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Jessica Marian, Elliot Patsoura, Joe Hughes

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The Work of Interpretation: *Critique* and the Review Form, 1946–1967

Jessica Marian, Elliot Patsoura, and Joe Hughes

Abstract: This article examines a series of pivotal moments in the history of the postwar French journal *Critique*, tracing the development, refinement, and reassertion of the journal's singular style of critical practice. We present the journal's founding documents and consider editor Georges Bataille's identification of Maurice Blanchot as the guiding model for the journal. Then we examine two defining texts in the review's development: Alexandre Kojève's "Hegel, Marx and Christianity" (1946) and Alain Badiou's "The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism" (1967). Kojève's celebrated article crystallised the ideals of the journal's programme; Badiou's article meanwhile tested those ideals, precipitating a minor editorial crisis.

GEORGES BATAILLE'S INFLUENTIAL REVUE *Critique* has been curiously neglected in histories of postwar French thought.¹ Almost all of the other major journals—*Présence Africaine*, *Tel Quel*, *Les Temps Modernes*, *La Nouvelle Revue française*, *Esprit*, the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*—have had significant book-length studies devoted to them.² Yet there is only one study of *Critique*—Sylvie Patron's *Critique 1946-1996, Une encyclopédie de l'esprit moderne*.³ This dearth of critical attention is disproportionate to the significant role the journal played in postwar French thought.⁴ *Critique* published some of the most important articles of the period. Maurice Blanchot published prolifically at *Critique* during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, including, most notably, the two reviews later brought together as "Literature and the Right to Death."⁵ Jacques Lacan's "Kant with Sade"⁶ was published in *Critique* in 1963. Jacques Derrida's "Force and Signification" (1963)⁷ and his two-part "Of Grammatology" also appeared there (1965-66).⁸ The latter would, of course, be expanded—under the encouragement of editor Jean Piel—into the book of the same title (*Of Grammatology* [1967]) which was itself published in Éditions de Minuit's series *Collection Critique*. This book series points to the wider influence *Critique* would have in the development of intellectual culture in the postwar period. In the early days of the series, the books it published were, like *Of Grammatology*, expanded versions

of reviews that had been published in *Critique*. Bataille's *Literature and Evil* (1957), Gilles Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense* (1969), Pierre Clastres's *Society Against the State* (1974), and Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), for instance, were all developed this way. By the 1960s, Patron observes, publishing in *Critique* had become a kind of rite of passage: the journal was the place where the great works of the period were published, either in their nascent state as a review, later as a book, or sometimes in both forms.⁹

With the possible exception of Clastres's *Society Against the State*, these defining works of the period share a certain philosophical style: the indirect development of an argument, a merging of philosophical positions, and an indiscernibility of speaking positions. Many of those features, in fact, point back to the editorial practices at *Critique*. In this article, we trace the development, refinement, and reassertion of *Critique's* singular style of critical practice, by focusing on three defining moments. We first address the founding of the journal and the unique mode of criticism it sought to cultivate. We then examine two individual articles published in *Critique*: Alexandre Kojève's "Hegel, Marx and Christianity" (1946), which was figured by Bataille as exemplary of the review's early critical project, and Alain Badiou's "The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism" (1967), which sparked editorial debate because it transgressed the norms of that same project. The founding documents of the review set out an idealized program for the journal, and the other two moments respectively realized and tested those ideals. Whether realized or tested, what interests us here is the way *Critique* institutionalized a mode of critical engagement that had far-reaching influence, transforming the nature of philosophical commentary.

A guiding methodological principle of our approach here is that the scene of work is not limited to the work: institutional work also demands an interpretation. It, too, is an operation that works over and transforms raw materials, a transformation that redistributes the sense of those materials and thus calls for interpretation. One of the recurrent themes in the founding documents of *Critique* was the goal to work both on and in the circulation of ideas, to tarry with the movement of spirit, and to establish a new field for the reflection on actuality. To take this ambition seriously, then, would mean that a sociological approach to the review misses something essential to its object: namely, its character as a kind of work in the field of ideas. For this reason, our approach is very different to that of a sociology of institution.¹⁰ If the institution itself is a kind of work, it is not enough to name the actors involved, register their explicit formulation of ends, and map the structure of the field in which the review is positioned. One has to determine the sense

of the critical labor organized and oriented by the review, the specific critical practice institutionalized and disseminated by *Critique*. That, of course, does not mean one can neglect its position in the field. On the contrary, it is there that we will begin.

I. The Field

Critique was established at the beginning of what Anna Boschetti has characterized as a postwar “reconstruction” of the literary and philosophical review.¹¹ The nature of this reconstruction took different forms depending on the specific experiences of continuity or rupture caused by the war. Some journals, such as the Catholic journal *Esprit* (1932) or Leon Brunschvicg’s *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* (1893), ran continuously or paused only briefly during the war. Among these, the *Nouvelle Revue française* is no doubt the most extreme and problematic case. Before the war it published the leading thinkers and writers of the interwar period: Jean-Paul Sartre, André Malraux, and André Gide. During the war, it became one of the leading voices of the Vichy regime until it was closed down for collaboration. In 1953, it was reopened by Jean Paulhan as the *Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue française*.

There were also a handful of new journals that started up with the hope of either returning to established prewar projects or responding to the new postwar situation. In 1946, for example, Jean Wahl established *Deucalion*, a journal whose aim was to take up and continue the lines of avant-garde philosophy represented by journals from the interwar period such as *Bifur* and *Recherches Philosophiques*. Alongside these restarts, there were two new journals that defined the field: Sartre’s *Les Temps modernes* and Bataille’s *Critique*. The foundation of *Les Temps modernes* is well documented and quasi-legendary: it grew out of the resistance group *Socialisme et Liberté*, which included among its members Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, among others. Their explicit goal in founding *Les Temps modernes* was, as de Beauvoir put it, and as Howard Davies has emphasised, to “give to the post war an ideology.”¹²

Critique is distinctly unlike *Les Temps modernes* in many ways. A thorough account of their relation would have to make a detour through the complex personal relations between Bataille and Sartre. There are, however, two immediately obvious structural differences between the journals that we want to emphasize in order to indicate the singularity of *Critique*. First, *Critique* is a review: it publishes not original works but reviews of works already in circulation. Its aim is not to produce a new “synthetic” account of a “situation” but to submit synthetic accounts

to critique. We'll return to this below. Second, *Critique* is not tied to a group or to an ideology. *Critique* has no manifesto comparable to Sartre's "Presentation des *Temps modernes*."¹³ In deliberate contrast to other contemporary journals, and especially to *Les Temps modernes*, Bataille fostered a strategy of political neutrality at *Critique*.¹⁴ In this respect, the aim of *Critique* is also markedly different from Bataille's earlier work in, for example, the *Collège de Sociologie* and its corresponding publication *Acéphale* or, indeed, in his interwar Surrealist magazine *Documents*. These groups and reviews had the explicit end of marking out an intellectual or an aesthetic community. They were based on commitments, on positions taken and disputes in the field of ideas. *Critique*, by contrast, had no immediately obvious intellectual, political, or aesthetic program. While many of the figures from the *Collège* and many of Bataille's Surrealist friends from *Documents* were involved in the early days of *Critique*, their work appeared alongside radically different viewpoints, and they were clearly no longer the orienting force of the review.¹⁵ What the appearance of these names in the pages of *Critique* retrospectively makes visible is precisely the fragmentation of those prewar communities, their loss of force and coherence. At the same time, we can see in that disorientation the beginnings of a new kind of coherence around a new kind of intellectual community.

