

Critique of Dialectical Reason. Jean-Paul Sarte 1960

The Dogmatic Dialectic and the Critical Dialectic

Written: 1960;
Source: Critique of Dialectical Reason;
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1 Dialectical Monism

Everything we established in *The Search for Method* follows from our fundamental agreement with historical materialism. But as long as we present this agreement merely as one option among others we shall have achieved nothing, and our conclusions will remain conjectural. I have proposed certain methodological rules; but they cannot be valid, in fact they cannot even be discussed, unless the materialist dialectic can be assumed to be true. It must be proved that a negation of a negation can be an affirmation, that conflicts – within a person or a group – are the motive force of History, that each moment of a series is *comprehensible* on the basis of the initial moment, though *irreducible* to it, that History continually effects totalisations of totalisations, and so on, before the details of an analytico-synthetic and regressive-progressive method can be grasped.

But these principles cannot be taken for granted; indeed most anthropologists (*anthropologistes*) would reject them. Of course, the determinism of the positivists is necessarily a form of materialism: whatever its subject matter, it endows it with the characteristics of mechanical materiality, namely inertia and exterior causation. But it normally rejects the reinteriorisation of the different moments in a synthetic progression. Where we see the developmental unity of a single process, the positivists will attempt to show several independent, exterior factors of which the event under consideration is the resultant. What the positivists reject is a monism of interpretation. Take, for example, the excellent historian Georges Lefebvre. He criticises Jaures for claiming to see the *unity* of a process in the events of 1789. As presented by Jaures, 1789 was one simple event. The cause of the Revolution was the ripening of the power of the bourgeoisie, and its result was the legalisation of that power. But it is now well known that the Revolution of 1789 as a specific event required a truly abnormal and unpredictable set of immediate causes: a financial crisis aggravated by the war in America; unemployment, caused by the commercial treaty of 1786 and by the war in the Far East; and, finally, high prices and shortages brought about by the poor harvest of 1788 and by the edict of 1787 which had emptied the granaries.

As for underlying causes, Lefebvre stresses the fact that without the abortive aristocratic revolution, which began in 1787, the bourgeois revolution would have been impossible. He concludes: ‘The rise of a revolutionary class is not necessarily the only cause of its victory; nor is its victory inevitable; nor need it lead to violence. In this instance, the Revolution was begun by

those whom it was to annihilate rather than by those who profited from it, and . . . there is no reason to suppose that great kings could not have checked the progress of the aristocracy in the eighteenth century.’

I do not wish to analyse this text, at least at present. Certainly, Lefebvre may be right to say that Jaures’ interpretation is simplistic, that the unity of a historical process is more ambiguous, more ‘polyvalent’ than he says – at least in its origins. One might try to find the unity of the disparate causes in a broader synthesis, to show that the incompetence of the eighteenth century kings was effect as much as cause, etc., to rediscover circularities, and to show how chance is *integrated* into those ‘feed-back’ devices which are the events of History; and that it is instantly incorporated by the whole so that it appears to everyone as a manifestation of providence, etc. But this misses the point. It is not a matter even of showing that such syntheses are possible, but of proving that they are *necessary*: not any particular one, but in general that the scientist must adopt, in every case and at every level, a totalising attitude towards his subject matter.

Let us not forget that anthropologists never reject the dialectical method *absolutely*. Even Lefebvre does not formulate a general criticism of *every* attempt at totalisation. On the contrary, in his celebrated lectures on the French Revolution he approached the relations between the Assembly, the Commune and various groups of citizens, from 10 August to the September Massacres, *as a dialectician*; he gave the ‘First Terror’ the unity of a developing totalisation. But Lefebvre refused to adopt the totalising attitude *consistently*. In response to our questions, he would no doubt say that History is not a unity, that it obeys diverse laws, that an event may be produced by the pure accidental coincidence of independent factors, and that it may, in turn, develop according to totalising schemata which are peculiar to it. In short, Lefebvre would simply say that he rejects monism, not because it is monism, but because it seems to him *a priori*.

The same attitude has been formulated in other branches of knowledge. The sociologist Georges Gurvitch has described it very accurately as dialectical hyper-empiricism. This is a Neopositivism which rejects every *a priori*; neither the exclusive appeal to analytical Reason, nor the unconditional choice of dialectical Reason can be justified rationally. We must accept the object as it is and let it develop freely before our eyes, without prejudging what types of rationality we will encounter in our investigations. The object itself dictates the method, the manner of approach. Gurvitch calls his hyper-empiricism ‘dialectical’, but this hardly matters since all he means is that his object (social facts) presents itself to investigation as dialectical. His dialecticism is thus itself an empirical conclusion. This means that the attempt to establish totalising movements, reciprocities of conditioning – or, as Gurvitch quite correctly puts it, reciprocities of ‘perspectives’ – etc., is based on past investigations and is *confirmed* by present ones. Generalising this attitude, one might, I think, speak of a neo-positivism which discovers in a given region of anthropology now a dialectical field, now a field of analytical determinism, and now, if occasion demands, other types of rationality.

Within the limits of an empirical anthropology this distrust of the *a priori* is perfectly justified. I have shown in *The Problem of Method* that this is necessary if a living Marxism is to incorporate into itself the disciplines which have hitherto remained external to it. However, whatever else one may say about it, this incorporation must consist in revealing beneath the classical determinism of particular ‘fields’, their dialectical connection with the whole or, where we are dealing with processes whose dialectical character is already recognised, in revealing this regional dialectic as

the expression of a deeper totalising movement. In the end, this means that we are confronted once again with the need to establish the dialectic as the universal method and universal law of anthropology. And this amounts to requiring Marxists to establish their method *a priori*: whatever relations are investigated, there will never be enough of them to establish a dialectical materialism. Such an extrapolation – that is, an infinitely infinite extrapolation – is radically different from scientific induction.

2 Scientific and Dialectical Reason

The attempt to ground the Marxist dialectic on anything other than its content, that is to say, the knowledge which it provides, might be denounced as idealism. In the first place, it might be said that Diogenes demonstrated motion by walking; but what if he had been momentarily paralysed? There is a crisis in Marxist culture; there are many signs today that this crisis is temporary, but its very existence prohibits us from justifying the principles by their results.

The supreme paradox of historical materialism is that it is, at one and the same time, the only truth of History and a total *indetermination* of the Truth. The totalising thought of historical materialism has established everything except its own existence. Or, to put it another way, contaminated by the historical relativism which it has always opposed, it has not exhibited the truth of History as it defines itself, or shown how this determines its nature and validity in the historical process, in the dialectical development of *praxis* and of human experience. In other words, we do not know what it means for a Marxist historian to *speak the truth*. Not that his statements are false – far from it; but he does not have the concept of *Truth* at his disposal. In this way, Marxism presents itself to us, as ideologists, as an unveiling of being, and at the same time as an unanswered question as to the validity of this unveiling.

In response to this, it may be claimed that physicists are not concerned with the ground of their inductions. This is true. But there is a general, formal principle; that there are strict relations between facts. This means: the real is rational. But is this really a principle, in the ordinary sense of the term? Let us say, rather, that it is the condition and fundamental structure of scientific *praxis*. Through experimentation, as through any other form of activity, human action posits and imposes its own possibility. *Praxis* does not, even dogmatically, affirm the *absolute* rationality of the real, if this means that reality obeys a definite system of *a priori* principles and laws, or, in other words, that it complies with a kind of *constituted* reason. Whatever the object of his research, whatever its orientation, the scientist, in his activity, assumes that reality will always manifest itself in such a way that a provisional and fluid rationality can be constituted in and through it. This amounts to saying that the human mind will accept *everything* presented to it by investigation and will subordinate its conception of logic and of intelligibility to the actual data revealed by its investigations. Bachelard has shown clearly how modern physics is in itself a new rationalism: the only presupposition of the *praxis* of the natural sciences is an assertion of *unity* conceived as the perpetual unification of an increasingly real diversity. But this unity depends on human activity rather than on the diversity of phenomena. Moreover, it is neither a knowledge, nor a postulate, nor a Kantian *a priori*. It is action asserting itself within the undertaking, in the explanation of the field and the unification of the means by the end (or of the sum of experimental results by the aim of the experiment).

