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Author(s): Ernst Bloch and Mark Ritter

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Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics*

by Ernst Bloch

A. *Early State of Affairs*

Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, by virtue of the fact that they may all be seen today. But that does not mean that they are living at the same time with others.

Rather, they carry earlier things with them, things which are intricately involved. One has one's times according to where one stands corporeally, above all in terms of classes. Times older than the present continue to effect older strata; here it is easy to return or dream one's way back to older times. Certainly, a person who is simply awkward and who for that reason is not up to the demands of his position, is only personally unable to keep up. But what if there are other reasons why he does not fit into a very modern organization, such as the after-effects of peasant descent, what if he is an earlier type? In general, different years resound in the one that has just been recorded and prevails. Moreover, they do not emerge in a hidden way as previously but rather, they contradict the Now in a very peculiar way, awry, from the rear. The strength of this untimely course has become evident; it promised nothing less than new life, despite its looking to the old. Even the masses flock to it since the unbearable Now at least seems different with Hitler, who paints good old things for everyone. There is nothing more unexpected, nothing more dangerous than this power of being at once fiery and puny, contradicting and nonsynchronous. The workers are no longer alone with themselves and the bosses. Many earlier forces, from quite a different Below, are beginning to slip between.

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Translator's Note: Here I am following my previous practice of translating (*un*)gleichzeitig as "(non)synchronous" (see Oskar Negt, "The Nonsynchronous Heritage and the Problem of Propaganda" in issue 9 of *NGC*). I am not certain that it is any more precise than "contemporaneous," but it is certainly less confusing than "simultaneous." Furthermore, "synchronous" has the only nominalization that could (hopefully) withstand the frequent use in this article without grating on the nerves. *Ungleichzeitigkeit* should have been previously translated as "nonsynchronism" not "nonsynchronicity." I see no reason to follow German in piling suffixes onto the stem of a word, unless it is absolutely necessary.

B. Nonsynchronisms, Reported

A type always begins from the beginning. For the most part, *Youth* turns away from the day that it has. It is a day that the young do not have today. But their dreams do not come only from an empty stomach. They are nourished just as materially by an empty condition of being-young, which is not of the present. Youths without work can easily be paid and seduced by the Right. Youths of bourgeois origins, but without any bourgeois prospects, invariably go to the Right, where they are promised a future. But it is still significant that no youth stands in the middle today; there is no twenty-year-olds' business party. The twenty-year-old condition is rather turned towards a different life than the reified one of today. Of course, there is no youth in itself, or none that would grow up as uniformly, as independently of the times just as all youths grow beards in all times. But as different as this condition is in different classes and times, as much as the words to describe it today differ from those of yesterday, it is also clear that earlier bodies emerge in the Now and send a bit of prehistoric life into it. If it is true that little boys bring back the past with bows and arrows, it is also true that youths easily become cliquish, seeking friends and above all a father, which their own one often was not. This happens more easily to bourgeois than to proletarian youth, not only because they are bourgeois, but also because they are more degenerated and consequently more open to games and enthusiasms. Continually preoccupied with the self, considering themselves to be of supreme importance, these young people show with their swing to the romantic Right how external their bad contemporary and material gesture was. The sharp wind of youth makes fires on the Left burn brighter, if they are burning; but if a "renewal" is under way on the Right, then the youth from bourgeois and other vulnerable circles is more vulnerable than ever: the blood-line, the organic youth is fertile soil for the Nazis. Bands in a very old style spring up from it, blood-bound, tangible life in small groups with a known leader, not numbers, at the top. The taste of this youth is very sensitive to well-developed masculine qualities, to strength, openness, decency and purity, whereby this "decency" belongs to healthy boys and does not wish to be one of firm prices. Positions assumed have a stronger impact than do teachings; rousing words seem more precise than analytical ones; folk dress seems more beautiful than cities: thus, the economic motive that drives bourgeois youth into past dreams connects itself to organic unrest and one's own primeval light. Now, when present life has become too unconvincing to whet one's horns on, that which had earlier blustered and gushed emptily now stands uninhibitedly apart in the beautiful old. The young who are out of step with the barren Now retreat, more easily than moving beyond the Today in order to get into the Tomorrow. This will remain true as long as the different time they experience does not shift towards tomorrow.

Another type comes from way back by virtue of its being rooted. It still lives

almost exactly like its forebearers and does the same things they did. It is the *peasantry*: there are faces in the country which are so old, for all their youth, that even the oldest people in the city no longer resemble them. Even if misery or greater opportunity drives them into the factory, there is still the peasant saying: "a job is no good if you have to obey a whistle" (*Arbeit taugt nichts, zu der man gepfiffen wird*). The small farmer thinks this way, even if he had previously not lived much better than his hired hand. Granted, the peasant is shrewd in calculating: he has given up his traditional costume, furniture and many old-fashioned ways, and by no means under compulsion. But even if the peasant responds to economic problems with refreshing sobriety, even if the home-spun sayings he uses are not all from native soil, the sobriety he has is still not from today, and the peasant still wears his old costume wherever silence and denseness, wherever traditional customs and beliefs hold sway. He stubbornly defends his economically obsolete position and is more difficult to replace by the machine than was the artisan a hundred years ago. He is more difficult to replace simply because he controls his means of production, using agricultural machinery only as an aid within the old framework of the farm and the fields belonging to it. Here we find no industrialist introducing the mechanical loom and the like, which only the capitalist can possess, against economically weak artisans. This continued communal form of production also makes it difficult to mobilize the economic contradictions within the peasantry.

