

THE UNDERGROUND CURRENT
OF THE MATERIALISM OF THE
ENCOUNTER
by Louis Althusser
and
NIETZSCHE, GENEALOGY, HISTORY
by Michel Foucault

DEAR FRIENDS,

I read these texts earlier this year, upon recommendation, and loved them—they seemed to be in conversation with nearly everything I've read recently (Marx, Tiqqun, D&G, other Foucault), and made certain ideas much clearer (the encounter and clinamen, the argument against essentialism and linearity.) I don't pretend to know other surrounding material as well as I might, but I still got a lot out of reading them. Although I'm sure half of you have already read them, and the other half may not care to, I liked them so much that I spent a whole week retyping them (OCR is the worst), and thought I'd send them out in this way. Read it or not, just leave it on the back of a toilet somewhere afterwards.

Two notes:

Althusser was a fuck, and this is obvious in the text;

I did not use accent marks, because it's hard.

Sorry.

THE UNDERGROUND CURRENT OF THE MATERIALISM OF THE ENCOUNTER

(a partial document, excerpted from *The Philosophy of the Encounter*)

It is raining.

Let this book therefore be, before all else, a book about ordinary rain.

Malebranche wondered ‘why it rains upon sands, upon highways and seas’¹ since this water from the sky which, elsewhere, waters crops (and that is very good), adds nothing to the water of the sea, or goes to waste on the roads and beaches.

Our concern will not be with that kind of rain, providential or anti-providential.² Quite the contrary: this book is about another kind of rain, about a profound theme which runs through the whole history of philosophy and was contested and repressed there as soon as it was stated: the ‘rain’ (Lucretius) of Epicurus’ atoms that fall parallel to each other in the void; the ‘rain’ of the parallelism of the infinite attributes in Spinoza and many others: Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx, Heidegger too, and Derrida.

That is the first point which—revealing my thesis from the start—I would like to bring out: *the existence of an almost completely unknown materialist tradition in the history of philosophy: the ‘materialism’* (we shall have to have some word to distinguish it as a tendency) *of the rain, the swerve, the encounter, the take [prise]*. I shall develop all these concepts. To simplify matters, let us say, for now, a materialism of the encounter, and therefore of the aleatory and of contingency. This materialism is opposed, as a wholly different mode of thought, to the various materialisms on record, including that widely ascribed to Marx, Engels and Lenin, which, like every other materialism in the rationalist tradition, is a materialism of necessity and teleology, that is to say, a transformed, disguised form of idealism.

The fact that this materialism of the encounter has been repressed by the philosophical tradition does not mean that it has been neglected by it: it was too dangerous for that. Thus it was very early on interpreted, repressed, and perverted into an *idealism of freedom*. If Epicurus’ atoms, raining down parallel to each other in the void, *encounter* one another, it is in order to bring out, in the guise of the swerve caused by the clinamen, the existence of human freedom even in the world of necessity. Obviously, producing this misreading, which is not innocent, suffices to preclude any other reading of the repressed tradition that I am calling the materialism of the encounter. Whenever one sets out from this misreading, idealist interpretations carry the day, whether what is in question is just the clinamen or all of Lucretius, as well as Machiavelli, Spinoza and Hobbes, the Rousseau of the second *Discourse*, Marx and even Heidegger (to the extent that Heidegger touched on this theme.) What triumphs in these interpretations is a certain conception of philosophy and the history of philosophy that we can, with Heidegger, call Western, because it has presided over our destiny since the Greeks; and also logocentric, because it identifies philosophy with a function of the Logos charged with thinking the priority of Meaning over all reality.

To free the materialism of the encounter from this repression; to discover, if possible, its implications for both philosophy and material-

ism; and to ascertain its hidden effects wherever they are silently at work—such is the task that I have set myself here.

We can start with a surprising comparison: between Epicurus and Heidegger.

Epicurus tells us that, before the formation of the world, an infinity of atoms were falling parallel to each other in the void. They still are. This implies both that, before the formation of the world, there was nothing, and also that all the elements of the world existed from all eternity, before any world that ever was. It also implies that, before the formation of the world, there was no Meaning, neither Cause nor End nor Reason nor unreason. The non-anteriority of Meaning is one of Epicurus' basic theses, by virtue of which he stands opposed to both Plato and Aristotle. Then the clinamen supervenes. I shall leave it to the specialists to decide who introduced the concept of the clinamen, present in Lucretius but absent from the fragments of Epicurus. The fact that this concept was 'introduced' suggests that it proved indispensable, if only on reflection, to the 'logic' of Epicurus' theses. The clinamen is an infinitesimal *swerve*, 'as small as possible'; 'no one knows where, or when, or how' it occurs², or what causes an atom to 'swerve' from its vertical fall in the void, and breaking the parallelism in an almost negligible way at one point, induce *an encounter* with the atom next to it, and, from encounter to encounter, a pile-up and the birth of a world—that is to say, of the agglomeration of atoms induced, in a chain reaction, by the initial swerve and encounter.

The idea that the origin of every world, and therefore of all reality and all meaning, is due to a swerve, and that Swerve, not Reason or Cause, is the origin of the world, gives some sense of the audacity of Epicurus' thesis. What other philosophy has, in the history of philosophy, defended the thesis that *Swerve was originary*, not derived? We must go further still. In order for swerve to give rise to an encounter from which a world is born, that encounter must last; it must be, not a 'brief encounter', but a lasting encounter, which then becomes the basis for all reality, all necessity, all Meaning and all reason. But the encounter can also not last; then there is no world. What is more, it is clear that

the encounter creates nothing of the reality of the world, which is nothing but agglomerated atoms, but that *it confers their reality upon the atoms themselves*, which, without swerve and encounter, would be nothing but *abstract* elements, lacking all consistency and existence. So much so that we can say that the *atoms' very existence is due to nothing but the swerve and the encounter* prior to which they led only a phantom existence.

All this may be stated differently. The world may be called *the accomplished fact* [*fait accompli*] in which, once the fact has been established, is established the reign of Reason, Meaning, Necessity, and End [*Fin*]. But *the accomplishment of the fact* is just a pure effect of contingency, since it depends on the aleatory encounter of the atoms due to the swerve of the clinamen. Before the accomplishment of the fact, before the world, there is only *the non-accomplishment of the fact*, the non-world that is merely the *unreal* existence of the atoms.

What becomes of philosophy under these circumstances? It is no longer a statement of the Reason and Origin of things, but a theory of their contingency and recognition of *fact*, of the fact of contingency, the fact of the subordination of necessity to contingency, and the fact of the forms which 'gives form' to the effect of the encounter. It is now no more than *observation* [*constata*]: *there has been* an encounter, and a '*crystallization*' [*prise*] of the elements with one another (in the sense in which ice 'crystallizes'.) All question of Origin is rejected, as are all the great philosophical questions: 'Why is there something rather than nothing? What is the origin of the world? What is the world's *raison d'être*? What is man's place in the ends of the world?' and so on. ³ I repeat: what other philosophy has, historically, had the audacity to entertain such theses?

I mentioned Heidegger a moment ago. One finds, precisely, a similar tendency in the thought of Heidegger, who is obviously neither an Epicuran nor an atomist. It is well known that he rejects all question of the Origin, or of the Cause and End of the world. But we find in Heidegger a long series of developments centered on the expression *es gibt*—'there is', 'this is what is given'—that converge with Epicurus' inspiration. '*There is* world and matter, *there are* people...' A philosophy

of the *es gibt*, of the ‘this is what is given,’ makes short shrift of all the classic questions about the Origin, and so on. And it ‘opens up’ a prospect that restores a kind of transcendental contingency of the world, into which we are ‘thrown’, and of the meaning of the world, which in turn points to the opening up of Being, the original urge of Being, its ‘destining’, beyond which there is nothing to seek or to think. Thus the world is a ‘gift’ that we have been given, the ‘fact of the fact [*fait de fait*]’ that we have not chosen, and it ‘opens up’ before us in the facticity of its contingency, and even beyond this facticity, in what is not merely an observation, but a ‘being-in-the-world’ that commands all possible Meaning. ‘*Dasein* is the shepherd of being.’⁷⁴ Everything depends on the *da*. What remains of philosophy? Once again—but in the transcendental mode—the *observation of the ‘es gibt’* and its presuppositions, or, rather, its effects in their insurmountable ‘givenness’.

Is this still materialism? The question is not very meaningful for Heidegger, who deliberately takes up a position outside the great divisions and the terminology of Western philosophy. But then are Epicurus’ theses still materialist? Yes, perhaps, doubtless, but on condition that we have done with a conception of materialism which, setting out from the questions and concepts it shares with idealism, makes materialism the response to idealism. We continue to talk about a materialism of the encounter only for the sake of convenience: it should be borne in mind that this materialism of the encounter includes Heidegger and eludes the classical criteria of every materialism, and that we need, after all, some word to designate the thing.

Machiavelli will be our second witness in the history of the underground current of the materialism of the encounter. His project is well-known: to think, in the impossible conditions of fifteenth-century Italy, the conditions for establishing an Italian national state. All the circumstances favorable to imitating France or Spain exist, but *without connections* between them: a divided and fervent people, the fragmentation of Italy into small obsolete states that have been condemned by history, a generalized but disorderly revolt of an entire world against foreign occupation and pillage, and a profound, latent aspiration of the people to unity, an aspiration to which all the great works of the

period bear witness, including that of Dante, who understood nothing of all this, but was waiting for the arrival of the ‘great hound.’ In sum, an atomized country, every atom of which was descending in free fall without encountering its neighbor. It was necessary *to create the conditions for a swerve*, and thus an encounter, if Italian unity was to ‘take hold.’ How was this to be done? Machiavelli did not believe that any of the existing states—and, in particular, any of the papal states, the worst of all—could play the role of unifier. In *The Prince*, he lists them one after the next, but only to reject them as so many decaying components of the prior, feudal mode of production, including the republics that are its alibis and captives. And he poses the problem in all its rigor and stark simplicity.

Once all the states and their princes—that is, all the *places* and *people*—have been rejected, Machiavelli, using the example of Cesare Borgia, moves on to the idea that unification will be achieved if there emerges some nameless man who has enough luck and *virtu* to establish himself somewhere, in some nameless corner of Italy, and, starting out from this atomic point, gradually aggregate the Italians around him in the grand project of founding a national state. This is a completely aleatory line of reasoning, which leaves politically blank both the name of the Federator and that of the region which will serve as starting point for the constitution of this federation. Thus the dice are tossed on the gaming table, which is itself empty (but filled with men of valor.)⁵

In order for this encounter between a man and a region to ‘take hold’, it has to *take place*. Politically conscious of the powerlessness of the existing states and princes, Machiavelli says nothing about this prince and this place. But let us not be fooled. This silence is a *political* condition for the encounter. Machiavelli’s wish is simply that, in an atomized Italy, the encounter should take place, and he is plainly obsessed with this Cesare, who, starting out with nothing, made the Romagna a Kingdom, and, after taking Florence, would have united all Northern Italy if he had not been stricken by fever in the marshes of Ravenna at the critical moment, when he was heading, despite Julius II, for Rome itself, to strip him of his office. *A man of nothing who has started out from nothing starting out from an unassignable place*: these are, for Machiavelli, the

conditions for regeneration.

In order for this encounter to take place, however, another encounter must come about: that of fortune and *virtu* in the Prince. Encountering *Fortuna*, the Prince must have the *virtu* to treat her as he would treat a woman, to welcome her in order to seduce or do violence to her; in short, to use her to realize his destiny. [*sic*] Thanks to this consideration, we owe Machiavelli a whole philosophical theory of the encounter between fortune and *virtu*. The encounter may not take place *or* may take place. The meeting can be missed. The encounter can be brief or lasting: he needs an encounter that lasts. To make it last, the Prince has to learn to govern fortune by governing men. He has to structure his state by training up its men, commingling them in the army (see Gramsci), and, above all, by endowing this state with constant *laws*. He had to win them over by accommodating them, while knowing how to keep his distance. This dual procedure gives rise to the theory of seduction and the theory of fear, as well as the theory of the ruse. I leave aside the rejection of the demagoguery of love ⁶, the idea that fear is preferable to love,⁷ and the violent methods designed to inspire fear, in order to go straight to the theory of the ruse.

Should the prince be good or wicked? He has to learn to be wicked, but in all circumstances he has to know to *appear to be* good, to possess the moral virtues that will win the people over to his side, even if they earn him the hatred of the mighty, whom he despises, for, from them, nothing else is to be expected. Machiavelli's theory is well-known: the prince should be 'like the centaur of the Ancients, both man and beast'. But it has not been sufficiently remarked that *the beast divides* into two in Machiavelli, becoming both lion and fox, and that, ultimately, it is the fox who governs everything.⁸ For it is the fox who obliges the Prince either to appear to be evil or to appear to be good—in a word, to fabricate a popular (ideological) image of himself that either does or does not answer to his interests and those of the 'little man'⁹. Consequently, the Prince is governed, internally, by the variations of this other aleatory encounter, that of the fox on the one hand and the lion and the man on the other. This encounter *may not take place*, but it also may take place. It has to last long enough for the figure of the prince

to 'take hold' among the people—to 'take hold', that is *to take form*, so that, institutionally, he instills the fear of himself as good; and, if possible, so that he ultimate is good, but on the absolute condition that he never forget how to be evil if need be.

The reader may object that this is merely *political* philosophy, overlooking the fact that a philosophy is simultaneously at work here too. A curious *philosophy which is a 'materialism of the encounter' thought by way of politics*, and which, as such, does not take anything for granted. It is in the political void that the encounter must come about, and that national unity must 'take hold'. But *this political void is first a philosophical void*. No Cause that precedes its effects is to be found in it, no Principle of morality or theology (as in the whole Aristotelian political tradition: the good and bad forms of government, the degeneration of the good into the bad.) One reasons here not in terms of the Necessity of the accomplished fact, but in terms of the contingency of the fact to be accomplished. As in the Epicurean world, all the elements are both here and beyond, to come raining down later [*la et au-dela, a pleuvoin*] (see above, the Italian situation), but they do not exist, are only abstract, as long as the unity of a world has not united them in the Encounter that will endow them with existence.