This is why any comparison between the scientific principle of rationality and the dialectic is absolutely unacceptable.

Scientific research can in fact be unaware of its own principal features. Dialectical knowledge, in contrast, is knowledge of the dialectic. For science, there is not any formal structure, nor any implicit assertion about the rationality of the universe: Reason *is developing* and the mind prejudices nothing. In complete contrast, the dialectic is both a method *and* a movement in the object. For the dialectician, it is grounded on a fundamental claim both about the structure of the real and about that of our *praxis*. We assert simultaneously that the process of knowledge is dialectical, that the movement of the object (whatever it may be) is itself dialectical, and that these two dialectics are one and the same. Taken together, these propositions have a *material content*; they themselves are a form of organised knowledge, or, to put it differently, they define a rationality of the world.

The modern scientist sees Reason as independent of any particular rational system. For him, Reason is the mind as an empty unifier. The dialectician, on the other hand, locates himself within a system: he defines a Reason, and he rejects *a priori* the purely analytical Reason of the seventeenth century, or rather, he treats it as the first moment of a synthetic, progressive Reason. It is impossible to see this as a kind of practical assertion of our detachment; and equally impossible to make of it a postulate, or a working hypothesis. Dialectical Reason transcends the level of methodology; it *states* what a sector of the universe, or, perhaps, the whole universe is. It does not merely direct research, or even pre-judge the mode of appearance of objects. Dialectical Reason legislates, it defines what the world (human or total) must be like for dialectical knowledge to be possible; it simultaneously elucidates the movement of the real and that of our thoughts, and it elucidates the one by the other. This particular rational system, however, is supposed to transcend and to integrate all models of rationality. Dialectical Reason is neither constituent nor constituted reason; it is Reason constituting itself in and through the world, dissolving in itself all constituted Reasons in order to constitute new ones which it transcends and dissolves in turn. It is, therefore, both a type of rationality and the transcendence of all types of rationality. The certainty of always being able to transcend replaces the empty detachment of formal rationality: the ever present possibility of *unifying* becomes the permanent necessity for man of totalising and being totalised, and for the world of being an ever broader, developing totalisation. But knowledge of such scope would be a mere philosophical dream if it did not have all the marks of apodictic certainty. This means that practical successes are not enough; even if the assertions of the dialectician were infinitely confirmed by research, this permanent confirmation would not get us beyond empirical contingency.

So we must take up the whole problem once again, and explore the limits, the validity and the extent of dialectical Reason. We cannot deny that a *Critique* (in the Kantian sense of the term) of dialectical Reason can be made only by dialectical Reason itself; and indeed it must be allowed to ground itself and to develop itself as a free critique of itself, at the same time as being the movement of History and of knowledge. This is precisely what has not been done until now: dialectical Reason has been walled up in dogmatism.

3 Hegelian Dogmatism

The source of this dogmatism lies in the basic problem of 'dialectical materialism'. In setting the dialectic back on its feet Marx revealed the true contradictions of realism. These contradictions were to be the very substance of knowledge, but they have been concealed. We must therefore take them as our starting-point.

The superiority of Hegelian dogmatism, for those who believe in it, lies precisely in that part of it which we now reject – its idealism. For Hegel, the dialectic had no need to prove itself. In the first place Hegel took himself to be at the beginning of the end of History, that is to say, at that moment of Truth which is death. The time had come to judge, because *in future* the philosopher and his judgement would never be required again. Historical evolution required this Last Judgement; it culminated in its philosopher. Thus the totalisation was complete: all that remained was to bring down the curtain. Besides, and most important, the movement of Being and the process of Knowledge are inseparable. This implies, as Hyppolite rightly says, that Knowledge of the Other (object, world, nature) is self-Knowledge, and conversely. Thus Hegel could write: 'Scientific knowledge, however, demands precisely that we surrender to the life of the object, or, which means the same thing, that one hold present and express the internal necessity of this object.' Absolute empiricism becomes identical with absolute necessity: the object is taken as given, at its moment in the history of the World and of Spirit. But this means that consciousness returns to the beginning of its Knowledge and allows this Knowledge *freely* to reconstitute itself within consciousness – it reconstitutes knowledge for itself; it means, in other words, that consciousness can see the strict necessity of the sequence and of the moments which gradually constitute the world as a concrete totality, because it is consciousness itself which constitutes itself for itself as absolute Knowledge, in the absolute freedom of its strict necessity. The reason why Kant could preserve the dualism of noumena and phenomena is that, for him, the unification of sense experience was effected by formal and non-temporal principles: the content of Knowledge could not change the mode of knowing. But if form and knowledge were modified together, and by each other, if necessity no longer belonged to a pure conceptual activity, but to a perpetual, and perpetually total, transformation, then it would have to be suffered *in the realm of Being* in order to be recognised in the development of Knowledge; and it would have to be lived in the movement of knowledge in order to be attributed to the development of the object. *In Hegel's time*, this seemed to imply the identity of Knowledge and its object. Consciousness was consciousness of the Other, and the Other was the being-other of consciousness.

4 The Dialectic in Marx

Marx's originality lies in the fact that, in opposition to Hegel, he demonstrated that History *is in development* that ***Being is irreducible to Knowledge***, and, also, that he preserved the dialectical movement *both in Being and in Knowledge*. He was correct, *practically*. But having failed to *re-think the dialectic*, Marxists have played the Positivist game. Positivists often ask Marxists how they can claim, given that Marx had the good sense to realise that 'pre-history' had not yet come to an end, to detect the 'ruses' of History, the 'secret' of the proletariat, and the direction of historical development. For Positivists, prediction is possible only to the extent that the current order of succession re-enacts a previous order of succession; and so the future repeats the past. Hegel could have answered them by saying that he had only *predicted the past*, in that his history was finished and complete and that, as a matter of fact, the moment which posits itself for itself in the process of living History can only guess the future, as the truth of its own incompleteness, unknowable *for it*. The Marxist future, however, is a genuine future: it is *completely new*, and

irreducible to the present. Nevertheless, Marx does make predictions, and long term rather than short term ones. But in fact, according to Positivist Rationalism, Marx had disqualified himself from doing this, and given that he himself was pre-historical and within prehistory, his judgements can have only a relative and historical significance – even when they concern the past. Thus Marxism *as dialectic* must reject the relativism of the positivists. And it must be understood that relativism rejects not only vast historical syntheses, but also the most modest assertions of dialectical Reason: whatever we may say or know, however close we may be to the present or past event which we attempt to reconstitute in its totalising movement, Positivism will always deny us the right. It does not regard the synthesis of all knowledge as completely impossible (though it envisages it as an inventory rather than as an organisation of Knowledge): but it considers such a synthesis impossible *now*. It is therefore necessary to demonstrate, in opposition to Positivism, how, *at this very moment*, dialectical Reason can assert certain totalising truths – if not the whole Truth.

