monad. Belief in magic, an over-estimation of the power of mental acts,

and animism are the symptoms here.²⁷ Secondly, there is the necessity for the subject to recognise that the world does not run according to its desire. That certain ‘feelings’ will always or regularly be present, certain ‘feelings’ will not because they are provided by another, the mother or a substitute. From this perceptible difference, the child’s ego gradually emerges along with the knowledge of objects.²⁸ That which is pleasurable is internalised, that which is unpleasurable is externalised. Libido is apportioned as ego-libido and object-libido respectively. Thus there remains in the child an attachment to things that are, in ‘reality,’ other but which gave pleasure. These are anaclitic (from the Greek ‘to lean on’) attachments, where the sexual instincts ‘lean on’ the ego or self-preservation instincts, and objects subsequently are chosen on the model of those who nourished those ego-instincts, ultimately the breast and mother, but also the father who protects.

But there is another type of object choice, which Freud did not expect to find, and this is narcissistic object-choice, where instead of forming relations through attachment, object-choice is affixed to the subject’s own self. Rather than loving the other as an object, narcissistic object-choice loves the self because it is the object of the other’s love. It strives to ‘identify.’ I think we can say that anaclitic object-choice corresponds to a vestige of primary narcissism, whereas narcissistic object-choice corresponds to secondary narcissism.²⁹ It was secondary narcissism, and its connection with perversion and homosexuality, that concerned Freud. I shall return to this point.

²⁷ For Freud the ontogenic maturation was a parallel miniature of the phylogenic maturation: ‘the animistic phase would correspond to narcissism both chronologically and in its content; the *religious* phase would correspond to the stage of object-choice of which the characteristic is child’s attachment to his parents; while the *scientific* phase would have an exact counterpart in the stage at which an individual has reached maturity, has renounced the pleasure principle, adjusted himself to reality and turned to the external world for the object of his desires.’ Cited in Rieff *FMM*, p. 47.

²⁸ As we shall see, in Chapter 4, Cornelius Castoriadis argues against such a ‘gradualist’ approach.

²⁹ We will see below that Brown takes a revised approach to this problem.

Perhaps the most important and justly famous factor arising from primary narcissism, one cited by both Brown and Marcuse, is in *Civilization and its Discontents* and runs as follows:

originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive—indeed, an all embracing—feeling which corresponds to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it.

(CD: 225)

This intimate bond, which we have already seen in Emerson (and indeed, that is only significant because of its long philosophical pedigree), remains with the subject in a more or less significant manner. It is the famous ‘Oceanic feeling’: the memory of primary narcissism. Freud sees it as the origin of mysticism and associated ‘religious’ experiences.³⁰ For Brown and Marcuse, though in different ways, this oceanic feeling becomes the locus of utopian hope. In their extrapolations from Freud’s drive-theory, this single speculative idea, that there was at some time, even if only briefly, a total immersion in the world prior to the demands of Anankē where the instincts were balanced, is enough to fuel *Eros and Civilization* and *Life Against Death*. For this original unity suggests that something *real* exists before the dominance of Freud’s dualisms, before the reality-principle, and that this state—which Freud recognises as the ego’s dearest wish and deepest fear—can be returned to. To this end, Marcuse and Brown between them employ almost the full weight of the Western philosophical tradition, from Anaximander to Whitehead; but the most important idea is Hegel’s dialectical phenomenology. As

³⁰ Rieff sees this quite rightly as Freud’s dismissal of any such religious feelings as ‘child-like’ or ‘regressive’ (FMM: 266-267). However, as we shall see, this only increases its significance for Brown and Marcuse. The difference is that for Rieff the oceanic feeling displays a dependence on parental figures and is thus a sign of immaturity, whereas for Brown and Marcuse, the oceanic holds on to the *promesse du bonheur*.

Brown writes, psychoanalysis needs ‘instead of an instinctual dualism, an instinctual dialectic’ (*LAD*: 82, 83).

III

Paul Ricoeur is quite clear that when reading Freud ‘a direct Hegelian translation’ is something we ‘may do on our own, at our own risk, but not as interpreters of Freud’ (*FP*: 317). At least one of the implied targets of this warning is Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization*, which as a ‘philosophical inquiry’ into Freud makes extensive use of Hegelian techniques.³¹ For Ricoeur, Hegel and Freud are different ‘continents’ and any reading of one in terms of the other, any colonial aspirations, would have to be viewed as violence, the outcome of which would be a ‘facile but absurd eclecticism’ (*FP*: 461). His own practice is to compare Freud with Hegel, to point to homologies, but not use one to change, improve upon or critique the other. Both Marcuse and Brown, however, see it as an important utopian move to go beyond any hermeneutic exercise, however adroit. They recognise in Freud, despite or perhaps because of its absurdity, the realization—or at least the next stage—of a vital contribution to the possibility of freedom initiated by Hegel’s dialectic of history.

One of the most pertinent and persuasive foundations for Ricoeur’s trepidation is that Freudian theory is ‘analytic’ and results in an ‘economics,’ whereas Hegel’s philosophy is ‘synthetic’ and leads to a ‘dialectic.’ Freud’s analytic of the libido, for example, takes it apart and considers the dynamic between these energies as something like a

³¹ In a significant note Ricoeur writes: ‘This entire chapter [‘Dialectic: Archeology and Teleology’] is an internal discussion or debate with Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, J. C. Flugel, *Man, Morals and Society*; and Philip Rieff, *Freud, the Mind of the Moralist*.’ (*FP*: 4).

hydraulic system of pressures in which effects can be traced back to causes. This establishes an always-finite *exchange* of energies, strictly analogous to the economic prejudices of the nineteenth-century and Freud's model of scarcity (*Anankē*). Ricoeur argues that this tends to solipsism, where intersubjectivity is played down and a figurative map of the individual (systems Cs., Pcs., Ucs., or id, ego, superego) dominates (*FP*: 476).

Synthetic philosophy, on the contrary, tends to bring things together, to expand outwards to the infinite, aligning seeming contradictories—such as other people—into relations of mutual necessity, it is dialectical. It is, however, clear to Ricoeur, that the predilection of Freudian theory for binarisms is always on the verge of a collapse into synthesis. Freud often finds it hard to keep to the two terms he wants (as for example with the conservative nature of the instincts) and occasionally introduces a third mediating term to keep them from dissolving (such as *Anankē*). Ricoeur also stresses that the analytic situation itself is fundamentally synthetic and that transference relies upon intersubjectivity (*FP*: 322). Freud, however, 'expressly states that the discipline he founded is not a synthesis but an analysis—i.e., a process of breaking down into elements and of tracing back to origins—and that psychoanalysis is not to be completed by a psychosynthesis' (*FP*: 460). In spite of such warnings, Marcuse and Brown make of Freudian theory a dialectic. But it is almost certainly because of them that they make their claims far away from the therapeutic field, for Marcuse in philosophy, for Brown in history.

Now, some have argued that Marcuse in particular suffers from being tied to Freud's outdated economic model,³² and on first glance it does seem odd to use an eco-

³² Douglas Kellner, for example, expresses surprise that Marcuse should exploit such an obviously limited bio-mechanical model. He argues that Marcuse is using 'nature' (instincts) to found the revolutionary subject. Whilst this is an appropriate reading, I seek here to stress Marcuse's overcoming of the economic model—and of nature—in the dialectic, and to position Marcuse with Hegel rather than Marx. See Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 162. Also, Anthony Wilden argues that the 'outdated' economic model, borrowed from Fechner, should be

conomic structure for what are substantively synthetic ends. I would argue, however, that it is precisely in his *revision* of this model that Marcuse's Hegelianism comes through. Marcuse does not accept the limitations placed upon the economic model—what Wilden would call its 'closed system'—but rather historicizes it and reveals it to be an open *process*. Take for example Marcuse's use of the ambivalent word *Trieb*, instinct or drive. Freud considered this word to be one of the triumphs of the German language, as it has a flexibility that the standard English translation 'instinct' does not. The German word *Instinkt*, which Freud uses only rarely, has the same connotations as the English instinct in the sense of 'innate' and 'inherited' biological structures. *Trieb*, however, is defined by Freud as 'bodily needs inasmuch as they represent an incentive to mental activity.'³³ It is that crossover from mere bodily or reflexive hungers to the mental, or the reflective—the *creative*—that is crucial in Freud's use of the term, and in Marcuse's appropriation of it.³⁴ The other common English word, 'drive,' is often used interchangeably with instinct. Whilst it has some of the dynamic connotations of *Trieb*, it still does not connect it to mental and creative activity. It is because of these nuances that it is easier to historicise *Trieb* than instinct or even drive. Thus Marcuse can conclude that "Instinct," in accordance with Freud's notion of *Trieb*, refers to the primary "drives" of the human organism which are subject to *historical* modification; they find mental as well as somatic representation' (*EC*: 8; Marcuse's emphasis). So the word instinct is preserved despite

replaced with a systems theory model based on feedback mechanisms and communications theory. Of course, thirty years on, this quasi-structuralist model seems equally moribund. Nevertheless, Wilden's article remains fascinating. Anthony Wilden, 'Marcuse and the Freudian Model: Energy, Information, and Phantasy,' *Salmugundi* (No. 10-11, Fall-Winter 1969-1970), pp. 196-245. Hereafter referred to as MFM in the text.

³³ Freud, cited in the editors' 'Glossary' to Friedrich Schiller (trans. and eds. Elizabeth Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby), *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*, English and German Facing (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982) p. 331. Schiller's more expansive use of *Trieb* will be discussed in the next chapter.

³⁴ It is also important to remember that this 'space' between psyche and soma was where Freud positioned the speculative and mythological basis of his instinct theory.

the argument for other translations. But it is necessary to recall its full range of connotations which cross from the mental to the bodily, because in this revision the instincts break down the distinction between nature and culture. Thus, for Marcuse, an instinct is not a fixed quantum of libidinal energy traversing the subject, but is the direct manifestation of the subject's relationship to nature that emerges from and as history as a dialectical process.³⁵ Instincts are as variable as the historical circumstances in which they are found.

It is also worth observing that Marcuse is only referring to the life and death instincts. Whereas, for Freud, instincts are multiple, and include destructive instincts, instinct to mastery, aggressive instincts, which come and go with the phases of ontogenesis or, like the aggressive or self-preservation instincts, are (earlier) versions of the life and death instincts. Marcuse's sole concern with Eros and Thanatos shows, firstly, that they are the most important because the most fundamental. Secondly, that nothing less than the historical (*Geschichtlich*) mutability of these instincts is what is at stake in the alteration of civilization.

The Hegelian theory that Brown and Marcuse employ is complex and wide ranging and I only want to touch on it selectively here. I follow Marcuse's own reading of the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic* (1812) in his *Hegel's Ontology, Reason and Revolution* and *Eros and Civilization*, and expanding on Brown's less frequent, but equally significant, references to Hegel in *Life Against Death* and elsewhere. What is important is not to exhaust Hegel's system but to explain how parts of it can help a reading of the instinct

³⁵ History, for Marcuse is always *Geschichte* and never *Historie*. *Geschichte*, in Marcuse's Hegelian vocabulary, is derived from *Geschehen*, event, happening, or process. History is something that *occurs*, it is *the* happening of every-thing that is. What I think this means is that history is not something that happened in the past, nor is it something that can be written about, i.e., historiography, but it is, as a cumulative process, the present. This is the subject of *HO*, and I refer the interested to it for further guidance on this. I return to it briefly in my discussion of memory in Chapter 3.

theory and thus of the books in question. I shall trace how the dialectic emerges from the contradiction between subjects and objects in order to explain the role of the dialectic in the life and death instincts and how this is transformed in an original understanding of narcissism. On the way I shall open up what Marcuse means by 'nature,' 'reason,' 'essence' and 'reality,' contrasting Brown's vision of an eschatology with Marcuse's rational *telos*.

An understanding of the dialectic, as Marcuse reads it, begins with Anankē, here interpreted as the human struggle with nature and the consequent experience of nature as susceptible to domination, mastery and control. Marcuse traces the origin of this thinking to Aristotle, or rather to 'the canonization of Aristotelian logic' (*EC*: 111) and the concept of '*Logos*,' which exemplifies the task of ordering, classifying and mastering according to the dictates of reason. This is also the point where the difference between the reality principle and the pleasure principle becomes philosophically significant. Those faculties and attitudes which resist ordering and classifying, and retain the demands of the pleasure-principle, become considered irrational, dysfunctional, somehow 'lower.' Reason becomes increasingly effective at production and less and less concerned with reception (a key word of Marcuse's aesthetics), and time itself becomes ordered according to the dictates of rational production. Eventually, 'The *Logos* shows forth as the logic of domination. When logic then reduces the units of thought to signs and symbols, the laws of thought have finally become techniques of calculation and manipulation' (*EC*: 111-112).

However, the domination of the reality principle, reified as reason, does not annihilate its other. Marcuse argues that the 'inner history of Western metaphysics' (*EC*: 112) is epitomized by the dynamic of reason and its irrepressible (or *only* repressible)

other. This otherness is the ‘synthetic’ or ‘dialectical’ urge: ‘The restless labor of the transcending subject terminat[ing] in the ultimate unity of subject and object: the idea of “being-in-and-for-itself,” existing in its own fulfillment’ (*EC*: 112). For Aristotle this only existed for God, *nous theos*. God as the pinnacle of the hierarchy of being could not be the object for a subject or the subject for an object. The *nous theos* always returns to itself in otherness—it is the moment of pure thought ‘thinking’ itself, the circle of being returning to its own origin in fulfillment. This should be reminiscent of Eros’s role after primary narcissism, the desire for a primal synthesis sustained in unity and growth. It is, Marcuse argues, this initial Aristotelian conception that is retained by the subsequent philosophical attempts to think through the problem of subject and object in terms of fulfillment. The most significant of these attempts is Hegel’s (though, as we shall see in the next chapter, it owes much to problems raised by Kant in particular).

Marcuse reads the *Phenomenology* as the beginning of Hegel’s systematic attempt to reconcile the two positions just outlined, firstly, the otherness of ‘nature’ as Anankē, secondly, the god-like notion of thought thinking itself. In Hegel, reason (*Vernunft*)—a modern interpretation of *logos* via the Latin ‘*ratio*’—becomes interpreted dialectically. Rather than asserting the dominance of a subject over an object, reason is the way in which the philosopher can understand the *interconnected* and reciprocal relationship between the subject and nature (as the world of objects) in a rational process which unfolds as (not *in*) history. The subject comes to know itself by knowing the world it makes, like Aristotle’s god. Marcuse writes: ‘This rationality is made possible through the subject’s entering into the very content of nature and history. The objective reality is thus also the realization of the subject’ (*RR*: 8). Unlike the canonized interpretations of Aristotle, objects are not treated as substances that can be analysed into elements and

categorised (ultimately exploited), but they actually *emerge into their being along with the process of subjectivity*.

This is captured, Marcuse argues, by Hegel's expression 'substance is subject.' which 'conceives reality as a process wherein all being is the unification of contradictory forces. "Subject" denotes not only the epistemological ego or consciousness, but a mode of existence, to wit, that of a self-developing unity in an antagonistic process' (RR: 8). A 'subject' is a mode of being which sustains itself in the face of contradiction. Thus, it is not a substance that *persists* throughout its changes (e.g., *eidōs*); it is that which *changes* throughout its persistence. This does not belong merely to human subjectivity—hence the phrase *substance is subject*—but to all beings. To use the familiar example, the flower *is* the contradiction of the bud, the seed of the flower, and the plant's life consists in the development of these contradictions, it 'unfolds' in them. However, there is no underlying form to which the plant obtains. Moreover, a plant remains unable to comprehend its life-process *actively*, a capacity that belongs solely to the self-realizing power of human consciousness, that is, to reason. As Marcuse puts it: 'the highest form of development is reached only when self-consciousness exercises mastery over the whole process. The life of the thinking subject is the only one that may be called self-realization in the strict sense' (RR: 238)

Reason, Hegel argues, is not something abstract (that is, 'removed'; abstract in the sense of something 'taken out'); it emerges as the telos of the movement of history on its ineluctable route to the realization of human freedom. History which operates to this end in spite of itself (the so-called 'cunning of reason'); for Marcuse, though, as we shall see, this route to freedom is not so self-evident. Though reason may only be described metaphysically, it is not in itself metaphysical, but is the process of a subject to-

wards its reality, by which Hegel means, its freedom. In the first instance it agrees with the role accorded to it by the Aristotelians, to shape nature through knowledge of it, and thus to master it and to release the subject from its bondage to *Anankē*. The difference here is that the subject, nature and history all emerge through the same process: as such, *Anankē* is historical. As Marcuse explains it in his essay on Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*: 'Man is not *in* nature; nature is not the *external* world into which he first has to come out of his own inwardness. Man *is* nature. Nature is his "expression," "his work and his reality."³⁶ The power to shape reality emerges along with that reality itself—otherwise it would not be open to change—"world history" is "the emergence of nature for man" (*SCP*: 24).³⁷ Thus:

Subject and object are not sundered by an impassable gulf, because the object is in itself a kind of subject and because all types of being culminate in the free 'comprehensive' subject who is able to realize reason. Nature thus becomes a medium for the development of freedom.

(RR: 9-10)

What is generally called objective reality, in Freudian terms that which sustains the reality-testing of the reality-principle—which is, of course, a tautology—is not, for Hegel, something over against the subject, or that in the last analysis escapes it (as it does for Freud and Kant), but is necessarily a part of the subjectivity that perceives it,

³⁶ 'The Foundations of Historical Materialism' (1932) pp. 1-48 in Herbert Marcuse (trans. Joris De Bres), *Studies in Critical Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 17; Marcuse's emphasis. Hereafter referred to as *SCP* in the text. The citations are from Marx's reading of Hegel. As will be shown, though, 'work' drops out of Marcuse's conception in *EC*. Or, in *HO*: 'Only human existence and all the objects formed, created and animated by *Dasein* [Heidegger's term from human *being*] in its existence, are historical according to their being' (cited in *MHH*: 185).

³⁷ In *Hegel's Ontology* Marcuse expresses it thus: "The world," the given manifold of beings is not an object (*Gegenstand*) of the human I; it is not something which stands over against it (*entgegen-stehendes*) in some ontologically appropriate form. The world "belongs" quite fundamentally to the being of the I. For it is the negativity through which the I can first be positivity; for it is the manifold through whose synthesis the I can first come *to be*' (*HO*: 36).

adapts it and overcomes it or succumbs to it. Subjectivity is this very *process* of overcoming and succumbing.

Every subject must come to understand the world—hence the importance of the philosopher and of philosophy as the basis of science for Hegel—in order to comprehend its essence and to bring it in line with *human* essence, which is the comprehension and realization of freedom. Hegel calls this the appropriation of the object’s ‘universality.’ Each new piece of knowledge about the world’s phenomena is gathered into the increasing authority of the subject and adds to her mastery. This is the movement from what is merely actual, that is phenomena as they exist under conditions of error (common-sense, *mere* appearance: *Schein*), to what is real, that is phenomena as they are brought under the dominance of reason (mediated appearance, *Erscheinung*), under which conditions the subject is ‘free’ because he or she has Absolute knowledge, is familiar with each particular in its universality. For Marcuse it is the movement of consciousness in the gathering of knowledge—its negativity—that is key, not the *telos* itself. On his terms, the Absolute is not the *telos*, but the *process* of historical becoming (see *HO*: 305-318; *MHH*: 192). As an historical phenomenon, this is what Hegel calls *Geist*, spirit.

In Marcuse’s reading, spirit, like reason, is not abstract, but is what emerges as the concrete (that is, the aggregate totality) of the self-movement of subjectivity toward the knowledge demanded by the *telos* of freedom: Absolute Spirit. Again, it is crucial to understand that for Marcuse, the movement [*Bewegtheit*] is more important than the end. Marcuse is quite clear that Hegel’s work should not be taken as an obtuse metaphysics (difficult, yes, obtuse no). Earlier stages of knowledge, usually called ‘common sense,’ or the ‘everyday,’ are *negated* such that the subject can retain itself against the contradictions of otherness; that is, it can unfold into its essence as freedom. This is an ‘infinite’ proc-

ess whereby every object is the contradiction of every other object, related through their negations of each other in order to persist as themselves. ‘Everything has to be understood in relation to other things, so that these relations become the very being of that thing’ (RR: 68). The condition of consciousness when this is properly recognised, at the end of the *Phenomenology*, emerges as Absolute Spirit.