It will have been noticed that, in this philosophy, there reigns an alternative: the encounter may not take place, just as it may take place. Nothing determines, no principle of decision determines this alternative in advance; it is of the order of a game of dice. 'A throw of the dice will never abolish chance.' Indeed! A successful encounter, one that is not brief, but lasts, never guarantees that it will continue to last tomorrow rather than come undone. Just as it might not have taken place, it may *no longer* take place: 'fortune comes and changes,' affirms Borgia, who succeeded at everything until the famous day he was stricken with fever. In other words, nothing guarantees that *the reality of the accomplished fact is the guarantee of its durability*. Quite the opposite is true: every accomplished fact, even an election, like all the necessity and reason we can derive from it, is only a provisional encounter, and since every encounter is provisional even when it lasts, *there is no eternity in the 'laws' of any world or any state*. History is nothing but the per-

manent revocation of the accomplished fact by another undecipherable fact to be accomplished, without knowing in advance whether, or when, or how the event that revokes it will come about. Simply, one day new hands will have to be dealt out and the dice thrown again on the empty table.

Thus it will have been noticed that this philosophy is, in sum, a philosophy of the *void*: not only the philosophy which *says* that the void pre-exists the atoms that fall in it, but a philosophy which *creates the philosophical void* [*fait la vide philosophique*] in order to endow itself with existence: a philosophy which, rather than setting out from the famous ‘philosophical problems’ (why is there something rather than nothing?),¹⁰ *begins by evacuating all philosophical problems*, hence by refusing to assign itself any ‘object’ whatever (‘philosophy has no object’)¹¹ in order to set out from *nothing*, and from the infinitesimal, aleatory variation of nothing constituted by the swerve of the fall. Is there a more radical critique of all philosophy, with its pretension to utter the truth about things? Is there a more striking way of saying that philosophy’s ‘object’ *par excellence* is nothingness, nothing, or the void? In the seventeenth century, Pascal repeatedly approached this idea, and the possibility of introducing the void as a philosophical object. He did so, however, in the deplorable context of an apologetics. Here, too, it was only with Heidegger, after the false words of a Hegel (‘the labor of the negative’) or a Stirner (‘all things are nothing to me’),¹² that the void was given all its decisive philosophical significance again. Yet we already find all this in Epicurus and Machiavelli: in Machiavelli, we evacuated [*fit le vide de*] all Plato and Aristotle’s philosophical concepts in order to think the possibility of making Italy a national state. One measures the impact of philosophy here—reactionary or revolutionary—despite the often baffling outward appearances, which have to be patiently and carefully deciphered.

If Machiavelli is read along these lines (the foregoing are just brief notes which have to be developed, and which I hope to some day¹³), how is it possible to imagine that his work is, under its political cloak, anything other than an authentically philosophical body of thought? And how is it possible to imagine that the fascination exercised by

Machiavelli has been merely political, or centered on the absurd question of where he was a monarchist or a republican (the very best philosophy of the Enlightenment was enamored of this foolishness),¹⁴ when the philosophical resonances of his work have been, unbeknown to Machiavelli himself, among the most profound to have reached us from this painful past? I would like to *displace* the problem, in order to challenge not simply the meaningless monarchist/republican alternative, but also the widespread thesis that Machiavelli merely founded political science. I would like to suggest that it is less to politics than to his ‘materialism of the encounter’ that Machiavelli basically owes the influence he has had on people who do not give a damn about politics, and rightly so—*no one is obliged to ‘engage in politics’*; they have been partly misled about him, vainly striving to pin down, as Croce still was, the elusive source of this *eternally* incomprehensible fascination.

Someone understood this fascination less than a century after Machiavelli’s death. His name was Spinoza. In the *Tractatus politicus*, we find high praise for Machiavelli, mentioned by name in a treatise whose subject, once again, would appear to be politics, whereas it is in reality philosophy as well.¹⁵ In order to grasp this philosophy, however, we have to take a step back, since Spinoza’s philosophical strategy is radical and extremely complex. This is because he was struggling in a full world and was stalked by adversaries ready to pounce on his every word, adversaries who occupied all the terrain, or thought they did. Moreover, he had to develop a disconcerting problematic—from the high ground, which dominates all the consequences.

Here. I shall defend the thesis that, for Spinoza, the object of philosophy is the void.¹⁶ This is a paradoxical thesis, in view of the great many concepts that are worked out in the *Ethics*.¹⁷ Yet we need only notice *how Spinoza begins*. He confesses in a letter that ‘some begin with the world and others with the mind of man; I begin with God’.¹⁸ The others: first, the Schoolmen, who begin with the world, and, from the created world, trace things back to God. The others are also Descartes, who starts with the thinking subject and, by way of the *cognito*, traces things back to the *dubito* and God as well. All of them take a path that leads through God. Spinoza shuns these detours and deliberately

takes up his position *in God*. Hence one can say that he occupies, in advance, the common fortress, the ultimate guarantee and last recourse of all his adversaries, by starting with this *beyond-which-there-is-nothing*, which, because it thus exists in the absolute, with absence of all relation, *is itself nothing*. Saying that one ‘begins with God’, or the Whole, or the unique substance, and making it understood that one ‘begins with nothing’, is, basically, the same thing: what difference is there between the Whole and nothing?—since nothing exists outside the whole... What, for that matter, does Spinoza have to say about God? This is where the strangeness begins.

Dues sive natura, God *is only* nature. This comes down to saying that He is *nothing* else: He is only *nature*. Epicurus, too, set out from nature as that which outside nothing exists. What, then, is this Spinozist God? An absolute, unique, infinite substance, endowed with an infinite number of infinite attributes. This is obviously a way of saying that anything which can exist never exists anywhere other than in God, whether this ‘whatever’ is known or unknown. For we know only two attributes, extension and thought, and even then, we do not know all the powers of the body,¹⁹ just as, when it comes to thought, we do not know the unthought power of desire. The other attributes—of which there are an infinite number, and which are themselves infinite—are there to cover the whole range of the possible and impossible. The fact that there is an infinite number of them, and that they are unknown to us, leaves the door to their existence and their aleatory figures wide open. The fact that they are *parallel*, that here everything is an effect of parallelism, recalls Epicurus’ rain. The attributes fall in the empty space of their determination like raindrops that can undergo encounters [*sont recontraables*] only in this exceptional parallelism, this parallelism *without encounter or union* (of body and soul...) known as man, in this assignable but minute parallelism of thought and the body²⁰, which is still only parallelism, since, here as in all things, ‘the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.’²¹ In sum, a *parallelism without encounter*, yet a parallelism that is already, in itself, *encounter* thanks to the very structure of the relationship between the different elements of each attribute.

One cannot assess this unless one perceives the philosophical effects of this strategy and this parallelism. The result of the fact that God is *nothing* but nature, and that this nature is the infinite sum of an infinite number of parallel attributes, is not only that *there is nothing left to say about God*, but that there is also nothing left to say about the great problem that invaded all of Western philosophy with Aristotle and, especially, Descartes: *the problem of knowledge*, and of its dual correlative, the knowing subject and the known object. These great causes, which are the cause of so much discussion, are reduced to nothing. *Homo cogitat*, ‘man thinks’,²² that is just how it is; this is the observation of a facticity, that of the ‘this is how it is,’ that of an *es gibt* which already anticipates Heidegger and recalls the facticity of the falling atoms in Epicurus. Thought is simply the succession of the modes of the attribute ‘thought’, and refers us, not to a Subject, but, as good parallelism requires, to the succession of the modes of the attribute ‘extension’.

Also interesting is the way in which thought is constituted in man. That he starts to think by thinking confused thoughts, and by hearsay, until these elements at last ‘take’ form, so that he can think in “common notions” (from the first kind to the second, and then the third: by thinking singular essences)²³ is important, for man could well remain at the level of hearsay, and the thoughts of the first kind might not “take hold” with those of the second. Such is the lot of most people, who remain at the level of the first kind and the imaginary—that is, at the level of the illusion that they are thinking, when they are not. That is just how it is. One can remain at the level of the first kind or not. There is not, as there is in Descartes, an immanent necessity that brings about the transition from confused thinking to clear and distinct thinking. There is no subject, no *cognito*, no necessary moment of reflection guaranteeing this transition. It may take place, or it may not. And experience shows that, as a general rule, it does not, except in a philosophy which is aware that it is nothing.

What remains of philosophy once both God and the theory of knowledge, destined to establish supreme “values” that provide the measure of all things, have been reduced to naught? No more morality, or, above all, religion. Better: a theory of morality and religion which,

long before Nietzsche, destroys them right down to their imaginary foundations of “reversal”—the “inverted *fabrica*” (see the appendix to Book I of the *Ethics*.)²⁴ No more finality (whether psychological or historical.) In short, *the void that is philosophy itself*. And inasmuch as this result is a result, it is attained only after an immense amount of labor, which makes for all the interest of the *Ethics*, has been performed on concepts: “critical labor”, as it is usually called; a labor of “deconstruction”, as Derrida would say, following Heidegger. For what is destroyed is simultaneously reconstructed, but on other foundations and in accordance with an altogether different plan—witness the inexhaustible theory of the imagination or the imaginary, which both destroys and reconstructs the theory of knowledge, the theory of religion, the theory of history, and so on—but in their actual, political functions.

A strange theory, which people tend to present as a theory of knowledge (the first of the three kinds), whereas *the imagination is not by any means a faculty, but, fundamentally, only the only*²⁵ *world itself in its “givenness”*. With this slide [*glissement*], Spinoza not only turns his back on all theories of knowledge, but also clears a path for the recognition of the “world” as that-beyond-which-there-is-nothing, not even a theory of nature—for the recognition of the “world” as a unique totality that is *not totalized, but experienced in its dispersion*, and experienced as the “given” illusions [*fabricae*]. Basically, the theory of the first kind as a “world” corresponds distantly, yet very precisely, to the thesis that God is “nature”, since nature is nothing but the world thought in accordance with ordinary notions, but given before them, as that prior to which there is nothing. For Spinoza, politics is then grafted on to the world’s imaginary and necessary myths. Thus Spinoza converges with Machiavelli in his profoundest conclusions and his rejection of all the presuppositions of traditional philosophy, the autonomy of the political being nothing other than the form taken by the rejection of all finality, all religion and all transcendence. But the theory of the imaginary as a world allows Spinoza to think the “singular essence” of the third kind, which finds its representation par excellence in the history of an individual or a people, such as Moses or the Jewish people. The fact that it is necessary means simply that it has been accomplished, but ev-

everything in it could have swung the other way, depending on the encounter or non-encounter of Moses and God, or the encounter of the comprehension or non-comprehension of the prophets. The proof is that it was necessary to explain to the prophets the meaning of what they reported of their conversations with God!—with the following limit-situation, of nothing itself, which was Daniel's: you could explain everything to him for as long as you liked, he never understood a thing.²⁶ A proof by nothingness of nothingness itself, as a limit-situation.

Hobbes, that “devil” or “demon”, will serve, in his fashion, as our transition from Spinoza to Rousseau. Chronology hardly matters in this business, because each of these bodies of thought is developed for itself, despite the intermediary role played by Mersenne, and because what is in question is, above all, the resonances of a tradition buried and then revived, resonances which must be registered.

All society is based on fear, Hobbes says, the factual proof being that you have *keys*. What do you have keys for? To lock your doors against attack from you don't know whom: it might be your neighbor or your best friend, transformed into a “wolf for man” by your absence, and the occasion and desire to enrich himself.²⁷ From this simple remark, which is worth as much as our best “analyses of essence”, Hobbes draws a whole philosophy: namely, that there reigns among men a “war of all against all”, an “endless race” which everyone wants to win, but which almost everyone loses, judging from the position of the competitors (whence the “passions” about which he wrote a treatise, as was then the fashion, in order to disguise politics in them) who are ahead, behind, or neck-and-neck in the race.²⁸ Whence the state of general war: not that it breaks out, here, between states (as Rousseau would logically claim), but, rather, in the sense which we talk about “the threat of an outbreak of foul weather” (it can start to rain at any time of the day or night, without warning); in short, as a permanent threat against one's life and possessions, and the threat of death which hangs, always, at every moment, over every man simply by virtue of the fact that he lives in society. I am well aware that Hobbes is thinking of something very different from competition, simple economic competition (as was once thought)—namely, the great revolts of which he

was a witness (one is not a contemporary of Cromwell and the execution of Charles I with impunity), in which he saw the equilibrium of the minor fear of the “keys” suddenly overturned in the face of the great fear of popular revolts and political murders. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, it is this great fear in particular that he means when he evokes the times of misfortune in which part of society could massacre the other in order to take power.

As a good theoretician of Natural Law, our Hobbes obviously does not restrict himself to these outward appearances, even if they are appalling; he wants to come to terms with the effects by tracing back to their causes, and therefore proceeds to give us a theory of the state of Nature as well. To reduce the state of Nature to its elements, one has to pursue the analysis down to the level of the “*atoms of society*” constituted by *individuals endowed with conatus*, that is, with the power and will “to persevere in their being” and create a void in front of themselves [*faire le vide devant eux*] in order to mark out the space of their freedom there. Atomized individuals, with the void as condition for their movement: this reminds us of something, does it not? Hobbes does indeed contend that freedom, which makes the whole individual and the force of his being, resides in the “void of impediments,” the “absence of impediments”²⁹ in the path of his conquering power. An individual joins the war of all against all only out of a desire to avoid every obstacle that would prevent him from forging straight ahead (one thinks here of the atoms descending in free fall parallel to each other); basically, he would be happy to encounter no one at all in a world that would in that case be empty.

It is an unfortunate fact, however, that *this world is full*—full of people pursuing the same goal, who therefore confront each other in order to clear the way before their own *conatus*, but find no other means of attaining their end than “to bestow death upon” anyone who blocks their path. Whence the essential role of *death* in Hobbes’s thought, which is a thought of infinite life; the role not of accidental death, but of necessary death, bestowed and received by man; the role of economic and political murder, which alone is capable of [*propre a*] maintaining this society of the state of war in an unstable but necessary equilibrium.