5 Thought, Being and Truth in Marxism

But that is not all. For Hegel, as we have seen, the apodicticity of dialectical knowledge implied the identity of *being*, *action* and *knowledge*. Marx, however, began by positing that material existence was irreducible to knowledge, that *praxis* outstrips Knowledge in its real efficacy. Needless to say, this is my own position. However, this position gives rise to new difficulties: how can we establish that one and the same movement animates these different processes? In particular, thought is both Being and knowledge of Being. It is the *praxis* of an individual or a group, in particular conditions, at a definite moment of History. As such, thought is subject to the dialectic as its law, just like the historical process, considered either as a whole or in its particular details. But it is also knowledge of the dialectic as Reason, that is, as the law of Being. But this presupposes an explanatory separation from dialectical objects, allowing us to unveil their movement. Is there not an inevitable contradiction between the knowledge of Being and the being of knowledge? The demonstration that thought, *as Being*, is carried along in the same movement as the whole of history, does not dissolve all contradictions. In fact it is precisely to this extent that thought is incapable of grasping itself in the necessity of its own dialectical development.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, consciousness apprehends its own necessity in the Other and, at the same time, it apprehends in itself the necessity of the Other. But according to Hegel, Christianity and scepticism provide the means for understanding the previous moment, Stoicism; and, in general, Being is Knowledge, and thought itself is *simultaneously* both constituent and constituted. In one and the same movement it *is subject to its law* in so far as it is constituted, and *it knows this law* in so far as it is constituent. But if thought were no longer the whole, it would see its own development as if it were an empirical succession of moments, and this lived experience (*le vécu*) would appear as contingency and not as necessity. If thought were to understand itself as a dialectical process, it could not formulate its discovery except as a simple fact. Still less could thought pretend to settle the question whether the movement of its object is modelled on the movement of thought, or whether the movement of thought is modelled on that of its object. If material being, *praxis* and knowledge are indeed irreducible realities, do we not have to appeal to a pre-established harmony in order to relate their developments? In other words, if the search for Truth is to be dialectical in its methods, how can it be shown *without idealism* that it corresponds to the movement of Being? And on the other hand, if Knowledge is to allow Being to develop itself according to its own laws, how can we prevent whatever processes are

involved from appearing as *empirical*? Moreover, in the latter case, the question arises how passive, and *therefore* non-dialectical, thought can evaluate the dialectic; or in ontological terms, how it can be that the only reality which lies beyond the laws of synthetic Reason is that which decrees them. Let no one think that he can get out of these dilemmas by means of some pseudo-dialectical answer such as: Thought is dialectical *by virtue of its object*, it is simply the dialectic as the movement of the real. For, even if it is true that History becomes intelligible when considered dialectically, the example of the Positivists shows that this can be regarded as mere determinism. For this reason, one must already be *situated* within constituent dialectical Reason in order to see History as constituted dialectical Reason. But if dialectical Reason *creates itself* (rather than suffering itself), how can one prove that it corresponds to the dialectic of Being, without relapsing into idealism? This old problem recurs whenever traditional dogmatic dualism is revived. No doubt it will seem surprising that I refer to Marxist monism as a dualism; it is, in fact, both monist and dualist.

It is dualist because it is monist. Marx's ontological monism consisted in affirming the irreducibility of Being to thought, and, at the same time, in reintegrating *thoughts* with the real as a particular form of human activity. This monistic claim, however, appears as a dogmatic Truth. But we must distinguish it from conservative ideologies which are mere *products* of the universal dialectic: in this way thought as the vehicle of truth can recover what it has lost ontologically since the: collapse of idealism, and become a Norm of Knowledge.

Of course dialectical materialism has a practical advantage over contemporary ideologies in that it is the ideology of the rising class. But if it were merely the inert expression of this rise, or even of revolutionary *praxis*, if it did not direct its attention back upon this rise so as to explain it to reveal it to itself, how could we speak of a progress of *consciousness*? How could the dialectic be regarded as the real movement of History unfolding itself? Like philosophical liberalism today, it would be no more than a mythical reflection. Besides, for the dialectician, *even* ideologies, however mystifying, contain an element of truth, as Marx often emphasised. But how is this partial truth to be established? Materialist monism, in short, has successfully eliminated the dualism of thought and Being in favour of total Being, which is thereby grasped in its materiality. But the effect of this has only been to re-establish, as an antinomy – at least an apparent one – the dualism of Being and Truth.

6 The External Dialectic in Modern Marxism

This difficulty has appeared insurmountable to modern Marxists. They have seen only one solution: to refuse to acknowledge thought itself as a dialectical activity, to dissolve it into the universal dialectic, and to eliminate man by dispersing him into the universe. This enables them to substitute Being for Truth. There is no longer *knowledge* in the strict sense of the term; Being *no longer manifests itself* in any way whatsoever: it merely evolves according to its own laws. The dialectic of Nature is Nature without men. There is therefore no more need for certainty, for criteria; even the attempt to criticise and establish knowledge becomes useless. Knowledge of whatever form is a relation between man and the world around him, and if man no longer exists this relation disappears.

The source of this unfortunate approach is well known: as Whitehead said, a law begins by being a hypothesis and ends by becoming *a fact*. When we say that the earth revolves, we do not feel as

though we are stating a theory, or that we are relying on a system of knowledge; we feel that we are in the presence of the fact itself, which immediately eliminates us as knowing subjects in order to restore to us our 'nature' as objects of gravitation. For anyone with a realist view of the world, knowledge therefore destroys itself in order to *become the world*, and this is true not only of philosophy but also of all scientific Knowledge. When dialectical materialism claims to establish a dialectic of Nature it does not present itself as an attempt at an extremely general synthesis of human knowledge, but rather as a mere ordering of the facts. And its claim to be concerned with facts is not unjustified: when Engels speaks of the expansion of bodies or of electric current, he is indeed referring to the facts themselves – although these facts may undergo essential changes with the progress of science. This gigantic – and, as we shall see, abortive – attempt to allow the world to unfold itself by itself and to no one, we shall call external or transcendental, dialectical materialism (*le materialisme dialectique da dehors ou transcendental*).

7 The Dialectic of Nature

It is clear that this kind of materialism is not Marxist, but still it is defined by Marx: "The materialist outlook on nature means nothing more than the conception of nature just as it is, without alien addition"[from draft of *Ludwig Feuerbach*, by Engels]. On this conception, man returns to the very heart of Nature as one of its objects and develops before our eyes in accordance with the laws of Nature, that is, as pure materiality governed by the universal laws of the dialectic. The object of thought is Nature as it is, and the study of History is only a particular form of it: we must trace the movement that produces life out of matter, man out of primitive forms of life, and social history out of the first human communities. The advantage of this conception is that it avoids the problem: it presents the dialectic *a priori* and without justification, as the fundamental law of Nature. This external materialism lays down the dialectic as exteriority: the Nature of man lies outside him in an *a priori* law, in an extra-human nature, in a history that begins with the nebulae. For this universal dialectic, partial totalisations do not have even provisional value; they do not exist. Everything must always be referred to the totality of *natural history* of which human history is only a particular form. Thus all real thought, as it *actually* forms itself in the concrete movement of History, is held to be a complete distortion of its objects. It becomes a truth again only if it is reduced to a dead object, to a result; and thus a position outside man, and on the side of things, is adopted so that the idea can be seen as a thing signified by things rather than as a signifying act. In this way, that 'alien addition' which is **man** – concrete, living man with his human relations, his true or false thoughts, his actions, his real purposes – is removed from the world. An *absolute object* is put in his place:

'What we call a *subject* is only an object considered as the centre of particular reactions' [Pierre Naville]. The notion of *truth* is replaced by those of success or normality as applied to performances in tests: 'As the centre of more or less delayed reactions, the body performs movements which organise themselves as behaviour. This produces actions. (Thinking is an action. Suffering is an action). These actions can be regarded as "tests"..., as trials'. [Naville]

Thus we get back to the disguised scepticism of 'reflection'. But when everything has apparently culminated in sceptical objectivism, we suddenly realise that it has been imposed on us dogmatically, that it is the Truth of Being as it appears to universal consciousness. Spirit *sees* dialectic as the law of the world. Consequently we fall back into complete dogmatic idealism.

