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The Dialectic of Circulation. Marx, Hegel, Plato

1

In his early writings, Marx develops, in part with Frederick Engels, the notion of ideology for the purpose of overcoming the philosophy of his time. The dissociation of the Marxian discourse from philosophy, this desire to overcome philosophy, finds one of its culminations in the 11th thesis on Feuerbach, which states with excessive clarity: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.”¹

This clarity is excessive, especially as Marx in his early writings at no point develops a discussion on the question of philosophy as such, but rather thoroughly attacks the philosophy of his time, mainly the leftovers of the Hegelian discourse and the young Hegelians’ attempts to understand the world according to the concepts of the mind. ‘Philosophy’ in the early Marx is the philosophy of the young Hegelians. At a certain point the disagreement with this type of philosophy seems to spread into philosophy as such.

The young Hegelians, followers of the philosophy Marx is concerned with, are criticised regarding two main aspects. Firstly, they invert the relation between mind and world; following Hegel, they seek to explain everything on the grounds of concepts of consciousness. But secondly, even worse is their assertion of the independence of the concept. The young Hegelians take the concept to be an independent reality of its own value, and this means that they understand the concept to be built upon its own force. Thought becomes autonomous.

Ideology, of which philosophy is the strongest expression, can be understood as a critical notion that is directed against these two characteristics of the young

¹ Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach”, in: Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition, Norton, New York/London 1978, pp. 143–145, here p. 145.

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Hegelian current. It critically denounces the inversion of the relation between reality and concept, as it critically denounces the apparent independence and autonomy of the concept, seemingly relying on its own forces. A combination of two aspects might at first view appear, at least in part, to be tautological, as the second moment – the apparent independence of the concept – could be understood as already implying the first moment, namely the inversion of the relation between reality and concept. One might argue that a concept that is built on its own forces implicitly positions the world to be a consequence of concepts.

But the second criterion is an intensification of the critique that Marx and Engels utter. The young Hegelians understand a change of the world as a change in consciousness, and thus they follow Hegel as they begin from the point of consciousness, but they also take the concepts of consciousness to be a reality of their own. Reality becomes the reality of consciousness, and this means that a change of consciousness is a change of reality.

From this point, it seems evident that the only possible rejection of this structure of philosophy has to be its reorientation towards the real reality. What needs to be done is to reorient the inverted relation between world and mind and to criticise the apparent autonomy of the mind. Thus, the discourse of philosophy, i.e. the discourse of the apparent autonomy of the mind, needs to be overcome by a discourse of reality. And this is the programme of the early Marx: Reality conditions the mind, and this means that reality precedes the mind and the mind consequently cannot be conceived of as independent. This programme has often been criticised; not only are the debates on the question of the humanism of the early Marx implied here, but also Marx's and Engels's emphasis on the reality of life has often been rejected. Althusser, for example, denounced the context of the notion of ideology as “plainly positivist.”²

122

Although Marx and Engels do indeed stress the notion of real life in an empiricist tone in *The German Ideology*, as well as the science of real life, and although they juxtapose it with the ‘phrases’ of philosophy, this opposition between real-

² Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, in: *Lenin and Philosophy, and other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, Monthly Review Press, New York 1971, pp. 127–186, here p. 159.

ity and philosophy is far more complicated than it seems at first view.³ There are especially two complications that need to be mentioned. The first one is rather simple, and might even not be considered an objection to the reproach of a dualistic opposition between reality and philosophy. This complication arises from the inner ambivalence of this opposition itself: The discourse of philosophy is criticised as a discourse on the apparent independence of its concepts, and following Marx, these apparent concepts would need to be replaced by an empiricist scientific approach. One recognises the famous broad opposition between science and ideology, as Althusser maintained. Within this opposition, then, a certain empiricist positivism is implied, directed against the nebulous concepts of philosophy, but once we focus on philosophy as the highest form of ideology, the opposition between philosophy and science indicates a conflict on the level of concepts, and therefore a conflict about the true concept. The apparent conflict between philosophy and science is a conflict on the level of concepts.