Patron, in reconstructing these lines, demonstrates that while *Critique* did not have a manifesto, it did have a determinate vision or "vocation." As Patron writes, the review "established a relation of injunction with its readers" across a heterogeneity of different kinds of texts: "the initial project, editorials, addresses to its readers, publicity bulletins, and publisher's catalogues."¹⁶ Philippe Roger, the current editor of *Critique*, has made similar claims to a broad critical project or overriding critical approach. Roger locates this unity at the level of style, proposing that "an original critical style thus came to flower [at *Critique*]"—for Roger, this was a mode of "affirmative critique" whereby *Critique* "endors[ed] many more works than it attacked."¹⁷ It's this idea of a "critical style" that we're interested in here—and less in its affirmative mode than in the particular situation it established between commentator, object, and their mutual implication in the movement of thought. The coordinates of that critical situation were sketched in the founding documents of the review and in Bataille's first articulation of the idea of *Critique*.

The Idea of Critique

The idea for *Critique* began to take shape in conversations between Bataille and his colleague Pierre Prévost, a journalist who was then known

mostly for his writings in *Combat*, one of the major publications of the resistance. They began talking seriously about the review in October of 1945 and in December formally pitched it to Maurice Girodias, the director of Éditions du Chêne, which had just published translations of Henry Miller's novels (indeed, the very first essay in *Critique* was Bataille's defense of Miller's work against charges of obscenity, "La Morale de Miller"). Bataille's pitch to Girodias begins with a description of the "Project of the Review" (which at this point was called *Critica*¹⁸): "We propose to found, under the title *Critica*, a review of general information, touching on every domain of knowledge—history, science, philosophy, technology—as well as political and literary actuality. This review would be composed of substantial analyses of the principle works appearing in France and abroad."¹⁹ At the conclusion of the proposal, this ambition is reasserted: "*Critica*, by bringing together the best possible analyses of the best publications would faithfully—systematically—expose the movement itself, the progress, of the human spirit."²⁰ This language is repeated almost directly, with one important modification in the address to readers on the opening page of the first number:

CRITIQUE will publish studies of books and articles appearing in France and abroad.

These studies surpass the importance of simple reviews. Through them, *CRITIQUE* would like to provide an *aperçu*, the least incomplete that it can, of the diverse activities of the human spirit in all of its domains, from literary creation to philosophical inquiry, to historical, scientific, political and economic knowledge.

The articles' authors freely develop an opinion which engages only themselves, they try to ground this opinion in reason, without contenting themselves with easy polemic.²¹

Across these different fragments of texts, there is a clear constellation of ideas. *Critique* is, first of all, committed not to the total field of intellectual actuality, but to the very *best* works in that field: the works that actualize the present, that take the movement of the mind to its limit. It takes as its end the "faithful" "exposure" of actuality. It is here that its particular image of philosophical commentary begins to take shape. On the one hand, the analyses are committed to faithful description of a work; on the other, that description will figure its object systematically, tying the work back into the unfinished system of knowledge and grounding an opinion (rather than ideological commitments) in reason.²² There is a "progress" of the human spirit, then, in the sense that what is at stake is the faithful description of the new at the moment of its birth and its

integration into a systematic past. But it is a progress that leaves the singularity of the interlocutors behind, setting opinion and polemic aside in a movement toward a more impersonal rationality.

Bataille's reference to the "movement" of thought or of the "human spirit" is significant. These were watchwords of postwar French Hegelianism, and it is clear that Bataille is articulating the aims of the journal in terms of the renewal of the dialectic he and Raymond Queneau had undertaken in their 1932 "Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic": the dialectic here moves from an immanent *description* of the lived experience toward the abstraction of a figure.²³ As Jean Piel, who replaced Bataille as editor in 1962, would put it in a later interview, the aim of *Critique* is "to make a figure of the epoch (*donner une figure à tout le mouvement de la pensée actuelle*)."²⁴ The ideal form for this kind of project was the review: tethered, on the one hand, to a recent text, a fragment of actuality; it was guided, on the other, by a critical and creative spirit working over that actuality. But Bataille clearly had in mind a specific kind of review targeting a specific kind of fragment. As he notes, *Critique* would devote itself to critical studies of recently published critical works. Every review, by virtue of its form, becomes a reflection on a reflection. This distance is precisely the form's value, part of what separates it from the "simple reviews" *Critique* will avoid. It is not a matter of original history, but, to invoke Hegel's categories here, of reflective history and, ultimately, of a systematic philosophical history."

The Review Form

When Bataille and Prévost sent the proposal for *Critique* to Girodias, they included a section titled "Character of the Reviews." They first specify the length of the reviews: "three to five long analyses" and "around 25 relatively short" ones (things didn't play out this way in the end). They then make a brief but important note regarding the kind of reviews they have in mind: "The studies of Maurice Blanchot (currently published in *L'Arche* or collected in *Faux Pas*) would be considered as a model to follow."²⁵ Bataille and Prévost don't explain what makes Blanchot's reviews amenable to grasping the movement of thought, but one reason might be found in the unique form of Blanchot's reviews from that period, a form that Leslie Hill suggests was perhaps even more important "than producing a new concept or defining a new theoretical approach."²⁶

There are several key elements of this form. First, Blanchot does not occupy the position of the master in his commentaries. His language is not a language of assertion, of continuous argumentative development,

or of unequivocal evaluation according to the norms of a discipline or another community. Rather than writing from a space of neutral description or authoritative evaluation, he writes within a specifically discursive space that emerges between his own thought and the text under review, where, as he puts it, it is “a matter of questioning rather than responding.”²⁷ Second, Blanchot’s reviews progressively erase any clear line of distinction between the reviewer and the reviewed, any clear location of an utterance within a rhetorical position that might be identified as belonging to the “opinions” of this or that person. As Hill characterizes it, Blanchot tends to “occupy the discourses of others, tiring them out, pushing them to the limit, overwhelming and transforming them.”²⁸ At the same time, however, one senses that Blanchot’s own repertoire of concepts is put into play in this dialectic as well.

The very form of Blanchot’s reviews speaks to the spirit and ambitions of *Critique*: this perpetual putting into question of the very best, the opening of a discursive space in which the movement of thought might be exposed and systematized. Blanchot offered *Critique* a form in which the marks of this or that thinker are only traces of an initial orientation. *Critique*, for its part, institutionalized a certain way of writing and of doing philosophy that is a defining feature of postwar French thought: the elaboration of the new by way of commentary, a commitment to rigorously reading the work of colleagues and contemporaries and pushing it to its limit. And yet it was not the most radical form of Blanchot’s review style, represented by his writings of the later fifties on and published in *The Space of Literature* (1955) and *The Infinite Conversation* (1969)—taken up by Deleuze, Derrida, Michel Foucault, and the next generation of *Critique* contributors—that Bataille had in mind. The essay that Bataille thought most fully realized his image of the review form was published in one of its first numbers and written by an author other than Blanchot.