There are subsistence farmers (*Zwergbauern*) living in misery, small farmers, middle-sized farmers and large farmers, and these very disparate property relations certainly prevent one from taking the peasantry as a uniform "class." The subsistence farmer still does have property, even if it is pitiful and completely debt-ridden, and the large farmer helps out, plays the active patriarch: the disparate property relations do not produce in and of themselves any struggle between exploiter and exploited (only a propaganda quite different from the proletarian type will catch hold here). Thus the peasantry feels itself, if not like a uniform class, then like an "estate" (*Stand*) that has remained relatively uniform. Beyond this, the peasants have another nonsynchronism aside from their possession of the means of production: that tenacity to take root which comes from the material that they work and which directly holds and nourishes them; they remain attached to the old soil and the cycle of the seasons. Thus, it is not only the agricultural crisis which drives peasants to the Right, where they feel supported by tariffs and where they are promised an exact return of the good times. Their bound existence, too, the relatively old form of their production relations, of their customs and of their calendar life in the cycle of an unchanged nature counteracts urbanization and binds them to reaction, a reaction which is founded on nonsynchronism. Even the sobriety of the peasants is old and sceptical, not enlightened, and their alert sense of property (for the soil, for a debt-free farm) is more rooted in things than the capitalist one. Sobriety as well as property sense and peasant individualism (property as an

instrument of freedom, the house as castle) come from pre-capitalist times, from production relations which already demanded division of the land, when there were not yet any individual citizens running businesses. Thus, the farm house, in spite of all capitalist forms, in spite of all its ready-made clothes and city goods, is still gothic in plan and aura. One could easily put the abandoned costumes and furniture back in their old places without it seeming pseudo-antique, as it would in the city. Isolated places are especially instructive here, for they show cultural underground water, which only lies deeper elsewhere. Chests are still being made today for married couples by the village carpenter in gothic form with a modern date—not as an imitation, but as they were made by their fathers, their great grandfathers and even older forebears. In spite of radio and newspapers, there are couples living in the village for whom Egypt is still the land where the princess pulled the baby Moses from the river, not the land of the Pyramids or the Suez Canal; it is still viewed from the Bible and the Children of Israel, rather than from the pharaoh. Konnersreuth once again: the ecstatic virgin Therese Neumann, who sweat blood there, against the will of the much more contemporary bishop, indicates another bit of gothic in Germany. The Fichtelgebirge, and the connected regions of the Spessart and Black Forest capsule such things; if these mountains are no longer as sinister and haunted as they were in Hauff's day, raftsmen, glass blowers, ghosts and robbers would still be the most appropriate scenery around such peasant gothic even today.¹ Economically and ideologically, the peasants, in the midst of the flexible capitalist century, are situated in an older place. This is so no matter how much capitalism has adapted landed property, a pre-capitalist element; no matter how much it has capitalized the peasants and furnished them with its commodities; no matter if even the most remote village is connected to the "juste milieu" by radio. The peasants retain a distorted remnant. They feel better represented by feudal estates than by the suspicious city—so long as the difference in time between city and country is not erased in a much broader Tomorrow than the present urban one.

As we know, the urban type, too, has been learning to lag behind for the past few years. An immiserated *middle class* wants to return to prewar conditions when it was better off. It is immiserated and hence susceptible to revolution, but its work is wide of the mark and its memories make it completely out of touch with the times. Insecurity, which produces only homesickness for what has been as a revolutionary impulse, sets characters into the middle of the city such as have not been seen for centuries. But here, too, misery does not invent anything or not everything; rather, it only divulges something, namely, nonsynchronism, which was long latent or seemed at most to be from yesterday, but which now refreshes itself beyond the Yesterday in an almost mysterious St. Vitus' Dance. Older types of being thus occur right in the city, older ways of thinking and

1. Wilhelm Hauff (1802-27) was a late romantic writer, who is best known for his fantastic tales and fairy tales, including *Das Wirtshaus im Spessart*.

objects of hate as well, such as the image of Jewish usury as exploitation itself. The infringement of "interest slavery" (*Zinsknechtschaft*) is believed in, as if this were the economy of 1500; superstructures that seemed long overturned right themselves again and stand still in today's world as whole medieval city scenes. Here is the Tavern of the Nordic Blood, there the castle of the Hitler duke, yonder the Church of the German Reich, an earth church, in which even the city people can feel themselves to be fruits of the German earth and honor the earth as something holy, as the *confessio* of German heroes and German history. This sort of patriotism, this foam at the mouth and dimming eye with which people honor Germany in Germany, is not merely a substitute for the lost sense of station. "The power and honor of the land" is not merely a dream (a very convenient dream for the arms industry), which with its collective feelings compensates the individual petty bourgeois for his factual powerlessness and degradation. This is not just a transfusion of the "chosen people" to a Germanic, completely idolatrous object; rather, the obvious excesses recall a primitive-atavistic "participation mystique," the ties of primitive man to the soil which contains his ancestral spirits. More than ever, the petty bourgeoisie is the moist, warm humus for ideology. But it is also clear that the ideology spreading today has long roots, longer than the petty bourgeoisie.