The second complication concerns the determination of the juxtaposed reality. Contrary to what one might suppose, the self-referential world of philosophy is not criticised by reference to reality as the essential being of the world. The concept of reality that Marx proposes escapes any essentialism. The reality Marx refers to is a reality of relations, in which the human being is understood to live under the condition of specific circumstances. The most distinct example is to be found in Marx's definition of the human being as a species-being in the *Paris Manuscripts*.⁴ The concept of reality that is developed in the early Marx can be understood as a concept of the conditionality of anything that exists – anything that is only exists in the context of specific circumstances and under specific conditions. Even if certain moments of positivism and empiricism are implied in the arguments, the interesting and theoretically valid point is not reference to the facts, but rather reference to the fact that any fact is related and conditioned.

³ See Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, in: Marx/Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 3 (MEW 3), Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED (ed.), Dietz-Verlag, Berlin 1978, p. 20.

⁴ “Man is a species-being, not only because he practically and theoretically makes the species – both his own and those of other things – his object, but also – and this is simply another way of saying the same thing – because he looks upon himself as the present, living species, because he looks upon himself as a universal and therefore free being.” Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts (1844)*, in: *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Penguin Books, London 1992, pp. 279–400, here p. 327.

This does not save Marx's argument from the general suspicion of metaphysical nuances, but it does refute the objection of positivism.

If thus the true pair of opposites in the early Marx is the pair of Reality and Ideology, we get a relation in which one side, reality, is defined as a conditionality and relationality, while the other side, Ideology, is defined as self-referential or precisely as the interruption of any relationality or conditionality. We find an opposition between relationality and autonomy, and the problem is that this opposition occurs as a relation itself. For, as we have already seen in the critical content of the notion of ideology – namely the connection between the critique of the inversion of the mind-world relation and the critique of the apparent autonomy of the concept – the opposition between relationality and autonomy is itself the outcome of a process; its forms are forms of a development. The reality that Marx invokes against the self-relation of philosophy is at the same time the reality that conditions this self-relation. It is the same reality on both sides. And this reality is, in the end, the division of labour – the beginning of all human relationality in the sexual act⁵ – which finds its purest form in the division of reality and philosophy, a division in which the side of philosophy will be able to understand itself only in relation to itself. Philosophy is the split of the relation in that specific sense that it does not negate the question of relation, but it is a perversion, taking relation to be a self-relation.

But if this opposition is then to be understood to be the result of a development, this does not only imply that the apparent autonomy of philosophy is conditioned by reality, it also means that the apparent autonomy of philosophy is itself a part of reality. And then again, reality cannot be taken as a negation of philosophy, although, from the point of view of reality, philosophy negates reality. From its own point of view, philosophy negates that there is something else. Thus, in this couple, reality and philosophy, negation is found on the side of philosophy, while one would have to admit that reality affirms even the reality of

124

⁵ “This sheep-like or tribal consciousness receives its further development and extension through increased productivity, the increase of needs, and, what is fundamental to both of these, the increase of population. With these there develops the division of labour, which was originally nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act, then the division of labour which develops spontaneously or ‘naturally’ by virtue of natural predisposition (e.g., physical strength), needs, accidents, etc., etc.” Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, Prometheus, New York, NY 1998, p. 50.

philosophy, although it affirms the reality of philosophy as that of a split. Reality affirms the reality of its other, namely philosophy, while philosophy negates the reality of the other. This negation is, from the point of view of reality, a dissociation – philosophy dissociates itself from reality, while reality is defined as the contrary: reality is an association, including the existence of the other. Reality affirms itself as an other, it is a different same.

The problem we are left with in the early Marx is then the following: if reality is considered to be conditioned and within relations, we could not only wonder whether this opens the path for a general relativism, but we might also ask why the non-relationality and self-relation of philosophy cannot simply be understood as another turn of the development of reality. If philosophy exists as a part of reality, why should reality be opposed to the ideological version of philosophy? At this point it might seem suitable to open the question of right and wrong. A possible answer to this problem might then be: Even if philosophy is a specific part of reality – even if it is real, in other words – philosophy presents a false understanding of reality. But the reference to right and wrong, false and true, is no real solution, because the definition of reality precisely contradicts any claim to a correct representation. Reality does not refer to an identity, and therefore it cannot be identified in a false or correct manner. So, the question remains: Why not reduce ideology to a part of reality, and why not claim an absolute relationality that even implies the self-relationality of ideology? How do we escape an absolute relationality? It is an absolute relationality that brings about two problems – on the one hand, a para-metaphysical claim as to the relationality of all being, and on the other hand, the proposal of an identification of reality as such – and thereby produces a contradiction in terms. So how do we escape an absolute relationality that would leave us in the abyss of an absolute contradiction, the abyss of a self-contradictory metaphysical claim?