II. Kojève, The Early Ideal

While Bataille and Prévost initially cast Blanchot as the foundational model for their aspirations at *Critique*, Bataille would soon come to cite Alexandre Kojève as an alternative exemplar. When *Critique* was awarded the “best journal of the year” by a jury of journalists in 1947, Bataille gave an interview in *Le Figaro* in which he described a recently published review by Kojève as “mark[ing] most clearly the intentions of *Critique*, which would like to be the crossroads of philosophy, literature, religion and political economy.”²⁹ The review was Kojève’s “Hegel, Marx

and Christianity,” which had appeared in the third issue of *Critique* in September 1946, and addressed Henri Niel’s 1945 work on the concept of mediation in Hegel, *De la médiation dans la philosophie de Hegel*.³⁰ But the broader appeal of the work was also evident to Bataille, describing Kojève’s review as an antidote to the “universal confusion” of the present moment, a confusion “which now turns thought . . . into . . . stupidity, a dog’s barking in the church.”³¹

Kojève was already well known for his influential series of lectures on Hegel’s philosophy at l’École des Hautes Études from 1933 to 1939 (though they would only appear in print, as *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* edited by Raymond Queneau, one year after his review, in mid-1947). Every Monday and Friday at 5:30 p.m. between 1933 and 1939, Kojève elaborated his particular reading of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* to an impressive coterie of Parisian intellectuals, many of whom, if they hadn’t already, would come to have a major impact on French intellectual life over the coming decades. Bataille was perhaps the most enthusiastic of Kojève’s attendees, describing the feeling of being “crushed, killed twice over: suffocated and transfixed”³² by Kojève’s lectures (although Queneau, to be sure, observed Bataille occasionally falling asleep during them).³³ Kojève and Bataille were quite close on both an intellectual and a personal level, often dining together after the lectures.

Many aspects of the reading Kojève articulated during these lectures are well known. Hegel’s philosophy, for Kojève, announces a necessary end to history that would take the form of a “universal and homogeneous state.”³⁴ Kojève famously begins his reading with an account of the dialectic of recognition, the notion that what distinguishes humans from animals is their desire to be desired or recognized by another self-conscious being. Kojève makes this moment the cornerstone of Hegel’s entire philosophy and indeed the course of human history that it rehearses—an interpretative liberty that he would later describe as a “work of propaganda.”³⁵ We would like to underline a third aspect of his reading here. When Alexandre Koyré asked Kojève to take over his course, *La Philosophie religieuse de Hegel*, Kojève kept the title. But Kojève maintained that Hegel’s philosophy is fundamentally, and often against appearances, atheistic in nature.³⁶

This position puts Kojève at odds with the subject of his review, Niel, who, as we will show below, argued that Hegel’s thought was fundamentally Christian. Kojève’s engagement with his object of critique, then, is defined by a constitutive tension, but Kojève’s critical posture is not “easy polemic” or simple self-assertion of his own position. He is certainly—indeed explicitly—aware that his review amounts to an instance of “*propaganda*” (which James Nichols fittingly calls philosophical “activ-

ism”³⁷) that not only facilitates what Bataille terms the “full consciousness of the conflicts which tear [humanity] apart,” but ultimately has the capacity to instantiate the truth of the Hegelian account of history precisely by intervening in these conflicts.³⁸ In opening up this perspective, Kojève’s review develops a metareflection on the historicity of truth that illuminates *Critique*’s movement from “opinion” to an impersonal, though historically inflected rationality. Reason here, in fact, becomes identified with the review form: it is the form in which individual positions are oriented toward an open futurity, and in turn open onto the risk of historical failure.³⁹

Kojève’s review manifests a relation between this conception of the philosopher as activist/propagandist and Kojève’s particular interpretation. As Kojève himself recognizes, it is a somewhat lengthy review, so we will approach it by discussing the key points of difference between his and Niel’s respective interpretations of Hegel, and we will try to show how and why Kojève’s singular defence of his interpretation amounts, for him, to a world-shaping form of philosophical activism.

The Struggle of Ambiguity

Kojève’s review begins with a mixed assessment of Niel’s interpretation of Hegel. Niel is said to have “executed a real tour de force by summarizing in less than 400 pages almost the totality of the Hegelian writings,” and to have exhibited “a profound understanding of the general structure of Hegel’s thought” (HMC 21). By contrast, Niel comes up short for Kojève, precisely insofar as he lacks what Kojève terms a formal “understanding of Dialectic in Hegel” (HMC 21). If Niel’s text can be both a *tour de force* and fundamentally lacking at the same time, it is because Kojève institutes a distinction between summary and commentary. Niel develops “a perfectly correct summary of the dialectical philosophy,” but his misunderstanding of the dialectic is “very grave in the sense that it inspires commentaries which give a fundamentally false meaning to correctly summarised theories” (HMC 21). For Kojève, a summary can be correct but nevertheless foster incorrect meaning because Hegelian texts are necessarily, and sometimes intentionally, ambiguous: “The same text . . . can mean very different things depending on the way in which it is read” (HMC 22). Kojève is not making recourse to the polysemy of textuality; rather, his aim is to open a space where there is a genuine, unpredetermined contest between competing interpretations, performatively staging the universality of the struggle for recognition that typifies his own Hegelianism.

Setting up a genuine battle between Niel's theistic, transcendent Hegelianism and his own atheistic, historical rendition is thus crucial to Kojève's approach in this review. Kojève describes this as both an "essential misunderstanding" and one that "endures as long as Hegelianism exists," positioning the tension between theistic and atheistic interpretations of Hegel as coconstitutive with Hegelianism proper (HMC 22).⁴⁰ While Kojève admits "one often finds theological formulas in Hegelian philosophy," he argues that,

in the deepest sense, this philosophy is nevertheless radically atheistic and non-religious. For the only and the unique *reality* of the Christian notion of God for this philosophy is Man, taken in the totality of his historical evolution accomplished in the midst of nature, this totality being completed (= perfect) through the Wise Man (Hegel), who reveals itself to itself in and through the *absolute Knowledge* which he has of it. And it is enough to correctly interpret the very notions of Mediation or of Dialectic (or, if you prefer, of Negativity, of Time, of History) to understand that it cannot be otherwise. (HMC 22)

Kojève's argument here is, perhaps unsurprisingly, circular: what establishes the veracity of the understanding of the dialectic that Kojève subscribes to is the atheistic rendition of Hegelianism that it produces; similarly, it is the atheistic rendition of Hegel that points one in the direction of Kojève's understanding of the dialectic. As will become evident, this circularity and the interpretative ambiguity it engenders are by no means at odds with the performative staging of Kojève's Hegelianism.