Peasants sometimes still believe in witches and exorcists, but not nearly as frequently and as strongly as a large class of urbanites believe in ghostly Jews and the new Baldur. The peasants sometimes still read the so-called Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses, a sensational tract about diseases of animals and the forces and secrets of nature; but half the middle class believes in the Elders of Zion, in Jewish snares and the omnipresence of Freemason symbols and in the galvanic powers of German blood and the German land. The white-collar worker lashes out wildly and war-like; he still wants to obey, but only as a soldier, struggling, believing. The *desire* of the white-collar worker not to be proletarian intensifies to orgiastic pleasure in subordination, in magic civil service under a duke. The ignorance of the white-collar worker as he searches for past levels of consciousness, transcendence in the past, increases to an orgiastic hatred of reason, to a "chthonism," in which there are berserk people and images of the cross, in which indeed—with a nonsynchronism that verges on extraterritoriality—Negro drums rumble and central Africa rises up. The reason: the middle class (in distinction to the proletariat) does not directly take part in production at all, but enters it only in intermediary activities, at such a distance from social causality that with increasing ease an alogical space can form in which primal drives and romanticisms, wishes and mythicisms come to the fore. Even the directly economic content of middle-class fascism is nonsynchronous or has become so since freedom of trade and industry has benefited only the large entrepreneurs and destroyed the small ones; parliamentary democracy is in this way the hated guarantor of free competition and its corresponding political

form. Instead of free competition, the corporative state wishes to lead the economy back to the level of the early capitalist small enterprise; it recommends itself to big capital as an instrument against the class struggle, to the middle class precisely as its salvation and the up-to-date, romantic expression of its non-synchronism. Likewise, the middle class cannot hold out *ideologically* within "rationalization" and sacrifices *ratio* that much sooner, the more it has appeared to the middle class only in hostile form, doubly hostile. That is, it appears as mere late capitalist rationalization and as a subversion of traditional intrinsic values—equally late capitalist, but understood as "Marxist-Jewish." The superman, the blond beast, the biographical cry for the great man, the scent of a witches' kitchen, of a time long past—all these signs of flight from relativism and nihilism, which had become the stuff of educated discussions in the salons of the educated upper classes, became genuine political land in the catastrophe of the middle class. It is, to be sure, still occupied only by employees, no matter how savage it seems; its houses are those of the family and "clean" business, be it of the pre-war era, be it of the corporative state; and the benefits go to the monopoly capitalist upper class, which utilizes gothic dreams against proletarian realities. Certainly, mysteries never had to endure such intense contact with philistines either, so much malice, meanness and refractory provincialism, so much Edda done in wood-burning, so many heraldic mottoes in Saxon dialect. Nevertheless, here, in the anger of millions, in the landscape around them that has become archaic, there are fields of a different *irratio*. Living and newly revived nonsynchronisms, whose content is genuine, whose appearances bring along heathen crudity and panic nature. Revolutions against civilization in this demonic form were previously known only in the Orient, above all in the Mohammedan world. Their fanaticism still benefits only the White Guard in our country as well, and will continue to do this as long as the revolution does not occupy and rebaptize the living Yesterday. With the demise of Hitler the non-synchronous will perhaps also seem weaker; it remains, however, as the germ and the ground for the national socialist as well as every future heterogeneous surprise. National Socialism has shown us enough demonized proletarianized people; their ridiculous, frightening image ought not to be forgotten, much less go unused.

C. *Synchronism and Nonsynchronism, Philosophically Considered*

Many of these people only lagged behind in the Now. They lagged behind its march only because they were hampered, although they otherwise belong completely to today. Therefore, one ought not to claim to see an older type where it is simply a retarded one, one which stands on a bad footing with Today, but nevertheless belongs to it.

The little man, for instance, has lost money and wants to have it back. While seeking this he can become like a brute and dream. He is on the wrong track

mentally, but still in the Now. If his situation improves, the dreamy and brutal aspects will end in any case. If it does not improve, and if Hitler, once in power, is disappointing, then the proletarians who went along with him or just gave him a try, will jump off to the Left anyway, where they are expected; however, the petty bourgeois will at least no longer believe in ghosts. There is much that is only falsely nonsynchronous, that would rather return to the drawing-room today than wait till tomorrow, that has a "sound" mind with anger and clichés, and refuses to dance the St. Vitus' dance. It fills itself with pretty words, loud play, flamboyant nonsense, and, at the bottom of all this drunkenness, really only wants to be a domestic animal again. Therefore, if one does not want to underestimate a movement (what does not appear to be only a recent occurrence with people) then one ought not to paint it garishly everywhere either. Believing, obeying, struggling, are those the fascist virtues?—perhaps, but, for many, obeying is the best virtue they have. Order and hierarchy, do they make up the fascist architectural style?—perhaps, but many are looking for quiet in the order, for a job in the hierarchy. Yes, national-socialist agitation has been called an appeal to the inner scoundrel in man, and rightly so. No negative remark can be more up to date. The images of a quieter inwardness are something else. If many of them were not so cheap, one would see that they cannot be more than thirty years old and are stale from it. Here the little man just does not notice where he is, although he definitely is in the Now, in a minor and stupefied way. Many of these cloudy situations, then, are unexpected and strange, yet not old.