2

In a very famous passage in *Sophist*, the discussion between the Stranger and Theaetetus examines the gigantomachy between those who believe that only bodies have a being and those who believe that only ideas have a being. After showing that those who believe in the material being of everything have to admit that there is at least something that exists and is not material, that there is at least a certain *dynamis*, a power that exists and is not material, the Stranger

proves that also the ‘friends of ideas’ need to accept that reason is in movement. But if reason is in movement, this leads to the problem that reason is in general considered to be at rest – stable, we could say – while at the same time it is proven to be in movement, because it has a soul.

This brings about a new problem, for the result cannot be that something is at rest and is in motion. If they were, then rest and movement either would both have to be moving or both would have to be at rest, which cannot be. So they *are*, but they are not the same. The consequence is then that being has to be considered as a category apart from movement and rest. If we understand rest and movement as the categories of identity and change, we can see that ‘at rest’ is that which refers only to itself – what is identical – and this is why reason, the example we began with, has to be ‘at rest’, if it is not supposed to change at any moment. But as reason also has a soul and a life, reason is also in movement, or, put differently, reason changes. But identity and change are neither identical nor both in movement. So we receive identity, change, and being as three categories on the same level.

From here we come to the problem between the one and the many. As we usually describe the one with many determinations – we describe one person with many characteristics – the question now turns into the question of whether everything needs to be kept apart in its one-ness or whether everything needs to be mixed. Is there only identity, or is everything in movement and changing continuously?

One can see that this question already addresses the difficult *relation* between the three categories of rest, movement, and being. If they are as categories only at rest, or if they simply rest identical with themselves, if no participation is possible, if nothing is mixed, then movement and rest could not participate in being. But then again, if everything is mixed, we end up with the contradiction of rest being moved and movement being at rest. The Stranger wants to avoid any of these contradictions, and therefore it can only be that some things mix and others do not.

To further understand this problem, the Stranger suggests adding two more categories, namely that of the same and that of the other: because the already secured categories of movement, rest, and being differ from each other but

are also in a relation of sameness to themselves. This means the categories of sameness and otherness spring from the first line of categories; they are already comprised within them. And as the categories of rest, movement, and being cannot be subsumed under the new categories of sameness and difference, the latter have to be further categories, so that in the end we have five categories: Rest, Movement, Being, Same, Other. The category of the other passes, as the Stranger argues, throughout all the other categories, insofar as each category differs from the other categories, every category is an other in relation to the other categories. If we then take the specific example of movement, we see that movement is different from being, movement and being are not identical, and then we have to admit that we find in the category of movement something that is not being, or: there is something in movement which *is not*. But if non-being exists in movement, we can also conclude that non-being exists throughout all the other categories. The existence of non-being, which here is indirectly proven, is the overall goal of this argument, because the problem of the categorisation of the sophist led the dialogue to the examination of the appearance, and afterwards to the problem of the existence of non-being, and now finally we receive otherness as a category that proves that non-being exists.

In this system of five categories we can discern a doubled set of structures. On the one hand, the five categories are systemised on one level. All the categories follow in one series; they are all necessary on their own, as they are all different from the others, but they also participate in the other categories. But on the other hand, the reason for this systematisation is already the inscription of a second series, the series of sameness and otherness, which opens a second layer of the same structure. This second layer brings the structure of sameness and otherness to the fore, according to criteria that are found within the first structure – rest, movement, being.

127

The specifics of this constellation can be seen more clearly in Hegel's very interesting reading of this passage of *Sophist*. The point Hegel is referring to in an incisive manner takes place some moments later in the discussion between the Stranger and Theaetetus. After they have established the five categories, the Stranger remarks that it is difficult and beautiful at the same time to consider the same as different or the different as the same, which is possible from a specific perspective that one might have on a certain thing.

