

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND PUBLIC PURPOSE

LUKÁCS'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF CAPITALISM

REIFICATION REVALUED

RICHARD WESTERMAN



Political Philosophy and Public Purpose

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Lukács's
Phenomenology
of Capitalism

Reification Revalued

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SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Anyone who has survived the trials of intellectual postmodernism during the 1990s is aware of the ways that many theorists were thrown out of their own abode. In their fervour to initiate a kind of cleansed political paradigm, students of theory enthusiastically turned their backs on some of the most crucial thinkers and traditions that could otherwise have countered some of the core hegemonic trends of neo-liberalism and the affirmative culture of capitalist society. Concepts such as reification, for instance, were taken over by many postmodern thinkers—often unwittingly if not clumsily—even as Lukács as a theorist was marginalized and neglected. The opening decades of our century, however, have shown that this was a mistake. It has shown that a return to what many of these marginalized thinkers were building is itself a great inheritance for combatting the great unwinding of hopes for a more democratic, more humane future.

Reification was a central concept in the development of Critical Theory and was also a core contribution to social theory and philosophy more generally. The essential thesis was that the critical ideas of thinkers such as Max Weber and Georg Simmel—both of whom saw modernity as a process of alienation of the modern individual from the institutions and processes of an ever-rationalizing mass society and mass culture—could be given a more political turn once we were able to see that it was rooted not in the general experience of modernity, but rather in the commodity form and the systems of production and consumption that it sustains. What was crucial, according to Lukács, was that we see that formative powers of modern commodity production as a system of quantification and rationalization that was shaping the consciousness of individuals. What was being

lost, indeed, what was being rendered invisible, was the reality that this system was produced by human praxis and this praxis was itself the very nucleus for an alternative social and historical order.

But the precise mechanism of reification that Lukács points to has been an issue of debate for some time. In many ways, it has only increased over time given the greater extension and penetration of the commodity form to all aspects of society and with the spread of capitalism under the pressures of globalization. One way to look at this mechanism of reification is to see it as a purely cognitive phenomenon. In this view, reification is a process whereby our capacity to think through the world is colonized by the processes of commodity production and the system of capitalism modern broadly. Critics, however, have dismissed Lukács on this point by maintaining that his central idea of reification is essentially underwritten by an Idealist conception of reason and the subject that has been surreptitiously sneaked into a Marxian framework. According to this general dismissal of Lukács's ideas, a dualism is assumed between some form of rational consciousness and its corruption by capitalism.

Richard Westerman's *Reification Revalued* seeks to help with this project of recovery of the concept of reification, but also to illuminate a different perspective on how reification itself emerges. For Westerman, Lukács's thesis must be seen in a radically different way from those of his critics. He argues for a phenomenological and ontological account of consciousness and social reality that sees consciousness not as a priori and somehow external to social reality, but rather as situated within that reality. Reification is the result of the ontic dimension of reality pressing on consciousness. It is only through seeing that this ontic layer of 'reality' is one that is created by the logic of the social system of capital that we can observe the ontological layer of the unity of subject and object which that ontic layer hides from view. Hence, a more robust and comprehensive account of reification is offered while at the same time saving it from the dismissive critiques of contemporary theory.

Westerman's book should be seen as an important interpretive move insofar as it not only makes us rethink the philosophical dimensions of reification but also allows us to apply its critical force in an age of post-modern theory and culture. He shows us not only the intellectual and philosophical importance of reification, but the political and practical relevance of the concept as well. What we come away with after reading this book is a renewed sense of how reification affects subject-formation, how it shapes our reflective and hence practical lives, and how it continues to

immunize us against the impulse for social critique and transformation. Westerman's important contribution therefore keeps one of the core concepts of Critical Theory alive in an age when Critical Theory itself is becoming reified and absorbed into the superstructure of alienated consciousness.

New York City
Spring, 2018

Michael J. Thompson

PREFACE

Only a few years ago, a new book on Georg Lukács might have seemed rather anachronistic. Despite his path-breaking work in identifying the philosophical roots of Marxism, he had long since fallen out of favour on the left. Structuralist Marxists condemned the apparent Romantic humanism of his central category of reification; for the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s, his preoccupation with class led to the mistaken exclusion of other categories of inequality such as race and gender; even the Frankfurt School, whose work most obviously descended from Lukács's thought, rejected him—the first generation for his embrace of Stalinism, the second for his seeming reliance on the category of labour as a transhistorical subject. Of course, the collapse of the Soviet Union put an end to any of the revolutionary hopes that had motivated Lukács's most important works; the rediscovery of his defence of *History and Class Consciousness* at the end of the 1990s might have seemed like a mere historical footnote.

Yet recent years have seen a remarkable revival in interest in Lukács, particularly in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and its continuing aftermath: this has been manifest in a flurry of monographs and collected volumes, as well as an extremely successful conference on Lukács's legacy in Budapest in 2017. In the 1990s and early 2000s, capitalism seemed triumphant: even social-democratic parties seemed to accept Margaret Thatcher's claim that there is no alternative, as the likes of Bill Clinton's Democrats, Tony Blair's New Labour, and Gerhard Schröder's SPD all embraced deregulated global markets to win electoral success. The post-2008 recession brought all of this into question: the recent rise of populist movements on both right and left in polities that had previously seemed

rigidly centrist is testament to the crisis of legitimation wrought by this collapse. At such a moment of widespread dissatisfaction with the neo-liberal order, it is perhaps less surprising that there is renewed attention in one of the leading theorists of revolutionary anti-capitalist mass movements. Two related questions are central to Lukács's thought: why is it that the masses do not normally work to overthrow a capitalist system that oppresses them? Under what circumstances can this general acceptance of the established order be broken and replaced with the desire to change it? Lukács offers the notion of reification to answer the first question: social reality under capitalism appears as a naturalistic system governed by unalterable laws that regulate the interactions of objects that appear to have no connection to the humans beneath. His aim is to identify the site of the rupture in this reality—the standpoint from which a society operating in this way appears contradictory, and the actions that should be taken in order to cultivate the first signs of such consciousness.

I offer a new interpretation of Lukács's solution to this problem. Many of his earlier critics assume that Lukács falls back on a kind of materialist version of German Idealism to explain the overcoming of reification: he posits (they claim) the proletariat as the subject that created social relations and is therefore able to take control of its product if only it recognizes itself as such. In making this argument, many of them point to Lukács's decidedly expressivist earlier literary works, such as *Soul and Form*, which speak in general terms of a spontaneous, feeling soul constrained by rigid objective structures that it must overthrow in order to regain its lost freedom. Such motifs are typical of the broader neo-Romanticism of the time, and the young Lukács was undoubtedly influenced by such intellectual currents. My aim, however, is to recontextualize Lukács within a quite different set of discourses, which are related by their attempts to explain *meaning* in terms of a formal structure independent of both subject and object. These primarily academic debates—including Neo-Kantianism, early phenomenology, and the formalist history of art—minimize the role of the subject, explaining it in terms of an orientation towards the structure of meaning. In order to situate Lukács within these discourses, I will read the central essays of *History and Class Consciousness* in relation to the drafts of a philosophy of art Lukács produced while working in Heidelberg between 1912 and 1918. Only rediscovered and published after Lukács's death, his so-called Heidelberg aesthetics draws explicitly on all of these debates. On account of their prominence in these aesthetic drafts, my analysis focuses primarily on four figures from these

debates—Edmund Husserl, Emil Lask, Alois Riegl, and Konrad Fiedler—but this quartet is representative of the broader intellectual milieu in which Lukács moved, and which provided key elements of the hidden philosophical scaffolding of his early Marxian theory. By offering a reading of Lukács’s theory that thus denies the primacy of a monolithic collective subject—and particularly the labouring proletariat—I hope to render his thought more directly applicable to pluralist, postindustrial societies, and to bring it into dialogue with similarly asubjective perspectives in contemporary thought.

In order to emphasize certain aspects of Lukács’s argument, I have generally opted to provide my own translations—particularly from *History and Class Consciousness*. The standard English translation by Rodney Livingstone is generally strong, but—as any translation must—nudges the meaning in certain directions; by returning to the original text, I have sought to draw out other implications of Lukács’s language. Most citations, therefore, are to the *Werke*. However, for ease of reference, I have also added citations to the Livingstone translation of *History and Class Consciousness*.

I have benefitted greatly in the gestation of this project from help and advice from a number of sources. The Robert Owen Bishop Fund at Christ’s College, Cambridge, supported some of the very earliest stages of this research, sowing seeds that germinated many years later. More recently, I have been able to present elements of this work at conferences thanks to the Support for the Advancement of Scholarship fund in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta.

Personal debts are more profound, and almost too numerous to mention. It has been a pleasure to work with John Stegner and Michelle Chen at Palgrave. I am grateful to the many mentors who have encouraged my interest in Lukács over the years: Melissa Lane first introduced me to Lukács’s work as an undergraduate many years ago; Martin Ruehl helped me explore the more literary and aesthetic elements of Lukács’s thought; Nicholas Walker was generous with his time in helping me tie Lukács to Kierkegaard. Raymond Geuss, my doctoral supervisor, was an inspiration: his endless creativity and analytical acuity spurred me on. Though I have disagreed with his interpretation of Lukács, I benefitted greatly from conversations with Moishe Postone while at the University of Chicago. I learnt of his sad passing while in the final stages of revising this book: he is a colossal loss to Marxian scholarship. Andrew Feenberg has been outstanding in his support and advice: I have learnt a great deal from his own

interpretations of Lukács, but I am also profoundly grateful for the personal support he has offered. In addition, I have benefitted at different times from conversations with, advice from, and the support of John Abromeit, Zohreh BayatRizi, Jocelyn Benoist, Ed Brooker, Steven Galt Crowell, Paul Datta, Dina Gusejnova, Saulius Jurga, James Noyes, George Pavlich, and Michael Thompson. I must particularly thank Christopher Lupke, who pushed me to sit focus on this project, and showed belief in me at a time when I had little: his professional and personal support have been instrumental in bringing this book to press, and I remain indebted to his generosity with his time and advice. I have been fortunate to have an extremely supportive family: my mother and father have always encouraged me to pursue my interests, however bizarre they may seem to them, and I am forever grateful for the sacrifices they made to ensure my brother and I were able to reach our potential.

Above all, I wish to thank Jia Von Then. Her selfless patience while I worked long hours on it, her unstinting support at moments of doubt, and her occasional prodding when my concentration wandered have kept me on track. Without her, this book would not have been written. It is fitting, therefore, that I dedicate it to her.

Edmonton, AB, Canada
April 28, 2018

Richard Westerman

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

Richard Westerman is an associate professor at the University of Alberta, Canada. He completed his PhD at Cambridge, before a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Chicago. His work is primarily on Lukács and the Frankfurt School, and he has also published works on philosophical aesthetics.



CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Lukács Debate

In January 2017, the City Council of Budapest voted to remove from a central park the statue of a philosopher who had died nearly half a century before.¹ Head bowed pensively, clad in an overcoat perhaps a size or more too large, and grasping for support on a railing, this was no glorification of its subject. Yet for Marcell Tokody, the councillor who proposed its removal, the statue depicted a man who represented all that he saw as a threat to his vision of Hungary: it was, of course, Georg Lukács, arguably the greatest philosopher and critic Hungary has yet produced.

Tokody's attack is not especially surprising in the context of contemporary Hungarian politics. Though he himself is a member of the neo-Nazi Jobbik party, his motion was eagerly supported by the governing Fidesz, whose leader Viktor Orbán has shown little compunction in throwing around thinly disguised anti-Semitic rhetoric about international plots against Hungary led by the Jewish financier George Soros. Indeed, the removal of the statue was not the first attack on Lukács: a year earlier, the Orbán administration announced the removal of the philosopher's papers from the archive located in his apartment, a process that was completed by early 2018. As a Marxist of Jewish descent, as an intellectual, and as a global cultural figure, Lukács represents all that these far-right parties detest.

Yet condemnation of Lukács is not confined to the far right, for his sternest critics include many of those who drew directly on his work. It is hard to question his significance: *History and Class Consciousness*, his most theoretically ambitious work, opened up Marxian thought beyond political economy and revolutionary practice by placing it in dialogue with the German post-Kantian tradition. In so doing, Lukács went far beyond the often-vulgar and reductionist Marxism of his time, reframing Marx's thought so as to apply it to basic philosophical questions of subjectivity, agency, and identity. His, though, was no coldly abstract analysis; rather, building on themes he had introduced in his pre-Marxist works such as *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács described capitalism from the perspective of living subjects who felt distanced from and powerless in the face of an impersonal, mechanized society that reduced the relations between humans to those between commodities. *History and Class Consciousness* offered both a name and a theoretical explanation of this reification, grounded in the structures of modern society. The rediscovery of Marx's Paris Manuscripts a few years later along with the rise of existentialism from the 1930s only reinforced Lukács's diagnosis: reification seemed to describe something fundamental about the situation of the individual under capitalism.

Of course, Lukács's account was quite out of kilter with the ossifying orthodoxy of 1920s Bolshevism. Already criticized by Lenin in 1920 for his ultra-leftism, Lukács came under even heavier attack after the publication of *History and Class Consciousness* in 1923: Zinoviev denounced him by name at the fifth Comintern Congress in 1924.² As the Bolshevik government hardened into Stalinist totalitarianism, Lukács was obliged to issue a series of autocriticisms in order to ensure his survival. As a result of this ostracism by the Stalinists, he became a figurehead of dissident Marxism for reformist groups in the 1956 Hungarian uprising against Soviet hegemony; he was subsequently arrested and sent for 're-education' for his participation in the Nagy government. Expelled from the party, his status was questionable for the remainder of his life.³

Stalinist disapproval was not sufficient to save Lukács from the insinuation that he himself had become a Stalinist hack—an accusation made not just by conservatives and centrist liberals, but also by the likes of Theodor Adorno, who drew heavily on Lukács's account of reification and his analysis of the relations between Marxism and the Kantian-Hegelian tradition.⁴ For Adorno, Lukács's decision to remain loyal to the Soviet regime made him complicit in totalitarianism, a producer of ideol-

ogy on demand. Subsequent interpreters such as Moishe Postone or Andrew Arato and Paul Breines have seen Lukács's choice as no coincidence, but rather as stemming from one of the central motifs of his thought: his identification of the industrial working class, the proletariat, as the sole agents of emancipatory social revolution.⁵ As early as 1929, the Frankfurt School had begun to doubt this, with Erich Fromm's psychological study of the German working class seeking to understand their failure to rise up in revolt, a problem confirmed by later studies such as *The Authoritarian Personality*.⁶ Of course, the rise of the New Left along with the emergence of postmodern and poststructural thought in the 1960s and 1970s marked a shift away from class as the primary dimension of analysis, to be replaced by categories of gender, race, sexuality, and so on. But for Lukács's critics, his preoccupation with class is more than just anachronistic: because the massed proletariat failed to fulfil his dreams, they argue, he turned instead to the dictatorial centralist Party that 'represented' them—and so opened the way to a deification of the centralized organs of control and a blood-stained dictatorship of the proletariat. Notwithstanding his participation in Imre Nagy's reformist government in 1956 (for which he was arrested when the Soviet tanks rolled in), Lukács largely remained loyal to the Soviet regime even during the depths of Stalinism. It is quite understandable that this adherence to an 'official' Marxism propagated by an unquestionably repressive authority made his theory unappealing by association during the Cold War.

Recent years have, however, seen a resurgence of interest in Lukács; perhaps as the Cold War fades into history, it has become possible once again to review his thought on its own merits, rather than implicated in Stalinism. It is the concept of reification above all that has been at the centre of attention, evocatively described the title of Timothy Bewes's 2002 book as the 'anxiety of late capitalism.'⁷ Bewes's account was followed in 2005 by Axel Honneth's innovative reinterpretation of the term as an intersubjective pathology rather than a social-structural problem.⁸ Though Honneth's version of Lukács has been the target of a great deal of justified criticism, his status as head of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (with its own relation to the Western Marxist tradition) meant that his attention helped turn more attention towards reification. Further testament is provided by two stimulating essay collections in 2011 (one edited by Michael Thompson, the other by Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall), another collection by János Kelemen, a thoroughly revised new edition of Andrew Feenberg's important monograph on Lukács in 2014, and

Konstantinos Kavoulakos's account of the Neo-Kantianism of the young Lukács.⁹ His thought may not yet be quite as easy to bury as the likes of Marcell Tokody would hope.

But even these sympathetic reappraisals of Lukács's thought have rarely been willing to endorse the class-focused theory of subjectivity normally attributed to him. His account seems fatally reliant on the unjustifiable assumption that some kind of labouring proletarian subject stands outside society and history, capable in principle of free and spontaneous action that could reshape social relations at will. The same criticisms he made against German Idealist and Romantic thought, it is assumed, can be made against him: he overstates the capacity of this mythological subject to throw off the social structures that restrain it and so liberate humanity.

These criticisms, I will argue, are mistaken. Lukács's theory does not rely on a subject acting as *deus ex machina* because he does not in fact treat the relation of subject to objectivity as the interaction of two mutually external entities. Instead, he defines the two as inseparably entangled. His social theory tacitly assumes a notion of *intentionality*: social practices constitute objects as meaningful by the ways in which they direct subjects towards objects. Subjectivity, then, is defined by these practices. Rather than standing outside reality as an observer, the subject is best understood in terms of a particular manner of relating to it—determined by the formal meaning-structure of that objective world. While Lukács's account of the unique potential of the proletariat is still unsuccessful, I will argue, it fails in more interesting ways than is normally understood to be the case. Reading Lukács as a phenomenologist of reification in capitalist society, he can provide a rich theoretical model for understanding the determination of different kinds of objective reality by social forms and the possible subjective stances thereto. My aim in this book, therefore, is to offer a comprehensive re-reading of the central essays of *History and Class Consciousness* on this basis. By doing so, I hope to extend the potential of Lukács's theory as a whole for understanding our position in society.

1 ROMANTIC ANTI-CAPITALISM

Some of the key elements of the social theory of *History and Class Consciousness* were formed, I will argue, in Lukács's attempts to write a philosophy of art between 1912 and 1918, while studying in Heidelberg. His explorations of subjectivity and objectivity at this time shaped his later accounts of the same concepts in his analysis of commodity fetishism.

I will suggest that his Marxism is permeated with the rarefied air of Neo-Kantianism, the phenomenology of the early Husserl, and certain elements drawn from formalist aesthetics and the history of art.

This interpretation is in direct contrast to many of Lukács's critics, for whom the accounts of reification and of the identical subject-object in *History and Class Consciousness* are a continuation of quite different interests from his earlier days. Such readings present his account of reification in terms of a conflict between a spontaneous, expressive, organic subject on the one hand, and despiritualized, alienated social structures on the other. The problem can be overcome only if the subject—conceived as logically prior to and separable in principle from those structures—seizes back control of the objective world it has unconsciously created, and so becomes the identical subject-object of history. The creative-expressive aspects of this subject have meant that his position has been characterized as a form of Romantic anti-capitalism. Such an approach, these critics charge, comes weighted with unacceptable metaphysical baggage; as a result, however persuasive Lukács's diagnosis of the problems of capitalism, his solution to those problems is unacceptable. It is worth briefly considering the grounds for this interpretation of his work in order to clarify my own account rather more—first, by surveying Lukács's milieu and early works to show its roots, and second, by summarizing the main features of this interpretation.

Given the circles in which the young Lukács moved, it is unsurprising that much of his early work was permeated with neo-Romantic motifs, such as the rejection of social structures that were seen as cold, calculating, and soulless. Michael Löwy offers the most systematic account of this tendency across Europe at the time, identifying Lukács as an 'intellectual'—a group he defined not as a class as such, but as a 'social category' defined by their role as producers of ideology rather than their economic origins.¹⁰ Their work placed them in '*a universe governed by qualitative values*,' such that the abstraction and calculation of capitalist enterprise seemed diametrically opposed to all they stood for. Their opposition to modern society could take many forms: Max Nordau, for whom such enormities as the spread of railways and the improvement of the postal service were among the most lamentable horrors of the age, offers a reactionary conservative example, but others adopted a more progressive attitude. Many intellectuals, Löwy argues, saw 'the gulf between the humanist traditions of classical culture and the concrete reality of bourgeois society and the capitalist world' as the definitive social problem of their time: they stood for the highest principles of bourgeois humanism against its actual material manifestations.¹¹

Underlying many of these critiques was a nebulous belief in some kind of ill-defined life-force or essence of what it meant to be truly human. In an article highly critical of Lukács, Gareth Stedman Jones situates him in relation to such traditions, such as the vitalism usually associated with Henri Bergson or the *Lebensphilosophie* of Wilhelm Dilthey; these perspectives preferred what they saw as the spontaneous expressiveness of culture to the rationalization of positivistic science.¹² The most obvious representative of such ideas in Lukács's life was Georg Simmel (1858–1918), whose influence on the young Hungarian is unquestionable. Studying in Berlin between 1906 and 1910, Lukács attended Simmel's lectures and came into his circle—though by 1910 he was none-too-modestly writing to his friend Beatrice de Waard that 'Simmel ... cannot offer me much anymore; what I could learn from him, I did.'¹³ Simmel's work is filled with *lebensphilosophisch* rhetoric, as the very opening of his 'Conflict in Modern Culture' illustrates:

Whenever life progresses beyond the animal level to that of spirit, and spirit progresses to the level of culture, an internal contradiction appears. The whole history of culture is the working out of this contradiction. We speak of culture whenever life produces certain forms in which it expresses and realizes itself: works of art, religions, sciences, technologies, laws, and innumerable others. These forms encompass the flow of life and provide it with content and form, freedom and order. But although these forms arise out of the life process, because of their unique constellation they do not share the restless rhythm of life, its ascent and descent, its constant renewal, its incessant divisions and reunifications. ... They acquire fixed identities, a logic and lawfulness of their own; this new rigidity inevitably places them at a distance from the spiritual dynamic which created them and which makes them independent.¹⁴

This passage illustrates a number of the recurrent motifs of *Lebensphilosophie*. 'Life' is treated as a dynamic, ever-changing force 'expressing' itself in culture—which thereby acquires a certain lustre as the creation of our most human energies. Yet this expression is tragic: in the very moment of being created, culture becomes something fixed and distant from the flowing spiritual force that produced it; in turn, it therefore begins to restrict and choke the life that produced it. Individual subjects were dragged in contradictory directions by the rigid demands of different social institutions that had become detached from their roots in life; culture itself lost the integrating function it had once had.¹⁵

Lukács's early life and works were thoroughly steeped in this discourse of Romantic anti-capitalism. A large amount of excellent work has been done on both, so I shall offer only a brief summary here—for my argument assumes that he largely overcame such tendencies in the pivotal sections of *History and Class Consciousness*. Mary Gluck's account of Lukács's circle in Budapest and Arpad Kadarkay's full biography both clearly root Lukács within a cultural atmosphere of quasi-Romantic, culturalist rejection of capitalism.¹⁶ Brought up in a high-bourgeois Budapest family, the son of a wealthy banker, the young Lukács struggled against his upbringing: he was in more or less open warfare with his mother, whose adherence to the norms and values of high society her son found contemptible; his indulgent father was repaid primarily with contempt for the esteem in which he held his wife.¹⁷ Lukács's own conduct could certainly not have been described as conventionally bourgeois. From 1907 until 1911, he sustained an unconsummated love affair with Irma Seidler; his monastic adherence to Kantian moral imperatives prevented him acting on his feelings, particular after she entered into an unhappy marriage. The situation was not improved by her subsequent affair with the licentious librettist Béla Balázs, one of Lukács's closest friends; her ultimate suicide in 1911 left him wracked with guilt at his failure to act on the imperatives of the spirit.¹⁸ His subsequent soap-operatically bad marriage in 1914 to Ljena Grabenko was, if anything, even worse. Ljena, a Russian artist and Social Revolutionary of unpredictable disposition, was soon smitten with one Bruno Steinbach, a pianist whose mental and emotional difficulties led at times to his institutionalization. Ljena brought her lover to live in their marital home, unwilling to leave him unsupervised lest he harm himself; Lukács in turn refused to leave Ljena, in case Bruno harmed her. Even when he eventually found the strength of will to end the marriage in 1917, he insisted that they had shared a 'spiritual affinity,' reproaching himself that 'If I was good, I would have stayed with her.'¹⁹ His own life was lived as a conflict between such abstract, formal demands and the rich, forceful demands of the spirit—a picture that is perhaps appealingly tragic, and all too easy to read into his later account of reification.

These same threads ran through much of his earliest work. As Löwy points out, Lukács's very early *History of the Development of Modern Drama* includes a critique of the reduction of quality to quantity, of excessive rationalization, and of the depersonalization of social relations—all themes that he rightly relates to a Simmelian concern with social structures drained of spiritual or qualitative elements, dominating and repressing a

rich cultural existence.²⁰ Indeed, as Anna Wessely has shown, Simmel's sociological perspective can be seen throughout the book, shaping Lukács's analysis of the development of theatre.²¹ Lukács's less systematic works of the time only served to reinforce this impression. The very title of *Soul and Form* (1908/1911) suggests an irreconcilable conflict between the pure demands of form and the reality of life. In the final essay of the collection, 'The Metaphysics of Tragedy,' he suggests that this conflict is an irreconcilable either/or—one that tragedy resolves in favour of form. As he puts it, 'drama alone creates – "gives form to" – real human beings, but just because of this it must, of necessity, deprive them of living existence.'²² Actual lived life is incoherent and meaningless; in order to experience meaning, one must in a sense 'deny life in order to live.'²³ Beneath the ostensible meaning of the essays, an even more significant conflict between form and life emerges—for it is all too easy to see the autobiographical elements in them. Drawing on Lukács's own diaries, Ágnes Heller suggests that 'Lukács recreated his relationship with Irma Seidler' in almost every essay in the collection.²⁴ Each piece sought to impose a form on his love—but in each case it failed. Lukács effectively admitted as much in the essay on Kierkegaard's aborted engagement to Regine Olsen, in which, Heller argues, 'the shaping of life proves to be a futile, shipwrecked endeavour.'²⁵ This autobiographical element is even clearer in a dialogue written and published after Irma's suicide, 'On Poverty of Spirit': in this piece, a thinly veiled Lukács clearly blames himself for the suicide of his beloved, because of his failure to step down from his austere and self-imposed intellectual isolation.²⁶ On both surface and autobiographical readings of all these texts, though, Lukács's diagnosis is clear: form had grown distant from life. As Gluck puts it, '[f]or Lukács, the tragedy of the aesthete – and by extension of all modern artists and intellectuals – was summed up in the experience of separation: the separation of the individual from the community, of man from nature, of art from life, of intellect from emotion, of man from woman.'²⁷ Life remained formless, and form remained empty—the two forever in conflict.

But it was the outbreak of war that crystallized Lukács's sense that modernity was afflicted with the domination of abstract rationalization over spiritual profundity—and this was manifest in his work of the time. Almost alone in his Heidelberg circle in reacting with horror to the war, Lukács attributed the catastrophe engulfing Europe to the growing dominance of depersonalized social institutions; as he explained in a letter to Paul Ernst in April 1915, 'the power of structures seems to be increasing unabatedly, and

for most people it represents the existing reality more accurately than does the really existent. But – and for me this is *the* ultimate lesson of the war experience – we cannot permit that. We have to stress again that after all, we and our souls are the only essentiality.²⁸ It was at this time that he was working on the philosophy of art in which (I will argue) he first experimented with some of the decisive categories he would later apply to society in *History and Class Consciousness*—but the war led him to put aside his drafts and turn instead to a proposed work on Dostoevsky, which was to present the Russian author as a model of a redeemed humanity. As has been shown elsewhere, Lukács was not alone amongst Western European intellectuals in looking to Dostoevsky as an example of deeper spiritual unity: for the likes of Andre Gide, John Middleton Murry, or even Weber himself, works like *The Brothers Karamazov* or *Crime and Punishment* offered glimpses of a more authentic communion with one another.²⁹ Unfortunately, the sheer ambition of the book may have doomed it to failure from the start. Only part of it reached publication: *The Theory of the Novel* was, it seems, initially intended only as a preface to the longer treatise on Dostoevsky. That work alone contains sufficient evidence of Lukács’s state of mind at the time—best indicated by his statement that ‘the novel is the form of the epoch of absolute sinfulness, as Fichte said.’³⁰ Contemporary societies offer no coherent, integrated world of meaning to their members: rather, the individual is cut off from the fabric of society; its structures ‘lose their obvious roots in supra-personal ideal necessities; they are simply existence ... [no longer] the natural containers for the overflowing interiority of the soul. They form the world of convention, a world from whose all-embracing power only the innermost recesses of the soul are exempt.’³¹ Note here the implication of a soul defined by its ‘overflowing’ passions, drives, and feelings, which exists in principle without social structures that might fulfil it—or, in the case of modern capitalism, suffocate it. The unpublished notes on the Dostoevsky book offer more radical claims. Distinguishing between a ‘First’ Ethic consisting in obedience to structures and a ‘Second’ Ethic oriented towards the dictates of the soul and the command of ‘solidarity, *the duty to love*.’³² Ultimately, some of his notes suggest, this might even paradoxically require an ethical hero to commit acts of terrorism—if doing so could restore the spontaneity of the soul over the alienated objective structures that restrict us. Rather than obedience to the structures of the external world, therefore, the Second Ethic directs us to look to the demands that emerge from within—those most deeply rooted in a ‘self’ that exists independently of social structures, and which may be repressed by them.

There is, then, a significant philosophical assumption running through the young Lukács's life, milieu, and work: in speaking of the 'soul,' Lukács implies that some subjective substance, defined in essence by interiority, drives, passions, and moral convictions, exists a priori at the most fundamental level of reality. External social structures are, in principle, ontologically distinct: they are separate from the soul, even if initially created by soul-centred humans; the relation between individual and social structure is thereby defined in terms of an interaction between two mutually external entities. In bourgeois-capitalist societies, these structures are so depersonalized that they have lost any meaningful content they originally had, and have slipped beyond our control. Rather than finding an extension of ourselves and our community in these structures, we experience them as alien impositions on our spontaneous expression. The subject is repressed and deformed by objective social structures over which it has no control. In this respect, the young Lukács—like many others of his time and social situation—echoed some of the criticisms hurled against the Enlightenment by the German Romantics.

It is therefore not difficult to understand why Lukács's Marxist work has so often been interpreted as a continuation of such literary and Romantic anti-capitalism. *History and Class Consciousness* describes reified social structures that distance people from one another by depersonalized systems that operate independently of human interaction. His account of classical German philosophy's quest for a subject-creator of the structures of reality might be taken as implying that he too sought such a subject—that is, that he sought a *solution* to Kantianism's central problem, rather than its *Aufhebung*. Seemingly, he vests the proletariat with extraordinary powers of creativity akin to those of a Romantic subject in order to explain the class's role as identical subject-object of history and its task of overthrowing reification. It is possible to construct a general model of such interpretations of Lukács's argument comprising five consecutive stages (some of which may be merely assumed or implied): while some critics accept the earlier steps, few are willing to follow him all the way. At some point, the assumption that Lukács presupposes a fixed human essence beyond society becomes the point of contention, which is held to undermine his case fatally. It will be a central contention of my argument in what follows that Lukács relies on no such notion.

First, according to these interpretations Lukács assumes that some kind of organic social unity pre-exists and creates the structural-institutional forms of society. This echoes the immediate cultural, affectual, or spiritual

social body he had hinted at in his pre-Marxist work, as well as the Romantic primacy of the subject over the object it creates. Reinterpreted by way of Marx, such unity was grounded on *labour*: as Postone explains it, Lukács wrongly follows ‘traditional’ Marxism (but not, he suggests, Marx himself) in that he ‘analyses society as a totality, constituted by labour, traditionally understood.’³³ The proletariat is the collective producer of the labour value that drives the capitalist economy and shapes its social relations. By extension, social structures are the *product* of this subject, emerging from the activity of a single collective creator. Thus, for Habermas, Lukács exemplifies the misguided ‘production paradigm,’ the Marxian echo of Idealism’s ‘philosophy of the subject,’ which mistakenly sees a single subject (rather than intersubjectivity) as the creator of social relations that somehow express its essence.³⁴

Second, Lukács allegedly uses ‘reification’ to refer to the separation of these objective social structures from the ‘real’ social subject-substance, such that they distort, misrepresent, and damage it. This distortion may be treated as merely epistemic. On this reading, reification entails a mistaken *belief* about the nature of capitalist social relations: the impersonal, abstract form they assume leads us to take them as unalterable, automatic, mechanized laws to which we must submit passively. In fact (this interpretation continues), this is not much more than an error of knowledge that might be corrected. Thus, Neil Larsen equates the account of reification given in ‘Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,’ the central essay of *History and Class Consciousness*, with the distinction between false and ‘imputed’ or ‘ascribed’ (*zugerechnet*) class consciousness in the ‘Class Consciousness’ essay.³⁵ Alternatively, Lukács’s argument may be read more ontologically: reified social relations are not just misrepresentations, but are actual restrictions on more real, immediate relations existing underneath. Though supposedly reflecting or mediating the essence of society, these relations have somehow become detached from their origin; they are now a Procrustean bed, deforming the genuine substance of society beneath. Rather than seeing one another in our authentic human form, we are obliged to relate to our associates as commodities in a way that perverts their true essence. It is this that Moishe Postone objects to, arguing instead that abstract relations such as the commodity form are indeed the real relations of capitalist society, not merely corruptions of more primary human connections (as, he believes, Lukács argues).