Scientific laws are experimental hypotheses verified by facts; but at present, the absolute principle that 'Nature is dialectical' is not open to verification at all. You may claim that some set of laws established by scientists *represents* a certain dialectical movement *in the objects of these laws*, but you cannot prove it. [These remarks apply, of course, only to the dialectic conceived as an abstract and universal law of Nature. However, when the dialectic is applied to human history, it loses none of its *heuristic* value. Concealed, it directs the collection of facts; then it reveals itself by making them comprehensible, by totalising them. This comprehension reveals a new dimension of History, and finally, its truth, its intelligibility]. Neither the laws nor the 'great theories' will change, however you view them. Your problem is not whether light transmits energy particles to the bodies it illuminates, but whether the quantum theory can be integrated into a dialectical totalisation of the universe. You need not question the kinetic theory of gases; you need only see whether it weakens the totalisation. You are reflecting on Knowledge. And since the law discovered by the scientist, taken in isolation, is neither dialectical nor anti-dialectical (it is only a quantitative determination of a functional relation), the consideration of scientific facts (that is to say, of established laws) cannot furnish, or even suggest, a proof of the dialectic. Dialectical Reason can only be *captured elsewhere*, so that it can be forcibly imposed on the data of physics and chemistry. *It is well known*, in fact, that the notion of dialectic emerged in History along quite different paths, and that both Hegel and Marx explained and defined it in terms of the relations of man to matter, and of men to each other. The attempt to find the movement of human history within natural history was made only later, out of a wish for unification. Thus the claim that there is a dialectic of Nature refers to the totality of material facts – past, present, future – or, to put it another way, it involves a totalisation of temporality. It has a curious similarity to those *Ideas* of Reason which, according to Kant, were regulative and incapable of being corroborated by any particular experience.

8 Critique of the External Dialectic

Thus a system of ideas is contemplated by a pure consciousness *which has pre-constituted their law for them*, though utterly incapable of justifying this ukase. But in order to grasp materiality as such, it is not sufficient to discuss the word 'matter'. Language is ambiguous in that words sometimes designate objects and sometimes concepts; and this is why materialism as such is not opposed to idealism. In fact, there is a materialist idealism which, in the last analysis, is merely a discourse on the idea of matter; the real opposite of this is realist materialism – the thought of an individual who is *situated* in the world, penetrated by every cosmic force, and treating the material universe as something which gradually reveals itself through a 'situated' *praxis*. In the present case, we are evidently confronted with an idealism which has appropriated the vocabulary of science in order to express ideas of such poverty that one can see straight through them. But the important point is this: if you are hunting for the Truth (as a *human* undertaking) of the Universe, you will find it, in the very words you use, as the object of an absolute and constituting consciousness. This means that it is impossible to get away from the problem of Truth. Naville deprives his 'centres of delayed reactions' of the ability to distinguish between True and False; he imposes the dialectic on them without allowing them knowledge of it; but *what he says* thereby becomes an absolute truth without foundation.

How can we accept this doubling of personality? How can a man who is lost in the world, permeated by an absolute movement coming from everything, also be this consciousness sure both of itself and of the Truth? It is true that Naville observes that 'these centres of reaction

elaborate their behaviour according to possibilities which, at the level both of the individual and of the species, are subject to an unalterable and strictly determined development . . .', and that 'experimentally established reflex determinations and integrations enable one to appreciate the narrowing margin within which organic behaviour can be said to be autonomous'. We obviously agree with this; but the important thing is Naville's application of these observations, which inevitably leads to the theory of reflection, to endowing man with constituted reason; that is, to making thought into a form of behaviour strictly conditioned by the world (*which of course it is*), while neglecting to say that it is also knowledge of the world. How could 'empirical' man think? Confronted with his own history, he is as uncertain as when he is confronted by Nature, for the law does not automatically produce knowledge of itself- indeed, if it is passively suffered, it transforms its object into passivity, and thus deprives it of any possibility of collecting its atomised experiences into a synthetic unity. Meanwhile, at the level of generality where he is situated, transcendental man, contemplating laws, cannot grasp individuals. Thus, in spite of Naville, we are offered two thoughts, neither of which is able to think *us*, or, for that matter, *itself*: the thought which is passive, given, and discontinuous, claims to be knowledge but is really only the delayed effect of external causes, while the thought which is active, synthetic and desituated, knows nothing of itself and, completely immobile, contemplates a world without thought. Our doctrinaires have mistaken for a real recognition of Necessity what is actually only a particular form of alienation, which makes *their own lived thinking* appear as an object for a universal Consciousness, and which reflects on it *as though it were the Thought of the Other*.

We must stress this crucial fact: Reason is neither a bone nor an accident. In other words, if dialectical Reason is to be *rationality*, it must provide Reason with its own reasons. From this point of view, analytical rationalism demonstrates itself, because, as we have seen, it is the pure affirmation – at a quite superficial level – of the bond of exteriority as permanent possibility. But let us see what Engels says about 'the most general laws' of 'the history of nature and human society'. It is this:

'... they can be reduced in the main to three:

- The law of the transformation of quantity into quality, and vice versa;
- The law of the interpenetration of opposites;
- The law of the negation of the negation.

'All three are developed by Hegel in his idealist fashion as mere laws of *thought*.... The mistake lies in the fact that these laws are foisted on nature and history as laws of thought, and not deduced from them.' [[Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*](#)]

Engels' uncertainty is revealed by his words, for abstraction is not the same as deduction. And how can universal laws be deduced from a set of particular laws? If you want a name, it can only be called *induction*. And as we have seen, the only dialectic one will find in Nature is a dialectic that one has put there oneself. But let us suppose for a moment that universal laws can actually be *induced*, that is to say, that they provide both a means of ordering scientific Knowledge and a heuristic procedure. For all that, they will remain only probabilities. Let us suppose, also, that their probability is very high and that, consequently, we are obliged to accept them as true. Where will this get us? To a discovery of the laws of Reason in the universe, like Newton's discovery of the principle of gravitation. When Newton said '*Hypotheses non fingo*', he meant that while

calculation and investigation permitted him to prove the *de facto* existence of gravitation, he would not try to establish it *de jure*, to explain it, to reduce it to some more general principle. Thus, to his contemporaries, rationality seemed to come to a halt with demonstrations and proofs; the fact in itself remained inexplicable and contingent. Science does not have to *account for* the facts that it discovers; it firmly establishes their existence and their relations with other facts. Later, the movement of scientific thought itself was to overthrow this hypothesis, for in contemporary physics gravitation is treated quite differently; without ceasing to be a fact, it is no longer the *untranscendable final fact*; it is part of a new conception of the universe and we know now that every contingent fact, however untranscendable it may appear, will be transcended in its turn, by other facts.