Yet these appalling men are also men; they think, that is to say, they “*calculate*”, weighing up the respective advantages of remaining in the state of war or entering into a contractual state³⁰ which, however, is based on the inalienable foundation of any human society: *fear or terror*. They reason, then, and eventually conclude that it would be to their advantage to make a mutual pact, a curious, asymmetrical [*desequilibre*] pact, in which they pledge (as atomistic individuals) not to resist the omnipotent power of the one to whom they then delegate, unilaterally and without receiving anything in exchange, all their *rights* (their natural rights): Leviathan—whether the individual of absolute monarchy or the omnipotent assembly of the people or its representatives. In making this pact, they make a mutual commitment to respect this delegation of power without ever violating it. If they did, they would incur the terrifying punishment of Leviathan, who, let us note, is not himself bound to the people by any contract; rather, he maintains the unity of the people through the exercise of an omnipotence to which all have consented, by making fear and terror reign at the limits of the law, thanks to his sense (what a miracle that he should possess it!) that it is his “duty” to maintain the people thus subjugated in subjugation, so as to spare it the horrors of the state of war, infinitely worse than its fear of him.³¹ A Prince bound to his people by nothing other than the duty to protect it from the state of war, a people bound to its Prince by nothing other than the promise—respected, or watch out!—to obey him in everything, *even in the realm of ideological conformity* (Hobbes is the first to think, if that is possible, ideological domination and its effects.) It is here that we find all the originality and horror of this subversive thinker (his conclusions were correct, but he was a poor thinker, as Descartes would later say: his reasoning was faulty) and extraordinary theoretician, whom no one understood, but who terrified everyone. He thought (this privilege of thinking, which consists in not giving a toss about what people will say, or about the world, gossip, even one’s reputation; in reasoning in absolute solitude—or the illusion of absolute solitude.)

What, then, did the accusations leveled at him (as they were also leveled at Spinoza) matter, accusations to the effect that he was an emissary of Hell and the Devil among men, and so on? Hobbes thought

that every war was a preventative war, that no one had any recourse against the Other he might some day face than to “get the jump on him.” Hobbes thought (and with what audacity!) that all power is absolute, that to be absolute is the essence of power, and that everything which exceeds this rule by however little, whether from the Right or the Left, should be opposed with the greatest possible rigor. He did not think all this with a view to justifying what people would today call—using a word blurs all distinctions, and therefore all meaning and all thought—“totalitarianism” or “estatism”; he thought all this in the interests of free economic competition, and the free development of trade and the culture of the peoples!

For, on closer inspection, it turns out that his notorious totalitarian state is almost already comparable to Marx’s, which must *wither away*. Since all war, and therefore all terror, are preventive, it was sufficient for this terrible state to exist, in order, as it were, to be so thoroughly absorbed by its own existence as not to have to exist. People have talked about the fear of the gendarme and the need to “make a show of one’s force so as not to have to make use of it” (Lyautey);³² today we talk about *not* making a show of one’s (atomic) force so as not to have to make use of it. This is to say that Force is a myth which, as such, acts on the imagination of men and peoples preventively, in the absence of any reason to employ it. I know that I am here extending an argument that never went this far, but I remain within the logic of Hobbes’s thought, and am accounting for his paradoxes in terms of a Logic that remains his.

Be that as it may, it is painfully clear that Hobbes was not the monster that he has been made out to be, and that his sole ambition was to contribute to securing the conditions of viability and development of a world which was what it was, his own world, that of the Renaissance, then opening itself up to the monumental discovery of another, the New World. To be sure, the “hold” of the atomized individuals was not of the same nature or as powerful as in Epicurus and Machiavelli; and Hobbes, unfortunately for us, was no historian, although he lived through so much history (these are not vocations that one can acquire by simple decree.) Yet, in his way, he had arrived at the same result as

his teachers in the materialist tradition of the encounter: *the aleatory constitution of a world*: and if this thinker influenced Rousseau (I shall discuss this some day) and even Marx as profoundly as he did, it is clearly owing to the fact that he revived this secret tradition, even if (this is not impossible) he was not aware of the fact. After all, we know that, in these matters, consciousness is only the Fly in the Coach; ³³ what matters is that the horses pull the train of the world at the full gallop of the plains or the long slow plods of the uphill climbs.

Although there are no references to Epicurus or Machiavelli in Rousseau's second *Discourse* or the "[Discourse on] the Origin of Languages", it is to the author of these works that we owe another revival of the "materialism of the encounter."

Not enough attention has been paid to the fact that the second *Discourse* begins with a description of the state of nature which differs from other such descriptions in that it is cut in two: we have a "*state of pure nature*" that is the radical Origin of everything, and the "*state of nature*" that follows certain modifications imposed on the *pure state*. In all the examples of the state of nature that the authors of the Natural Law tradition provide, it is clear that this state of nature is a state of society—either of the war of all against all, as in Hobbes, or of trade and peace as in Locke. These authors do indeed do what Rousseau criticizes them for: they project the state of society onto the state of pure nature. Rousseau alone thinks the state of "*pure*" nature, and, when he does, thinks it as a state lacking all social relations, whether positive or negative. ³⁴ He uses the fantastic image of the primeval forest to represent it, recalling another Rousseau, Le Douanier, whose paintings show us isolated individuals who have no relations to each other wandering about: *individuals without encounters*. Of course, a man and a woman can meet, "feel one another out", and even pair off, but only in a brief encounter without identity or recognition: hardly have they become acquainted (indeed, they do not even become acquainted: and there is absolutely no question of children, as if the human world, before *Emile*, were oblivious to their existence or could manage without them—neither children nor, therefore, father or mother: no *family*, in sum) ³⁵ than they part, each of them wending his way through the in-

finite void of the forest. As a rule, when two people do encounter one another, they merely cross paths at a greater or lesser distance without noticing each other, and the encounter does not even take place. The forest is the equivalent of the Epicuran void in which the parallel rain of the atoms falls: it is a pseudo-Brownian void in which individuals cross each other's paths, that is to say, do not meet, except in brief conjunctions that do not last. In this way, Rousseau seeks to represent, at a very high price (the absence of children) a *radical absence [neant] of society* prior to all society; and—condition of possibility for all society—the radical absence of society that constitutes the essence of any possible society. That the radical absence of society constitutes the essence of all society is an audacious thesis, the radical nature of which escaped not only Rousseau's contemporaries, but many of his later critics as well.

For a society to be, what is required? *The state of encounter has to be imposed* on people; the infinity of the forest, as a condition of possibility for the non-encounter, has to be reduced to the finite by external causes; natural catastrophes have to divide it up into confined spaces, for example islands, where men *forced* to have encounters and forced to have encounters that last: forced by a force superior to them. I leave to one side the ingenuity of those natural catastrophes that affect the surface of the earth—the simplest of which is the very slight, the infinitesimal, tilt of the equator from the ecliptic, an accident without cause akin to the clinamen—in order to discuss their effects.³⁶ Once men are forced to make encounters and found associations which, *in fact*, last, *constrained relationships* spring up among them, social relationships that are rudimentary at first, and then are reinforced by the effects that these encounters have on the their human nature.

A long, slow dialectic comes into play at this point; in it, with the accumulation of time, forced contacts produce language, the passions, and amorous exchanges or struggle between men: such struggle eventually leads to the state of war. Society is born, the state of nature is born, and war as well. Along with them, there develops a process of accumulation and change that literally *creates socialized human nature*. It should be noted that it would be possible for this encounter not to last if the

constancy of external constraints did not maintain it in a constant state in the face of the temptation of dispersion, did not literally impose its law of proximity without asking men for their opinion; their society thus emerges from behind their backs, so to speak, and their history emerges as the dorsal, unconscious constitution of this society.

No doubt man in the state of pure nature, although he has a body and, as it were, no soul, carries within himself a transcendent capacity for all that he is and all that will happen to him—*perfectibility*—which is, so to speak, the abstraction and transcendental condition of possibility for all anticipation of all development; and also a faculty that is perhaps more important: *pity*, which, as the negative faculty of being able to bear the suffering of one's fellow man, is society by virtue of its absence [*société par manque*], hence latent society, a negative society latent in the isolated man, athirst for the Other in his very solitude.³⁷ But all this, which is posed from the beginning of the state of “pure” nature, is not active there, has no existence or effect, but is merely expectation of the future that awaits man. Just as society and the history in which it is constituted come about behind man's back, without his conscious, active involvement, so both perfectibility and pity are merely the negative [*nul*] anticipation of this future, in which *man has no hand*.

There have been studies of the genealogy of these concepts (Goldschmidt's book is definitive),³⁸ but there has not been enough study of the effects of this system as a whole, which is rounded off in the second *Discourse* by the theory of the *illegitimate contract*, a contract of force concluded with the obedience of the weak by the arrogance of the powerful, who are also the “most cunning”. This determines the true meaning of the Social Contract, which concluded and persists only under the constant threat of the *abyss* (Rousseau himself uses this word [*abîme*] in the *Confessions*) represented by a *re-lapse* [*re-chute*] into the state of nature, an organism haunted by the inner death that it must exorcise: in sum, an encounter *that has taken form* and become necessary, but against the background of the aleatory of the non-encounter and its forms, into which the contact can *fall back* at any moment. If this remark, which would have to be developed, is not wrong, it would resolve the classical aporia that constantly counterposes the *Contract*

to the second *Discourse*, an academic difficulty whose only equivalent in the history of Western culture is the absurd question as to whether Machiavelli was a monarchist or a republican.

...By the same token, it would clarify the status of the texts in which Rousseau ventures to legislate for the peoples (the Corsican people, the Poles, and so on) by reviving, in all its force, the concept that dominates in Machiavelli—he does not utter the word, but this hardly matters, since the thing is present: the concept of the *conjuncture*. To give men laws, one must take full account of the way the *conditions* present themselves, of the surrounding circumstances, of the “*there is*” this and not that, as, allegorically, one must take account of the climate and many other conditions in Montesquieu, of these conditions and their history, that is to say, of their “having come about”—in short, of the encounters which might not have taken place (compare the state of nature: “that state that might never have arisen”) ³⁹ and which have taken place, shaping the “given” of the problem and its state. What does this signify, if not an attempt to think not only the contingency of necessity, but also the necessity of the contingency at its root? The social contract then no longer appears as a utopia, but as the inner law of any society, in its legitimate or illegitimate form, and the real problem becomes: *how does it happen that one never rectifies an illegitimate (the prevailing) form, transforming it into a legitimate form?* At the limit, the legitimate form does not exist, but *one has to postulate it* in order to think the existing concrete forms: those Spinozist “singular essences”, whether individuals, conjectures, real states or their peoples—one has to postulate it as the transcendental condition for any condition, that is, any *history*.

The most profound thing in Rousseau is doubtless disclosed and covered back up [*decouvert et recouvert*] here, in this vision of any possible theory of history, which thinks the contingency of necessity as an effect of the necessity of contingency, an unsettling pair of concepts that must nevertheless be taken into account. They make themselves felt in Montesquieu and are explicitly postulated in Rousseau, as an intuition of the eighteenth century that refutes in advance all the teleologies of history which tempted it, and for which it cleared a broad path under the irresistible impulsion of the French Revolution. To put

it in polemical terms: when one raises the question of the “end of history”, Epicurus and Spinoza, Montesquieu and Rousseau range themselves in the same camp, on the basis, explicit or implicit, of the same materialism of the encounter or, in the full sense of the term, the same idea of the *conjecture*. Marx too, of course—but Marx was constrained to think within a horizon torn between the aleatory of the Encounter and the necessity of the Revolution.

Let us hazard one last remark, which tends to bring out the fact that it is perhaps no accident that this curious pair of concepts interested, above all, men who sought, in the concept of encounter and conjecture, a means with which to think not only the *reality* of history, but, above all, the reality of *politics*; not only the essence of reality but, above all, the essence of *practice*, and the link between these two realities in their *encounter in struggle* (I say struggle) and, at the limit, war (Hobbes, Rousseau). This struggle was the struggle for recognition (Hegel), but also, and well before Hegel, the struggle of all against all that is known as competition or, when it takes this form, class struggle (and its “contradiction”).⁴⁰ Is there any need to recall why and on whose behalf Spinoza speaks when he invokes Machiavelli? He wants only to think Machiavelli’s thought, and since it was a thought of practice, to think practice via that thought.⁴¹

All these historical remarks are just a prelude to what I wanted to call attention to in Marx. They are not, to be sure, accidental, but, rather, attest that, from Epicurus to Marx,⁴² there had always subsisted—even if it was covered over (by its very discovery, by forgetfulness, and, especially, by denial and repression, when it was not by condemnations that cost some their lives)—the “discovery” of a profound tradition that sought its materialist anchorage *in a philosophy of the encounter* (and therefore in a more or less atomistic philosophy, the atom, in its “fall”, being the simplest figure of individuality.) Whence this tradition’s radical rejection of all philosophies of essence (*Ousia, Essentia, Wesen*), that is, of Reason (*Logos, Ratio, Vernunft*) and therefore of Origin and End—the Origin being nothing more, here, than the anticipation of the End in Reason or primordial order (that is, the anticipation of Order, whether it be rational, moral, religious or aesthetic)—in the

interests of a philosophy which, rejecting the Whole and every Order, rejects the Whole and order *in favor of* dispersion (Derrida would say, in his terminology, “dissemination”) and *disorder*.

To say that in the beginning was nothingness or disorder is to take up a position prior to any assembling and ordering, and to give up thinking the origin as Reason or End in order to think it as nothingness. To the old question “What is the origin of the world?”, this materialist philosophy answers: “Nothingness!”, “Nothing,” “I start out from nothing,” “There is no obligatory beginning of philosophy,” “philosophy does not start out from a beginning that is its origin;” on the contrary, it “catches a moving train,” and, by sheer strength of arm, “hoists itself aboard the train” that has been running for all eternity in front of it, like Heraclitus’ river. Hence there is no end, either of the world, or of history, or of philosophy, or of morality, or of art or politics, and so on. These themes, which from Nietzsche to Deleuze and Derrida, from English empiricism (Deleuze) to (with Derrida’s help) Heidegger, have become familiar to us by now, are fertile for any understanding not only of philosophy, but also all its supposed “objects” (whether science, culture, art, literature, or any other expression of existence.) They are crucial to this materialism of the encounter, however well disguised they may be in the form of other concepts. Today we are capable of translating them into plainer language.

We shall say that the materialism of the encounter has been christened “materialism” only provisionally^a, in order to bring out its radical opposition to any idealism of consciousness or reason, whatever its destination. We shall further say that the materialism of the encounter turns on a certain interpretation of the single proposition *there is* (*es gibt*, Heidegger) and its developments or implications, namely: “there is = there is nothing”; “there is” = “*there has always-already been nothing*”, that is to say, “something”, the “always-already”, or which I have made abundant use in my essays until now although this has not always been noticed—since the always-whatever is the grip⁴³ (*Grieffen*: grasp [*prise*] in German; *Begriff*: grasp or *concept*) of this antecedence of each thing over itself, hence every kind of origin. We shall say, then, that the materialism of the encounter is contained in the thesis of the primacy of

positivity over negativity (Deleuze), the thesis of the primacy of the swerve over the rectilinearity of the straight trajectory (the Origin is a swerve from it, not the reason for it), the thesis of the primacy of disorder over order (one thinks here of the theory of “noise”), the thesis of the primacy of “dissemination” over the postulate that every signifier has a meaning (Derrida), and in the welling up of order from the very heart of disorder to produce a world. We shall say that the materialism of the encounter is also contained in its entirety in the negation of the End, of all teleology, be it rational, secular, moral, political or aesthetic. Finally, we shall say that the materialism of the encounter is the materialism, not of a subject (be it God or the proletariat), but of a process, a process that has no subject, yet imposes on the subjects (individuals or others) which it dominates the order of its development, with no assignable end.