This process of negation, however, becomes particularly acute when it is not an object that is being negated by a subject but another subject. It is impossible, Hegel argues, for a subject to be content with the dominance, the understanding in their universality, of mere objects. An ego (*Ich*), he argues, can only be satisfied by another ego. In *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse explains it as follows: ‘the ego is first *desire*: it can become conscious to itself only through satisfying itself in and by an “other.” Such satisfaction involves the “negation” of the other, for the ego has to prove itself by truly “being-for-itself” *against* all “otherness”’ (EC: 113). The assertion of the ego’s freedom is always challenged by the freedom of other egos as they attempt to negate each other in order to attain their freedom. Desire³⁸ is what Hegel calls this movement from subject to subject: the need to abolish the other recognisably equivalent self-consciousness in its otherness. ‘[S]elf-consciousness,’ Hegel writes, ‘is *Desire* in general.’³⁹ (It is worth sign-posting here that Brown’s reading of the dialectic based in desire is an interpretation of Hegel, via Freud [narcissism], rather than a decisive break with him. The key to Brown’s reading will be the translation of Hegel’s embattled desire into ‘love.’ See next section.) Thus, the ego has continually to *win* its freedom from the other. The ego will only gain this

³⁸ In Hegel desire is *Begierde*. According to Laplanche and Pontalis, Freud mainly uses *Wunsch*, but sometimes *Begierde* or *Lust*. J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Quadrige PUF, 1997), p. 120.

³⁹ G. W. F. Hegel (trans. A. V. Miller; foreword & analysis J. N. Findlay), *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 105. Hereafter referred to as *PS*.

satisfaction when the other ego, the other self-conscious subject, acknowledges its mastery, that is, makes itself an *object*. This is the familiar scenario of master and slave, the unequal battle of recognition, which for Hegel fuels human history. Moreover, what is key here is that for each stage to be realised, the subject has to risk negation. That is, the master risks his or her life in order to subdue the slave; the slave risks his or her life in order to overcome the master. Only through this process of risking life can the position of *universal* recognition—equality—arise, as Hegel thought it had in the decisive revolutionary ‘spirit’ of his own time.

These two *movements*, then, the first the domination of objects, the second the struggle for mutual recognition, are what comprises *dialectic*. It is not the merely logical dissolution of pairs into a third term (thesis, antithesis, synthesis). Dialectic is the *real* overcoming (sublation, *Aufhebung*) of contradictions that imperil the stability of subjects as substance, and, moreover, it is the historical spirit (*Geist*) of this self-movement (*Bewegtheit*).

How, and in what sense, then, are Eros and Thanatos dialectically engaged? Neither Marcuse nor Brown make this explicit but as I have come to understand it, they are meaningfully dialectical as part of the ongoing conflict between essence and existence that is at the root of Hegel’s thought, and continues through into Marxism. To put it simply, there exists a contradiction between what humans *are*, their essence, and how they *live*, their existence. We have just already seen this, briefly, in the dialectic of master and slave. It maps onto the instincts in a complex manner. They are engaged in such a way that instinctual struggle belongs to our essence whereas the reality principle and the pleasure principle belong to our existence. And it is how the instincts are *mani-*

fested in the pleasure principle *and* the reality-principle, how essence manifests as existence, in its contradictory forms of life and death, that is at stake.

It is important, particularly under prevailing intellectual conditions, to understand just what is meant by a word like ‘essence’, which has come to stand for a variety of reactionary postures. Essence is not the expression of something’s immutable ‘biological operation’ or its reified ‘status’ or ‘race,’ and it does not belong to ‘essentialism’—though unfortunately it can be interpreted as such. The essence of something is *not* how it exists; the essence of something is the *contradiction* of its existence. To follow the German, *Wesen* or essence, derives from the past participle of the verb ‘to be,’ *Gewesen* or ‘it was’. For both Hegel and Marcuse this describes how essence is historical: that which *is* now *has come to be* or ‘that which being (always already) was’ (*HO*: 69; *MHH*: 191-192).⁴⁰ The trouble with so-called common-sense, Hegel argues, is that it mistakes existence, the misunderstood phenomena (*Schein*), for essence, the actualizing of something’s—a being’s—potentiality. This difference or contradiction is the ‘genuine dialectical’ movement of all being, as Marcuse puts it: ‘the necessary prelude to its reality’ (*RR*: 66). ‘When something turns into its opposite, Hegel says, when it contradicts itself, it expresses its essence.... The contradiction is the actual motor of the process’ (*RR*: 148-149). This process (*Geschehen*) is history (*Geschichte*).

Now, as Marcuse observes in his essay on Marx, ‘Essence and existence *separate* in [man]: his existence is a “means” to the realization of his essence, or—in estrangement—his essence is a means to his mere physical existence’ (*SCP*: 29). There is, as with all beings, a gap between essence and existence; the difference with humans is that this

⁴⁰ See also Marcuse’s 1936 essay, ‘The Concept of Essence,’ *Negations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 43-88, especially pp. 67-69. Hereafter referred to as *Neg* in the text.

gap becomes ossified. In animals or plants, the distinction between essence and existence is ongoing, but they never rest content, they do not *adapt* to their factual condition if it means contradicting their ‘essence.’ Humans, though, because of the dialectic of self-consciousness, can actually mistake their existence for their essence. It is the task of philosophy—for Marx, it is the task of revolutionary praxis (remembering ‘Thesis Eleven’)—to educate people as to their essence: freedom. As Marcuse puts it, again in the Marx essay, ‘It is precisely this unerring contemplation of the essence of man that becomes the inexorable impulse for the initiation of radical revolution’ (*SCP*: 29). The disjunction between existence and essence as expressed in Hegel and Marx, then, is another way of registering romantic discontent. Possibly amongst the last ways achieved, as the distinction has since been set aside by Heideggerian phenomenology, where existence and essence are the same thing, and by Sartrean existentialism,⁴¹ where existence *precedes* essence. The problem has been changed to one of living an ‘authentic life.’⁴²

Under the present ‘performance-principle,’ Marcuse’s term for the current historical form of the reality-principle, which is in *excess* of repression demanded by scarcity, ‘The human existence in this world is mere stuff, matter, material, which does not have the principle of its movement in itself’ (*EC*: 104). This condensed expression of Marcuse’s Hegelianism confirms that existence is out of kilter with essence and this forms the state of alienation to which we have adjusted our existential conditions. The

⁴¹ See Marcuse’s ‘Sartre’s Existentialism,’ *SCP*, pp. 157-190.

⁴² One redoubtable critic of this change is Theodor Wiesengrund-Adorno. See, for example *Negative Dialectics*, where he blames Nietzsche’s suppression of essence for the dominance of positivism—what we are left with is *mere* existence which offers no ‘negative’ point of critique. Theodor Adorno (trans. E. B. Ashton), *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1973), pp. 169-170; see also pp. 122-124. Marcuse deals with this briefly and polemically in his 1934 essay ‘The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State,’ *Neg*: 3-42, especially pp. 31-42. See also ‘The Concept on Essence.’

It could be argued that Rieff’s work corresponds to just such a positivism; in particular the rejection of the dialectic of hope and despair, leaving a position without critique.

relation to the world that would better express historical human being (Geist) has become attenuated. However, in a remarkable post-Marxist gesture, Marcuse argues that technology, the current and damning state of the performance/reality-principle, contains both the principle of this ossification and the solution. He states that not only are the conditions of scarcity enforced by Anankē met,⁴³ but that the very idea of labour is no longer a significant part of human existence. It is no longer, as it was for Marx, a key to human essence.

The ideology of scarcity, or the productivity of toil, domination, and renunciation, is dislodged from its instinctual [i.e., Freud] as well as rational [i.e., Hegel and Marx] grounds. The theory of alienation demonstrated the fact that man does not realise himself in his labor, that his life has become an instrument of labor, that his work and its products have assumed a form and a power independent of him as an individual. *But the liberation from this state seems to require, not the arrest of alienation, but its consummation, not the reactivation of the repressed and productive personality but its abolition.* The elimination of human potentialities from the world of (alienated) labour creates the preconditions for the elimination of labor from the world of human potentialities.

(EC: 105; emphasis added)

Labour is no longer a ‘human’ issue, no longer an issue for human essences. The ‘productive personality’—Marx’s revolutionary subject—is abolished, negated by the *affirmation* of its own alienation. The division of labor has proceeded so far that we are divided *from* labour. This is one of the most striking conclusions of *Eros and Civilization* and what can be understood from it is that the alienation of ‘man’ from ‘his’ labour is the very

⁴³ This is obviously a contentious claim. I am not going to gainsay it here as my interest is with Marcuse’s romantic utopian trajectory rather than anything empirical. For more see, for example, *PU*, pp. 25ff; and for a sideways sneer at Marcuse see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marcuse* (London: Glasgow, 1970), pp. 46-47. For a broader and more economically informed reading of the empirical details, with relevant graphs and analysis, see John Fry, *Marcuse—Dilemma and Liberation: A Critical Analysis* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1974), specifically chapters 4 and 5, ‘Further considerations of the Fundamental Economic Propositions and Implications,’ ‘The Critique of the Fundamental Social and Political Propositions and Implications,’ pp. 68-146 and *passim*.

condition of his potential freedom. Subjects are alienated from labour because toil is no longer *necessary*. The expansion of *technē* is so far advanced that it has achieved a kind of independent control of Anankē.⁴⁴ What is at stake here, then, is the significance of Marcuse's assumption that scarcity only exists because it is *organised* to protect the interests of 'a particular group or individual in order to sustain and advance itself in a privileged position' (*EC*: 36). This state of organisation, the performance-principle, acts over and above the rethought problem of Anankē, and exacts from particular social groups more than is required by the modified idea of the reality-principle—that is, surplus repression (the debt to Marxism is apparent here). In *Eros and Civilization*, with the reality-principle corrected and thus with surplus-repression obviated, it becomes possible for the pleasure-principle to become the principle of civilization. The differential, which comprises repression, is reduced to a point where it is able to support 'pleasure' or instinctual expression as a viable existential choice. Ultimately, what replaces the dialectic of labour in Hegel and Marx is the new dialectic of the instincts, of love and of death, which I have begun to describe here. History, the repressive outcome of the dialectic and impetus for its continuance, is fuelled by the contradiction between Eros and Thanatos. Thus, Marcuse does not just revise Freud, but also Marx.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ I should note that Marcuse takes a more Heideggerian position on technology in his later writings. In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), for example, he is concerned that our very response to nature is already conditioned by an *a priori* technological way of Being which disempowers the subject from recognising her own part in the creation of that technology, and thus the possibility of mutual transformation. Rather than being a way of reconciling subject and object, technology has become predicated on *production* which circumscribes the world, objectifying it as raw material. Nature disappears behind technology rather than being disclosed by it. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 153ff. Cf. Robinson, *FL*: 236.

⁴⁵ Whether this is a radical critique of Marx, or rather an acceptance of the consummation of communism, would depend on the position taken with regard to an ontology based on labour. Most Marxists would be less than sanguine about giving it up.

From these points, the contradiction between essence and existence, the obviation of surplus repression, the refutation of labour as necessary to human essence and the existential possibility of pleasure, emerge further clues to the role of instincts in a dialectic. Firstly, the fact that humans have a tendency to adapt to their existences, rather than to their essences. Secondly, that this occurs when priority is yielded to the *Zweckerationalität* of the reality-(performance-)principle: the domination of nature under the rubric of production, beneath which a limited pleasure principle is all but quashed. Thirdly, that this crisis reveals the very paradigm on which freedom could be based: *technē*. In the Hegelian sense, we are misled by common-sense away from reason. But in this Freudian sense, we are misled by the reality-principle away from instinctual ‘truths’, which would be better served by the existential choice of the pleasure-principle—which on this point, as a negating force, equates directly with reason.

It is an interesting aside to notice here a resonance with the American trend in the comprehension of the instincts, where both Lionel Trilling and Philip Rieff take an almost Emersonian stance on the role of ameliorative and oppositional role of ‘nature’ attributed to the instincts. Considering the instincts, Trilling writes:

Now, Freud may be right or he may be wrong in the place he gives to biology in human fate, but I think we must stop to consider whether this emphasis on biology, correct or incorrect, is not so far from being a reactionary idea that it is actually a liberating idea. It proposes to us that culture is not all-powerful. It suggests that there is a residue of human quality beyond the reach of cultural control, and that this residue of human quality, elemental as it may be, serves to bring culture itself under criticism and keeps it from being absolute.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Lionel Trilling, ‘Freud: Within and Beyond Culture,’ *Beyond Culture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 106.

Rieff echoes this very point, which is primarily a critique of neo-Freudiansim. Freud, he argues, ‘transformed the mechanist notion of impersonal objective forces within the individual; he made these forces, the instincts, the individual’s chief mode of defence against the world, by defining an individual as the agent of his instincts, seeking a means of expression for them’ (*FMM*: 28). In this way, the instincts act over against *culture*. They are, in Trilling’s words, beyond culture. Of course, we have already seen that neither ‘nature’ nor ‘culture’ really has this kind of meaning for Marcuse or for Brown, where they are rather the very process of human becoming, one example of which is the instincts (*Trieben*). Where I think Rieff and Trilling retain their critical force, however, is in the recognition that ‘nature’ is a kind of negating presence within the subject. In a sense they provide an analogous resource to the myth of the frontier thesis, here internalised as a natural ‘virgin land,’ and as such the instincts contradict the ‘cultural’ and civilising demands of the reality principle. They maintain, I would argue, an agonal dialectic to the conventional or common sense conception of reality: they hold onto a promise.

Marcuse’s questioning of the reality-principle raises the problem of just what ‘reality’ could be said to mean within a Hegelian re-reading of Freud. For Hegel reality is not what *is*—the factual conditions to which the reality principle adheres—but what *ought to be*. Like essence, reality is a privative concept; it points to what is not, or at least not yet. We can be sure now, I think, that this trope belongs to romanticism, to romantic dissatisfaction. It is in this way that it opens the space for utopian thinking. The true meaning of reality can be accorded only to that which belongs to reason, for which reason has striven and attained. Hegel calls this the ‘Concept,’ *Begriff*.⁴⁷ Reality is not the

⁴⁷ Often translated as ‘Notion’.

stable world in which we find ourselves—or where, as Emerson points out, we struggle to find ourselves—but ‘a dynamic in which all fixed forms reveal themselves to be mere abstractions’ (RR: 26). Here we find the familiar philosophical dualism between appearance and reality, phenomena and noumena. The difference with Hegel, and why he is important for utopian thought, is that he is convinced that reality *can* be grasped, that it does not elude human reason, in fact, that it *is* human reason. The change is from an insuperable dualism, as in Kant or Freud, to a dialectic. Thus Hegel’s pronouncement ‘the real (*Wirklich*) is the rational.’ What seems at first like a terrible positivist injunction, and has been taken as such,⁴⁸ comes rather to mean something like: the real is that which continues to negate and dissolve all stable perceptions and concepts of objects. The real exists as the *possible*, making its way toward the ‘actual’ to unite with it and thus to ‘become’ in-and-for-itself. In Marcuse’s interpretation, reality, like essence and reason, is a *negative* force which strives to overcome the alienation between subject and object and thus reach a place in thinking where all antagonisms are resolved and Concepts revealed. Hegel calls this ‘the Absolute.’

With this dialectic of existence and essence in mind, let us recall where we left the instincts in section two. Firstly, Freud defined them as fundamentally conservative, drawing their energy from the tension of life that desires to relapse into the entropic simplicity of the inorganic. Thanatos is the instinct to die directly; Eros is the instinct to die the death of the species. In their combat, Freud called it ‘the battle of the Giants’ (FP: 452), Eros can only stay an inevitable fate. In so doing Eros forces the subject to make use of nature and others to protect the path to death laid down for it. Thus Eros

⁴⁸ For a famous attack on the right-wing reading of this aphorism, see Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1976), pp. 5ff.

expands out into the world, joins objects and subjects, and demands of nature its due allotment—death. Yet, Thanatos must be repressed by the institutions Eros creates, but because of its unconscious presence these institutions are stained with its daemonic (Freud's word) force. Freud's late drive-theory emerged in the twentieth-century just in time to be confirmed as the tragic destiny of civilization. How do the positions offered by Brown and Marcuse refute Freud's pessimism and in what way does Hegel give steel to their utopian visions?

Marcuse begins by associating the death instinct not with dying *per se*, but with the regressive requirement to dissipate tension, that is, with the Nirvana principle (*EC*: 29). Because he makes this qualification, anything that releases tension, say the overcoming of Anankē through technology, could help to modify this instinct, which, ultimately is *historical* (*Geschichtlich*) not *eternal*. Now, though this reading of death as a negative force in the Hegelian sense rather than in the mortal sense does tie in to Freudian theory, it is a major revision of it. Freud does not admit that the 'immortal adversar[ies]' (*CD*: 340) of life and death are historically variable in the way that Marcuse is proposing. Yet, if as he suggests, both death and life come together in the pleasure-principle, it would be theoretically defensible to argue that anything that makes existence more pleasurable, such as the reduction in instinctual renunciation necessitated by labour, would also mean that less instinctual energy is diverted toward destruction, consequently, bringing about a reduction in repression. So, just as the pleasure-principle can become a viable existential choice if surplus-repression is extinguished from the per-

formance-principle, Eros and Thanatos will also become expressible, by returning to what Marcuse sees as their unified source: the quiescence of tension.⁴⁹

If, as it seems, there is nothing in Freud's theory that completely agrees with Marcuse that Death will not strike, earlier than is appropriate, at life, at least Marcuse finds an ally in Ricoeur. He also argues that: 'The death instinct turns out to be the most striking illustration of the constancy principle, of which the pleasure principle is always regarded as a mere psychological double' and concludes that 'the death instinct, introduced precisely in order to account for the instinctual character of the compulsion to repeat, is not beyond the pleasure principle, but is somehow identical with it' (*FP*: 319). Such a revision of the pleasure principle, to ally it with death, reveals the problem at the heart of Freud's essay. What needs to be recognized, and I think the implications of this are in *Eros and Civilization*, is that it is Eros, the synthetic principle, not Thanatos, that is *beyond* the pleasure-principle. And it is this re-theorising of Eros via narcissism that, as we shall see in the next section, results from a dialectic of the instincts.

This is a complicated point that relies on Freud's later topography and an overcoming of some of the differences between the ego and the id. The ego, Freud argues, is synthetic, and has a tendency to "harmonize," "reconcile," "organize" the conflicts and divisions in mental life' (*LAD*: 84). This synthetic capacity is attributable, ulti-

⁴⁹ The search for a 'unified source' at the origin of history (Being) is one of the main thematics of *HO*. Marcuse begins that book following Hegel's contention that philosophy begins with the fall into division (*Entzweiung*), from which all the dualities, subject/object, understanding/sensibility, mind/body, spirit/matter, etc, arise. Marcuse attempts to trace all these back to the division caused by the thinking subject which divides itself (from Being) in the act of positing an object and which only returns to unity in Hegel's 'Reason.' Indeed, it is apparent—and I shall go some way to showing it below—that the quest for a unity at the basis of instincts in *EC* is parallel to Marcuse's quest for the common origin of understanding and sensibility in that earlier book. I shall return to this in the next chapter. Cf. note to Schiller's 'Eighteenth Letter' in *Letters*: 127.

Curiously, Robinson, even whilst observing the same Hegelian trajectory in Marcuse, fails to see a dialectic of instincts in *Eros and Civilization*. Indeed, it is on this point that he differentiates Brown and Marcuse, for he does see such a dialectic in Brown (*FL*: 213-214). I hope here to redress Robinson's oversight.

mately, to Eros, the bringer of unity, and the seeker of ever-wider unification. The instinctual task of Eros is the dual legacy of the primary monad and of the need to sustain the route to death immanent in the organism, that is to return to an undifferentiated state. Narcissism, in both its positive and its negative forms, is a way of maintaining this instinctual injunction. Thus, Brown points out, ‘just as Freud said object-finding was re-finding, we may add that the fusion sought by the ego is re-fusion’ (*LAD*: 84). The ego in its synthetic role is actually dancing to the tune of the id. In ‘finding’ reality, the ego is rather striving to repeat the unity that is sustained in unconscious wishes. Objects and the reality they make up are, actually, responses to an instinctual demand for unity, and reality is not *other* to the instincts, in a privative sense, but is made *manifest* by their actions. There are two ways this can work out. The first is through the logic of domination, and I call this ‘the narcissism of the understanding.’ The second instance is through an originary co-belonging, I call this and ‘erotic’ or ‘ecstatic narcissism.’ I will say more on this shortly.