If reification is an externalized imposition on the subject-substance, it follows that it should in principle be possible for that subject simply to

slough off its effects and return to its natural freedom. The third stage of Lukács's argument in this reading, then, is that he relies on a proletariat somehow capable of standing outside society and reification as the source of liberation. If the effects of reification are merely epistemic, this means that correct consciousness alone should suffice: thus Stedman Jones interprets Lukács as arguing that it is sufficient merely for the proletariat to come to consciousness for reification to be overthrown—though, as Löwy rightly points out, the quotation he offers in support of this states that such consciousness offers only the *possibility* of revolution.³⁶ Even if Lukács only treats correct knowledge as the first step, not the final one, he seems to make unjustified assumptions to justify the proletariat's capacity for such an unclouded view of society. For Tom Rockmore, not only does Lukács fail to explain why a bourgeois thinker would be unable to think 'proletarian' philosophy (and why he, Lukács, was an exception), his entire argument rests on a *petitio principii*: 'if proletarian consciousness is the condition of free action, in effect he maintains that the condition of becoming free is that one is already free.'³⁷ That is, in order to know society correctly, the working must be assumed to be already free in some manner from the supposedly inescapable effects of reification—leaving it unclear why such emancipation is necessary.

Assuming the proletariat attains a correct consciousness of its social situation, it still needs to overthrow the objective manifestations of capitalism. Fourth, then, his critics argue that Lukács resorts to imbuing the proletariat with almost-mythical powers as a creative subject akin to that of Romanticism or Idealism: it has the capacity to bring about change almost single-handedly, as the original creator of social structures. Martin Jay insists that 'his quasi-Fichtean emphasis on subjectivity' contradicts the argument that history controls individuals seen throughout the rest of the text.³⁸ For Terry Eagleton, 'Lukács retains the form of the metaphysical. ... He replaces the world spirit [of Hegel] with the proletariat.'³⁹ Eagleton's comment indicates a common strand in such criticisms: Lukács's account is seen as, in essence, a Marxian version of German Idealism's excessive reliance on a creative subject. (Whether this draws on an accurate reading of German Idealism is an entirely separate matter.) Rockmore links this more closely to Fichte, stating that 'the importance of Fichte's view for Lukács becomes clear in his argument that the unity of subject and object that Fichte allegedly locates in mental activity is, in fact, brought about through the activity of the proletariat.'⁴⁰ Ultimately, for Arato and Breines, Lukács's solution 'derives from the quest of classical German philosophy to express

all substance and in particular nature itself as the deed of a *subject*.⁴¹ In capitalism, a society of commodity relations, this subject is the proletariat, the creator of value in commodities; it is for this reason that the working class seems capable of overcoming capitalism.

Fifth, the obvious failure of the global proletariat to rise up in revolution meant (on this reading) that Lukács either had to abandon his faith in the subject or had to find another one. He chose the latter—and thus turned to the centralizing powers of the Bolsheviks. Stedman Jones, in fact, saw this as a positive step, praising Lukács for the increasing realism of his turn towards Leninism.⁴² But for most of his readers, this meant a step towards Stalinism. For Martin Jay, the closing essays of *History and Class Consciousness* demonstrate that Lukács's opinion had 'shifted clearly in favor of the highly disciplined vanguard party' of Leninism.⁴³ As Arato and Breines see it, this drove Lukács towards a misguided faith in the central organizing forces of revolution.⁴⁴ By turning agency over to the party that represented the class, they suggest, Lukács paves the way for authoritarianism.

For many of Lukács's critics, then, *History and Class Consciousness* represents a Marxian reinterpretation of the essentially neo-Romantic outlook of his early years. This perspective is characterized by a belief in a more real, immediate, and organic unity between people, based on culture or spontaneous feeling. This is the basis of a creative subjectivity—one capable of expressing itself in a rich cultural world (for the pre-Marxist Lukács), or through its labour as the source of social relations (in *History and Class Consciousness*). It is distorted by the imposition of formal, abstract social structures upon it; its essence remains the same, but it comes into conflict with the social rules that deform it. Only by throwing off the shackles of societal structures can it return to its prelapsarian freedom and once more set about consciously building its social world.

2 THE EQUALITY OF SUBJECT AND OBJECT

Lukács's error, for his critics, is the continued primacy he seems to accord to the subject: the identical subject-object is, it seems, more weighted towards the subject that creates and recognizes itself in the object, maintaining the thrust of his earlier work. There are, however, a number of more sympathetic readings—many of which, significantly, assume rather different interpretations of subject, object, and their relation. As Konstantinos Kavoulakos puts it, 'despite the fact that many formulations of Lukács lend credit to this

“official” interpretation of the proletariat as “the identical subject-object” of the socio-historical process, as “the subject of action; the ‘we’ of the genesis,” one can evoke other passages in order to show that in effect Lukács wanted to mount ... a critique of the philosophy of the subject and its pretension to pin down an immutable basis of the unity of reason.⁴⁵ Such understandings of Lukács have a lengthy pedigree. As long ago as the 1950s, Merleau-Ponty argued that Lukács’s central critique of Weber was that he had not ‘gone so far as to “relativize the notions of subject and object.”’⁴⁶ Jay Bernstein agrees, suggesting that ‘readings of the “Reification” essay which construe it as proposing the proletariat as a historically grounded Fichtean absolute subject ... contravene the letter and spirit of Lukács’s project.’⁴⁷

Some of the most intriguing and comprehensive evaluations of Lukács on this line come from Lucien Goldmann and two of his students—Andrew Feenberg and Michael Löwy. Although Löwy interprets the early Lukács as mired in neo-Romanticism, he does not argue that this approach directly produced the theory of *History and Class Consciousness*. Rather, the revolutionary book is, for Löwy, the *Aufhebung* of his earlier problematic; it overcomes, rather than merely reclothing his earlier arguments in Marxist garb. Goldmann famously argued that much of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*—in particular, some gnomic references to reification—were written in response to Lukács, despite not mentioning him by name. He suggests that Heidegger’s ‘Being’ equates to the category of totality in Lukács, leading both to diagnose similar problems in the very structure of contemporary existence.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, Goldmann died before revising and extending his argument, which exists only in incomplete form. The most comprehensive version of this perspective is offered by Andrew Feenberg, who similarly treats reification and consciousness as ontological, rather than epistemological categories. When Lukács refers to ‘consciousness,’ he suggests, he is in fact referring to something similar to the anthropological notion of *culture*, which refers to ‘the unifying pattern of an entire society, including its typical artifacts, rituals, customs and beliefs. The concept of culture points towards the common structures of social life.’⁴⁹ Reification thus describes a misguided set of collective practices based on rationalization, not a mistaken knowledge of society; emancipation should therefore aim at making cultural practices fully transparent and deliberate, rather than at claiming to ‘know’ social reality from some mythological standpoint outside reality. Thus, Feenberg’s Lukács is emphatically not predicated on any transcendental subject. As such, it

could not possibly be used to justify Stalinist authoritarianism: to do so fundamentally misunderstands the necessarily collective nature of practice as a set of social relations.

The basic intuition behind all these readings is correct: they downplay the supposedly Romantic primacy of the subject or an expressive life-force of the kind described by Simmel, and rightly see Lukács as having overcome his earlier neo-Romanticism by the time of *History and Class Consciousness*. But they do not, by and large, go quite far enough in justifying their case—chiefly because of the specific aims of their arguments. Bernstein and Merleau-Ponty, for example, deal with Lukács as one thinker amongst several under consideration. Löwy's primary focus is Lukács's earlier work; he offers only a short (but sympathetic) account of *History and Class Consciousness* itself. Only Feenberg offers a comprehensive interpretation of Lukács's Marxist work that could justify such a claim in full—and it will be apparent that in many respects, the interpretation I will offer here is largely compatible with his account. But I will argue there is even more to Lukács's choice of the term 'consciousness' than is contained within the concept of 'culture.' Feenberg suggests that Lukács opted for the latter term because the concept of 'culture' in its modern sense was not available to him. However, the term 'consciousness' comes with significant additional philosophical implications that go beyond 'culture': these include the idea of mental states, the concepts of subject and object as questions inherent to it, the notion of reality, the themes of experience and memory, and the problem of the first-person perspective. Lukács's theory deals with all of these, and in doing so does more than 'culture' alone can capture. While Feenberg's term undoubtedly describes part of what Lukács is concerned with, I will suggest that there is even more to his use of the term 'consciousness' than this.

Therefore, I propose an interpretation in keeping with the spirit of these readings, but offering a distinct philosophical and theoretical perspective on them. Rather than read Lukács's interpretation of Marxism as a kind of materialist Romanticism or Idealism, I suggest that it is better understood with the framework that he deployed in a set of posthumously published drafts of a philosophy of art written at Heidelberg between 1912 and 1918. The central aim of this work was to explain how a work of Art (in the grand sense) could be its own source of meaning, beyond any significance it had in relation to the lives of its creator or its audience. In making his case, Lukács drew on a quite different set of debates. Where many of his earlier works fit comfortably within the milieu of neo-Romantic

anti-capitalism, his Heidelberg drafts on art drew instead on a range of discourses oriented towards the philosophical and aesthetic analysis of meaning. Emerging in reaction to materialist and psychologistic reductionist in the nineteenth century, such discourses treated meaning as a realm unto itself, governed by a formal-logical structure that could not be explained in terms of any hidden underlying reality, nor (crucially) as the projection of an empirical-psychological mind. Broadly, such discourses included the Neo-Kantianism that dominated parts of German academic philosophy at the time (particularly in Heidelberg), as well as the early forms of phenomenology. Lukács's aesthetic drafts draw broadly on all these debates, but on four figures in particular: the theorist of art Konrad Fiedler, the formalist Vienna School art historian Alois Riegl, the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, and the Neo-Kantian Emil Lask, Lukács's close friend. Given their importance in his Heidelberg drafts, I will take these four as the key points of reference for my interpretation throughout for the sake of clarity, but they should be understood as representative of broader tendencies in the discourses that shaped Lukács's philosophy of art.

His insistence on separating the meaning of art from anything it purported to represent was drawn directly from Fiedler, but his attempt to answer this question philosophically in terms of a discrete, logical sphere of meaning and validity led him to both Husserl and Lask; meanwhile, Riegl gave him a range of specific ways to describe particular systems of meaning in works of art. Within this framework, the problem of the relation of subject and object is reconfigured: rather than the relation of an a priori subject to an objective reality that exists outside or opposed to it, subject and object are treated as structurally defined parts of a meaningful totality of consciousness. They are defined *within* the formal system of appearances, rather than as outside it. In effect, this inverts the Kantian order of priority: in that model, phenomena are the product of a subject's rational knowledge of the world, whereby both subject and objective world exist outside the phenomena themselves. Instead, the way in which subject and object exist and relate to one another is defined within a broader structure of appearances that rules out the sort of one-directional subjective activity that Lukács's critics allude to in calling him Fichtean. Crucially, I will argue, he later applied the paradigm he developed to analyse art to his explanation of *society* in *History and Class Consciousness*—and because he does so, his theory there also avoids the charge of Fichteanism.

Lukács himself described the theory of art he put together from these sources as a ‘phenomenology of the aesthetic,’ and because of this, I shall follow him in referring to it as ‘phenomenological’ both in discussing his Heidelberg drafts on art and in his later deployment of the same paradigm in *History and Class Consciousness*. However, his use of this term does not indicate that he was an orthodox Husserlian. His use of Husserl was by no means sufficiently systematic or granular to count as such.

Most obviously, where Husserl was largely concerned with mental acts, Lukács is concerned with objective realms of meaning—first artworks, then social relations. In this, I will suggest, he may to some degree have followed Lask’s reading of Husserl, in which the role of the thinking mind is limited. Moreover, Lukács’s first encounter with Husserl was with the *Logical Investigations*: here, Husserl is primarily concerned with the formal analysis of meaning as such; this includes, but is not limited to, mental acts. It is in this respect that Lukács’s theories of art and of social relations are ‘phenomenological’: he analyses these realms as domains of objective meaning that cannot be explained either as a property of brute objects, or as a projection or belief that subjects attach to the objects they perceive. Such meanings are formally analysable: they have a particular structure defined by their relation to other entities within that domain of meaning; for example, the social meaning of an object is governed by its relations with other social objects. Meaning is integral to what an object *is*: treating objects as ‘commodities’ is no mere mistake on the part of a subject unable to grasp the thing-in-itself, nor a quality of the merely material object; rather, the way in which these objects behave is regulated by their phenomenological significance. These meaning-structures also presuppose a specific *intentionality*—that is, a definite subjective stance towards the complex object, but a stance determined objectively by a system that demands a certain attitude from the subject. To understand a work of art, Lukács argues, we cannot take the stance of its creator, for whom it can never have the kind of self-enclosed completeness required for a peak aesthetic experience; rather, for that latter meaning to be disclosed, the subject must take up a standpoint within the work. When he transfers this argument to the description of social relations, such intentionality is manifest in practices that require subjects to treat objects in certain ways—*as* commodities, crowns, and so on. It is for this reason that Feenberg is right to link Lukács’s use of the term ‘consciousness’ to the notion of culture: like mental acts, cultural practices too relate to things as meaningful. The object’s significance is contained within the act as an intrinsic part of its

social being. Society and culture, like consciousness, are realms of intentional meaning, not simply of brute objectivity; this meaning can be analysed as an independent factor of social structure.

By making this step, Lukács was able to offer an important new dimension to Marxist theory, supplementing its political-economic theory with a non-reductive account of consciousness as a moment of social relations. The orthodoxy of the Second International was strongly objectivist in its materialism: it emphasized those aspects of Marx's thought that tended most to explain society on natural-scientific lines, as a set of impersonal processes governed by the underlying mode of production. From this perspective, consciousness was merely an epiphenomenon that might at best reflect those deeper social structures, without having any real independence of their own. If the revolutionary had a role, then, it was to use their superior (Marxist) knowledge of these processes to manipulate this objective system to better advantage. Lukács's critics (those who see him as Fichtean) have read him as going too far in the opposite direction, giving the same prominence to subjectivity that Second International Marxism gave to social structures: instead of these objective structures determining subjectivity, the labouring subject produces its objective social world, and should be capable of reassuming control over its creation on becoming conscious of that fact. Neither approach truly reconciles subject and object: in each case, one is made determinative, the other dependent. Even in the supposedly Fichtean version of Lukács, subjectivity would be theoretically separate from the objectivity it created: objective social structures remain something outside the subject, to be manipulated and remoulded at will, something the subject is conscious *of*. In contrast, I will argue that by incorporating intentionality into social practices themselves, Lukács includes subjectivity as a determinative moment within objective structures: it is integral to social practices that they include this dimension of meaning. The subject is in turn defined as part of the objectively meaningful practices it partakes in. Drawing on certain aspects of Riegl's thought, he is able to offer a historically variable account of these structures, showing how different configurations of society produce varying forms of subjectivity. This allows him (as I will argue in Chaps. 5 and 6) to postulate more active kind of subject: he is not referring simply to an *ens causa sui* capable of entirely spontaneous action but rather a possibility lying in changes in the intentionality of social practices.

3 UNTANGLING THE WEB OF INFLUENCE

Given the prominence of the Kantian and Hegelian traditions in *History and Class Consciousness*, it may seem quite counter-intuitive to cite the various discourses represented by Husserl, Lask, Riegl, and (to a lesser degree) Fiedler as sources of Lukács's thought. His pell-mell dash through classical German philosophy in the central section of the 'Reification' essay has suggested to most of his readers that he believes Marxism can offer the solution to its central problem—that of the subject. It is for this reason that commentators such as Jay or Arato and Breines have characterized his theorization of proletarian subjectivity as 'Fichtean': like Fichte, they suggest, he resolves the problem by positing the subject as creator; in this case, the labouring proletariat creates the social relations it must then overthrow. I will address this argument more fully in Chap. 5, but in general I agree with Löwy's verdict that *History and Class Consciousness* is not the solution to these problems, but rather their *Aufhebung*: Lukács does not move beyond classical thought on its own terms, but by fundamentally reconfiguring the problem. The point of his lengthy analysis of Idealism is to show that the problem of the creator is a product of the particular way in which the question is set, not an attempt to resolve by showing how the subject can, after all, be revealed to create the objective world if only the argument is applied to social reality. Understood phenomenologically, subject and object are mutually co-constituting. Therefore, rather than being 'influenced' or shaped by German Idealism, Lukács's theory aims to show that its very *problems* are the result of error.

In order to counter the excessive weight hitherto placed on Lukács's debts to classical German philosophy, then, my exegesis of *History and Class Consciousness* will minimize their influence. As far as possible, I will largely exclude detailed consideration of Idealism as a *source* of his thought, rather than as the *object* of his analysis. This does not mean that I entirely deny the importance of the Kantian tradition for Lukács, but the excessive attention paid hitherto to his engagement with the post-Kantian tradition has led to a tendency to see almost *every* aspect of his theory as little more than a materialist version of Idealist arguments. The same applies for a number of his other influences, such as Georg Simmel and Max Weber; for example, Lukács's theory of reification is often seen as a Marxian version of the former's account of the tragedy of culture. By limiting my analysis of these thinkers, it becomes possible to pick out the phenomenological elements of his thought. Of course, in places it will be

necessary to refer to other theorists on whom Lukács draws at specific points but I will explain them within the phenomenological framework I develop here, and mostly not as independent sources of Lukács's thought. Marx is, of course, ever-present in the background, but here I present him as Lukács reads his account of commodity fetishism refracted through the prism of phenomenology, rather than as himself the methodological model for Lukács's social analysis.

There is, however, one figure from the post-Kantian tradition who cannot be omitted completely: Hegel. In limiting my discussion of someone like Fichte, I am deliberately seeking to argue that his influence on Lukács was much less (or at least quite other) than commonly thought. The same cannot be said about Hegel, whose language and concepts Lukács draws on throughout his argument. I do not seek to deny his significance—but by emphasizing the phenomenological aspects of Lukács's argument, I suggest that it is not what it is normally assumed to be. For many of Lukács's critics, Lukács's theory is Hegelian in that it supposedly relies on a grand historical demiurge, a macrosubject that (unconsciously or consciously) is capable of driving history. By demonstrating that the elements of Lukács's theory that have hitherto been read as granting primacy to the subject are better understood phenomenologically as instead describing the equal co-constitution of subject and object, I will rule out that argument. But this only clears the way to show where Hegel's influence can be seen: it is visible primarily in Lukács's use of the ontological categories of his *Logic*, and not the narrative of *Geist* unfolding itself in the world.

It lies beyond the scope of this work to give a full account of Lukács's adoption of Hegel's conceptual toolbox: to do so would mean staking a position on much-debated aspects of Hegel's own thought as well as on Lukács's use of it. Nevertheless, I will in places turn to Hegel. In part, this is to make clear where the influence of Husserl, Lask, Fiedler, and Riegl stops, so as to avoid the contrary problem of overinflating their importance at the expense of other sources. But it is also necessary to give at least some indication of the ways Hegel's thought is interwoven with the phenomenological quartet in Lukács's complex, shifting text. He draws above all on the categories of Hegel's *Logic*, which he treats as ontological categories. In this respect, I read Lukács as closer to those in recent scholarship like Doz or Houlgate, rather than di Giovanni, for whom the *Logic* is intended in a Kantian-transcendental fashion, as an outline of the structures of thought alone, and not of being.⁵⁰ As I shall explain in Chaps. 4, 5, and 6, he makes full use of the different levels of Being that Hegel outlines in

the *Logic*, differentiating, for example, between the mere existence and the determinate being (*Dasein*) of objects as they come into social relations, or between the essence (*Wesen*) and appearance (*Erscheinung*) of capitalism as a whole.

What he does *not* take from Hegel, however, is the latter's account of subjectivity, both at the level of the individual mind and at the macro-historical level of *Weltgeist*. Lukács acknowledges Hegel's efforts to overcome what he sees as the definitive flaw of 'bourgeois' philosophy—the antinomy of subject and object, assumed to exist separately a priori. Hegel's solution to this problem (in Lukács's reading) is to show the identity of subject and object: the categories by which we know the world are at the same time those through which it exists. But, Lukács argues, Hegel treats the emergence of these categories separately in thought and in reality: the logical deduction of these categories is separate from their emergence in history, and he ultimately falls back into the erection of a rational system as the driving force of history, rather than actual events and practices. In reality, 'intellectual and historical genesis ... [must] coincide.'⁵¹ Consequently, Hegel's philosophy falls back into a dualism of subject and object, rather than uniting them; they develop only in parallel. The subject remains outside of existence, apparently developing under its own steam, allowed only to observe as *Geist*, the true demiurge of history, works itself out in practice.

I shall examine Lukács's critique of Hegel's account of subjectivity a little more closely in Chap. 5, but this cursory overview helps indicate where Lukács turned back instead to the phenomenologically inclined thinkers who shaped his Heidelberg philosophy of art. To avoid the a priori separation of subject and object (wherein the former contemplates the latter, seeking to grasp it in thought), Lukács defines the two as distinct parts of a single whole from the outset. He therefore treats consciousness as *primary*, such that its structures are what define subject and object in turn, as well as the relation between them. He can thereby attain the goal that Hegel aimed for, but (he argues) fell short of: thought and being coincide because objects only meaningfully exist (as particulars) insofar as they are disclosed through the categorial structure of conscious social practices. These structures simultaneously determine the subject by placing it in a certain relation towards objectivity—an argument that he derives particularly from Riegl. Thus, rather than assuming the separation of subject and object from the start and then seeking to explain their reconciliation, Lukács defines them first in relation to one another, such that it is their *division* in 'bourgeois' philosophy is the problem to be explained.

4 ARGUMENT

I will outline my case in three stages. The first section, consisting of Chaps. 2 and 3, offers intellectual-historical justification for this reading of Lukács by examining the development of his thought in the years leading up to his embrace of Bolshevism. Chapter 2 examines the drafts he prepared of a philosophy of art while studying at Heidelberg in the Weber circle from 1912 to 1918. Never completed and only rediscovered after Lukács's death, they are significant for my argument for two reasons. First, Lukács engages extensively and explicitly here with the thinkers I have identified as major sources of his thought. He develops a model of analysis that he describes as 'phenomenological,' using avowedly Husserlian language, to describe art and the creative and receptive stances towards it. In addition, he draws on Riegl and Fiedler, in formulating his account. Fiedler's work is less systematic than Riegl's (or that of Husserl and Lask), so I will have less cause to refer back to him in detail in later chapters—but his basic claims about visual art provide Lukács's fundamental assumptions about being and appearance, and the way they should be analysed. Second, I will note the emergence of a number of important terms that were to play a decisive role in the social theory of *History and Class Consciousness*: they are the *totality*, the *standpoint*, and the *subject-object relationship*. His definition of these concepts within the phenomenological framework of his philosophy of art laid the groundwork for his later use of them in his Marxian thought. The methodological and conceptual framework he develops here later served, I will argue, as the basis of his analysis of commodity fetishism.

Chapter 3 examines the years between Heidelberg and *History and Class Consciousness*—that is, from his initial embrace of Marxism up to the publication of the book. I will argue that his 1918 conversion to Bolshevism itself may well be explicable in terms of a Romantic anti-capitalism and messianic belief in revolution, but that his outlook had changed substantially by 1923, when the book was published. I will argue that the three new essays he wrote or entirely rewrote for the book in 1922 (the 'Reification' essay, 'Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization,' and 'What is Orthodox Marxism?') show clear signs of a return to the intellectual framework of his Heidelberg years. The texts Lukács cites, the terminology he uses, and philosophical motifs he draws on all increasingly point back towards the broad intellectual discourse represented by Husserl, Lask, Fiedler, and Riegl, which had shaped his earlier

work so thoroughly. Tracing the reappearance of such phenomenological language, I will thereby lay the groundwork for my detailed interpretation of the theory itself.

The second section (Chaps. 4, 5, and 6) contains the substance of my interpretation, in which I outline a phenomenological version of Lukács's thought. Throughout, I offer three levels of his theory. First, he offers a directly phenomenological account, examining the ways specific objects appear or the individual's direct relationship to the social world. Second, he provides what I refer to as an ontic analysis—an account of the overall structure of reality under capitalism that governs the interactions of objects. Finally, he explains this ontic account in terms of a deeper ontological explanation that understands the appearance of an objective reality its determination of the subject in terms of a definite orientation towards reality. In Chap. 4, I apply this to the explanation of *objective* social reality. Lukács identifies the commodity form as the decisive phenomenological structure of capitalism. In order to do this, he extends the term 'consciousness' to cover social institutions, relations, and practices, not simply the contents of the mind: objects are socially determined by the formal structure of practices surrounding them. In the case of the commodity, objects are determined as divided, with form and content irretrievably separated. Individual objects are shaped by quantitative relations with one another, such that the subject feels no control over them. Finally, I explain the isolation of the individual outside society through the same commodity structure that determines social reality as 'real' through positing the subject as merely contemplative.

Chapter 5 turns, therefore, to the subject. For Lukács, the individual feels themselves isolated from capitalist social reality. Drawing on his use of Riegl, I will suggest that this is a consequence of the particular structures of objectivity that presents a world as a reality that formally excludes the subject. I shall then suggest that his theory of the party offers Lukács's vision of how this might be overcome: its fluid, inclusive forms incorporate subjects as co-constitutor of the proletariat's social being. Finally, I speculatively suggest that Lukács might be read as using such structures to identify a moral imperative to revolution that is immanent to the structures of social reality in capitalism.

Chapter 6 examines the problem of identity and experience; as will become clear, it is where I find Lukács's argument least persuasive. The phenomenological structures applied to social reality are also, he suggests, applicable within the consciousness of the individual: consciousness is rei-

fied in the sense that experience itself becomes a thing, to which the subject is related in a specifically structured fashion. Those in different social positions relate to that experience in a range of ways—and the particular relationship of the proletariat to its experience is contradictory, potentially disrupting reification. While the intramental elements of his argument are not entirely convincing, his application of this model to the formation of collective identity may offer a new dimension to our understanding of social movements.

The third and final section, consisting of Chaps. 7 and 8, tries to apply this phenomenological reading of Lukács outside the problems he tackles in *History and Class Consciousness*. Chapter 7 considers the relation between society and nature. I consider the criticisms of Lukács's approach made both by Andrew Feenberg and by Lukács himself several decades later. Reinterpreting this relationship phenomenologically, I suggest, most of these criticisms are avoidable. Moreover, this reading challenges the very opposition of society and nature, and offers ways to think about the designation of certain things as 'natural,' 'irrational,' or extra-social. Finally, in concluding I offer a Lukácsian explanation of postmodernity in relation to the analysis of Fredric Jameson, and argue briefly that he suggests a substantial concept of rationality that may be made available for Critical Theory—and which has advantages over the abstract formalism of Jürgen Habermas. In showing these potential implications of a phenomenological reading of Lukács's thought, I hope not only to indicate his own renewed relevance today—but also to bridge the gap between Marxian Critical Theory and phenomenology more generally.

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PART I

The Road to Reification



CHAPTER 2

Reality and Representation in Art

Arriving in Heidelberg in 1912, Lukács soon found himself drawn into one of the most richly diverse and intellectually stimulating circles of its time—the group around the great social theorist Max Weber.

As Paul Honigsheim later recounted, their regular Sunday meetings included the likes of Georg Simmel, Karl Jaspers, Stefan George, Friedrich Gundolf, Wilhelm Windelband, and Heinrich Rickert.¹ Lukács himself was particularly associated with two of its members. The first was Ernst Bloch, who had persuaded Lukács to come to Heidelberg, and for whose personal impact Lukács later expressed the highest regard.² Their closeness led to a joke: ‘Who are the Four Apostles? Matthew, Mark, Lukács, and Bloch.’ The jester responsible was Lukács’s second friend, Emil Lask, perhaps the Crown Prince of Neo-Kantianism until his untimely death at the Front in 1915.³ Bloch and Lask represent contradictory tendencies in Lukács’s thought—the former pulling him towards an eschatology of revolution and radical rejection of bourgeois society, the latter drawing him to the rigorous logical and philosophical analysis of forms of being. Ultimately, I will argue, the first tendency may have played the larger role in his conversion to Bolshevism—but it was the second that was most significant for the decisive sections of *History and Class Consciousness*.

Besides these two, there was one other figure of the circle with whom Lukács was particularly close: its patron, Max Weber himself. So strong was their connection that when Lukács unexpectedly married Ljena

Grabenko, Weber sought to assuage the concerns of Lukács's solidly bourgeois father by claiming her as a relative.⁴ (This particular duty of an academic to their students is strangely absent from *Science as a Vocation*.) Recollecting their relationship later in life, Lukács attributed it above all to a single remark that had, it seemed, made a profound impression on Weber:

I ought perhaps to mention the fact, because it plays a part in my good relationship with Weber, that I once remarked to him that according to Kant the essence of aesthetics lay in the aesthetic judgement. My view was that aesthetic judgements did not possess such priority, but that priority belongs with being. 'Works of art exist. How are they possible?' This was the question I put to Max Weber and it made a deep impression on him. It is the fundamental problem of my *Heidelberg Aesthetics*.⁵

Lukács was not entirely mistaken in his evaluation of the impact of his statement: Weber expressly cites this claim in the closing sections of *Science as a Vocation*.⁶ As Lukács indicated, it was the central question he sought to answer in his abortive efforts to develop a comprehensive aesthetics and philosophy of art while seeking habilitation at Heidelberg.

What Weber found so striking in Lukács's formulation of the problem was the secondary, dependent role afforded to the subject. As he put it in a letter to his younger colleague, 'after having seen aesthetics approached from the standpoint of the receiver and more recently from that of the creator, it is a pleasure to see that the "work" itself is given a voice.'⁷ Lukács's move was not meant to indicate a return to some kind of Humean theory of aesthetic properties, or individual objective features of the work that bring pleasure. Rather, it could be understood as an attempt to apply in aesthetics Husserl's dictum to return *zu den Sachen selbst!* or to go back to the things themselves in all their meaningful complexity. To do so, Lukács developed a 'pure doctrine of aesthetic validity' that avoided either metaphysical or psychologistic reductionism, and instead asked what formal conditions must be satisfied in order for a thing to be manifest as a meaningful work of art. If an artwork were to fulfil its claim to manifest a timeless value, or to motivate pure aesthetic experiences that seemed to transcend everyday life, it must be understood as an autonomous complex of meaning. Thus, any significance the work drew from its reference to or representation of an external world (as a visual depiction of material reality, say, or equally as a repository of social and cultural values) must be ignored; equally, we fail to experience a work as art in the full sense if our

enjoyment of it is drawn from personal responses such as identification with the characters of a novel. Of course, such external referents might indeed be part of any object offered as a work of art: Lukács's argument was merely that they must be ignored if we are to take the object as art. To do so, we must bracket any reference they might have to a reality outside themselves, or to any perceiving subject, and take the work as a significant, interpretable form in its own right.