If we were to push these theses further, we would be led to formulate a number of concepts that would, of course, be *concepts without objects*, since they would be the concepts of *nothing*, and, inasmuch as philosophy has no object, would make this nothing into being or beings, to the point of rendering it unrecognizable and recognizable in them (which is why it was, in the last analysis, both misrecognized and anticipated.) To illustrate these theses, we would refer to the first form, the simplest and purest, which they took in the history of philosophy, in Democritus and, especially, Epicurus. Democritus’ and Epicurus’ work, we would note in passing, did not fall victim to the flames by accident, these incendiaries of every philosophical tradition having paid for their sins in kind—the flames, produced by friction, which one sees bursting from the tips of the tallest trees, because they are tall (Lucretius)⁴⁴, or from philosophies (the great philosophies.) We would then have, in this illustration (which must be renewed at every stage of the history of philosophy), the following first forms:

“*Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist*” (Wittgenstein):⁴⁵ the world is everything that “falls”, everything that “comes about [*advient*]”, “everything that is the case”—by case, let us understand *casus*: *at once occurrence and chance*, that which comes about in the mode of the unforeseeable, and yet of being.

Thus, as far back as we can go, “there is” = “there has always been”, there “has-always-already-been”, the “already” being absolutely necessary in order to mark this priority of the occurrence, of the *Fall*, over all its forms, that is to say, all the *forms* of beings. This is⁴⁶ Heidegger’s *es gibt*, the inaugural deal [*la donne*] (rather than what has been dealt out [*le donne*], depending on whether one wishes to highlight the active or passive aspect); it is always prior to its *presence*. In other words, it is the primacy of absence over presence (Derrida), not as a *going-back-towards*, but as a horizon receding endlessly ahead of the walker who, seeking his path on the plain, never finds anything but another plain stretching out before him (very different from the Cartesian walker who has only to walk straight ahead in a forest in order to get out of it⁴⁷, because the world is made up, alternatively, of virgin forests and forests that have been cleared to create open fields: without *Holzwege*⁴⁸.)

In this “world” without being or history (like Rousseau’s forest), what happens? For *there are occurrences there*, taking this phrase in the impersonal, active/passive sense [*car il y advient: “il”, actif/passif impersonnel.*] *Encounters*. What happens there is what happens in Epicurus’ universal rain, prior to any world, any being and any reason as well as any cause. What happens is that “there are encounters” [*ca se rencontre*]; in Heidegger, that “things are thrown” in an inaugural “destining.” Whether or not it is by the miracle of the clinamen, it is enough to know that it comes about “we know not where, we know not when”, and that it is “the smallest deviation possible”, that is, the assignable nothingness of all swerve. Lucretius’ text is clear enough to designate *that which nothing in the world can designate*, although it is the origin of every world. In the “nothingness” of the swerve, there occurs an encounter between one atom and another, and this event [*evenement*] becomes *advent* [*avenement*] on condition of the parallelism of the atoms, for it is this parallelism which, violated on just one occasion, induces the gigantic pile-up and collision-interlocking [*accrochage*] of an infinite number of atoms, from which a world is born, (one world or another: hence the plurality of possible worlds, and the fact that the concept of possibility can be rooted in the concept of original disorder.)

Whence the *form of order* and the *form of beings* whose birth is induced by this pile-up, determined as they are by the *structure* of the encounter; whence, once the encounter has been effected (but not before), the primacy of the structure over its elements; whence, finally, what one must call an *affinity* and a complementarity [*completude*] of the elements that come into play in the encounter, their “readiness to collide-interlock” [*acrobabilite*], in order that this encounter “take hold”, that is to say “take form,” *at last give birth to Forms, and new Forms*—just as water “takes hold” when ice is there waiting for it, or milk does when it curdles, or mayonnaise when it emulsifies. Hence, the primacy of “nothing” over all “form”, and of *aleatory materialism over all formalism*.⁴⁹ In other words, not just anything can produce just anything, but only elements destined [*voues*] to encounter each other and, by virtue of their affinity, to take “take hold” one upon the other—which is why, in Democritus, and perhaps even in Epicurus, the atoms are, or are described as, “hooked”, that is, susceptible of interlocking one after the other, from all eternity, irrevocably, for ever.

Once they have thus “taken hold” or “collided-interlocked”, the atoms enter the realm of Being that they inaugurate: they constitute *beings*, assignable, distinct, localizable beings endowed with such-and-such a property (depending on the time and place); in short, there emerges in them a structure of Beings or of the world that assigns each of its elements its place, meaning and role, or better, establishes them as “elements of...” (the atoms as elements of bodies, of beings, of the world) in such a way that the atoms, far from being the origin of the world, are merely the secondary consequence of its assignment and advent [*assignement et avenement*]. If we are to talk about the world and its atoms in this way, it is necessary that the world exist, and, *prior to that*, that the atoms exist, a situation which puts discourse on the world *forever in second place*, and also puts in *second place* (not first, as Aristotle claimed) the philosophy of Being—thus making forever intelligible, as impossible (and therefore explicable: see the appendix to Book I of the *Ethics*, which repeats nearly verbatim the critique of all religious found in Epicurus and Lucretius) any discourse of *first philosophy*, even if it is materialist (which explains why Epicurus, who knew this, never subscribed to the “mechanical” materialism of Democritus, this materialism being only

a resurgence, within a possible philosophy of the encounter, of the dominant idealism of Order as immanent in Disorder.)

Once these principles have been set out, the rest follows naturally, if I may be forgiven the expression.⁵⁰

1. For *a being* (a body, an animal, a man, state, or Prince) *to be*, an encounter has *to have taken place* (past infinitive). To limit ourselves to Machiavelli, an encounter has to have taken place between beings with affinities [*des affinissables*]; between such-and-such an individual and such-and-such a conjecture, or Fortune, for example—the conjuncture itself being junction, con-junction, congealed (albeit shifting) encounter, since it has already taken place, and refers in its turn to the infinite number of its prior causes, just as (let us add) a determinate [*defini*] individual (for instance, Borgia) refers to the infinite sequence [*suite*] or prior causes of which it is the result.

2. There are encounters only between series [*series*] of beings that are the results of several series of causes—at least two, but this two soon proliferates, by virtue of the effect of parallelism or general contagion (as Breton puts it, profoundly, “elephants are contagious.”^b) One also thinks here of Cournot, a great but neglected thinker.

3. Every encounter is aleatory, not only in its origins (nothing ever guarantees an encounter), but also in its effects. In other words, every encounter might not have taken place, although it did take place; but its possible nonexistence sheds light on the meaning of its aleatory being. And every encounter is aleatory in its effects, in that nothing in the elements of the encounter it prefigures, before the actual encounter, the contours and determinations of the being that will emerge from it. Julius II did not know that he was harboring his mortal enemy in his Romagnol breast, nor did he know that his mortal enemy would be lying at death’s door, and so find himself outside history [*hors histoire*] at the critical hour of Fortune, only to go off and die in an obscure Spain before the walls of an unknown castle.⁵¹ This means that no determination of the being which issues from the “taking-hold” of the encounter is prefigured even in outline, in the being of the elements that converge in the encounter. Quite the contrary:

no determination of these elements can be assigned except by *working backwards* from the result to its becoming, in its retroaction. If we must therefore say that there can be no result without its becoming (Hegel), we must also affirm that there is nothing which has become except as determined by the result of this becoming—this retroaction itself (Canguilhem). That is, instead of thinking contingency as a modality of necessity, or an exception to it, we must think necessity as the becoming-necessary of the encounter of contingencies. Thus we see that not only the world of life (the biologists, who should have known their Darwin, have recently become aware of this^c), but the world of history, too, *gels* at certain felicitous moments, with the taking-hold of elements combined in an encounter that is apt to trace such-and-such a figure: such-and-such a species, individual, or people. Thus it happens that there are aleatory men or “lives”, subject to the accident of a death bestowed or received, as well as their “works”, and the great figures of the world to which the original “throw of the dice” of the aleatory has given their form (Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, etc.) This makes it all too clear that anyone who took it into his head to consider these figures, individuals, conjunctures or States of the world as either the necessary result of given premises or the provisional anticipation of an End would be mistaken, because he would be neglecting the fact (the “*Faktum*”) that these provisional results are doubly provisional—not only in that they will be superseded, but also in that they might never have come about, or might have come about only as the effect of a “brief encounter”, if they had not arisen on the happy basis of a stroke of good Fortune which gave their “*chance*” to “last” to the elements over whose conjunction it so happens (by chance that this form had to preside. This shows that we are not—that we do not live—in Nothingness [*le Neant*], but that, although there is no Meaning to history (an End which transcends it, from its origins to its term), there can be meaning in history, since this meaning emerges from an encounter that was real, and really felicitous—or catastrophic, which is also a meaning.

From this there follow very important consequences as to the meaning of the word “law”. It will be granted that no law presides over the encounter in which things take hold. But, it will be objected, once the

encounter *has* taken hold—that is, once the stable figure of the world, of the *only* existing world (for the advent of a given world obvious excludes all the other possible combinations), has been constituted—we have to do with a stable world in which events, in their succession [*suite*], obey “laws”. Hence it does not much matter whether the world, our world, (we know of no other; of the infinity of possible attributes, we know only two, the understanding and space: “*Faktum*”, Spinoza might have said), emerged from the encounter of atoms falling in the Epicurean rain of the void, or from the “Big Bang” hypothesized by the astrophysicists. The fact is that we have to do with this world and not another. The fact is that this world “*plays by the rules*” [*est regulier*] (in the sense in which one says that an honest player does: for this world plays and—no mistake about it—plays with us), that it is subject to rules and obeys laws. Hence the very great temptation, even for those who are willing to grant the premises of this materialism of the encounter, of resorting, once the encounter has “taken hold”, to the study of the laws which derive from this taking-hold of forms, and repeat these forms to all intents and purposes, indefinitely. For it is also a fact, a *Faktum*, that there is order in this world, and that knowledge of this world comes by way of knowledge of its “laws” (Newton) and the conditions of possibility, not of existence of these laws, but only of knowledge of them. This is, to be sure, a way of indefinitely deferring the old question of the origin of the world (this is how Kant proceeds), but only in order to obscure all the more effectively the origin of the second encounter that makes possible knowledge of the first in this world (the encounter between concepts and things.)

Well, we are going to resist this temptation by defending a thesis dear to Rousseau, who maintained that the contract is based on an “abyss”—by defending the idea, therefore, that the necessity of the laws that issue from the taking-hold induced by the encounter is, even at its most stable, haunted by a *radical instability*, which explains something we find it very hard to grasp (for it does violence to our sense of “what is seemly”): that laws can change—not that they can be valid for a time but not eternally (in his critique of classical political economy, Marx went that far, as his “Russian critic” had well understood,⁵² arguing that every historical period has its laws, although he went no further,

as we shall see), but that they can change at the drop of a hat, revealing the aleatory basis that sustains them, and can change without reason, that is, without an intelligible end. This is where their *surprise* lies (*there can be no taking-hold without surprise*) [*il n'est de prise que sous la surprise*].⁵³ This is what strikes everyone so forcefully during the great commencements, turns or suspensions of history, whether of individuals (for example, madness) or of the world, when the dice are, as it were, thrown back on the table unexpectedly, or the cards are dealt out again without warning, or the “elements are unloosed in the fit of madness that frees them up for new, surprising ways of taking-hold [*de nouvelles prises suprenantes*] (Nietzsche, Artuad). No one will balk at the idea that this is one of the basic features of the history of individuals or the world, of the relation that makes an unknown individual an author or a madman, or both at once: when Holderlins, Goethes and Hegels come into the world conjointly; when the French Revolution breaks out and triumphs down to the march of Napoleon, the Zeitgeist, beneath Hegel’s windows at Jena; when the Commune bursts forth from treason; when 1917 explodes in Russia, or, *a fortiori*, when the “Cultural Revolution” does, a revolution in which, truly, almost all the “elements” were unloosed over vast spaces, although the lasting encounter did not occur, like the 13th of May,⁵⁴ when the workers and students, who ought to have “joined up” (what a result would have resulted from that!) saw their long parallel demonstrations cross, but *without joining up*, avoiding, at all costs, joining up, conjoining, uniting in a unity that is, no doubt, still forever unprecedented (the rain in its *avoided* effects.)

To⁵⁵ give some sense of the underground current of the materialism of the encounter, which is very important in Marx, and of its repression by a (philosophical) materialism of essence, we have to discuss the mode of production. No one can deny the importance of this concept, which serves not only to think every “social formation”, but also to periodize the history of social formations, and thus to found a theory of history.^d

In fact, we find *two* absolutely unrelated conceptions of the mode of production in Marx.

The first goes back to Engels' *Condition of the Working-Class in England*; its real inventor was Engels. It recurs in the famous chapter on primitive accumulation, the working-day, and so on, and in a host of minor allusions, to which I shall return, if possible. It may also be found in the theory of the Asiatic mode of production. *The second* is found in the great passages of *Capital* on the essence of capitalism, as well as the essence of the feudal and socialist modes of production, and on the revolution; and, more generally, in the "theory" of the transition, or form of passage, from one mode of production to another. The things that have been written on the "transition" from capitalism to communism over the past twenty years beggar the imagination and are past all counting!

In untold passages, Marx—this is certainly no accident—explains that the capitalist mode of production arose from the "encounter"⁵⁶ between "the owners of money" and the proletariat stripped of everything but his labor-power. "It so happens" that this encounter took place, and "took hold", which means that it did not come undone as soon as it came about, but *lasted*, and became an accomplished fact, the accomplished fact of this encounter, inducing stable relationships and a necessity the study of which yields "laws"—tendential laws, of course: the laws of the development of the capitalist mode of production (the law of value, the law of exchange, the law of cyclical crises, the law of the crisis and decay of the capitalist mode of production, the law of the passage—transition—to the socialist mode of production under the laws of the class struggle, and so on.) What matters about this conception is less the elaboration of laws, hence of an essence, than the aleatory character of *the "taking-hold" of this encounter, which gives rise to an accomplished fact* whose laws it is possible to state.