To quote Plato, one needs “to be able to follow the things that are said both whenever someone says it to be the same while it is other *in a sense*, and whenever someone says it to be other while it is the same, and show by examination in case by case that it’s *in that sense* and according to that that either of them has been affected as the speaker says it has.”⁶

Hegel refers to this passage, but gives it a specific twist. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel says: “Plato says definitively that what is other – τὸ ἕτερον – is also the same (αὐτόν) or the self-identical, and what is the same (self-identical) is the other too, and indeed in one and the same respect (and not in such a way as to confute and contradict one another), and according to the same aspect, so that they are identical.”⁷

As can be seen quite clearly, Hegel adjusts Plato’s claim to his own systematic point, and even explicitly rejects the aspect of relation that Plato was actually referring to, when pointing out that things are said in a sense. For Plato, the same can be the other and the other can be the same according to different relations from a subjective point of view. With Hegel, sameness and otherness are integrated into the same process that becomes other. But it is not only the subjective account that is deleted; a further relation is also withdrawn. Indirectly, for Plato, the sense is a *relation* that orients the possibility of something *same* becoming something *other*. So that something *same* can become something *other in relation* to the sense in which it is taken.

But let us take one example in which this logic in its Hegelian change is played out, the famous example of the dialectic between Lordship and Bondage from

⁶ Plato, *Sophist*, in: *The Being of the Beautiful, Plato’s Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman*, trans. Seth Benardete, University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London 1984, 259c-d. Emphasis added.

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Vol. II: Greek Philosophy*, trans. Robert F. Brown, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2006, p. 201. In German, the passage reads: “Platon spricht es so aus: das, was das Andere ist, ist das Negative überhaupt, – dies ist Dasselbe, das mit sich Identische; das Andere ist das Nichtidentische, und dies Dasselbe ist ebenso das Andere, und zwar in ein und derselben Rücksicht. Es sind nicht verschiedene Seiten, nicht im Widerspruch bleibend; sondern sie sind diese Einheit in einer und derselben Rücksicht, und nach der einen Seite, daß das Eine von ihnen gesetzt ist, sind sie identisch nach derselben Seite.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie II*, in: G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke* Vol. 19, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1971, p. 75.

Phenomenology. Hegel introduces the dialectic between the Lord and the Bondsman as the confrontation of a consciousness with another consciousness, or as the confrontation of the *one* with the *other*, indicating thereby that we are entering the realm of forms of self-consciousness that act as a multiplicity of living forms of the I and the We.

“The Lord is the consciousness that exists *for itself*,” as Hegel writes, but as this existence for itself, the Lord exists as mediated through another, and this is how the Lord is related to the Bondsman, “mediately”.⁸ The Lord is in an immediate relation to himself, mediated by his relation to the Bondsman. The Bondsman, however, works on the thing, which he is not able to fully negate, and therefore the thing rests independent of him. Out of a first moment of mutual recognition, insofar as both Lord and Bondsman act out of a certain incapability towards the thing, there results a first inversion. In his consciousness, the Lord is dependent on the servant: “The *truth* of the independent consciousness is accordingly the servile consciousness of the bondsman.”⁹ In the next step Hegel shows how the Bondsman will also invert his relation to himself. It is through the work on the thing that he is able to relate to himself. In opposition to the Lord, his work is an act of realisation: What the Lord can only desire and then only enjoy via the mediation of the servant, the servant does actually work upon. He is able to hinder the desire, to interrupt the consumption of the thing, by working on it. Instead of the disappearance caused by the Lord, the Bondsman can create permanence. But at the same time the Bondsman is affected by fear, as he now realises that he ‘exists in his own right’, that he has his own consciousness. Between that fear and the formative activity that the servant unfolds, he needs to establish a skill with which some things can be mastered, but not the thing in general, not the generality of the thing. Instead of a general master, the servant becomes the skilful master of many things.

129

This famous scene puts the accent on the mutual recognition of the other in the same and the same in the other, and this structure is organised around the thing. Via the mediation of the thing, the one and the other are led to the recognition that the other is the same, and that the same is the other. The other

⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York 1977, p. 115.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

consciousness is a consciousness, too, and the consciousness itself is related to the other consciousness as well. They are the same, insofar as they both act upon the thing and are both dependent. They are others, insofar as the Lord actually finds his truth in the dependent servant and insofar as the servant effectively masters the thing through his work. Self-relation is relation to the other, mediated by the thing.