Lukács's drafts attempt to identify the formal conditions that must be satisfied for an artwork to be valid in this way—but despite producing several hundred pages of manuscript, he never completed the work. Only one chapter, on the subject-object relationship in art, ever reached publication. On returning to Budapest in 1917, he left this manuscript, along with hundreds of pages of notes and letters, in a valise deposited at a Heidelberg bank; though he stopped by to renew the deposit in the 1930s, he did not disclose the existence of the suitcase even to his closest associates, and it was only rediscovered by chance in 1972, a year after his death.⁸ Careful editorial work suggested that the surviving manuscripts comprised two different versions of the text—one put together roughly between 1912 and 1914 (issued posthumously as the *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst*) and a second produced roughly between 1916 and 1918 (published as the *Heidelberger Ästhetik*).⁹ He interrupted his work on the aesthetics in order to write his planned book on Dostoevsky, a work that Weber declared he 'hated' for taking Lukács away from the more systematic treatise on art, seeming to confirm Lask's description of him as a 'born essayist' unsuited to longer work.¹⁰

Lukács himself was conscious of the substantial difference between the Heidelberg drafts and much of his other writing, complaining to Ernst of his difficulties in writing the Dostoevsky book: 'as a result of my work on *Aesthetics*,' he explained, 'I have lost my ability to write concisely,' having had to accommodate himself to 'a systematic-philosophical style of writing with its architectonic structure.'¹¹ Admittedly, in some respects they share certain themes with his other writings of the time. The work seems to be motivated by the question of whether art can serve any redemptive, utopian role of bringing form and meaning to a chaotic world; as we shall see, Lukács answers this question in the negative. There remains a preoccupation with the separation of form and life, and with a loss of meaning. But the manner in which Lukács makes his argument and the particular points of reference he draws on mark these drafts out from his other writings of the time. This is obvious even at a superficial level. Gone is the

occasionally purple prose of his literary essays and their tendency towards allusion instead of argument; indeed, Weber remarked on the extremely ‘concise and logical’ form of these drafts.¹² This work required a very different approach: the Heidelberg drafts on art are marked out from his essays by their rigour, depth, and austerity; at the same time, his task required him to develop a consistent, systematic vocabulary to analyse art and the aesthetic.

The differences with his earlier work were more than stylistic. In bringing together Husserlian phenomenology with the Neo-Kantianism of Lask, Lukács’s aesthetics offered a theory of art that defined both subject and object through the immanent meaning-structure of the work itself. Where his earlier works often equate the subject with a soul-substance pre-existing any objectivity it encounters, his Heidelberg drafts on art determine subjectivity in terms of formal orientations towards the work, associated with particular configurations of its meaning—such as those of the creator whose experience of creating the work means they are never able to perceive it as an autonomous whole. The meaning of the work therefore cannot be understood in terms of an expression by such a subject: its significance is instead determined by its internal formal structure. Drawing on Riegl’s notion of *Kunstwollen*, Lukács explained different genres (such as naturalism) in such formalist terms: each genre constructed meaning in its own peculiar way, endowing the elements of its works with a significance governed by the composition of the work as a whole.

The method that Lukács used to explain the meaning of works of art, I will argue, was the basis for the method he later used to interpret social relations in *History and Class Consciousness*. He would come to treat social being as a meaningful reality in which the relations between different entities (humans and objects) were structures of signification that determined both the existence and interactions of the various elements of the whole. In the same way as he argued that the meaning of the elements of a work of art are defined by their formal relation to one another, so too would he later insist the meaning of an object (such as a commodity) is no mere illusion; it is that object’s social existence, what it *is*, determined by its relation to other socially significant things. Meanings are socially real, not mere reflections of an external reality—just as the meaning of an artwork is more than its representation of an objective world outside itself. The framework of the Heidelberg drafts provided the basis for his Marxian theory.

My aim here is to isolate those elements of the Heidelberg drafts which were most important for his later work. I shall not, therefore, offer a comprehensive reconstruction of these fragmentary works for their own sake, nor shall I distinguish systematically between the first and second drafts of these works. Moreover, I will not seek to defend its claims, many of which now seem quite antiquated. For example, Lukács's preoccupation with the 'genius' creator of art and with the internal harmony of the work is now rather out-of-date in contemporary philosophies of art. Indeed, his insistence on understanding the work through a formalist and immanent lens is in stark contrast to the Marxist historicism he would later display in, say, *The Historical Novel*. I shall not attempt to defend his argument as a theory of art, therefore, but will instead plunder it with an eye to the ideas that would later reappear in his analysis of reification. I shall begin by offering the background to Lukács's attempt to explain art—the reaction to psychologistic and naturalistic attempts to explain knowledge and art in the nineteenth century. I shall then introduce the most important sources for Lukács's own theory—first, the theorists of art Konrad Fiedler and Alois Riegl; second, the philosophers Edmund Husserl and Emil Lask. Finally, I shall turn to the meat of Lukács's own theory, focusing on two particular questions he addresses in the Heidelberg drafts—the notion of the work as a self-enclosed *totality*, and the problem of the *subject-object relation*. His exploration of these ideas here is essential: these notions were, of course, to play a decisive role in his Marxist theory; it was here in his philosophy of art, I claim, that they first appeared in something like the form they would take in his account of society.

I TRUTH VERSUS JUDGEMENT: TRANSCENDING PSYCHOLOGISM

By directing his attention towards the formal structures of the work itself, Lukács sought to preserve a sphere of aesthetic value that could not be explained away as depending on the drives or desires of an individual viewer. The genuine work of art must aspire to universality, its value transcending time, place, and audience; to do so, its meaning must be construed as independent of the judging subject, resting instead in the formal structures of coherence organizing the work. Lukács's strategy was fully in line with one side of a particularly virulent philosophical debate of his time: his philosophy of art is characteristic of the anti-psychologism of

much late nineteenth-century German thought. His own argument—and indeed those of the likes of Husserl and Lask—will be clearer if placed in relation to this contest.

As Martin Kusch explains, the decline of Idealism following the death of Hegel and the rise of both historicism and the natural sciences posed a threat to the autonomy of philosophy in almost all of its fields.¹³ The likes of Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) and Theodor Lipps (1851–1914) sought to explain our knowledge of the world as a result of physiological and psychological processes; indeed, some sought to reformulate Kant’s explicitly transcendental argument so as to make it compatible with a natural-scientific explanation of the world. Even logic was a product of mental developments that could be described, tested, and verified in broadly empirical terms: the belief that a statement was ‘true’ was held in the mind, and so could be examined and described like other states of minds. Far from being universal and necessary, therefore, the very conditions of truth themselves were dependent on the mechanics of the mind. Ethics fell beneath the same critique as truth: from a psychological perspective, moral values could simply be reduced to the expression of preferences that we had happened to learn, rather than expressions of what was necessarily good; at the same time, the free will presupposed by moral norms was itself undermined by deterministic scientific explanations. Nor was art left untouched: as Martin Jay lucidly explains, “psychologism” ... emerged as a source of anxiety at certain key moments in the genesis of aesthetic modernism as well.¹⁴ Psychologism threatened the purity of high art, and the disinterestedness of the aesthetic attitude with which we were supposed to engage with the work of art. Classic theories of what became known as the aesthetic attitude (such as those of Schopenhauer or Kant) emphasized the passionless disinterest with which the perceiver was supposed to regard the work of art in order to appreciate its beauty, but psychologism suggested that any such detachment was false; our appreciation of art was, in fact, merely emotional. Jay points to the likes of T.E. Hulme and T.S. Eliot, among others, many of whom turned directly to Husserl’s anti-psychologistic screed in *Logical Investigations*. For these artists, psychologism undermined art’s claim to timeless, objective value, reducing it to mere contingent emotion. The Good, the True, and the Beautiful were all, it seemed, no more than physiological responses to material stimuli: explaining them undercut any value they might have.

It was to form that philosophy turned in order to identify a realm that could not be explained psychologically—and particularly to the forms of

logic. The most far-reaching effort to identify a sphere of depersonalized logical necessity was that of Hermann Lotze (1817–1881). For Gillian Rose, Lotze's work paved the way not only for the Neo-Kantianism that Lukács encountered in Heidelberg, but also for the logical foundations of sociology as we know it today. Lotze investigated the necessary conditions of knowledge. His argument rested on a distinction between mere perception and actual knowledge: while we might *perceive* an accidental coincidence of particulars, *knowledge* attempts to join these particulars in a suitable way. Thus (to borrow Kant's example) we might perceive that when the sun shines, the stone is warm—but knowledge requires us to link these perceptions properly, for example by stating 'the sun warms the stone.' The relations between ideas (and, indeed, metaphysically, between things) were central to Lotze's thought: the rules by which they might be coordinated are the laws of validity. In Kantian spirit, these laws can be deduced a priori as necessary—but where Kant tied such transcendental conditions to the knowing subject, Lotze was concerned only with objective knowledge as such. Thus, the minimum components of propositional thought must include *objects* (for we must always assume some underlying substance to be related), *concepts* or dependent properties sitting upon those objects, and *relations*, explaining the connections between objects based on their properties. The examination of the proper relations between these components of thought is the domain of validity: a proposition 'holds' or 'is valid' if its parts are placed in logically correct relations to one another. The rules of validity could be derived a priori, and were neither 'subjective,' in that they were not the product of individuals' thoughts or judgements, nor 'objective,' in the sense that they existed in objective reality; rather, they belonged to a separate realm that was entirely *sui generis*. Validity thus provided a sphere for philosophy that must stand above psychology because its laws were the unavoidable conditions of any truth whatsoever.

In his notion of validity, then, Lotze presented coherence as independent both of the psychological dispositions of the subject, and of any correspondence with an external world. The conditions of validity applied irrespective of personal or historical circumstance. Lotze's argument was taken up by the historically oriented Neo-Kantians of the South-West German School in defending values against historicist or naturalistic diminution. In drawing on Lotze, the likes of Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915) or Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936) sought to bypass some of the problems they perceived in Wilhelm Dilthey's attempt to rebut psychologism. Dilthey had been right to insist on a sharp distinction between

the highly deterministic natural sciences and the more fluid, interpretive human sciences—but his *Lebensphilosophie* risked reducing all values and arguments, including philosophy itself, to a historically contingent worldview. Even if we recognized that values (rather than merely material forces) played a role in motivating human action, their historical and social variability implied that there might be no objective way to know which values were truly *worthy* of our dedication. Lotze seemed to offer a way around this by making it possible to consider the formal validity of values separately from whether or not they were actually held at any point in the past. Christian Krijnen aptly summarizes the implications for the South-West School's programme thus:

Starting philosophical analysis with given cultural phenomena, i.e., spheres of culture containing objective validity claims, does not imply that the premise of the analysis is a *Faktum* that is stipulated dogmatically as valid. Rather, the analysis takes such *facta* as problematic, as a validity claim that is in need of philosophical determination and evaluation. ... According to the Neo-Kantians' understanding of the method of transcendental philosophy, the original determinacy of the different spheres of culture is to be known via an oblique, validity-reflexive disclosure of the constituents of meaning of those spheres of culture, i.e., of the principles of validity of those claims.¹⁵

By identifying the validity principles inherent to different spheres, therefore, it was possible to analyse them as 'rational.' For example, Windelband, who had completed his doctorate under Lotze, brought his teacher's notion to bear in the history of philosophy. He refused to treat his subject relativistically, as merely a record of the genesis of worldviews that had emerged at different points in time; rather, he argued, the philosophical historian should also aim at a judgement of the validity of these views according to their own immanent standards.

Lukács's project on aesthetics was in this respect unashamedly Neo-Kantian: indeed, much of it seems to have been written in the hope of habilitating under the auspices of Windelband's student, Heinrich Rickert. Rickert had supervised Lask's doctorate and Heidegger's habilitation, but—despite support from Weber—would not agree to work with Lukács. Nevertheless, the latter's Heidelberg manuscripts were clearly intended to offer precisely such a Neo-Kantian analysis applied to the domain of art: in seeking the conditions of the possibility of the work as such, he tries to explain what it means for a work to cohere in a way that provides a peak

aesthetic experience. That is, he seeks the conditions of validity of the aesthetic sphere, such that works acquire a meaning and a value independent of the psychological dispositions of their creators or audiences, and separate from any significance they may have as representatives of a particular socio-historical worldview. To grasp their specifically aesthetic significance, he argued, it was necessary to regard them within their own special validity sphere, apart from the world that produced them, and to evaluate the work of art on its own, in splendid isolation.

2 THE AUTONOMY OF ART: FIEDLER AND RIEGL

In seeking to identify the distinct validity principles of the aesthetic as such, Lukács turned to theorists of art who sought to explain works purely on their own terms, rather than reducing them to any external causes. Two such figures are of particular importance here: Konrad Fiedler and Alois Riegl. In early 1913, he recommended both thinkers to Weber (who had read Fiedler, but was not acquainted with Riegl), and he draws extensively on both writers in his drafts.¹⁶ Though he refers by name to both writers in a number of places, the full extent of his debts to them in the Heidelberg texts is perhaps less apparent than it might be precisely because it is so thoroughgoing: for example, he repeatedly uses Riegl's pivotal concept of *Kunstwollen*, but treats the source of the concept as sufficiently self-evident not to require constant identification. Elsewhere, the outline for the work as a whole includes a proposed section on a *system of Kunstwollen*—that is, an account of the logically necessary categories entailed by the concept.¹⁷ Unless the reader is familiar with the terminology and paradigms used by Riegl and Fiedler, Lukács's use of their ideas is not always obvious. But it was through their arguments that Lukács sought to ground his claim that art must be understood solely on its own terms.

Little read today, Konrad Fiedler's (1841–1895) unconventional work was profoundly influential in its time.¹⁸ Though unsystematic and often vague, his thought has a central focus on 'visual perception' as such. This is perhaps misleading in two directions. On the one hand, it might point towards a Kantian concern with the aesthetic judgement; Fiedler, however, explicitly distinguishes aesthetics from art, for we may of course find aesthetic pleasure in nature. Equally, the individual of indiscriminate taste may be pleased by a rough work that the refined connoisseur rejects, but we have no ground to suppose that the nature of the pleasure is any less 'aesthetic.' On the other hand, we might take 'visual perception' to mean

that art's task is—in the old-fashioned sense—no more than the representation of the world as we see it outside of us. But here too Fiedler demurs: the material world is never perceived naively; any perception of it is an ordering, a giving of form to it, not a direct rendering. For one thing, our perception of the material world is not only visual, but incorporates all our other senses. Painting isolates *one* sense, operating only with visual perception. But even this requires selecting from the mass of visual sensations in order to give a definite form to the work. It is that is the core of 'artistic activity': the artist's task is to take what they have experienced visually, and to refine its form in a process that 'represents a progression from confusion to clarity, from the indeterminacy of the inner process to the determinacy of the external expression.'¹⁹ Fiedler insists on a sharp distinction, therefore, between the artistic form and the natural 'substance' that is represented in painting. Art 'does not descend from thoughts, from the products of the mind, down to forms; rather, it rises from the formless and shapeless to form and shape, and in this process lies its entire spiritual significance.'²⁰ Nature—whatever is 'out there'—is not formed and meaningful as such until it comes to form in art.

For Fiedler, therefore, art and artistic activity are autonomous and clearly distinct from any other sphere. The visual artist isolates certain aspects of experience with no direct correlate in other senses: colour, for example, is not manifest to touch. But such aspects are the very stuff of the visual arts; rather than mere aspects of a total experience, they are its central concern. In the deepest sense, real 'seeing' or pure visual experience must be understood in detachment from any supposed connection to external reality. As a sphere of meaning, art is sufficient unto itself: 'what [art] creates is not a second world alongside the other world which exists without it; rather, above all it brings forth the world through and for the artistic consciousness.'²¹ This gnomic comment has two significant implications. First, it emphasizes the immanence of artistic meaning: the *sense* of a work of art is determined by its own forms, not by reference to the nature that it represents, the emotions it expresses, and so on. Second, there is a sense that we can only attribute 'existence' to a 'world' when it takes on form—and that the role of the artist, therefore, is to bring more and more of the formless, shapeless stuff into a formed, meaningful whole. His theory is effectively a rejection of Platonic qualms about art as no more than a distorted imitation of the objects or events depicted. For Fiedler, in contrast, it is meaningless to talk of some more true reality that visual arts are supposed to imitate. Because 'objective' being is unformed,

and any knowledge of that being whatsoever is, in effect, a forming of it, art counts as a knowledge of reality as valid as any other.

To contemporary readers, this is unavoidably reminiscent of Heidegger's account of art as a happening of truth—an impression reinforced by the similarity of titles: Heidegger's *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* suggestively echoes that of Fiedler's main work, *Über den Ursprung der künstlerischen Tätigkeit*.²² Heidegger's evocative comment that 'earth juts forth in to world' finds similar echoes in Fiedler. Unlike the Kantian noumenon, the shapeless substance that the artist brings to form cannot remain forever unknowable behind the representation; it is always, in a sense, present in the artist's ever-renewed attempt to bring more of the world to visual representation. The work overflows itself: in choosing a particular style to organize a work, the artist is tacitly aware that the same stuff could come to form in a plurality of other ways; their art implicitly entails endless reinterpretation of the same material. It is this aspect that Lukács focuses on in the earliest appearance of Fiedler in his Heidelberg texts: 'for Fiedler, the process is the eternal, the work only a station, an objectification, something fragmentary; "the task of art," he says, "always remains the same, unresolved and insoluble, and must always remain the same as long as there are men."' ²³ This obviously echoes Lukács's earlier concern with the inability of form to capture content, expressed so evocatively in *Soul and Form* and elsewhere—but with an important twist. His literary essays had described the problem in terms of a *post festum* imposition of forms that had in principle nothing to do with the content to which they were applied; by treating that content as restricted by such forms, Lukács implied its existence in some kind outside of them. Here, however, the content comes to reality only to the extent that it acquires form: the suggestion that a living content might find itself restricted by alien structures is nonsensical in this paradigm, for it presupposes a continual striving towards form rather than a completed act. Thus, Lukács's own explicit focus on the logical possibility of the Being of the artwork starts from the Fiedlerian claim that such Being is valid and distinct reality *sui generis*, rather than merely a reflection of an external world.

He was not uncritical of Fiedler, however, suggesting that the art theorist fetishized the role of the creator to too great a degree, neglecting the work itself.²⁴ Later, in *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács goes further: Fiedler's insistence on separating visual perception from all other senses qualifies him as an example of the theoretical 'fragmentation of the unity of the subject.'²⁵ Lukács sought to avoid such dependence on both

creating and perceiving subject, and to examine the work in its own right: rather than the product of an artist's creative vision, he sought a depersonalized principle of form immanent to the artwork. He found this in the thought of Alois Riegl (1858–1905), described by Barasch as ‘the fullest expression’ of the ‘trend in the theory of art’ that included Fiedler.²⁶ Intriguingly, while he relegates Fiedler to a footnote in *History and Class Consciousness*, Riegl is cited as one of three ‘truly important historians of the nineteenth century.’²⁷ I will return later to the significance of the remark; for now, it is sufficient to note what Lukács still found so admirable a decade later: Riegl's concern with the structure of our relation to the world, as expressed through his central concept, the *Kunstwollen*.

Unlike Fiedler, Riegl was deeply embedded within the academic study of art and the broader field around it. He studied art connoisseurship under Moritz Thausing, but also attended classes by Franz Brentano (who influenced Husserl) and Robert Zimmermann (the Herbartian philosopher, rather than the Minnesotan Nobel laureate). This philosophical background may have helped shape his theory of art. He began his career at the Museum of Art and Industry in Vienna; later, he served as director of the bureau of public monuments. His highly formalist work made him a leading figure in the Vienna School of Art History, and was a major point of reference for thinkers such as Erwin Panofsky and Karl Mannheim. Walter Benjamin identified Riegl's *Late Roman Art Industry* as one of ‘four books that would last’; tellingly, Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* was also on the list.²⁸ Though his formalism fell out of favour for a time with the rise of socio-historical approaches to the history of art in the 1970s, a rash of new editions of his work in recent years is testament to his renewed appeal.

Riegl's most celebrated term, *Kunstwollen*, is a product of the claim he shared with Fiedler: artistic style must be understood on its own terms. Riegl's case emerged in his polemical engagement with the then-dominant theories of Gottfried Semper (1803–1879). For Semper, styles of decorative arts followed directly from the purpose of an object, the material from which it was made, and the techniques available for it; intellectual concerns were purely secondary. Thus, geometric ornamentation might emerge from the fact that early walls were made of wickerwork.²⁹ In his early *Stilfragen*, Riegl overturned this claim by tracing the development across time of a number of decorative motifs such as vegetal patterns or arabesques. Rather than resulting from changes in the materials used, such patterns were the product of a purely artistic development: the acanthus

ornament, for example, was not copied directly from nature but was instead produced by the gradual elaboration of an earlier palmette motif.³⁰ Artistic styles, it followed, should be understood as autonomous, governed by their own immanent development rather than factors external to them.

The *Kunstwollen* could be seen as Riegl's formalization of this insight. He developed the term through its application in analysing the products of a vast range of periods from ancient Egypt to the Dutch baroque.³¹ There is considerable debate over the exact meaning of the term, as reflected in the various English translations of the term—'artistic volition,' 'will to art,' and others; the problem is only compounded by Riegl's liberal application of it to eras, to peoples, and to individuals: he speaks, for example, of the *Kunstwollen* of late Roman art, of Germans, and of Rembrandt at different points. But it would be fair to begin by characterizing it as the central principle of structure governing any given work of art, such that every detail is determined by the way it related each particular to the others. By implication, the work's theme, the material it is made of, or the purpose to which the object is put is not especially relevant to understanding the *Kunstwollen*. But where Fiedler personalizes such principles by attributing them to the creative subject, Riegl makes it possible to detach them from an individual creator by describing them in clusters of related concepts that determine how objects *must* appear in a given work. Identifying such principles allows us to judge works on their own terms, rather than by their success in representing some supposed external reality.

In seeking to identify the *Kunstwollen* of works of art, Riegl aimed to evaluate them by their own standards of validity and coherence, rather than ones imposed on them; as a result, he was notably open to often-neglected artistic genres. Thus, in *Late Roman Art Industry*, Riegl turns to the art, architecture, and decoration of the later Western Roman Empire. Next to the elegant motion and realism that characterized early Roman art, the art of this era was long scorned for its crude, static quality. But this, Riegl argued, was a misunderstanding of its *Kunstwollen*. First, he distinguished between the art of antiquity and that of modernity: where the Renaissance, for example, emphasized group composition and the coordination of discrete entities within a system of perspective, the art of antiquity aimed at 'the representation of external objects as clear material entities,' self-sufficient in their own right.³² Consequently, such art avoided anything that might undercut the unambiguous boundaries of the object that made it stand out from the world around: Egyptian painting, for example, places its figures on a bare background, and does not mask them

with the effects of light, shade, and perspective. Late Roman art was no exception, but it innovated in seeking to depict the discrete object in *three* dimensions, rather than the two of flat Egyptian art, so lifting its figures up from the plane.³³ This permitted the presentation of groups in which some figures stood behind the front row. To ensure that these figures nevertheless remained clearly distinct from one another, late Roman art emphasized the distinction between highlight and shadow to ensure unambiguous dark boundaries between the figures that kept them distinct (e.g. by particularly deep cuts in stone between figures). In turn, this made possible a new compositional principle or *Kunstwollen*: these boundaries produced a rhythmic alternation of light and dark, unifying the composition as a whole comprised of discrete entities. Rather than judge the work by an external standard, then, Riegl offered a way to identify its own internal standards—in a sense, to point (in Neo-Kantian vein) to the forms of validity of each work as the source of judgement.

Importantly, subordination of the individual entity to the group composition should not be understood as a deviation from strict realism—because any *Kunstwollen* implies a distinct understanding of what is ‘real.’ This might seem counter-intuitive: to modern eyes, Renaissance art’s development of perspective seems obviously more ‘realistic’ than flat Egyptian paintings, for example. Riegl demurs: to Egyptian eyes, the entities so depicted are distorted by the artist’s eye. The diminution of figures by their distance from the viewer or the obscuring of the object by the effects of aerial perspective conceals their ‘real’ essence. Instead, by presenting distinct figures that remain the same regardless of how we look at them, Egyptian art tried to capture the fixed substance of the object. Riegl distinguishes these two different *Kunstwollen* by designating them *optisch* (optic) and *haptisch* (haptic): the former presents reality as it appears to the eye, while the latter presents reality as known by touch, for which the boundaries of objects are sharply delineated rather than fading into shadow. These artistic principles correspond to distinct ways of understanding the nature of reality as such. The ancients had ‘a notion of the world as composed of tactile (plastic), self-contained individual shapes.’³⁴ Each entity was defined entirely by its own internal essence; their interactions were, in consequence, mechanistic and ‘chain-like,’ in that they were determined by the essences of these objects themselves.³⁵ *Haptisch* art, which (like touch) grasps each object individually and in isolation, depicts this understanding of reality. In contrast, the modern image of the world is of an interconnected web, a complete system within

which objects interact according to laws that are independent of the individual entity. By subordinating all appearances to the rational rules of perspective, *optisch* art corresponds to such an understanding—and, as we shall see, to Lukács's view of classical German philosophy.

Riegl develops his analysis of *Kunstwollen* by positing a number of different categories beyond the *haptisch/optisch* distinction. Such categories shape not only the objective reality depicted in the work, but also the subject's relation to it. He distinguishes, for example, *nahsichtig*, *normal-sichtig*, and *fernsichtig* art, describing respectively whether a work is meant to be viewed from close-up, a middle distance, or from afar. This distinction implies that the very position of the subject is presupposed by the formal construction of the work and the nature of the reality it assumes. In perhaps his clearest definition of the term, Riegl makes the centrality of this subject-object relation explicit:

[T]he *Kunstwollen* of antiquity, especially in the final phase, is practically identical with other major forms of expression of the human *Wollen* during the same period. All such human *Wollen* is directed towards self-satisfaction in relation to the surrounding environment (in the widest sense of the word, as it relates to the human being externally and internally). Creative *Kunstwollen* regulates the relation between man and objects as we perceive them with our sense; this is how we always give shape and color to things. Yet man is not just a being perceiving exclusively with his sense (passive) but also a longing (active) being. Consequently, man wants to interpret the world as it can most easily be done in accordance with his inner drive. ... The character of this *Wollen* is always determined by what may be termed the conception of the world at a given time [*Weltanschauung*] (again in the widest sense of the term), not only in religion, philosophy, science, but also in government and law.³⁶

Kunstwollen offer a stylistic representation of both the nature of objective reality and the relation of the individual to that reality prevailing in a given society. Any notion of the nature of the world implies too our possible modes of interaction with it. Like Fiedler, then, Riegl treats works of art as presenting a world of their own, structured by an immanent principle that sets up realities within themselves. Riegl, though, is more ambitious (and systematic) in his incorporation of the subject-position into the work—and too in extending the concept beyond art to imply that identical structuring principles might be at work in broader social phenomena such as the law.

The exact meaning of *Kunstwollen* remains a matter of debate. For example, Riegl's attribution of different *Kunstwollen* to different cultures and 'peoples' might imply that they originate in some kind of national spirit. This, at least, was the interpretation offered in 1929 by the controversial Hans Sedlmayr; his subsequent involvement with the Nazis sullied Riegl's reputation by association.³⁷ Erwin Panofsky offers a quite different approach: explicitly seeking to purge any 'psychologistic' or subjective elements from Riegl's theory, he refines the theory of *Kunstwollen* to a trio of logically necessary, a priori conceptual dyads: *any* work of visual art entails a choice between haptic and optic, depth and surface, and fusing and splitting.³⁸ There is textual evidence to support both interpretations—but what is more important for our purposes is Lukács's appropriation of Riegl's central concept. There is much to suggest his reading is closer to that of Panofsky. In the first place, he criticizes Fiedler for excessive emphasis on the role of the creative subject.³⁹ Indeed, he prefigures Panofsky in expressly rejecting psychologistic explanations of art.⁴⁰ Moreover, in seeking to develop Riegl's concept for broader application, he looks for its logical foundation. He criticizes Riegl for identifying *Kunstwollen* inductively from specific works of art, rather than establishing their logical foundation—with the consequence that Riegl achieves only a 'philosophical history of art' rather than a philosophy of art as such.⁴¹ In place of this, his sketched outline for the work as a whole includes a proposed section on 'a system of *Kunstwollen*'—that is, a logically structured analysis that, had it been written, might have looked rather similar to Panofsky's.⁴² Thus, in taking on Riegl's concept in his own analysis, Lukács deploys it in a way that minimizes the contribution of an individual creator; he directs attention instead to the immanent structures that determine the forms of an artwork and at the same time define the position of the subject within the totality.

Fiedler and Riegl, then, offered a general claim that the world appearing formed and meaningful within art must be understood as a valid on its own terms, not merely as a representation of an external reality. A work of art presents a *reality* in the sense that it is a seemingly complete or total organization of all its elements on its own terms. What any given object within a work *is* or *means* is defined within that work, rather than by fidelity to an external objective world. Moreover, the structuring principle (or *Kunstwollen*) governing it indicates a complete depiction of the workings of reality and the interactions a subject may have with it. Their insistence that a work must be understood as a world unto itself, governed by its own internal principle, made Riegl and Fiedler easily available for Lukács to appropriate

their ideas in Neo-Kantian fashion: they offered a reflexive identification of the validity principles appropriate to a particular sphere as the source of judgement—even down to the level of an individual work of art.

3 THE PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK: HUSSERL AND LASK

While Fiedler and Riegl offered Lukács a way to think about specific works and genres of art, his statement that Riegl offered only a philosophical *history* of art indicates that he needed to look beyond them in order to generalize their theories. Riegl's *Kunstwollen* helped to interpret the perspective from which historical cultures viewed the relationship of individual and world, but it is not clear that he went the further step of analysing this problem at a fundamental philosophical level, let alone of suggesting that art could actualize such relations in practice. To make this step, Lukács turned to some of the most innovative philosophy of his time—the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and the aletheiology (or theory of truth) of his Heidelberg friend Emil Lask. There are obvious parallels between Fiedler's and Riegl's approach to art and Husserl's phenomenology: Barasch points to the similarity between the former's 'idea of concentrating on the phenomena perceived while altogether disregarding the physical reality of the objects reflected in these images,' and the latter's phenomenological *epoché*, which 'brackets' the existence of the real world outside phenomena.⁴³ Lukács himself was fully aware of these similarities, explicitly referring to Fiedler's theory as 'phenomenological.'⁴⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that he applied the same label to his own philosophy of art, referring repeatedly to its phenomenological aspects.

What was 'phenomenological' about Lukács's Heidelberg drafts (as he saw it) was that they explained the aesthetic significance and meaningfulness of works of art according to their own immanent structures, on the model of Husserlian analysis of phenomena, rather than as representations of a material or cultural reality outside them. Following Husserl, he treated this meaning as *intentional*—that is, aesthetic meaning and value depends on a particular subjective stance towards the work as a totality; different subjective stances would alter the meaning of the work to which they were related. What Husserl applied to mental acts, Lukács transferred to works of art as spheres of value and meaning *sui generis*—and subsequently, I will argue, to his account of capitalistic reification. In each case, meaning is treated as integral to the objective reality of beings, rather than simply imposed on objects by the subject; rather, the way meaning is structured,

Lukács would argue, defines the subject in turn. In adumbrating Lukács's reading of Lask and Husserl in his Heidelberg drafts, then, I seek to identify the modes of thought he would later develop in quite a different direction in *History and Class Consciousness*.

Husserl and Lask drew on a range of different and often-conflicting strands of thought, but if their sources had one common feature, it was a preoccupation with 'non-existent' purely mental entities. Previously, philosophy had concerned itself with things that existed (or were thought to exist)—through either ontology, describing what they are, or epistemology, explaining how we come to know them. Such entities were understood as being extended in space, as having properties of their own, of determinable quantity and so on. However, as Franz Brentano (1838–1917) most famously argued, our mental images of such objects were necessarily bound up with aspects that could not conceivably be part of the object as it existed beyond consciousness—but nor could they be attributed to a transcendental knowing subject such as that of Kant:

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not do so in the same way. In presentation, something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on. ... This intentional inexistence is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon exhibits anything like it.⁴⁵

Brentano's meaning was sufficiently opaque that he criticized almost all his own students' attempts to interpret or develop it: it remains unclear exactly what he meant by the *inexistence* of an object, whether this refers to the fact that mental objects 'exist in consciousness,' or that they do not 'exist' in a strict sense. But by introducing the notion of *intentionality*, Brentano implied that it was almost impossible even to think of objects merely through the categories of existence; they would always and inevitably be entangled with their *meaning*. It was necessary, therefore, to develop a systematic philosophical vocabulary with which to describe and analyse this new element of experience.

Brentano's account was rooted in his own quasi-psychologistic thought; his student Edmund Husserl took on the notion of intentionality but

sought to purge it of psychologism. Husserl's move was prompted, it is usually assumed, because of a scathing review of his early *Philosophy of Arithmetic* (1891), in which he had attempted to explain the psychological foundations of arithmetic.⁴⁶ The reviewer was Gottlob Frege (1848–1925), whose work on mathematics and logic was foundational for analytic philosophy. His *Grundlagen der Arithmetik* (1884) and *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik* (1893) offered vehement arguments against psychologism, but it is his contribution to the debate on meaning that is most relevant here, particularly in his 1892 paper, 'On Sense and Reference.' Two sentences, 'Hesperus is shining' and 'Phosphorus is shining,' may appear to mean the same thing if we know that these are two different names for the planet Venus: their *reference* is identical, in that they point to the same lump of rock. But their *sense* is different: the first designates Venus as 'the evening star,' the second as 'the morning star.'⁴⁷ That Frege made this point through the logical analysis of statements, in contrast to Brentano's preoccupation with our affective orientation towards objects, was characteristic of his anti-psychologism; in making this move, he offered a way to think of meaning independently of psychological dispositions.