But what are we to make of a doctrine which presents the laws of Reason in the same way as Newton presented those of gravitation? If someone had asked Engels: Why are there three laws rather than ten, or just one?; Why are the laws of thought *these* and not others?; Where do they come from?; Is there some more general principle from which they might be deduced, instead of appearing as having the contingency of a fact?; Is there some way of uniting them in an organised synthesis, and putting them in some order?; etc., he would probably have shrugged his shoulders and replied, like Newton, '*Hypotheses non fingo*'. The upshot of this is paradoxical: Engels criticises Hegel for imposing the laws of thought on matter, but he does precisely the same himself, in that he expects the sciences to verify a dialectical reason which he discovered in the social world. But, in the historical and social world, as we shall see, there *really* is a dialectical reason; by transferring it into the 'natural' world, and forcibly inscribing it there, Engels stripped it of its rationality: there was no longer a dialectic which man produced by producing himself, and which, in turn, produced man; there was only a contingent law, of which nothing could be said except *it is so* and not otherwise. In short, Reason once more becomes a bone, since it is merely a fact and has no knowable necessity. It so happens that opposites interpenetrate. Rationality is merely a final and universal law; and *therefore* it is irrationality pure and simple. However one looks at it, transcendental materialism leads to the irrational, *either* by ignoring the thought of empirical man, *or* by creating a noumenal consciousness which imposes its law as a whim, or again, by discovering in Nature '*without alien addition*' the laws of dialectical Reason in the form of contingent facts.

9 The Domain of Dialectical Reason

Must we then *deny* the existence of dialectical connections in inanimate Nature? By no means. Indeed, in the present state of our knowledge, I do not see that we are in a position to affirm or deny it. Every one is free either to *believe* that physico-chemical laws express a dialectical reason, or *not to believe it*. In any case, in the domain of the facts of inorganic Nature, the claim must be extra-scientific. We merely ask for the restoration of the order of certainties and discoveries: for if there is such a thing as a dialectical reason, it is revealed and established in and through human *praxis*, to men in a given society at a particular moment of its development. On the basis of this discovery, the limits and scope of dialectical certainty have to be established. The dialectic will be an effective method as long as it remains *necessary* as the law of intelligibility and as the rational structure of Being. A materialist dialectic will be meaningless if it cannot establish, within human history, the primacy of material conditions as they are discovered by the *praxis* of particular men and as they impose themselves on it. In short, if there is to be any such thing as dialectical materialism, it must be a *historical* materialism, that is to say, a materialism from

within; it must be one and the same thing to produce it and to have it imposed on one, to live it and to know it. Consequently, this materialism, if it exists, can be *true* only within the limits of our social universe. It is at the heart of a society which is organised and stratified – and which is also rent by strife – that the appearance of a new machine will bring profound changes which will reverberate from the infrastructures to the superstructures; it is *within* a society which possesses tools and institutions that the material facts – the poverty or richness of the subsoil, the climate, etc. – which condition it and in relation to which it is itself defined, will be discovered.

As for the dialectic of Nature, it cannot be anything more than the object of a metaphysical hypothesis. The procedure of *discovering* dialectical rationality in *praxis*, and then projecting it, as an unconditional law, on to the inorganic world, and then *returning* to the study of societies and claiming that this opaquely irrational law of nature conditions them, seems to us to be a complete aberration. A human relation, which can be recognised only because we are ourselves human, is encountered, hypostasised, stripped of every human characteristic and, finally, this irrational fabrication is substituted for the genuine relation which was encountered in the first place. Thus in the name of monism the practical rationality of man making History is replaced by the ancient notion of a blind Necessity, the clear by the obscure, the evident by the conjectural, Truth by Science Fiction. If there is a dialectic now, and if we are to establish it, we shall have to seek it where it is. We shall accept the idea that man is a material being among other material beings and, as such, does not have a privileged statute; we shall even refuse to reject *a priori* the possibility that a concrete dialectic of Nature will one day be discovered, which would mean that the dialectical method would become a heuristic in the natural sciences and would be used by scientists themselves and under experimental control. All I say is that dialectical Reason must be turned over once again, that it must be recognised *where it is there to be seen*, instead of being dreamed of in areas where we cannot yet grasp it. There is such a thing as historical materialism, and the law of this materialism is the , dialectic. But if, as some writers imply, dialectical materialism is to be understood as a monism which is supposed to control human history from outside, then we are compelled to say that there is no such thing as *dialectical materialism*, at least for the time being.

[It may be said that the metaphysical hypothesis of a dialectic of Nature becomes more interesting when it is used to explain the passage from inorganic matter to organic bodies, and the evolution of life on earth. This is true. But it should be noted that this *formal* interpretation of life and evolution will never be more than a pious dream as long as scientists have no way of using the notions of ‘totality’ and ‘totalisation’ as a guiding hypothesis. Nothing is gained by proclaiming that the evolution of the species or the appearance of life are moments of the ‘dialectic of Nature’ as long as we are ignorant of *how* life appeared and *how* species are transformed. For the present, biology, in its actual research, remains positivistic and analytical. It is possible that a deeper knowledge of its object, through its contradictions, will force biology to consider the organism in its totality, that is to say, dialectically, and to consider all biological facts in their relation of interiority. This is *possible*, but it is *not certain*. In any event, it is curious that Marxists, as dialecticians of nature, denounce as idealists those who, like Goldstein, attempt (rightly or wrongly) to consider organic beings as totalities although this only involves showing (or trying to show) the dialectical irreducibility of the ‘state of matter’ which is life, to another state – inorganic matter – which nevertheless generated it.]

This long discussion has not been useless. It has enabled us to formulate our problem; it has revealed the conditions under which a dialectic can be established. No doubt these conditions are contradictory, but it is their moving contradictions which will throw us into the dialectical movement. Engels' mistake, in the text we quoted above, was to think that he could extract his dialectical laws from Nature by non-dialectical procedures: comparison, analogy, abstraction and induction. In fact, dialectical Reason is a whole and must ground itself by itself, or dialectically.

(1) The failure of dialectical dogmatism has shown us that the dialectic as rationality must be open to direct, everyday investigation, both as the objective connection between facts and as the method for knowing and fixing this connection. But at the same time, the provisional character of *dialectical hyper-empiricism* forces us to the conclusion that dialectical universality must be imposed *a priori* as a necessity. The '*a priori*', here, has nothing to do with any sort of constitutive principles which are prior to experience. It relates to a universality and necessity which are contained in every experience but which transcend any particular experience. But since, as Kant showed, experience provides facts but not necessity, and since we reject all idealist solutions, there is obviously a contradiction here. Husserl could speak of apodictic certainty without much difficulty, but this was because he remained on the level of pure, formal consciousness apprehending itself in its formality; but, for us, it is necessary to find our apodictic experience in the concrete world of History.

(2) We have noticed the aporias of being and knowledge in Marx. It is clear that the former is irreducible to the latter. On the other hand, the 'dialectic of Nature' has shown us that *knowledge* vanishes when reduced to one modality of being among others. Nevertheless, this dualism, which threatens to lead us into some form of disguised spiritualism, must be rejected. The possibility that a dialectic exists is itself dialectical; or, to put it another way, the only possible unity of the dialectic as law of historical development and the dialectic as knowledge-in-movement of this development is the unity of a dialectical movement. Being is the negation of knowledge, and knowledge draws its being from the negation of being.

(3) 'Men make their own History . . . but under circumstances . . . given and transmitted from the past.' If this statement is true, then both determinism and analytical reason must be categorically rejected as the method and law of human history. Dialectical rationality, the whole of which is contained in this sentence, must be seen as the permanent and dialectical unity of freedom and necessity. In other words, as we have seen, the universe becomes a dream if the dialectic controls man from outside, as his unconditioned law. But if we imagine that every one simply follows his inclinations and that these molecular collisions produce large scale effects, we will discover *average* or statistical results, but not a *historical development*. So, in a sense, man submits to the dialectic as to an enemy power; in another sense, he *creates* it; and if dialectical Reason is the Reason of History, this contradiction must itself be lived dialectically, which means that man must be controlled by the dialectic in so far as he *creates* it, and *create* it in so far as he is controlled by it. Furthermore, it must be understood that there is no such thing as man; there are people, wholly defined by their society and by the historical movement which carries them along; if we do not wish the dialectic to become a divine law again, a metaphysical fate, it must proceed *from individuals* and not from some kind of supra-individual ensemble. Thus we encounter a new contradiction: the dialectic is the law of totalisation which creates *several* collectivities, *several* societies, and *one* history – realities, that is, which impose themselves on individuals; but at the same time it must be woven out of millions of individual actions. We must show how it is

possible for it to be both a *resultant*, though not a passive average, and a *totalising force*, though not a transcendent fate, and how it can continually bring about the unity of dispersive profusion and integration.