If we compare this situation to the relation of the same and the other in Plato, we recognise that the process is arranged in a different direction. We can list the moments of difference: Firstly, the contradiction is a necessary part of the process, as the scene of recognition is not only some random event, but necessary for the unfolding of the consciousness as self-consciousness – and thus the scene describes the unfolding and the sublation of a contradiction. Secondly, the relation between the one and the other is a symmetrical relation with the complicated thing in its middle. Thirdly, there exist differences between the sides of the master and the slave, but these differences are not organised, are not formalised. We see, for example, that the servant in the end is better off, because he is actually able to establish permanence, to create a world. So it is a dissymmetrical scene that via a mutual recognition and via a symmetrical contradiction is led into an inversed dissymmetry. But a part of the dissymmetry cannot be referred to the dialectic of the one and the other; rather a certain contingency is inscribed from the beginning that moves the symmetrical scene.

In Plato there is a dialectic that is organised around the question of senses and that refuses to inscribe the contradiction as it also refuses to localise the other. In Hegel there is a dialectic that is organised around the contradiction and that finds its transport in the mediation of the thing, but that refuses to inscribe the sense as it also refuses to localise a specific sense – because as soon as one position is taken it will develop into its other. Hegel thus localises the contradiction, but refuses, in some sense, to localise the same and the other, as the same is only the same in its very being the other.

130

There are two questions that might be raised at this point, namely: a) How do these two different organisations of dialectic relate to each other?; and b) Where do we find Marx in this situation?

3

Marx, as we saw, thinks reality as opposed to a real existing ideology. This opposition is asymmetrical insofar as it is, as we saw, a relation of different relations: The side of reality is a relation to the other; the side of ideology is the relation to the self. From a structural point of view, ideology is not related in the same way to its other as reality is. Both sides, the side of reality and the side of ideology, actually refer to their others according to a specific sense. The position taken by ideology is the dismissal of any otherness. The position taken by the side of reality is not the dismissal of sameness, but the affirmation of otherness. It is thus actually the structure of dissymmetry that allows different positions to arise. Hegel, however, dismisses the inscription of a position and develops the dialectic into the form of a contradiction within one process. The difference that organised the relation between one and the other in Plato thereby becomes the contradiction that moves the process in Hegel.

In Plato, the difficulty with the question of non-being is resolved by an analysis of differences, but the result – that non-being exists – is nevertheless troublesome, because indirectly the question of the contradiction persists in Plato. It is hidden and dissolved on the surface, but one of the conclusions from Plato's result is, of course, the existence of non-being in being itself, a conclusion that amounts to a contradiction but which is not directly examined as that. Furthermore, we find in Plato the constellation of two layers of thought that are not even two different layers: In the first series of concepts there was movement, rest, and being, and then sameness and otherness, as further categories, are drawn from this series. In the first series, 'being' was introduced as a further category because being could not be understood as a higher category that would comprehend rest and movement. Being as a category did not subsume rest and movement as its lower categories. The categories of the same and the other refer to the relation between the categories of the first series; they are not a proper addition, but rather a conclusion from within. But then Plato adds these categories within the first series, and this presents a specific ambivalence: On the one hand, a contradiction is inscribed between being and non-being, between the first series and the second series, but on the other hand, this contradiction is reduced to a set of differences.

In his interpretation Hegel focuses on the contradiction and radically restructures the process, but he misses the organisation of differences and as well misses the question of the positioning. The question of the position, to remark on the side, is not a question of the subject, but it is rather a question of the multiplicity of conflicts. For Plato, it is actually possible that there are different accounts of the same thing, as the one or the other, according to different positions, and this enables him to say in the end that there are different conflicts that relate to each other as being the same or other. The question of the subject in Plato should rather be localised at the void point of the hidden-but-present contradiction within the set of differences.

What about Marx, then? As we saw, Marx localises the contradiction in the set of philosophy and reality, although he also accounts for both sides being a part of reality. But it is only from the side of reality that philosophy can be localised as a specific part of reality. Thus we find a structure of a sense or of a position inscribed, but we also find the Platonic order of differences. Finally, the contradiction is then also inscribed: because it is actually the self-referential discourse of philosophy that rejects and contradicts reality, and it is at this point that the contradiction appears. In Plato, the other did not contradict the same, it was simply other than the same, but it did also participate in the same. Bourgeois philosophy is other than that, it does not participate in something else; it only refers to itself, it understands itself as a different type of sameness, and therefore it opens the contradiction that the same is not the same. Bourgeois philosophy, dissociating itself from reality, opens the contradiction on the plane of reality.