It was this that provided the starting point as Husserl began to develop the philosophy for which he is famous: phenomenology. In selecting this name, Husserl means to examine the structures of the experiences themselves, without regard to their relation to external reality—but also avoiding psychological reductionism. His *Logical Investigations* (1900/1901) brought together Brentano's concern with mental phenomena, but infused with the logical concerns of the likes of Lotze and Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848). The six essays that make up the positive argument of this text after the anti-psychologistic 'Prolegomena' explore the meaningfulness of mental representations by identifying the logical preconditions for different kinds of sense-making. Husserl begins by treating statements as manifestations of the conscious mental states he aims to analyse.⁴⁸ He follows Frege in distinguishing reference and sense, but uses Brentano's 'intentionality' to designate this directedness of consciousness towards its object. For example, Napoléon is both 'the victor at Jena' and 'the vanquished at Waterloo': the same being is referred to in each statement, but these two designations are clearly quite different in the phenomenological sense. Neither is the one, true, exclusive Napoléon, nor can either be dismissed as a mere representation that does not grasp the essence beneath.⁴⁹ Husserl insists that 'an act of meaning is the determinate manner in which

we refer to our object of the moment’—it is almost impossible to conceive of a relation to the object *stripped* of such meaning.⁵⁰

However, the inherent meaningfulness of consciousness is no mere psychological disposition; it is subject to its own transcendental logic. Thus, Husserl distinguishes between ‘nonsense’ and ‘absurdity’ as different failures of meaning. A sentence such as ‘a round or’ is nonsense: the basic laws of grammar mean that the simple meanings indicated in the words of this phrase cannot be combined to produce a coherent meaning.⁵¹ Conversely, ‘a square circle’ passes the test of grammatical coherence, but is absurd because the complex meaning arising from this combination of elements is contradictory. Much of the *Logical Investigations* is devoted to identifying rules governing such meanings. For example, the Third Investigation considers the relation of parts and wholes. Here Husserl distinguishes between dependent and independent parts of a phenomenon: it is possible to think of the head of a horse separately from the horse, so this counts as an independent part; it is not possible to think of, say, a person’s regional accent separately from their actual speech, so this would be a dependent part.⁵² The essential meaning of dependent parts is only comprehensible in terms of a broader whole of which they are parts, while other phenomena—both independent parts and wholes—are in principle thinkable on their own (a claim, I will suggest, that plays an important role in Lukács’s understanding of totality). What is important, then, is that Husserl’s deductions on meaning are logical: they are not derived from empirical-psychological observation, and so offer secure knowledge of the nature of meaning.

In thus identifying the transcendental preconditions of meaning, Husserl secured a distinct realm of investigation separate from psychology, conventional epistemology, and naturalistic descriptions of the objective world. This was the realm of consciousness—to which he increasingly directed his attention after *Logical Investigations*. By the time of *Ideas I* (1913), he had come to argue explicitly for the separateness of this field. In order to understand the meaningfulness of consciousness, he argued, we must first systematically ignore the world outside phenomena: performing the phenomenological *epoché*, we ‘bracket’ the entire external world, and (though not denying its existence) ‘make absolutely no use’ of it.⁵³ This allows the phenomenologist to study consciousness *qua* consciousness: ‘consciousness has, in itself, a being of its own which in its own absolute essence, is not touched by the phenomenological exclusion. It therefore remains as the “*phenomenological residuum*,” as a region of being which is of essential necessity quite unique and which can indeed become

the field of a science of a novel kind: phenomenology.⁵⁴ Just as Fiedler distinguished the world within the artwork from its external correlate, so too does Husserl bracket out the reality beyond consciousness.

This *epoché* allowed Husserl to examine the meaning-generative structures of consciousness directly. It is a matter of relative indifference whether or not the mental presentation of an object corresponds to an external object. If we imagine the god Jupiter, our image still includes the same structures of intentionality and significance as our image of Bismarck; from a purely *phenomenological* point of view, the meaningfulness of the presentation is formally similar.⁵⁵ In *Ideas I*, Husserl refers to these structured meaning-complexes as *noema*, broadly designating the object as a specific meaning at a particular juncture, intended in a definite way. (Much ink has been spilt on his precise meaning, with Woodruff Smith identifying at least four different schools of thought.⁵⁶) Such noema should not be confused with the Kantian phenomenon, defined in opposition to the noumenon: 'it is fundamentally erroneous,' he states, 'to believe that perception ... does not reach the physical thing itself. The latter is not given to us in itself or in its being-in-itself. ... It is not the case that, in its stead, a picture or a sign is given.'⁵⁷ That is, our image is not a re-presentation of an object that is absent (like a photograph of the object, or a word designating it), pointing our attention past itself and towards the missing thing. We are instantly directed towards the object itself; this is the nature of its givenness in consciousness.

Of course, Husserl is no idealist, reducing the object to the mind's projection of it. It is integral to our experience of objects that they overflow our immediate consciousness of them. Husserl gives the example of a box that we at first glimpse only from one angle. If I 'tilt and turn' it to view it from a different angle, the contents of my consciousness change as I see parts of the box that were hidden. But at the same time, I am viewing one and the same box: it continues to exist throughout my various perceptions.⁵⁸ The same, of course, is true of different ways of understanding an object. We may find ourselves aesthetically affected by 'certain arabesques or figures,' but then realize that we are looking, not at ornament, but at 'symbols or verbal signs.'⁵⁹ In this case, it is the intentional act that has changed; the content remains the same. Thus, the object in consciousness always remains incomplete: we are unavoidably aware that it may be intended in different ways. It transcends our act, but this transcendence is immanent to our experience of it, in our constant awareness that different intentional acts may correspond to the same underlying content.⁶⁰

It is not only the object that is implied rather than directly presented by the immanent structures of consciousness. Where Kant felt able to deduce the rational faculties of the subject a priori, separable from experience, Husserl offers a subject or ego living in its consciousness. His exact view of this ego developed throughout his work, although for our purposes it is only necessary to consider its significance in *Ideas I* and the *Logical Investigations*, as his later arguments postdate *History and Class Consciousness*. In the *Logical Investigations*, he explicitly rejects the notion that a ‘pure Ego’ must be assumed as the central point of our consciousness as that to which all appearances are shown, disagreeing with the Marburg Neo-Kantian Paul Natorp on this point—but the second edition of the book explicitly retracted this argument.⁶¹ At this point, though, Husserl takes pains to emphasize that we should not think of consciousness (or the ego) as one entity and the object as another, such that they ‘become related to one another in a real sense’ through the intentional act.⁶² Indeed, he acknowledges the ambiguity of the term ‘act,’ which wrongly implies a ‘doer’ performing a ‘deed.’⁶³ Instead, we should think of certain experiences as having an act-character about them as part of their meaning-structure. While it is possible for us to bring our ego before our attention, we are typically too absorbed in relating intentionally to objects to have ‘awareness’ (*Bewusstheit*, as Natorp has it) of the ego. Rather, ‘the ego [is] one pole of the relation in question, while the other pole is the object.’⁶⁴

By the time *Ideas* emerged, however, Husserl had somewhat altered his view. There remains the implication that the act-character of an experience implies a subject: Husserl now argues that to every noema, there corresponds a specific noesis—an act-content, as it were, such as ‘liking,’ ‘judging,’ ‘using’ the noema as the thing liked, judged, or used. In Husserl’s words, ‘owing to its noetic moments, every intensive mental process is precisely noetic; it is of its essence to include in itself something such as a “sense” and possibly a manifold sense on the basis of this sense-bestowal and, in unity with that, to effect further productions which become “senseful” precisely by «this sense-bestowal».’⁶⁵ There must, then, remain some kind of ego-pole implied by the structure of experience: as Husserl explains, ‘each Ego is living in its mental processes. ... It lives in them: that is not to say that it has them and «has» its “eye on” what they include.’⁶⁶ Here again we see his insistence that we should not treat the ego as a mind that reaches out to a separate object through its intentional act. But there is an added dimension in *Ideas*, one that more directly reveals the ego.

Like the object, the ego transcends in immanence: it is not actually perceived directly, but the structure of experience reveals it indirectly by the overflow of the moment. This is brought out in the temporality of our experience. When listening to music, for instance, I am not simply concerned with the specific tone I hear at this instant. My image of that tone also contains a memory of the previous tone—what Husserl calls *retention*—and, usually, an anticipated horizon of possibilities for the subsequent tone—or *protention*.⁶⁷ This provides us with ‘a stream of mental processes as a unity’—in other words, a unity of consciousness.⁶⁸ For Husserl, ‘as soon as I look at the flowing of life in its actual present and, while doing so, apprehend myself as the pure subject of this life. ... I say unqualifiedly and necessarily that I am, this life is, I am living: *cogito*.’⁶⁹

The manifest indications of Husserl’s importance for Lukács’s thought are found throughout the Heidelberg drafts. The basic framework for his analysis is explicitly phenomenological. One lengthy chapter, seemingly planned for both versions of the treatise, is titled *Phänomenologische Skizze des schöpferischen und receptiven Verhaltens*, or ‘Phenomenological Sketch of Creative and Receptive Attitudes,’ and the very word *Phänomenologie* and its cognates appears therein to an almost tiresome degree. Beyond this, Lukács draws liberally on Husserl’s works and terminology throughout. The earlier drafts, which Márkus and Benseler date between 1912 and 1914, quote from the *Logical Investigations*, published in 1900–1901.⁷⁰ By the later drafts, which Márkus and Benseler date to 1916–1918, he was referring explicitly to the Husserlian *ἐπιχρή*, using both that term and referring to ‘»In-Klammern-setzen«’ or ‘placing in brackets.’⁷¹ This suggests he must have read *Ideas*, which appeared only in 1913, indicating a desire to keep up with the most current incarnation of Husserl’s thought. (It is, incidentally, *Ideas* to which he refers in a footnote in *History and Class Consciousness*.⁷²) At the same time, though, his appropriation of Husserlian thought was far from straightforward despite his use of Husserlian terms. For example, as Heller notes, Lukács at one point in the later version of the drafts hints that his phenomenology is more Hegelian than Husserlian in some regards.⁷³ But any such Hegelianism was, as Heller concedes, his own idiosyncratic interpretation; what is Hegelian about it is that Lukács aims to treat the *artwork*, rather than its creator or its audience, as subject.⁷⁴ Moreover, in a curriculum vitae submitted in May 1918 in support of his application for *Habilitation*, Lukács specifically singled out the ‘great impact’ of the ‘methodological stimulus of Husserl’s writings’ on him.⁷⁵ The precise wording is signifi-

cant: the fact that this stimulus was ‘methodological’ suggests that Lukács’s use sought to apply Husserl’s approach to other domains, rather than to investigate the same questions as Husserl himself.

But what complicates Lukács’s use of Husserl is that his is a distinctly Neo-Kantian appropriation of phenomenology. Indeed, Lukács’s engagement with Husserl may have been directly stimulated by several of his Heidelberg friends and acquaintances. His relationship with Karl Jaspers was especially close: Jaspers treated Ljena Grabenko, Lukács’s first wife, for a time. He was on sufficiently friendly terms with Max Scheler for the latter to have visited him at home to discuss philosophy during the war. But it is likely that it was, above all, Emil Lask who directed him towards Husserl, and whose own interpretation of Husserl’s thought shaped Lukács’s reading. Lask’s death at the front in 1915 meant that he never brought his philosophy to full fruition. He was, however, also associated with Husserl, as illustrated by Steven Galt Crowell, who places Lask alongside Husserl as an important influence on Heidegger, and by Karl Schuhmann and Barry Smith, who trace the correspondence between Lask and Husserl.⁷⁶ But the eclipse of Neo-Kantianism has left him largely understudied—despite some interest in Japan, thanks to his student and editor of his collected works, Eugen Herrigel, who taught there in the 1920s.⁷⁷ Lask was a close friend and mentor to Lukács, who published a memorial piece to him in *Kant-Studien* in 1917. His influence on Lukács’s philosophy of art is visible in the latter’s concern with the question of the logical possibility of works of art in themselves, regardless of the judging subject. Lask’s thought focuses on parallel questions at the level of logic, which he presented as underlying the very being of objects. In this ontological turn, he began to move away from mainstream Neo-Kantianism: a contemporary review of his posthumous *Gesammelte Schriften* (1923) notes a ‘remarkable radical change in the development of this thinker’ manifest in his late works.⁷⁸

Lask’s doctoral dissertation, *Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte*, is worthy of note for any account of Lask’s influence on Lukács: it is Lask who picks out the elements of Fichte’s thought on which Lukács would later rely in his account of the Idealist in *History and Class Consciousness*. He presents a Fichte quite at odds with the conventional image of his thought as dependent on a self-positing Ego that projects or creates reality as a whole from within itself. While acknowledging such tendencies in the earliest versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Lask argues that Fichte moved decisively away from such subjectivism in a dramatic *Umschwung* or rever-

sal around 1797.⁷⁹ After this point, Fichte began to doubt the capacity of reason to explain individual particulars. Incapable of total conceptualization, such particulars always retained something elusive in them—which Fichte later referred to as the *hiatus irrationalis*, the ‘irrational gap’ between the general category and the individual example. Consequently, the rational knowing subject could no longer claim to be the source of all real existence. As Beiser notes, Lask fixed his attention on this term, seeing it as the key to Fichte’s later work, as well as the reason it was impossible to produce a real science of history, filled as it was with rich particulars.⁸⁰ It was, I shall argue in Chap. 5, this version of Fichte, denuded of the creative subject, on which Lukács would later draw.

Lask’s concern with history in his Fichte book was typical of the South-West Neo-Kantians. But reading Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* led Lask to doubt whether his teacher Rickert had truly escaped psychologism. To avoid the same fate, his subsequent work sought to develop an asubjective logic freed from its Kantian connection with judgement—with ontological implications. His first step, in ‘Gibt es einen Primat der praktischen Vernunft in der Logik?’ (1908) was to criticize his Neo-Kantian teachers (including Rickert) for their preoccupation with *norms* over *values*. Reading Husserl had persuaded Lask that—despite the best efforts of Rickert and Windelband—the notion of a norm remained tainted with psychologism on account of its conative demands on a subject’s will. In contrast, a valid value is true in itself, making no appeal to will: it transcends such subjectivity entirely. Lask aimed to explain the logical structures of diverse values as such, without recourse to subjectivity. His goal, Beiser explains, was to extend Kant’s philosophy by showing that transcendental principles are not only necessary for experience, but for all forms of knowledge or meaning whatsoever, above and beyond what individual subjects happen to believe about them.⁸¹ He defined his thought as *aletheiology*—which Crowell defines as ‘an ontological (nonmetaphysical, nonrepresentational) theory of meaning grounded in the concept of truth.’⁸² All matter presupposes categorial validity and form in order to come to objectivity. Drawing on his reading of the later Fichte, Lask made clear that categories were not identical with the individual object; indeed, form or validity are always dependent on matter because they are always the validity or form of *something*. As he explained, ‘all sense that we can in fact find in actuality is tied to *factual* experiencing.’⁸³ But at the same time, the being of objects *as objects* depends on their coming to form: things entail meaning as part of their *existence*, not merely as a (psychological) component of

the way we know them. There is, therefore, no thing-in-itself behind the phenomenon.⁸⁴ Where Kant's categories were merely epistemological—they applied to the knowledge of experience—Lask aimed to develop categories that could, Crowell explains, 'recover the ontological significance of the Aristotelian conception of categories while retaining the decisive Kantian insight into their purely "logical" character.'⁸⁵

It is at first glance difficult to understand how Lask could argue both that his categories were not Idealistically identical with the object but were nevertheless the real categories of its existence—all while remaining within the boundaries of Kant's critical philosophy. The resolution lies in the concept of validity and its relation to truth. Consider the exact relation he posits between categories and existents. Lask demanded 'the recognition of the transcendental logicity or "thinkable" quality of Being.'⁸⁶ Thus, 'the sundering of the object and the "truth about it" into two realms should not be allowed; rather, the truth itself passes into the object, and is identical with it.'⁸⁷ Categories reveal the truth of objects, but 'truth,' for Lask, is not a matter of correspondence with an external reality—rather, it concerns the philosophical question of validity. Validity determines what truth *is*. Matter without valid form therefore has no contact with truth—it certainly cannot be thought of as 'more truly' itself than its existence in and through form. Consequently, though Lask does not deny that matter overflows form, the valid categorical form of the object is its *true* existence.

Moreover, Lask's preoccupation with validity as such meant that his logic was asubjective. From his perspective, Kant's grounding of the categories in the act of judgement made truth dependent on the subject (and hence at risk of psychologism) rather than universally and unconditionally necessary. Instead, experience 'is not so much a matter of a relationship between knowing subject and object, not about the subject-object duality, but rather of a relationship between transcendently logical knowledge content and object.'⁸⁸ This results in the theoretical diminution of the subject itself: Lask describes it variously as 'the scene where the actualization of objectively valid content takes place,' or as 'the scene of the transcendental object.'⁸⁹ Crowell is thus undoubtedly right to suggest that 'Lask's discussion of the "subject" generally has the appearance of an afterthought.'⁹⁰ Inasmuch as he does attend to the subject, Lask defines it in terms of a specific relation to the object, instead of any a priori categories of its own. In a striking prefiguration of Lukács's critique of reification, he criticizes the 'theoretical-contemplative' structuring of the subject-object relation, which, as Schuhmann and Smith note, suspends any interaction

between subject and world. In Lask's words, "the knower "lives" only in truth, and in knowing he has his life. In contrast, he does not live in that which he merely speculates about."⁹¹ Such an attitude of epistemological contemplation generates what Lask calls a *historische Einteilung* or 'historical separation' of the subject from the world, leading to 'castrated, blasé knowledge' of a world of shadows.⁹² I shall return to the implications of this claim for Lukács; what is important at this point is the secondary, derived role that Lask affords the subject. It is, in effect, circumscribed by the objectively determined validity forms of its relation to the object.

Like Husserl, then, Lask saw meaning as inextricable from the being of objects. The task of philosophy was to explain such meaning without reducing it to psychological impulses. In this respect, it is easy to understand why Lukács treated Husserl and Lask as the philosophical complements to Riegl and Fiedler. The latter treated art as a realm of significance and meaning in ways analogous to the broader philosophical claims of the former two. For Fiedler, recall, the artwork was not, of course, identical with the world it claimed to depict—but at the same time, it manifests a reality of its own, to be understood on its own terms; Riegl's *Kunstwollen* might be understood (in line with a more Panofskyan interpretation) as the formal validity conditions of a given work, such that it determined the way content was to be disclosed to the spectator. It is no coincidence that both art historians have been linked with modernism and its associated preoccupation with form—Fiedler for his nonrepresentational theory of art, Riegl for his formalist method. It is no surprise, then, that Lukács's early account of art was able to use these disparate theorists in complementary fashion—and that the theory he devised thereby was itself highly formalist, despite his own later historicism. Following their lead, he sought to explain the validity structure of the work of art as a locus of meaning subject *sui generis*. It is to analysis of his method that we must now turn.

4 THE ARTWORK AS TOTALITY

The young Lukács's philosophy of art was expressed in terms of the same debates to which Husserl and Lask responded. This context shaped his analysis: the general method he used to construct his argument was phenomenological. It can be characterized in this way most simply because this was Lukács's own choice of term for it—indicated both by the title of the lengthy chapter, 'Phenomenology of the creative and receptive attitudes,' and by his repeated use of the term 'phenomenology' and its cog-

nates. This title offers an important qualification to one of the central claims of the Heidelberg drafts. Lukács contends that the work of art is to be understood as a self-enclosed totality, its meaning determined by its own immanent structures. Of course, such a claim seems entirely at odds both with his later Marxist realism and with his earlier exploration in his *History of Modern Drama*, of the ways any artwork is shaped by the social and historical circumstances of its emergence. Yet his philosophy of art, while obviously *different* from his other accounts, is not necessarily *incompatible* with them: each account investigates distinct questions about art. His more sociological and Marxian accounts explain works of art in purely objective terms: a given work exhibits certain properties or deploys specific symbols because it draws from its own broader context. But in his Heidelberg works, Lukács sets aside such questions to analyse what might be described as peak or pinnacle aesthetic experiences—those rare subjective encounters with an artwork that seem to lift the percipient beyond their everyday experience into a state that he characterizes as utopian. What such experiences depend on, Lukács suggests, is a particular attitude towards the work: it is *intended* (phenomenologically) as a self-enclosed totality. The artwork as brute material object may, therefore, be quite thoroughly shaped by socio-historical context, but it is the phenomenological object, the artwork as noema, with which Lukács is preoccupied. There is no contradiction in arguing that the same material work could at the same time be understood as a historical document and as the source of aesthetic pleasure—but these distinct ways of intending it are obviously correlated with quite different experiences of the work.

In order to explain what such self-enclosure of the artwork meant, then, Lukács had recourse to Fiedler, Riegl, Husserl, and Lask. The artwork, he argued, must posit its own sphere of meaning, within which every element of the work was defined in relation to the whole; this task depended (following Lask) on the validity of its forms—though of course different genres of art each had their own specific structural principles, each valid in its own way (an idea drawn from Riegl). Finally, the validity of these forms depended too on definite intentional stances (from Husserl) towards the work: even the creator, Lukács argued, might be unable to grasp the work as self-enclosed. This framework, I will argue, was the basis for Lukács's subsequent analysis of *social* relations too. Because my aim here is to identify those elements that would later recur in *History and Class Consciousness*, I shall not offer a detailed account of the fragmentary theory of art of the Heidelberg drafts on its own terms, nor shall I seek to

defend it: many of its preconceptions would no longer be accepted by contemporary philosophers of art. Rather, I shall pick out those elements that prefigure his later argument. In this section, I shall examine Lukács's argument that the successful work of art must be treated as a self-enclosed totality organized by a *standpoint*—two concepts that played a central role in his account of capitalist society. In the following section, I shall outline his account of the relationship of subject and object in the artwork. The continuity of these themes, I will suggest, implies that he treats social being as analogous to art: it too is a level of being *sui generis*, defined by its own immanent logic.

Art, Lukács argues, is a realm entirely unto itself—both as a whole, and in the case of individual artworks. What we seek in art is a utopia of wholeness: while everyday experience is fragmented and contradictory, works of art are capable of re-presenting life as coherent and meaningful. To attain this, a successful artwork must be a self-enclosed totality, in that the meaning of the work stems entirely from its own internal organization. If the defining feature of a work of art is its *specificity*, it follows that that it must be its own source of meaning and value—and hence include its own validity standards, whereby its values are brought to clarity. What the Heidelberg drafts aim at, therefore, is a general theory of the validity of artworks such that their particularity of value is possible: rather than a descriptive account of existing works of art, Lukács aims at a normative theory of the conditions that must be met for a work to count as art, and as a source of aesthetic experience. A work must be capable of being the source of its own meaning. Thus, works that sought to meet some external standard could not qualify as art: this applied not just to those created with didactic intent to exhibit some ethical norm, but even to works that sought to be beautiful.⁹³ Any notion of beauty is invariably derived from external arguments, depending on the central motif of a given philosopher's entire thought. Thus, a 'logico-metaphysical' approach treats beauty as 'something absolute,' as the formative principle of the cosmos.⁹⁴ But it follows that beauty can be seen in the very structures of the natural world, so reducing art to an imperfect reproduction of nature rather than a source of value *sui generis*. Thus, the standards of art can only be derived from the complete set of all successful *works* of art: 'the relationship of value and value-realisation in aesthetics is the diametric opposite of these relationships [i.e. of logic and ethics]: the aesthetic value, the artwork, arises firstly in, through, and with the process of its realisation.'⁹⁵ The work succeeds to the degree that it manages to bring to clarity values which then stand as unique

monuments within the complete field of art. They are, by definition, unrepeatable: any new work that merely tries to imitate the values of a past one cannot count as art. Lukács's argument here is clearly indebted to Fiedler in their shared insistence on the specificity of artistic value, while at the same time drawing on Lask's arguments that objects of particular kinds *exist* as valid meaningful complexes. The analysis of the validity structures of art and artworks as the way they generate their meanings is the unique task of what Lukács describes as the 'phenomenology of the aesthetic.'⁹⁶

Art is an attempt to communicate one's experience concretely: that which is formless and vague in experiential reality becomes clear and significant only through its manifestation in art—its values, that is, are disclosed through valid forms. But whether or not this is successful depends on 'the microcosmos character of the work of art ... that it is a totality that is shut in on itself, perfect, and self-sufficient.'⁹⁷ Lukács means something quite specific by this: the meaning of the work is thinkable in isolation from other sources outside itself. In explaining this, he makes direct reference to Husserl's third *Logical Investigation*, concerning parts and wholes. He quotes from §5, in which Husserl examines the notions of inseparability and isolability, using the example of a horse's head (mentioned above) which can in principle be thought apart from any particular surroundings and with a variety of contents, without changing the 'essence' of the head so imagined.⁹⁸ Citing Husserl, Lukács makes clear that the independence of the object is 'in the final analysis only relative.' His reference to Husserl's mereology to justify the notion of the artwork as an independent source of meaning brings home the phenomenological character of his argument. A work must be isolable *in principle*, such that it is *possible* to understand its meanings as self-contained—even though, like the horse's head, it is inevitably surrounded in fact with other contents. His claim, therefore, is quite narrow. Far from denying that a work may be shaped by social context or reference to earlier works, he tacitly acknowledges such factors. But reading the work as a document of its external influences is to misunderstand it as art. The aesthetic value and meaning of the work are not defined by its value as, say, a historical document, which must be bracketed in any consideration of the work as art. By taking this position, Lukács begins to experiment with the idea that different realms in which things come to form have their own immanent principles of value, determined by particular validity forms—pointing towards his treatment of social being as a realm unto itself in *History and Class Consciousness*.

To clarify the point, Lukács distinguishes two mistaken attitudes on the part of the artist that undermine such autonomy. The ‘virtuoso,’ or ‘Jacobin of technique,’ is concerned only with pure form, subordinating experience and content to perfect style. Here, the content of the work is reduced to insignificance; the work is governed by the rules of form, valuable only as a demonstration of techniques that transcend it. A principle of validity not tailored to the material it shapes is imposed on experience, draining it of meaning. On the other hand, the ‘dilettante,’ or ‘Jacobin of experience,’ values only the content: they seek to crystallize their experience in the work on its own terms, without organizing it according to any internal principle.⁹⁹ Here meaning is defined by this or that biographical experience or sensation that the dilettante wishes to express through the work; it cannot be detached from that external element, so it fails to generate its own value. Mere shapeless experience predominates: without the rigour of formal validity, no coherent values emerge. Lukács contrasts these mistaken attitudes with the ‘genius’—a rare figure, capable perhaps only by chance of identifying the necessary connection between form and content such that technique and material are seen to coincide necessarily. In a sense, this entails the *withdrawal* of the creator from their own work: it must *appear* complete on its own terms rather than dependent on any external subject for it to count as art.¹⁰⁰ This is hardly the Romantic genius, pouring their soul out in their work; rather, Lukács’s genius seems little more than a vehicle for the work. In fact, he states explicitly that it is only through the work that genius *becomes* a genius—the object determines the subject, rather than the reverse. This paradoxical genius, the artist who withdraws from the work, is what produces its self-enclosure: it appears as necessary rather than contingent upon the will of an individual, as the only *valid* configuration of form and content, as a way in which this material and its meanings exist rather than as a representation of a reality external to it.

What Lukács means by a ‘totality,’ then, is more than just the inclusion of the sum total of elements of the work: it is the work’s structural self-enclosure, such that it is entirely self-validating. Its status as a totality depends in Laskian vein on the independent forms of its validity. ‘Totality’ designates formal completeness and coherence, whereby the meanings of every part of the work are defined in relation to the whole. Here, I think, he means a little more than Husserl meant in distinguishing between parts and wholes. Obviously, both dependent and independent parts both obviously presume the wholes of which they are part. But Husserl also (rightly)

clarifies that a whole does not necessarily preclude anything outside itself; as he explains, anything that is a whole relative to its parts might itself be a part relative to a larger whole. In contrast, a totality in Lukács's sense implies finality of meaning: it cannot itself be understood as a mere part without its meaning being fundamentally transformed. A self-enclosed totality therefore refuses interpretation in terms of something greater—whether a universal principle of beauty that it exemplifies, or as biographical expression of a suffering artist's tortured soul.

The importance of valid coherence is perhaps most clearly shown by the consequence of its absence: a work that fails to adopt a standpoint will be unable to present the world it depicts as a *reality*. This is illustrated by Lukács's scathing critique of naturalism. Here he follows Fiedler in judging naturalism an artistic failure—and indeed his verdict is parallel to that of Husserl's attack on philosophical naturalism in 'Philosophy as Rigorous Science.' However, it is Riegl's terminology that Lukács deploys. Repeatedly referring to the *naturalistische Kunstwollen*, he suggests that it must inevitably fail in its task of manifesting a self-contained totality or world within the artwork.¹⁰¹ In seeking to depict the external world with a minimum of subjective distortion, naturalism commits itself to rendering every individual object without distorting stylization.¹⁰² It fails to take a standpoint that would organize the whole, instead imagining a 'reality' consisting of an infinite number of discrete, faithfully rendered entities. Consequently, it becomes impossible to subordinate these objects to the overall artistic scheme.¹⁰³ As a whole, then, the work appears *less* real or as a mere illusion or representation of something outside it; the relations of its elements to one another are incoherent without an organizing standpoint. Hence Lukács connects coherence with the very realness of the world depicted by art: the totality conveys an understanding of reality as an organized whole, just as Riegl's *Kunstwollen* illustrated a given society's understanding of reality. But at the same time, he attacks naturalism at the Laskian level of coherence and validity: in failing to determine a guiding organizational form, it fails to specify the 'truth' of the world it depicts, and so seems, quite literally, 'unreal.'

5 SUBJECT AND OBJECT

Lukács's preoccupation with the immanent meaningfulness of the work meant, of course, that he affords a relatively minor role to the subject—as none other than Weber noted. Praising the early drafts of Lukács's manu-

script, he remarked that ‘after having seen aesthetics approached from the standpoint of the receiver and more recently from that of the creator, it is a pleasure to see that the “work” itself is given a voice.’¹⁰⁴ Thus, instead of analysing the subject in itself (in ways parallel to Kant’s aprioristic deduction of the categories of rational cognition), Lukács treats subjectivity as an attitude within the complete meaning-structure of the artwork. Subject and object are determined within a complete system that defines them by their relation to one another—not by how one ‘knows’ the other. The Heidelberg drafts contain a number of explorations of this theme. I shall focus on three: first, his explanation of the standpoint; second, his account of the different attitudes of creator and audience towards the work; finally, his direct examination of the question of subject and object in art.

Lukács’s explanation of the meaning-structure of the artwork as self-enclosed totality was fully in line with Neo-Kantianism’s anti-psychologism: he wanted to avoid any reduction of our appreciation of art to a personal response to the object, whether physiological or grounded in the life of the percipient. To achieve self-enclosure, Lukács argues, the work must be organized by what Lukács refers to as a *Standpunkt* or ‘standpoint.’ Far from being a point of view or perspective on a totality that exists, fully formed, waiting to be gazed upon, the standpoint is instead what brings the work together *as* a totality. It does so first as the principle by which the work is purged of extraneous elements, those incongruent with its central meaning. At the same time, it organizes each element of the work, governing their relations to one another. Thus, an artist may ground the work on their own experience or something they seek to communicate—but within the work, its meaning is transformed such that every element, even those with no meaning in experienced reality, is made significant by their relating to one another through the standpoint rather than as a reference to the external reality from which they originated. In this way, ‘the standpoint thus gains a more concrete meaning, and conveys it to the elements of experience selected by it; it becomes a *Weltanschauung*, and the elements selected by it become symbolic, i.e. they become bearers of meaning in addition to that which they are in and for themselves.’¹⁰⁵ We should not be misled by Lukács’s use of the Diltheyan term *Weltanschauung*: rather than reducing the work to the expression of cultural values, he uses it to designate a *valid* formation of the whole as a complete system of meaning. Within this whole, the standpoint designates the subjective attitude that treats the work as objectively independent. As he puts it, the autonomy of the work is bound up the ‘intention of the experiencing

subject' as an 'act of disinterestedness.'¹⁰⁶ The language of intentional acts is striking here—indeed, this claim appears in a discussion of Husserl. It is no surprise, therefore, that he immediately qualifies this, lest he seem to place too much emphasis on the power of the subject: this intentionality is 'merely the subjective aspect of this kind of positing of the object.'¹⁰⁷ By speaking of the 'standpoint,' then, Lukács is not describing any particular perspective on a work—merely the *formally necessary* attitude *if* the work is to cohere as an autonomous sphere of meaning.