IV

Brown also assumes, following clues in Freud’s theory of childhood, that the instincts can be appeased and a state of nature can be reached. Of course, we must see this through the dialectical reformulation of the word ‘nature.’ Nature is not *other* to the ‘human’, it *is* how and what the human becomes. Thus nature is not *in the past*, say a Rousseauvian primitivism, but is the emergence of the present uncontaminated by the past, freed from the neurosis of history. For Freud there is an insuperable gap between the ‘natural’ or the ‘instinctual’ and the benefits of civilization. For Brown and Marcuse,

reading Freud through Hegel and the young Marx, nature exists as the possible expression of human essence as instinct (*Trieb*), but also as the possible negation of that essence. Brown's route to this, and it is echoed in Marcuse's theory of memory that I shall look at in the next chapter, is to consider time and finitude under the heading 'Death, Time, Eternity.'

For Brown, in contrast to Marcuse and Ricoeur, the unification of life and death does not just present a new concept of man, but also of history.

The reunification of Life and Death—accepting for the moment Freud's equation of Death and Nirvana—can be envisioned only as *the end of the historical process*. Freud's pessimism, his preference for dualism rather than dialectics, and his failure to develop a historical eschatology are all of a piece. To see how man separated from nature, and separated out the instincts, is to see history as neurosis; and also to see history, as neurosis, pressing restlessly and unconsciously toward the *abolition of history* and the attainment of a state of rest which is also a reunification with nature. It comes to the same thing to say that the consequence of the disruption of the unity of Life and Death in man is to make man the historical animal.

(*LAD*: 91; emphasis added)

Marcuse's 'new concept of the person,' brought about by an historical alteration of the instincts under conditions of non-repressive technology and the realignment of the reality and pleasure principles, is replaced here with the vision of an eschatological end of history, the end of time. Neurosis, Brown consistently argues, points to its own cure; history itself is obsessed with its own end—the lingering end that is a state of peace. History, unlike in Marcuse's interpretation of Hegel, is located *against* nature—nature has no history; it just *is*, it does not *become*. The human tragedy is never 'to enjoy instead of paying back old scores and debts, and [never] to enter that state of Being which was the goal of his Becoming' (*LAD*: 19). We can see from this that Brown is presenting a vision almost diametrically opposed to Marcuse for whom it is the technological 'under-

standing' of nature that will allow for human release from instinctual renunciation, and allow life and death to regress to the steady pulse of the pleasure-principle. Brown has no parallel conclusion to this idea of controlling or dominating nature such that nature's demands are excluded altogether. His position is a 'return' to nature. A nature that was only left under conditions of repression, to let *it* overtake humanity and to regain an animal balance with the forces that construct us at the most elemental level, the instincts. This would, in Brown's terms, be the end of time, an eschatological revolution, where, 'again psychoanalysis, carried to its logical conclusion, and transformed into a theory of history, gathers to itself ageless religious aspirations' (*LAD*: 93). By a theory of history, he means a theory of the end of history, as we find in the Bible, as well as in Hegel and Marx. Brown's history 'ends' not with revelation or absolute knowledge or the dictatorship of the proletariat—though in part it is all of those things. His history ends by plunging humanity into the immanence of 'nature.'

There is clear blue water between Brown and Marcuse on this point. Though both see the instincts as fundamentally historical, what they understand by history is not the same. For Marcuse, as we have seen, the process of history (*Geschichte*) itself remains dominant whereas for Brown history becomes merely symptomatic. What I mean by this is that in *Eros and Civilization* the instincts, as mutable, are the product of history and must sublimate the present historical stage defined by technological advancement. Their negative power is 'subterranean' (*EC*: 16) and only emerges in an epiphenomenal repression. In Brown's work, however, technology has no decisive influence, indeed there is no epochal principle at work at all. History only exists because of the hitherto irreconcilability of the instincts—it is the product of those instincts and not vice-versa. Ultimately the difference between Marcuse and Brown depends on whether ontological

precedence is given to history, as Marcuse holds, or to instincts, as Brown holds. Because Brown thinks of history as a symptom—rather than possessed of its own self-movement (*Bewegtheit*), then the decisive change, which makes a reconciliation possible, is not technological advancement, but psychoanalysis itself. History can be ‘cured.’ *Life Against Death* does not presuppose a teleology, say the completion of the Enlightenment project, but an *eschatology*. The reconciliation of instincts is not the product of a particular path, but of the sudden enlightenment put forward by Freud—in the broadest possible sense it is a religious enlightenment not a rationalistic one. This difference on the meaning of history goes some way to explaining the increasing differences between Marcuse and Brown in the controversy over *Love’s Body* that form the basis of Chapter 4.

If Brown is to conclude that Eros is the drive behind history, then he first has to come to terms with its adversary, Thanatos. It is Thanatos’s Avatar, the repetition-compulsion, that keeps civilization tied to time, humanity to its history, which is against nature—a trend we have seen develop from the interpretations of Aristotle. As we have also seen, this yields the neurotic movement of time as the return of the repressed. Life, on its own, as Eros, Brown argues, has no need for historical time. He takes his cue from Freud’s underdeveloped conclusion that there is no time in the id, that there nothing is forgotten and nothing is negated. This is a position that lives on in the recollection of primary narcissism and in the demands of the pleasure principle. Nature, however, he argues, recognises death, but is not made ill by it—though life and death exist at the most basic organic level, they are not in conflict: ‘That is to say there is some sort of dialectical unity’ (*LAD*: 100).

This is ‘*The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*’, which is the subtitle he gives to his book. What must be stressed in this title is the word *meaning*, indicating that this is a

hermeneutic and not a historiographic problem.⁵⁰ It is expressly not writing history from a psychoanalytic point of view, a study in the Oedipal motivations of ‘great individuals’ for example, but an interpretation of the very drives of history using the implications of Freud’s late metapsychology. And, as for Marcuse, this means a conceptual revolution from class-struggle, or master and slave, to a dialectic of instincts. ‘From the psychoanalytical point of view’, Brown argues, ‘unsatisfied and repressed but immortal desires sustain the historical process. History is shaped beyond our conscious will, not by the cunning of reason but by the cunning of desire’ (*LAD*: 16). That this is a Freudian interpretation of Hegel and Marx is confirmed by the following statements: ‘The riddle of history is not in Reason but in desire; not in labour but in love’ and ‘From this point of view, repressed Eros is the energy of history and labour must be seen as sublimated Eros’ (*LAD* 16, 17). Eros is the key to history, but the movement of Eros in ‘man’ is desire, thus, ‘the essence of man consists, not as Descartes maintained, in thinking, but in desiring’ (*LAD*: 7)—I *desire* therefore I am—a complete overturning of the dominance of disembodied ‘mind’ in interpretations of the essence of ‘humanity.’ Indeed, one of the professed claims of *Life Against Death* is to return the soul to the body as embodied *Geist*. It should be apparent, then, from these statements why Brown believes a psychoanalytical theory of history is necessary. Because the force that moves

⁵⁰ Thus I disagree totally with Robinson’s assertion that ‘[Brown] was unable to account for the historical rise of repressive civilization (the subtitle of *Life Against Death*, ‘The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History,’ was both pompous and misleading), and equally incapable of envisioning any historical escape from the dilemma of modern unhappiness.’ *FL*: 233. Brown was not trying to make a historiographic point but rather a hermeneutic one.

There is also an argument about Brown’s response to history carried in *Dissent* in the late 1960s. The opening salvo is Lionel Abel’s ‘Important Nonsense’ (March-April, 1968, pp. 147-157) which accuses Brown of having an inadequate idea of the anthropological bases of history. The return of fire is by Arthur Efron ‘In Defense of Norman O. Brown’ (September-October, 1968, pp. 451-455), who accuses Abel of misreading Freud and misrepresenting Brown. Abel responds in the same issue (pp. 455-458), and does not recant. Overall, their contretemps adds very little to any reading of Brown, dealing mainly with their own paradigms. The whole argument is warmed over and served up in more detail by Efron in: ‘Philosophy, Criticism, and the Body,’ *Panuch*, 1973, pp. 72-163.

history is not consciousness, not thinking, not even the cunning of reason, but the *unconscious*, which must be understood through its representations which are expressions of repressed instinctual desire.

This is the struggle captured in the title of his book: life against death *is* the psychoanalytical meaning of history. Any kind of positive counter-Enlightenment project, leaning on Freud's instinct theory, which is clearly what both Brown and Marcuse are offering, has to theorise a dialectic in which Eros triumphs, and in which death does not disappear, but is sublated. It must not be death itself that is the problem, because it is never going to go away—Marcuse and Brown are not offering immortality—but rather the way that Western civilisations cope with, or fail to cope with, death; what it means for them and how it structures the lives possible within them. Indeed, for Brown, it is in death that the saving power grows. Both Brown and Marcuse, searching for a widely applicable solution, tend to generalise here. But the conclusion they come up with, something that is apparent in the dominant Western forms of Judeo-Christian thought and in psychoanalysis itself, is that life and death are considered as *separate*—that death, the absoluteness of finitude, is not an *issue* for life, and certainly not for the life of the body. To any view that accepts non-contradiction in definitions this seems absurd, but to dialectical thinking truth only emerges within or as the movement of contradictions: as their sublation. Thus, the truth of life is death and vice-versa, and the outcome of this movement must be a different understanding of what has hitherto been called life and death.

It is not death itself that is the problem, but the human treatment of it as other, as punishment, as something *inhuman* (hence Brown's assessment of psychoanalysis as 'the science of original sin' [*LAD*: 14]). Humans, he argues, repress their death and in

so doing create history as the history of this repression, civilization as neurosis. It is their failure to recognise, at the most basic level, that life and death are, dialectically, the ‘same.’ Freud is, perhaps, suggestive of this conclusion when he argues that the goal of all life is death, but he shies away from the truth as Brown sees it, and retains a dualism. Freud, he points out, aligned his metaphysical principle with the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles’ cosmological division between love (*philia*) and strife (*neikos*). Brown, however, aligns himself with the earlier Greek thinkers, Anaximander, who asserted a primal undifferentiated state, and Heraclitus, who suggested the ‘ultimate unity of opposites, including life and death’ (*LAD*: 83). There is an important distinction between the two positions: one ends in the reinforcement of therapeutic pessimism, despair and division, the other points to reconciliation, which for Brown means hope. If there is a cosmological unity between life and death, then there is no inherent reason why humans should not enjoy it. He uses Hegel to further his point.

In Brown’s reading of Hegel, ‘history’ is what man does with his death.

Dialectics is a dialectic of life against death
 death is a part of life
 Like Freud, Hegel says the goal of all life is death:
 ‘The nature of the finite lies in this, that it dissolves itself
 it must go under
 this is self-contraction in practice, in action...

Hegel, *Phenomenology*: ‘Not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself undefiled by devastation (*Vernichtung*), but the life that suffers death and preserves itself in death is the life of the Spirit. Spirit gains its truth by finding itself in absolute dismemberment (*Zerrissenheit*).’⁵¹

⁵¹ Norman O. Brown, ‘From Politics to Metapolitics,’ in *Caterpillar* (Vol. 1, October, 1967), pp. 62-94, p. 85.

Man, faced with his own death—his own negation—transforms ‘the consciousness of death into a struggle to appropriate the life of another human being at the risk of one’s own life: history as the class struggle (the dialectic of master and slave, in Hegel’s terminology) is based on an extroversion of death’ (*LAD*: 102). We are already familiar with these ideas. What Brown does, even more clearly than the Hegelian Marcuse does (again, perhaps because he is not in his own field), is link this to Freud. Freud has concluded that the will to mastery over nature and other people is also an extroversion of the death instinct—sado-masochism. Freud first thought that people were innately aggressive; only later did he turn this around and, like Hegel, see aggression as a way of protecting the self; Thanatos rebounding off Eros as violence. What Brown adds to this is the notion of the unconscious, and thus he changes death as an absolute into death as an *interpretation* of the death instinct under conditions of its repression.

Hegel needs reformulation in the light of psychoanalytical doctrine of repression and the unconscious. It is not the consciousness of death that is transformed into aggression, but the unconscious death instinct; the unconscious death instinct is that negativity or nothingness which is extroverted into the action of negating nature and other men. Freud himself...derived affirmation from Eros and negation from its instinctual opposite.

(*LAD*: 102-103)

Brown’s point is that the negation of the other—be it nature as an object or another subject—in the process of the extroversion of death is mistaken by consciousness. Eros, which for Hegel demands the *extinction* of otherness, can in fact open itself as the *affirmation* of otherness, in exactly the same way that the subject was affirmative in the phase of primary narcissism. It is in this way, I would say, that for Brown Desire becomes Love. ‘I desire therefore I am’ becomes something like ‘I love therefore *we* are’.

It figures an original and expansive co-belonging.⁵² And, as he says repeatedly, it is only repression that keeps Eros and Thanatos from coming into agreement. And repression is the *sine qua non* of history from which Brown wants to escape in order to return—though not by going backward, but in a messianic sense—to what he calls the ‘Sabbath of Eternity’—the bliss of childhood.

For Brown, as we saw with Marcuse, when Freud uses the word death, he does not mean *death*, but rather the equivocal tripartite matrix of the Nirvana-principle, the repetition compulsion, and sado-masochism. Only the last of these in any way applies to destruction, and all three can be tied to the pleasure principle. At this point I see the same problem facing Brown as faces Marcuse. If the pleasure-principle is actually allied with the death instinct (is its existential expression), then just what is *beyond* the pleasure-principle, and, moreover, how can Eros be thought in order to grow into that space? For it is surely something *beyond* the pleasure principle that is going to bring about the kind of utopian visions they both advocate. The pleasure principle itself, as Freud formulates it, is intimate only with a kind of death. For the pleasure-principle is the advocate of separation, the annihilation of the stimulation brought about by difference and otherness—it is the principle of negation—pleasure is, in this sense, negative. As Brown puts it, ‘Only an unrepressed humanity, strong enough to live-and-die, could let Eros seek union and let death keep separateness’ (*LAD*: 106). As I have already established, in order to make the dialectical reversal, both Brown and Marcuse make use of Freud’s speculative ‘oceanic feeling,’ that moment of undifferentiation when there was pleasure in otherness because it was affirmed in unity. This first stage of childhood equates with Hegel’s last stage of knowledge. It is the circle of being, as we saw with Aristotle’s *nous*

⁵² In Chapter 4 there is a lengthy discussion of what this means.

theos, a going out, an ex-stasis, which returns in an extinction that is an affirmation. It is the standard romantic trope that returns from diremption to unity.

This is the principle of Narcissus so perfectly rendered by Rilke's 1913 poem of that title.

Narcissus perished. From his beauty rose
incessantly the nearness of his being,
like scent of heliotrope that clings and cloy.
But his one avocation was self-seeing.

Whatever left him he loved back again,
he whom the open wind could not contain;
rapt, closed the round of reciprocity,
annulled himself, and could no longer be.⁵³

I do not mean to provide a reading for this poem outside of the context presented here. The Narcissus myth could, of course, be read in terms of the dangers of secondary narcissism,⁵⁴ but Rilke's poem is more relevant, I believe, to the transience of primary narcissism. It begins with a death, but the negation is not of the other, but of the self as ego. Primary narcissism is egoless, or, to put it another way that means the same thing: *everything* is the ego (the image captured in Emerson's epiphany). Hegel argues that the ego emerges as the desire to extinguish the other. The path of Eros is, rather, the extinction of the self, but it is a perishing in which the ego grows—it sees itself everywhere, almost by accident. The word 'avocation,'⁵⁵ which Hamburger chooses, does not

⁵³ Maria Rainer Rilke (trans. Michael Hamburger), *An Unofficial Rilke* (London: Anvil, 1992), p. 43.

⁵⁴ Such a reading is provided in the modern Ted Hughes translation of Ovid where Narcissus mistakes 'the picture of himself on the meniscus/For the stranger who could make him happy' and is a 'Poor misguided boy! What you hope/To lay hold of has no existence./Look away and what you love is nowhere', from 'Echo and Narcissus,' Ted Hughes, *Tales from Ovid* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), pp. 79-80.

⁵⁵ Though I put emphasis on this word, Hamburger's choice is something of a mystery. Avocation suggests something trivial, a hobby or a pastime, whereas the German word *gesetzt* (*ihm aber war gesetzt...*) implies that it was mandatory, from the past participle of *Setzen*, to put something in place. The over all feel of Rilke's line is rather that it is Narcissus's destiny to see himself—perhaps this refers back to the clinging, cloying scent.

contain the compulsive feel of secondary narcissism. And the gravity of Narcissus' modest avocation returns the world to him in an erotic, ever widening, circle which the 'open wind could not contain'. Narcissus' being, then, is not 'annulled' by the death instinct, but by the *life* instinct—Eros is able to return to an undifferentiated state not by killing the ego, but by its infinite expansion into the world. This is the transient state that the rethinking of Eros by Marcuse and Brown hopes to sustain. A movement outward that inverts the Hegelian drive to absolute knowledge.⁵⁶ It is not in the negation and domination of others that Eros thrives and stills Thanatos, but in the *affirmation of otherness*. A Narcissism of pure self-reflection allies itself only to death, a narcissism that obliterates the self allies itself to life. Life, Eros, is beyond the pleasure principle because, in welcoming difference it tolerates—maybe even thrives on—tension, a tension that is untainted by threat. This tension is described by Wilden as 'negative entropy,' or 'emergent evolution,' the negation of the entropy of the death instinct as the Nirvana principle. It is the force provided by an open system (an unrestricted economy) 'the constant tendency to higher and higher levels of organization—which implies a very high order of *morphogenesis*: the ability to elaborate and change structure' (MFM: 211). It preserves what he calls a 'gradient' that refuses the homeostasis of entropic forms. It is the higher organisational principle of, particularly social, life.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ As we shall see below, this inversion is arguably implicit in Hegel himself.

⁵⁷ On this point Wilden actually positions himself against Brown: 'Eros is an affirmative, gradient producing, differentiating principle. But as that which seeks the *identification* of self with other, under the commands of the Other, [(as that which Norman O. Brown sees as the great unifying principle, being-one-with-the-world uniting the notions of narcissism and object choice), Eros is the principle of *negation* of difference, the reduction of gradient; it is entropic in itself' (MFM: 237). In this I believe he has misread the dialectical nature of Brown's thought.

In Chapter 4 I shall try to show that this principle of expansion is fundamental to the imagination and to creativity.

I can now begin to explain what I meant by the narcissism of the understanding and its other, referred to at the end of the last section. Firstly, in ‘finding’ reality, the ego is rather striving to repeat the unity that is sustained in unconscious wishes. Secondly, there is the linked claim that objects and the reality they make up are, actually, responses to an instinctual demand for unity. Such a finding is only to follow the Hegelian path to reality which, through the dialectic of negation, strives to bring existence in line with essence. For Marcuse and Brown, the essence of what it is to be human is instinctual, but, moreover, it is Eros. It is in both the reality principle and the pleasure principle that the dynamic tension between essence and existence is played out. Neither of Freud’s two principles applies to ‘reality’ in the rethought essential sense I am maintaining here, but are rather the *field of conflict*. Both reality and pleasure are the way the essences exist, but not how they *ex-sist*, not how they are in the ‘expanded field’ of Eros. As we saw above, objects as they arise in the field of nature, are in fact the ‘objectification’ of the conflict between essence and existence that emerges as nature and history. Nature (Brown) and history (Marcuse), on this reading, are attempts to (re)attain unity, to re-find essential desires in existent things. It is because of this that we can conclude, reality is not *other* to the instincts, in a privative sense, but is *made manifest* by their actions. Moreover, how this expansion is approached will determine whether domination or co-belonging is the telos of the dialectic.

V

Narcissism is the self-movement of the ego as it strives to gather itself in otherness, to love back again whatever leaves it. The question remains, though, whether this move-

ment, Hegel calls it desire, annihilates the *other* or the *self*. In Marcuse's and Brown's readings, it is the self that gives way to otherness: Hegel's desire is replaced by love. In a more conventional reading of Hegel or of Freud, quite the opposite might be assumed. Such a reading of Freud is provided by Rieff.