This can be put differently: the whole that results from the "taking-hold" of the "encounter" does not precede the "taking-hold" of its elements, but follows it; for this reason, it might not have "taken hold", and, *a fortiori*, "the encounter might not have taken place."⁵⁷ All this is said—in veiled terms, to be sure, but it is said—in the formula that Marx uses in his frequent discussions of the "encounter" [*das Vorgefundene*] between raw labor-power and the owners of money. We can

go even further, and suppose *that this encounter occurred several times in history before taking hold in the West*, but, for lack of an element or suitable arrangement of the elements, failed to “take”. Witness the thirteenth-century and fourteenth-century Italian states of the Po valley, where there were certainly men who owned money, technology and energy (machines driven by the hydraulic power of the river) as well as manpower (unemployed artisans), but where the phenomenon nevertheless failed to “take hold”. What was lacking here was doubtless (perhaps, this is a hypothesis) that which Machiavelli was desperately seeking in the form of his appeal for a national state: a *domestic market* capable of absorbing what might have been produced.

The slightest reflection on the presuppositions of this connection suffices to show that it is predicated on a very special type of relationship between the structure and the elements that this structure is supposed to unify. For what is a mode of production? We provided an answer to this question, following Marx: *it is a particular “combination” of elements*. These elements are an accumulation of money (by the “owners of money”), an accumulation of the technical means of production (tools, machines, an experience of production on the part of the workers), an accumulation of the raw materials of production (nature) and an accumulation of producers (proletarians divested of all means of production.) The elements do not exist in history *so that* a mode of production may exist, they exist in history *in a “floating” state* prior to their “accumulation” and “combination”, each being the product of its own history, and none being the teleological product of the others or their history. When Marx and Engels say that the proletariat is “the product of big industry”, they utter a very great piece of nonsense, positioning themselves within the *logic of the accomplished fact of the reproduction of the proletariat on an extended scale*, not the aleatory logic of the “encounter” which produces (rather than reproduces), as the proletariat, this mass of impoverished, expropriated human beings as one of the elements making up the mode of production. In the process, Marx and Engels shift from the first conception of the mode of production, a historico-aleatory conception, to a second, which is essentialistic and philosophical.

I am repeating myself, but I must: what is remarkable about the first conception, apart from the explicit theory of the encounter, is the idea that every mode of production comprises *elements that are independent of each other*, each resulting from its own specific history, in the absence of any organic, teleological relation between these diverse histories. This conception culminates in the theory of *primitive accumulation*, from which Marx, taking his inspiration from Engels, drew a magnificent chapter of *Capital*, the true heart of the book. Here we witness the emergence of a historical phenomenon whose result we know—the expropriation of the means of production from an entire rural population in Great Britain—but whose causes bear no relation to the result and its effects. Was the aim to create extensive domains for the hunt? Or endless fields for sheep-raising? We do not know *just what* the main reason for this process of violent dispossession was (it was most likely the sheep) and, especially, the main reason for the violence of it; moreover, it doesn't much matter. The fact is that this process took place, culminating in a *result* that was promptly *diverted* from its possible, presumed end by “owners of money” looking for impoverished manpower. *This diversion is the mark of the non-teleology of the process* and of the incorporation of its result into a process that both made it possible and was wholly foreign to it.

It would, moreover, be a mistake to think that this process of the aleatory encounter was confined to the English fourteenth century. It has always gone on, and *is going on even today*—not only in the countries of the Third World [*sic*], which provide the most striking example of it, but also in France, by way of the dispossession of agricultural producers and their transformation into semi-skilled workers (consider Sandouville: Breton's running machines⁵⁸)—as a permanent process that puts the aleatory at the heart of the survival and reinforcement of the capitalist “mode of production”, and also, let us add, at the heart of the so-called socialist “mode of production” itself.^e Here Marxist scholars untiringly rehearse Marx's fantasy, thinking the *reproduction* of the proletariat in the mistaken belief that they are thinking its production; thinking in the accomplished fact when they think they are thinking in its becoming-accomplished.

There are indeed things in Marx that can lead us to make this error, whenever he cedes to the other conception of the mode of production: a concept that is totalitarian, teleological and philosophical.

In this case, we are clearly dealing with all the elements mentioned above, but so thought and ordered as to suggest that they were from all eternity destined to enter into combination, harmonize with one another, and reciprocally produce each other as their own ends, conditions, and/or complements. On this hypothesis, Marx deliberately leaves the aleatory nature of the “encounter” and its “taking-hold” to one side *in order to think solely in terms of the accomplished fact of the “take” and, consequently, its predestination*. On this hypothesis, each element has, not an independent history, but a history that pursues an end—that of adapting to the other histories, history constituting a whole which endlessly *reproduces* its own [*propre*] elements, so made as to [*propre a*] mesh. This explains why Mar and Engels conceive of the proletariat a “product of big industry”, “a product of capitalist exploitation”, *confusing the production of the proletariat with its capitalist reproduction on an extended scale*, as if the capitalist mode of production pre-existed one of its essential elements, an expropriated labor-force.^f Here *the specific histories no longer float in history*, like so many atoms in the void, at the mercy of an “encounter” that might not take place. Everything is accomplished in advance; *the structure precedes its elements and reproduces them in order to reproduce the structure*.

What holds for primitive accumulation also holds for the owners of money. Where do they come from in Marx? We cannot tell, exactly. From mercantile capitalism, as he says? (This is a very mysterious expression that has spawned many an absurdity about “the mercantile mode of production.”) From usury? From primitive accumulation? From colonial pillage? Ultimately, this is of small importance for our purposes, even if it is of special importance to Marx. *What is essential is the result: the fact that they exist*. Marx, however, abandons this thesis for *the thesis of a mythical “decay” of the feudal mode of production and the birth of the bourgeoisie from the heart of this decay*, which introduces new mysteries. What proves that the feudal mode of production declines and decays, then eventually disappears? It was not until 1850-70 that capitalism es-

tablished itself firmly in France. Above all, given that the bourgeoisie is said to be the product of the feudal mode of production, what proves that it was not a class of the feudal mode of production, and a sign of the reinforcement rather than the decay of this mode? These mysteries in Capital both revolve around the same object: money and mercantile capitalism on the one hand, and, on the other, the nature of the bourgeois class, said to be its support and beneficiary.

If, to define capital, one contents oneself with talking, as Marx does, about *an accumulation of money* that produces a surplus—a money profit ($M' = M + M'$)—then it is possible to speak of money and mercantile capitalism. But these are *capitalisms without capitalists*, capitalisms *without exploitation of a labor force*, capitalisms in which exchange⁵⁹ more or less takes the form of a levy governed not by the law of value, but by practices of pillage, either direct or indirect. Consequently, it is here that we encounter the great question of the *bourgeoisie*.

Marx's solution is simple and disarming. The bourgeoisie is produced as an antagonistic class by the decay of the dominant feudal class. Here we find the schema of dialectical production again, a contrary producing its contrary. We also find the dialectical thesis of negation, a contrary naturally being required, by virtue of a conceptual necessity, to replace its contrary and become dominant in its turn. But what if this was not how things happened? What if the bourgeoisie, far from being the contrary product of the feudal class, was its culmination and, as it were, acme, its highest form and, so to speak, crowning perfection? This would enable us to resolve many problems which are so many dead ends, especially the problems of the bourgeois revolutions, such as the French Revolution, which are supposed, come hell or high water, to be capitalist,^g yet are not; and a number of other problems that are so many mysteries: what is this strange class—capitalist by virtue of its future, but formed well before any kind of capitalism, under feudalism—known as the bourgeoisie?

Just as there is not, in Marx, a satisfactory theory of the so-called mercantile mode of production, nor, *a fortiori*, of merchant (and money) capital, *so there is no satisfactory theory of the bourgeoisie in Marx*—except-

ing, of course, for the purpose of eliminating problems, a superabundant utilization of the adjective “bourgeois”, as if an adjective could stand in for the concept of pure negativity. And it is no accident that the theory of the bourgeoisie as a form of antagonistic disintegration of the feudal mode of production is consistent with the philosophically inspired conception of the mode of production. In this conception, the bourgeoisie is indeed nothing other than the *element predestined* to unify all the other elements of the mode of production, the one that will transform it into another combination, that of the capitalist mode of production. It is the dimension of the whole and of the teleology that assigns each element its role and position in the whole, reproducing it in its existence and role.

We are at the opposite pole from the conception of the “*encounter between the bourgeoisie*”, an element that “floats” as much as all the others, and other floating elements, an encounter that brings an original mode of production into existence, the capitalist mode of production. Here there is no encounter, for the unity precedes the elements, *for the void essential to any aleatory encounter is lacking*. Whereas it is in fact still a question of thinking *the fact to be accomplished*, Marx deliberately positions himself within *the accomplished fact*, and invites us to follow him in the laws of its necessity.

Following Marx, we⁵⁹ defined a mode of production as a double combination (Balibar), that of the means of production and the relations of production. To pursue this analysis, we need to distinguish certain elements in it, “productive forces, means of production, those who possess the means of production, producers with or without means, nature, men, etc.” What then comprises the mode of production is a combination which subjects the productive forces (the means of production, the producers (to the domination of a totality, in which it is the owners of the means of production who are dominant. This combination is essential [*est d'essence*], is established once and for all, and corresponds to a center of references; it can, to be sure, disintegrate, but it still conserves the same structure in its disintegration. A mode of production is a combination because it is a *structure* that imposes its unity on a series of elements. What counts in a mode of production,

what makes it such-and-such, is the *mode of domination* of the structure over its elements. Thus, in the feudal mode of production, it is the *structure of dependence* which imposes their signification on the elements: possession of the manor, including the serfs who work on it, possession of the collective instruments (the mill, the farmland, etc.) by the lord, the subordinate role of money, except when, later, pecuniary relations are imposed on everyone. Thus, in the capitalist mode of production, it is the structure of exploitation that is imposed on all the elements, the subordination of the means of production and the productive forces to the process of exploitation, the exploitation of the workers stripped of the means of production, the monopoly of the means of production in the hands of the capitalist class, and so forth.

Notes

- a. This is why Dominique Lecourt is right to advance the term “sur-materialism” in connection with Marx, in a remarkable work that has naturally been ignored by a University accustomed to responding with contempt whenever it feels that “a point has been scored against it” (see *L’Ordre et les jeux*, Paris, 1981, last part).
 - b. Compare Feuerbach citing Pliny the Elder: “elephants [...] have no religion.” Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot, Amherst, New York, 1989, p. 1.
 - c. See the fine and very successful conference on Darwin recently organized in Chantilly by Dominique Lecourt and Yvette Conry [Conry, ed., *De Darwin au Darwinisme: Science et idéologie*, Paris, 1983].
 - d. See [Althusser et al.], *Lire le Capital*, I [ed. Etienne Balibar, Paris, 1996, pp. I-244].
 - e. See Charles Bettelheim’s remarkable *Class Struggles in the USSR*, trans. Brian Pearce, vol. 2: Second Period, New York, 1978 (1965).
 - f. On this point, Engels’ “The Principles of Communism” [*MECW* 6: 346] leaves no room for doubt: the proletariat is the product of the “industrial revolution” (*sic*-Louis Althusser).
 - g. [Albert] Soboul [1914-82] stubbornly devoted the whole of his short life to trying to prove this.
1. See Nicholas Malebranch, *A Treatise of Nature and Grace*, trans. Anon., London, 1695, p. 22, translation modified: “I use the examples of the irregularity of ordinary rain to ready the soul for another rain, which is not given to the merits of men, no more than the common rain which falls equally upon lands that are sown, as well as those that lie fallow.”
 2. Althusser intended to insert a note here. It would probably have been a ref-

erence to Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Book 2, II. 217-20. [Trans.]

3. Leibniz, “Principles of Nature and of Grace, Based on Reason, 7, in *idem*, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. G.H.R. Parkinson, trans. Parkinson and Mary Morris, London, 1973, p. 199. I thank V. Morfino for help with this and other notes. [Trans.]

4. Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”, trans. Frank A Capuzzi and J. Glen Gray, in *Heidegger, Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, London, 1993, p. 245; translation modified. [Trans.]

5. The first draft reads “itself empty (yet full)”.

6. P 62-3 (“How To Avoid Hatred”). [Trans.]

7. *Ibid.*, p. 38 (“Cruelty Prudently Used”). [Trans.]

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-5 (“The Prince Must Fight as Both Animal and Man”). [Trans.]

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 66 (“The Prince Ready, in Necessity, to Abandon Conventional Ethics”). [Trans.]

10. See n. 3 above. [Trans.]

11. “LP” 193. [Trans.]

12. This is the first line of Goethe’s “Vanitas! Vanitatum vanitas”, from which Max Stirner took the epigraph to *The Ego and His Own*. [Trans.]

13. Here, Althusser is thinking of *MU*, a text based on the many courses on Machiavelli that he gave over the years. He seriously considered publishing it on a number of occasions.

14. Althusser intended to insert a note here. It would probably have been a reference to “RSC” 118 (Book 3, ch. 6): “Under the pretence of teaching kings, it has taught important lessons to the people. Machiavelli’s *Prince* is a handbook for Republicans.”

15. Althusser intended to insert a note here. It would probably have been a reference to *TP*, V, 7. [Trans.]

16. As Althusser was writing these lines, Pierre Macherey was defending much the same paradoxical thesis at an October 1982 conference held in Urbino to commemorate the 350th anniversary of Spinoza’s birth. His paper, “Entre Pascal et Spinoza: Le vide” (1982), was later published in Macherey, *Avec Spinoza*, Paris, 1992. See especially pp. 165 ff:

If we look beyond Pascal’s literal formulation to the meaning that he is trying to communicate, does he say anything different [from Spinoza]? In relating his “feeling” about the void, he plainly means to postulate the infinity, that is, indivisibility of extension, which, as such, is irreducible to any physical component of nature whatsoever, so that we must be able to think it in and of itself, independently of the presence of any finite material reality. Whether one calls this infinity full or empty is, after all, merely a question of the name that one chooses to give it, and has no bearing on the content of the reasoning that name designates.

17. Compare E II, P 15, S. [Trans.]

18. The remark that Althusser attributes to Spinoza was in fact jotted down by Leibniz after a discussion of Spinoza with Tschirnhaus.

19. E II, P 2, S. [Trans.]

20. This section of the text is so thickly covered with handwritten emendations that it is difficult to decipher. The original versions reads: “The attributes fall in the

empty space of their indetermination like the drops of rain that have encountered each other only in man, in the assignable, but minute parallelism of thought and the body?”