This relativization of the subject to a subject-position or perspective on a whole can be seen too in the chapter that earned Weber's admiration—revealingly entitled 'Phenomenological Sketch of the Creative and Receptive Attitudes.'¹⁰⁸ Lukács's terminology here is suggestive: rather than trying to define the 'creator' or 'receiver' as such, he defines them in terms of attitudes, *Verhalten*, towards the work. Crucially, neither attitude could be characterized as a relation of *knowledge* of the work; rather, each entails a shifting of the standpoint of the work considered in its own terms to one between subject and work, fundamentally altering the meaning of the work as a whole. This is shown by Lukács's analysis of the receptive attitude. To the degree that the work is grasped from its own immanent standpoint as a self-enclosed totality, he argues, it represents a utopian perfection that life could never achieve. But this leaves it cut tragically adrift from its audience's experience. More likely, therefore, is that the receiver or percipient of the work will relate to it within their own experiential reality. For such a receptive attitude, the work of art appears as part of experiential reality: it is interpreted within a broader whole according to a standpoint *between* work and receiver, rather than one within the work. This alters its meaning: it no longer appears as a self-enclosed totality, but is instead opened up and fragmented, the meaning of each of its parts transformed. The reader may, for example, identify too closely with a character or plot in a novel; this changes its meaning-structure of as a whole, as the significance of some of its elements is now derived from a point outside the work as object. But, crucially, the difference between these two versions of the receptive attitude is not one of knowledge: neither perspective has greater or lesser knowledge of it. Rather, the work as a complex of meaning is *itself* structurally altered by the attitude or intention of its audience: the receiver is better understood as a principle structuring that meaning than as an entity looking on the work from outside.

This is even clearer in Lukács's account of the creator's relation to their work: strikingly, the artist is, if anything, even less capable of experiencing

the work as art than its receiver. It is almost impossible for the creator to view their work as a unified totality: they are too conscious of the separate origins of each element ever to see them as a whole. Iago, Lukács suggests, is merely a ‘fact’ for Shakespeare, produced by dramatic necessity; he cannot appear to his creator as the malevolent figure whose mysterious motivation only adds to his impact on audience.¹⁰⁹ The artist is always too aware of the tension between the reality of experience and utopia in the work; where the artwork presents harmony, the artist sees the discord that has gone into its creation. We might think here of Goethe’s remark to Eckermann on *Faust*, written over several decades: ‘the life I portray in *Faust* is rich and many-colored and very various, and a fine thing it would have been, I must say, if I had attempted to thread that on to the thin string of a single prevailing ideal!’¹¹⁰ Goethe’s response was exactly as Lukács would have predicted: keenly conscious of the tensions behind the work, the creator is incapable of intending it as a self-enclosed totality, and thus cannot relate to it as art, or a source of aesthetic experiences:

In all these moments the phenomenological personality of the creator shows itself as a subject laden with tragic restlessness and peacelessness: in its relationship to experienced reality it concerns itself with an insurmountable tension between reality and utopia, and its comportment towards the work is always an incessant and – in the subject – unfulfillable strain to reach the unreachable. The creator, who suffers much more deeply under the objective distance of the world, strives in vain through an eternal struggle to that which is effortlessly and naturally offered to the receptor through simple readiness: he can merely rouse to existence the aim of all these wishes, the work as the desired utopian reality. As creator he has no access to it: ‘we are made for expressing, not for having,’ says Flaubert.¹¹¹

The artist can only manifest this harmony in the work, not his actual existence; the artwork’s content is less than that of his experience, so its forms are never valid for his entire life; the creator can never attain the work’s utopian coherence. It goes without saying that this cannot be a failure of knowledge: obviously, the artist ‘knows’ the work in every aspect. Instead, the problem lies in the antinomic character of the creator’s relation to the work. Either the artist continues to treat elements of the work as belonging to themselves—in which case it cannot appear as a totality. Or the work appears as a self-enclosed totality—in which case the harmonious totality of experience it presented must seem untrue to the creator.

There is, then, a problem similar to the classic notion of alienation, but not exactly identical: while alienation implies the loss (*Entäußerung*) and psychological distancing from (*Entfremdung*) of foundational elements of one's soul or self, creators do not *lose* part of their selves, so much as fail to go beyond themselves. Their attitude, like that of the typical perceptive, does not grasp the work as art. These two attitudes towards the work are, then, orderings of the work towards an attitude that constructs its meaning differently. They are to be understood as immanent to art's structure, not outside it; they govern the meaning of the work in qualitatively different ways.

Lukács's account of the creative and receptive attitudes relegates these two potential subjects to mere structural factors within the work as a complex of meaning. This impression is more explicit in what appears to be one of the later-written sections of his Heidelberg philosophy of art—and the only part to reach publication during his lifetime: a chapter titled 'The Subject-Object Relation in Art.' Here, rather than treating it as definable in principle as separate from the object it confronts, he determines the subject by its range of orientations towards objectivity. He speaks in Husserlian terms of the 'directedness' (*Gerichtetheit*) of the subject—that is, the specific way it intends its object. His point is clarified in the distinction he draws between the role of the subject in logic, ethics, and art. The subject of logic is an empty place-holder, required only to mouth necessary laws that anyone, in principle, could utter: this produced 'an absolute ... primacy of the object as opposed to the subject.'¹¹² Ethics has, at first glance, the opposite problem: while the empirical subject is indeed expected to act, ethical action is directed inwardly, not on an object: 'this relationship is never that of a subject to an object.'¹¹³ But to the extent that we take on objective ethical maxims as the foundation of our subjectivity, we are reduced to the same objectivity as logic.¹¹⁴ Rather than a productive relationship, subject and object are separated forever. In both instances, then, Lukács treats the subject as a specific comportment towards objectivity, not as an autonomous entity.

Art, Lukács suggests, offers the only possibility for bringing together subject and object in the full sense. 'The aesthetic subject,' he states, 'stands in the strict sense of the meaning of the sphere ... only opposite an object, the artwork.'¹¹⁵ This is a definite relationship to a specific object intended in a certain way as a particular complex of meanings. This permits the creation of a work of art to be 'less its (the subject's) objectification than its self-positing, its ... subjectification.'¹¹⁶ Lukács's distinction

here is significant: it implies that the subject exists only in the process of finding the specific forms (and standpoint) suitable for the material of the work, and in bringing that work to a meaning-complex. The work is not merely the expressed, objective form of something inherent to the subject; rather, artistic creation is itself the site of subjectivity. In Fiedlerian spirit, he implies that the artist's job is never done, and that the giving of form is necessarily endless. Once the work is finished, its forms are fixed; the creative subject is excluded from them, and merely contemplates the work passively. It is as the work is underway—as the subject is practically engaged in the forming and re-forming of material—that the artist is fully subject. The subject exists, then, only in the specific manner it intends its object; as Weber observed, it plays only an auxiliary role in the phenomenological structure of the work.

6 CONCLUSION

Lukács's Heidelberg philosophy of art and aesthetics offers some invaluable indications of the development of his thought in the years leading up to his conversion to revolutionary Bolshevism. His theoretical framework here is flawed and incomplete, but the striking difference with his own, more orthodox Marxist literary criticism serves to highlight the zig-zags in his intellectual development: the sheer variety of paradigms he adopted makes it difficult to pigeonhole Lukács's work as a whole. What makes these papers important for my purposes is that they show him grappling systematically with a set of problems that were at the heart of his analysis in *History and Class Consciousness*—and deploying an unfamiliar and unsuspected structural-formal framework to do so, one that is far more rigorous than the neo-Romanticism of his earlier essays and literary works. Since the central essays of *History and Class Consciousness* aim at the same kind of rigour in touching on many of the same themes, it makes more sense to concentrate on the conceptual apparatus of the Heidelberg works to contextualize and understand his Marxist philosophy. The incompleteness of the Heidelberg drafts limits their value as a philosophy of art, but they contain the rudiments of the theoretical paradigm Lukács would later use to analyse social being.

This brief examination of Lukács's forbidding aesthetics has yielded two important points. First, the Heidelberg drafts show Lukács drawing on some unfamiliar sources—thinkers whose importance for his intellectual development has largely been overlooked despite Lukács's own refer-

ences to it. Only Lask's influence has received real attention hitherto, and even here, it has not been universal.¹¹⁷ In contrast, the importance of Husserl's phenomenology and—even more—the theories of art of Fiedler and Riegl have been almost entirely ignored. By identifying these figures as having played a significant role in Lukács's early thought, it is possible to suggest that their paradigms informed his later work as well. Together, they offered a framework to think about art as a nonrepresentational sphere of being: the ways things appear in a work of art is what they are, their form and meaning determined within the work itself, by the standpoint it required, and by the particular validity forms of its structuring principle or *Kunstwollen*.

In addition to these sources, the Heidelberg drafts contain Lukács's first systematic accounts of some of the decisive concepts of his social theory—above all, the related notions of totality and standpoint, and the relationship of subject and object. His early formulations of these ideas were decisively shaped by these four thinkers. 'Totality' describes the objective form of the artwork as a Laskian sphere of validity of its own. It does not refer to the sum total of the elements of the work, but the manner in which they form a coherent, self-enclosed unity. It is 'total' in its internal self-referentiality and self-validation: its elements gain their meaning from one another. The 'standpoint' is the immanent structurally defined perspective from which these elements cohere, analogous to Riegl's account of the position of the spectator revealed by different *Kunstwollen*. Together, these two concepts form the basis of an account of objective artistic being: intending an object as a work of art in the grand sense entails examining the generation of a meaningful, complete, self-enclosed reality within the work. At the same time, this focus on the work's own immanent generation of meaning meant the relative limitation of the role of the subject. It is defined by the manner in which it is oriented or directed towards objectivity; the subject of art is different from that of ethics or logic. Thus, subject and object must be treated as a related whole defined by the structure of their interaction.

I have characterized Lukács's method here as 'phenomenological,' and not simply because he himself attached this name to it. The Heidelberg drafts' preoccupation with the artwork—that is, with the *object* rather than with mental acts—makes his a distinctly Neo-Kantian interpretation of phenomenology, likely shaped by Emil Lask's own appropriation of Husserl; Lask too is probably responsible for Lukács's connection of reality and validity. But Lukács takes a step back towards Husserl in his con-

cern with the subject. Using explicitly Husserlian language of ‘intentional acts,’ Lukács describes the structure of meaning of the work in a way that *necessarily* includes the subjective perspective as part of its sense-making. Although this subject is strictly defined as a formal subject-pole in the total meaning-structure of the work, Lukács’s introduction of this element takes him beyond Lask’s asubjective logism. Drawing on Husserl allows Lukács to escape the austere worldlessness of his Neo-Kantian background by making the meaningfulness of experiences directly relate to subjective orientations. This combination of Husserl and Lask, then, helped the Marxist Lukács to interpret society as a meaningful whole by identifying its validity structure, and by directing him towards the question of intentionality as a component of every subjective relation to an object.

There are, obviously, certain continuities and common themes across Lukács’s pre-Marxist writings—whether his literary-cultural essays or the philosophically oriented Heidelberg drafts. The concern in the latter with art as a form of communication, with the inapplicability of aesthetic form to life, and with the unattainability of the utopia offered in works of art all have undeniable affinities with his literary essays. The pessimistic conclusion that the values generated by the work of art were not applicable to life outside that work was also in line with his other works. But in thinking through these problems in a systematic, philosophically oriented framework informed by Husserl’s phenomenology and Lask’s aletheiology, Lukács’s thought underwent certain important transformations. First, he began to adumbrate a phenomenological ontology that treated the significance and meaning of objects as an inextricable part of what they are. In this respect, he went beyond even Hegel, who deduces general categories and levels of Being, but offers little of the kind of semantic explorations of Husserl and Heidelberg Neo-Kantianism. Lask showed that meaning was intrinsic to reality—and he learnt from Riegl that different *Kunstwollen* offer realities structured in radically different ways. This level of formal philosophical exploration went beyond Lukács’s earlier essayistic writings, even if the Heidelberg drafts remained incomplete. It allowed him (as I shall show in Chap. 4) to extend this model beyond art to social forms more broadly: he came to understand social relations and social institutions in Laskian vein as the way in which society *exists* through coming to valid coherence.

Second, the Heidelberg drafts see Lukács beginning to inch away from neo-Romantic ideas of the ‘soul’ as the basis of the subject. His movement is not yet complete: his account of the contrast between the creator’s lived experience and the form it is endowed with in the artwork suggests a cer-

tain residue. But his account of the work on its own terms allows him to interpret the subject above all as an orientation towards objectivity, defined *within* the totality of the work along with the object it interacts with. It is the directedness of the subject, the specific relation in which it stands towards the object, that defines what it *is*. At least from the perspective of the existence of the artwork, the reality of the subject is defined by this relation. Put differently: there is no theoretical subject *outside* this totality; it is a determined position within the structure of the work, shaped as part of the whole. The Heidelberg drafts tend in this respect towards an overcoming of neo-Romanticism. Consequently, the theoretical paradigm he begins to develop here offers him a path away from his earlier implication that the ‘soul’ exists independently of rationalized structures that are then imposed upon it and restrict its fullest expression. By implication, the subject cannot be disentangled from these structures even in theory: rather than restricting it, they are the forms of its existence as subject.

Lukács’s students Ágnes Heller and György Márkus have very compellingly argued that there are substantial similarities between his abandoned Heidelberg drafts and his late *Specificity of the Aesthetic* (1963).¹¹⁸ In this mature work, Lukács deploys several of his own terminological coinages and arguments—which, it emerged after the rediscovery of the Heidelberg manuscripts, he had first developed and used in almost identical ways in his early, unfinished project. If he had not forgotten these theoretical innovations by the 1960s, he certainly could not have done so by the 1920s, when writing *History and Class Consciousness*. In the short term, though, Lukács’s Heidelberg drafts did not bring about a clean break with his literary-cultural work in the short term. Their very incompleteness is evidence of this: he never managed to bring these disparate elements together in a comprehensive system that answered all his earlier questions. Indeed, he ends up by declaring paradoxically that art almost inevitably *fails* in its utopian promise. The artist seeks to re-present experience as intrinsically meaningful, but this was only attainable if the work was phenomenologically self-enclosed to such a degree that its significance was entirely cut off from the lives of both artist and audience. Whatever perfection appeared in art, whatever unity of subject and object it brought about within itself, it remained too isolated to have any real broader effects. It was perhaps because of this—to which he alludes in passing in *History and Class Consciousness*—that he turned instead to practical social change.

At any rate, history twice broke in on his thought. The first version of the drafts was interrupted by the First World War: he reported to Paul Ernst in April 1915 that he had put aside work on the aesthetics.¹¹⁹ Horrified by the mass slaughter wrought by mechanized warfare at the behest of massive and depersonalized state apparatuses, Lukács fled back to dreams of a cultural and spiritual unity expressed in messianic terms. He set to work on his proposed Dostoevsky book, which itself was largely abandoned save for the fragment published as *Theory of the Novel*. His second attempt to complete his philosophy of art, from 1916 to 1918, was abandoned in turn as he returned to Budapest, and ultimately threw himself into what appeared to be a more practical eschatology—revolutionary Bolshevism. Left mouldering in a suitcase in a Heidelberg bank vault, the abstractions of his philosophy of art must have seemed entirely irrelevant in the face of a practical revolutionary struggle, and it is difficult to find any traces of them in Lukács's fervidly enthusiastic writings in the immediate wake of his commitment to revolution. Yet even then, Lukács had not completely abandoned these ideas. They lay in hibernation, only emerging when the immediate practical situation left him struggling to explain the failure of revolution. It was in the later stages of writing the essays included in *History and Class Consciousness* that the same theoretical patterns reemerged—but in the dramatically new guise of a theory of social being.

NOTES

1. Honigsheim, Paul. 1963. 'Erinnerungen an Max Weber,' in *Max Weber zum Gedächtnis: Materialien zur Bewertung von Werk und Persönlichkeit*, R. König & J. Winkelmann eds. Cologne and Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag; also Congdon, Lee. 1983 *The Young Lukács*, Chapel Hill & London: UNC Press. 50.
2. Lukács, Georg. 1983. *Record of a Life*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. Istvan Eörsi. London: Verso. 38.
3. Jaspers, Karl. 1961. 'Heidelberger Erinnerungen,' in *Heidelberger Jahrbücher* vol 5, 5. Quoted in Karádi, Éva. 1987. 'Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukács in Max Weber's Heidelberg,' in *Max Weber and his Contemporaries*, ed. Wolfgang Mommsen & Jürgen Osterhammel, 499–514. London: Unwin Hyman at 499.
4. Kadarkay, Arpad. 1991. *Georg Lukács: Life, Thought, Politics*. Oxford: Blackwell. 166.
5. Lukács, *Record of a Life*. 37–38.

6. Weber, Max. 1958. 'Science as a Vocation,' in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills Oxford: Oxford University Press. 154.
7. Weber to Lukács, March 10, 1913, in Lukács, Georg. 1986. *Selected Correspondence*, ed. Judith Marcus & Zoltán Tar. Budapest: Corvina. 222.
8. Gluck, Mary. 1985 *Georg Lukács and His Generation 1900–18*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass. 3.
9. For an explanation of the reconstruction of Lukács's intended texts, see Márkus, György, 'Nachwort' 253–278 in Lukács, Georg 1968–1981, *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst*, vol 17 of 18 in *Werke*, (W) 18 vols., ed. György Márkus & Frank Benseler. Darmstadt: Luchterhand.
10. Weber to Lukács, August 14, 1916, in Lukács, *Correspondence* 263–264.
11. Lukács to Ernst, April 14, 1915, in Lukács, *Correspondence* 245.
12. Weber to Lukács, March 22, 1913, in Lukács *Correspondence* 223.
13. Martin Kusch, 1995. *Psychologism*. London: Routledge, 1995.
14. Martin Jay, 1996. 'Modernism and the Specter of Psychologism,' in *Modernism/modernity*, Vol. 3/2, 94.
15. Christian Krijnen, 2015. 'Philosophy as philosophy of culture?' in *New Approaches to Neo-Kantianism*, eds. de Warren, Nicolas and Staiti, Andrea 111–126. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 117–118.
16. Weber to Lukács, March 10, 1913 in Lukács *Correspondence* 222.
17. Lukács, Georg 1968–1981, *Heidelberger Ästhetik*, vol 18 of 18 in *W*, 244.
18. For further background on Fiedler, see Barasch, Moshe. 1998. *Modern Theories of Art 2: From Impressionism to Kandinsky*. New York & London: New York University Press. 122–132.
19. Fiedler, Konrad. 1971. *Schriften zur Kunst*, ed. Gottfried Böhm. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag. two vols, I.323: 'Der künstlerische Vorgang stellt, wie es jeder geistige Vorgang tut oder wenigstens tun sollte, einen Fortschritt dar von der Verworrenheit zur Klarheit, von der Unbestimmtheit des innerlichen Vorganges zu der Bestimmtheit des äußeren Ausdrucks.'
20. Fiedler, *Kunst* i.53: 'Sie geht nicht vom Gedanken, vom geistigen Produkte aus, um zur Form, zur Gestalt hinabzusteigen, vielmehr steigt sie vom Form- und Gestaltlosen zur Form und Gestalt empor, und auf diesem Wege liegt ihre ganze geistige Bedeutung.'
21. Fiedler, *Kunst* i.52: 'Was sie schafft ist nicht eine zweite Welt neben einer anderen, die ohne sie existiert, sie bringt vielmehr überhaupt erst die Welt durch and für das künstlerische Bewußtsein hervor.'

22. As far as I am aware, these parallels have only been noted by Udo Kultermann. See Kultermann, 1997 'Konrad Fiedler und die Kunsttheorie der Gegenwart,' 55–70 in *Auge und Hand. Konrad Fiedlers Kunsttheorie im Kontext* ed. Majetschak, Stefan. Munich: Wilhelm Fink.
23. Lukács *W*xvii.38; Fiedler i.328; see also Lukács *W*xviii.77 and xviii.231 ff.
24. Lukács *W*xvii.39.
25. Lukács, *W* ii.321 n.1; Lukács, Georg. 1971 [1923]. *History & Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, [HCC] trans. Rodney Livingstone. (London: Merlin) 215, n53.
26. Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art*, 143.
27. Lukács, *W* ii.334 'wie dies den wirklich bedeutenden Historikern des XIX. Jahrhunderts, wie z. B. Riegl, Dilthey, Dvořák, nicht entgehen konnte'; *HCC* 153.
28. Peaker, Giles. 2001. 'Works that have lasted ... Walter Benjamin reading Alois Riegl'; 291–310 in. 2002. *Framing Formalism: Riegl's Work* ed. Woodfield, Richard. Amsterdam: G+B Arts International; also Gubser, Michael, 2006. *Time's Visible Surface: Alois Riegl and the Discourse on History and Temporality in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. Especially pp. 201–214.
29. Semper, Gottfried. 2011 [1851]. *Four Elements of Architecture*, ed. & trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave & Wolfgang Hermann. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
30. Riegl, Alois, 1992 [1893]. *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*. Trans. Evelyn Kain. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
31. There is a considerable debate over the exact meaning of the term and Riegl's own consistency in using it. For example, while Binstock suggests that the notion was relatively fixed by the time of *Stilfragen*, Olin argues that Riegl continually revised his meaning at least throughout the 1890s. See Olin, Margaret. 1992. *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press; Binstock, Benjamin. 2004. 'Foreword,' in Riegl, Alois. 2004 [1966] *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts*. trans. Jacqueline E. Jung. 11–36 New York: Zone Books.
32. Riegl, Alois. 1985 [1901] *Late Roman Art Industry*, [LRAI] trans. Winkes, Rolf. (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore.) 21.
33. Riegl, *LRAI*, 223.
34. Riegl, *LRAI*, 231.
35. Riegl, *LRAI* 232.
36. Riegl, *LRAI* 231.
37. Sedlmayr, Hans. 2002 [1929]. 'The Quintessence of Riegl's Thought.' in Woodfield, *Framing Formalism*, 11–31.

38. Panofsky, Erwin 1981 [1920]. 'The Concept of Artistic Volition,' trans. Kenneth Northcott & Joel Snyder in *Critical Inquiry* vol 8, No.1, 17–33; Panofsky, Erwin 2008 [1925] 'On the Relationship of Art History and Art Theory: Towards the Possibility of a Fundamental System of Concepts for a Science of Art' trans. Katharina Lorenz & Jas' Elsnet, 43–56 in *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2008)
39. Lukács *W* xvii.39.
40. Lukács *W* xvii.46 & xvii.162.
41. Lukács *W* xvii.39: 'bei Riegl entstanden wichtige Ansätze zu einer Geschichtsphilosophie der Kunst, bei Fiedler zu einer Phänomenologie des Künstlers, die aber beide, weil sie nicht bewußt als solche gewollt wurden, manches Unklare und Widerspruchsvolle an sich tragen.'
42. Lukács, *W* xviii.244: 'Ob es System des Kunstwillens gibt?' (My emphasis.)
43. Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art*, 126.
44. Lukács *W* xvii.46.
45. Franz Brentano. 1973. *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. AC. Rancurello, D.B. Terrell, and L. McAlister London: Routledge, 1973. 88–89.
46. Kusch points to arguments that Husserl may already have begun to move this way before reading Frege's review. See Kusch, *Psychologism*, 12–13.
47. Gottlob Frege 'On Sense and Reference' in *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, ed. & trans. Geach P. and Black, M., Oxford: Blackwell, third edition. As Frege himself presents the problem, it is outlined in an analysis of identity statements. Moreover, he himself formulated the sentence as 'the morning star is the morning star,' and 'the morning star is the evening star,' but subsequent citations have tended to substitute the proper names 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus.'
48. Husserl, Edmund, 2001. *Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay. London: Routledge. 2 vols, i.166–167.
49. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, i.197.
50. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, i.198.
51. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, ii.67.
52. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, ii.4–6.
53. Husserl, Edmund, 1991. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F Kersten. Dordrecht & Boston MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers. 61.
54. Husserl, *Ideas*, 65.
55. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, ii.99.
56. For a concise summary of the debate, see David Woodruff Smith. 2007. *Husserl* (London & New York: Routledge). 304 ff.

57. Husserl, *Ideas*, 92; Woodruff Smith, *Husserl*, 211–212.
58. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, ii.104.
59. Husserl, *Logical Investigations* ii.105.
60. Husserl, *Ideas* Section 44.
61. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, ii.91–92.
62. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, ii.100.
63. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, ii.102.
64. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, ii.100.
65. Husserl, *Ideas*, 213–214.
66. Husserl, *Ideas*, 174.
67. Husserl, *Ideas*, 175.
68. Husserl, *Ideas*, 197.
69. Husserl, *Ideas*, 100.
70. Lukács *W* xvii.156 n1.
71. Lukács, *W* xvii.46; xviii.31.
72. Lukács *W* ii.295, n.2; *HCC* 212 n.14.
73. Lukács *W* xviii.44; Ágnes Heller, 1991 ‘The Unknown Masterpiece,’ in *The Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism* ed. Ágnes Heller and Ferenc Féhér 211–247. New Brunswick & London: Transaction Publishers. 230.
74. Heller, ‘Unknown Masterpiece,’ 231.
75. Lukács ‘Curriculum Vitae’ 286–288 in Lukács *Correspondence*, 287.
76. Crowell, Steven Galt. 2001. *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning: Paths toward Transcendental Phenomenology*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press; Schuhmann, Karl and Smith, Barry. 1993. ‘Two Idealisms: Lask & Husserl,’ *Kant-Studien* 83, 448–466
77. Herrigel himself is largely known for his *Zen in the Art of Archery* (1948), the title of which inspired books like Robert M. Pirsig’s *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*—an odd line of descent from Neo-Kantianism! Unfortunately, despite his admiration for the Jewish Lask, Herrigel later seems to have become an ardent Nazi.
78. Anonymous reviewer M, ‘*Gesammelte Schriften* von Emil Lask und Eugen Herrigel,’ in *Annalen der Philosophie und philosophischen Kritik*, Vol. 4, 1, 9–10.
79. Lask, Emil 1923–1924. *Gesammelte Schriften*. ed. Eugen Herrigel. 3 vols. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) ii.99–115.
80. Beiser, Frederick C. 2011. *The German Historicist Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 446.
81. Beiser, *German Historicist Tradition*, 456.
82. Crowell, *Space of Meaning*, 37.
83. Lask, *Schriften*, iii.80: ‘Aber wir fügen sogleich hinzu, daß dadurch unsere These, daß aller in der Tatsächlichkeit antreffbarer Sinn ans tatsächliche Erleben gebundener Sinn ist, nicht angetastet wird.’

84. On this problem, see Schuhmann & Smith, 'Two Idealisms'; also Rosshoff, Hartmut. 1975. *Emil Lask als Lehrer von Georg Lukács: zur Form ihres Gegenstandsbegriffs*. Bonn: Bouvier. 61.
85. Crowell, *Space of Meaning*, 39.
86. Lask *Schriften*. ii.28–29: 'in der Erkenntnis der transzendentalen Logizität oder "Verstandes"-Artigkeit des Seins.'
87. Lask, *Schriften*, ii.109: 'Aber auch hier darf nicht die Auseinanderreißung in die beiden Reiche des Gegenstandes und der "Wahrheit darüber" zugelassen werden, sondern die Wahrheit rückt wiederum in den Gegenstand selbst hinein, ist mit ihm identisch.'
88. Lask, *Schriften*, ii.29: 'es handelt sich somit hierbei gar nicht um ein Verhältnis zwischen erkennendem Subjekt und Gegenstand, nicht um die Subjekt-Objekt-Zweiheit, sondern um ein Verhältnis zwischen transzendentallogischem Erkenntnis*gehalt* und Gegenstand.'
89. Lask, *Schriften*, ii.96; II.415: 'Schauplatz des transzendentalen Gegenstandes'; Crowell p. 67.
90. Crowell, *Space of Meaning*. 72.
91. Lask, *Schriften*, ii.191–192: 'der Erkennende "lebt" eben nur in der Wahrheit, und am Erkennen hat er sein Leben. Dagegen lebt er nicht in dem, worüber er nur spekuliert.'
92. Lask, *Schriften*, iii, 240; Schuhmann & Smith.
93. Lukács, *W* xvii.60–62.
94. Lukács, *W* xviii.137: 'Das Entscheidende der logisch-metaphysischen Problemstellung ist das Streben, die Schönheit als etwas Absolutes zu setzen.'
95. Lukács, *W* xvii.79: 'Das Verhältnis von Wert und Wertrealisation in der Ästhetik ist der diametrale Gegensatz zu diesen Verhältnissen: der ästhetische Wert, das Kunstwerk, entsteht erst in, durch, und mit dem Prozeß seiner Realisation.'
96. Lukács *W* xvii.59.
97. Lukács, *W* xviii.109: 'der Mikrokosmos-Charakter des Kunstwerks ... dass es eine in sich abgeschlossene, vollendete und selbstgenügsame Totalität ist.'
98. Husserl, *Logical Investigations* ii.9. Lukács's citation appears in *W* xviii.106.
99. Lukács, *W* xvii.190: 'Für den Dilettanten ist der Stoff alles – und seine Leistung fällt kraftlos und ohne eine eigene Immanenz zu erlangen ins Leben zurück; für den Virtuosen ist der Stoff nichts – und was er zu vollbringen meint, zerflattert in Nichts infolge seiner wesenleeren Immanenz.'
100. Lukács, *W* xvii.76.
101. Lukács, *W* xvii particularly 102–123.
102. Lukács, *W* xvii.118.

103. Lukács, *W* xvii.104.
104. Weber to Lukács, March 10, 1913, in Lukács, *Correspondence* 222.
105. Lukács, *W* xvii.83.
106. Lukács, *W* xviii.106: ‘Und doch ist hier der entscheidende Schritt zum Auffinden des ästhetischen Gegenstandes getan: der Akt der Interesselosigkeit bedeutet letzten Endes nichts anderes als die Intention des erlebenden Subjekts auf einem dem reinen Erleben angemessenen Gegenstand.’
107. Lukács, *W* xviii.106: ‘so ist das Nicht-hinaus-gehen-können über das Objekt nur der subjektive Aspekt der Art der Objektsetzung.’
108. Lukács *W* xvii.43–150; in the *Ästhetik*, it is titled ‘Phenomenology of the creative and receptive attitudes.’
109. Lukács, *W* xvii.135.
110. Goethe, conversation with Johann Peter Eckermann, quoted in Goethe. 1966. *Conversations and Encounters*, ed. & trans. David Luke & Robert Pick. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 160. For further discussion of this problem, relating Goethe’s statement to Montaigne’s work, see Jay, Martin. 2005. *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press. 23–28.
111. Lukács, *W* xvii.150: ‘In allen diesen Momenten zeigt sich aber die phänomenologische Persönlichkeit des Schöpfers als ein mit tragischer Rastlosigkeit und Ruhelosigkeit beladenes Subjekt: immer handelt es sich in seinem Verhältnis zur Erlebniswirklichkeit um eine unaufhebbare Spannung zwischen Wirklichkeit und Utopie, immer ist sein Verhalten zum Werk eine unaufhörliche und – im Subjekt – nie vollendbare Anspannung zum Erreichen des Unerreichbaren. Was dem Receptiven durch die einfache Bereitschaft mühelos und selbstverständlich geboten wird, dem strebt der Schaffende, der viel tiefer unter dem objektiven Abstand der Welt leidet, in ewigem Kampf vergeblich zu: er kann das Ziel all dieser Wünsche, das Werk als die ersehnte utopische Wirklichkeit nur zum Dasein erwecken, als Schaffender hat er nie Zutritt zu ihr: “nous sommes faits pour le dire, non pour l’avoir” sagt Flaubert.’
112. Lukács, *W* xviii.93: ‘ein absoluter ... Primat des Objekts dem Subject gegenüber.’
113. Lukács, *W* xviii.93: ‘Das empirische Subjekt ist zwar das Substrat und das Material des normativ-ethischen Verhaltens, diese Beziehung ist aber niemals die von einem Subjekt zu einem Objekt.’
114. Lukács, *W* xviii.94.
115. Lukács, *W* xviii.97: ‘Das ästhetische Subjekt steht im strengen Sinne der Sphäre ... nur einem Objekt, dem Kunstwerk gegenüber; das Subjekt selbst ist, in ebendemselben strengen Sinne – ein rein und unmittelbar erlebendes Subjekt.’