(4) We are dealing with a *materialist dialectic*; and by this I mean from a strictly epistemological point of view – that thought must discover its own necessity in its material object, at the same time as discovering in itself, *in so far as it is itself a material being*, the necessity of its object. This could be done within Hegelian idealism, and either the dialectic is a dream or it can be done in the real material world of Marxism. This inevitably refers us from thought to action. Indeed, the former is only a moment of the latter. We must therefore inquire whether, in the unity of an apodictic experience, every *praxis* is constituted, in and through the material universe, as the transcendence of its object-being (*etre-objet*) by the Other, while revealing the *praxis* of the Other as an object. But, at the same time, a relation must be established, by and through the Other, between each *praxis* and the universe of things, in such a way that, in the course of a perpetual totalisation, the thing becomes human and man realises himself as a thing. It must be shown, in concrete reality, that the dialectical method is indistinguishable from the dialectical movement; indistinguishable, that is to say, both from the relations which each person has with everyone through inorganic materiality, and from those which he has with his materiality and with his own organic material existence, through his relations with others. We must show, therefore, that the dialectic is based on this, everyone's permanent experience: in the universe of exteriority, one's relation of *exteriority* to the material universe and to the Other is always accidental, though always present; but one's relation of interiority with men and with things is fundamental, though often concealed.

(5) The dialectic, however, if it is to be a reason rather than a blind law, must appear as untranscendable intelligibility. The content, the development, the order of appearance of negations, of negations of negations, of conflicts, etc., the phases of the struggle between opposed terms, and its outcome – in short, *the reality* of the dialectical movement, is governed in its entirety by the basic conditions, the structures of materiality, the initial situation, the continuous action of external and internal factors, and the balance of the forces involved. Thus there is no *one* dialectic which imposes itself upon the facts, as the Kantian categories impose themselves on phenomena; but the dialectic, if it exists, is the individual career of its object. There can be no pre-established schema imposed on individual developments, neither in someone's head, nor in an intelligible heaven; if the dialectic exists, it is because certain regions of materiality are *structured* in such a way that it cannot not exist. In other words, the dialectical movement is not some powerful unitary force revealing itself behind History like the will of God. It is first and foremost a *resultant*; it is not the dialectic which forces historical men to live their history in terrible contradictions; it is men, as they are, dominated by scarcity and necessity, and confronting one another in circumstances which History or economics can inventory, but which only dialectical reason can explain. Before it can be a *motive force*, contradiction is a result; and, on the level of ontology, the dialectic appears as the only type of relation which individuals, situated and constituted in a certain way, and on account of their very constitution, can establish amongst themselves. The dialectic, if it exists, can only be the totalisation of concrete totalisations effected by a multiplicity of totalising individualities. I shall refer to this as *dialectical nominalism*. Nevertheless, the dialectic cannot be valid for all the particular cases which recreate it, unless it always appears as *necessity* in the investigation which reveals it, nor is

it valid unless it provides us with the key to the process which expresses it, that is, unless we apprehend it as *the intelligibility* of the process in question.

The combination of the necessity and intelligibility of dialectical Reason, with the need to discover it empirically *in each instance*, leads to several reflections. In the first place, no one can *discover* the dialectic while keeping the point of view of analytical Reason; which means, among other things, that no one can discover the dialectic while remaining *external* to the object under consideration. Indeed, for anyone considering a given system in exteriority, no specific investigation can show whether the movement of the system is a continuous unfolding or a succession of discrete instants. The stance of the desituated experimenter, however, tends to perpetuate analytical Reason as the model of intelligibility; the scientist's passivity in relation to the system will tend to reveal to him a passivity of the system in relation to himself. The dialectic reveals itself only to an observer situated in interiority, that is to say, to an investigator who lives his investigation both as a possible contribution to the ideology of the entire epoch and as the particular *praxis* of an individual defined by his historical and personal career within the wider history which conditions it. In short, in order to preserve the Hegelian idea (that Consciousness knows itself in the Other and knows the Other in itself), while completely discarding its idealism, I must be able to say that the *praxis* of everyone, as a dialectical movement, must reveal itself to the individual as the necessity of his own *praxis* and, conversely, that the freedom, for everyone, of his individual *praxis* must re-emerge in everyone so as to reveal to the individual a dialectic which produces itself and produces him in so far as it is produced. The dialectic as the living logic of action is invisible to a contemplative reason: it appears in the course of *praxis* as a necessary moment of it; in other words, it is created anew in each action (though actions arise only on the basis of a world entirely constituted by the dialectical *praxis* of the past) and becomes a theoretical and practical method when action in the course of development begins to give an explanation of itself. In the course of this action, the dialectic appears to the individual as rational transparency in so far as he produces it, and as absolute necessity in so far as it escapes him, that is to say, quite simply, in so far as it is produced by others. Finally, to the extent that the individual becomes acquainted with himself in the transcendence (*depassement*) of his needs, he becomes acquainted with the law which others impose on him in transcending their own (he becomes acquainted with it: this does not mean that he submits to it), and becomes acquainted with his own autonomy (in so far as it can be and constantly is, exploited by the other – shamming, manoeuvring, etc.) as an alien power and the autonomy of the others as the inexorable law which enables him to coerce them. But, through the very reciprocity of coercions and autonomies, the law ends up by escaping everyone, and in the revolving movement of totalisation it appears as dialectical Reason, that is to say, external to all because internal to each; and a developing totalisation, though without a totaliser, of all the totalised totalisations and of all the de-totalised totalities.

If dialectical Reason is to be possible as the career of all and the freedom of each, as experience and as necessity, if we are to display both its total translucidity (it is no more than ourselves) and its untranscendable severity (it is the unity of everything that conditions us), if we are to ground it as the rationality of *praxis*, of totalisation, and of society's future, if we are then to *criticise* it as analytical Reason has been criticised, that is to say, if we are to determine its significance, then we must realise the situated experience of its apodicticity *through ourselves*. But let it not be imagined that this experience is comparable to the intuitions of the empiricists, or even to the kind of scientific experiments whose planning is long and laborious, but whose result can be

observed instantaneously. The experience of the dialectic is itself dialectical: this means that it develops and organises itself on all levels. At the same time, it is the very experience of living, since to live is to act and be acted on, and since the dialectic is the rationality of *praxis*. It must be *regressive* because it will set out from lived experience (*le vecu*) in order gradually to discover all the structures of *praxis*. However, we must give notice that the investigation we are undertaking, though in itself historical, like any other undertaking, does not attempt to discover the movement of History, the evolution of labour or of the relations of production, or class conflicts. Its goal is simply to reveal and establish dialectical rationality, that is to say, the complex play of *praxis* and totalisation.

When we have arrived at the most general conditionings, that is to say, at materiality, it will then be time to reconstruct, on the basis of the investigation, the schema of intelligibility proper to the totalisation. This second part, which will be published later will be what one might call a synthetic and progressive definition of 'the rationality of action'. In this connection, we shall see how dialectical Reason extends beyond analytical Reason and includes *within itself* its own critique and its own transcendence. However, the limited character of the project cannot be emphasised sufficiently. I have said – and I repeat – that the only valid interpretation of human History is historical materialism. So I shall not be restating here what others have already done a thousand times; besides, it is not my subject.