21. E II, P 7. [Trans.]

22. E II, A 2. [Trans.]

23. E II, P 40, S 2. [Trans.]

24. E I, Appendix, p. 74: “This doctrine concerning the end turns Nature completely upside down. For what is really a cause, it considers as an effect, and conversely.” Elsewhere, Althusser translates Spinoza’s phrase *tota illa fabrica*, which occurs in the Appendix to Book I of the *Ethics* shortly before the sentence just quoted, as “an entire “apparatus””, likening it to his own concept of the “Ideological State Apparatus”. [Trans.]

25. It would appear that two handwritten emendations are juxtaposed here; the first does not appear to have been deleted.

26. TTP 78. [Trans.]

27. L 186.

28. Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*, ed. Ferdinand Tönnies, 2nd ed., London, 1969, p. 47 (Part I, ch. 9, 21). [Trans.]

29. L 261. [Trans.]

30. *A rester dans un etat de guerre ou a entrer dans un Etat de contrat: etat* means “state”, in the sense of “political state”, “nation-state” when it begins with a capital letter, and “state” in the sense of “condition” when it begins with a small letter. [Trans.]

31. L 170. [Trans.]

32. See p. 103 and note 115 on p. 159 of *Philosophy of the Encounter*. [Trans.]

33. The common French expression *la mouche du coche* comes from Lafontaine’s fable “Le coche et la mouche” (*Fables*, Book VII, fable 8). A coach gets stuck; the horses finally succeed in pulling it up the hill; the fly, whose contribution consists in buzzing around and biting them, concludes that she is the one who “makes the machine go”, taking all the glory for the exploit and complaining that she had to do all the work herself. [Trans.]

34. “RSD” 132, 215-6 (Exordium 5; Note XII, 7.) [Trans.]

35. *Ibid.*, p. 145 (Part I, 25). [Trans.]

36. “ROL” 273; Rousseau, “L’influence des climats sur la civilisation”, in Rousseau, (*Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, Paris, 1964, p. 531. [Trans.]

37. “RSD” 151-4 (Part 1, 35-8). [Trans.]

38. Victor Goldschmidt, *Anthropologie et politique: Les principes du système de Rousseau*, Paris, 1974.

39. “RSD” 159 (Part I, 51). In the passages that Althusser cites here, Rousseau in fact says that the conditions whose convergence precipitated the transition to the state of society might never have arisen. [Trans.]

40. This sentence is so thickly covered with handwritten emendations that it is difficult to decipher.

41. Althusser intended to cite an unspecified passage from TP, V, 7 here, See note 15 above.

42. In a handwritten addendum to an earlier version of the present text, Althusser here inserts: “who, let us note, devoted his doctoral thesis to him, basing it on a splendid piece of nonsense, which the thought of his “youth” made inevitable: an interpretation of the “clinamen” as “freedom”. [Trans.]
43. The French word here translated as “grip” [*griffe*] also designates a wide variety of tools used for clutching or clamping; a stamped signature; and the tag that identifies the designer or manufacturer of a garment. [Trans.]
44. See Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Book V, II. 1094-1100. [Trans.]
45. “The world is everything that is the case.” This is the opening sentence in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which Althusser quotes in very approximate German.
46. In a handwritten addendum to another version of the text, Althusser specifies: “but interpreted in the sense, not of thrownness (*Geworfenheit*), but of the aleatory.” [Trans.]
47. Althusser’s library contained a copy of the 1952 German edition of Heidegger’s *Holzwege*.
48. This phrase is a handwritten addendum, and the sole occurrence of the phrase “aleatory materialism” in the present text. Althusser entitled one of his last texts, written in 1986, “On Aleatory Materialism” [*Sur le matérialisme aléatoire*, ed. Francois Matheron, *Multitudes* 21, 2005, pp. 179-94].
49. *Coule de source*, a rather unaleatory idiom that means, literally, “flows from the source/spring” [Trans.]
50. Cesare Borgia died fighting before the Castle of Viana, in Navarre, on 12 March 1507. [Trans.]
51. C1 100n., 101-2. See p. 17 and note 20 on p. 152 in *Philosophy of the Encounter*.
52. Here, as well as a few lines later, Althusser plays on the links between prise (here translated as “taking-hold”) and surprise, which, besides meaning what it also means in English, silently evokes a neologism, sur-prise, roughly analogous to “surrealism”. Surprendre, to surprise, thus comes to carry the same connotations as surprise. The French word for “overdetermination”, it should be noted, is “surdetermination”. Compare note a, above. [Trans.]
53. An allusion to the biggest of demonstrations that took place in France in May 1968. The words “or, a fortiori, when “the Cultural Revolution”” are a handwritten addendum to the text; the reference is to May 1968 alone in the original version, in which the “workers” and the “students” who failed to “join up” are faulted for lacking the will to move beyond “derisory refusal”.
54. The pages that follow originally constituted chapter 12 of the projected book described in the editors’ introduction to the present text, pp. 164-5 [*The Philosophy of the Encounter*]. They represent a lightly revised version of a text initially entitled “On the Mode of Production”.
55. C1 874. [Trans.]
56. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis, 1983, p. 225. [Trans.]

57. The allusion is to the Renault Plant in Sandouville, in Normandy.
58. Presumably a slip for “exploitation.” [*Trans.*]
59. We have reproduced the original version of the following passage here, because the changes Althusser made in it so as to incorporate it into his projected book (see note 63 above) yielded a patently unsatisfactory result. “We” in Althusser’s text doubtless means the authors of *Reading Capital*.

NIETZSCHE, GENEALOGY, AND HISTORY

1. Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.

On this basis, it is obvious that Paul Ree¹ was wrong to follow the English tendency in describing the history of morality in terms of a linear development in genesis to an exclusive concern for utility. He assumed that words had kept their meaning, that desires still pointed in a single direction, and that ideas retained their logic; and he ignored the fact that the world of speech and desires has known invasions, struggles, plundering, disguises, ploys. From these elements, however, genealogy retrieves an indispensable restraint: it must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles. Finally, genealogy must define even those instances where they are absent, the moment when they remained unrealized (Plato, at Syracuse, did not become Mohammed).

Genealogy, consequently, requires patience and a knowledge of details, and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material. Its “cyclo-

pean monuments”² are constructed from “discreet and apparently insignificant truths and according to a rigorous method”; they cannot be the product of “large and well meaning errors.”³ In short, genealogy demands relentless erudition. Genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might compare to the molelike perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the meta-historical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for “origins”.

2. In Nietzsche, we find two uses of the word *Ursprung*. The first is unstressed, and it is found alternately with other terms such as *Entstehung*, *Herkunft*, *Abkunft*, *Geburt*. In *The Genealogy of Morals*, for example, *Entstehung* or *Ursprung* serve equally well to denote the origin of duty or guilty conscience;⁴ and in the discussion of logic or knowledge in *The Gay Science*, their origin is indiscriminately referred to as *Ursprung*, *Entstehung*, or *Herkunft*.⁵

The other use of the word is stressed. On occasion, Nietzsche places the term in opposition to another: in the first paragraph of *Human, All Too Human* the miraculous origin (*Wunderursprung*) sought by metaphysics is set against the analyses of historical philosophy, which poses questions *uber Herkunft und Anfang*. *Ursprung* is also used in an ironic and deceptive manner.

In what, for instance, do we find the original basis (*Ursprung*) of morality, a foundation sought after since Plato? “In detestable, narrowminded conclusions. *Pudenda origo*.”⁶ Or in a related context, where should we seek the origin of religion (*Ursprung*), which Schopenhauer located in a particular metaphysical sentiment of the hereafter? It belongs, very simply, to an invention (*Erfindung*), a sleight of hand, formula, in the rituals of black magic, in the work of the *Schwarzekunstler*.⁷

One of the most significant texts with respect to the use of all these terms and to the variations in the use of *Ursprung* is the preface to the *Genealogy*. At the beginning of the text, its objective is defined as an examination of the origin of moral preconceptions and the term used is *Herkunft*. Then, Nietzsche proceeds by retracing his personal involve-

ment with this question: he recalls the period when he “calligraphied” philosophy, when he questioned if God must be held responsible for the origin of evil. He now finds this question amusing and properly characterizes it as a search for *Ursprung* (he will shortly use the same term to summarize Paul Ree’s activity).⁸ Further on, he evokes the analyses that are characteristically Nietzschean and that began with *Human, All Too Human*. Here, he speaks of *Herkunftshypothesen*. This use of the word *Herkunft* cannot be arbitrary, since it serves to designate a number of texts, beginning with *Human, All Too Human*, which deal with the origin of morality, asceticism, justice, and punishment. And yet, the word used in all these works had been *Ursprung*.⁹ It would seem that at this point in the *Genealogy* Nietzsche wished to validate an opposition between *Herkunft* and *Ursprung* that did not exist ten years earlier. But immediately following the use of the two terms in a specific sense, Nietzsche reverts, in the final paragraphs of the preface, to a usage that is neutral and equivalent.¹⁰

Why does Nietzsche challenge the pursuit of the origin (*Ursprung*), at least on those occasions when he is truly a genealogist? First, because it is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities, because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. This search is directed to “that which was already there,” the image of a primordial truth fully adequate to its nature, and it necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity. However, if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is “something altogether different” behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms. Examining the history of reason, he learns that it was born in an altogether “reasonable” fashion--from chance;¹¹ devotion to truth and the precision of scientific methods arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, and their spirit of competition--the personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapons of reason.¹² Further, genealogical analysis shows that the concept of liberty is an “invention of the ruling classes”¹³ and not

fundamental to man's nature or at the root of his attachment to being and truth. What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.¹⁴

History also teaches how to laugh at the solemnities of the origin. The lofty origin is no more than "a metaphysical extension, which arises from the belief that things are most precious and essential at the moment of birth."¹⁵ We tend to think that this is the moment of their greatest perfection, when they emerged dazzling from the hands of a creator or in the shadowless light of a first morning. The origin always precedes the Fall. It comes before the body, before the world and time; it is associated with the gods, and its story is always sung as a theogony. But historical beginnings are lowly: not in the sense of modest or discreet like the steps of a dove, but derisive and ironic, capable of undoing every infatuation. "We wished to awaken the feeling of man's sovereignty by showing his divine birth: this path is now forbidden, since a monkey stands at the entrance."¹⁶ Man originated with a grimace over his future development; and Zarathustra himself is plagued by a monkey who jumps along behind him, pulling on his coattails.

The final postulate of the origin is linked to the first two in being the site of truth. From the vantage point of an absolute distance, free from the restraints of positive knowledge, the origin makes possible a field of knowledge whose function is to recover it, but always in a false recognition due to the excesses of its own speech. The origin lies at a place of inevitable loss, the point where the truth of things corresponded to a truthful discourse, the site of a fleeting articulation that discourse has obscured and finally lost. It is a new cruelty of history that compels a reversal of this relationship and the abandonment of "adolescent" quests: behind the always recent, avaricious, and measured truth, it posits the ancient proliferation of errors. It is now impossible to believe that "in the rending of the veil, truth remains truthful; we have lived long enough not to be taken in."¹⁷ Truth is undoubtedly the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history.¹⁸ Moreover, the very question of truth, the right it appropriates to re-

fute error and oppose itself to appearance,¹⁹ the manner in which it developed (initially made available to the wise, then withdrawn by men of piety to an unattainable world where it was given the double role of consolation and imperative, finally rejected as a useless notion, superfluous, and contradicted on all sides) does a history, the history of an error we call truth? Truth, and its original reign, has had a history within history from which we are barely emerging “in the time of the shortest shadow,” when light no longer seems to flow from the depths of the sky or to arise from the first moments of the day.²⁰

A genealogy of values, morality, asceticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their “origins”, will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary, it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive to their petty malice; it will await their emergence, once unmasked, as the face of the other. Wherever it is made to go, it will not be reticent--in “excavating the depths”, in allowing time for these elements to escape from a labyrinth where no truth had ever detained them. The genealogist needs history to dispel the chimeras of the origin, somewhat in the manner of the pious philosopher who needs a doctor to exorcise the shadow of his soul. He must be able to recognize the events of history, its surprises, its unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats--the basis of all beginnings, atavisms, and heredities. Similarly, he must be able to diagnose the illnesses of the body, its conditions of weakness and strength, its breakdown and resistances, to be in a position to judge philosophical discourse. History is the concrete body of a development, with its moments of intensity, its lapses, its extended periods of feverish agitation, its fainting spells; and only a metaphysician would seek its soul in the distant ideality of the origin.

3. *Entstehung* and *Herkunft* are more exact than *Ursprung* in recording the true objective of genealogy; and, while they are ordinarily translated as “origin,” we must attempt to reestablish their proper use.

Herkunft is the equivalent of stock or *descent*; it is the ancient affiliation to a group, sustained by the bonds of blood, tradition, or social class. The analysis of *Herkunft* often involves a consideration of race²¹ or

social type.²² But the traits it attempts to identify are not the exclusive generic characteristics of an individual, a sentiment, or an idea, which permit us to qualify them as “Greek” or “English”; rather, it seeks the subtle, singular, and subindividual marks that might possibly intersect in them to form a network that is difficult to unravel. Far from being a category of resemblance, this origin allows the sorting out of different traits: the Germans imagined that they had finally accounted for their complexity by saying they possessed a double soul; they were fooled by a simple computation, or rather, they were simply trying to master the racial disorder from which they had formed themselves.²³ Where the soul pretends unification or the self fabricates a coherent identity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning--numberless beginnings whose faint traces and hints of color are readily seen by an historical eye. The analysis of descent permits the dissociation of the self, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events.²⁴

An examination of descent also permits the discovery, under the unique aspect of a trait or a concept, of the myriad events through which--thanks to which, against which--they were formed. Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form to all its vicissitudes. Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations or conversely, the complete reversals--the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents.²⁵ This from the moment it stops being pious and be has value as a critique.²⁶

Deriving from such a source is a dangerous legacy. In numerous instances, Nietzsche associates the terms *Herkunft* and *Erbschaft*. Nevertheless, we should not be deceived into thinking that this heritage

is an acquisition, a possession that grows and solidifies; rather, it is an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within or from underneath: “injustice or instability in the minds of certain men, their disorder and lack of decorum, are the final consequences of their ancestors’ numberless logical inaccuracies, hasty conclusions, and superficiality.”²⁷ The search for descent is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself. What convictions and, far more decisively, what knowledge can resist it? If a genealogical analysis of a scholar were made--of one who collects facts and carefully accounts for them--his *Herkunft* would quickly divulge the official papers of the scribe and the pleadings of the lawyer--their father²⁸--in the “pure” devotion to objectivity.