116. Lukács, *W* xviii.116: ‘es ist weniger ihre Objektivierung als ihre Selbstbesetzung, ihrer ... Subjektivierung.’
117. Two works which do in fact pay attention to Lask’s importance are Feenberg, Andrew. 2014. *The Philosophy of Praxis: Marx, Lukács, and the Frankfurt School*. London: Verso. and Rosshoff, *Emil Lask als Lehrer von Georg Lukács*.
118. Márkus, György, 1983 ‘Life and Soul: the Young Lukács and the Problem of Culture,’ in *Lukács Revalued* ed. Heller, Ágnes, 1–26. Oxford: Blackwell. 2.
119. Lukács to Ernst, March 1915, in *Lukács Correspondence* 244.

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CHAPTER 3

The History of *History* and *Class Consciousness*

In December 1918, Budapest lay in turmoil. The defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the War had led to the collapse of the monarchy and the declaration in mid-November of the Hungarian Democratic Republic, headed by Mihály Károlyi. The new liberal government was, however, barely able to hold together the numerous cultural and linguistic groups encompassed by the territory of the former imperial state; under attack by Romania, Serbia, and Czechoslovakia, Károlyi's regime could barely maintain its borders. Domestically, defeat brought massive social and economic disturbances. Meanwhile, events in Russia seemed to offer a harbinger of what was to come: the February Revolution that had brought Kerensky's liberal Provisional Government to power had itself been overturned by the Bolsheviks' October Revolution. There was every reason to believe that Hungary itself would follow the same path.

In the midst of this chaos, Budapest's cultural and intellectual intelligentsia began to choose their sides. As Gluck, Löwy, and Kadarkay have recorded, many of them harboured a long-standing disillusionment with bourgeois capitalism: though no adherents of the monarchical system, many of them were sceptical too of the capacity of liberal democracy to bring about the cultural revival they sought.¹ Under such circumstances, Bolshevism's redemptive promise, its claim to resolve the problems of modernity at a stroke, held an obvious appeal. But for others, the dangers of civil war, dictatorship, expropriation, and revolution were much

too great: the moral cost could not by any means be justified. In the middle of December, an article appeared in the *Szabadgondolat* arguing precisely this:

Bolshevism rests on the metaphysical assumption that good can issue from evil, that it is possible, as Razumikhin says in *Crime and Punishment*, to lie our way through to the truth. This writer cannot share this faith, and therefore sees an insoluble dilemma at the root of Bolshevism. Democracy in his view requires only superhuman self-abnegation and self-sacrifice from those who, consciously and honestly, persevere to the very end. But democracy, though it requires a superhuman effort, is not in essence such an insoluble question as is Bolshevism's moral problem.²

The article was clearly not especially persuasive: by the time it appeared, its author had already joined the Party—for it was Lukács himself. Between the writing and the publication of the article, he had been prevailed upon to commit himself to the cause of revolution.

Lukács's leap of faith apparently came as some surprise to his friends: as Kadarkay recounts, he announced it to his closest circle when he arrived late to a meeting at which they were to discuss the very essay, 'Bolshevism as a Moral Problem,' in which he made his case against revolution.³ It seems that his decision was spurred by Ernő Seidler—the brother of Irma, whose suicide had brought such a sense of guilt on Lukács years before.⁴ Seidler had been a prisoner of war in Russia, where he was recruited by the Bolsheviks; returning to Hungary, he was given the task of recruiting potential revolutionaries. It was he who persuaded Lukács that all his messianic hopes could be realized in the form of Bolshevism. Lukács himself justified the decision precisely as an *irrational* act, citing Kierkegaard's statement that to sacrifice oneself for a cause is always an irrational act.⁵

The biographical details of Lukács's conversion to Bolshevism have been described admirably elsewhere. My concern here is with his theoretical development at this time. Lukács's writings in his early years as a Marxist—in particular, those written during the Council Republic of 1919—are marked by the messianism that spurred his conversion; in line with this, they exhibit many of the same themes and preoccupations as his earlier cultural and literary essays. There is almost no trace of the dense, technical philosophy he drew on in preparing his Heidelberg philosophy of art. Even where philosophy does appear—in, for example, references to Hegel—Lukács uses terms and arguments in the most general fashion, to

make sweeping and unpersuasive claims. But with the failure of revolution by the early 1920s, Lukács was forced to reconsider, in order to explain why the working classes had mysteriously not responded to the clarion call to liberate themselves. It was this that spurred him to advance the concept of reification as part of a broader theory of social being. In order to do so, I suggest, he turned back to the philosophical paradigms with which he was so familiar—those he had drawn on his Heidelberg manuscripts on aesthetics. That is to say, the theory of social being in *History and Class Consciousness* draws on the categories and concepts as the phenomenological account of art with which he had aimed to habilitate. He began to analyse society using a paradigm analogous to that which he applied to art: it is a realm in which the meaning of objects is determined in relation to the totality of all other such objects, according to a governing principle that simultaneously presupposes a definite intentional attitude on the part of the subject. Society, like art, should be understood as a level of being *sui generis*; the social form of objects is no mask over more real things underneath but is their actual existence. It is possible to trace this movement in Lukács's writings from early 1919 until late 1922, when he completed work on his Marxist masterpiece: in the essays written and rewritten in the final months of this period we can discern clear signs of his return in spirit to his Heidelberg preoccupations.

My aim in this chapter is to justify reading the core essays of *History and Class Consciousness* in relation to Lukács's phenomenological aesthetics. I shall first acknowledge the messianism of Lukács's writings in the midst of revolution: the naïve fervour with which he speaks of the coming of revolution is so bereft of theoretical sophistication that it cannot be understood as offering a competing paradigm that Lukács would have had to overcome. I shall then turn to *History and Class Consciousness* itself: rather than treating the book as a single coherent whole, I will suggest we follow Lukács's own advice and remember that it is a collection of essays written at different times, and—in most cases—in response to particular circumstances. I will distinguish between the essays on this basis, arguing that it is those that were written (or revised) in what Lukács referred to as a 'period of enforced leisure' after the failure of revolution that show signs his intellectual return to Heidelberg. These can be seen most explicitly in the footnotes of these essays, which point most directly to his earlier interlocutors. Less explicitly but more significantly, they can be seen in the specific way Lukács deploys the word 'consciousness,' the central category of the 'Reification' essay. His use, I will argue, is clearly phenomenological

in the sense of his Heidelberg aesthetics: rather than designating the (epistemological) knowledge possessed by a subject of an object opposed to and separate from it, he uses it to refer to a totality within which (following Fiedler) objects exist meaningfully. As such, it is structured immanently, and determines subject and object within itself. This illustration of Lukács's increasingly phenomenological use of the term 'consciousness' will prepare for the detailed exposition of his theory of social being in the chapters that follow.

1 REVOLUTIONARY ESCHATOLOGY

Looking back late in life on his first years as a Marxist, Lukács frankly confessed that his intellectual development at the time had been patchwork and often contradictory: his growing knowledge of Marxism was counter-balanced by his idealistic moralism. 'If I consider my not-especially-numerous and not-especially-important literary essays from that period,' he remarked, 'I find that they often outdo my earlier works in their aggressive and paradoxical idealism.'⁶ Elsewhere, he described his own attitude at the time—like that of most of his Hungarian comrades—as one of 'messianic sectarianism.'⁷ The writings he produced at this time attest to this: as Lukács's remarks indicate, they are almost embarrassing to read in their feverish optimism. It is worth very briefly considering them, however, so as the better to understand the significance of the later works of this period.

In one respect, Lukács's first works as a Bolshevik were driven by the same problem as 'Bolshevism as a Moral Problem': whether revolution was an act demanded by ethical or moral laws. His new answer to this question, however, indicated a radical change in his philosophical premises. Lukács's rejection of Bolshevism had been couched in distinctly Neo-Kantian terms: revolution wrongly conflated the ethical objective of socialism and the sociological fact of class struggle, which in fact belonged to 'two different categories of reality,' values and facts, that had wrongly been placed on the same level.⁸ 'Tactics and Ethics,' his first Marxist essay, reaches the opposite conclusion by annulling the ontological distinction between 'is' and 'ought.' Lukács's preoccupation here is still moral, but he no longer recognises this distinction. The imminent reality of revolution, Lukács suggests, collapses it, making the ultimate goal, now achievable in practice, the only valid standard of ethical norms. In making this argument, he reached back to a number of points of reference that he had drawn on in, for example, his notes

towards the failed Dostoevsky book. He points to the Russian author Ropshin (the pseudonym of Boris Savinkov), whose novel *The Pale Horse* offers an extended justification for revolutionary terror, and concludes 'Tactics and Ethics' with a quotation from Hebbel: 'to express this sense of the most profound human tragedy in the incomparably beautiful words of Hebbel's Judith: "Even if God had placed sin between me and the deed enjoined upon me – who am I to be able to escape it?"'⁹ In his Dostoevsky notes, he suggests that the truly ethical action is to take on the moral responsibility of committing a necessary evil that will bring about salvation; the good that will result does not, however, annul the evil of the act.¹⁰ He reaches the same conclusion in 'Tactics and Ethics,' stating that 'everyone who at the present time opts for communism is therefore obliged to bear the same *individual* responsibility for each and every human being who dies for him in the struggle, as if he himself had killed them all'—but insisting that Bolshevism is the moral choice nevertheless.¹¹

The very titles of Lukács's essays throughout the rise and fall of the Hungarian Council Republic testify to the centrality of ethical questions in his thought at the time: 'Tactics and Ethics' was followed by 'The Role of Morality in Communist Production,' (1919) and 'The Moral Mission of the Communist Party' (1920). They contain such wonderfully naïve statements as the claim that in a postrevolutionary society, 'freedom of morality will take the place of legal compulsion in the regulation of all behaviour.'¹² Communism would produce a 'new spiritual epoch,' of a freely unified community wherein social relations were not dominated by objective structures. Elsewhere, his Luxemburgist faith in the spontaneity of the revolutionary proletariat led him to suggest that there was no longer a need for an organized revolutionary party—illustrated by his rather starry-eyed declaration on the effective union of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party and Bolshevik Party in March 1919: 'The parties have ceased to exist – now there is a unified proletariat,' and 'the Hungarian revolution has demonstrated that this revolution is possible without fratricidal struggles among the proletariat itself.'¹³ Unfortunately, his optimism was somewhat premature: the revolution lasted less than five months, failing in part due to insufficient support among various segments of the working classes. What these tracts indicate, then, is a belief in immediate, spiritual social unity restricted by artificial social relations that would at best merely represent and at worst strangle it—just as his earlier literary essays had indicated.

Michael Löwy describes Lukács's development as a journey 'from Romanticism to Bolshevism,' and this evidence suggests that his conversion to the cause of revolution was indeed shaped in its early stages by an ethically oriented Romantic anti-capitalism of the 'soul.'¹⁴ However, it does not follow that *History and Class Consciousness* too was shaped by the same neo-Romanticism, as critics such as Stedman Jones or Arato and Breines have charged. Löwy's more subtle interpretation captures the situation more effectively: he sees *History and Class Consciousness* as the *Aufhebung* of these earlier tendencies, their supersession within a Marxian framework that resolved those earlier problems by showing their falsity. Circumstances changed dramatically between 1919 and 1922–1923, and it makes sense that Lukács's thought should have developed in that time too.

Admittedly, the collapse of the Hungarian Council Republic at the beginning of August 1919 brought little immediate alteration in the tone of his work. Along with Ottó Korvin, Lukács was left in Budapest while the rest of the party leadership, headed by Béla Kun, fled in to exile. Within a month, Korvin had been arrested and Lukács too had left for Vienna. The ensuing years were spent in poisonous internecine squabbles between Kun's faction and that of Jenő Landler; as a leading ally of Landler, Lukács came into frequent conflict with Kun. As Lukács saw the difference between them, Kun's method consisted in 'creating a party and a reputation by demagoguery, violence, and if need be, bribery.'¹⁵ Kun—supported by Zinoviev—therefore sought to send the party émigrés back to Hungary in order to head the movement. Siding instead with Landler, Lukács looked instead for the possibility of reviving support from within Hungary; as Landler insisted, 'the real movement would have to originate in Hungary.'¹⁶ Neither strategy was at all practicable; Lukács's position bore the residual traces of a messianic belief in the proletariat, leading to criticism by Lenin in 1920 for his 'purely verbal' communism.¹⁷ But Kun too was criticized, leaving the split in the Hungarian party unresolved: while Kun's leadership of the émigrés in Moscow was undisputed, Lukács was in effective control of the Hungarian party in Vienna. As such, he attended the third Comintern congress in Moscow in 1921, still fully engaged in practical revolutionary work; his writings at this stage concern practical and ethical questions of revolution. But his time was almost up. Kun had cultivated an alliance with Zinoviev; Moscow finally intervened to ensure a unified party, and Lukács was obliged to resign from the Central Committee only a short time after his return to Vienna in September 1921.¹⁸ His in-depth engagement with practical politics was, for a time, suspended; he was

forced into a period of ‘involuntary leisure.’¹⁹ But however unwelcome such leisure was for him at the time, it was in this period that he wrote the most important essays of *History and Class Consciousness*—and, I suggest, that he returned to the sophisticated philosophical models of his Heidelberg days.

2 THE THEORETICAL RETURN TO HEIDELBERG

History and Class Consciousness was born out of failure. It was produced by the failure of the Hungarian revolution, by the failure of the Spartacist revolt and the Bavarian Soviet Republic in Germany, and by the widespread failure of the workers of the world, alas, to unite. It was born too out of Lukács’s own failure to win the factional struggle with Béla Kun in the Hungarian party, and by the Hungarian party’s failure to foment any further revolutionary spirit from exile—or even to agree on a coherent strategy to do so.

History and Class Consciousness aimed to resolve this problem by explaining on the one hand why the proletariat did not seem willing to unite for the revolutionary cause, and on the other to identify the ways a revolutionary consciousness might be fomented. Yet it does not offer a systematic or unified theoretical solution. Indeed, in his preface to the first edition, Lukács took care to warn his readers of the potential inconsistencies of the work, given that many of the essays had emerged from specific practical revolutionary situations at different times.²⁰ Only two pieces had been written especially for it, during that time of involuntary leisure in the aftermath of losing the struggle for supremacy within the Hungarian party. These two were, however, the most theoretically significant pieces in the collection: ‘Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,’ and ‘Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization.’ Moreover, other essays were significantly revised. An essay entitled ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ had first appeared under Lukács’s name in 1919, but the revised version that opens *History and Class Consciousness* is twice as long, and contains very little of the original. ‘Class Consciousness’ too received large additions, and ‘The Changing Function of Historical Materialism’ was somewhat edited.

There are significant differences between those essays written or substantially revised during 1922 and those that were produced earlier. Ignoring this shift in Lukács’s thought leads to serious misrepresentations of his theory—particularly his account of reification. For example, in his highly critical Althusserian reading, Stedman Jones recognizes the incon-

sistencies stemming from the fact that the book contains a number of essays written at different times—but states that they were ‘not subsequently edited or significantly altered for book publication.’²¹ Since the book version of the very first essay of the book, ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ is twice as long as its original, it is immediately obvious that this cannot be true. Stedman Jones goes on to suggest that the two essays placed last in the book—‘Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization’ and ‘Critical Observations on the Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg’—both of which he describes as having been ‘written in 1922,’ show a ‘marked difference in quality,’ particularly compared to the ‘Reification’ essay’s supposed ascription of ‘thaumaturgical powers’ to consciousness.²² Yet the ‘Critical Observations’ essay is marked as January 1922—and therefore precedes the writing of the ‘Reification’ piece. To imply that the failures of the ‘Reification’ piece were so obvious that Lukács himself was forced to correct them in the ‘Critical Observations’ piece is thus a distortion of the historical record.²³

Nevertheless, Stedman Jones’s criticisms do help identify the nature of the change in Lukács’s thought: he identifies Lukács as ‘the first major irruption of the romantic anti-scientific tradition of bourgeois thought into Marxist theory.’²⁴ It is precisely this that Lukács shed in the later stages of writing *History and Class Consciousness*: indeed, the preface, written in 1922, makes a point of this, explicitly repudiating the ‘exaggeratedly optimistic hopes’ of rapid success for the Revolution found in the ‘Historical Materialism’ essay.²⁵ By this stage, Lukács had moved away from a Romantic belief in a macrosubject of history existing prior to and outside of society, and instead begun to locate subject and object within the broader totality of consciousness. In doing so, he turned back to the theoretical models of his Heidelberg writings: having treated *art* there as a realm of being, he extended his models to cover consciousness in general. I shall begin with a brief overview of these crucial essays, before pointing to two developments in the later essays that indicate this change. First, these later essays explicitly refer back to the writers with whom he had engaged in his earlier work: his footnotes to a work ostensibly on Marxist revolution are filled with references to philosophers and thinkers of quite another orientation. Second, and more profoundly, he begins to use the term ‘consciousness’ and its cognates in phenomenological-ontological terms to refer to a sphere of being, rather than (epistemological) knowledge of an opposed and separate object. These two factors, I will suggest, give clear indication of Lukács’s redeployment of the categories of his Heidelberg aesthetics.

The three essays written or entirely rewritten for *History and Class Consciousness* form the theoretical heart of the book. Where most of the other, earlier pieces examine questions of particular revolutionary tactics, the essays of 1922 are broad in scope and ambition, laying out the basic presuppositions of Lukács's theory. A brief adumbration of their main ideas suffices to distinguish them from the more occasional pieces that make up much of the rest of the collection. This is obvious from the very first essay, 'What is Orthodox Marxism?,' which introduces major concepts such as dialectics and totality. The essay offers a critique of the positivistic worship of 'facts,' summed up in Lukács's (in)famous claim that Marxism could survive the refutation of every single one of Marx's specific findings, because its core lay in its dialectical method. Positivism fails, he argues, because it does not understand that its stable 'facts' are themselves the product of a definite relation of subject and object or thought and being that isolates elements of a process in a way that makes them appear fixed and unambiguous. This subject-object relation is what defines the coherent 'reality' of a society—so under capitalism, social reality appears as an atomized set of data. History records the steady transformation of these socially determined forms of reality, which shape our sense of who we are; it is only under capitalism that the individual's existence has become entirely socialized, or brought within one system of reality. The essay's implications are far-reaching: a postrevolutionary society, it suggests, will have an entirely different conception of reality.

'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,' by far the longest essay, is the backbone of the book. Here, Lukács offers a general account of capitalism on the terms set out in 'What is Orthodox Marxism?': he analyses it as a particular kind of social being, or as a system of phenomena comprising the everyday reality of its members. It is here that he introduces his most important concept, *Verdinglichung* or reification—which most simply describes the situation when human activity takes on the form of 'something objective, something independent,' and thereby begins to control us.²⁶ His account is divided into three sections; as it happens, my exposition in Chaps. 4, 5, and 6 will each draw predominantly (though not exclusively) on the first, second, and third sections respectively. The opening section, 'The Phenomenon of Reification,' describes the manifestations of reification in a range of social institutions. Lukács begins by identifying Marx's account of commodity fetishism as the heart of his thought. However, he silently adjusts the focus to what he refers to as the commodity *structure*, describing a particular formal arrangement of social

relations; this same structure, he argues, can be found not only in the economy (e.g. in Taylorist factory work) but elsewhere in society, such as law and bureaucracy. What such institutions have in common is that they allow only the most limited subjective input: by reducing every social interaction to the most abstract and universal form, they limit us to the mindless performance of simple tasks to the degree that we are left as passive spectators of the society we supposedly live in.

This same theme of systematization reappears in the second section of the essay, 'The Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought,' wherein Lukács moves from sociology and economics to the 'classical German philosophy' of Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and their contemporaries. The decisive contribution of such thought, he argued, was that it began with the subject: rather than trying to explain the nature of things, Kant and his heirs asked how our relation to those things was shaped by the conditions of our knowledge. Yet it ran into an insoluble problem: while the principles of knowledge themselves could always be derived from the subject, the actual existence of known objects remained as an irrational residue that could not be deduced from the system. This foundational error drove classical German thought to search for the identical subject-object—a subject that could be seen as the creator or origin of the world around it. First in Kant's epistemology, then in Fichte's ethics, and finally in Hegel's dialectical ontology, such philosophy ran repeatedly into the same problem: its concern with rational system-building left it unable to grasp actually existing particulars as anything more than instantiations of the most general categories. Lukács tries to offer a resolution to these problems in the final section of the essay, 'The Standpoint of the Proletariat.' The problem with both bourgeois thought and capitalist social relations, he argues, is their ill-founded starting point. Kant and his heirs assume the separation of subject and object from the outset: they begin from the premise of an isolated individual confronting the world, just like the individual *homo oeconomicus* whose social relations to others take the form of isolated acts of commodity exchange. Controversially, he argues that the proletariat is uniquely able to see through this problem because its standpoint reveals that the isolation of the subject is not real. Moreover, the social relations that produce this isolation are the result of *practices*, not of eternal historical laws. This opens the possibility—but no more than the possibility—that the working class might come together to change those practices and reshape society.

The move from possibility to actuality is the subject of the final essay, 'Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization.' Rather than

matters of particular tactics, Lukács examines what it means in general for the proletariat to have a distinct organizational form. It is essential, he argues, if spontaneous actions by the workers are to blossom into a genuinely revolutionary movement, without being derailed by the demands of others. Crucially, such organization cannot follow any a priori blueprint, nor may it be imposed from above by leaders acting on behalf of the workers. The proletariat rises to conscious existence in organizing itself: every member of the movement must be fully engaged in this. Parties that limit popular engagement—whether Caesarist or bureaucratic—will lapse back into reification, leaving the masses as mere observers; similarly, any party attending only to instrumental or tactical matters instead of organizational ones will no longer be able to speak for the workers. Lukács's central category of reification therefore underpins his theory of party organization: it is to avoid the passivity and contemplativity induced by the commodity structure that he calls for an open party organized from the bottom up.

Perhaps it was the theoretical ambition of these essays that nudged Lukács towards more philosophical sources for his argument. This change is obvious in the footnotes of the 'Reification' essay. Marx, Engels, and other major figures of Marxist theory appear, of course, as do the likes of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. But so too do the very thinkers he had immersed himself in during his Heidelberg days. Max Weber is mentioned favourably several times; his brother Alfred appears too, as do Tönnies and Simmel—though the last is qualified with rather faint praise. Beyond sociological thought, he turns above all to Neo-Kantian philosophy: Ernst Cassirer is cited with particular approval, along with Heinrich Rickert and Hermann Cohen. Husserl is there, and Lask is lauded in a number of notes as 'the most acute and logical of the modern Neo-Kantians,' whose clear perceptions are especially useful.²⁷

At the same time, Lukács returns explicitly to some of the central questions of his Heidelberg-era aesthetics in a discussion of 'the systematically-theoretical and ideological significance which the *principle of art* acquires in this period.'²⁸ Arguing that the hope of reconciling subject and object offered by art is illusory, he directly cites his own 'Subject-Object Relationship in Aesthetics,' the only part of the Heidelberg drafts that reached publication in his lifetime. In this context, he mentions Fiedler by name somewhat critically, as an example of the theoretical tendency of splitting the subject into its separate faculties (given his exclusive concern with *visual* perception). But perhaps the most striking echo of his earlier work is a rather-too-casual aside on models of historical thought:

As the truly important historians of the nineteenth century such as Riegl, Dilthey, and Dvořák could not miss, the essence of history consists precisely in the changes of those *structural forms* by means of which the interaction of people and their environment takes place, and which determine the objectivity of both their inner and their outer lives.²⁹

Lukács's statement here—in the middle of a Marxist essay on revolutionary consciousness, let us emphasize—is somewhat incongruous, to say the least. Wilhelm Dilthey is perhaps the least surprising: his account of *Weltanschauungen* is not entirely out of place in a discussion of the different relations of various classes and groups to their social world, even if only as an example of a non-Marxist perspective on the same problem. But to place *Riegl* as the first name on a short list of 'truly important historians' is staggering: it is hard to see why his accounts of late Roman statuary might be related to the practicalities of revolutionary organization. The final name on the list, Max Dvořák, only adds to this confusion: a historian of Renaissance art and Mannerism, he succeeded Riegl as director of the bureau of public monuments for the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and edited some of Riegl's papers for posthumous publication. Dilthey might have been familiar to some of Lukács's audience; Riegl and Dvořák would have been entirely foreign. That Lukács should afford them such importance—and without offering any explanation—is so unexpected as to be worthy of comment in itself.

The significance of these points of reference at this point, then, is to reinforce the impression of Lukács in 1922 turning back to his earlier intellectual world—to the thinkers, that is, with whom he had engaged in preparing his Heidelberg aesthetics. Their very incongruity is striking: while he might have had what Quentin Skinner describes as 'confidence in uptake' had he addressed such statements to his academic colleagues of the 1910s, there were no grounds to suppose that his revolutionary colleagues had any particular interest in Neo-Kantian philosophy or Viennese art history.³⁰ In his late autobiographical interview, Lukács mentions that the serious possibility arose in 1923 that he would be appointed to 'a professorial chair in Jena': it may be that there were rumblings of this the previous year, and that these footnotes were intended to show that his thought remained philosophically sophisticated despite his time in revolutionary politics.³¹ This, though, is mere speculation. What is not in doubt is that in writing the 'Reification' essay, Lukács was directly revisiting his earlier sources and his own past theory. While his writings from 1919 until

1921 exhibit varying degrees of messianic or neo-Romantic thought, the ‘Reification’ essay in particular returns to the more austere intellectual universe of Heidelberg.

3 CONSCIOUS KNOWLEDGE TO CONSCIOUS BEING

Lukács’s return to his earlier sources led to a significant conceptual transformation in his theory—one that stemmed from the central problem he sought to answer, that of the failure of the proletariat to support the Party. The transformation is in a move from an *epistemological* to a *phenomenological* approach to the relationship between consciousness and society. That is, he moves from describing consciousness as knowledge reflecting or representing a world that stands outside it, towards treating consciousness as the mode in which that (social) world exists. He moves from a transitive to an intransitive sense of consciousness, if I may put it thus: consciousness does not point (transitively) outside itself towards an ontologically prior material reality behind our representations of it; rather, it is the realm in which objects come to their real and meaningful social existence. This allows him to treat consciousness in the way he had treated art: he analyses the validity forms governing the meaning-structure of social objects and their relations to one another, and explains subjectivity in terms of the relation towards objects defined by that structure. By extension, when Lukács speaks of ‘reality,’ he uses it to designate a *validly formed* system of formed, meaningful social being—in the sense that Riegl spoke of various *Kunstwollen* as different depictions of reality. To understand ‘reality’ is to understand a *particular* mode of social being and its associated meaning-structures—those which subjects in that society take for granted as real—*not* to understand the laws of the objective operation of the cosmos (or of all human history). It is to understand the idea of reality held by those in a given society, which governs the forms of their social relations.

My aim at this stage is simply to identify this general tendency in the later essays of *History and Class Consciousness*, as a prelude to the systematic account of Lukács’s phenomenology of social being in the following chapters. To do this, I shall first contrast his use of the term ‘consciousness’ in the earlier essays of the book, wherein it designates knowledge that is distinct from the objects it represents, with that in the later ones, according to which the meaningful manifestation of objects in consciousness is what they really are. Second, I shall point to his increasing tendency

to describe consciousness itself as a meaningfully structured realm, within which subject and object are related in determinate ways. Finally, I shall turn to his general definition of ‘reality.’ Consciousness is ‘reality’ in the same way as a work of art can be a ‘reality’: it is a consistent, coherent system of phenomena interacting in a manner determined by a governing internal structure. As such a self-validating system of truth, consciousness—like the artwork—is a totality.

The first sign of a change in Lukács’s theoretical paradigm, then, is that he moves away from treating consciousness as knowledge, and comes increasingly to treat the conscious manifestations of objects as their real existence. In the earlier essays of *History and Class Consciousness*, he deploys ‘consciousness’ in a conventional sense, to indicate the knowledge that a subject has of a world outside itself. Such knowledge was not identical with the world it represented, and so might be more or less accurate. This approach stemmed, of course, from the very failure of the revolution: the working classes had not been uniformly enthusiastic in their support for the party. Assuming that Marxist theory was correct, the simplest explanation would be that they had failed to understand their interests correctly—but that the Party could, by dint of its superior scientific method, identify the real needs of the working class and act on them. This is the basis of Lukács’s discussion of ‘imputed’ consciousness, which appears in the earlier version of ‘Class Consciousness’ (1920).³² Here, he argues that the proletariat have fallen victim to a ‘false’ consciousness that can nevertheless be replaced by a more appropriate outlook gleaned from a Marxist analysis of the class structures of capitalist society. This allows us to deduce ‘the thoughts and feelings that people in a particular situation *would* have if they were able to grasp completely their situation and the interests it gives rise to relative to immediate action and the structure of society as whole – the thoughts etc. that are appropriate for their objective position. ... The rational, appropriate reactions, then, which are *imputed* on this basis to a specific, typical position in the process of production, is class consciousness.’³³ Lukács refers approvingly in a footnote to Weber’s account of ideal types of motive for social action, suggesting that class consciousness is a closely related concept: it is one based on more-or-less accurate knowledge of an objective situation.

The same is seen in the earlier version of ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ (1919). Here, he explains the superiority of Marxist theory as the recognition that concepts and facts are not fixed but are instead ‘*living realities*, which produce a process of continuous transition, of sudden change.’³⁴

Temporary truths that apply at a particular moment are, in Marxism, supplanted by the ‘great socio-historical process.’³⁵ That is, by incorporating this historical dimension into analysis, Marxism can know more about reality: it possesses more facts, more information about a society that exists outside of our knowledge of it. Informed by Marxist theory, the Party can claim greater insight into the real interests of proletarians because the latter merely look to their momentary needs, while the former understands the hidden structures that determine real interests. At this early stage, then, ‘consciousness’ meant little more for Lukács than ‘knowledge’ or ‘beliefs’ about a mind-external object—either the ‘false’ knowledge that proletarians have, or the knowledge and desires they would have if only fully enlightened by their Party leaders.

Looking back late in life on his theoretical development at the time, Lukács remarked that it aimed at ‘a new attitude towards reality: epistemologically-directed standpoints overcome.’³⁶ This change is visible in the three last-written essays in the book (as well as in some of the revisions to other essays). Increasingly, where these essays touch on the knowledge that we have of an objective situation, Lukács tellingly avoids the term *Bewußtsein* (consciousness), instead using the slightly different *Bewußtheit*, or ‘awareness.’ For example, he remarks at one point that ‘class consciousness [*Klassenbewußtsein*] is, then – viewed abstractly and formally – at the same time a class-determined *unawareness* [*Unbewußtheit*] of one’s socio-historical situation.’³⁷ Lukács’s transition here from the positive *Klassenbewußtsein* to the negative *Unbewußtheit* is significant: it implies that the former is distinct from the knowledge that a group may have of its situation. Elsewhere, he refers to ‘an awareness [*Bewußtheit*] of the whole of society’—here using this particular form clearly to describe knowledge of an external object.³⁸

In contrast, *Bewußtsein* is used quite differently in the 1922 essays. In the first place, Lukács applies it to a far greater ontological range than just mental representations. As Merleau-Ponty notes, class consciousness for Lukács ‘is not in the form of an “I think.”’³⁹ Instead, it is embodied in the Party as the ‘organizational form of this class consciousness’—he applies the term ‘consciousness’ to specific social institutions.⁴⁰ Similarly, in the 1922 version of ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ he argues that ‘Marx’s demand that we understand “the sensuous world,” the object, reality, as human sensible activity signifies humanity’s becoming conscious of itself as a social being.’⁴¹ Consciousness designates practical social activity, not simply a set of representations in the mind. I shall explore what Lukács

means by such statements in the following chapters; for now it is sufficient to note the extension of the term ‘consciousness’ to realms other than knowledge. By definition, consciousness must be more than an epistemic matter of the correspondence of our beliefs to an external reality.