If a summary of this introduction is required, however, one could say that in the field of dialectical rationality historical materialism is its own proof, but that it does not provide a foundation for this rationality even, and above all, if it provides the History of its development as constituted Reason. Marxism is History itself becoming conscious of itself, and if it is valid it is by its material content, which is not, and cannot be, at issue here. But precisely because its reality resides in its content, the internal connections which it brings to light, in so far as they are part of its real content, are indeterminate in form. In particular, when a Marxist makes use of the notion of 'necessity' in order to characterise the relation of two events within one and the same process, we remain hesitant, even if the attempted synthesis convinces us completely. This does not mean that we reject necessity in human affairs quite the opposite; but simply that dialectical necessity is by definition *different from* the necessity of analytical Reason and that Marxism is not concerned – why should it be? – with determining and establishing this new structure of being and of experience. Thus our task cannot *in any way* be to reconstruct real History in its development, any more than it can consist in a concrete study of forms of production or of the groups studied by the sociologist and the ethnographer. Our problem is *critical*. Doubtless this problem is itself raised by History. But it is precisely a matter of testing, criticising and establishing, *within History* and at this particular moment in the development of human societies, the instruments of thought by means of which History thinks itself in so far as they are also the practical instruments by means of which it is made. Of course, we shall be driven from *doing* to *knowing* and from *knowing* to *doing* in the unity of a process which will itself be dialectical. But our real aim is theoretical. It can be formulated in the following terms: on what conditions is the knowledge of a History possible? To what extent can the connections brought to light be necessary? What is dialectical rationality, and what are its limits and foundation? Our extremely slight dissociation of ourselves from the letter of Marxist doctrine (which I indicated in *The Search for Method*) enables us to see the meaning of this question as the disquiet of the genuine experience which refuses to collapse into non-truth. It is to this disquiet that we are attempting to respond. But I am far from believing that the isolated effort of an individual can provide a

satisfactory answer – even a partial one – to so vast a question, a question which engages with the totality of History. If these initial investigations have done no more than enable me to define the problem, by means of provisional remarks which are there to be challenged and modified, and if they give rise to a discussion and if, as would be best, this discussion is carried on collectively in working groups, then I shall be satisfied.

from Critique of Dialectical Reason. Jean-Paul Sartre. 1960

Critique of Critical Investigation

1 The Basis of Critical Investigation

We know the abstract conditions which this investigation must satisfy if it is to be possible. But these conditions leave its individual reality undetermined. In the same way, in the sciences of Nature we can have a general idea of the aim of an experiment (*experience*) and the conditions for it to be valid, without knowing what physical fact is to be investigated, what instruments it will employ, or what experimental system it will identify and construct. In other words, a scientific hypothesis includes its own experimental requirements; it indicates, in broad outline, the conditions that the *proof* must satisfy; but this initial schema can be distinguished only formally from the conjecture which is to be tested. This is why the hypothesis has sometimes been called an experimental idea. It is historical circumstances (the history of the instruments, the contemporary state of knowledge) which give the projected experiment its peculiar physiognomy: thus Faraday, Foucault and Maxwell, for example, constructed such and such a system in order to get such and such a result. But our concern is with the problem of a totalising investigation, and this clearly means that it bears only an extremely distant resemblance to the experiments of the exact sciences. Nevertheless, it too must present itself in its technical particularity, detail the instruments of thought it employs, outline the concrete system it will constitute (that is to say, the structural reality which will be exteriorised in its experimental *practice*). This is what we shall now specify. [These moments are in fact for the most part inseparable. But it is appropriate that methodological reflection should at least register an example of the stubbornness of reason.] By what particular *experimentation* can we expect to expose and demonstrate the reality, of the dialectical process? What instruments do we need? What is their point of application? What experimental system must we construct? On the basis of what facts? What type of extrapolation will it justify? What will be the validity of its proofs?

2 Dialectical Reason as Intelligibility

In order to answer these questions we must have some guide-line; and is provided purely by what the object demands. We must turn, therefore, to this basic demand. But if this demand is reduced to the simple question, ‘Are there ontological regions where the law of being correlatively, that of knowledge can be said to be dialectical?’, there is a serious risk of making it unintelligible and of relapsing either into some form of hyper-empiricism or into the opacity and contingency of the laws formulated by Engels. If we were to discover these regions in the same way as *natural* regions (for example, an area of the together with its climate, hydrography, orography, flora and fauna, etc.) are discovered, then the discovery would share the opacity of something merely *found*.

If, on the other hand, we were to ground our dialectical categories on the impossibility of experience without them, as Kant did for positivist Reason, then we would indeed attain but we would have contaminated it with the opacity of facts. Indeed, to say, 'If there is to be any such thing as experience, the human mind must be able to unify, sensuous diversity through synthetic judgements', is, ultimately, to base the whole critical edifice on the unintelligible judgement (a judgement of fact), 'But experience does occur.' And we shall see later that dialectical Reason is itself the intelligibility of positivist Reason; and this is precisely why positivist Reason presents itself at first as the unintelligible law of empirical intelligibility. [I am thinking here of the *Critique of Pure Reason* rather than of Kant's later works. It has been clearly demonstrated that, in the very last part of Kant's life, the requirement of intelligibility led him right up to the threshold of dialectical Reason.]

If, however, dialectical Reason has to be grasped initially through human relations, then its fundamental characteristics imply that it appears as apodictic experience in its very intelligibility. It is not a matter of simply asserting its existence, but rather of directly experiencing its existence through its intelligibility, independent of any *empirical discovery*. In other words, if the dialectic is the reason of being and of knowledge, at least in certain regions, it must manifest itself as double intelligibility. Firstly, the dialectic as the law of the world and of knowledge must itself be intelligible; so that, unlike positivist Reason, it must include its own intelligibility within itself. Secondly, if some real fact — a historical process, for example — develops dialectically, the law of its appearing and its becoming must be — from the stand-point of knowledge — the pure ground of its intelligibility. For the present, we are concerned only with original intelligibility. This intelligibility — the translucidity of the dialectic cannot arise if one merely proclaims dialectical laws, like Engels and Naville, unless each of these laws is presented as a mere sketch, revealing the dialectic as a totality. The rules of positivist Reason appear as separate instructions (unless this Reason is envisaged as a limiting case of dialectical Reason and from its point of view). Each of the so-called 'laws' of dialectical Reason is the *whole* of the dialectic: otherwise the dialectic would cease to be a dialectical process, and thought, as the *praxis* of the theoretician, would necessarily be discontinuous. Thus the basic intelligibility of dialectical Reason, if it exists, is that of a totalisation. In other words, in terms of our distinction between being and knowledge, a dialectic exists if, in at least one ontological region, a totalisation is in progress which is immediately accessible to a thought which unceasingly totalises itself in its very comprehension of the totalisation from which it emanates and which makes itself its object.

It has often been observed that the laws stated by Hegel and his disciples do not at first seem intelligible; taken in isolation, they may even seem false or gratuitous. Hyppolite has shown convincingly that the negation of the negation — if this schema is envisaged in itself — is not necessarily an affirmation. Similarly, at first glance, the opposition between contradictories does not seem to be necessarily the motive force of the dialectical process. Hamelin, for example, based his whole system on the opposition between contraries. Or, to give another example, it is difficult to see how a new reality, transcending contradictions while preserving them within itself, can be both irreducible to them and intelligible in terms of them. But, these difficulties arise only because the dialectical 'principles' are conceived either as mere data or as induced laws; in short, because they are seen from the point of view of positivist Reason in the same way as positivist Reason conceives its own 'categories'. Each of these so called dialectical laws becomes perfectly intelligible when seen from the point of view of totalisation. It is therefore necessary for the

critical investigation to ask the fundamental question: is there a region of being where totalisation is the very form of existence?