D. The Genuinely Nonsynchronous Remainder

But all the same, not everything here is a little man who deceives himself. Besides daybreak produced by musty surroundings, necessity also brings genuine daybreak which has to be taken into account. There are those huge seven-league boots of misery today which lead as far back into past times as the seven-league boots of good fortune in the fairy tale. If misery only afflicted synchronous people, even though of different positions, origins, and consciousness, it could not make them march in such different directions, especially not so far backwards. They would not have such difficulty "understanding" the communist language which is quite completely synchronous and precisely oriented to the most advanced economy. Synchronous people could not permit themselves to be so largely brutalized and romanticized, in spite of their mediate position, which keeps them economically stupid, in spite of all the semblance that has a place there. Certainly middle class people also rebel differently than the proletariat against becoming a commodity because they are only indirectly involved in production. Also because the white-collar worker, at least until recently, was not so annulled, not so alienated in his work, not so unassured in his position; besides, unlike the proletarian, he had a few individual possibilities of getting ahead. But, if even now, after complete proletarianization and insecurity, after the

decline of a higher standard of living and all chances for a career, the masses of white-collar workers are not joining the communists, or even the social democrats (quite the contrary), then obviously, forces are reacting which not only conceal the commodity reification of humans (*Ware-Werden*) subjectively and ideologically (as alone was the case for the non-radicalized middle until after the war), but do so in real terms, that is, precisely from *real nonsynchronism*. Then, motives and reserves from precapitalist times and superstructures, hence genuine nonsynchronisms, take effect, which a sinking class brings to life or has brought to life in its consciousness.

Here, after all, not only peasants and little people, but also high-class gentlemen have kept themselves fresh, that is, old. The street that capital opened up through the land of "organic" tradition shows, at least in its German form, many by-ways and ruptures. It had already become evident in the war that Germany was not only a monopoly capitalist country and the Junker caste not merely window dressing. All of this mixed even older causes and contents into the imperialist war as the "mutiny of the productive forces against the form of their exploitation in national states." (German social democracy had recognized this at the time, without, however drawing revolutionary consequences from it—namely, struggle first against the domestic Junkers and automatic militarism; the value of this nonsynchronous perception is not cancelled by the fact that the consequences were not drawn.) Germany in general, which did not accomplish a bourgeois revolution until 1918, is, unlike England, and much less France, the classical land of nonsynchronism, that is, of unsurmounted remnants of older economic being and consciousness. Ground rent, large landed property and their power were rather completely integrated into the capitalistic economy and its political power in England, and in a different way, in France. On the other hand, given the long retarded and even longer heterogeneous conditions in Germany the victory of the bourgeoisie did not develop itself economically, much less politically or ideologically to the same extent. The "unequal rate of development," which Marx ascribes to material production in relationship to artistic production in the introduction to the *Critique of Political Economy*, existed here long enough on the material level alone and hindered in this way the clearly dominating influence of capitalist thinking in the hierarchy of economic powers, that is, synchronism. Along with East Elbian feudalism, an entire museum of German interactions maintained itself, an anachronistic superstructure which still prevails—no matter how obsolete and shoddy. World history was not always just urban history in Germany. It is not a question here of whether Prussian Junkerdom itself has displayed quite artificial, even rationalistic traits since days of old (unlike the genuine Boyardom, which is rooted in the people): the Prussian pillar of the Holy Alliance was, if not the most "modern," in any case not the weakest. At present the Junkers are half dissolved or dependent upon German-national "people's parties" or even National Socialism. But the

Marxist revolution, which wants to “overthrow the old world with its own great arsenal of means” does not only run up against monopoly capital in the capitalist republic. Rather, it runs up against new reactions of nonsynchronism, against the Weimar Republic’s blunted “contradiction” to capital and sharpened one to Marxism. Over and above a great deal of false nonsynchronism there is this one in particular: Nature, and more than that, the ghost of history comes very easily to the desperate peasant, to the bankrupt petty bourgeois; the depression which releases the ghost takes place in a country with a particularly large amount of pre-capitalist material. It is important to ask whether Germany is not more undeveloped, even more volcanic than, for instance, France, in terms of its *power*. Certainly it has not formed and evened out capitalist *ratio* nearly as synchronously. Just this relative chaos rolled “things out of season,” nonsynchronous things from an even “deeper” retardation, from *barbarism*, to National Socialism; and it would not have taken a Nietzsche in Germany to make the antitheses of blood against mind, savagery against morality, intoxication versus reason into a conspiracy against civilization.