Kojève also takes issue with Niel's claim that Hegel's thinking underwent a continual process of evolution over time, pushing back against Niel's idea that Hegel's thought evolved in any substantial way in the period between the discovery of the dialectic of recognition and Hegel's death. Once Hegel discovered the dialectic of recognition, according to Kojève, "Hegel finds himself in possession of the key notion of his whole philosophy" such that, for Kojève, Hegel's writings from 1806 onward merely recapitulate this same dialectic across the various planes of Hegel's philosophy—his phenomenology (*Phenomenology*), ontology (*Logic*) and metaphysics (*Encyclopaedia*)" (HMC 31). "Therefore, it is through the analysis of this fundamental notion," Kojève continues, "that one understands the arrangement of the different aspects and elements of the Hegelian dialectic, as well as the mutual relations between Hegel's philosophical writings" (HMC 31).

This difference between Kojève and Niel is especially important for our understanding of the strategy of Kojève's review, for what he does is arrange the debate between these competing interpretations of Hegel as yet another struggle to the death. Kojève's review is a performative

testament to the future truth of his own account. Should Kojève's thesis be recognized as true—the thesis that Hegel captured the objective movement of history and did so specifically through a universalization of this dialectic of recognition—then Kojève's own engagement with a competing interpretation of Hegel should, by necessity, follow the same playbook. But this leads him into a particular interpretative difficulty, for he cannot abstractly negate Niel's competing interpretation of Hegel. Rather, he must recognize an underlying, constitutive point of commonality between their interpretations and show how the debate remains an open one, a battle to the death undetermined in advance by transcendent categories and where each side is subject to the risk of historical failure.

One can imagine Bataille seeing in this gesture his image of the review form. It is not merely that two novel and rigorous readings of Hegel confront one another. What is key is that they confront each other not at the level of "opinion" but in a way that incorporates the conditions of their disagreement. At a performative level, Kojève locates the heart of the argument not in Niel's interpretation or his own (though it certainly supports his own), but in the very conditions of their differing interpretation, a condition Kojève places at the unchanging foundation of Hegel's thought (Dialectic, or Negativity, or Time). Kojève pursues another dimension of this in the final pages of his review, where he concludes "that the work of an interpreter of Hegel takes on the meaning of a work of political propaganda" (HMC 42). The space Kojève has carved out is necessarily a space of "propaganda," of philosophical activism, of historical efficacy, wherein one can only *assert* the correctness of their own interpretation of Hegel in an attempt to bring the very truth of this interpretation into being through their actions.

The Truths of History

There is a third and final point of contestation that we wish to underline here, one that arguably brings out the ultimate stakes of any interpretation of Hegel. Kojève takes issue with Niel's claim "that history has refuted *Hegelianism*" (HMC 41). If Hegel *had* articulated the absolute in his speculative proposition, Niel argued, then there would not currently be—nor would there have originally emerged—a split between Left and Right Hegelians. The significance of this fact for Kojève, however, is that it leads not to a "refutation" but to the specific relation of philosophical discourse to history and to the work of interpretation. "The most one can assert," Kojève writes, "is that [history] has not decided between the

'leftist' and the 'rightist' interpretations of Hegelian philosophy": "According to Hegel, a discussion can only be settled by reality, that is to say, by the realisation of one of the theses that confront each other" (HMC 41). What is at stake here is not only which modality of Hegelianism—a Left Hegelianism or a Right Hegelianism—will shape the course of history, but also (and we here return to the figure of circularity) how the course of history will shape the meaning of Hegelianism.

Kojève stages this encounter between Hegelianism and history in terms of the structure of truth, and he does so in a way that illuminates the sense and function of the review form:

In our time, as in the time of Marx, Hegelian philosophy is not a truth in the proper sense of the term: it is less the adequate discursive revelation of a reality, than an idea or an ideal, that is to say, a "project" which is to be realized, and therefore proved true, through action. However, what is remarkable is that it is precisely because it *is* not yet true that this philosophy alone is capable of *becoming* true one day. For it alone says that truth is created in time, out of error and that there are no "transcendent" criteria (whereas a theistic theory of necessity either has always been true, or is forever false). And that is why history will never refute Hegelianism, but will limit itself to choosing between its two opposed interpretations. (HMC 41)

Kojève's review is of course concerned with truth in the initial form sketched here—that of an accurate statement or interpretation, of saying something correct about Hegel. But Kojève further insists that this truth is possible only in light of an end or aim. It is part of a project, and, at the limit, the project of history. Truth can therefore be established only in or after the fact of a project's completion, but until that point, interpretation needs to remain within the indetermination of the struggle, to maintain the possibility of misrecognition, to risk the attribution of a false meaning; in short, Kojève needs to invite the fatal charge of error to his own circular account.⁴¹ What is at stake here is neither the accuracy of an interpretation nor indeed the presence of a preestablished truth; rather, it is the very bringing to being of a truth to come.

This is ultimately why Kojève takes issue with the transcendent quality of Niel's interpretation: it closes off the need for interpretative struggle and implicitly presents a static image of the Hegelian absolute. Kojève remarks that "one has the impression that [Niel] wanted to present the enemy as beaten before having even started the fight and perhaps precisely in order to avoid starting it" (HMC 40). For Kojève, however, the struggle has always already started and is still unfolding—a position that echoes Kojève's grounding of Hegel's thought in practical activity. One implication of this position is that to say history will ultimately decide

which interpretation is right leads not to an intellectual quietism but to the imperative to work. Interpretation itself becomes a form of work, an intervention into a state of affairs the success of which, nevertheless, cannot be guaranteed. This is what Kojève captures when he concludes with a reflection on the performative, necessarily “propagandistic” quality of his philosophical “activism”: “One can therefore say that, for the moment, every interpretation, if it is more than idle talk, is nothing but a program of struggle and one of work (and one of these ‘programs’ is called Marxism). And this means that the work of an interpreter of Hegel takes on the meaning of a work of political propaganda” (HMC 41-2).

What does this then mean for Bataille’s claim of the exemplary quality of Kojève’s review for *Critique*? In locating the “intention” of *Critique* in this review, Bataille is associating the institutional work of *Critique* with the direction of history during this postwar period. In the closing lines of his review, Kojève writes that “the future of the world, and therefore the meaning of the present and the significance of the past, depend, in the final analysis, on the way in which the Hegelian writings are interpreted today” (HMC 42). This sense of the relation between history and writing shaped Bataille’s image of the ideal review: the exemplary review is one that intervenes in a situation in a way that is not a single-minded assertion of a proposition but an assertion that self-consciously recalls and reflects the conditions of discourse, risking error in the process.