Freud's ideas of sexuality as a general energy of the self may be given another interpretation: that satisfaction from an object is but a devious means of self-love.... Loving, the body is loved, and thus any object is absorbed into the subject; even adult loves retain their autistic and self-regarding character. That love must serve the self or the self will shrink from us, that the self may chase love around an object and back to itself again—this is Freud's brilliant and true insight, reminiscent of La Rochfoucauld's keen detection of the ego behind the curtain.

(FMM: 157-158)

From the position of *Eros and Civilization* and *Life Against Death*, what Rieff is lacking is the idea of a widened self in primary narcissism. This is the key to both Brown's and Marcuse's thought; if it is denied, they fall apart. For Rieff, the primary monad is still an unproblematic 'self,' an ego in waiting. The 'body' of narcissism, as such, gains no pleasure from the other, has no relation to the other. It is thus a primary autism not a primary narcissism.⁵⁸ Rieff's child, it seems, begins in alienation, 'the bodily self we first explore and like, before we know what it is to like other bodies' (FMM: 156). For Rieff—as for Freud—the world is alien and hostile. The oceanic feeling is regressive, 'a flagging of the ego', which denies the 'permanent conflict between self and non-self' (FMM: 267). Reunion *at the expense* of the ego is simply an irrational surrender. Indeed, it is very hard to perceive any value, utopian or otherwise, in the extinguishing of the ego as one object among many. This may provide another explanation as to why Marcuse and Brown move apart in later years, with Marcuse implying a refutation of some of the

⁵⁸ We will see another version of this with Castoriadis in Chapter 4.

ideas of *Eros and Civilization*, moving closer to Rieff, and Brown intensifying his quest for unity. It also leads to a critique of this position by Joel Whitebook.

Whitebook recognises only hubris in Marcuse's claims for narcissism (and by extension, though he is not considered in Whitebook's study, Brown's claims). He marshals a large amount of work subsequent to Marcuse's book which suggests the authority and omnipotence of narcissism is, in fact, 'a defensive sham' (*PU*: 14), a position always present in Freud's work. For Whitebook—and I concur though draw different conclusion—the 'treatment of narcissism lies at the speculative and problematic core of Marcuse's already unabashedly speculative work' (*PU*: 33). In his critique he argues that primary narcissism relies on a reality based on the primary monad of mother-baby-world and can lead only to 'de-differentiation.' He uses an expression borrowed from Hegel's analogous critique of the young Schelling in his 'Preface,' that this egoic monism leads to the 'night...in which all cows are black' (*PU*: 13-14). It is of course interesting that Whitebook, presumably knowingly, would aim a critical phrase used by Hegel in the direction of a Hegelian. For Whitebook, the phrase means that primary narcissism is an omnivorous expression of the libido dissolving Eros and Thanatos into a fatal identity that utterly submerges the ego. We have already seen, however, how Marcuse and Brown turn to Hegel rather than Freud in defence of primary narcissism. Thus, Hegel's phrase is an apposite riposte, for what he means to criticise by it is Schelling's notion of absolute identity that collapses into the impossibility of difference. For Schelling, Walter Kaufman argues, it was only the perspective of an inadequate ego that brought differen-

tiation into the world.⁵⁹ Hegel, on the contrary, means that absolute knowledge ‘understands’ everything but preserves it in its difference.

For Hegel the understanding (*Verstand*) meant two things. The first is the process by which the subject is able to determine the world in an elementary form. Marcuse establishes it as follows: ‘Understanding...conceives a world of finite entities, governed by the principle of identity and opposition. Everything is identical with itself and with nothing else; it is, by virtue of its self-identity, opposed to all other things’ (RR: 44). This is basically the same as what he calls ‘common-sense’—we know it as the logic of non-contradiction or the reality-principle—which is the general security that each thing exists untouched in its individuality and maintains itself as such. This obviously corresponds to *pre*-dialectical thinking. The later meaning of the word, coming after dialectical consciousness, states that:

The unity of the thing is not only determined but constituted by its relation to other things, and its thinghood consists in this very relation.... The thing becomes itself through its opposition to other things; it is, as Hegel says, the unity of itself with its opposite, or, of being-for-itself with being-for-another. In other words, the very ‘substance’ of the thing must be gleaned from its self-established relation to other things. This, however, is not within the power of perception to accomplish; it is the work of (conceptual) *understanding*.

(RR: 109)

What the Understanding⁶⁰ does, in this case, is to take the perception of a particular thing, say a simple salt, and to follow the path by which we come to terms with what it ‘is,’ its substance. Firstly, as it is perceived, it is *negated* by that perception, broken into

⁵⁹ See Walter Kaufman’s commentary to his translation of the ‘Preface’ to the *Phenomenology* in *Hegel: Texts And Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 26-27; Hegel’s words are on p. 26, and Schelling is cited in Kaufman’s commentary on p. 27. The influence of the young Schelling on Emerson is apparent here (see Chapter 1).

⁶⁰ Following the convention, I shall capitalise Understanding when it is meant in this second sense.

sense data (white, cubic, hard, etc.); the role of the Understanding is to *negate* this difference so that the thing is reconstituted in its *universality*. By universal here Hegel means nothing more than how the particular once *Understood* can be utilised in the self-movement of the subject toward freedom where that object is *for* a subject. The double negation takes what was ‘in-itself,’ wrapped up in its individuality, and recognises that it is ‘for-another’—as such it is *universal*: through the dialectic, the salt comes to be *for* us. The pattern of the Understanding is repeated in all acts of cognition right up to self-consciousness and the dialectic of desire in the master/slave conflict. The Understanding is the faculty by which objects come to emerge from the subjectivity of the perceiver; their universality is recognised as their dialectical engagement with the subject.

The problem with the Understanding, though, is that because of the nature of its subjectivity, when it goes out from the subject, it finds nothing but itself (as in Rieff’s reference to La Rochfoucauld). It is a finite version of *nous theos*, or, what I am calling here, *the narcissism of the understanding*. The truth it seeks behind the veil of appearance given by *everyday* understanding is revealed, in Understanding as the truth of the subject, that is its teleological path to freedom in reason. Nevertheless, the question holds: does reason in negating the particularity of the object annihilate its otherness or preserve it? How this is taken determines how we are to read Brown and Marcuse and how we are to take the narcissism of the understanding that this represents. Marcuse observes that ‘Understanding finds nothing but *itself* when it seeks the essence behind the appearance of things’ (RR: 111), and he cites Hegel from the *Phenomenology*: ‘It is manifest that behind the so-called curtain, which is to hide the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless *we ourselves* go behind there, as much in order that we may thereby see, as that there may be something behind there which can be seen’ (RR: 111). This suggests more

than a simple analogy or correlation between noumenal reality and the phenomenal Understanding of that reality.

For Marcuse this direct, or Absolute, relationship cuts right to the heart of Hegel's importance for Utopian thinking, and psychoanalysis in particular. It seems to suggest that a *subjective* change will bring about an *objective* change—that a dialectical Understanding of reality brings about a total revision of reality. To this end Marcuse can see in this a fundamental contribution to an idealist politics, of which both Freud and Marx are heirs.

Hegel's insistence that the subject be recognised behind the appearance of things is an expression of the basic desire of idealism that man transform the estranged world into a world of his own. The *Phenomenology of Mind* accordingly follows through by merging the sphere of epistemology with the world of history, passing from the discovery of the subject to the task of mastering reality through self-conscious practice.

(RR: 110)

Existence and essence only come together when reality is mastered, which means that a fundamental identity is observed between subject and object and an epochal change in history takes place.

Holding on to the question of what happens to otherness as the most vital question here, precisely how *essence* is described again becomes important. The problem is to escape the narcissistic abyss of thought thinking itself, of having no object but itself (RR: 163), which was the objective end of Hegel's philosophy—freedom only existing in pure thought. In this narcissism of the understanding all is merged into the kind of logical rationality that spells its domination. Hegel is as we can see suggestive of this end,⁶¹ and

⁶¹ See, for example, Marcuse's comment: 'our interpretation also refutes Dilthey's view that the concept of "otherness" is a source of embarrassment for Hegel' (HO: 49). Cf. the rest of this Chapter "The Absolute

his thought is often considered a colonial strategy that obliterates all difference into the Same, the ‘identity thinking’ of the narcissism of the understanding. This is a negative approach that posits nature in terms of categories and measurable quantities. It contains an *a priori* conception of nature as open to domination. In Freud this corresponds to the reality principle in that it withstands reality testing (again, a tautology) which comprises precisely these *a priori* conceptions of measurability, repeatability, etc. For Whitebook, this is another danger of *Eros and Civilization*, that the synthetic ego, leaving the subject for the object, is liable to fall into a systematic (Aristotelian) vision of the world. Whitebook cites Samuel Weber who suggests that ‘the attempt to grasp the world in systematic thought, which is to say in terms of unity and totality results from the narcissistic ego’s impulses...to impose its own artificial and rigid unity on the world’ (*PU*: 109). It is also worth recalling here Freud’s remark in ‘On Narcissism: An Introduction,’ that systematic philosophy arises from paranoia, which is a form of narcissism (*NI*: 91). This is a point to which I return in Chapter 4.

Marcuse, however, reads Hegel positively, and shows how he can be located as the preserver of difference, giving us the possibility that ‘identity’ does not mean the ‘Same.’

Essence denotes the unity of being, its identity throughout change. Precisely what is this unity of identity? It is not a permanent and fixed substratum, but a process wherein everything copes with its inherent contradictions and unfolds itself as a result. Conceived in this way, identity contains its opposite, difference, and involves a self differentiation and an ensuing unification. Every existence precipitates itself into negativity and remains what it is only by negating this negativity. It splits up into a diversity of states and relations to other things, which are originally foreign to it, but which become part of its proper self when they are brought under the working influence of its essence. Identity is thus the

Difference within Being: Equality-with-Self-in-Otherness. Being as Motility [*Bewegtheit*]’ (*HO*: pp. 39-49) for a more detailed reading of otherness in Hegel’s philosophy. Cf. *MHH*: 185f.

same as the ‘negative totality,’ which was shown to be the structure of reality; it is ‘the same as Essence.’

(RR: 146)

It is worth taking some time to explain what Marcuse means in the context of the rethinking of narcissism and the instincts taking place in *Eros and Civilization* and *Life Against Death*.

‘Essence denotes the unity of being, its identity throughout change.’ In Hegel’s words, ‘*Essence* is infinity as the *supersession* of all distinctions’ (PS: 106). In our terms, essence has been given over to Eros, the preserver of life, unity and growth. Eros is the principle of being. Marcuse says as much in *Eros and Civilization*, ‘The death instinct affirms the principle of non-being (the negation of being) against Eros (the principle of being)’ (EC: 125). The death instinct is not *death* per se, it is not the mere end of organic life (though it is that too), but is the dialectical contradiction (negation) of Eros. Being is the negation of non-being and non-being is the negation of being—dialectically they are unified in this opposition, the one cannot exist without the other.⁶² The unity of this identity, which Marcuse questions, ‘is not a fixed substratum’; it does not consist in any Platonic ideal reality to which the evanescent world of change must correspond. Identity is, rather, the dynamic exchange between life and death, which, as we have seen, is the energy of history—in Brown’s, terms, the meaning of history. Life and death must *overcome* their inherent contradictions. The contradiction is one of tension: life seeks either its slow extinction over the life of the species, or—as we have reconfigured it here—it seeks to preserve tension as the pleasure of otherness recalled from primary narcissism. Death wants the immediate quiescence of life, the staying of tension. Mar-

⁶² See G. W. F. Hegel (trans. A. V. Miller), *Science of Logic* (Amherst NY: Humanity Books, 1999), pp. 82-108.

cuse and Brown both attempt to find a point wherein the dialectic sublates. Again, they choose primary narcissism. Here, they might argue, ‘identity contains its opposite, difference, and involves differentiation and an ensuing reunification.’ In this way death, as the negation of Eros, is not removed from the movement, nor is life reduced to a permanent catatonia. Rather, the negativity that is ‘precipitated,’ that is the contradiction between the ego and the ‘other,’ is in turn negated and the other is preserved in an expanded ego. The dialectic operates such that there is a movement from primary narcissism, which is negated by otherness, but because of the synthetic capacity of the ego enacting the desires of the id, the other can be united with, yet *retained* in its *otherness*. The ego, to follow Marcuse, ‘splits up into a diversity of states and relations to other things which are initially foreign to it, but which become part of its proper self when they are brought under the working influence of its essence’; it loves back again whatever leaves it. That essence is the instinctual desire for unity and undifferentiation. This is how identity can be taken to mean unity in otherness, which is the ‘structure of reality,’ ‘negative totality’ and ‘essence.’ Thus, identity does not mean uniformity, stability, harmony, but rather, expansion, restlessness⁶³ and creativity. It is, thus, beyond the pleasure principle, but is not *unpleasurable*; it is an affirmation of the once and future pleasure of primary narcissism. The negation of the negation is affirmation. Thus, even Hegel’s absolute, seen as Eros, is not a stable end, but, ‘as it were, dialectical thought, unfolded in its totality [which] thus contains its negation; it is not a harmonious and stable form

⁶³ As Ricoeur confirms: ‘*Unruheigkeit*, the ‘restlessness’ of life, is not at first defined as drive and impulse, but as noncoincidence with one’s self; this restlessness already contains within itself the negativity that makes it other and which, in making it to be other, makes it be self’ (FP: 465) and ‘The opposition in which each consciousness seeks itself in the other and “does what it does only so far as the other does the same” is an infinite movement, in the sense that each term goes beyond its own limits and becomes the other. We recognize here the notion of *Unruheigkeit*, the restlessness of life, but raised to the reflective degree through opposition and struggle; it is only in this struggle for recognition that the self reveals itself as never being simply what it is—and therefore as being infinite’ (FP: 467).

but a process of unification of opposites. *It is not complete except in its otherness*' (RR: 165; emphasis added). Hegel's own project, in Marcuse's interpretation, ends not in the Same, but in the Other. However, as shall become crucial in later chapters, it is an otherness that remains held to the determinism of a rationalistic teleology and to the recollective power of memory (*Erinnerung*).

This reading of Marcuse through Hegel in *Reason and Revolution* actually anticipates the main thread of Whitebook's critiques and even pre-empts Whitebook's own alternative. Whitebook argues that rather than an egoic monism the ego needs to be expanded by what he calls, after Piaget, 'decentration,' which 'refers to the process through which children's egocentrism is dislodged and they are compelled to reorient themselves in a world of multiple perspectives' (PU: 13). Opposed to this view of decentration is the decentred subject of so-called 'post-structuralist' critiques, which reduces the subject to an effect of, a 'de-centring' by, another system such as language or power. It seems to me that a Hegelian understanding of the dialectic of Eros enacts precisely the first egoic re-orientation to other egos—indeed, that seems to be immanent to the movement of the *Phenomenology*. The difference, though, is that for Whitebook, as for Rieff, the ego is initially weak and only becomes strengthened through this re-orientation ordered by the father. For Marcuse and Brown, it is the initial strength of primary narcissism that creates the later ego as the expansion of Eros and its synthetic function is consequent upon an instinctual dialectic. What a weak ego fears, Whitebook argues, is engulfment by the Mother or Other, what Hans Leowald, after Karen Horney, calls the 'dread of the womb.'⁶⁴ The father at first appears to be the saviour of the child

⁶⁴ Hans Leowald, 'Ego and Reality,' in *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 16-17.

by intervening in the dyad and allowing the individual ego to be. With this intervention the father brings the reality-principle to bear, and subsequently the ‘impulse to re-establish the lost Narcissistic-maternal unity is interpreted as a “threat,” namely, the threat of maternal engulfment’ (*EC*: 230). This threat, however, depends entirely on whether unity is achieved through domination or through a dialectical expansion.

An analogous criticism is voiced by Nancy Chodorow, only the terms are reversed from the will of the mother to that of the child. She argues that only through an objectification of the mother—seeing her *not* as a subject—can Marcuse and Brown ‘envision narcissistic union and the complete satisfaction of pre-genital demands and desires as progressive social impulses.’⁶⁵ The mother must be annihilated in order for the desires of the subject to be fulfilled. The mother’s role as provider and separate agent fulfilling her own goals is thus obviated and the self extended in its place. That is, the memory of gratification negates the activity of nourishment given by another, and a childhood idea of the ‘true,’ as a uniform extension of the self, becomes the telos of their liberatory theory. At first glance there is a lot of truth in this. But by taking Brown and Marcuse out of an Hegelian or idealist theory of synthetic history—the only position in which I would claim they make any sense—and placing them into a psychoanalytic/object relations context which is predicated on separation and distinction of roles, it is not surprising that they appear to fall into contradiction and inherent sexism as Chodorow claims.

In connection with this there is one point I would like to pursue, and it concerns the nature of primary narcissism and intersubjectivity. Chodorow argues that ‘Brown’s

⁶⁵ Nancy Chodorow, ‘Beyond Drive Theory: Object Relation and the Limits of Radical Individualism,’ pp. 114-153, in Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989), p. 141ff. Hereafter referred to as *FPT* in the text.

and Marcuse's idealization of a narcissistic mode of relating and of drive gratification based on the pleasure principle precludes those very intersubjective relationships that should form the core of any social and political vision' (*FPT*: 135). By this, she means to point to the flaw at the centre of their hopes for future communities showing that they would reduce everything to an expression of infantile desires. In opposition, she concludes following Freud that:

the reality principle does not simply signify an abstract, repressive civilization based on the performance principle and domination, or on a morbid and neurotic history and culture. Rather, the reality principle is in the first instance the subjectivity of others—the recognition that others have their own intentions, goals, and experiences of pleasure and pain. For the child, learning the meaning of the self-other distinction and of one's relatedness to a differentiated other is the same thing as the reality principle and is intrinsic to the construction of the self.

(*FPT*: 136)

In response to this, it is important to counterpose Ricoeur:

the desire of the other is directly implied in the emergence of Eros; it is always with another that the living substance fights against death, against its own death, whereas when it acts separately it pursues death through the circuitous paths of adaptation to the natural and cultural environment. Freud does not look for the drive for life in some will to live inscribed in each living substance: in the living substance *by itself* he finds only death.

(*FP*: 291)

For Ricoeur the instincts are not the strivings of a wilful child to be civilised by the reality-principle. They are a direct implication of *intersubjectivity*; the very process of overcoming Anankē described by Freud in his initial definition of Eros as a complicating and expansive 'force.' Ricoeur writes: 'Freud never described instincts outside of an intersubjective context' (*FP*: 387). Life, Eros, only emerges through a widening that takes in

and responds to others, at first Anankē and later other subjects. The relationship to the other only arises because there are instincts. Also, for Hegel, the 'I' is *always* 'We.'

A self-consciousness exists *for a self-consciousness*. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it.... What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is—this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'.⁶⁶

(PS: 110; Hegel's emphasis)

It is vital to see the *whole* of the Hegelian dialectic at play when Marcuse, in particular, talks about primary narcissism, and not just the often underdeveloped philosophical intuitions of Freud. The Hegelian dialectic of desire can only exist in the maintenance of otherness, because only in *otherness* can the self be confirmed. This process is on going and infinite.

Brown also escapes Chodorow's censure, because in his interpretation he revises the aggressive negation in anaclysis, which is his reading of the child's need to *negate* the mother in order to possess her nourishing qualities. Instead, he suggests that narcissism incorporates it by 'not really incorporating it, but incorporating it passively by making ourselves like it' (*LAD*: 44). Thus, he does not seek to possess the other, but to identify with it. And this identity is the outcome of a dialectic of recognition and equality. For Brown, anaclysis is the desire to *possess* the object, and narcissism is the desire to *identify* with the object. This revision is important, because Anankē, in its translation as neces-

⁶⁶ It is worth mentioning in this context Kenley Royce Dove's suggestion that the 'We' here discussed by Hegel are in fact the philosophers. Which is to be contrasted with the 'We' of the proletariat of Marx's thesis eleven. Dove 'Hegel's Phenomenological Method,' in Warren E. Steinkraus ed., *New Studies in Hegel's Philosophy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), pp. 46, 49.

sity, contains within in it the connotation of lack or inadequacy.⁶⁷ Anaclisis, in its grabbing after the other, points to this lack. Identification or narcissism, on the other hand, with its suggestion of union, observes an extant plenitude in *otherness*. Brown makes this point apropos of Platonic Eros and Christian Agape. ‘The Platonic Eros is the child of defect or want. Its direction is away from the insufficient self; its aim is to possess the object that completes it’ (*LAD*: 49). And the Christian Agape ‘with its sacrificial structure, has the same basis in the insufficiency of the self, but in it the self can be completed by no object [that is, only by God] and therefore must be extinguished’ (*LAD*: 49). Freud’s Eros, as narcissistic, seeks identification and passive union, its plenitude is immanent in its transcendence (a romantic realization of an ideal completion). This might not be a strict Freudian answer, but it proves consistent with the thinking through of psychoanalysis that Brown achieves in *Life Against Death*. He links this directly to the oceanic feeling described earlier, and in doing so confirms that the overcoming of lack is not dependent on technology, but on a way of finding objects that does not dominate or possess them, being, rather, dependent on the erotic fulfilment of narcissism, where the subject determines reality in line with freedom, that is in line with instinctual gratification.