Needs and elements from past ages break through the relativism of the general weariness like magma through a thin crust. Indeed, the nihilism of bourgeois life, this becoming-a-commodity, becoming alienated from the entire world, shows preserved nonsynchronisms in a doubly “natural” way and preserved “nature” in a doubly magical way. And so campfires and sacrificial smoke burn in the people’s (*völkisch*) hall. Trumpet blasts announce the *Führer* in a more than Wilhelminian manner; the thin little gardens of ideology that falsify the myth become materially overheated and spring up—in a frenzied middle class—into a jungle. The pancake craters of nature, which otherwise steamed in the parlor, become genuine volcanoes. That means not only mud volcanoes but also those of the darkest primitivization, of a completely nonsynchronous, even disparate insanity. One is reminded of the St. Vitus’ dancers and latent child murderers who shout “Stop, thief!” when they accuse Jews of ritual murder. One is reminded of the tune “When a Jew’s blood drips from the knife,” which has been spreading among the SA troops like a swastika in music. One feels the dream of preserved insanity, of preserved overcompensations from puberty in this sort of National Socialism. One senses the use of sensationalism to exploit the Indian murder sects and Chinese secret societies, the whole creeping, whispering forest of earlier sensational literature (with the Elders of Zion or the Caves of the Freemasons in the interior of the mountain). One encounters age-old sadism even at funerals, vows of revenge, or the rites of rage (*Wutzeremoriell*) at the “memorial.” Thus, there are uncanny elements enough in the entire “awakening”; it is not only simple “rejuvenation” nor merely the struggle for survival by beastly means. Under the threshold of submerged stock quotations, beneath an intoxication that by daylight often contains nothing but a bit of disturbed pseudo-antiquity, beneath a false nonsynchronism, which only appears as a

volcanic island to the extent that it is not in the vanguard of the times—beneath all these bad anachronisms there is a genuine one of such a kind that it makes one guess. Its acts are to be determined in the following, but its contents are a wild confusion of unsold history, prehistory too. The fact that this contradiction is alien to the times makes possible the deceit as well as the pathos of “revolution” and reaction at the same time.

E. The Logical Constitution of Nonsynchronous Contradictions

Distress is in need of food, and, in the middle strata, in need of something higher as well, something which it can no longer find in life nowadays, which indeed, it has long been missing in the barren land. What has been customarily, ultimately “psychically,” missed likewise contradicts the Now, just as strongly as missing food and not only economically. Furthermore, every upsetting contradiction, even its semblance, has two sides: an *inner* one so to speak, which something does not suit, and an *outer* one, in which something is amiss. Then the immiserated middle strata, by and large not part of today, contradict the Now, which lets this group fall further and further, with *torpidity* on the inward level, and outwardly with remnants which are *alien* to the Now. Thus the contradictory factor here is inwardly or subjectively a torpid remnant, but at the same time externally or objectively, it is an alien, a leftover, in short, a nonsynchronous remnant. As a simply torpid not wanting of the Now, this contradicting factor is *subjectively* nonsynchronous. As an existing remnant of earlier times in the present it is *objectively* nonsynchronous. The *subjectively* nonsynchronous, having been for a long time merely embittered, appears today as *pent-up anger*. In calm times it was the peevish or contemplative side of the German petty bourgeois, who withdrew cursing or reticently from a life with which he could not keep up. The fallen branches of duty, education, and “estate” of the middle strata, in a time that no longer knows a middle, are subjectively nonsynchronous in the meager sense, but tinder in the face of anger. Corresponding to this is the *objectively* nonsynchronous as the after-effect of older relations and forms of production and older superstructures, no matter how thwarted they may be. The *objectively* nonsynchronous is that which is far from and alien to the present; it includes both *declining remnants* and, above all, uncompleted *past*, which has not yet been “sublated” by capitalism. The subjectively nonsynchronous contradiction activates this objectively nonsynchronous one, so that both contradictions come together, the rebelliously distorted one of pent-up anger and the objectively alien one of left-over being and consciousness. Here are elements of the old society and its relative order and fulfillment in the present disorderly society, and the subjectively nonsynchronous contradiction revives these in a way both negatively and positively surprising. House, soil and people are examples of such *objectively* delineated contradictions between the traditional and the capitalist Now, within which they are increasingly being

destroyed and not replaced. They are both contradictions of the traditional with the capitalist Now as well as elements of the old society which are not yet dead. They were contradictions even in their origin, contradictions to past forms, which never did realize the intended contents of house, soil or people. Therefore, they were already contradictions of unfulfilled intentions *ab ovo*, quarrels with the past itself: not on the spot, like the divisions of the synchronous contradictions, but through the whole of history as it were so that here contradictions even to history, namely, to uncompleted intentional contents of the past themselves join the rebellion if the occasion arises. Certainly, the past is beautified by the petty bourgeoisie today. In opposition to the Now, it places its unfulfilled condition, mixed with that which was relatively better in the past. Thus, pent-up anger has its nonsynchronous contradiction not so much against the meager inheritance of the past as against a Now in which even the last inkling of fulfillment has disappeared.