In fact, Lukács goes to some lengths to reject the classical epistemological understanding of consciousness. The later version of ‘Orthodox Marxism’ is quite direct in attacking standard ‘criticism’ (i.e. Kantianism) because it assumes as its starting point ‘the separation of method and reality, of thought and being,’ thus wrongly positing a distinction between objects and our knowledge of them.⁴² This clearly echoes Lask’s desire to overcome ‘the age-old sundering of object and truth-content, in the recognition of the transcendental logicity or “thinkable” quality of Being.’⁴³ Lukács agrees, insisting that every object is ‘given’ as an ‘inseparable complex of form and content’—that is, that its form is part of what it *is*.⁴⁴ The same applies to ways social forms such as the commodity appear in our consciousness. It is wrong to understand the commodity form as a mistaken or misguided vision of a more fundamental reality underneath; as he insists, it is ‘not something (subjectively) thrust in to the objects from without ... *but is rather the disclosure of their authentic, objective, concrete structure itself*.’⁴⁵ Lukács’s claim here is distinctly phenomenological rather than epistemological. In extending the term ‘consciousness’ to include social practices and institutions, he implies that social being itself is inherently meaningful—and that this meaning is a decisive part of the social existence of any object. Consciousness cannot, therefore, be understood as knowledge or representation of a separate reality—something that we can have better or worse knowledge of—but is instead a level at which reality exists. Thus, he cites Marx’s comments on ancient religion: “Did ancient Moloch not rule? Was the Delphic Apollo not a real power in the lives of the Greeks?”⁴⁶ Whatever Marx’s original intent, Lukács argues that we should not treat these ancient gods as mere masks for class power: they existed socially, and so counted as directly ‘real,’ and therefore as effective forces in social relations. Society, in other words, can be said to ‘exist’ in and through its disclosed forms—as ‘consciousness.’

The second significant change in Lukács’s use of the term ‘consciousness’ is that he begins to describe its own immanent structures, distinct from those of the objects manifest in consciousness and from the cognitive powers of the subject. This is most obvious in his account of reification, which he repeatedly describes as a structure of consciousness. Thus, he states that ‘it was capitalism, with its unified economic structure

embracing the whole of society, that first produced a – formally – unified structure of consciousness for its totality.⁴⁷ Elsewhere he speaks of the ‘reified structure of consciousness’: it is consciousness that is reified, its meaning-structure distorted by the effects of the commodity form.⁴⁸ This claim that consciousness *itself* is something reifiable is significant for intellectual-historical reasons. Georg Simmel is often cited as one of Lukács’s sources for the notion of reification: his *Philosophy of Money* describes the objective reification of certain social relations as they are taken over by the money form. Simmel, though, does not suggest that it is consciousness that is reified; rather, he retains a fairly orthodox Kantianism in suggesting that a subject that stands outside and gazes on social forms that have become distorted in certain ways.⁴⁹ The *social world* is reified for Simmel, but not consciousness. Compare this with the following statement: ‘To follow the model of the natural sciences almost inevitably means to reify consciousness.’ Here, it is not an external world, but *Bewußtsein* itself that is so structured. But this statement is not taken from Lukács, however much it might sound like him. Rather, it was Husserl who stated this, in his programmatic essay in the first edition of *Logos*, ‘Philosophy as a Strict Science.’⁵⁰ Lukács’s analysis thus echoes Husserl in seeking to identify the structures peculiar to consciousness itself—except that, as we have seen, he extends ‘consciousness’ to cover social institutions as well. In effect, in treating reification as a structure of consciousness, he performs the phenomenological *epoché*: he aims to explain this formal structure as such, disregarding the existence of an external world for the purposes of the analysis.

It follows that Lukács increasingly treats the subject’s relation to consciousness in the same way. Rather than characterizing the subject in terms of the transcendental categories of its knowledge, he frames it in terms of an intentional stance towards objectivity. Most obviously, he follows Husserl’s correlation of noema and noesis, stating that the reification of consciousness entails a ‘form of objectivity on the one hand and the correlative stance of the subject on the other hand.’⁵¹ The subject, in other words, is defined in relation to the structures of consciousness as such, rather than producing them. Similarly, his comparison of the logical, ethical, and artistic subjects in his Heidelberg drafts is paralleled by the distinction he makes between the subject in Fichte and Kant: where the latter’s subject is epistemological, the former opts for a practical-ethical definition of subjectivity. In seeking to replace knowledge with activity, Lukács argues, Fichte’s subject is related to the world through a distinct

‘structure of consciousness.’⁵² The difference lies, therefore, in the particular attitude of their subjects towards the world, as part of a total structure of consciousness—not in any properties lying within the subject in isolation. Consciousness is not just knowledge, governed by rational categories but distinct from the subject; the description of consciousness *includes* the structurally defined orientation of the subject towards objects *within* consciousness.

Finally, and most strikingly, by 1922 Lukács increasingly treats consciousness as a complete system of *reality* in itself. ‘Reality’ here must be understood in a very specific sense. It does *not* refer to any underlying substance, to a system that exists outside of our distorted knowledge of it and that shapes our minds accordingly. Rather, just as in his Heidelberg drafts on art, ‘reality’ designates the integrated completeness of a system of valid forms, such that all parts encountered in consciousness are manifest through the same principles. Different ‘realities’ are conceivable: consider Riegl’s distinction between the ‘reality’ of Egyptian art, which depicts a cosmos of independent, self-contained objects, as opposed to the ‘reality’ of the modern *Kunstwollen*, which treats all entities as subordinated to a broader system of rules governing the whole; recall too Lukács’s early critique of naturalism as a failed *Kunstwollen* on account of its inability to achieve the coherence of reality. In order for any system of artistic appearances to achieve the level of reality, he had argued, it must become a self-enclosed totality—that is, every element must be defined immanently, rather than in relation to something outside itself. Equally, then, ‘totality’ does not refer to the sum total of human society and the historical process, but to the self-enclosure of a validity system of social being. Although his earlier essays lean towards the notion that Marxism simply tells us more about an objective and independent ‘real’ world behind our delusions about it, by 1922 he returns to the phenomenological notion of reality he had used in his Heidelberg drafts.

This shift in his thought is most obviously manifest in a comparison of the two versions of ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’—the 1919 edition, a product of Lukács’s period of revolutionary zeal, bears very little resemblance to the second version, the product of the same period in which he was writing the ‘Reification’ essay. Both versions of the essay argue that ‘orthodox’ Marxism is distinguished by a particular scepticism towards so-called facts that seem to present society as natural and immutable, and both suggest that the perspective of ‘totality’ undermines such facts. But they diverge on how they interpret this totality. In the earlier version,

totality consists of the historical dialectic: as Lukács explains, Marx ‘*always sees the whole from the standpoint of the even more comprehensive totality of a grand socio-historical process.*’⁵³ This perspective reveals the constancy of change and flux, or the dialectical process by which ‘every concept *must* transform in to its opposite.’⁵⁴ His argument is relatively straightforward: positivistic bourgeois thought takes the current state of society as fixed and unchanging, rather than a developing reality; it is a sort of sociological Uncertainty Principle. Totality is *extensive*: what makes it ‘total’ is that it encompasses an additional dimension (the historical) that is not included in the static, one-dimensional sum total of facts gathered by bourgeois thought. There is a fairly crude version of Hegelian historicism here, one that quite straightforwardly equates truth with the end result, seeing any momentary ‘truth’ as relativized by a definite historical process that determined the greater truth.

In contrast, the later version of the essay is concerned above all with the nature of reality—or how it is that any arrangement of categories and contents comes to appear as ‘real.’ In this account, the hallmark of Marxist thought is the recognition that any reality is itself conditioned and determined. As he explains, ‘the facts will only first become facts within a methodological treatment – which varies according to the goal of knowledge.’⁵⁵ The kind of question Lukács is posing is shown by his analysis of natural-scientific knowledge: even the facts it produces are ‘reduced to their purely quantitative essence, as expressed in numbers and numerical relations.’⁵⁶ But the problem is not inherent to the natural sciences as such—such fixed facts, isolated from any broader social structures, ‘are – precisely in the structure of their objectivity – products of a determinate historical epoch: of capitalism.’⁵⁷ As he explains, ‘it is of the essence of capitalism to produce phenomena in this way ... [it is] a *historical* peculiarity of capitalist society.’⁵⁸ The second version of the essay thus goes far beyond the first. Where Lukács’s earlier account saw the strength of Marxism as lying in its capacity to add an extra dimension to the analysis—in a sense, to add more ‘facts’—the later version asks what it is that makes ‘facts’ seem real and factual at all. Rather than the extensive totality of the 1919 essay, the version in *History and Class Consciousness* suggests an *intensive* totality—one unified by a fundamental principle that presents a ‘reality’ in a particular style.

To be crystal clear in this case: Lukács is not claiming that world history *is and always was in fact* governed by the structures of capitalism, and simply awaited our awareness of it. Rather, he is arguing that these are the

valid forms of consciousness under capitalist society—and as they form a totality, they are what people in that society imagine to be the fundamental ‘reality.’ Thus, Lukács’s argument could not be read as suggesting that, for example, the European proletariat was the protagonist of world history; rather, his method helps understand why, within a given phenomenological reality, one particular narrative of development was cast as the inevitable path of human development—as in, say, the Weberian claim adopted by certain more recent theorists that the forms of rationalization found ‘in Western civilization only ... lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value.’⁵⁹ Rather than claiming to penetrate to the core of all existence, Lukács’s method seeks to explain how different societies conceive reality, such that narratives of this kind can come to seem plausible at all. By extension, when Lukács refers to ‘totality,’ he does *not* mean ‘the sum total of facts about society and/or history’; rather he interprets societies as totalities to the extent that they are coherent ‘realities’ comprising definite ways of understanding the material world, and social relations and institutions associated with that grasp of the world. Formal completeness is what makes totalities seem ‘real,’ in the sense that they do not point to anything outside themselves as their ground, but instead comprise the fundamental preconditions of explanation as such. This explains Lukács’s sly allusion to Riegl in the middle of the ‘Reification’ essay. The art historian had suggested that different *Kunstwollen* depict a range of conceptions of the world as real. Lukács extends this beyond art to the social realm as a whole: each type of society has a different formal ‘structure of objectivity’ that can be identified across its culture and practice; this is how a society is manifest, or how it is brought to conscious form as a reality.

4 CONCLUSION

Lukács may have resented the period of ‘enforced leisure’ in 1922 brought about by Béla Kun’s triumph in the internecine struggles of the Hungarian party, but it was this leisure that permitted him to develop a distinct philosophical interpretation of Marxism that offered radically new perspectives on the theory. The essays produced in this year—‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’, ‘Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,’ and ‘Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization,’—along with the less-extensively revised ‘Class Consciousness’ and ‘Historical Materialism’ pieces—were dramatically different from his earlier works in

both tone and theoretical framing. He stepped away from the often-naïve enthusiasm of his revolutionary-period writings and instead offered a philosophically sophisticated and far-reaching reinterpretation of key elements of Marxist theory. Above all, these works are marked by the reappearance of the ideas first given expression in his Heidelberg aesthetic manuscripts: he begins to analyse social forms using the same version of phenomenology that he had used to explain the work of art in his earlier drafts.

It would be too much to describe 1922 as the single decisive turning point in Lukács's thought as a whole, because to do so would imply that he had entirely turned his back on his earlier messianism. In the first place, his *Lenin* pamphlet bears clear traces of those beliefs, particularly in the canonization of the revolutionary leader figure.⁶⁰ Moreover, his political thought continued to develop—as he made clear later in life—until the publication of the so-called Blum Theses in 1928. But 1922 *was* decisive for the development of his specific account of reification in *History and Class Consciousness*.

His earlier revolutionary writings indeed betray signs of neo-Romantic anti-capitalism, harking back to the themes of *Soul and Forms* or the proposed Dostoevsky book. In theoretical terms, these early writings assume the existence of subjects and communities beyond and independently of social structures; society 'exists' in a certain sense even without the institutions and formalized relations it creates to govern itself, and which (in Simmelian fashion) eventually come to restrict it. But Lukács's philosophical return to Heidelberg in 1922 helped him move beyond these presuppositions, and so indicates the overcoming of his own neo-Romantic tendencies.

By drawing on the phenomenological and art-theoretical models that he had used in his theory of art, he began to interpret social being as a realm of consciousness itself, rather than as an object of which we are conscious—and he did so using the categories and questions he had used in developing his earlier philosophy of art. Such consciousness is 'reality' in the same sense as the 'reality' manifest in a successful work of art: it comprises its own conditions of validity that determine the categories of social being. It is possible, therefore, to analyse social being phenomenologically in terms of its own structure as a realm of meaningful existence, rather than simply as a reproduction or representation of a supposedly more true or 'real' world beneath social forms. The way the social world *appears* is what the social world *is*, because social being is inherently a realm of meaning. At the same time, Lukács's approach entails the same relativization of the subject as his earlier philosophy of art. The categories do not rest on

the subject for their existence: insofar as we can speak of a subject, that subject supervenes on the structure of consciousness. Thus, Lukács's phenomenology of society is non-idealist in not relying on a demiurge (such as Hegelian *Geist*) for the positing or the validity of either the contents or the structure of consciousness. Human society only properly 'exists' to the extent that it is made or becomes conscious—that is, it acquires form as an explicit, organized totality. As a realm of meanings, significances, structures, and explicit relations, society is conscious, and is analysable phenomenologically.

Of course, all that I have argued thus far is that Lukács uses the same phenomenological paradigm and language to talk about social being in 1922 as he used to analyse art between 1912 and 1918, shown in the nuances of his account of consciousness as a reality. I have not yet provided sufficient detail to support the claim that Husserl, Lask, Riegl, and Fiedler informed his Marxian account of reification in any of its particulars, rather than just in general; more importantly, I have certainly not offered any justification of Lukács's transposition of a philosophical model of art to analyse the very different domain of social being. These arguments will be the focus of the following chapters, in which I will offer a more detailed account of his method in a way that (I hope) renders it plausible: it would be pointless to attempt an a priori justification of Lukács's general approach.

However, the evidence I have offered does have important ramifications of its own. It reinforces the sense that *History and Class Consciousness* cannot be understood as a single, monolithic work expressing only one united position. This has been acknowledged before—but often inaccurately, such as in Stedman Jones's separation of the final two essays in the published book. Paying attention to the date of composition and to the language Lukács uses reveals a rather different set of unities and fissures in the text: the three essays that form a significant group are 'What is Orthodox Marxism?', 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,' and 'Towards a Methodology of Organization.' These were the final three to be written, and their language and concepts are clearly closer to Lukács's Heidelberg years. They will be the centre of my attention in what follows.

This means, however, that I shall jettison some of the concepts most closely associated with Lukács, because they do not (I suggest) figure prominently in the arguments of these three essays. Indeed, they may even mislead us in interpreting these later essays. The most significant of such

notions is that of ‘imputed’ or ‘ascribed’ (*zugerechnet*) class consciousness, and the associated idea of ‘false’ consciousness—which are central to the ‘Class Consciousness’ essay. Lukács’s suggestion that Marxist analysis could reveal the needs and interests that the occupants of a particular class position *should* have, regardless of their empirical thoughts and desires, has been one of his most widely criticized claims. Taken at face value, this claim has obvious implications for the interpretation of the other essays in *History and Class Consciousness*. First, it nudges the reader towards understanding Lukács’s discussion of the ‘standpoint of the proletariat’ in the ‘Reification’ essay as an account of the ideal-typical proletariat—the ‘standpoint’ would, on this interpretation, refer to the position in the system of production that the workers occupy, and which therefore determines their interests. Second, it is not difficult to read his account as an argument that the Communist Party simply knows better than the proletariat, and hence as a justification of their claim to lead the workers and even oppress them in their own greater interest. Read through the lens of ‘imputed class consciousness,’ the ‘Methodology of Organization’ essay (among others) might be seen unreflectively as an account of a centralist Party that leads the revolution from above.

Extending imputed class consciousness across the entirety of the book in this way would be a mistake: as I have argued, it exemplifies a definition of consciousness as ‘knowledge’ that Lukács overcame in the essays of 1922. In fact, Lukács himself barely mentions the notion of imputation in these later essays: the term *zugerechnet* simply does not appear at all in either the ‘Reification’ or the ‘Orthodox Marxism’ essays, and only occurs in passing in ‘Towards a Methodology of Organization.’ Lukács’s account of the standpoint of the proletariat is phenomenological, not ideal-typical, as I will explain in Chap. 5; moreover, he explicitly and repeatedly rejects any claims by a Party to have greater knowledge warranting its action as on behalf of the workers, as we shall see in Chap. 6. I have no intention of drawing on the concept of imputation, therefore, and will not seek to defend it or incorporate it into the interpretation of Lukács I offer. Similarly, the interpretation I will offer takes Lukács far away from a classically Leninist party and places him closer in some respects to Rosa Luxemburg, despite his criticisms of her. I will therefore not undertake any justification for vanguard parties that claim to stand for the proletariat: on my interpretation of Lukács, he was as far as can be from either Leninist or Stalinist centralism.

In short, then, Lukács's intellectual development from before his conversion to Marxism until some years after *History and Class Consciousness* was not monolithic, linear, unidirectional, or clear. But the key essays of 1922 were marked by a distinct return to his Heidelberg drafts, leading him to enquire into social being in terms of its forms of validity as categories of existence. Drawing on the paradigm he had developed in his unfinished philosophy of art, he was able to pose new questions of society: in what ways, he asked, do social objects *exist* as inherently meaningful unities? How does such existence rise to the level of 'reality'? It was by treating the commodity structure as the validity form of capitalist society that he sought to answer these questions.

NOTES

1. Gluck, Mary. 1985 *Georg Lukács and His Generation 1900-18*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass; Löwy, Michael. 1979. *Georg Lukács: From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, trans. Patrick Camiller. London: New Left Books; Kadarkay Arpad. 1991. *Georg Lukács: Life, Thought, Politics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
2. Lukács, Georg, 1995. 'Bolshevism as an Ethical Problem,' in *The Lukács Reader*, ed. Arpad Kadarkay, 216–221. Oxford: Blackwell. 220.
3. Kadarkay, *Lukács*, 202.
4. Kadarkay, *Lukács*, 203–204.
5. Kadarkay, *Lukács*, 203.
6. Lukács, Georg 1968–1981. *Werke*, (W) 18 vols., ed. György Márkus & Frank Benseler (Darmstadt: Luchterhand) ii.12: 'Wenn ich etwa an die nicht allzu zahlreichen und nicht allzu bedeutenden Aufsätze literarischen Charakters aus dieser Zeit denke, so finde ich, daß sie an aggressivem und paradoxem Idealismus meine früheren Arbeiten oft übertreffen'; Lukács, Georg. 1971 [1923]. *History & Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, [HCC] trans. Rodney Livingstone. London: Merlin. X.
7. Lukács, Georg. 1983. *Record of a Life*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. Istvan Eörsi (London: Verso). 76.
8. Lukács, 'Bolshevism as an Ethical Problem,' 218–219.
9. Lukács, 1974. 'Tactics and Ethics,' Lukács, Georg. *Tactics and Ethics: Political Essays, 1919–29*, 3 trans. Michael McColgan; ed. Rodney Livingstone, 3–11. at 11.
10. Lukács, Georg. 1985. *Dostojewski Notizen und Entwürfe*, ed. J.C. Nyíri. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
11. Lukács, 'Tactics and Ethics,' 11.

12. Lukács, 'The role of morality in communist production,' 48–52 in *Tactics and Ethics* at 48.
13. Lukács, 'Party and Class' 28–36 in *Tactics and Ethics*, at 36.
14. Löwy, *Georg Lukács*, 171.
15. Lukács, *Record of a Life* 73.
16. Lukács, *Record of a Life* 74.
17. Kadarkay, *Lukács*, 260.
18. Kadarkay, *Lukács*, 262.
19. Lukács *W* ii.163: 'in der Zeit einer unfreiwilligen Muße'; *HCC* xli.
20. Lukács, *W* ii.163; *HCC* xli.
21. Stedman Jones, G. 1977. 'The Marxism of the Early Lukács,' 11–60 in Stedman Jones et al. 1977. *Western Marxism: A Critical Reader*. London: (New Left Books, 1977) n.3.
22. Stedman Jones 'Early Lukács,' 55.
23. Stedman Jones's subsequent work, after his move away from Althusserianism, has been far more historically rigorous. See, for example, his recent *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2016, which offers a detailed Cambridge School contextualization of Marx and his work.
24. Stedman Jones 'Early Lukács,' 37.
25. Lukács *W* ii.163: 'übertrieben optimistischen Hoffnungen'; *HCC* xli; Löwy *Romanticism to Bolshevism* 178.
26. Lukács, *W* ii.261: 'An dieser struktiven Grundtatsache ist vor allem festzuhalten, daß durch sie dem Menschen seine eigene Tätigkeit, seine eigene Arbeit als etwas Objektives, von ihm Unabhängiges, ihn durch menschenfremde Eigengesetzlichkeit Beherrschendes gegenübergestellt wird.'
27. Lukács *W* ii.323 n.1: 'Lask, der scharfsinnigste und folgerichtigste der modernen Neukantianer'; *HCC* 215 n.56.
28. Lukács *W* ii.317: 'Worauf es hier ankommt, ist die systemtheoretische, die weltanschauliche Bedeutung, die dem Prinzip der Kunst für diese Epoche zukommt.' *HCC* 137.
29. Lukács *W* ii.336: 'Dabei besteht – wie dies den wirklich bedeutenden Historikern des XIX. Jahrhunderts, wie z. B. Riegl, Dilthey, Dvorak, nicht entgehen konnte – das Wesen der Geschichte gerade in der Änderung jener *Strukturformen*, vermittels welcher die Auseinandersetzung des Menschen mit seiner Umwelt jeweilig stattfindet, die die Gegenständigkeit seines inneren wie äußeren Lebens bestimmen.' *HCC* 153.
30. Skinner, Quentin. 2002. 'Interpretation and the understanding of speech acts,' I.103–127 in Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Vol. I, Regarding Method*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 104.
31. Lukács, *Record of a Life* 71.

32. Neil Larsen suggests that the third section of the ‘Reification’ essay offers an explanation or justification for Lukács’s concept of ‘imputed’ class consciousness. I am not persuaded by this: the earlier ‘Class Consciousness’ essay still seems to me to retain an epistemic orientation despite additions to it. The ‘Reification’ essay treats consciousness in quite a different fashion. Indeed, the word *zugerechnet* (‘imputed’) does not, in fact, appear in the later essay. See Neil Larsen: ‘Lukács *sans* Proletariat, or Can *History and Class Consciousness* be Rehistoricized?’ 81–101, in Bewes, Timothy & Hall, Timothy. 2011 *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence. Aesthetics, Politics, Literature*. (London: Continuum).
33. Lukács, *W* ii.223: ‘werden jene Gedanken, Empfindungen usw. erkannt, die die Menschen in einer bestimmten Lebenslage haben *würden*, wenn sie diese Lage, die sich aus ihr heraus ergebenden Interessen sowohl in bezug auf das unmittelbare Handeln wie auf den – diesen Interessen gemäßen – Aufbau der ganzen Gesellschaft *vollkommen zu erfassen fähig wären*; die Gedanken usw. also, die ihrer objektiven Lage angemessen sind. ... Die rationell angemessene Reaktion nun, die auf diese Weise einer bestimmten typischen Lage im Produktionsprozeß *zugerechnet* wird, ist die Klassenbewußtsein.’
34. Lukács, *W* ii.62: ‘sondern *lebendige Realitäten*, die einen Prozeß des ununterbrochenen Übergangs, des Sprungs verursachen.’ Lukács ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ 19–27 in Lukács, *Tactics & Ethics*. 20.
35. Lukács, *W* ii.66: ‘eines großen gesellschaftlich-geschichtlichen Prozeß.’ Lukács, ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ *Tactics & Ethics*. 24.
36. Lukács, *Record of a Life*, 162.
37. Lukács, *W* ii. 224–225: ‘Das Klassenbewußtsein ist also – abstrakt formell betrachtet – zugleich eine klassenmäßig bestimmte *Unbewußtheit* über die eigene gesellschaftlich-geschichtliche ökonomische Lage.’ *HCC* 52. Livingstone translates *Unbewußtheit* as ‘unconsciousness,’ obscuring the difference in Lukács’s terminology.
38. Lukács, *W* ii.364: ‘Bewußtheit über das Ganze der Gesellschaft.’ *HCC* 179.
39. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1973, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. Joseph Bien, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. 50.
40. Lukács, *W* ii.505: ‘organisatorisch[e] Gestalt dieses Klassenbewußtseins.’
41. Lukács, *W* ii.192: ‘die Forderung von Marx, die “Sinnlichkeit,” den Gegenstand, die Wirklichkeit als menschliche sinnliche Tätigkeit zu fassen, bedeutet ein Bewußtwerden des Menschen über sich als Gesellschaftswesen.’ *HCC* 19.
42. Lukács, *W* ii.174: ‘die Trennung von Methode und Wirklichkeit, von Denken und Sein.’ *HCC* 4.

43. Lask, Emil 1923–1924. *Gesammelte Schriften*. ed. Eugen Herrigel. 3 vols. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). ii.28–29: ‘die Aufhebung dieser Unabhängigkeit des Seins gegenüber der logischen Sphäre, in der Zerstörung der uralten Auseinanderreißung von Gegenstand und Wahrheitsgehalt, in der Erkenntnis der transzendentalen Logizität oder “Verstandes”-Artigkeit des Seins.’
44. Lukács, *W* ii.304: ‘untrennbarer Komplex von Form und Inhalt.’ *HCC* 126.
45. Lukács, *W* ii.346: ‘nichts von außen (subjektiv) in die Gegenstände Hineingetragenes, ist kein Werturteil oder Sollen, das ihrem Sein gegenüber stände, sondern ist das Offenbarwerden ihrer eigentlichen, objektiven, gegenständlichen Struktur selbst.’ *HCC* 162.
46. Lukács, *W* ii.306: ‘Hat nicht der alte Moloch geherrscht? War nicht der delphische Apollo eine wirkliche Macht im Leben der Griechen?’
47. Lukács, *W* ii.275: ‘erst der Kapitalismus hat mit der einheitlichen Wirtschaftsstruktur für die ganze Gesellschaft eine – formell – einheitliche Bewußtseinsstruktur für ihre Gesamtheit hervorgebracht.’ *HCC* 100.
48. Lukács, *W* ii.275: ‘verdinglichte Bewußtseinsstruktur.’ *HCC* 100.
49. Simmel, Georg. 2004. *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore, David Frisby, & Kaethe Mengelberg, London: Routledge.
50. Husserl, Edmund. 1965. ‘Philosophy as a strict science,’ in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans. Q. Lauer. New York, Evanston & London: Harper. 103.
51. Lukács *W* ii.258 ‘Gegenständlichkeitsform einerseits und aus dem ihr zugeordneten Subjektverhalten andererseits ergeben.’ *HCC* 84.
52. Lukács, *W* ii.302: ‘Struktur des Bewußtseins.’ *HCC* 124.
53. Lukács, *W* ii.66: ‘er sieht immer die Ganzheit vom Standpunkt einer noch umfassenderen Totalität eines großen gesellschaftlich-geschichtlichen Prozesses.’ Georg Lukács, ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ 19–27 in *Tactics and Ethics: Political Essays, 1919–1929* trans. Michael McColgan, ed. Rodney Livingstone, 24.
54. Lukács *W* ii.63: ‘jeder Begriff in sein Gegenteil umschlagen muß.’ Lukács, ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ *Tactics and Ethics*, 20.
55. Lukács, *W* ii.176: ‘die Tatsachen bloß in einer solchen – je nach dem Erkenntnisziel verschiedenen – methodischen Bearbeitung überhaupt erst zu Tatsachen werden.’ Lukács, ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ in *HCC* 5.
56. Lukács, *W* ii.176: ‘Dieser Prozeß steigert sich noch dadurch, daß die Erscheinungen auf ihr rein quantitatives, sich in Zahlen und Zahlenverhältnissen ausdrückendes Wesen reduziert werden.’ Lukács, ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ in *HCC* 6.
57. Lukács, *W* ii.178: ‘sie sind – gerade in der Struktur ihrer Gegenständlichkeit – Produkte einer bestimmten Geschichte: des Kapitalismus.’ Lukács, ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ in *HCC* 7.

58. Lukács, W ii. 176–177: ‘es zum Wesen des Kapitalismus gehört, die Erscheinungen in dieser Weise zu produzieren ... es sich hier um eine *historische* Eigentümlichkeit der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft handelt.’ Lukács, ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ in *HCC* 6.
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PART II

The Phenomenology of Capitalism



CHAPTER 4

The Forms of Social Reality

The pivotal essays of *History and Class Consciousness* may have been the product of Lukács's reconsideration of his earlier messianic Marxism, but they were far from his final word. In the ensuing decades, he repudiated his masterwork on a number of occasions and for a range of ostensible reasons. Much of this later autocriticism was political: in the 1967 reissue of the book, he explained it as an 'entry ticket' to the struggle against Fascism from within the party.¹ Whatever one may think of Lukács's political judgement in this instance, it should not cloud our evaluation of the book's own arguments and its author's later attitude to them. He gives a more considered reappraisal in comments on the book towards the end of his life, both in the 1967 preface and in a set of notes and interviews given in 1971 after learning that he was terminally ill.² The succinct judgement of his earlier work found there highlights certain features of *History and Class Consciousness* that have not been sufficiently appreciated hitherto—and which will be the focus of my reinterpretation of the text.

In one of these final statements, Lukács summarizes his main disagreement with his earlier theory thus:

The fundamental ontological error of the book is that I only recognize existence in society as true existence, and that since the dialectics of nature is repudiated, there is a complete absence of that universality which Marxism gains from its derivation of the organic from inorganic nature and of society from the organic realm through the category of labour.³

What is striking here is that Lukács criticizes his earlier work for *insufficient* attention to labour as the engine of social forms. By implication, he understood his own earlier work to treat social being as such as the only significant level of existence open to analysis. Nothing *outside* the forms of society could play any role in his argument—including, as he makes clear, labour considered as an activity (or entity) with an essence of its own, outside social relations.

Lukács's statement is important because many of his sympathetic critics—those such as Habermas or Postone who draw on his theory of reification but reject his account of revolution—criticize *History and Class Consciousness* on the grounds that it seems to *overestimate* labour in the form of the proletariat as revolutionary subject.⁴ For such critics, Lukács's theory of reification is a valid and fruitful development of certain aspects of Marx's theory; they see him as broadly correct in targeting the depersonalization of social structures and relations under capitalism. For example, Moishe Postone argues that, for Marx, 'a characteristic of capitalism is that its essential social relations are social in a peculiar manner. They exist not as overt interpersonal relations but as a quasi-independent set of structures that are opposed to individuals, a sphere of impersonal "objective" necessity and "objective dependence."⁵ As a *critical* theory, Lukács's account seems to capture something fundamentally wrong with capitalist society. But, these critics charge, Lukács errs in his precise diagnosis of the problem and his proposal for a solution. Postone's critique is particularly significant because he readily acknowledges Lukács's influence in shaping his own thought. For Postone, Lukács falls into the same error as what he terms 'traditional Marxists.' Such Marxists place too great an emphasis on *labour* as the ultimate substance of society, with the consequence that they overstate the significance of the proletariat as the source of such labour under capitalism. As he puts it '[traditional Marxist] interpretations imply that overcoming capitalism would involve the supersession of a mediated form of social relations by a direct unmediated form. Labour could then realize its social character directly.'⁶ For all his theoretical innovations, Postone suggests, Lukács too 'analyses society as a totality, constituted by labour, traditionally understood,' with the result that he identifies it as 'the historical Subject, constituting the social world and itself through its labour. By overthrowing the capitalist order, this historical Subject would realize itself.'⁷ Such an argument (Postone suggests) ends up by wrongly treating reification merely as an illusion or imposition that could be sloughed off to liberate the more fundamental essence of society beneath.

Instead, he argues, Marx in fact treats such abstract relations as the real structure of capitalism, not a mere illusion: this is what capitalist society consists of in fact.

Postone's critique is one of the most sophisticated versions of the common charge that Lukács resorts to a labouring subject that exists in some mode outside the reified social relations it is charged with overthrowing. According to such critiques, Lukács assumes some kind of fundamental social unity that is merely distorted by the reified relations imposed on it; he seems, in other words, to argue that society exists outside of its forms in some more primordial fashion. Lukács's late criticism of *History and Class Consciousness* is, therefore, an obvious problem for interpretations like those of Postone. Where these critics suggest that the book is wrong because it places too much importance on labour and on an agent that operates from outside social reality, Lukács's criticism takes the exact opposite approach. In his view, the book did *not* rely on such claims—and it was precisely *because* of this omission that its arguments were inadequate. The 1967 preface makes this point repeatedly: Lukács rejected his basic approach because it meant that both 'the ontological objectivity of nature' and 'the interaction between labour understood in a genuinely materialist way and the development of labouring humans' necessarily disappeared from his analysis.⁸ If Lukács's goal in his later work was to ground his explanation of social reality on a pre-social understanding of labour as such, we might have expected him to identify such elements in his earlier work as the part of it worth saving—but instead he criticizes himself for this omission. The problem with *History and Class Consciousness*, he makes clear, is precisely that it *fails* to allow for the existence of anything outside of social reality, not that it draws *too much* on such extra-social entities in explaining how social problems could be overcome. It seems *prima facie* more plausible to accept the interpretation of the author who believed such elements should have been in his theory but regretted not having included them than those of his critics who believed they should not, but claimed to have found them there.