So Marcuse and Brown are bound to disagree with the answers provided by a reality-principle which suggests that the truth lies *only* in division, and rather suggest the possibility of a re-emergence of narcissism under conditions of mature, by which is meant non-repressive, reality. Intersubjectivity is key here, and it is the culmination of the master and slave or class struggle and the dialectic of desire. Though neither Mar-

⁶⁷ By this Brown anticipates and avoids Whitebook’s critique of Marcuse’s misunderstanding of Anankē that ends Chapter 3.

cuse nor Brown state precisely what this would look like—and Chodorow is correct to criticise them on this (*FPT*: 137)—merely pointing to that fact that this *possibility* is contained in unconscious desires and emerges in romantic, mythic and poetic—aesthetic—tropes. But how they treat the aesthetic is determined by the series of differences or binarisms between the responses to romanticism and idealism found in *Eros and Civilization* and *Life Against Death* in their congruent passage to an expansive or ecstatic dialectic of narcissism. That is, Marcuse's conception of a technological *telos* arising from the process of history as reason versus Brown's vision of an eschatological return to nature from history as symptom. In the next two chapters, these divisions will become clearer through an exploration of aesthetics and of myth.

—Chapter Three—
The Aesthetic State: *Phantasie*, Myth and Memory

The full flavour of Marcuse's and Brown's utopianism comes through in their revision of narcissism, opening up a benevolent aspect that Freud had been reluctant to pursue. Once they have disclosed this possibility for narcissism, they attempt to provide coherent visions of how this impulse has been apparent in culture from the very beginning. Because, if the repression that results from the contradiction between life and death is the energy of history—either as symptom or process—it is also the dynamic that gives us culture. And it is to cultural practice rather than, say, empirical economic data, that they appeal to provide the necessary evidence to support their theories. The relevant forms they address are phantasy, myth and aesthetics. However, with regard to aesthetics, I shall only discuss Marcuse in this chapter because he is a theoretician, whereas Brown is a practitioner, whose work is interpreted in the last two chapters.

I am arguing that it is romantic and idealist philosophy, remembering the circling of their mutual crisis that creates the utopian visions of *Life Against Death* and *Eros and Civilization*. The optimism they maintain over against Freud's pessimism can only arise because they have a limited interest in—and place no real value upon—the therapeutic concerns of psychoanalysis—an interest in which, for example, charges Rieff's pessimism and his refutation of the dialectic of hope and despair. Rather, they read psychoanalysis as an aspect of the synthetic trend in European philosophy. One of the things I tried to make clear in the last chapter is just this, that Brown and Marcuse are contributing to—or, to use Cavell's word 'inheriting'—a speculative romantic and idealist philosophy which has only a tangential relation to clinical practice. But not only are they not contributing to clinical practice, they are ignoring the evidence it provides if it

does not cohere with a larger chain of ‘symptoms’ arising from their chosen philosophical and cultural heritage. Because the truths they want are largely confirmed outside of the analytic situation (because they are not angling for a cure, but a representation of the *possibility* of cure) they can champion the very structures that Freud wanted to overcome: the id, the pleasure principle, the instincts, phantasy, perversion and narcissism. Indeed, almost everything that Brown and Marcuse write takes its direction from the *regressive* impulses, from the Orphic backward glance, that for Freud descends into unconscious turmoil.

I

Regression, observes Marcuse, in all its manifold forms, is an ‘unconscious protest against the insufficiency of civilization: against the prevalence of toil over pleasure, performance over gratification’ (*EC*: 109). Though it only emerges in symptoms (neurotic, poetic, philosophical), regression displays the ‘innermost tendency in the organism’ (*EC*: 109) to turn against a civilization that believes *a priori* in the domination of the most basic drives in nature and strives to exclude humanity from that sphere. Regression is not something that Marcuse is afraid of; he welcomes it as a necessary corrective gesture by which repressed libidinal energies can escape. He writes:

the emergence of a non-repressive reality principle involving instinctual liberation would *regress* behind the attained level of civilized rationality. This regression would be psychological as well as social: it would reactivate early states of libido which were surpassed in the development of the reality ego, and it would dissolve the institutions of society in which the ego exists.

(*EC*: 198)

Marcuse's non-repressive reality principle is, as we have seen, all but identical to the pleasure principle. It renders it a viable existential possibility. In his Hegelian vocabulary, it approaches the confluence of existence and essence. He is quite clear, then, that these conditions can be met because contemporary civilization has actually attained a level of rationality and of productivity that is unnecessary—that does not just match up to but is in excess of its needs. In this, he is hinting at the post-industrial, consumerist, one-dimensionality that becomes a focus of his work in the early 1960s. Of course, such a theory remains dependent upon the dominance of scarcity through *technē* as does so much of Marcuse's utopianism. However, it also relies on the speculative re-thinking of regressive libidinal energies organising themselves in accordance with the instincts, and with a priority given by the narcissistic 'past.'

For Ricoeur regression is the central tendency he calls it the 'melodic core' [*FP*: 440]) of Freudianism. The interpretation of dreams and of neurotic symptoms forms an 'archaeology' wherein the fragments of the past dominate the understanding of the present. By pointing out that the last word of *The Interpretation of Dreams* is 'past' Ricoeur seeks to give emphasis to his point as well as to Freud's dismissal of the future. Psychoanalysis does not look to the future, but is regarded 'as a revelation of the archaic, a manifestation of the ever prior [which] has roots, both old and new, in the romantic philosophy of life and the unconscious' (*FP*: 440).¹ That romanticism is built out of

¹ For Ricoeur this is another point of tension between Freud and Hegel. He argues: 'Spirit has its meaning in later forms or figures; it is a movement that always destroys its starting point and is secured only at the end. The unconscious, on the other hand, means that intelligibility always proceeds from earlier figures, whether this anteriority is understood in a strictly temporal or in a metaphysical sense. Man is the sole being at the mercy of childhood; he is a creature constantly dragged backward by his childhood... To put the antithesis most concisely, I will say that spirit is history and the unconscious is fate—the early fate of childhood, the early fate of symbolisms, pre-given and repeated without end...' (*FP*: 468). And again, he argues, to merge these two principles would be a 'facile eclecticism' (*FP*: 468)—as we have seen both Marcuse and Brown disagree that that is necessarily a bad thing.

fragments we have already seen, but we can take this further here and see the fragment as the archaeology of the subject, the *imagos* of the past that ‘turn-up’ under the fresh ploughed ground of sexuality, poetry and myth.² As Joel Whitebook puts it, ‘The transgressive phantasms of the unconscious...not only are a source of regression but also provide the *imagos* of a different reality’ (*UP*: 6). Marcuse uses this source to turn the idea of regression around making it equivalent to progression:

The liberation of the past does not end in its reconciliation with the present. Against the self-imposed restraint of the discoverer [i.e., Freud], the orientation on the past tends toward an orientation on the future. The *recherche du temps perdu* becomes the vehicle of future liberation.

(*EC*: 19)

Though the reference to Proust makes it clear that Marcuse is, in part, referring to memory³ I want to concentrate for now on two other regressive paths: phantasy and myth.

One aspect of regression on which Brown and Marcuse do not agree is the place of phantasy (Brown spells it *fantasy*). Freud famously describes phantasy in his ‘Two-Principles of Mental Functioning’ (1911):

With the introduction of the reality principle one species of thought-activity was split off; it was kept free from reality-testing and remained subordinated to the pleasure principle alone. This activity is *phantasying*, which begins already in children’s play, and later, continued as *day-dreaming*, abandons dependence on real objects.⁴

I return to some of these ideas in the next chapter with reference of Castoriadis’ idea of the radical imagination.

² I examine the relationship between fragments and primordial symbolism in the next chapter.

³ See Section 4.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, ‘Two-Principles of Mental Functioning’ in (James Strachey trans.), *On Metapsychology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 39. Hereafter referred to as ‘Two Principles’ in the text.

We know that Marcuse places the origin of the reality principle with the philosophical interpretation of Logos as ‘categorisation under reason’ leading to domination. Thus, we can assume that the interpretation of phantasy as a separate ‘species of thought’ is born at the same moment. For Freud this activity is split off because it forms no useful function in adulthood, save as a refuge dangerously close to neurosis. He suggests that the only safe outlet for phantasy is art—for Freud a crystallised day-dream,⁵ which, by creating another ‘world’ can release the dangerous, regressive impulses of the pleasure principle to which phantasy is attached. Marcuse, though, recognises in phantasy an important continuity with existence prior to the domination of reason and its instrumentality. Phantasy is *independent* of the claims made upon the body by so-called reality, indeed, ‘phantasy has a truth value of its own, which corresponds to an experience of its own—namely, the surmounting of the antagonistic human reality’ (*EC*: 143). This can be interpreted to mean that through the hopes maintained in phantasy the distinction between essence and existence, unique to repressed humanity, can be challenged. And as this positive ‘return of the repressed’—that is repressed *life* not repressed *death*—‘Phantasy had always built the bridge between the unreconcilable demands of object and subject, extroversion and introversion’ (*EC*: 148). In this sense, phantasy is given the fundamental ontological role we have already seen given to Eros. It is the path to objects in the world which gives them their reality, but which does not seek to dominate, but rather to unite. Phantasy is the symptom provided by the return of the repressed primary narcissism. However, whether an idealist phantasy can square itself with reality, can become a more valid reality, is something that remains to be proved.

⁵ See Sigmund Freud, ‘Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming’, (1908) in James Strachey ed: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol IX (London: Hogarth, 1959), pp. 143-153.

For Freud, phantasy is fundamentally regressive and potentially debilitating—indeed, he argues that phantasy *always* retains the mark of repression.

In the realm of phantasy, repression remains all-powerful; it brings about the inhibition of ideas *in statu nascendi* before they can be noticed by consciousness, if their cathexis is likely to occasion a release of unpleasure. This is the weak spot in our psychical organization; and it can be employed to bring back under the dominance of the pleasure principle thought-processes which have already become rational.

(Two Principles: 40)

In this sense phantasy is a reflex defensive structure that flees reality, if it is likely to be unpleasurable. That this sustains the promise of the pleasure principle is clear enough. However, for Freud this is a false promise and the flight from ‘reality’ is irrational; it undoes all the work of maturity and in particular the education brought about by contemporary scientific standards. There is, Freud seems to suggest, no need to study the difficulties of the world if the refuge of phantasy, by which he means mythology, superstition, religion—not to mention neurotic withdrawal—remains easily available to the psyche. Ironically, science itself is seen as problematic, in that it follows the path of a *temporary* renunciation of pleasure for long term reward, thus it only displaces the pleasure principle but does not over-turn it. Phantasy, for Freud, is a kind of nostalgia; it can be preserved in the mature psyche, but it is always the remnant of something more fundamentally lost. In a telling footnote, he argues that the retention of the pleasure principle in phantasy is analogous to the way ‘a nation whose wealth rests on the exploitation of the produce of its soil will yet set aside certain areas for reservation in their original state and for protection from the changes brought about by civilization. (E.g. Yellowstone Park.)’ (Two-Principles: 39). This choice of analogy confirms the position of Freud vis-à-vis Marcuse. The reality principle exploits and dominates for the improvement of

production whereas the pleasure principle belongs to a primitive ‘original state’ which has been overcome by ‘civilization.’

It is perhaps surprising that Brown goes even further than Freud does in his criticisms of *fantasy*.⁶ In fact, this is probably the point where he is, implicitly, most critical of Marcuse’s project. Brown begins where we left him with regard to object relations in the last chapter. Fantasy is the backward glance of narcissistic libido which, though appealing to union (identification) rather than to domination (his interpretation of *anaclysis*) is also necessarily regressive in the way outlined by Freud. The reason for this is that it operates as a *sublimation* of sexual aims. Thus the actual living present ‘is denied by reactivating fantasies of past union, and thus, the ego interposes the shadow of the past between itself and the full reality of life and death in the present’ (*LAD*: 162). Fantasy is a way of avoiding the harshness of the life and death struggle that, for Brown is actualized as history. Instead of facing the causes of history directly—which would ‘end’ history—fantasy allows aberrant imagos of the past to dominate the present, such as the ‘conscience’ and the ‘superego.’ But, more importantly for Brown, the attachment to the past as fantasy is what gives rise to the soul, ‘the shadowy substitute for a bodily relation to other bodies’ (*LAD*: 162). It does so at the expense of the living body traced with life, death and otherness. He goes on,

The more specific and concrete mechanism whereby the body-ego becomes a soul is fantasy. Fantasy may be defined as a hallucination which cathects the *memory* of gratification; it is of the same structure as the dream, and has the same relation to the id and to instinctual reality as the dream. *Fantasy and dreaming do not present, much less satisfy, the instinctual demands of the id, which is of the body and seeks bodily erotic union with the world;*

⁶ The ‘f’ rather than the ‘ph’ is telling for two reasons, firstly because it means the word loses its Germanic philosophical pedigree; and a second related point, Marcuse only uses this spelling when he talks, deprecatingly, of ‘childish fantasy’ (*EC*: 159).

they are essentially, like neurosis, ‘substitute-gratifications.’
(*LAD*: 163-164; emphases added)

Fantasy, then, like other cures that are part of the problem—neurosis, religion and psychoanalysis itself—does not correspond to the actual movement of the instincts or the realization of Eros as the expansion of the body. In fact, it does quite the opposite, it leads to a negation of the body which is also a negation of that erotic reality; the id’s expansion into the world through the mutual expansion of the ego, which as we saw in the last chapter, constructs a positive narcissistic reality. Unlike Marcuse who presents the *phantastic* as a source of future liberation, Brown sees *fantasy* as a hallucinatory idea (*Vorstellung*) which deludes the ego by negating the present and replacing it with the past. It is a process of backward representation in which the ego uses its own recollected images to replace the ‘reality’ of the erotic body; that is the body as Eros. In this sense, Brown seems to assert that fantasy aligns itself with the misrecognised idealism of the narcissism of the understanding, in which the ego perpetuates its narrow place in the world, surrounded by its own reflections, which are but memories of past gratifications. From this it must be gathered that for Brown primary narcissism is not an historical stage that can be re-membered, but, as shall be shown, belongs to his eschatological turning into the ‘now.’

An additional problem, one encountered by Freud much to his cost, is that the primal fantasies appear to have no existence apart from their re-enactment in the analytic or neurotic setting. Or, as Brown writes, ‘to put it another way, they do not exist in memory or in the past, but only as hallucinations in the present, which have no meaning except as negations of the present’ (*LAD*: 166). Fantasies present themselves retroactively (*Nachträglichkeit*), as a response to the ‘infantile flight from life-and-death’ (*LAD*:

166). This is the curse of the (negative) idealism of humanity, which posits something other than the body, other than ecstatic-instinct, as the process of being. This un-real goal emerges, Brown argues, from the very real flight from the body that begins with the repression of infantile sexuality and reaches its acme with the mind-body dualism; a dualism which, as an exemplary abstraction, is the main target of Brown's polemic. He argues—and there is a Hegelian twist to this—that the most profound knowledge we can gain about ourselves only emerges from the most abstract positions, which involves the *negation* of our bodies, of our materiality. This materiality, as alluded to in the last chapter, is inverted—the displacement from below upward—being eventually dominated by vision (*theoria*), which is most able to maintain the distance between bodies. So, 'As life restricted to the seen, and by hallucinatory projection seen at a distance, and veiled by negation and distorted by symbolism, sublimation perpetuates and elaborates the infantile solution, the dream' (*LAD*: 172).

Sublimation is no real answer for Brown. There is, as he demonstrates with *elan* in *Life Against Death*, a general reversal in the accepted version of the aspirations of mankind. At the most basic level the foundation of monetary exchange on the primitive economy of shit—the child's first 'product'—with the mother, and on a more elevated level, the proposition that higher metaphors are often based on physical attributes, the well known example being 'spirit.' In his reading of Swift, Brown concludes that 'Not only the genital function but also the anal function is displaced upward' (*LAD*: 197). He takes this to its limit in his brilliant discussion of Luther: 'Protestantism was born in the temple of the Devil, and it found God again in extremest alienation from God' (*LAD*: 209). That is, the vision of reformed religion given to Luther on the 'jakes' (the second divine *kenosis*, or 'emptying out') is the exemplary archetype of sublimation up-

wards. Or Emerson's reversal: 'What is there divine in a load of bricks? What is there of the divine in a privy? Much. All' [*Journals* :126].) In this radical Protestantism, the world, the body and in particular money, is given to the Devil—is a shard from the Devil's arse. The world is quite literally for Luther the shit in which God's flowers grow. The irony is, of course, that the attributes admired by Protestantism, parsimony, orderliness, and obstinacy, are identified by psychoanalysis as 'anal traits' (*LAD*: 203). Much of culture, both Marcuse and Brown argue, retains just such a 'taint' of the pleasure principle held over from the anal phase. This is one reason why Marcuse argues that Freud ultimately rejects artistic or liberal culture in favor of constraint as the impetus of civilization. The unconscious, though, refuses to forget 'the equation with freedom and happiness tabooed by the consciousness' (*EC*: 18). Its continued presence is the force behind utopian speculation and romantic discontent.

Sublimation, then, for Brown, is the loss of 'life' as Eros, which returns as the perpetual quest for that life; it is 'the mode of an organism that must discover life rather than live, must know rather than be' (*LAD*: 171). It is the attempt to return to a world that has been carved off from us, idealised into subject-object positions.

If the mechanism of sublimation is the dream, the instinctual economy which sustains it is a primacy of death over life in the ego. The path which leads from infantile dreaming to sublimation originates in the ego's incapacity to accept the death of separation, and its inauguration of those morbid forms of dying—negation, repression, and narcissistic involution. The result is to substitute for the reality of living-and-dying the desexualized or deadened life.

(*LAD*: 174)

In its most pervasive form desexualised sublimated fantasy presents itself to us as language, as symbolisation, which, Brown argues, operates as a hallucination of what is *not there*, 'negating what is there, conferr[ing] on reality a hidden level of meaning, and

lend[ing] a symbolical quality to all experience' (*LAD*: 167). The animal in language is the animal that has lost its world 'and which preserves in its symbol systems a map of the lost reality, guiding the search to recover it' (*LAD*: 167).⁷ Culture is this Atlantean map writ large. Maybe one tentative conclusion we could reach at this point is that Marcuse mistakes the map for the territory; mistakes the transgressive force of phantasy—which is not in dispute—for the lost object of narcissism. That which for Brown is *misrecognised* as memory is for Marcuse the *thing* itself. The first case tends to romanticism, the second, to idealism. We will only get any further here in subsequent discussions of language and the imagination.

One thing that Brown and Marcuse agree on, at least structurally, is that this problem begins with the Greeks. For Marcuse it is the now familiar interpretation of Aristotelian Logos but for Brown it is 'Apollo...the god of form—of plastic form in art, of rational form in thought, of civilized form in life' (*LAD*: 174). Apollo, as 'form,' is the negation of the instincts, he is the god who taught the Greeks how to sublimate, an inheritance felt throughout the Western world. Brown follows Nietzsche in defining the Apollonian world as made up of the dream:

Apollo rules over the fair world of appearance as a projection of the inner world of fantasy; and the limit which he must observe, 'that delicate boundary which the dream-picture must not overstep,' [Freud] is the boundary of repression separating the dream from instinctual reality.

(*LAD*: 174)

⁷ See discussion of Vico in Chapter 5.