But the subjectively nonsynchronous contradiction would never be so acute, nor the objectively nonsynchronous one so visible, if there were not also an objectively *synchronous contradiction*, specifically, that which is posited and growing in and with *present-day capitalism*. Anachronistic savagery and recollection are only discharged by the crisis, and answer to its objectively revolutionary contradiction with one that is subjectively as well as objectively reactionary, that is, nonsynchronous. Only, the nonsynchronous contradiction, even if it is set free by the growing immiseration, disintegration and dehumanization in the bosom of late capitalism, by the intolerability of its objectively synchronous contradictions, is at first, as a nonsynchronous contradiction, not dangerous to capitalism. On the contrary, capital uses that which is nonsynchronously contrary, if not indeed disparate, as a distraction from its own strictly present-day contradictions; it uses the antagonism of a still living past as a means of separation and struggle against the future that is dialectically giving birth to itself in the capitalist antagonisms. Throughout the entire 19th century, "the interests of two classes mutually cancelled each other out" (Marx) in the petty bourgeoisie. In addition to this cancelling process there are today harmonizing images of the past which merely seek to retract or to subordinate to themselves the excesses of capitalism. They fill nihilism—this eminently synchronous contradiction in the retinue of late capitalism, this ideological parallel to the commodity reification of all people and things—with hybrid structures, such as the war spirit of 1914, with romantic theories of the state and their feudal anti-capitalism, with Prussianism and socialism or other ideologies as premature solutions of social contradictions. The nonsynchronous contradiction is in this way the opposite of a driving, exploding contradiction; it does not stand with the proletariat as today's historically decisive class. It does not stand in the battlefield between proletariat and monopoly capital as that space of today's decision. After all, the nonsynchronous contradiction as well as its contents broke loose

only in the general *vicinity* of the capitalist antagonisms, and in them it is almost an accidental, at least a warped difference so that a hiatus exists between the nonsynchronous contradiction and capitalism, a fissure, which can be consoled or filled with clouds. Above all, the nonsynchronous contradiction, as that of merely declining pasts, which themselves are not completed, cannot precipitate a change into a new quality, no matter how great its quantity. The revolutionary line of knots in which the contradiction eventually becomes entangled at a single point and drives with leaps for the revolutionary solution, can take place only in keeping with synchronous contradictions, which themselves are the growing child of the Future or of Being-different, not with nonsynchronous ones, which as historical contradictions have their greatness behind them and with it the adventure of their quality. Even the possible late ripening of what is actually incompleting in this past can never turn into a new quality of its own accord, one that is not already known from the past. That end could be served at best by an alliance, which liberates the still *possible future* from the *past* only by putting both in the present. Nevertheless, there is a reality in the nonsynchronous contradiction, which—as the terrible example shows—is not simply swept along and subsumed by the synchronous. In a resolution about fascism formulated by communists it was once said that it contains within itself both the offensive of the ruling class and the elements of its dissolution; in short, that it reflects the contradictions of late capitalist development and thereby its own demise. This is completely correct, but does not exhaust the nonsynchronous contents which express themselves remotely enough in pent-up anger and left-over ties.

The distress that is born solely of today, that of the workers, has much easier means of defending itself. Here the *synchronous contradiction* is alone. It is in the Today, in possession of it, also completely tangible or the winning cause itself. Its subjective manifestation, its subjective factor is not pent-up anger, but rather the class-conscious revolutionary proletarian. Its objective manifestation, its objective factor is not a perishing remnant nor even an *incompleted past*, but rather the *impeded future*. It is the existence of the proletariat itself, the disproportion between the productive forces unleashed by capitalism and the relations of production—the crisis. Recognizing himself as a commodity, the worker reveals at the same time the commodity character of capitalist society, a state as raving as it is ghostly. He does this—as the new class—and cannot be mistaken for the old, and also his “humanity” or his “life,” which he opposes to reification, cannot be historically determined at any point. The proletarian as the self-dissolution of bourgeois society, indeed, of all class society, is the subjectively and objectively incarnate contradiction of synchronous society itself, and his revolution—as the fruit of dialectical *knowledge* of synchronous contradictions—does not take exception to any figures or memories, nor in the first instance, to any contents from the past. Rather, it activates purely the future society with which the present one is pregnant and towards which the nihilisms and anarchies