Finally, descent attaches itself to the body.²⁹ It inscribes itself in the nervous system, in temperament, in the digestive apparatus; it appears in faulty respiration, in improper diets, in the debilitated and prostrate body of those whose ancestors committed errors. Fathers have only to mistake effects for causes, believe in the reality of an “afterlife,” or maintain the value of eternal truths, and the bodies of their children will suffer. Cowardice and hypocrisy, for their part, are the simple offshoots of error: not in a Socratic sense, not that evil is the result of a mistake, not because of a turning away from an original truth, but because the body maintains, in life as in death, through its strength or weakness, the sanction of every truth and error, as it sustains, in an inverse manner, the origin--descent. Why did men invent the contemplative life? Why give a supreme value to this form of existence? Why maintain the absolute truth of those fictions which sustain it? “During barbarous ages...if the strength of an individual declined, if he felt himself tired or sick, melancholy or satiated and, as a consequence, without desire or appetite for a short time, he became relatively a better man, that is, less dangerous. His pessimistic ideas could only take form as words or reflections. In this frame of mind, he either became a thinker and prophet or used his imagination to feed his superstitions.”³⁰ The body--and everything that touches it: diet, climate, and

soil--is the domain of the *Herkunft*. The body manifests the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings, and errors. These elements may join in a body where they achieve a sudden expression, but as often, their encounter is an engagement in which they efface each other, where the body becomes the pretext of their insurmountable conflict. The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body.

4. *Entstehung* designates *emergence*, the moment of arising. It stands as the principle and the singular law of an apparition. As it is wrong to search for descent in an uninterrupted continuity, we should avoid thinking of emergence as the final term of an historical development; the eye was not always intended for contemplation, and punishment has had other purposes than setting an example. These developments may appear as a culmination, but they are merely the current episodes in a series of subjugations: the eye initially responded to the requirements of hunting and warfare; and punishment has been subjected, throughout its history, to a variety of needs--revenge, excluding an aggressor, compensating a victim, creating fear. In placing present needs at the origin, the metaphysician would convince us of an obscure purpose that seeks its realization at the moment it arises. Genealogy, however, seeks to reestablish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of dominations.

Emergence is always produced through a particular stage of forces. The analysis of the *Entstehung* must delineate this interaction, against adverse circumstances, and the attempt to avoid degeneration and regain strength by dividing these forces against themselves. It is in this sense that the emergence of a species (animal or human) and its solidification are secured "in an extended battle against conditions which are essentially and constantly unfavorable." In fact, "the species must

realize itself as a species, as something--characterized by the durability, uniformity, and simplicity of its form--which can prevail in the perpetual struggle against outsiders or the uprising of those it oppresses from within." On the other hand, individual differences emerge at another stage of the relationship of forces, when the species has become victorious and when it is no longer threatened from outside. In this condition, we find a struggle "of egoisms turned against each other, each bursting forth in a splintering of forces and a general striving for the sun and for the light."³¹ There are also times when force contends against itself, and not only in the intoxication of an abundance, which allows it to divide itself, but at the moment when it weakens. Force reacts against its growing lassitude and gains strength; it imposes limits, inflicts torments and mortifications; it masks these actions as a higher morality, and, in exchange, regains its strength. In this manner, the ascetic ideal was born, "in the instinct of a decadent life which...struggles for its own existence."³² This also describes the movement in which the Reformation arose, precisely where the church was least corrupt;³³ German Catholicism, in the sixteenth century, retained enough strength to turn against itself, to mortify its own body and history, and to spiritualize itself into a pure religion of conscience. Emergence is thus the entry of forces; it is their eruption, the leap from the wings to center stage, each in its youthful strength. What Nietzsche calls the *Entsehungsbird*³⁴ of the concept of goodness is not specifically the energy of the strong or the reaction of the weak, but precisely this scene where they are displayed superimposed or face to face. It is nothing but the space that divides them, the void through which they exchange their threatening gestures and speeches. As descent qualifies the strength or weakness of an instinct and its inscription on a body, emergence designates a place of confrontation but not as a closed field offering the spectacle of a struggle among equals. Rather, as Nietzsche demonstrates in his analysis of good and evil, it is a "non place," a pure distance, which indicates that adversaries do not belong to a common space. Consequently, no one is responsible for an emergence; no one can glory in it, since it always occurs in the interstice.

In a sense, only a single drama is ever staged in this "non-place", the

endlessly repeated play of dominations. The domination of certain men over others leads to the differentiation of values;³⁵ class domination generates the idea of liberty;³⁶ and the forceful appropriation of things necessary to survival and the imposition of a duration not intrinsic to them account for the origin of logic.³⁷ This relationship of domination is no more a “relationship” than the place where it occurs is a place; and, precisely for this reason, it is fixed, throughout its history, in rituals, in meticulous procedures that impose rights and obligations. It establishes marks of its power and engraves memories on things and even within bodies. It makes itself accountable for debts and gives rise to the universe of rules, which is by no means designed to temper violence, but rather to satisfy it. Following traditional beliefs, it would be false to think that total war exhausts itself in its own contradictions and ends by renouncing violence and submitting to civil laws. On the contrary, the law is a calculated and relentless pleasure, delight in the promised blood, which permits the perpetual instigation of new dominations and the staging of meticulously repeated scenes of violence. The desire for peace, the serenity of compromise, and the tacit acceptance of the law, far from representing a major moral conversion or a utilitarian calculation that gave rise to the law, are but its result and, in point of fact, its perversion: “guilt, conscience, and duty had their threshold of emergence in the right to secure obligations; and their inception, like that of any major event on earth, was saturated in blood.”³⁸ Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination. The nature of these rules allows violence to be inflicted on violence and the resurgence of new forces that are sufficiently strong to dominate those in power. Rules are empty in themselves, violent and un-finalized; they are impersonal and can be bent to any purpose. The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them; controlling this complex mechanism, they will make it function so as to overcome the rulers through their own rules.

The isolation of different points of emergence does not conform to the successive configurations of an identical meaning; rather, they result from substitutions, displacements, disguised conquests, and systematic reversals. If interpretation were the low exposure of the meaning hidden in an origin, then only metaphysics could interpret the development of humanity. But if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations. The role of genealogy is to record its history: the history of morals, ideals, and metaphysical concepts, the history of the concept of liberty or of the ascetic life; as they stand for the emergence of different interpretations, they must be made to appear as events on the stage of historical process.

5. How can we define the relationship between genealogy, seen as the examination of *Herkunft* and *Entsehung*, and history in the traditional sense? We could, of course, examine Nietzsche's celebrated apostrophes against history, but we will put these aside for the moment and consider those instances when he conceives of genealogy as "wirkliche Historie," or its more frequent characterization as historical "spirit" or "sense."³⁹ In fact, Nietzsche's criticism, beginning with the second of the *Untimely Meditations*, always questioned the form of history that reintroduces (and always assumes) a suprahistorical perspective: a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself; a history that always encourages subjective recognitions and attributes a form of reconciliation to all the displacements of the past; a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development. The historian's history finds its support outside of time and pretends to base its judgments on an apocalyptic objectivity. This is only possible, however, because of its belief in eternal truth, the immortality of the soul, and the nature of consciousness as always identical to itself. Once the historical sense is mastered by a suprahistorical perspective, metaphysics can bend it to its own purpose and, by aligning it to the demands of objective science, it can impose its own "Egyptian-

ism.” On the other hand, the historical sense can evade metaphysics and become a privileged instrument of genealogy if it refuses the certainty of absolutes. Given this, it corresponds to the acuity of a glance that distinguishes, separates, and disperses, that is capable of liberating divergence and marginal elements--the kind of dissociating view that is capable of decomposing itself, capable of shattering the unity of man’s being through which it was thought that he could extend his sovereignty to the events of his past.

Historical meaning becomes a dimension of “wirkliche Historie” to the extent that it places within a process of development everything considered immortal in man. We believe that feelings are immutable, but every sentiment, particularly the noblest and most disinterested, has a history. We believe in the dull constancy of instinctual life and imagine that it continues to exert its force indiscriminately in the present as it did in the past. But a knowledge of history easily disintegrates this unity, depicts its wavering course, locates its moments of strength and weakness, and defines its oscillating reign. It easily seizes the slow elaboration of instincts and those movements where, in turning upon themselves, they relentlessly set about their self-destruction.⁴⁰ We believe, in any event, that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology and that it escapes the influence of history, but this too is false. The body is molded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances.⁴¹ “Effective” history differs from traditional history in being without constants. Nothing in man--not even his body--is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self recognition or for recognizing other men. The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled. Necessarily, we must dismiss those tendencies that encourage the consoling play of recognitions. Knowledge, even under the banner of history, does not depend on “rediscovery,” and it emphatically excludes the “rediscovery of ourselves.”⁴² History becomes “effective” to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being—as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. “Ef-

fective” history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.⁴³

From these observations, we can grasp the particular traits of historical meaning as Nietzsche understood it—the sense which opposes “wirkliche Historie” to traditional history. The former transposes the relationship ordinarily established between the eruption of an event and necessary continuity. An entire historical tradition (theological or rationalistic) aims at dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity—as a teleological movement or a natural process. “Effective” history, however, deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations. An event, consequently, is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked “other”. The forces operating in history are not controlled by destiny of regulative mechanisms, but respond to haphazard conflicts.⁴⁴ They do not manifest the successive forms of a primordial intention and their attraction is not that of a conclusion, for they always appear through the singular randomness of events. The inverse of the Christian world, spun entirely by a divine spider, and different from the world of the Greeks, divided between the realm of will and the great cosmic folly, the world of effective history knows only one kingdom, without providence or final cause, where there is only “the iron hand of necessity shaking the dice-box of chance.”⁴⁵ Chance is not simply the drawing of lots, but raising the stakes in every attempt to master chance through the will to power, and giving rise to the risk of an even greater chance.⁴⁶ The world we know is not this ultimately simple configuration where events are reduced to accentuate their essential traits, their final meaning, or their initial and final value. On the contrary, it is a profusion of entangled events. If it appears as a “marvelous motley, profound and totally meaningful,” this is because it began and continues its secret existence through a “host of errors and phantasms.”⁴⁷

We want historians to confirm our belief that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities. But the true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference.

Effective history can also invert the relationship that traditional history, in its dependence on metaphysics, establishes between proximity and distance. The latter is given to a contemplation of distances and heights: the noblest periods, the highest forms, the most abstract ideas, the purest individualities. It accomplishes this by getting as near as possible, placing itself at the foot of its mountain peaks, at the risk of adopting the famous perspective of frogs. Effective history, on the other hand, shortens its vision to those things nearest to it—the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion, and energies; it unearths the periods of decadence and if it chances upon loft epochs, it is with the suspicion—not vindictive but joyous—of finding a barbarous and shameful confusion. It has no fear of looking down, so long as it is understood that it looks from above and descends to seize the various perspectives, to disclose dispersions and differences, to leave things undisturbed in their own dimension and intensity.⁴⁸ It reverses the surreptitious practice of historians, their pretension to examine things furthest from themselves, the grovelling manner in which they approach this promising distance (like the metaphysicians who proclaim the existence of an afterlife, Situated at a distance from this world, as a promise of their reward.) Effective history studies what is closest, but in an abrupt dispossession, so as to seize it at a distance (an approach similar to that of a doctor who looks closely, who plunges to make a diagnosis and to state its difference.) Historical sense has more in common with medicine than philosophy; and it should not surprise us that Nietzsche occasionally employs the phrase “historically and physiologically”⁴⁹, since among the philosopher’s idiosyncracies is a complete denial of the body. This includes, as well, “the absence of historical sense, a hatred for the idea of development, Egyptianism,” the obstinate “placing of conclusions at the beginning,” of “making last things first.”⁵⁰ History has a more important task than to be a handmaiden to philosophy, to recount the necessary birth of truth and values; it should become a differential knowledge of energies and failings,

heights and degenerations, poisons and antidotes. Its task is to become a curative science.⁵¹

The final trait of effective history is its affirmation of knowledge as perspective. Historians take unusual pains to erase the elements in their work which reveal their grounding in a particular time and place, their preferences in a controversy—the unavoidable obstacles of their passion. Nietzsche’s version of historical sense is explicit in its perspective and acknowledges its system of injustice. Its perception is slanted, being a deliberate appraisal, affirmation, or negation; it reaches the lingering and poisonous traces in order to prescribe the best antidote. It is not given to a discreet effacement before the objects it observes and does not submit itself to their processes; nor does it seek laws, since it gives equal weight to its own sight and to its objects. Through this historical sense, knowledge is allowed to create its own genealogy in the act of cognition; and “wirkliche Historie” composes a genealogy of history as the vertical projection of its position.

6. In this context, Nietzsche links historical sense to the historian’s history. They share a beginning that is similarly impure and confused, share the same sign in which the symptoms of sickness can be recognized as well as the seed of an exquisite flower.⁵² They arose simultaneously to follow their separate ways, but our task is to trace their common genealogy.