III. The Badiou Crisis

After Bataille’s death in 1962, *Critique* came under the general direction of Jean Piel.⁴² Bataille had formed a committee in the early years of the review made up of Pierre Prévost, Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Josserand, Jules Monnerot, Éric Weil, and Albert Ollivier, but their influence was shortlived and after the first few years almost nonexistent.⁴³ In 1962, Piel began assembling a group of both established and rising stars in the postwar philosophical firmament to support editorial decisions. Roland Barthes, Foucault, and Michel Deguy were appointed in 1962 and Derida in 1967. In the final part of this essay, we want to look at a second review that further illuminated the norms of *Critique*: Alain Badiou’s “The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism,” which appeared in the journal’s May 1967.⁴⁴ Badiou’s essay precipitated a minor editorial crisis, staged in a series of letters circulated among the members of the editorial board, and it tested the now implicit norms of discourse the review had been founded upon.⁴⁵

Unlike the general model of the Blanchotian review form, and the specific exemplar of Kojève’s “Hegel, Marx, and Christianity,” Badiou’s

review was thoroughly nonexemplary for the project then established at *Critique*. Our interest here is in what the circumstances surrounding the publication of Badiou's review might tell us about the further development and sedimentation of the editorial practices and "house style" of *Critique*. Indeed, one of the remarkable aspects of the debate concerning Badiou's review is that it centered not on the philosophical rigour or quality of Badiou's thought, but instead attended primarily to issues of tone and style. Tone and style, however, are not merely ornamental; they point to deeper structures. For the editorial board, they are symptoms of Badiou's relation to his object and markers of the position from which he speaks.

Defining Althusser

One of Badiou's first publications, the review addresses three recent works by Louis Althusser: the seminal volumes *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* (both 1965), as well as the shorter article "Matérialisme dialectique et matérialisme historique."⁴⁶ Badiou's review opens with a short polemic on the "frightening and essentially *deviant*" abandonment of theory among the "Communist parties in the 'West'" and, above all, in the Communist Party of the USSR" (R 133-34). Badiou frames Althusser's critical problematic as an intervention into this historical situation that works by articulating the specific concepts of and relations among science, ideology, and politics. Althusser's commitment to disentangling these three concepts in Marx's work marks, according to Badiou, an exception in the general field of existing "vulgar" Marxisms ("fundamental, totalitarian, and analogical"), each of which prioritizes a certain phase in Marx's writings and misrecognizes the epistemological break in Marx's thought (R 135). Althusser's Marxism, unlike these others, considers and works through the internal differences and contradictions within Marx's oeuvre, articulating "what these variants do not say," namely that science, ideology, and theory are three distinct formations of knowledge (R 13738).

A little way into the review, Badiou sets his task:

Althusser's work can be traversed in the order of *its own* reasons. It is not a matter here of retelling its story, nor of confronting it either with existing theories or with an undifferentiated concept of the real, but rather of folding it back upon itself, introducing some play into it, qua theory, according to the meta-theoretical concepts that it produces—to investigate if this work obeys the rules whose operation it isolates as the law of construction of its objects. And if there appear any lacunae, any *gaps* between that which the text produces as

the norm for itself and the textual production of these norms, our goal is less to contest the project than to “suture” its lacunae, to introduce *into* the text the problems whose absence it indicates. Thus what we engage with in the discourse of Marxist theory, without ever separating ourselves from it, is a self-recovery of its blank spaces. (R 143)

On one level, Badiou’s aims participate in the ideals that Bataille and Kojève had established for the review. In setting himself the metatheoretical task of reading Althusser in Althusserian terms, he takes a self-reflective position with respect to his object and pushes the logic of that object to its limit. Indeed, what follows is a lengthy discussion of important Althusserian concepts: the theory of historical materialism, the relation of structural causality and determining practices. But, as Badiou’s language here already suggests, he is at the same time pointing toward an altogether different approach, one that moves beyond Althusser’s own concepts and thus beyond the values and philosophical atmospheres that animated the early days of *Critique*: it is a question of moving from the “telling” of a “story” to the explicit extraction and rigorous testing of theoretical rules of operation that condition the construction of any object. While Althusser was content to reconstruct this object within a natural language, Badiou proceeds with the adoption of a new, formal language.

In the final sections of the review, Badiou seeks to pose the question of the theoretical status of dialectical materialism (which, in Althusser’s conception, is the theory of historical materialism, or the theory of history).⁴⁷ Badiou’s questioning then concerns the theoretical status of the theoretical discourse of the theory of history. He argues that Althusser’s concept of dialectical materialism “poses more problems than it solves” (R 163). First, it risks appearing too similar to Hegel’s philosophy, transforming the becoming of social formations in history into so many “figures” whose possibility is mapped in advance by “dialectical materialism” (R 162). Put differently: it risks producing itself as a merely ideological form of historical materialism, insofar as it promises a kind of conceptual closure and foundational self-sufficiency. Second, it leaves the nature of dialectical materialism’s scientificity under-theorized. Insofar as dialectical materialism collects the set of possible elements that constitute a social formation, Badiou argues, and insofar as those elements are set in relations of determination and domination, at a minimum, Althusser presupposes a theory of sets and functions.

In response to these problems, Badiou presents a brief exercise in set theory in which he attempts to formalize (rather than merely philosophize) some of the fundamental concepts of historical materialism, a task he will later pursue at length in the opening pages of *Theory of the*

Subject. This is framed as an attempt to fill in the “principle ‘blanks’ of [Althusser’s] project” (R 159), but it also involves inverting Althusser’s subordination of mathematics to the concept in *Reading Capital*.⁴⁸ This reconstruction culminates in a remarkable conclusion where Badiou *defines* Althusser. In the final two pages of the review, Badiou notes two sources of Althusser’s precarious resistance to Hegel: an openly acknowledged debt to Baruch Spinoza and an unacknowledged debt to Immanuel Kant. It is in terms of these specifically philosophical debts that Althusser is defined by Badiou *as* a philosopher (and not in terms of the “science” Althusser claimed to have constructed with Marx): “Althusser—or, in order to think Marx: Kant *within* [*dans*] Spinoza” (R 170). These two comments—defining Althusser and reconstructing his thought in a language that is not Althusser’s own, nor even a natural language—would inflect the exchanges of *Critique’s* editorial board.

Letters of the Editorial Board

The review was circulated to members of the editorial committee in early 1967. Two letters—one from Barthes to Piel, and another from Derrida to Piel—provide the outlines of the committee’s response to Badiou’s review.

Monday, early 1967

Dear friend,

In thanking you again for the lovely evening the other day, I’m sending you Badiou’s text. It’s long and difficult and unappealing to me personally. But the exceptional quality of the thinking is clear and it seems to me beyond doubt that it must be published—with the reservation about the note on Foucault, which, for me, would present no problem but for which the imprimatur of the affected party must be obtained. If Foucault doesn’t respond, really doesn’t, I think the text must be published all the same.

All my best wishes,

R. Barthes⁴⁹

26 February 1967

Cher Monsieur,

I have just reread Badiou's text. Like yourself and Barthes, I find it at least irritating because of its tone, the airs the author puts on, the "grades" (*les notes*) which he distributes as on the day of the general inspection or the Last Judgment. It seems to me quite important, in the current conjuncture and beyond. I do not think it is possible to doubt it, and I recognize its importance all the more freely because I am far from feeling 'philosophically' ready to follow it in its pursuit or in its conclusions. But this is another problem, many other problems . . . there is so much to say.