of present society seek to transform themselves. But that does not prevent the synchronous contradiction's being driven in part by the same material that the nonsynchronous one also misses in the present and which it seeks, with such distortion, in the past. The forms and contents of the past naturally do not attract the class-conscious worker at all. If so, only at a few revolutionary points, with which he feels an elective affinity. And yet, the relatively more lively and intact nature of earlier human relationships do become clear to him. These relationships were still relatively more immediate than those in capitalism. They carried with them more "substance," both in the people among whom they existed and in the environment upon which they worked. To be sure, this immediacy was only seemingly closer in earlier forms, only relatively better determined. And yet, this "relative" not only serves, in a reactionary way, to hold up against the present a past as something which in part is genuinely not dead. It also positively delivers in places a part of that matter which seeks a life not destroyed by capital, indeed, which, leading in a proletarian way, but just as "generally," rebels as the alienation (*Entäusserung*) of "human beings," as the tearing up "of life." We called the nonsynchronous differentness warped, and its rebellion, as a much older substance, peripheral. But, ultimately, it turns out that a part of this very substance of nonsynchronous contradictions has long supplemented the synchronous ones. The substance of synchronous contradictions is not only that which is very much present, namely of the liberated forces of production, but is also that most extreme force of *negativity* which "from there" overturns the present-day conditions. The alienated individual or proletarian, alienated work or commodity fetishism, the emptiness of nothingness—these negativities have something dialectically positive within themselves, to be sure, even the sublime. But it is only there as something rebellious missing from within the synchronous contradiction and its matter—missing from the whole man, from non-alienated labor, from the earthly paradise. To be concise, in the rebellion of proletarian and reified negativity, there is ultimately also the material of a contradiction that rebels from "productive forces" which are not unleashed at all, from intentional contents of a *still nonsynchronous type*. This positivity does not only touch—in the deepest sense—the subversively utopian "of mankind," a "life" which never received fulfillment in any age and is hence the final spur to every revolution, indeed, still the brightest space of every ideology; it also touches, beyond this hidden generality, those positivities which were recalled very early against capitalism, precisely because they are forms and contents of older matter. Not only bourgeois revolutionary positiva, such as Rousseau's "Arcadian Nature," belong here, but also those mixed with restorative tendencies, or even abdications of the revolution: the middle ages of romanticism, the rebirth of a world set up organically and qualitatively out of the empty spaces of the "problem of the thing in itself," and other mirages and picture-puzzles—treasures of a not quite completed past. The factors of the nonsynchronous contradiction, which are—as was shown—incapable of "over-

turning' present-day conditions, nevertheless already recalled, sentimentally or romantically, that wholeness and liveliness from which communism draws genuine material against alienation. In addition to communism, there are other things which thrive off this in confusion such as barbarism, attachment to the land, arcadian and dionysian "nature." They thrive as creatures not satisfied, as *Menetekels* and witnesses which at least make the *problem* of a multi-level wholeness an obligation for dialectics, which is too bound up on one level with capitalism alone. Marxism is not itself radical like destructive capitalism, not ommissive like the latter's abstract calculation. It is not half-enlightening either, but rather, completely revealing and superior. It is least of all ascetic *vis-à-vis* the claims of "Nature"—this antiquary shop of unresolvedness. There would not be such setbacks, much less any problem of the "heritage" in the process, if its last stage were the only one on which dialectics has to stand and the revolution to happen. The foundation of the nonsynchronous contradiction is the unfulfilled fairy tale of the good old days, the unresolved myth of dark old being or of nature. Here there is a past which, in places, is not only not past in terms of classes, but not even completely redeemed materially.

F. The Problem of a Multi-level Dialectics

Thus, it is our task to extend the agitated Now. First, one must distinguish the falsely from the genuinely nonsynchronous contradiction, the latter from the synchronous contradiction, and then, in both of them, the objective and the subjective factors of the contradiction. *The subjectively nonsynchronous contradiction is pent-up anger, the objectively nonsynchronous one is unsettled past; the subjectively synchronous one is the proletariat's free revolutionary act, the objectively synchronous contradiction is the impeded future contained in the Now, the impeded technical benefaction, the impeded new society, with which the old one is pregnant in its productive forces.* The basic factor in the objectively synchronous contradiction is the conflict between the collective character of the productive forces developed within capitalism and the private character of their antipathy. The increasing socialization of labor is no longer compatible with the private capitalist property relations, with the bourgeois form in which industrial labor grew up. This is the objectively synchronous contradiction of the times or its exact class antithesis: productive forces and property relations are two essential parts of an equally synchronous unity. Only this exact antithesis is decisively revolutionary for the times. Nevertheless: it is not the only one there. The other antithesis, that between capitalism and the nonsynchronously immiserated classes, lives alongside the synchronous antithesis, even though only in a diffuse way. Thus it produces fear and pent-up anger in the class of the petty bourgeoisie which "lacks a history." Nor does it allow for an elaborated, present class-consciousness of its own. For that reason it makes the thrust of the conflict external and blunt, directed only against the symptoms, not against the core of

exploitation; the content of the conflict itself is romantically, more or less archaically anticapitalistic.

It is our task now to locate within contradiction a possible force even when it does not go beyond the nonsynchronous rift. The latter remains favorable to the Now of capitalism only as long as the nonsynchronous people lack the leadership, or even the magic spell spurring them to march into the present-day battlefield. The task is to extrapolate the elements of the nonsynchronous contradiction which are capable of antipathy and transformation, that is, those hostile to capitalism and are homeless in it, and to refit them to function in a different context. Consequently, what remains is the "triple alliance" between the proletariat and the immiserated peasants and the immiserated middle class, under proletarian hegemony. The genuinely synchronous contradiction has the job of being concrete and total enough to detach even the genuinely nonsynchronous contradictions from reaction and to bring them to its own tendency. Of themselves the older contradictions do not become a problem on the grounds of proletarian being. Revolutionary dialectics remains exclusively one involving the contradictions set by late capitalism, not the ruptures it sets free, which the Hitler movement exploits. But precisely this proletarian hegemony in the overdue triple alliance cannot be managed, especially if the hegemony is to be undiluted and secure unless dialectics also thoroughly "masters" the material of genuine nonsynchronism and its heterogeneous contradictions.