3 Totality and Totalisation

From this point of view, and before taking the discussion any further, we must make a clear distinction between the notions of totality and totalisation. A totality is defined as a being which, while radically distinct from the sum of its parts, is present in its entirety, in one form or another, in each of these parts, and which relates to itself either through its relation to one or more of its parts or through its relation to the relations between all or some of them. If this reality is *created* (a painting or a symphony are examples, if one takes integration to an extreme), it can exist only in the imaginary (*l'imaginaire*), that is to say, as the correlative of an act of imagination. The ontological status to which it lays claim by its very definition is that of the in-itself, the inert. The synthetic unity which produced its appearance of totality is not an activity, but only the vestige of a past action (just as the unity of a medallion is the passive remnant of its being struck). Through its being-in-exteriority, the inertia of the in-itself gnaws away at this appearance of unity; the passive totality is, in fact, eroded by infinite divisibility. Thus, as the active power of holding together its parts, the totality is only the correlative of an act of imagination: *the symphony or the painting*, as I have shown elsewhere, are imaginaries projected through the set of dried paints or the linking of sounds which function *as* their *analogon*. In the case of practical objects — machines, tools, consumer goods, etc. — our present action makes them seem like totalities by resuscitating, in some way, the *praxis* which attempted to totalise their inertia. We shall see below that these inert totalities are of crucial importance and that they create the kind of relation between men which we will refer to, later, as the practico-inert. These *human* objects are worthy of attention in the human world, for it is there that they attain their practico-inert statute; that is to say, they lie heavy on our destiny because of the contradiction which opposes praxis (the labour which made them and the labour which utilises them) and inertia, within them. But, as these remarks show, they are products; and the totality despite what one might think, is only a regulative principle of the totalisation (and all at once disintegrates into the inert ensemble of its provisional creations).

If, indeed, anything is to appear as the synthetic unity of the diverse, it must be a developing unification, that is to say, an activity. The synthetic unification of a habitat is not merely the labour which has produced it, but also the activity of inhabiting it; reduced to itself, it reverts to the multiplicity of inertia. Thus totalisation has the same statute as the totality, for, through the multiplicities, it continues that synthetic labour which makes each part an expression of the whole and which relates the whole to itself through the mediation of its parts. But it is a *developing activity*, which cannot cease without the multiplicity reverting to its original statute. This act delineates a practical field which, as the un differentiated correlative of praxis, is the formal unity of the ensembles which are to be integrated; within this practical field, the activity attempts the most rigorous synthesis of the most differentiated multiplicity. Thus, by a double movement, multiplicity is multiplied to infinity, each part is set against all the others and against the whole which is in the process of being formed, while the totalising activity tightens all the bonds, making each differentiated element both its immediate expression and its mediation in relation to the other elements. On this basis, it is easy to establish the intelligibility of dialectical Reason; it is the very movement of totalisation. Thus, to take only one example, it is within the framework

of totalisation that the negation of the negation becomes an affirmation. Within the practical field, the correlative of praxis, every determination is a negation', for praxis, in differentiating certain ensembles, excludes them from the group formed by all the others; and the developing unification appears simultaneously in the most differentiated products (indicating the direction of the movement), in those which are less differentiated (indicating continuities, resistances, traditions, a tighter, but more superficial, unity), and in the conflict between the two (which expresses the present state of the developing totalisation). The new negation, which, in determining the less differentiated ensembles, will raise them to the level of the others, is bound to eliminate the negation which set the ensembles in antagonism to each other. Thus it is only within a developing unification (which has already defined the limits of its field) that a determination can be said to be a negation and that the negation of a negation is necessarily an affirmation. If dialectical Reason exists, then, from the ontological point of view, it can only be a developing totalisation, occurring where the totalisation occurs, and, from the epistemological point of view, it can only be the accessibility of that totalisation to a knowledge which is itself, in principle, totalising in its procedures. But since totalising knowledge cannot be thought of as attaining ontological totalisation as a new totalisation of it, dialectical knowledge must itself be a moment of the totalisation, or, in other words, totalisation must include within itself its own reflexive retotalisation as an essential structure and as a totalising process within the process as a whole.

4 Critical Investigation and Totalisation

Thus the dialectic is a totalising activity. Its only laws are the rules produced by the developing totalisation, and these are obviously concerned with the relation between unification and the unified.

[A few examples: the whole is entirely present in the part as its present meaning and as its destiny. In this case, it is opposed to itself as the part is opposed to the whole in its *determination* (negation of the whole) and, since the parts are opposed to one another (each part is both the negation of the others and the whole, determining itself in its totalising activity and conferring upon the partial structures the determinations required by the total movement), each part is, as such, mediated by the whole in its relations with the other parts: within a totalisation, the multiplicities (as bonds of absolute exteriority — i.e., quantities) do not eliminate, but rather interiorise, one another. For example, the fact of *being a hundred* (as we shall see when we discuss groups) becomes for each of the hundred a synthetic relation of interiority, with the other ninety-nine; his individual reality is affected by the numerical characteristics of *being-the-hundredth*. Thus quantity can become quality (as Engels said, following Hegel) only within a whole which reinteriorises even relations of exteriority. In this way the Whole (as a totalising act) becomes the relation among the parts. In other words, totalisation is a mediation between the parts (considered in their determinations) as a relation of interiority: within and through a totalisation, each part is mediated by all in its relation to each, and each is a mediation between all; negation (as determination) becomes a synthetic bond linking each part to every other, to all, and to the whole. But, at the same time, the linked system of mutually conditioning parts is opposed to the whole as an act of absolute unification, to *precisely the extent* that this system in movement does not and cannot exist except as the actual embodiment and present reality (here and now) of the whole as a developing synthesis. Similarly, the synthetic relations that two (or $n + 1$) parts maintain between themselves, precisely because they are the effective embodiment of

the whole, oppose them to every other part, to all the other parts as a linked system and, consequently, to the whole in its triple reality as a developing synthesis, as an effective presence in every part, and as a surface organisation. Here we are only giving a few abstract examples; but they are sufficient to illustrate the meaning of the bonds of interiority within a developing totalisation. Obviously these oppositions are not static (as they might be if, as might happen, the totalisation were to result in totality); rather they perpetually transform the interior field to the extent that they translate the developing act into its practical efficacy. It is no less clear that what I call a '*whole*' is not a totality, but the unity of the totalising act in so far as it diversifies itself and embodies itself in totalised diversities.]

That is to say, the modes of effective presence of the totalising process in the totalised parts. And knowledge, itself totalising, is the totalisation itself in so far as it is present in particular partial structures of a definite kind. In other words, totalisation cannot be consciously present to itself if it remains a formal, faceless activity of synthetic unification, but can be so only through the mediation of differentiated realities which it unifies and which effectively embody it to the extent that they totalise themselves by the very movement of the activity of totalising. These remarks enable us to define the first feature of the critical investigation: it takes place inside the totalisation and can be neither a contemplative recognition of the totalising movement, nor a particular, autonomous totalisation of the known totalisation. Rather, it is a real moment of the developing totalisation in so far as this is embodied in all its parts and is realised as synthetic knowledge of itself through the mediation of certain of these parts. In practice, this means that the critical investigation can and must be anyone's reflexive experience.