Marx can thus be said to rearrange the dialectical question of differences and contradiction. This is not simply a question of an addition, it might rather be the result of a different position. Marx – this is where we began – opens a discourse that seeks to withdraw from philosophy. But this withdrawal from philosophy is built on the conviction of the conditionality of any discourse. Marx can then structure his own discourse on this immanent gap of any discourse, namely that any discourse relies on conditions and is inscribed into relations. Strictly speaking, this is the point at which the contradiction sets in: The discourse of philosophy is preceded by something that it is not able to grasp. Of course, we could ask why the same issue should not be applied to Marx's own discourse of 'reality'. Is not the Marxian discourse itself founded on conditions and set into relations, and would not this open an endless series in which in the end

everything becomes the same? But it is the localisation of the contradiction that escapes such relativism here. Bourgeois philosophy finds itself conditioned by something it cannot oversee, and Marx presents this contradiction as the discourse of reality. Therefore, the conditionality is specific, and not general. Marx's discourse is not one of the general conditionality of any discourse, but a discourse on the concrete determination of the specific discourse of bourgeois philosophy. It can be such because it exits philosophy, because it understands itself as a specific discourse. To open this contradiction, to make it visible, he needs to take a position outside the discourse of philosophy as the discourse of the general. He needs to present an other thought, a specific thought that is no longer burdened by the generality of the philosophical discourse. More specifically, we see that the Marxian discourse operates its exit from philosophy within philosophy: it presents a specific discourse within philosophy as its other.

At this point we have the structure of a set of differences within one thought in Plato, we have the structure of a contradiction within one thought in Hegel, and now we find the presentation of an inner exterior thought in Marx as the combination of difference and contradiction. The contradiction is the real condition of thought; it is therefore the conditionality of thought that appears on the plane of reality.

And here we see that something gets lost in Marx, because he thinks it is enough to take this position on the side of reality and to not draw consequences from the fact that this position on the side of reality is a position taken within thought. Marx posits the contradiction as a pure position, an act, which he considers to be an act of conditionality. But with this act, started within philosophy, he moves outside philosophy and proposes the opposition of reality to philosophy as a contradiction that appears between thought and reality. And a contradiction outside thought, a contradiction even posited against thought is unwillingly sent back to the relation of the one and the other. And so we are sent back to the relation of the one and the other, although this time we see that the real contradiction is linked to a position, to a sense.

The position changes the order of the given facts and inscribes the contradiction into the reality of differences; it is what allows for the beginning of an asymmetrical relation. This then is what Plato was incapable of articulating, that the beginning of the asymmetry, the position, unfolds as a contradiction in the

very moment that the thing is not simply an object viewed in different relations, rather the thing effectively changes the relation between the one and the other. This is what Hegel sees: the different relations unfold an effectivity of their own, and he inscribes this effectivity into the contradictory thing and suspends the question of the differences of positions. But once the contradiction is the other of thought, it falls back into the structure of the one and the other. In Hegel it will be the other of the one, and here we risk the sameness of symmetry and contradiction. But this symmetry is excessive, because it prepares for the contradiction to exist, and once it exists, it is already again the other of the one. It is impossible for the contradiction to escape the logic of thought, the logic of the other and the one. But it also impossible for the contradiction not to be, and where it appears, it prepares for the excess. This is the circulation of dialectics.

Marx then seeks to reintroduce the position as the proper formulation of the contradiction; he enables the contradiction to appear, but at the same time sends it back to the relation of the one and the other. The appearance nevertheless is necessary, because it marks the excess of dialectics itself. This is, so to speak, the dialectics of circulation.

Dialectics thus presents itself as a process that thinks itself. At any time in this process there are three positions to be thought, the positions of Plato, Hegel, and Marx. Plato is only fully understood once he is read via Hegel and Marx, Hegel is only fully understood once he is read via Plato and Marx, and Marx finally is only fully understood once he is read via Plato and Hegel.

At any point we can think dialectics fully and understand it. But it will always be a rational understanding that is bound and connected to a position, to a real conditionality of thought, and it will always again have to solve the riddle of the relation between the differences and the contradiction, which can only be solved as a real position.

Dialectics, as a real figure of thought, finds its reality therefore in a politics that presents us this specific problem of the relation between differences and contradiction. This problem is known under the name of democracy, in Plato, in Hegel, but also in Marx. Dialectics thinks itself; this then also means that it presents the reality of democracy precisely as a real contradiction. The name we might put here may be left in suspension.