It would be better to have the agreement of Foucault, especially because of this nasty (*méchante*) note. But is it not difficult anyway, for this reason or for another, to refuse such a text or to postpone its publication for a long time? Such is my feeling, since you have kindly asked me. Allow me this opportunity to tell you how much I wish that my entry to the editorial board of *Critique*, if it is to be done formally, be subject to the agreement of all other members. So, even if Foucault's answer should be slow, I wish that no decision be taken without taking it into account. On this point at least - which may not be the case for Badiou's text - there is no urgency. And you know of course that you can count on my collaboration: do not hesitate to send me texts. I look forward to the prospect of this joint work.

Please trust, dear Sir, my most faithful feelings.

J. Derrida⁵⁰

The intimacy of Barthes's letter contrasts Derrida's more formal letter. Barthes and Piel were indeed longtime friends, whereas Derrida had not yet officially joined the review committee (though he had been advising in an informal capacity, he would not officially join until April 1967). But both agree that Badiou's essay presents a series of more or less delicate problems that the two thinkers hedge in different ways, and the fact that Piel solicited so much feedback from his editorial team suggests that he thought so too. Both Barthes and Derrida take interestingly equivocal positions: each immediately marks his dislike of the review but frames it as merely a matter of personal taste and in the next moment dismisses his position. Underneath this hedging, one can discern the ways Badiou's essay challenged the implicit norms of the review and the common values that all three had shared but are now outsourcing to the other. In what follows, we want to look at the way two different tensions resonate within these letters.

The Note on Foucault

The most obvious problem for the editorial board is Badiou's inclusion of a critical footnote about Foucault. In a long note, which begins by describing *The Birth of the Clinic* as a "true masterpiece," Badiou sharply contrasts Foucault to Althusser: only the latter has identified what a science is and understood the break it enacts from the field of ideology (a field which includes, for Marx, philosophy) (R 139-40n11). For an Althusserian, there cannot be an archaeology of science (the very task of Foucault's *The Order of Things*, published just a year prior to the note): science has no depth, and its specific power lies precisely in its shallowness and the break it operates from the patterns of everyday life and their ideological or philosophical abstraction. Badiou writes:

Science is precisely the practice without systematic substructure other than itself, without fundamental 'bedrock', and this precisely to the extent that any constituent bedrock is the theoretical unconscious of *ideology*.

On the basis of this discordance, we would try to explain:

- a) Foucault's inability to produce against the structural backdrop that he draws, in spite of its universality, the distinctive operators of science and non-science; and thus his *necessary* limitation to the archeology of the pseudo-sciences.
- b) The pre-theoretical superficiality of his judgments about Marx (cf. *The Order of Things* [. . .]). (R 139-40n11)

Patron notes that the word "*méchante*" was added to Derrida's typewritten letter by hand.⁵¹ This late addition focuses several aspects of Badiou's note. There are many ways the note might be read as nasty. First, Badiou had in fact been invited to write the review by Foucault. There is a certain sense of discomfort at Badiou's criticisms of the editorial committee member who had directly invited and encouraged the essay. No doubt those concerns were intensified by firm, evaluative comments in the note: Foucault's oeuvre is marked by a fundamental "inability," it is structured by a "necessary limitation," and his ideological (pretheoretical) fish-bowling of Marx reveals a "superficiality." Perhaps, more distantly, there is the implication that Foucault had written the history of certain sciences, underlining the transitions and breaks that made them modern, without having a well-developed concept of what a modern science is. The absence of the mathematized sciences from Foucault's archaeological project is here rendered less as a conscious decision on Foucault's part than as the product of this necessary limitation.

Badiou's comments about Foucault are not dissimilar to other comments that are littered throughout the broader essay. Badiou freely and repeatedly offers comprehensive judgments about the oeuvres of his contemporaries—Lucien Goldmann, Jean Pierre Vernant, Sartre, Derrida, Michel Serres, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, “the fundamental problem of *all* structuralism,” and others (R 157n45). It's these comments that fill out Barthes and Derrida's sense that Badiou's review is “unappealing” and “irritating” at the level of tone, the observation Derrida makes of Badiou handing out “*les notes*” as though he were the inspector general.

At one level, these concerns are local, questions of the kind of things you can publish about your colleagues, about the possible impropriety of pointing out structural limitations in the work of the person who invited you to contribute. These are not minor considerations for a journal that had been founded on friendship from the start and frequently reflected on the nature of friendship. The reviewers did indeed seek the approval of Foucault, and Foucault, in letters apparently since lost, insisted on the rapid publication of the review.⁵² At another level, this note signals a quite precise position about Foucault's work, and Foucault himself would probably agree with its description: his work *is* an attempt to make explicit and visible the governing structures of different domains of life and speech. It is set up on the territory of the ideological in Althusser's sense.⁵³ But Althusser's break with the field of ideology and philosophy and Badiou's intensification of that break supports a distinct critical stance, one defined by a break, even a certain judgmental transcendence, that connects these worries about Foucault's feelings to Derrida's comments about Badiou's tone.

Inspector Badiou

Both Barthes and Derrida express their concerns in tonal terms: for Barthes, the essay is long, difficult, and unappealing. Derrida concurs and adds some examples: its irritating tone, its self-aggrandizing airs, and the atmosphere of judgment. Both, however, insist it be published anyway on the grounds of the “exceptional quality of the thinking” and its obvious philosophical importance, and in this way, they unequivocally set tonal concerns apart from the content of the piece. And yet one would be hard-pressed to find two thinkers for whom issues of style and tone could be more important, or who would be less willing to cordon off the quality of the thought from the quality of the writing. For this editorial board in particular, tone is surely much more than an issue bound by personal preference or taste. We would argue that they are

symptoms of Badiou's relation to his object and markers of the position from which he speaks. Put differently, they relate to the very structure of critical discourse that the question of "science" brings to the foreground.

Consider Derrida's image of Badiou as either handing out grades or (foot)notes on the day of '*l'inspection générale*' or on the day of the Last Judgment. This characterization of Badiou as an officer in either an administrative or a religious procedure grasps something fundamental about their different practices of philosophizing. Derrida imagines Badiou as a kind of administrator where what is decisive about administration is precisely its distance and abstraction from both the form and material it surveils. The inspector comes from elsewhere, guided by a policy that spells out rules that are expressly *not* related to the materials under examination. On the day of judgment, he speaks from a position of transcendent authority and finality.

Badiou's approach is thus in many ways directly at odds with the ethos of review as it had been shaped over the preceding twenty years. We argued above that the early numbers of the review, taking Blanchot's reviews as their model and Kojève's as their exemplar, began to institutionalize a distinctive philosophical style: the development of argument through indirection, a merging of philosophical positions, a critical discourse open to the movement of history, and a becoming indiscernible of rhetorical standpoints and voices. What is striking about Badiou's essay is that it shares none of these characteristics. It develops its argument directly and polemically. Far from merging philosophical positions, it takes Althusser's radical scientificity and strives to push it further; and rather than allowing the positions from which one speaks to blur, Badiou insists on an extreme clarity at the level of theoretical construction. For Badiou, the reconstruction of his object in a formal language is necessary to secure the claims of his own discourse's scientificity. For the editorial board, Badiou's critical style is too terse, too distant, too conclusive, and it does not sufficiently foster the kind of open futurity of critique that Kojève's essay had exemplified.