The descent (*Herkunft*) of the historian is unequivocal; he is of humble birth. A characteristic of history is to be without choice: it encourages through understand and excludes qualitative judgments—a sensitivity to all things without distinction, a comprehensive view excluding differences. Nothing must escape it, and more importantly, nothing must be excluded. Historians argue that this proves their tact and discretion. After all, what right have they to impose their tastes and preferences when they seek to determine what actually occurred in the past? Their mistake is to exhibit a total lack of taste, the kind of crudeness that becomes smug in the presence of the loftiest elements and finds satisfaction in reducing them to size. The historian is insensitive to the most disgusting things; or rather, he especially enjoys those

things that should be repugnant to him. His apparent serenity follows from his concerted avoidance of the exceptional and his reduction of all things to the lowest common denominator. Nothing is allowed to stand above him; and underlying his desire for total knowledge is his search for the secrets that belittle everything: “base curiosity.” What is the source of history? It comes from the plebs. To whom is it addressed? To the plebs. And its discourse strongly resembles the demagogue’s refrain: “No one is greater than you and anyone who presumes to get the better of you—you who are good—is evil.” The historian, who functions as his double, is heard to echo: “No past is greater than your present, and, through my meticulous erudition, I will rid you of your infatuations and transform the grandeur of history into pettiness, evil, and misfortune.” The historian’s ancestry goes back to Socrates. This demagogy, of course, must be masked. It must hide its singular malice under the cloak of universals. As the demagogue is obliged to invoke truth, laws of essences, and eternal necessity, the historian must invoke objectivity, the accuracy of facts, and the permanence of the past. The demagogue deniers the body to secure the sovereignty of a timeless idea and the historian effaces his proper individuality so that others may enter the stage and reclaim their own speech. He is divided against himself: forced to silence his preferences and overcome his distaste, to blur his own perspective and replace it with the fiction of a universal geometry, to mimic death in order to enter the kingdom of the dead, to adopt a faceless anonymity. In this world where he has conquered his individual will, he becomes a guide to the inevitable law of a superior will. Having curbed the demands of his individual will in his knowledge, he will disclose the form of an eternal will in his object of study. The objectivity of historians inverts the relationships of will and knowledge and it is, in the same stroke, a necessary belief in Providence, in final causes and teleology—the beliefs that place the historian in the family of ascetics. “I can’t stand these lustful eunuchs of history, all the seductions of an ascetic ideal; I can’t stand these whited sepulchres producing life or those tired and indifferent beings who dress up in the part of wisdom, and adopt an objective point of view.”⁵⁴

The *Entsehung* of history is found in nineteenth-century Europe: the

land of interminglings and bastardy, the period of the “man-of-mixture.” We have become barbarians with respect to those rare moments of high civilization: cities in ruin and enigmatic monuments are spread out before us; we stop before gaping walls; we ask what god inhabited these empty temples. Great epochs lacked this curiosity, lacked our excessive deference; they ignored their predecessors: the classical period ignored Shakespeare. The decadence of Europe presents an immense spectacle (while stronger periods refrained from such exhibitions), and the nature of this scene is to represent a theater; lacking monuments of our own making, which properly belong to us, we live among crowded scenes. But there is more. Europeans no longer know themselves; they ignore their mixed ancestries and seek a proper role. They lack individuality. We can begin to understand the spontaneous historical bent of the nineteenth century: the anemia of its forces and those mixtures that effaced all its individual traits produced the same results as the mortification of asceticism; its inability to create, its absence of artistic works, and its need to rely on past achievements forced it to adopt the base curiosity of plebs.

If this fully represents the genealogy of history, how could it become, in its own right, a genealogical analysis? Why did it not continue as a form of a demagogic or religious knowledge? How could it change roles on the same stage? Only by being seized, dominated, and turned against its birth. And it is this movement which properly describes the specific nature of the *Entstehung*: it is not the unavoidable conclusion of a long preparation, but a scene where forces are risked in the chance of confrontations, where they emerge triumphant, where they can also be confiscated. The locus of emergence for metaphysics was surely Athenian demagogy, the vulgar spite of Socrates and his belief in immortality, and Plato could have seized this Socratic philosophy to turn it against itself. Undoubtedly, he was often tempted to do so, but his defeat lies in its consecration. The problem was similar in the nineteenth century: to avoid doing for the popular asceticism of historians what Plato did for Socrates. This historical trait should not be founded upon a philosophy of history, but dismantled beginning with the things it produced; it is necessary to master history so as to turn it to genealogical uses, that is, strictly anti-Platonic purposes. Only then

will the historical sense free itself from the demands of a suprahistorical history.

7. The historical sense gives rise to three uses that oppose and correspond to the three Platonic modalities of history. The first is parodic, directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition; the second is disassociative, directed against identity, and opposes history given as continuity or representative of a tradition; the third is sacrificial. Directed against truth, and opposes history as knowledge. They imply a use of history that severs its connection to memory, its metaphysical and anthropological model, and constructs a counter-memory—a transformation of history into a totally different form of time.

First, the parodic and farcial use. The historian offers this confused and anonymous European, who no longer knows himself or what name he should adopt, the possibility of alternate identities, more individualized and substantial than his own. But the man with historical sense will see that this substitution is simply a disguise. Historians supplied the Revolution with Roman prototypes, romanticism with knight's armor, and the Wagnerian era was given the sword of a German hero—ephemeral props that point to our own unreality. No one kept them from venerating these religions, from going to Bayreuth to commemorate a new afterlife; they were free, as well, to be transformed into street-vendors of empty identities. The new historian, the genealogist, will know what to make of this masquerade. He will not be too serious to enjoy it; on the contrary, he will push the masquerade to its limit and prepare the great carnival of rime where masks are constantly re-appearing. No longer the identification of our faint individuality with the solid identities of the past, but our “unrealization” through the excessive choice of identities—Frederick of Hohenstaufen, Caesar, Jesus, Dionysus, and possibly Zarathrusta. Taking up these masks, revitalizing the buffoonery of history, we adopt an identity whose unreality surpasses that of God who started the charade. “Perhaps, we can discover a realm where originality is again possible as parodists of history and buffoons of God.”⁵⁵ In this, we recognize the parodic double of what the second of the *Untimely Meditations* called “monumental his-

tory”: a history given to reestablishing the high points of historical development and their maintenance in a perpetual presence, given to the recovery of works, actions, and reactions through the monogram of their personal essence. But in 1874, Nietzsche accused this history, one totally devoted to veneration, of barring access to the actual intensities and creations of life. The parody of his last texts serves to emphasize that “monumental history” is itself a parody. Genealogy is history in the form of a concerted carnival. The second use of history is the systematic dissociation of identity. This is necessary because this rather weak identity, which we attempt to support and to unify under a mask, is in itself only a parody: it is plural; countless spirits dispute its possession; numerous systems intersect and compete. The study of history makes one “happy, unlike the metaphysicians, to possess in oneself not an immortal soul but many mortal ones.”⁵⁶ And in each of these souls, history will not discover a forgotten identity, eager to be reborn, but a complex system of distinct and multiple elements, unable to be mastered by the powers of synthesis: “it is a sign of superior culture to maintain, in a fully conscious way, certain phases of its evolution which lesser men pass through without thought. The initial result is that we can understand those who resemble us as completely determined systems and as representative of diverse cultures, that is to say, as necessary and capable of modification. And in return, we are able to separate the phases of our own evolution and consider them individually.”⁵⁷ The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit itself to its dissipation. It does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us. “Antiquarian history,” according to the *Untimely Meditations*, pursues opposite goals. It seeks the continuities of soil, language, and urban life in which our present is rooted and, by cultivating in a delicate manner that which existed for all time, it tries to conserve for posterity the conditions under which we were born.”⁵⁸ This type of history was objected to in the *Meditations* because it tended to block creativity in support of the laws of fidelity. Somewhat later—and already in *Human, All Too Human*—Nietzsche reconsiders the task of the antiquarian, but with an altogether different emphasis. If genealogy in its own right gives rise to questions concerning

our native land, native language, or the laws that govern us, its intention is to reveal the heterogenous systems which, masked by the self, inhibit the formation of any form of identity.

The third use of history is the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge. In appearance, or rather, according to the mask it bears, historical consciousness is neutral, devoid of passions, and committed solely to truth. But if it examines itself and if, more generally, it interrogates the various forms of scientific consciousness in its history, it finds that all these forms and transformations are aspects of the will to knowledge: instinct, passion, the inquisitor's devotion, cruel subtlety, and malice. It discovers the violence of a position that sides against those who are happy in their ignorance, against the effective illusions by which humanity protects itself, a position that encourages the dangers of research and delights and disturbing discoveries.⁵⁹ The historical analysis of this rancorous will to knowledge⁶⁰ reveals that all knowledge rests on injustice (that there is no right, not even in the act of knowing, to truth or a foundation for truth) and that the instinct for knowledge is malicious (something murderous, opposed to the happiness of mankind.) Even in the greatly expanded form it assumes today, the will to knowledge does not achieve a universal truth; man is not given an exact and serene mastery of nature. On the contrary, it ceaselessly multiplies the risks, creates dangers in every area; it breaks down illusory defenses; it dissolves the unity of the subject; it releases those elements of itself that are devoted to its subversion and destruction. Knowledge does not slowly detach itself from its empirical roots, the initial needs from which it arose, to become pure speculation subject only to the demands of reason; its development is not tied to the constitution and affirmation of a free subject; rather, it creates a progressive enslavement to its instinctive violence. Where religions once demanded the sacrifice of bodies, knowledge now calls for experimentation on ourselves,⁶¹ calls us to the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge. "The desire for knowledge has been transformed among us into a passion which fears no sacrifice, which fears nothing but its own extinction. It may be that mankind will eventually perish from this passion for knowledge. If not through passion, then through weakness. We must be prepared to state our choice: do we wish humanity to end in fire

and light or to end on the sands?”⁶² We should now replace the two great problems of nineteenth-century philosophy, passed on by Fichte and Hegel (the reciprocal basis of truth and liberty and the possibility of absolute knowledge), with the theme that “to perish through absolute knowledge may well form a part of the basis of being.”⁶³ This does not mean, in terms of a critical procedure, that the will to truth is limited by the intrinsic finitude of cognition, but that it loses all sense of limitations and all claim to truth in its unavoidable sacrifice of the subject of knowledge. “It may be that there remains one prodigious idea which might be made to prevail over every other aspiration, which might overcome the most victorious: the idea of humanity sacrificing itself. It seems indisputable that if this new constellation appeared on the horizon, only the desire for truth, with its enormous prerogatives, could direct and sustain such a sacrifice. For to knowledge, no sacrifice is too great. Of course, this problem has never been posed.”⁶⁴

The *Untimely Meditations* discussed the critical use of history: its just treatment of the past, its decisive cutting of the roots, its rejection of traditional attitudes of reverence, its liberation of man by presenting him with other origins than those in which he prefers to see himself. Nietzsche, however, reproached critical history for detaching us from every real source and for sacrificing the very movement of life to the exclusive concern for truth. Somewhat later, as we have seen, Nietzsche reconsiders this line of thought he had at first refused, but directs it to altogether different ends. It is no longer a question of judging the past in the name of a truth that only we can possess in the present; but risking the destruction of the subject who seeks knowledge in the endless deployment of the will to knowledge.

In a sense, genealogy returns to the three modalities of history that Nietzsche recognized in 1874. It returns to them in spite of the objections that Nietzsche raised in the name of the affirmative and creative powers of life. But they are metamorphosized; the veneration of monuments becomes parody; the respect for ancient continuities becomes systematic dissolution; the critique of the injustices of the past by a truth held by men in the present becomes the destruction of the man who maintains knowledge by the injustice proper to the will to knowledge.

Notes

1. See Nietzsche's preface to *The Genealogy of Morals*, 4, 7.
2. *The Gay Science*, 7.
3. *Human, All Too Human*, 3.
4. *The Genealogy*, II, 6, 8.
5. *The Gay Science*, 110, 111, 300.
6. *The Dawn*, 102
7. *The Gay Science*, 151, 353; and also *The Dawn*, 62; *The Genealogy*, I, 14; *Twilight of the Idols*, "The Great Errors," 7.
(*Schwarzkünstler* is a black magician.)
8. Paul Ree's text was entitled *Ursprung der Moralischen Empfindungen*.
9. In *Human, All Too Human*, aphorism 92 was entitled *Ursprung der Gerechtigkeit*.
10. In the main body of *The Genealogy*, *Ursprung* and *Herkunft* are used interchangeably in numerous instances (I, 2; II, 8, 11, 12, 16, 17.)
11. *The Dawn*, 123.
12. *Human, All Too Human*, 34.
13. *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, 9.
14. A wide range of key terms, found in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, are related to this theme of "disparity": the concepts of series, discontinuity, division, and difference. If the same is found in the realm and movement of dialectics, the disparate presents itself as an "event" in the world of chance. For a more detailed discussion, see "*Theatrum Philosophicum*".
15. *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, 3.
16. *The Dawn*, 49.
17. *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, p. 99.
18. *The Gay Science*, 265 and 110.
19. See "*Theatrum Philosophicum*" below, pp. 167-168, for a discussion of the development of truth; and also "History of Systems of Thought: Summary of a Course at the College de France—1970-1971", pp. 202-204.
20. *Twilight of the Idols*, "How the world of truth becomes a fable."
21. For example, *The Gay Science*, 135; *Beyond Good and Evil*, 200, 242, 244; *The Genealogy*, I, 5.
22. *The Gay Science*, 343-349; *Beyond Good and Evil*, 260.
23. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 244.
24. See "*Theatrum Philosophicum*," pp. 172-176.
25. *The Genealogy*, III, 17. The *abkunft* of feelings of depression.
26. *Twilight*, "Reasons for philosophy."
27. *The Dawn*, 247.

28. *The Gay Science*, 348-349.
29. *Ibid.*, 200.
30. *The Dawn*, 42.
31. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 262.
32. *The Genealogy*, III, 13.
33. *The Gay Science*, 148. It is also to an anemia of the will that one must attribute the *Entstehung* of Buddhism and Christianity, 347.
34. *The Genealogy*, I, 2.
35. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 260; cf. also *The Genealogy*, II, 12.
36. *The Wanderer*, 9.
37. *The Gay Science*, III.
38. *The Genealogy*, II, 6.
39. *The Genealogy*, preface, 7; and I, 2. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 224.
40. *The Gay Science*, 7.
41. *Ibid.*
42. See “What Is an Author?” on rediscoveries.
43. This statement is echoed in Foucault’s discussion of “differentiations” in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 130-131, 206; or the use of the word “division” in “A Preface to Transgression”.
44. *The Genealogy*, II, 12.
45. *The Dawn*, 130.
46. *The Genealogy*, II, 12.
47. *Human, All Too Human*, 16.
48. See “Theatrum Philosophicum” for an analysis of Deleuze’s thought as intensity of difference.
49. *Twilight*, 44.
50. *Twilight*, “Reason within philosophy,” 1 and 4.
51. *The Wanderer*, 188. (This conception underlies the task of *Madness and Civilization* and *The Birth of the Clinic* even though it is not found as a conscious formulation until *The Archaeology of Knowledge*; for a discussion of archaeology as “diagnosis”, see especially p. 131.)
52. *The Gay Science*, 337.
53. See “Intellectuals and Power.”
54. *The Genealogy*, III, 26.
55. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 223.
56. *The Wanderer* (Opinions and Mixed Statements), 17.
57. *Human, All Too Human*, 274.
58. *Untimely Meditations*, II, 3.
59. Cf. *The Dawn*, 429 and 432; *The Gay Science*, 333; *Beyond Good and Evil*, 229-230.
60. “*Vouloir-savoir*”: the phrase in French means both the will to knowledge and knowledge as revenge.
61. *The Dawn*, 501.
62. *Ibid.*, 429.
63. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 39.
64. *The Dawn*, 45.

“...knowledge is not made for
understanding; it is made for
cutting”