The deeper argument seems to suggest that the real shift, the revolution in thinking, occurs when myth becomes philosophy, when *mythos* is interpreted as *logos* (for Brown the best philosophy is that which obtains to the status of myth).⁸

A key text here is Brown's introduction to his translation of Hesiod's *Theogony* (1953), where he observes that the early Greek mythical idiom, the way in which they 'were accustomed to speculate on the great questions of life'⁹ must be *translated* into philosophy in order for us moderns to understand it. To say that myth is the language of the pleasure principle would be to go too far; rather, Brown suggests myth emerges from the era prior to the repressive division between reality and pleasure. This is no lost utopia. What it describes is not paradise or innocence, but the chance of a dialectical 'resurrection of the body'—the title of the last chapter of *Life Against Death*. The mythical poetry of the *Theogony*, 'is a reinterpretation of traditional myths in order to create a set of symbols which give meaning to life as experienced by the poet and his age' (*Theo*: 35). There is nothing radical here until you realise that *this is what Brown comes to do in his own work*. His unselfconscious interdisciplinary mining of the history of philosophy, psychology, poetry and myth is just such an invocation of symbols appropriate to the writer's age. *Life Against Death* is a somewhat circumspect version of this vision. The force of Brown's mythography will only be revealed when we read *Love's Body* in Chapter 4 and *Closing Time* in Chapter 5.

Many of the central themes of *Life Against Death* are highlighted by Brown as integral to the *Theogony*. There is no doubt a certain amount of circular thinking here, by

⁸ The relation of *mythos* to *logos* is returned to in Chapter 5. For an acute, but separate, reading of this see Martin Heidegger (trans. J. Glenn Gray), *What is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper Collins, 1968), p. 10 and *passim*.

⁹ Norman O. Brown, 'Introduction,' pp. 7-48, Hesiod (trans. and ed. Norman O. Brown), *Theogony* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1953), p. 15. Hereafter referred to as *Theo* in the text.

which I mean Brown is reading Hesiod in terms already dominating his thinking in the later book, and that book in turn is coloured by the *Theogony*. Indeed, if as he has suggests more than once, his turn to Freud took place early in the 1950s,¹⁰ it is likely that there was a certain amount of overlap. Two such themes I can pick up on immediately are the primal force of Eros and the conflict between Eros and Death. His translation of the famous creation scene, the first Western Genesis, begins: ‘First of all, the Void [*Chaos*] came into being, next broad-bosomed Earth [*Gaia*], the solid and eternal home of all, and Eros [*Desire*], the most beautiful of the immortal gods, who in every man and every god softens the sinews and overpowers the prudent purpose of the mind’ (*Theo*: 56). With Eros the creative energy that spawns gods and humans enters the cosmos, and as Brown observes, it is creative energy that is the ‘fundamental attribute of power’ (*Theo*: 8) which exists in issue and is thwarted by castration. It is also Eros that brings differentiation, growth and change into the cosmos, and thus is the origin of history as myth—for Brown an essential part of the *Theogony*’s speculative structure. Desire itself has no offspring, but is the energetic source—the self-movement—of the procreation that begets the mythical figures of Hesiod’s poem, from Chronos to Zeus to Prometheus and the nameless ranks of ‘men’: ‘the immanent creative energy which Hesiod calls Desire is in all things, driving them to constant proliferation’ (*Theo*: 41). History is not yet symptom, it is rather *poiesis*: creation outside of (historiographical) time.

In the second instance, and because of the first, Hesiod’s universe is dynamic and refuses inertia or death for its own sake. This dynamism emerges, Brown argues, in the conflict between order and creativity. Order does not yet mean the stable Apollon-

¹⁰ Norman O. Brown, *Apocalypse and/ or Metamorphosis* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1991), pp. 157, 179. Hereafter referred to as *AM* in the text.

ian order of restraint, but is rather self-developing and permits substantial freedom—it is an *Erotic* order. Each stage of Hesiod’s history, like Hegel’s dialectic, creates new conflicts, and order is rather the guiding principle of those conflicts than their suppression. He writes: ‘An order which permits free development is one which does not do violence to the principle of creativity. For Hesiod the conflict is not between creativity and inertia but between creativity and order. He has a recurring pattern of conflict’ (*Theo*: 43). Hesiod’s order is like Heraclitus’ ‘subtle “hidden” harmony, which is a “harmony in contrariety”’ (*Theo*: 43)—and identity in otherness. Death, then, does not bring an end, but engages with Eros in an on going ‘strife’ which, Brown argues, is also the model of the Greek society it was composed for (*Theo*: 46).

Hesiod’s poem does not yet engage in the symbolic replacement of reality, is not yet a flight from life-and-death but rather reveals their dialectic in its structure and narrative. The position of Eros, as the third term between earth and void, being and nothing (*Theo*: 16), that allows the progressive generation of the myth from gods to men—from a cosmic order to an anthropocentric order, preserves the truth of this dialectic. The understanding provided by the *Theogony* is not sublimated. It is not the imposition of order on chaos, but is amongst the earliest statements of the truths Freud finds preserved in the unconscious and which Brown, the modern mythographer, uses his later writings to disclose.

Though Marcuse stresses the extant power of phantasy in his readings of myth, he is otherwise remarkably similar in his interpretations. For Marcuse, much more than for Brown (though the same trend is there), myth is tied to its modern re-workings in the imaginations of the romantics and their heirs. Thus his readings of Narcissus come from Valéry and Gide not from Ovid, and Orpheus belongs to Rilke. His contrast is

between Prometheus as the representation of toil, and Narcissus and Orpheus as the representations of joy and union.

If Prometheus is the culture-hero of toil, productivity and progress through repression, then the symbols of another reality principle must be sought at the opposite pole. Orpheus and Narcissus (like Dionysus to whom they are akin: the antagonist of the god who sanctions the logic of domination, the realm of reason) stand for a very different reality. They have not become-culture heroes of the Western world: theirs is the image of joy and fulfillment; the voice which does not command but sings; the gesture which offers and receives; the deed which is peace and ends the labor of conquest; the liberation from time which unites man with god, man with nature.

(EC: 161-162)

In Marcuse's pantheon, Prometheus—often seen as the rebel—replaces Apollo. Prometheus seems a strange choice. He is the creator of man and the bringer of fire who tricked Zeus, the punishment for which was the first woman, Pandora (the reference is still Hesiod). She, infamously, brought all the ills into the world, leaving only hope. What Prometheus symbolises, however, is that the price of culture is pain, that only productivity can lead to mastery—he is the example of the culture-hero who suffers, and who leaves an inheritance of suffering to mankind. Moreover, the myth asserts that the feminine, the sexual, is disruptive and destructive—it is a punishment.

Orpheus and Narcissus, however, stand for a different existential condition that refuses to accept that pleasure has a price, though, of course, ironically they both pay the ultimate price for that refusal. Orpheus figures the imaginative power to shape the physical reality, Rilke's 'new births and transformation,'¹¹ the ability to communicate with nature and to shatter the rocks with his song. Narcissus, as we have seen, denotes

¹¹ Rainer Maria Rilke (trans. Stephen Cohen), *Sonnets to Orpheus with Letters to a Young Poet* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2000), p. 15. Hereafter referred to as *SO* in the text.

the unity of subject and object, of the human and the natural, in the erotic widening of the self that allows both self and world to *be* in their otherness. Narcissism is not the withdrawal into the self but the liberation of the potential of beings in their freedom. It is at this point that Marcuse ventures his reading of Freud's theory of primary narcissism, from which he concludes:

beyond all immature autoeroticism, narcissism denotes a fundamental relatedness to reality which may generate a comprehensive existential order. In other words, narcissism may contain the germ of a different reality principle: the libidinal cathexis of the ego (one's own body) may become the source and reservoir for a new libidinal cathexis of the objective world—transforming this world into a new mode of being.

(*EC*: 168)

For Marcuse, as for Brown's Hesiod, this is the key to a new *order*. Marcuse writes that it is only Baudelaire's use of this word, in the refrain from '*L'Invitation au voyage*,' that sustains a non-repressive sense: '*Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, / Luxe, calme, et volupté*' (*EC*: 164). Marcuse concludes, and in this is almost echoing Brown (both, perhaps, revealing a Hegelian trend that in turn belongs to the Greeks), that 'Static triumphs prove dynamic; but it is a static that moves in its own fullness—a productivity that is sensuousness, play and song' (*EC*: 164-165). 'Singing is Being [*Gesang ist Dasein*]' (*SO*: 15). It is an Erotic order, which belongs to what Marcuse calls 'the aesthetic dimension.'

II

Marcuse's aesthetics are fascinating not because of any success they might have as a theory of art, but because they follow the dramatic unworking, or romantic failure, that we saw at the heart of Emerson's 'Experience.' In his attempt to ascend from appear-

ance to actuality, that is for art to be political and to heal the wounds of reason (its fragmentation), Marcuse has no choice but to fail because his philosophical antecedents, namely Kant and Schiller, refuse the possibility of any such rapprochement between the two realms. He is, as we shall see, unable to fly by the nets of inherited philosophy.

Each of Marcuse's works on aesthetics contains an explicit need or hope for reconciliation between reason and sensibility (*Vernunft* and *Sinnlichkeit*) in the *reception* of beauty, and of art in particular. Each book, that is, except his last most pessimistic but, arguably, most convincing work on art after *Eros and Civilization*, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978). Here he has ceased to hold such a hope (though if this hope was ever sustainable must be a question for this section). Holding out for the promise of a reconciliation between reason, or the intellectual faculty, and sensuality, or the somatic faculty (and the failure to sustain such a reconciliation) has been part of Marcuse's work since at least his book on Hegel in 1932. Here he writes, 'According to Hegel Kant had not only indicated the internally possible unity between understanding and sensibility, but also between thought and being, subjectivity and objectivity as well' (*HO*: 17). Though Kant would have resisted such a unity, the position that Marcuse has in mind, and which he discusses in detail in *Eros and Civilization*, is the relationship between imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) as a sensuous faculty, and the understanding (*Verstand*) as a cognitive faculty, in the reception of beauty in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1791), and in particular, the first part of that book, 'The Critique of Aesthetic Judgment'.

The problem that Marcuse identifies in Enlightenment aesthetics is that the 'sensuous perception' of the beautiful was restricted, from its inception in Alexander

Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (c.1750), to « *les facultés de connaissance "inférieure" à l'intelligence* »¹² [‘the faculties of knowledge “inferior” to the intelligence’]. This is characteristic of a long-standing philosophical denigration of the sensible that remains insidious in the philosophy of Kant, where ‘reason must exercise dominion over sensibility [*Sinnlichkeit*].’¹³ Leading to Marcuse's point that: ‘The philosophical history of the term *aesthetic* reflects the repressive treatment of the sensuous (and thereby “corporeal”) cognitive processes’ (*EC*: 181). This priority of the intelligible over the sensible extends as far back as Plato:

We must in my opinion begin by distinguishing between that which always is and never becomes from that which is always becoming but never is. The one is apprehensible by *intelligence* with the aid of reasoning, being eternally the same, the other is the object of opinion and *irrational sensation*, coming to be and ceasing to be, but never fully real.¹⁴

However, as we know from the Kantian settlement set out in Chapter 1, his relation to the sensible and the intelligible is quite different from Plato's. In Kant's writing before his *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, the aesthetic corresponds to the pure intuition of time and space (the transcendental aesthetic).¹⁵ In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), sensibility extends only to objects of possible experience, that is not to things-in-themselves, but to our *experience* of perception from which we can *intellectually* postulate these things but from which we cannot *determine* them. What is most ‘real’ belongs to the perception of the sensible (intuition), and though reason can assume a thing-in-itself, it cannot obtain to it. Kant's expectation of reason, unlike Plato's, is lim-

¹² Armand Nivèlle, *Les Théories esthétiques en Allemagne de Baumgarten à Kant* (Paris: Société d'édition “Les Belles Lettres,” 1955), p23.

¹³ Immanuel Kant (trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews), *The Critique of the Power of Judgement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 [1790 (2nd edn. 1793)]), p. 151. Hereafter referred to as *CJ* in the text.

¹⁴ Plato (trans. Desmond Lee), *Timaeus and Critias* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 28; emphasis added.

¹⁵ See Chapter 4.

ited (merely regulative)—indeed, Marcuse implies, it constitutes a reversal of Platonism, from intellect to sense.

In English each of the words ‘sensual,’ ‘sensuous,’ and ‘sensible,’ has a different meaning and their common Latin root, *sensus*, is all but forgotten. However, Marcuse points out that in German they correspond to the word *sinnlich* or to the noun form *Sinnlichkeit* (EC: 181ff). The word ‘sensuous’ was coined in English by John Milton in order to avoid the appetitive and corporeal connotations of ‘sensual.’ His Puritan distortion has been maintained, and with it, the aversion to the sexual and instinctual connotations present in everyday as well as philosophical German. ‘Sensible’ has also lost much of its meaning as ‘palpable’ and is more often used in philosophy to mean ‘perceptible to the mind.’ English, then, translates *sinnlich(e)* as ‘sensuous,’ rather than ‘sensual,’ and downplays the material connotations of the word ‘sensible.’ For Marcuse, it is vital to return the body to the senses and remove the stress upon the *cognitive* faculty in aesthetic theory.¹⁶ Marcuse sums up this point as follows:

The etymological fate of a basic term is rarely an accident. What is the reality behind the conceptual development from *sensuality* to *sensuousness* (sensitive cognition) to art (aesthetics)? Sensuousness, the mediating concept, designates the senses as sources and organs of cognition. But the senses are not exclusively, and not even primarily, organs of cognition. Their cognitive function is con-fused¹⁷ with their appetitive function (sensuality); they are erotogenic, and they are governed by the pleasure principle. From this fusion of the cognitive and appetitive functions derives the confused, inferior, passive character of sense-cognition which makes it unsuitable for the reality principle unless subjected to and formed by the conceptual activity of the intellect, of reason. And in so far as philosophy accepted the rules and values of the reality principle, the

¹⁶ It might also be useful to recall the opening sentence of Marx’s first thesis on Feuerbach: ‘The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism—that of Feuerbach included—is that the thing, reality, sensuousness [*Sinnlichkeit*], is conceived only in the form of the *object* or of *intuition*, but not as *human sensuous activity, practice*, not subjectively’, in Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976). Which concurs with Marcuse’s reading of Hegel in the last chapter.

¹⁷ ‘Confused’ in aesthetic theory means ‘mixed’ or ‘un-separated’ rather than ‘bewildered’ or ‘puzzled.’

claim of sensuousness free from the dominance of reason found no place
in philosophy; greatly modified, it obtained refuge in the theory of art.
(*EC*: 183-184)

Here then, Marcuse uses a psychoanalytic discourse to retrieve the ontological priority of Eros, established in the last chapter, from the domination of reason, and asserts its continuity, albeit adulterated, in aesthetic theory. What he is pointing to though, crucially for his aesthetics, is that art (the ‘art-work’) is not the most important thing. Rather, it is the *feeling*—the somatic—response to art that lies beyond, not beneath, the claims of reason. The relationship between Eros and art is deeply rooted in psychoanalysis, and the pleasure principle’s responsiveness to art is recognised by Marcuse as a critique of the technological reason of the performance principle. ‘[T]he beautiful pertains to the domain of the primary instincts’,¹⁸ to their needs as represented by the desires registered in the response to artworks. Art is received as an expression of unfulfillment which is also displayed in fantasy and perversion and, as such, like them, it corresponds to the return of the repressed primary needs of the psyche (*EC*: 145). Marcuse summed up this power of art under that great clarion call of the New Left: Whitehead’s ‘The Great Refusal.’

For Marcuse, the aesthetic is a way of thinking and acting *creatively* that does not exclusively use rationality. This is important because it allows a negative position to be taken with regard to rationalistic modernity and, as we shall see, the assertion of a romantic reunification with nature’s historical process. The authority for his aesthetic negativity is extrapolated from Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. In this, his third *Critique*, Kant strove to find a way to put human understanding back into nature and to

¹⁸ Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 26. Hereafter referred to as *EL* in the text.

provide a ground, in judgment, for human morality. That is, to make the understanding (the theoretical) chime with the moral (the practical), and the way he did this was to suggest that they came together in the reception, or judgment, of the beautiful—in doing so Kant laid the ground for German romanticism. Judgments, broadly speaking, are the way in which we come to decisions about our intuitions, how we can say *a priori* what something *is* (theoretically), how someone *should act* (practically), or if something *seems beautiful* (aesthetically). The question, then, is why is an aesthetic judgment different from a pure or practical judgment of the understanding? The difference, Kant argues, is between cognition and feeling. In judgments of the understanding we relate an intuition to a concept and thereby judge of it.¹⁹ A concept, in this instance, is different from what we saw in Hegel in the last chapter, where *Begriff* meant knowledge of the complete mediation of an object. For Kant *Begriff*, or concept means, rather, the way in which the manifold of undetermined appearances is determined into one representation—it is an epistemological rather than an ontological category. The key word here for the third *Critique* is ‘determined,’ for Kant distinguishes between ‘determining’ and ‘reflecting’ judgments, the first of which are conceptual, the second purely formal. In the latter instance, judgment corresponds to a feeling of pleasure or displeasure, not to cognition. Aesthetic judgments, or reflecting judgments, are grounded in the sensations of the body, not of the mind,²⁰ thus ‘The basic experience in this dimension is sensuous rather than conceptual; the aesthetic perception is essential intuition, not notion [*Begriff*]’ (*EC*: 176).

¹⁹ See Immanuel Kant (trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood), *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), ‘Transcendental Analytic’ pp. 201-265, and the ‘On the Schematism of the Pure Concepts of Understanding,’ pp. 271-277.

²⁰ Though, I would argue, in Kant this opposition is often not sustainable.

Marcuse goes on to summarise Kant:

The aesthetic perception derives from the perception of the pure *form* of an object, regardless of its ‘matter’ and of its (internal or external) ‘purpose.’ An object represented in its pure form is ‘beautiful.’ Such representation is the work (or rather play) of *imagination*. As imagination, the aesthetic perception is both sensuous and at the same time more than sensuousness (the ‘third’ basic faculty²¹): it gives pleasure and is therefore essentially subjective; but in so far as this pleasure is constituted by the pure form of the object itself, it accompanies the aesthetic perception universally and necessarily—for *any* perceiving subject.

(EC: 176-177)

What is meant by form is that we, through our intuitions (time and space) *impose*, subjectively, a representation upon an object that we cannot know in itself. Moreover, in aesthetic judgments, we do not even attempt to know the ‘matter’ of the object that might be cognisable. For example, we reflect on a *painting*, not the paint; we read a *poem*, not the print. What is cognisable about a painting or poem, what it *is*, is not how we aesthetically respond to it, which, Kant argues, exists in purely formal terms as pleasure or unpleasure. We can go as far as to say that in Kantian aesthetics there is no (art) object as such (in the sense of the famous transcendental X of the first *Critique*), only a feeling which we reflect upon; that is, a *reflecting judgment*.

Also, such a formal concern is without a ‘purpose’ or ‘end’ [*Zweck*]. Non-conceptual judgments of beauty are not teleological. In this Kant stresses the indeterminability of the judgment, that, as Marcuse writes, ‘Whatever the object might be (thing, flower, animal, or man²²), it is represented and judged not in terms of its usefulness, not according to any purpose it may possibly serve, and also not in view of its “in-

²¹ Imagination, sensibility [*Sinnlichkeit*] and apperception; see Chapter 4.

²² Kant does actually say that human beauty does not fit into this paradigm, because it always concerns a teleological interest in the health of the subject in question and belongs to the cultural (empirical) determinations of race. See *CJ* pp. 114-115; 118-119, where beauty is either normative or ideal, i.e., *purposive*.

ternal” finality and completeness’ (*EC*: 178). Art must be non-utilitarian (a problem for a Marxist aesthetics as we shall see) and cannot be a whole in itself (which is why Kant should not be used to support the New Criticism). Rather, as to its relation to the larger picture of the world in which the aesthetic judgment occurs, it must be indeterminate and subjective. Any response to art must be *disinterested*. And because it contains no references to culture or other empirical or learned modes of judgment, the judgment of beauty can be assumed as at least (ideally) possible for all people, no matter when and where they are, (which gives Kant his famous ‘*sensus communis*’). Subsequently, these formal judgments are called ‘subjective universals.’