False consciousness and abstract romanticism must be exorcized at every point, and an understanding that is not *abstractly* omissive must likewise take into its house the subversive and utopian elements, the repressed matter of that which is not yet past. It is said, and certainly correctly, that it is the essence of fascist ideology to incorporate the morbid components of all cultural phases. But it is incorrect to say: "only the morbid ones" and thus to imply that the healthy ones would not be accessible to the ideology of decay at all. Such a summary judgment incorporates in a completely abstract-negative way even the specific opposition of nonsynchronism because of its murkiness into the rotten magic and nothing else. Therefore, in the final analysis, fascism is supported; that is, the difference between the nonsynchronous contradiction and fascist deception of it is denied, denied and plastered over this time from the vulgar Marxist side. Fascism, however, has exploited long enough whatever peasant, petty bourgeois, or nonsynchronous opposition of any kind which made itself felt. Thus, in order for one to become master of the nonsynchronous, the problem of a multi-level dialectics emerges. Obviously, the entirety of earlier development is not yet "sublated" in capitalism and its dialectics. World history, as the bourgeois revolutionary Ludwig Börne has said, is a house that has more stairways than rooms. And, if Marx himself emphasizes the relatively more bearable aspect of the precapitalist condition, if even he characterizes Greek art and epic as "in a certain respect the norm and unattainable ideal" (introduction

to the *Critique of Political Economy*), then this “social childhood of humanity” is a barely dissolved attraction for him or, in any case, capitalism is not the only house in history that could be dialectically inherited. Having everything that is past, in infinite polyphony as it were, without a dominant voice, is mere historicism. Applying typically identical, at least formally identical “forms” and “laws” to all that is past is mere sociology. Marxism, on the other hand, does not find its dialectics to be the same everywhere as they appear in capitalism. It varies them concretely according to individual social conditions, and above all, it tries to maintain for its dialectics, even with the continually effective past in capitalism, that *totality* which is proper to the dialectical tendency of development—not at every stage, but at every mastered stage. Multispatial and multi-temporal dialectics, the polyrhythm and the counterpoint of such dialectics, are in this way precisely the instrument of the *mastered* last stage or of totality; not of any and every stage of course, but of the critical, noncontemplative ones that intervene practically.

This totality must be *critical* so as not to load itself down with stale modes of being and the doubly false consciousness that is a consequence of such staleness. What history has not yet managed to do with that which is absolutely past, namely, to make it hopeless and nothing more than the burial place of historical memories, is completed positively through a materialist analysis of the remaining false consciousness by dissolving its semblance and unmasking its present-day mirages. Therefore, for the sake of those very elements in the past which are not past and continue to be effective, for the sake of the *genuine nebulae* (which have yet to give birth to a star), totality will not encumber itself with mere pseudo-nebulae, with unclear constellations that have long since achieved their final form, even though these may resemble the nebulae as closely as the soil cliché resembles the new earth or the Third Reich, the future state. The totality must furthermore be *critical* in order that it not fall from its justified antithesis to the capitalist dismemberment of all relations of life into a false similarity to idealistic “totality,” which is a mere totality of the system (spinning out from a single idealistic principle and its uninterrupted, panlogical connection), which indeed is a derivative of myth (the belief in the great unbroken Pan).

And the totality must not only be critical, but above all, *non-contemplative*: only in this way does it reach the point of not letting the uncompleted and uncorrected in the past remain there; instead, the concealed contradiction to the past and the revealed one to the present mesh in the dialectical practical gears. Hegel’s dialectical totality was still merely a totality of recollected knowledge and was monadic as well, in which “no link was not drunk” but in which each could still be content in its place because it was equipped “with the complete wealth of the spirit.” Of course, Hegel likewise viewed the following stage as the intended higher truth of the preceding one and the totality more and more precise in the respectively last link; indeed, he has the contradiction to the

entirety of the entire thing as the driving basic contradiction in the individual contradictions (and even in the individual reconciliations). Here, dialectics is not only unity of contradictions (as for Schelling), but unity of unity and of contradictions.

If, however, the Hegelian truth of the last stage is to be put into practice as well as the “self” that “has to penetrate and digest this entire wealth of its substance,” then the penetration can only be a non-contemplative one, or one that possesses the wealth of the substance, not in gilded pasts, but in the actual heritage of its end in the Now—in short, one that gains *additional revolutionary force* from the *incomplete* wealth of the past, especially if it is not “sublated” in the last stage. The still subversive and utopian contents in the relations of people to people and nature, which are not past because they were never quite attained, can only be of use in this way. These contents are, as it were, the gold-bearing gravel in the course of previous labor processes and their superstructures in the form of works. Polyphonous dialectics, as a dialectics of the “contradictions” which are more concentrated today than ever, has in any case enough questions and contents in capitalism that are not yet “superseded by the course of economic development.” The proletarian voice of synchronous dialectics remains decidedly the leading one; but both above and below this *cantus firmus* (fixed hymn) run disorderly emissions which can only be related to the *cantus firmus* (fixed hymn) by its relating itself to them—in a critical and non-contemplative totality. And multispatial dialectics proves itself above all in the dialecticization of still “irrational” contents which are, in terms of their still critical positivism, the “nebulae” of the nonsynchronous contradictions.

Translated by Mark Ritter