Piel maintained serious reservations about Badiou's article. Patron reports that Piel reached out to Gerard Granel in April 1967 (that is, presumably after Badiou's article had been accepted for publication according to the advice of the editorial committee, but in advance of its actual publication) to request another review of the recent work of Althusser, a review that would be delivered "in a way I imagine very different [presumably, from Badiou's]." ⁵⁴ Granel would figure here as a less reactive, less polemic critic. Granel declined. Instead, he would prepare another article for *Critique* in 1967, "Jacques Derrida and the erasure of origin," ⁵⁵ a laudatory review, to borrow Eleanor Kaufman's name for the

genre, of Derrida's *Writing and Difference*, *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology*.⁵⁶ Badiou's essay is, in fact, the only review of Althusser's work that would appear in *Critique* during Althusser's lifetime.⁵⁷

IV. Conclusion

In this essay, we have reconstructed three moments in the early history of *Critique*: its projection of an idealised program in the founding documents, the first realization of that plan in Kojève's essay, and its testing by Badiou's essay. Charles Forsdick and Andy Stafford write in the introduction to their collection on the postwar French revue that journals are sites of "dynamic cooperation between individuals with a shared approach to cultural production."⁵⁸ That sense of dynamic cooperation, that shared approach at *Critique*, we tried to show, is best understood as a specific form of critical labour.

Critique institutionalized and disseminated a unique critical practice, even as the individual and sometimes radically heterogeneous thinkers involved with the journal developed their various independent projects. Echoing Bataille, we might say that the ideal critical practice at *Critique* is one that subjects "the best publications" of the day to "the best possible analyses," where that "best" analysis takes a specific form. Blanchot's essays provide a model in which the reviewer becomes indistinguishable at some level from the reviewed: both voices are transformed in the encounter. Kojève's review demonstrates the manner in which, even in the sharpest of negations, the position of the reviewer is still fundamentally caught up in the movement of thought, still open to the charge of error, engaging the work through difference and opposition, but also recognition and reflection. Badiou's review of Althusser was a moment of institutional reckoning in which these norms confronted what in many ways was their own determinate negation.

In charting these three moments across the first twenty years of *Critique*'s publication, we wanted to draw out the contours of a mode of philosophical reflection that was defined not by an external reflection on a work but an immersion in it; not by its secondariness or its status as a late echo, but by its elevation to a generative form. This mode of philosophical reflection, institutionalized and disseminated by *Critique*, we would suggest, in many ways shaped the practice of philosophy in postwar France.

We have also hoped to begin to develop here a novel approach to twentieth century theory and philosophy more broadly: taking the work of the journal rather than the work of one or another individual thinker

as our primary object of study, while at the same time upholding a close attention to specific texts (this, as opposed to a more distant sociology of the institution). We seek to consider the formal and generic specificities of journals, their explicitly articulated aims or programs, their implicit critical and stylistic norms, and how all of these inscribe themselves upon thought. This will enable us to understand intellectual production at the interface of philosophical writing, the material practices of periodical publishing, and networks of judgment and legitimation.

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NOTES

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1 Indeed, as Michèle Richman has noted, *Critique* figures as a lacuna even in individual biographical studies of Bataille's life and work. Richman, "Bataille Moraliste?: *Critique* and the Postwar Writings," *Yale French Studies* 78 (1990): 143.

2 See, for instance, V. Y. Mudimbe, ed., *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness 1947-1987* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992); Anna Boschetti, *Sartre et "les Temps Modernes": Une entreprise intellectuelle* (Paris: Minuit, 1985); Howard Davies, *Sartre and 'Les Temps Modernes'* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987); Patrick Ffrench, *The Time of Theory: A History of Tel Quel, 1960-1983* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995); Niilo Kauppi, *The Making of an Avant-Garde: Tel Quel* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994); and Peter Hallward and Knox Peden, ed., *Concept and Form* (London: Verso, 2012).

3 Sylvie Patron, *Critique 1946-1996, Une encyclopédie de l'esprit moderne* (Paris: Éditions de IMEC, 1999) (hereafter cited as *CUE*).

4 *Critique* would seem a somewhat conspicuous absence from the 2013 collection *La Revue: The Twentieth-Century Periodical in French*, ed. Charles Forsdick and Andy Stafford (New York: Peter Lang, 2013).

5 The two original reviews are "Le Règne animal de l'esprit," *Critique* 18 (1947): 387-405, and "La littérature et le droit à la mort" *Critique* 20 (1948): 30-47.

6 Jacques Lacan, "Kant avec Sade" *Critique* 191 (1963): 291-313.

7 Jacques Derrida, "Force et signification (I)," *Critique* 193 (1963): 483-99, and "Force et signification (II)" *Critique* 194 (1963): 619-36.

8 Derrida, "L'écriture avant la lettre" *Critique* 233 (1965): 1016-42, and "De la grammatologie" *Critique* 224 (1966): 23-53.

9 Patron, *CUE*, 17 (see also 135-42).

10 See Gillian Rose's critique of the neo-Kantian prehistory of the sociological tradition and its incompatibility with Hegelian thought. Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London: Verso, 2009).

11 Anna Boschetti, *Une entreprise intellectuelle*, 185. Boschetti also presents a Bourdieuean map of the field (186).

12 Howard Davies, *Sartre and Les Temps Modernes*, 1.

13 See "Introducing *Les Temps Modernes*," in Jean-Paul Sartre, "What is Literature?" and *Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), 249-68.

14 *Critique's* apolitical nature is often noted as one of its defining qualities. See Patron, *CUE*, 57-58; Richman, "Bataille Moraliste," 145; Phillippe Roger, "Critique," in *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman (New York: Columbia Univ. Press 2006), 694-97; and Stuart Kendall, *Georges Bataille* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 178.

15 Richman has further drawn the comparison between Bataille's "pre-war activities of a collective nature" and his work at *Critique*, noting that "in comparison with the radical politics of *La Critique sociale* or the surrealist eclecticism of *Documents*, *Critique* presents a subdued, even scholarly, image." She also notes the shift in Bataille's "'underground' profile" and strategy of "deliberate marginality" during the twenties and thirties, to a significantly more public role with *Critique* which "brought Bataille into the intellectual and cultural spheres constituted by the other prominent journals of the postwar period." Richman, "Bataille Moraliste," 144-45.

16 Patron, *CUE*, 30.

17 Roger, *CUE*, 695.

18 On the shift from *Critica* to *Critique*, see Patron, "Le nom de Critique," in *Manières de critiquer*, ed. Francis Marcoin and Fabrice Thumerel (Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2001), 199-210.