This is important for Marcuse because a subjective response to nature breaks away from the hold of the concept of the understanding and allows for a receptive freedom (a negation). The subjectivity of aesthetic judgment is at the heart of the third *Critique*, because hitherto Kant had discussed objective knowledge and objective morality, but had had difficulty in placing the individual, had not been able to locate him or her in nature. But pleasure felt purely in judging a beautiful object is—in fact has to be—subjective as, Kant argues, there is no objective way in which pleasure could be shared *a priori*, so the subject judges purely for him or herself. But, what causes pleasure is not a somatic thrill as such, but rather the satisfaction the subject feels in finding the understanding in nature itself—nature being the first object and exemplary model of beauty (here Kant can be seen to subsume the intuition under *theoria*, the dominance of vision). On one level, we can recall the last chapter, seeing this as another example of the narcissism of the understanding. For, and Kant makes this quite clear on several occasions in the first *Critique*, nature itself is nothing more than the totality of appearances brought together by the understanding—so, we might conclude that the understanding finds

pleasure merely in itself.²³ This is certainly a plausible reading, and indeed, seems key to the comprehension of absolute idealism, where the subject *makes* its own nature (finds him or herself behind the veil). But such a reading, though I think important, would perhaps miss the point, which is that the subject, through the act of reflecting judgment, finds him or herself at home in an element that is essentially other to his or her cognitive faculties. Nature, in this sense, is *analogous* to the noumenal substructure of appearances (freedom) rather than to what the understanding makes of those appearances (cause and effect, or necessity). A way of being that occurs precisely because in reflecting judgment the subject does not press a claim to knowledge, only to feeling. In some way this goes so far as to break out of the idealist claim that nature comes only with the understanding, and allows for something ‘other’ to be prior to it—but without curtailing the formal creative claim of the Kantian subject.²⁴

Pleasure, then, is derived from the subject being *creatively at home* in nature, releasing nature from conceptual objectivity, and allowing it simply to ‘be.’ Marcuse argues that:

This experience, which releases the object into its ‘free’ being, is the work of the free play of the imagination. Subject and object become free in a new sense. From this radical change in the attitude toward being results a new quality of pleasure, generated by the form in which the object now reveals itself. Its ‘pure form’ suggests a ‘unity of the manifold,’ an accord of movements and relations which operates under its own laws—the pure manifestation of ‘being-there,’ its existence.

(EC: 178)

²³ This is summarised in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*: ‘nature and possible experience are quite the same, and as the conformity to law in the latter depends upon the necessary connection of appearances in experience (without which we cannot cognize any object whatever in the sensible world), consequently upon the original laws of the understanding, it seems at first strange, but is not the less certain, to say: *the understanding does not derive its laws (a priori) from, but prescribes them to, nature.*’ Trans. James W. Ellington and Paul Carus (Indiana: Hackett 1977), p. 62; Kant’s emphasis.

²⁴ I examine the possibilities contained in this paragraph more concretely in the next chapter.

Through the free-play of the imagination (more on which in the next chapter), the subject and object are released into a new and free way of being which extracts the subject from the dominance of the reality principle. The imagination in this instance has its own law (without a law—i.e., concept) and its own purposiveness (without a purpose or end—i.e., determination). Nothing in the aesthetic judgment is determined in advance and that is what makes it so important for Marcuse, as it gives a space that is continually open in which to think the utopian moment. The imagination, in its free-play, exceeds the mere determination of nature by the understanding. What Kant gives Marcuse is a way of thinking of sensible pleasure as being quite as significant as reason itself—indeed, as having some kind of priority. In this sense his aesthetics, as Marcuse understands them, have very little to do with artworks and everything to do with the way that sensibility mediates the realms of necessity (the conceptual determination of phenomena) and of freedom (the indeterminate realm of the noumenal). Which, according to Marcuse, constitutes the ‘philosophical effort to mediate, in the aesthetic dimension, between sensuousness and reason...an attempt to reconcile the two spheres of the human existence which were torn apart by the reality principle’ (*EC*: 179). Art, then, is not the end of aesthetic judgment, but only the stimulus for it. Art reveals the possibility of an otherness held in the dialectic of hope and despair.

Nevertheless, the radical nature of Kant’s formulation, which frees the sensibility from the tyranny of understanding (though only subsequently to assert the authority of reason), is only the beginning for Marcuse, who wants to politicise this gesture. He turns to Schiller’s engagement with Kant in his *Aesthetic Letters*. What I will argue is that

the reason why Marcuse's aesthetics do not cohere and fall ultimately into pessimism is because they try to sublimate Schiller's aesthetics, but they remain Kantian.²⁵

Schiller was writing in the aftermath of the French Revolution's turn into the Terror,²⁶ and his was a determined attempt to rescue the Enlightenment from its internal barbarity, to move from the state of reason to an 'aesthetic state.' As he writes, 'if man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom' (*Letters*: 9). And if Kant's conclusions show that the understanding (the reality principle) has been unfairly biased toward reason, then Schiller's work, Marcuse argues, 'aims at a remaking of civilization by virtue of the liberating force of the aesthetic function: it is envisaged as containing the possibility of a new reality principle' (*EC*: 80).

Schiller, more than Kant, was sensitive to the corporeal significance of sensuousness (*Sinnlichkeit*), basing his aesthetic theory on the equal priority of two metaphysical forms of energy that ground humanity: the sense-drive or *sinnliche Trieb*, and the form-drive or *Formtrieb*. The first of these corresponds to the plastic nature of humanity, its shifting variations in the course of its being, that is to the temporal and the spatial (what Kant calls the intuitive), and also to the fact of its mere stuff (*Stoff*) which is the principle of becoming (*Werden*). The second corresponds to the formal aspect of humanity, its continuity amidst change and its desire for uniformity and eternity; that is,

²⁵ This, then, is contrary to Paul De Man who has observed that the reception of Kant's aesthetics is so coloured by Schiller that almost nobody's aesthetics are really Kantian. The exception he cites is Nietzsche, who despised the Kant he thought he knew. Paul De Man, 'Kant and Schiller' in his *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 129-162.

²⁶ See Josef Chytrý, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 70-105, in particular, p. 77.

the principle of its Being (*Wesen*).²⁷ These drives are not merely abstract metaphysical principles, but rather as in Hegel's metaphysics, actually constitute the *way* that we come to be, that is they are appetitive and wilful. Because they are polar opposites, Schiller insists they never come into contact, one always acting at the expense of the other, but without resolving their dialectical antagonism. This is what Schiller's translators refer to as a 'binary synthesis' (*Letters*: lxxxvii). So, in the normative reality principle, the form-drive dominates, whereas in the more 'natural' state (*Zustand*) of humanity the sensuous-drive dominates (as for Freud, this natural state exists both at an earlier time and in childhood—though, also like Freud, Schiller admits that such a history is necessarily hypothetical or 'ideal').

The problem that Schiller shares with Marcuse, and why he becomes so vital for him in his reading of Kant, is that the *Letters* argue there must be a compromise between these two drives, and moreover, that the sensuous drive should to be given temporal priority. For, as Schiller writes: "The sensuous [*sinnliche*] drive...comes into operation earlier than the rational, because sensation precedes consciousness, and it is this *priority* [Schiller's emphasis] of the *sensuous* [*sinnlichen*] drives which provides the clue to the whole history of human freedom" (*Letters*: 139; emphasis added). (In this way, Schiller's *Letters* provide a prototype for what Freud was to call the oceanic, which formed the nexus of my reading of Brown and Marcuse.) According to Schiller, the subject is at first undifferentiated from its 'world'; it is pure sense without form or the consciousness that results from form. This empty state, which Schiller refers to as an 'empty infinity' (*Letters*: 129), is overcome (*aufgehoben* in the pre-Hegelian sense), by the form drive, which asserts the

²⁷ In the last chapter this was translated as 'essence,' but here I am following the Wilkinson and Wiloughby rendering. Indeed, this distinction between being and becoming, form and matter, ought to be seen as a precursor to Hegel's distinction between essence and existence.

‘Personality,’ or the unity of being, and the subject emerges. This pattern, however, as a shallow version of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is not what concerns Marcuse explicitly; it is, rather, the way in which these two drives, though they do not touch, interact. Schiller calls this the ‘aesthetic-drive,’ and in it, *both* the other drives are annulled.

In a sense, Schiller’s aesthetic-drive is a metaphysical hypostatisation of Kant’s ‘formal pleasure,’ in which neither the understanding nor sensibility dominate but both are in play. In this condition, Marcuse writes, ‘man is free to “play” with his faculties and potentialities and with those of nature, and only by “playing” with them is he free. His world is then display (*Schein*), and its order is that of beauty’ (*EC*: 188). *Schein*, display or mere appearance or illusion, as Schiller’s master term, is not here dismissed as a falling away, as it will be for Hegel, to be superseded by an *Erscheinung*, or mediated appearance. But it is rather to be celebrated precisely because it does not mediate, because it has no relation to ‘reality,’²⁸ it lets things ‘be-there,’ and as pure form does not touch them (it remains without a concept). Marcuse explains:

With this change in the basic and formative experience, the object of experience [i.e., nature] changes: released from violent domination and exploitation, and instead shaped by the play impulse, nature would also be liberated from its own brutality and would become free to display the wealth of its purposeless forms which express the ‘inner life’ of its objects. And a corresponding change would take place in the subjective world...beyond want and anxiety human activity becomes *display*—the free manifestation of potentialities.

(*EC*: 189-190)

There is, however, a moment in this where Marcuse diverges, though without admitting it, from Schiller’s avowed ends. For Schiller the aesthetic-drive, manifested in play and display, is only valid as a step on the way to the re-finding of an *inherent* morality.

²⁸ Which for Schiller is both *Realität* and *Wirklichkeit* interchangeably.

Whereas Marcuse argues that in freeing sensuality from reason, the aesthetic has done its job, which is, in a sense, to overstep the world, to *show* it how it could be, not how it is. *Schein* acts purely as a negative force, an antithesis to the false actuality of the world. And here we come to the very centre of Marcuse's romantic aesthetics: the potential for the imagination to exceed the given world, to exceed 'reality,' and to exist as *schöner Schein*, not merely in art works, but in an existential comportment to the world, which for Marcuse is erotic in the widened—and widening—sense. 'Imagination,' he writes, 'preserves the objectives of those mental processes which have remained free from the repressive reality principle; in their aesthetic function, they can be incorporated into the conscious rationality of mature civilization' (*EC*: 193-194). As a return of the pre-rational in the rational, Marcuse's (and Schiller's) aesthetics are profoundly anti-realist, and it is this, amongst other things, that makes for a vexed relationship with Marxism.²⁹

Now, with his anti-realism in mind, we might want to ask what kind of art Marcuse does approve of, what he finds appropriate to his own political position.³⁰ However, I think that this is precisely the wrong question to ask, because it is not art that is in question, but, to return to Kant, it is *judgment*. What is at stake is how we *respond* to that which we cannot know, such as the impossible otherness of nature or of our own natures, of which the novelty of the artwork is the exemplar. Which becomes the utopian question: how can we be lead to a world that is-not-yet and which figures a reconciliation between phenomena and noumena, appearance and reality? This, as Andrew Bowie observes, is central to the romantic aesthetic:

²⁹ See Chapter 4.

³⁰ This is the question behind Timothy J. Lukes, *The Flight into Inwardness: An Exposition and Critique of Herbert Marcuse's Theory of Liberative Aesthetics* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1985), who fails to provide an understanding of Kant or a reading of Schiller which is adequate to the problems Marcuse encounters. However, he does provide the very taxonomy of artistic forms that I am deliberately going to avoid here (pp. 87-130).

In the Romantic conception art can be regarded as reconciling in the realm of appearance what is unreconciled in reality, and thus as a form of ideology. Art does so, though, because it grants freedom to the imagination, allowing it to move beyond the world of what there is to a world of as yet unrealised possibility. There is therefore, in the strict sense of the word, a 'utopian' aspect involved in the understanding of art.

(RCT: 14)

This tension remains very much in the background of Marcuse's thinking. But I shall bring it to the fore and show that this 'ideological reconciliation,' or rather a considered rejection of it, is precisely why his aesthetics break down and fall into the near despair of *The Aesthetic Dimension*. I want to sketch this romantic trajectory of his aesthetics in the next section: the irreducible and ultimately unsublatable conflict between a formal *Schein* and recalcitrant 'reality.'

III

Marcuse identifies his own problem as early as *Eros and Civilization* and then spends the next twenty-five years circling around it and repeating it. He sums it up as follows:

As aesthetic phenomenon, the critical function of art is self-defeating. The very commitment of art to form vitiates the negation of unfreedom in art. In order to be negated, unfreedom must be represented in the work of art with the semblance of reality. This element of semblance (show, *Schein*) necessarily subjects the presented reality to aesthetic standards and thus deprives it of its terror. Moreover, the form of the work of art invests the content with the qualities of enjoyment. Style, rhythm, meter introduce an aesthetic order which is itself pleasurable: it reconciles with the content.

(EC: 144-145)

How can art actually affect a reality that it cannot touch without distorting it? How can our mere sensuous pleasure manifest itself in real changes in society? The romantic ori-

gin of this duality, already observed in Kant's disinterestedness, in that art's *isness*, its materiality or its ideality, is not an issue for aesthetic judgment, are made plain in Schiller's *Letters*. Here semblance must not obtain to reality; to do so would be to overstep art and fall back from the aesthetic state into the merely real.

But it is in the *world of semblance* alone that he [the poet, *Dichter*] possesses sovereign right, in the insubstantial realm of the imagination; and he possesses it there only as long as he scrupulously refrains from predicating real existence on it in theory, and as long as he renounces all idea of imparting real existence through it in practice.

(*Letters*: 197; Schiller's emphasis)

Nevertheless, for Schiller the aesthetic state (both *Zustand*, and *Staat*) remains the moral potential of humanity and the telos of his substantively didactic work (on the aesthetic *education* of man). But this is only because his aesthetic theory raises the level of the argument above either materiality or form, the two drives, and onto a higher plateau. Marcuse is less sanguine despite his faith in the oceanic feeling, Eros, and even in phantasy. Art in and of itself ineluctably falls back into the *mere form* by which it is judged, that is, no sublation, no overcoming, of either form or matter takes place. The aesthetic state (*Zustand* and *Staat*) is lost to utopia.

However, this is not his only word on the subject. In *An Essay on Liberation* (1969), for example, he is, to begin with at least, much more optimistic about art's powers. Here, the connection between the beautiful and the political, only a possibility in Kant, but explicit in Schiller, lies behind the questions Marcuse asks himself. 'Throughout the centuries,' he writes, 'the analysis of the aesthetic dimension has focused on the idea of the beautiful. Does this idea express the aesthetic ethos which provides the common denominator of the aesthetic and the political?' (*EL*: 26). Here form is expres-

sive of a new goal, what he calls a ‘new sensibility.’ Moreover, form is genuinely productive:

In the reconstruction of society for the attainment of this goal, reality altogether would assume a *Form* expressive of the new goal. The aesthetic quality of the Form would make it a work of *art*, but in as much as *the Form is to emerge* in the social process of production, art would have changed its traditional locus and function in society: it would have become a *productive* force in the material as well as cultural transformation. And as such force, art would be an integral factor in shaping the quality and the ‘appearance’ of things, in shaping the reality, the way of life. This would mean the *Aufhebung* of art: end of the segregation of the aesthetic from the real...

(EL: 31-32)

There is a difficult and inexplicable elision here between the appearance of things and the way their reality is shaped. For Schiller, if reality becomes art then it would be art that would cease to be. Marcuse momentarily asserts the opposite, tries out the position he most wants to obtain by translating—sublating—reality into art, into a production of aesthetic form. In this passage, he has clearly moved to a dialectical position—but it proves to be unsustainable.

In the last chapter, we saw how the concept of nature emerges from the dialectic of consciousness, and how the real itself is actually an unstable factor in this ongoing process. If Marcuse was being Hegelian here, then what he is saying makes sense. But he cannot reconcile his ‘formalism’ with his new conception of an aesthetic reality. To allow such a sublation Marcuse has either to release art from any such formal structure and ‘make it real,’ that is give it a concept (in either the Kantian or the Hegelian sense), which is suggested in the citation as an end or goal, or he has to reduce reality to a vulgar idealism of the merely formal. This reprises, in a new mode, the romantic crisis of system and fragment. He is incapable of maintaining either of these contradictory positions. Rather, a few pages latter he reasserts the binarism, the consequence of art’s

purely negative authority, and returns from Hegel to Schiller and Kant, to the separation of art and reality.

The aesthetic necessity of art supersedes the terrible necessity of reality, sublimates its pain and pleasure; the blind suffering and cruelty of nature (and of the 'nature' of man) assume meaning and end—'poetic justice.'... And inside this aesthetic universe, joy and fulfillment find their proper place alongside pain and death—everything is in order again. The indictment is cancelled, and even defiance, insult, and derision—the extreme artistic negation of art—succumb to this order.

(*EL*: 44)

Art is sublimation (*Là tout n'est qu'ordre...*), every negation of reality is reassumed by reality, is cancelled out because the formal qualities of art are just that: form. Even though art continues to negate, and the imagination assumes a position counter to reality, by revealing the 'truth' of that reality—is even in excess of it—it is a toothless negation because such art, as an aesthetic or reflecting judgment, cannot form a concept. As such, it maintains a rather precarious ontological existence.

To recapitulate, art works, as objects, do not transcend reality, only our judgments do. As such and because of the Kantian/Schillerian origin of Marcuse's argument, the artwork itself is not on these terms subversive, but only our *reception* of art. Therefore, when he talks about art, Marcuse faces a dilemma. The example he draws on to illustrate this problem is the branch of then contemporary art that he calls 'anti-art,' by which he means those works which have rejected bourgeois or traditional concepts of form, by fracturing syntax, tonal structure, rhythm, the frame, perspective, etc. But these, he argues, negate only to be drawn back into what they negate, show the way only to lead nowhere (they are indeterminate). If they are not brought to nothing by academic acceptance, then they are by commercial success. Thus, "The very Form of art contradicts the effort to do away with the segregation of art to a "second reality," to

translate the truth of the productive imagination to the first reality' (*EL*: 42). Perhaps surprisingly, Marcuse seems to be back in Plato's *Republic*. The ideality of the artwork in its reception is unoblatable and its materiality disappears beneath the Kantian inheritance, which is the romantic inheritance. The distilled problem then is that art cannot become praxis, cannot lead directly to a revolutionary act, only to revolutionary *ideas*. This is dealt with most coherently in Marcuse's last book, *The Aesthetic Dimension*.

Here Marcuse does two things, firstly, he takes the difficult relationship between form, content and reality to another degree; secondly, he asserts the failure of art as praxis because, 'In reality it is evil which triumphs, and there are only islands of good where one can find refuge for a brief time.'³¹ The discussion of form, content and reality is continuous with the foregoing argument that art as form is insuperably separated from the reality it represents. And, again, Marcuse celebrates this as the true authority of art. Indeed, just as in Schiller's *Letters*, realistic art which corresponds to the discursive practices and events of 'everyday life'—by which I assume he means any kind of Lukàcian reflectionism or socialist realism—is dismissed as useless precisely because of its 'utility.' As for Kant, art remains without interest and without purpose. Art *is* art only where it transcends the given—or rather our *understanding* of the given.

Here Marcuse inserts a subtle twist. His example, again, is taken from the various radical or anti-arts. These, he argues, 'share a common assumption—namely, that the modern period is characterized by a disintegration of reality which renders any self-enclosed form, any intention of meaning (*Sinngebung*) untrue, if not impossible' (*AD*: 49-50). Thus, art gives up on mimesis because the world itself is no longer 'realistic' and

³¹ Herbert Marcuse (trans. and rev. Herbert Marcuse and Erica Sherover), *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, 1978 (German edn. *Die Permanenz der Kunst* (Munich: Verlag, 1977)), p. 47. Hereafter referred to as *AD* in the text.

anti-art claims to follow the truth of this new way of looking at the world. In this instance, Marcuse claims, anti-art asserts its truth as the impossibility of truth. But, this very claim to truth by radical art is in itself problematic, for it only leads to another desublimation. Following the trend in Marcuse's thought, we are not surprised to find him say that 'Only in the "illusory world" do things appear as what they are and what they can be' (*AD*: 54). If anti-art is based on a new truth of reality then in and of itself, it would be false to the possibilities of a *transcendent* art that preserved a formal distance from 'reality.' It has failed Schiller's test and fallen back into the merely 'actual.' Thus, we are also not surprised to find that, in *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Marcuse returns to bourgeois art forms.