19 In Pierre Prévost, *Rencontre Georges Bataille* (Paris: Éditions Jean-Michel Place, 1997), 123-24.

20 Prévost, *Rencontre*, 125. Cf. Sartre: "We would like our journal to contribute in a modest way to the elaboration of a synthetic anthropology. But it is not, we repeat, simply a question of effecting an advance in the domain of pure knowledge: the more distant goal we are aiming at is *liberation*" (Sartre, "Introducing *Les Temps Modernes*," 261).

21 *Critique* 1 (June 1946): 2.

22 Patron sees this recurrent invocation of a transcendence of opinion throughout the early issues as an "overcoming the opposition of individualism and dogmatism" (Patron, "Le nom de Critique," 8).

23 Georges Bataille, "The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic," in *Visions of Excess*, ed. Allan Stoekl, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1985), 105-15.

24 See Patron, *CUE*, 40.

25 Prévost in Patron, *CUE*, 360. *L'Arche* was Jean Amrouche's counter-review to the *Nouvelle Revue française*.

26 Leslie Hill, Introduction to *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (London: Routledge, 1996), 3.

27 Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993), 8.

28 Hill, Introduction to *Maurice Blanchot*, 3.

29 See Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (New York: Verso, 2002), 369.

30 Alexandre Kojève, "Hegel, Marx et le Christianisme," *Critique* 3-4 (1946): 339-66. Unless otherwise indicated, all future references will be to the English translation, "Hegel, Marx, and Christianity," trans. Hilail Gildin, *Interpretation* 1 (1970): 21-42 (hereafter cited as HMC).

31 Quoted in Surya, *Bataille*, 372.

32 Quoted in Surya, *Bataille*, 189.

33 Raymond Queneau, "Premières confrontations avec Hegel," *Critique* 195-196 (1963): 694-700; quoted in Kendall, *Georges Bataille* (London: Reaktion, 2007), 92.

34 Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. J. H. Nichols (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1969), 69.

35 See Kojève, Letter to Tran-duc-Thao, October 7, 1948, in “Alexandre Kojève et Tran-Duc-Thao: Correspondance Inédite” *Genèses* 2 (1990): 134. For a reflection on Kojève’s concept of “propaganda,” see James Nichols, *Alexandre Kojève: Wisdom at the End of History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 82.

36 See, for instance, Kojève’s statement that “according to Hegel—to use the Marxist terminology—Religion is only an ideological superstructure that is born and exists solely in relation to a *real* substructure. This substructure, which supports both Religion and Philosophy, is nothing but the totality of human *Actions* realized during the course of universal history . . .” Kojève, *Introduction*, 32.

37 Nichols, *Alexandre Kojève*, 42.

38 Quoted in Surya, *Bataille*, 369.

39 The review form’s openness to the risk of historical failure appears to distinguish it markedly from the approach Kojève took in his lectures on Hegel. Stefanos Geroulanos describes the “propagandistic” pedagogy deployed in the lectures in terms of a “successful confusion of personal and historical categories that left [Kojève’s] listeners unable to step outside of his way of setting forth the problematic and its solution at the same time.” Citing Bataille’s 1937 “Letter to X, Instructor of a Class on Hegel,” Geroulanos further observes that Bataille was aware of the implications of this pedagogy. See Geroulanos, *An Atheism that Is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010), 168-9, and Bataille, “Letter to X, Instructor of a Class on Hegel,” *The College of Sociology (1937-39)*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 89-93.

40 Translation modified. See Kojève, “Hegel, Marx et le Christianisme,” 340.

41 Consider Kojève’s comment that “[i]t is as work (‘economic system’), revolutions and wars that the polemic between ‘Hegelians’ has been taking place for nearly 150 years. Recently the left has won a brilliant victory, and it would be absurd to conclude from it that it is the ‘right’ that will finally win. But it would be just as false to say that the provisionally victorious interpretation has definitively proved itself to be true” (HMC 41).

42 Piel, Bataille’s brother-in-law, was influential from the earliest days of the review. Over the course of the fifties, his influence on the review steadily grew. See Kendall, *Georges Bataille*, 186.

43 For an overview and chronology of these details, see Patron, *CUE*, 13-25.

44 Alain Badiou, “Le (Re)commencement du matérialisme dialectique,” *Critique* 240 (1967): 438-67. Unless indicated, references hereafter will be to the English version of Badiou’s essay (hereafter cited as R) that was later included in a collection of reviews, essays, and talks entitled *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Verso, 2012).

45 Badiou’s review was one of the first in a series of early writings in which he pursued the limits of Hegelianism and pushed Althusser’s insistence on a scientific break with Hegelianism in the later Marx to a new foundation in set theory—a project that animated his essays for the *Cahiers pour l’analyse*. See Peter Hallward’s lucid account of this phase in his essay “Badiou and the Logic of Interruption” in *Concept and Form*, vol. 2, ed. Peter Hallward and Knox Peden (London: Verso, 2012), especially 130-33.

46 See Louis Althusser, “Matérialisme dialectique et matérialisme historique,” *Cahiers Marxist-Léninistes* 11 (1966): 90-122.

47 Badiou, glossing Althusser, holds that *Capital* is a “scientific work” that represents a fundamental break with a youthful Marx concerned with the space of Hegelian ideology. With *Capital*, “Marx has founded a new science”—a Marxist science of history, that is, historical materialism (R 140). This is distinguished from the discourse of dialecti-

cal materialism, which is by contrast the “science of the scientificity of the sciences” (a scientifico-philosophical or Theory function for Althusser) (R 143). See Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005), 33, 168.

48 Badiou explicitly notes and breaks with Althusser’s assertion in *Reading Capital* that “mathematical formalization must be subordinate to conceptual formalization” (R 167n62). See Althusser et al., *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2009), 203.

49 Roland Barthes, *Album: Unpublished Correspondence and Texts*, trans. Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2018), 162.

50 See Patron, *CUE*, 88.

51 Patron, *CUE*, 88n1.

52 See Patron, *CUE*, 88. See Patron, too, on Foucault’s relative inactivity and short tenure on the editorial board (Patron, “‘Foucault est vraiment exceptionnel’ [Michel Foucault et Critique],” *La Revue des revues* 30 [2001]: 23-31).

53 In this context, it is worth recalling too, that a few years later Foucault seems to have “entrusted the ‘pruning’ (*égamage*)” of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* to Badiou. See Knox Peden, “Foucault and the Subject of Method,” in *Concept and Form*, vol. 2, ed. Peter Hallward and Knox Peden (London: Verso, 2012), 70.

54 Letter by Jean Piel to Gerard Granel, cited in Patron, *CUE*, 88.

55 In this review, Granel, like Badiou, makes some critical comments about the “evident inadequacies” of Foucault’s *History of Madness* and *The Order of Things*. There is no indication that Foucault sought to influence edits to Badiou’s criticisms, but according to Benoît Peeters in the case of Granel’s review, Foucault unsuccessfully petitioned Derrida to “oppose, if not the publication of the whole article, at least this extremely brutal paragraph.” Benoît Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 182-83.

56 See Eleanor Kaufman, *The Delirium of Praise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001).

57 Patron, *CUE*, 87.

58 Forsdick and Stafford, *La Revue*, 17-18.