Marcuse's dialectical rigor has taken him yet one stage further: anti-art does not even reflect the truth of a modern fragmented and intentionless social reality. For, he argues, society is not fragmented, but rather increasingly homogenised and integrated (one-dimensional), against which stands the otherness of artistic form. We seem to be left in an impossible position. If anti-art *appears* unrealistic, it fails to transcend society precisely because it reflects the false consciousness or reality/performance principle, which argues that society, *is* fragmented. 'The release (*Entschränkung*) and desublimation,' he writes, 'which occur in anti-art thus abstract from (and falsify) reality because they lack the cognitive and cutting power of the aesthetic form; they are mimesis without transformation' (*AD*: 52). What they are mimetic of is precisely that which art should deny. Marcuse is left once more with the paradoxical legacy of romanticism, where art fails because it does not touch reality, but its very distance from reality is its only strength. The truth of art, that it turns content into form, is not the truth of reality, where form versus content is a false duality and a false dialectic. In reality there is only

the process of negation as such. Artistic form, in accepting the (false) fragmentation of everyday life as a starting point, has given up on the dialectic, leading to the crisis of romanticism, which is always *between* the ideal totality and the (real) fragment as its negation. Art's formal ideality suggests a false and impossible reconciliation of sensibility and understanding, obviating the truth of its fragmentary relationship to 'reality.' Which is why Marcuse has to conclude—and in this lies his critique of Marxist aesthetics—that:

The political potential of art lies only in its own aesthetic dimension. Its relation to praxis is inexorably indirect, mediated, and frustrating. The more immediately political the work of art, the more it reduces the power of estrangement and the radical, transcendent goals of change.

(AD: xii-xiii)

This reveals that because of the rigor of Marcuse's own reading of Schiller's *schöner Schein*, his own great love of art and his continued belief in its ameliorative authority is still not allowed to determine the reality it critiques, and is not given a political power it does not possess. Art, as appearance does not become reality, does not transform reality, it only exists in the separate aesthetic dimension as an 'idea'—what Kant calls an 'aesthetic idea.' For all Marcuse's Left-Hegelian or Marxist intentions, his own aesthetics lead him back from a dialectic to a dualism—back, that is, to Kant.³²

For Kant, as was briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, an idea is the necessary position reached by 'reason' that exceeds the understanding—the experiences of which constitute our reality. In this sense, Kant interprets Platonism—that which is ideal is beyond that which is known to be real and is legislated by our finitude. Through reason we can, for example, ask about god, the infinite, the moral—we can even act as though

³² This return to Kant is also noted by Sidney Lipshires, though in a slightly different context. See, Lipshires, *Herbert Marcuse: From Marx to Freud and Beyond* (Cambridge MA: Schenkman, 1974), p. 82.

they exist in religion, in mathematics or in the kingdom of ends respectively, but we can never *experience* these ideas as grounded. But reason also extends out from aesthetics, providing a necessarily regulative aesthetic idea. Kant's crucial definition of the aesthetic idea runs as follows, and I think it is important to see in this much of what comes down to us as romanticism.

The imagination (as a productive cognitive faculty) is, namely, very powerful in creating, as it were, another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it. We entertain ourselves with it when experience seems too mundane to us; we transform the latter, no doubt always in accordance with analogous laws, but also in accordance with principles that lie higher in reason (and which are every bit as natural to us as those in accordance with which the understanding apprehends empirical nature); in this we feel our freedom from the law of association (which applies to the empirical use of that faculty), in accordance with which material can certainly be lent to us by nature, but the latter can be transformed by us into something entirely different, namely into that which steps beyond nature.

(CJ: 192; emphases added)

The aesthetic idea *steps beyond nature*, steps beyond the given, by following through the very 'laws' that are given in that nature. The production of reality by the understanding [*Verstand*] is transcended by the imagination as it observes the very pattern of reason [*Vernunft*]. As Marcuse puts it: 'Art stands under the law of the given, while transgressing that law' (AD: 11). This transcendent (and transcendental) imagination gives Marcuse the 'regulative idea' (AD: 69) on which stands the liberative potential of his aesthetic theory. Indeed, this is the very definition of freedom for Kant, the ability to go beyond the phenomenal laws of cause and effect, to open ourselves to the noumenal—even if only through analogy—in reflecting judgment.

We are returned to the higher court of reason; but, for Kant, reason (*Vernunft*) is not repressive (the closest to that would be the understanding: *Verstand*), but of itself is both the goal and the way to freedom. This is not to say that Marcuse shares Kant's

Enlightenment optimism, though he does take from him his philosophical support. Rather, for Marcuse the regulative idea that corresponds to transcendent aesthetic form emerges only insofar as ‘art preserves, with the promise of happiness, the memory of the goals that failed.’ The regulative idea becomes ‘the desperate struggle to save the world’ (*AD*: 69) over against the reality principle of productive forces and the enslavement to the memory of failure. In this instance, art is negation pure and simple.

The *nomos* which art obeys is not that of the established reality principle but of its negation. But mere negation would be abstract, the ‘bad’ utopia. The utopia in great art is never the simple negation of the reality principle but its transcending preservation (*Aufhebung*) in which past and present cast their shadow on fulfillment. The authentic utopia is grounded in recollection.
(*AD*: 73)

So, form cannot be didactic, cannot show ‘reality,’ cannot produce a politics. Art, in itself, is a ‘bad utopia,’ a no-place of thought that emerges from the failure of romanticism and a continuing attachment to Kant’s two-world theory, wherein reality remains untouchable, and which, in this instance, cannot be overcome. But ‘great art’ also *preserves* this failure, makes it somehow accountable to itself, responsible to what it cannot achieve. This is the transcending preservation of an authentic utopia grounded in recollection. And it is to, Marcuse’s last hope, memory that I turn in the last section of this chapter.

IV

Fredric Jameson has pointed out that the titan, Mnemosyne, ‘Memory,’ the mother of the muses, has a similar significance for Marcuse as Eros and Thanatos have for Freud.³³ Memory, the Platonic ‘anamnesis,’ literally ‘bringing back to mind, re-membering,’ is for Marcuse the plenitude that negates the partial reality of the performance-principle. Memory preserves, in some form, the truth values of the essential potential of individuals over against the repressive influence of the reality principle. It does not allow the subject to entirely forget that there was once a period of fulfillment. In this, I think, lies the difference between imagination as transcendental form (the projection of plenitude) and phantasy as recollection (the remembrance of plenitude). Hence its therapeutic power and its centrality to psychoanalysis, but also its difficulties and dangers. Memory is irrational and atemporal, it is regressive; but, as only the repressed subject is rational, Marcuse argues, recovered memory enacts the *negation* of repression. ‘As cognition gives way to re-cognition, the forbidden images and impulses of childhood begin to tell the truth that reason denies. Regression assumes a progressive function’ (*EC*: 19). Memory also sustains the imagos of phantasy that I considered above, the fantasies of the future and of liberation. For Marcuse, as Martin Jay observes, memory has a utopian potential.

Memory, by restoring the forgotten past, was thus a model of the utopian temporality of the future. In other words, it was not merely the content of what is remembered that constitutes the liberating power of memory, but also the fact of memory’s ability to reverse the flow of time that makes it a utopian faculty. If there is to be a true human totality in the future, anamnestic totalization in the present is one of its prefigurations.³⁴

³³ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 112.

³⁴ Martin Jay, ‘Anamnestic Totalization: Reflections on Marcuse’s Theory of Remembrance,’ *Theory and Society*, (Vol. 1, No. 10, January 1982, pp. 1-15) p. 9. Hereafter referred to as *AnT* in the text.

Jay here draws on Marcuse's contention, which Brown echoes, that 'the fatal enemy of lasting gratification is *time*, the idea of inner finiteness, the brevity of all conditions' and that the 'struggle against time' is the *sine qua non* of 'integral human liberation' (*EC*: 191). Though, as we saw, time for Brown was symptomatic, whereas for Marcuse it was, as memory, not merely the dim trace of the past that can be conjured in the present, but rather the sweeping wave in the which the present is enclosed. It *is* the entirety of subjective history, in the Hegelian sense, that has brought us to this moment.³⁵ Because of this, the past *is* the present and the present *is* the past—they are the negations of each other.³⁶ This is what Jay is suggesting with 'anamnestic totalization'; it is the timelessness of the 'present' which is the ontological 'presence' of history. Things pass into absence through their negation in the present; but, equally, they are preserved in that present, are *sublated* into it. The past does *not* just go away.

Remembrance in German is *Erinnerung*. Like *Trieb*, this word has no satisfactory translation, particularly when it is enmeshed in Hegel's thought. Marcuse gives it the sense of "'turning into oneself" [a] *re-turn* from externalization' (*EC*: 117n). It is the movement of the subject described by the *Phenomenology* back into itself with the knowledge of the world that we saw in the dialectic of Understanding. A totalized memory, then, would be the product of Absolute knowledge (in Marcuse's sense) and brings with it the freedom that entails. Even a freedom from the repressive fear of death: 'the bond that ties Eros to the death instinct[, t]he brute fact of death denies once and for all the reality of a non-repressive existence' (*EC*: 231). For it is death and transience, not just the fading of memory, that makes time the enemy of lasting gratification.

³⁵ Cf. MHH: 186.

³⁶ For Marcuse's detailed reading of this see RR: 103ff and *HO*: *passim*.

The flux of time is society's most natural ally in maintaining law and order, conformity, and the institutions that relegate freedom to a perpetual utopia; the flux of time helps men to forget what it was and what can be: it makes them oblivious to the better past and the better future.

(*EC*: 231)

For Marcuse, the Erotic transcendence into the world which returns, in Understanding, from objects, as a mediated Absolute, must also absolve the transience of history, which is preserved in the tension of re-membrance. Memory retroactively puts back together what was severed by repression.

What the past preserves, in contradiction to the present, is alternatives. The alternative that is important to Marcuse is the remembrance, the turning back into, primary narcissism. Remembrance, *Erinnerung*, is the negation of the extant understanding of temporal conditions, the fixation to a categorical movement of time, clock time. Time, under present conditions, he argues, is reflected in the necessity of *forgetting*, a forgetting which is a forgiving and a forgiving which perpetuates the crimes of the past. 'The wounds that heal in time are the wounds that contained the poison' (*EC*: 232). 'Eros,' he writes, 'penetrating into consciousness, is moved by remembrance; with it he protests against the order of renunciation; he uses memory in his effort to defeat time in a world dominated by time' (*EC*: 233). Eros has a double task of negation, firstly to negate the forgetting of injustice, and secondly to negate the forgetting of instinctual fulfilment. The first of these tasks Marcuse gives to art, in its negative relation to the reality principle in which it preserves the promise of the pleasure principle (which we saw in Kant as the understanding finding itself in nature—in beauty). The second task he gives to psychoanalysis and philosophy, which is to the negativity of a Critical Theory that destabilises the inertia of thinking. In both these instances memory is the instantiation

of a critical or ‘Archimedean point’ (*AnT*: 8) outside of present conditions because memory *returns* from a negativity, it re-members; it does not work with the part, but the whole. Though these primary negations may be given to literature and to thinking, they in themselves are not going to achieve anything. As he writes of Proust: ‘this defeat of time is artistic and spurious; remembrance is no real weapon unless it is translated into historical action’ (*EC*: 233). Memory must be translated into praxis, if it is to be decisive in the struggle against domination. Here is restated the problem with artistic form that was encountered in the last section.

There are two pressing critiques of this position, one articulated via Whitebook from Ricoeur, the other from Ernst Bloch, via Jay. Whitebook, attacking Marcuse’s premises outlined in the last chapter, contends that he is not only naïve but wrong to begin by associating Freud’s Anankē with material scarcity and then to suggest that scarcity has been overcome through *technē*. His point is that Marcuse is fundamentally incorrect even to translate Anankē as need, want or *Lebensnot*. In theory, Whitebook has nothing against the suggestion that material scarcity can and should be overcome. However, he argues, and I think he is correct in this, that for Freud,

there is also an essential connection between Ananke and temporality in the form of transience; Ananke presents itself to us in the figure of loss, the ineluctable result of the fleeting existence of things, that is, the inexorable unidirectional flow of time and the loss that inevitably results from it.

(*UP*: 29)

The question Whitebook asks Marcuse is whether the struggle against *time*, if it is even conceivable, is actually desirable at all (in this we must also remember Emerson and Funes the Memorious). Like Brown, one of the things that Marcuse sees, particularly in the mythical figures of Orpheus and Narcissus, is an arrest of time. For Whitebook, this

is part of Marcuse's '*omnipotent denial of reality*' (PU: 40; Whitebook's emphasis), which in traditional psychoanalysis is set off against not only want, but also *transience*, that is the absence of the (lost) object which becomes internalised in the process outlined above. This transience is integral to the subject's coming to know the world at all, to its finding of objects, for if this is to be a re-finding then the objects must be 'lost.' It seems highly unlikely that a purely Freudian reading of Marcuse's theory of narcissistic object choice, a union that relies on the oceanic feeling, can coherently emerge from transience.

Whitebook is here relying on Ricoeur's translation of Anankē as 'ineluctable' or 'inexorable.' It is something that directly militates against the hallucinatory fulfillment of primary narcissism; it is attached to the reality principle, which for Freud is the real meaning of Anankē. The basic principle runs thus: if there is no loss, and as such, if loss is not registered in the emergence of time, then there can be no desire, which as we have seen is the engine of Marcuse's and Brown's dialectics. Desire is the way this loop operates and from which the time sense comes. But, what is more important for Whitebook, is that the human response to loss is *symbolisation*, is language itself—a conclusion that we saw with Brown, where language is the attempt to recover the lost world. If the circuit of desire 'qua insatiable demand' (PU: 73) is broken, then speech itself would be impossible. Speech, by these lights, emerges from the gap between the wish and its fulfillment, between the lost object and its re-finding. Language has an unbreakable relationship to time. This is why, though he may agree in part with the speculative logic and integrity of Marcuse's position, Whitebook has to ask if such a position is *desirable*.

While Whitebook's criticism of Marcuse's use of Anankē stands in part, it is necessary to go on to differentiate two 'types' of time. On the one hand, there is ra-

tional time, and on the other hand a 'time' in which the self is preserved in its essence, or Hegelian time. The first is only a means to the second, and the second is more complex than the simple omnipotent denial of reality. It is, as we have seen, the coming into being *of* reality. In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse sums up his reading of Hegel and history as follows:

The labor of history comes to rest in history: alienation is cancelled, and with it transcendence and the flux of time. The spirit 'overcomes its temporal form; negates Time.' [Hegel] But the 'end' of history recaptures its content: the force which accomplishes the conquest of time is remembrance (re-collection). Absolute knowledge, in which the spirit attains its truth, is the spirit 'entering into its real self, whereby it abandons its (extraneous) existence and entrusts its Gestalt to remembrance.' [Hegel] Being is no longer the painful transcendence toward the future but the peaceful recapture of the past. Remembrance, which has preserved everything that was, is 'the inner and the actually higher form of the substance.' [Hegel]

(EC: 116-117)

The citations are from the concluding parts of the *Phenomenology*. The most pressing definition, which confirms our above position, is that 'the "end" of history recaptures its content: the force which accomplishes the conquest of time is remembrance'. Remembrance as totalization is not the absence of loss or the denial of loss; it is the *negation* of loss that must pass through it in order to return from it. The end of history is in the process of history, what Marcuse calls the 'preservation of time in time' (EC: 234). Language and symbolisation are not hereby disavowed but, as Marcuse's emphasis on poetry and myth shows, are the main, if hidden, roots for the movement of history. Indeed, in *Reason and Revolution*, Marcuse writes that 'Language is the medium in which the first integration between subject and object takes place' (RR: 75); it is what creates community and also gives mastery over objects, it both individualises and appropriates the other. This, of course, is diametrically opposed to Brown's view in *Life Against Death*

where the totalization of memory, or the mere memories of past gratifications, dominates the reality of the erotic body. Brown's transcendence, as shall become increasingly clear, is only for the present—it creates only for the now: it is timeless not because it recaptures (remembers), but because it creates *ex nihilo*.

So whilst I agree with Whitebook that Freud's *Anankē* is traced with transience, I do not think that Marcuse wants to avoid this, but *to pass through it*. Marcuse's affirmation of Eros and plenitude is not merely the denial of anything that happens after primary narcissism but is the philosophical and psychoanalytical process of double negation that returns to it. There is, then, no call for an original plenitude, but only the myth of such a totality preserved in the memory *retroactively* (*Nachträglichkeit*). Marcuse, as Jay puts, it was 'introducing a myth of original wholeness, or perfect present, of the "remembering" of what has been dismembered, whose roots, if in memory at all, were in remembered desire rather than remembered fulfillment' (*AnT*: 10-11). So desire is retained as the retroactive engine or force that drives the progressive dialectic.

The trouble remains, though, and this is the burden of Bloch's implied critique, that if there is no longer any 'painful transcendence toward the future' but only the 'peaceful recapture of the past' how do *new* conditions emerge in history. Anamnesis is essentially a regressive force, and like Hegel's own theory, it pays no mind to the future—dialectics (contra Ricoeur) are essentially backward looking, Orphic, by nature: the telos is contained in the inception. Anamnesis belongs to the maïeutic tradition of Socratic dialogue which maintains that knowledge is already present and can be recalled if the right questions are asked. This is a circular knowledge where the 'soul merely

meets in reality what it always knew as idea'.³⁷ It cannot explain, nor does it allow for the shock that may take place in the discovery of the new. Jay explains that Bloch prefers the term *anagnorisis*, or 'recognition,' which is based on his 'idiosyncratic ontology of the "not-yet,"' (*AnT*: 12) which does not believe in an archaic plenitude of 'formal' knowledge held in the connotations of anamnesis. *Anagnorisis*, Bloch says:

is revealing: that the new is never completely new for us because we bring with us something to measure it by. We always relate what we find to earlier experience or to an image we have of it. As a result it often happens that we misjudge it upward or downward, but still it becomes richer for us, and is colored with history. It approaches us from our own past and must prove that it is genuine. *Anamnesis* provides the reassuring evidence of complete similarity; *anagnorisis*, however, is linked with reality by only a thin thread; it is therefore more alarming...*anagnorisis* is a shock.

(Bloch: 178)

Bloch's theory suggests that the past cannot rest complete in the present because the present itself brings something new with it and the gap between them elicits a shock rather than a peaceful recurrence. It strikes me that a theory which maintains a gap between an incoming future and a recollection of the past is better suited to a continuation of romantic dissatisfaction with its inherent skepticism of Absolute Idealism—in particular the way it deals with reflecting judgment. This is the most pertinent critique of Marcuse and it exists not only in his aesthetics but also in his own criticism of Brown, who, as we have seen, has a completely different conception of temporality. We will see it in full flower in the next chapter when I use Cornelius Castoriadis's notion of temporal alterity, the complete disjunction between a futural otherness and a deterministic theory of history, to split the difference between Marcuse and Brown.

³⁷ Michael Landmann (trans. David Parent), 'Talking with Ernst Bloch: Korčula, 1968,' *Telos* (Vol. 25, Fall, 1975, pp. 165-185) p. 178. See also *AnT*: pp. 11-12.

In conclusion, we can say that the problem is still one of otherness and is still one of time. Is time the repression of historical otherness or the ingression of futural otherness? Can a formal aesthetics affect concrete changes in reality? Eros as the restless movement toward otherness and toward a creative sustaining relationship between ego and object has to make this decision. For Marcuse, it is clear, in phantasy the object comes from the subject's past, and it is held onto because of the persistence of primary narcissism in the unconscious: 'the image of the redemption of the ego: the coming to rest of all transcendence in a mode of being that has absorbed all becoming, that is for and with itself in all otherness' (*EC*: 130). But this collapses in his vision of representative art as *Schein*, which is as ineluctably removed from reality as we found Emerson's experience was from the death of Waldo. Yet, for Marcuse, art retains its liberative force because of the romantic dialectic of hope and despair. For Brown, whose critique of regressive hallucination leads in the other direction, it is more difficult to place his relation to the otherness of art or of reality. In some ways, for Brown, there is no *other*—in this sense his idealism is purer than Marcuse's, who in this instance is a victim of the romantics' naïve desire to find themselves everywhere only to find 'everywhere' falling into fragments. But this does not mean that for Brown everything is the same; rather it means that difference is only a part of a larger body, *Love's Body*, the expansion of which exists as the motion of metaphor, that is, simply as poetry.