In fact, there is plenty of evidence even within the essays of 1922 that Lukács does not assume some prior unity of society in an unmediated form. He makes this explicit in his rejection of Hegel's notion of *Volkgeist*, or the 'spirit of the people' that is supposedly expressed in that nation's culture and institutions.⁹ Any attempts to posit such an immediate existence of society ends up in mystification, or relies on a 'mechanical-naturalistic psychology' as the driving force behind social being.¹⁰ (This

very phrasing obviously harks back to the anti-psychologism of his Heidelberg days itself.) Moreover, as I shall argue in Chap. 5, his notion of the relation between class and party implies that there is no prior unity of the proletariat as labouring subject. He insists that a party aiming merely at making actual what is merely latent—that is, simply expressing something that was already tacitly there—is inadequate; rather, it is only in its conscious forms of organization that the class exists. It follows, therefore, that Lukács does not presuppose the kind of immediate social unity or subjectivity that Postone and others have attributed to him.

It is, then, the ontology of *History and Class Consciousness*, that which the later Lukács would criticize as too self-enclosed in its ignoring of nature, that is the core of this chapter. What he argues is that the mediated forms of society are in fact its real existence—not merely reflections of some more real substance underneath. In certain respects, the influence of Hegel is clear and undeniable in Lukács’s approach. The ontological language he uses is largely Hegelian. For example, he refers to the ‘determinate being’ or ‘determinate social being’ (*gesellschaftliches Dasein*) of people and objects throughout the late essays of the book: rather than a foreshadowing of Heidegger, this is a direct use of Hegel’s terminology. Similarly, he draws on Hegel’s broader terms such as *Sein* (Being) and *Wirklichkeit* (actuality) to distinguish different levels of existence, and takes care to link such a ladder of ontological concepts to Marx.¹¹ Hegel thus provides a basic conceptual vocabulary for Lukács’s account. However, his categories are too general—they are categories of reason, not of the actual determinate existence of things. They can at best explain the quiddity of things, not their haecceity, producing no more than ‘a formal typology of the forms of appearance of history and society, in which the historical facts can be used as *examples*,’ leaving the connection between the system of concepts and the entities determined by them merely to chance.¹² As a result, Hegel does not grant any decisive role to a particular set of determinations. Lukács, in contrast, argues that the commodity structure—a very specific mode of social being—has its own logical dynamic. It is central to his argument this structure as such *directly* determines the logic of capitalist society. While agreeing with Hegel’s general scheme of the gradations of existence, Lukács rejected the determination of these gradations through reason alone.

To make up for this deficit, the specifics of his analysis of social being are, I will argue, distinctly phenomenological in the sense in which he used that term in his Heidelberg aesthetics. What distinguishes this ontology—what

makes it quite different from the mainstream of Marxist thought at the time—is that it does not explain social relations in terms of certain brute material interests or positions that are merely reflected or mediated through, say, the commodity form. In fact—as the later Lukács noted—it almost entirely precludes such explanations. Rather, it is the formal structure of social relations that governs them. This structure determines the meaning of objects in society directly: the significance of social objects comes from the relations they stand in, not from their material properties. As I argued in the previous chapter, Lukács extends the term ‘consciousness’ to cover society as a whole, not merely mental acts and states. He does so because social relations are meaningful in the way that consciousness is phenomenologically meaningful for Husserl, Riegl, Fiedler, and Lask: it is built on structures that generate a meaning that cannot be reduced to either the projection of the subject or the reflection of the object. What keeps Lukács’s argument materialist rather than idealist is that such meaning is not merely present in ideologies. As Feenberg rightly argued, Lukács’s innovative solution is to apply this same method of analysis to social relations and practices: it is these that constitute the ‘consciousness’ of society, in that social relations (particular those embodied in institutional practices) are the determinate form of interactions between people. It is these practices that constitute social objects as definite, meaningful entities. Lukács uses the word ‘consciousness’ to describe these practices because they are, like mental acts in Husserl’s phenomenology, *intentional*: in these acts, the subject is directed towards the object in a certain meaningful way. Of course, any such practices necessarily presuppose a subject-pole—the individual’s attitude or intention towards the object in the phenomenological model becomes a practical attitude in Lukács’s application of this paradigm to social relations. This intentionality is inseparable from what the object *is* in society; indeed, the meaning-structure of the intentional object is what determines its very social existence. (A crown, say, is defined by a set of social relations; the physical properties of the gold and gems that constitute it are irrelevant.) The commodity form and its pursuant reification, it follows, are not a *mistaken* understanding of society; they are (directly) how society *is*. The ontology of social being in the essays of 1922, then, explains society by the logic of its forms of appearance—not by any underlying structures or mysterious power of labour.

I will outline this theory in three stages, indicating three ontological levels of Lukács’s account. Borrowing Heidegger’s terminology, I will refer to these as the phenomenological, the ontic, and the ontological, as

certain elements of Lukács's account map well on to Heidegger's distinctions. This should be accompanied by some strong caveats: Lukács himself does not use these terms, nor is there any exact correlation in all details between Heidegger's use of the terms and my own use to distinguish the levels of Lukács's analysis. Indeed, given the multiple diverging strands of thought in *History and Class Consciousness* examined in the previous chapter, there are undoubtedly sections of the book that do not make use of such an ontological model. Notwithstanding such contradictory elements, these terms capture fairly well the distinction Lukács relies on in his explanation of reification.

I shall begin by identifying the phenomenological aspects of Lukács's argument. His analysis is phenomenological in that the social being of objects is determined by practices characterized by their intentionality: the subject is directed towards the object in a meaningful way. This meaning is peculiar to social being, dependent neither on the projection of the subject nor on the mediation of a brute material thing; the social existence of the object can be analysed on its own terms, just as Husserl describes the meaningfulness of phenomena. What characterizes such practices in capitalist society, Lukács argues, is a split intentionality: objects are defined as divided against themselves, integrated into social relations only as abstract form, while their concrete content is semantically excluded from society as a whole.

Second, Lukács's phenomenological account of individual objects is nested within an ontic exploration of social reality as a whole, and the direct analysis of the categories that govern it. By 'ontic,' I mean the daily social reality experienced by those living in a given society. An ontic analysis can identify the categories that define objects within that society. Here, Lukács is perhaps more indebted to Lask than to Husserl: rather than explaining the meaningfulness of individual objects, he identifies a broad principle of validity structuring the realm of social being as a whole: it is the commodity structure that determines all kinds of capitalistic social being, bringing objects into social relations only under the specific category of Value and excluding any other features they may have. On this basis, Lukács offers a relational ontology—one that determines objects by the logic governing the intentional practices that shape them. To describe this as 'ontic' indicates that this is the lived reality of those in capitalist society; it is what necessarily appears to *them* as real, or as the only way objects can exist socially.

Lukács goes further, however: he tries to identify what it is that makes reality appear real, as it were—in other words, what makes a given system of relations of social being into a complete and coherent reality. I shall describe this level of his analysis as ‘ontological.’ Where a socio-ontic analysis tries to identify the categories and laws governing a given lived reality, an ontological analysis aims to understand how those categories as a whole come together to seem real. Lukács implies that any social reality can be understood by the identification of a foundational principle: in the case of capitalism, it is the commodity structure that epitomizes and defines the entirety of social reality. Above all, this reality is determined as a relation of subjects and objects to one another and to society as a whole. Reification is ontically real—it characterizes the entirety of capitalist social reality—but ontologically determined by the commodity structure. The recognition that any ontic reality is ontologically determined is a first step towards its critique and transformation, and reveals (for Lukács) the possibilities of agency it entail.

1 THE DIVISION OF THE OBJECT AS COMMODITY

To speak of the social being of an object is to describe it, in the first place, as having a specific meaning that cannot be explained in terms of its purely physical properties. A crown, say, might be considered simply as a mass of dense metals and glittering stones—or as the symbol of power and authority. Its determination as a crown, of course, rests in turn on its components being understood as the most precious of metals and gems, which only the wealthiest or most powerful can own. Its meaning as a crown, then, depends on a network of significance rather than being determined by its material qualities beyond that network. It would obviously miss the point to claim that viewing this mass of metal as a crown is in any way a mistake or an illusion, one obscuring the more ‘real’ existence of the raw materials underneath; it is equally real as a crown, in the sense that it has definite power within its social context. Its meaning is intrinsic to what it *is*. At the same time, of course, its definition as a crown does not exhaust the underlying stuff of which it is made: we could just as well understand its components differently, seeing its diamonds as useful for cutting glass, or repurposing its gold as a conductor of electrical signals. No one of these interpretations is untrue in itself: each of them is an equally true description of the object. Obviously, what is at stake here is the Husserlian question of intentionality. The same underlying stuff (*hyle*, in Husserl’s

terms) can be intended in quite different ways, bearing a variety of meanings; those meanings are peculiar to the intentional object, and can thus be analysed according to their own logic rather than in relation to the material beneath.

Lukács's account of reification and the commodity structure presupposes precisely such an understanding of social forms and objects. Many of Lukács's critics have understood these terms as designating errors or mistakes: on this reading, seeing objects as commodities is simply an error, mistakenly grasping them as something other than their true essence; by extension, we also mistakenly treat other humans through the lens of the commodity. Society (so this interpretation runs) operates organically beneath this false perception, but our mistaken attitude leads to problems that might be avoided if we were corrected. Yet—as indicated in the previous chapter—Lukács makes quite clear that he does not see the social existence of objects as mere misperceptions: the meaning of an object *is* its social being. This is quite clear in his account of the commodity in particular: far from being a misunderstanding, the commodity form is genuinely 'the real principle of actual process of production of commodities.'¹³ Pace Postone, he does indeed recognize that 'economic categories are, following Marx, forms of determinate being, determinations of existence.'¹⁴ In other words, Lukács already recognizes the point that Postone purports to introduce: commodity fetishism is not a mistaken knowledge of society, but is instead the direct form of the practice and hence the existence of people and objects in capitalism.

Lukács's explanation of commodity fetishism does not, however, stop at treating commodities in terms of a set of beliefs (however socially real) that subjects have about objects. Rather, he offers a formal outline of the commodity *structure* as a logically analysable form with effects and consequences stemming from its structural properties. As Andrew Feenberg has pointed out, Lukács uses Neo-Kantian language in describing reification—most prominently in the first section of the 'Reification' essay, 'The Phenomenon of Reification,' in which Lukács points to a number of behaviours that constitute consciousness. Throughout this section of the essay, Lukács describes reification 'as a form of objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeitsform*] on the one hand, and as the subjective stance [*Subjektverhalten*] appropriate to it on the other.'¹⁵ The distinctly Neo-Kantian term *Gegenständlichkeitsform* indicates that there is a particular logic behind the commodity form: it is not simply an agglomeration of beliefs held by subject, but a structure governing the way objects in gen-

eral appear. Just as significant, though, is that Lukács returns to the language of his Heidelberg drafts in characterizing subjectivity as a *Verhalten* or ‘stance’ correlated with a particular meaning-structure. In this respect, his account of the commodity is distinctly intentional. Echoing Husserl’s pairing of noema (the meaningful object) and noesis (the mental act), Lukács ties together the meaning of the object with an expected orientation of the part of the subject. When we intend an object as a crown, say, we are expected to reverence it; when the same object is intended as a work of art or craft, we should adopt an aesthetic attitude so as to appreciate its fine workings. In each case, the subjective stance is defined by the structure of objectivity, rather than as something stemming from the rational faculties of the subject.

However, in marrying this phenomenological model to Marxism, Lukács aimed to avoid idealistic overestimation of purely mental contents. Thus, as Feenberg perceptively argues, Lukács extends the term ‘consciousness’ (*Bewußtsein*) far beyond merely mental contents to designate something akin to the modern anthropological notion of a culture comprising a set of practices.¹⁶ Feenberg’s interpretation finds support in Lukács’s statement in the 1922 version of ‘What is Orthodox Marxism?’ that ‘Marx’s demand that we understand “the sensuous world,” the object, reality, as human sensible activity signifies humanity’s becoming conscious of itself as a social being.’¹⁷ Social reality—and all the objects disclosed within it—is a realm of activity: it is something we *do* rather than something we merely *know*. What justifies the application of the term ‘consciousness’ to this activity is that Lukács treats practices as meaningful in the same way as Husserl treats phenomena as meaningful. In place of Husserl’s mental acts, Lukács puts social acts or practices; in both cases, these acts are shaped by the intentional structure of the object itself. Our practices are shaped by the meaning of the thing to which they are oriented. Thus, the meaning-structure of, say, a sacred religious object demands certain behaviours towards it—an emotional attitude of reverence in its presence; handling it with care and ensuring it is not used for profane purposes; following ritualized forms in using it; stipulating punishments for blasphemy against it. The religious meaning of the object necessarily entails such subjective stances towards it. Correspondingly, the subject itself is better understood as such a structured orientation towards social objects, rather than as an entity with its own internal characteristics; it is defined by its expected behaviours towards the noema. When Lukács talks about consciousness, then, he

means it in this practical way as an intersubjective realm of the construction of meaningful objects; by definition, this *cannot* be reduced to the ‘knowledge’ that a mind (or group of minds) has of a brute material world or society. It refers instead to the semantics of practice, or the way in which social relations construct a set of objects as meaningful by orienting subjects towards them in definite ways.

This sheds light on Lukács’s statement that ‘there is no problem of this stage of human development that does not lead back to this question in the final analysis, and whose solution could not be sought out in the solution to the puzzle of the *commodity-structure*.’¹⁸ Lukács’s sly transition from the commodity as such to the commodity *structure* is significant: rather than a narrow focus on capital from an economic sense, he indicates that the same structure of meaning applies across all capitalist social reality: in his words, ‘only capitalism, with its unified economic structure, [that] brought forth a – formally – unified structure of consciousness for the whole of society.’¹⁹ It is for this reason that he focuses on Marx’s account of commodity fetishism—which is, of course, only a small part of the sprawling argument of *Capital*. Lukács’s step was thus a highly unusual choice at a time when it was the supposedly scientific analyses of the economic structure of capitalist society that dominated the common view of Marxist theory. Indeed, Lukács explicitly disavows any attempt to give an economic analysis. Rather, he sets as his task the analysis of the commodity structure’s effects on the very mode in which social being is manifest: as he explains, the very ‘structures of objectivity’ of all ‘subjective and objective appearances’ in a society wholly governed by the capitalist commodity structure are determined by it.²⁰ These formal structures of meaning depend neither on the supposed properties of a brute, unformed object, nor on the (psychological, naturalistic, or Romantic-expressive) qualities of the subject: they are entirely *sui generis*. They delimit the kinds of object that might be brought to social being, because they define the way we behave towards the objects.

In past societies, Marx explains, exchange may have taken many forms, such as payment in kind or the mutual responsibilities of feudal lord and peasant. The objects of such exchange would manifest their use values, or the specific purpose they served for the flesh-and-blood individuals who exchanged them. Matters are quite otherwise under capitalism. Here we produce as ‘private individuals or groups of individuals’ who only come into contact in the act of exchange.²¹ Of course, even this exchange presupposes humans with needs: the commodity must have a use value for

someone in order for it to be traded at all. But under the conditions of industrialized mass production, such exchange is facilitated by a consistent standard of value to compare articles of different use value—so they turn to the property all objects have in common, the fact that they were produced by human labour. The value of commodities, then, is determined by comparing the amount of labour typically taken to produce it, relative to other objects: an item that typically takes four hours to produce will have a value four times that of a commodity that can be made with only one hour of labour.

In *Capital*, Marx himself predominantly describes the economic consequences of this fetishism—such the relentless drive for ever-more surplus value that drives capitalistic development. In contrast, Lukács identifies a formal logic at the heart of the commodity structure that determines *multiple* dimensions of society, and which dictates what can and cannot rise to the level of social being. The social practice of exchange intends its objects in a uniquely dichotomous way: we must act towards commodities as both concrete use values and as abstract exchange values. Let us take the example of, say, a rock or some such mere thing. Lying on the earth, it has no social being until someone wishes to purchase it from the individual who gathered it or whose land it is found on; until this point, it does not exist as a commodity. The commodity is intended as the item to be used; its meaning depends on this orientation towards a subjective need. But in the practice of exchange, it is intended as a quantitative Value, determined by the amount of socially necessary labour required to produce it and bring it to market. Value is thus a category of the commodity's social being, or how it exists socially. What it *is* within these relations is formal and abstract, represented merely as a quantity of labour. The commodity as the intentional structure of practices of exchange thus limits the possible properties and relations of the social objects it: only its abstract and quantitative properties are legible when it comes into relation with other things.

But at the same time, this necessarily ignores and excludes the particularities of the object—all those qualities that are intended in its use value. Its specific content remains outside the commodity exchange: it is that which *by definition* cannot be assimilated into the formal and rational structure of social relations. This is epitomized by the fact that labour value is defined in terms of 'socially necessary' labour—that is, the amount of labour typically required in a given society to produce a certain commodity. In consequence, the specific details of an individual worker's labour are actively excluded from the object as it stands in relation to other

objects: as Lukács explains, ‘the human qualities and peculiarities of the worker appear more and more as *mere sources of error*.’²² It is not the case that the universal form of the commodity merely does not adequately represent the content beneath; it must actively and positively exclude it. The social being of the commodity (and of all objects determined as commodities) is, therefore, on the one hand, an abstract, formal, quantity standing in relation to other quantitatively variable but qualitatively identical objects, but, on the other hand, a substantial content or use value to be consumed, that is excluded from those relations. Under capitalism, individual objects inevitably appear in this double way, divided against themselves. Their substance and particularity are determined as liminal; they have a paradoxical social being as that which is outside the system, as private, rather than public, concerns.

By treating the commodity as a phenomenological meaning-structure *sui generis* instead of as the reflection or mediation of an underlying reality, Lukács is able to identify its recurrence beyond the economy and throughout capitalist society—while at the same time avoiding the reduction of all other social relations to mere superstructural epiphenomena entirely dependent on the economic base. Capitalism is distinct from previous societies because for the first time there is a ‘formally-unified structure of consciousness for the whole of society.’²³ That is, (almost) all social practices intend their objects in the same dichotomous way, bringing people and things into the network of social relations only in their most abstract and universal aspects. Drawing on Weber, Lukács points to the practices common in social institutions such as law and the bureaucratic state. Phenomenologically, those practicing in the legal system, for example, intend their objects as cases, determining them in a specific manner by bringing different particulars to a common legal form. Pre-capitalist law, he suggests, was riddled with ‘empirical, irrational’ elements ‘tailored subjectively to the people in action, and objectively to the concrete matter in hand.’²⁴ The legal procedure and the case itself—the way in which the incident is brought to social being—might incorporate concrete particulars of the situation or of those involved. Contemporary law, however, pays no heed to the contents of a particular case. It aims at ‘a rational systematization of all legal regulation of life,’ which can in principle be applied to any imaginable case.²⁵ Now, the content of the case has little or no bearing on its legal form: the two are entirely separated, and it is the form that determines how any circumstances are incorporated into social relations. Even the laws themselves take on the same

dichotomous existence. Quoting Hugo Preuß, Lukács emphasizes that ‘the cohesion of these laws is purely formal: *what* they express, “the content of legal institutions is however never juridical, but rather always of a political or economic nature.”’²⁶ The legalistic form becomes entirely divorced from its irrational content, giving the case the same divided existence as the commodity.

Lukács’s critique of the commodity is, then, phenomenological in that he examines the social being of objects in terms of a formal meaning-structure that cannot be explained as a mere reflection of an underlying material reality. He transfers Husserl’s account of the intentional structure of the mental acts and the phenomena of consciousness to the practical acts and phenomena of social being. He offers a semantics of practices, pointing to the way they intend their objects in a particular way, defining what they are and how they interact. Noema and noesis are bound together: as a meaningful object, the commodity is correlated with a specific intentional stance towards it. But the commodity structure that determines the forms of being under capitalism discloses objects in a peculiarly divided fashion: their form is determined so abstractly that it has nothing to do with their content. This division defines everything particular as external to society, because such particulars cannot be incorporated into the social being of the object. This leaves the formal structures themselves to operate unimpeded—and, as we shall see, they do so according to their own immanent logic.

2 THE LOGIC OF SOCIAL FORMS

If Lukács’s account of the meaningfulness of practices is phenomenological, he is nevertheless forced to go beyond Husserl by the fact that he is explaining *social* being in particular. To consider anything as ‘social’ is, obviously, to look at its relations to other entities and the degree to which it is shaped by those relations. Max Weber, for example, defines ‘action’ as consciously motivated behaviour—and ‘social action’ as that which takes account of the expected motives and actions of others. It is, in other words, action shaped by a relationship.²⁷ For Lukács, the meaning of social objects is thus defined in relationally: what an object is, and the kinds of intentional practices that follow therefrom, is defined in mutual relation to other entities and agents; no social object can be defined in isolation from its interactions with others. Before his engagement with Marx’s account of the commodity form, Lukács was already familiar with formal-relational

accounts of social being: Georg Simmel, under whom he planned to habilitate, had adumbrated just such a theoretical model. Indeed, he later conceded that he first saw Marx through ‘methodological spectacles extensively determined by Simmel and Max Weber.’²⁸ But Lukács aims for greater systematicity than Simmel. It is possible to identify nexuses of such relations in particular domains, and to describe the logic governing such clusters. Lukács treats the commodity structure in just such a fashion: more than simply determining individual objects, it comprises a set of general principles governing how entities in general can be disclosed and the kinds of relations that can exist between them. In this respect, he returns to the Neo-Kantianism of Lask et al.: the commodity form serves as the principle of validity for a domain of social being, delimiting what can and cannot exist within this system of social reality. This enables him to give what I will term an ontic analysis—that is, one that analyses the total set of formal relations constituting a particular social reality, explains the kinds of objects determined by these forms, and infers the logic of this overall structure. This is ‘ontic’ in the sense that it is *a* reality—it consists of a set of objects interacting in identifiable and determinate ways—but it is historically specific and itself dependent on a more fundamental ontological principle.

Lukács’s relational account of social being has two faces. On the one hand, he explains the properties of individual objects in terms of the relations in which they stand, rather than by any essence internal to them. To explain this, I shall begin by outlining the relevant aspects of Georg Simmel’s theory, both to show Lukács’s source for this model of analysis and because Simmel’s account offers a more readily comprehensible version of this approach. On the other hand, Lukács analyses the overall structure of these relations directly, to identify the logic governing them. As I shall argue, the commodity structure not only determines individual objects; it simultaneously and contradictorily defines society as a whole as both fragmented and yet entirely determined. This is the core of reification—a structure of consciousness produced by a phenomenological social form, rather than by the actions of subjects.

While I have argued that *History and Class Consciousness* bears few signs of a Simmelian ‘tragedy of culture,’ Lukács does echo his erstwhile teacher in one important respect: he identifies the logic of social relations directly. For Simmel, it was possible to calculate the nature of certain social relationships from their basic formal elements. Simmel outlines a series of examples, the simplest of which concern the number of participants in social interaction: an interaction between three social agents (a triad), he

argues, is subject to quite different constraints from one between two (a dyad).²⁹ If *two* people are in disagreement or conflict, it may be difficult for them to reach a resolution; if a third joins them, that third can act as arbiter, or may ally with one participant against the other. Simmel's argument is explicitly Kantian: these relations can be deduced a priori, without needing to observe the interactions of dyads and triads to understand their possibilities. A group of three logically permits more interactions than a group of two, by virtue of the purely formal qualities of the interaction—here, the mere number of distinct agents. Thus, the differences between interactions of two or three *individuals* are repeated in interactions of two or three *groups*: in a society of three classes, Simmel observes, two will normally ally to overcome the third.

Simmel applies his method to more than simply the number of participants in a relationship. In one of his most famous examples of a social form, he examines the position of the Stranger—an individual who is (to borrow Wood's felicitous rendering) 'in the group but not of it.'³⁰ The Stranger is not one completely unknown to the rest of the group; rather, someone who comes from outside but stays—Simmel gives the example of the merchant trader who brings goods from afar, or the situation of Jewish people in Europe. It is, he says 'a very positive relation; it is a specific form of interaction': the Stranger is both distanced from the group (not involved in its internecine struggles) but intimate with it. This allows the Stranger to act as arbiter—or to be told 'confidences which sometimes have the character of a confessional and which would be carefully withheld from a more closely related person.' It is, Simmel suggests, the unique combination of nearness and farness, insider and outsider, of 'distance and nearness, indifference and involvement,' that defines the Stranger's qualities by these categorial relations to the rest of the group. These, of course, contrast with the properties attributable to native group members, of inescapable nearness and involvement, or of complete outsiders, such as indifference to the group's needs. What is important here is the way Simmel identifies these properties of Stranger and native. The particular relationship of the foreigner who joins the group generates a set of possible properties: one may be categorized as inside (native), outside (foreigner), or outsider-inside (Stranger). (Indeed, this suggests the possibility of going beyond Simmel to postulate the form of the insider-outside, the émigré, or the exile, and to speculate on the sort of properties that might be attributed to such an individual.) These categories do not stem from any inherent essence of the person who happens to be the Stranger—whether as

individual or member of a particular nation—so they are different from classical Aristotelian categories. But equally they are not simply Kantian categories of knowledge: they constitute the real structure of the Stranger as social entity. They are the forms of its social being. The categories are, in a sense, the objectification of the relational form—they attribute to the entity certain features of the relationship in which it stands.

In certain important respects, Lukács's account of social reality is Simmelian—but he both differs from and goes beyond his teacher in a number of important regards. What he draws from Simmel is the concern with social form as the determining factor in an ontology of social being. The ontology of the 'Reification' essay is implicitly relational: what a thing *is* is defined by the logic of the relationships within which it is disclosed and the practices entailed thereby—and not by any essential characteristics it may be supposed to have. The abstract value of the commodity is simply the way it is related to other items for sale, defining the properties of the object by comparison of quantitative values. But Lukács adds both a historical specificity and an ontological ambitiousness that goes beyond Simmel, exemplified in the difference between the teacher's celebrated *Philosophy of Money* and the student's account of the commodity structure.³¹ For Simmel, the decisive significance of money as social form is that it places everything into a straightforward relationship to everything else by presenting all objects in terms of simple, quantitative monetary values. His verdict on this is ambivalent: by thus homogenizing the social world, it risks encouraging a 'blasé' attitude to life; at the same time, because it can be used as a means to *any* goal, money has a democratizing effect by permitting anyone with sufficient money to pursue whatever ends they wish. Moreover, money is uniquely versatile: relationships taking the form of money can exist in complex networks over vast distances, and permit great flexibility.

While recognizing the significance of Simmel's work as a 'very interesting and astute book in matters of detail,' Lukács repudiates his former mentor rather ungraciously, lumping him along with other bourgeois thinkers whose analysis goes no further than 'the immediacy of reification,' looking only at its 'most alienated and empty forms,' as if they were a 'timeless form of human relations in general.'³² In the first place, Simmel holds to a classically Kantian view: he presumes the existence of a subject that seeks to know the world, and to whom money as a form remains external. While the objective world appears reified, this does not particularly affect the composition of the subject. As will become clear in the

following chapter, Lukács's view is quite different: for him, the subject is historically variable because it is defined as a position within the meaning-structures of social relations. Where the commodity structure encompasses a complete social relationship that determines the categories of existence of those involved, Simmel's money form is merely an intervening moment between people.

Even setting aside the subjective consequences for the moment, Lukács argues that Simmel fails to consider the difference between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies. He cites Marx's description of the role of money in pre-capitalist societies: as Marx argues, 'merchant's capital is originally merely the intervening moment between extremes which it does not control and between premises which it does not create.'³³ Under capitalism, however, the dominance of the commodity form means that it constitutes a complete set of social relations between entities that it defines thoroughly. It is a total system of validity, in that it re-presents social reality as a complete whole whereby literally any objects are in principle relatable by expressing them in the commodity form. Consequently, it determines social relations far more thoroughly than mere money. Where the commodity is still not dominant—as, for example, in an agrarian feudal society—such economic exchange cannot play the same role. Peasants with some access to the means of production can satisfy some of their own needs without recourse to the market; even where they do trade commodities, there is neither the consistency of methods of production nor the total integration of the markets required to determine the labour value of a commodity with any certainty over a wide area. In contrast, in an advanced division of labour under capitalism, the individual is only able to meet their needs for subsistence through exchange: they directly produce almost nothing that they need. Marx explains that such a society presupposes the 'mutual exchangeability of all kinds of useful private labour [as] an established social fact'—that is, it assumes that individuals will be able to sell their labour on the market at a rate that will allow them to purchase the commodities required for their own use.³⁴ Under such circumstances, the commodity's double-face as both 'a useful thing and a value' becomes important: it is at this point that 'useful articles are produced for the purpose of being exchanged, and their character as values has therefore to be taken into account, beforehand, during production.'³⁵ Under such circumstances, the commodity structure is the fundamental form taken by social relations: consumers and producers alike are related in terms of a universally fungible standard of Value. It is this that determines the social

being of specific objects in capitalism: as Lukács explains, ‘the interchangeability of qualitatively different objects’ requires recognition of a ‘formal equality’ of quantity.³⁶ This determines ‘the form of objectivity of both objects and subjects in society.’³⁷ When people are related only in terms of an abstract structure—whether a quantity of Value, or as, say, formally equal citizens with the same legal and political rights—their social being is itself abstract. The commodity structure requires that their qualitative differences be effaced in the name of comparability, so that they can be brought within social relations.

It is this that explains the particular features of social being under capitalism. Abstraction is at the heart of the validity principle (in the Laskian sense) of a society ruled by the commodity form. In order for objects to come into relation with one another, they must shed their qualitative differences and appear only as Values or other abstractions; they may interact only on these terms. Other matters—the beauty, the moral worth, the traditional symbolism of an item—cannot be disclosed in the realm structured by the commodity. All such concrete and particular determinations are invalidated by universal abstraction. This, however, means the divorce of form and content—as a basic presupposition of the commodity form as such. That is, the formal determination of social objects comes to vary entirely independently of their contents. The Value of a commodity—and thus the labour of its producers, as well as their social being—is determined by the relative Value of other commodities. The purchasing power of my labour may be reduced by technological improvements or shortages in other parts of the economy over which I have no control; my social being is therefore distanced from my material existence, and the social existence of my product is, by definition, something over which I exercise only minimal control.

For this reason, Lukács distinguishes the commodity structure from previous social forms because it is so explicit in what it is. Non-commodity social objects—works of art, sacred relics, even royal crowns—seem to be what they are because of certain properties that adhere to them as particular entities, or due to their links to specific human individuals believed to possess definite essential characteristics of their own. Of course, all such characteristics are themselves socially determined—but this social determination is masked. In contrast, the capitalist commodity externalizes any such specific content, and determines the social being of an entity quite purely and directly by its relation to other objects similarly defined. However, it is because of this absolute separation of form and content that it is possible, as noted above, for mediation to be ‘not something (subjectively) thrust in to

the objects from without ... *but rather the disclosure of their authentic, objective, concrete structure itself.*³⁸ The formal determinations of the commodity are quite explicitly and directly mediating categories: these forms are not attached to the individual object as its personal qualities, but are instead the expression of the object's situation in relation to other objects. Mediation is therefore not an epistemological category—that is, one that emerges as a subject seeks to know an object through its subsumption under rational forms that may transcendental and a priori (as in Kant) or discovered through a dialectical process of coming to know the world (in the Hegelian sense). Rather, it is a category of the social existence of the objects themselves, part of their dual social being as irrational content outside of relations to other objects on the one hand, and rational, abstract forms that incorporate it into society on the other. Anything that cannot be so rationalized, any substantive *content*, is disclosed as external to the system—outside the border of the social, liminal, irrational, natural, even abject.

The commodity structure thus doubly determines the social being of individual objects: it explains their relations to one another and their possible interactions through a set of quantifying, abstract, and rational forms that define such objects as 'social,' and it determines anything specific to them as external and irrational. This, for Lukács, explains Marx's statement that the value of a commodity appears 'to result from the nature of the products' and from a set of naturalistic laws of value rather than from human activity: by separating out the (irrational) activity from the determinate social being of the item as a value, the commodity structure decouples the production of the object from its existence in society.³⁹ Its value is indeed directly determined only in relation to other commodities—and it is this that determines what it *is*. As Lukács puts it, 'the objects that satisfy our needs no longer appear as the products of an organic life process of a community ... but appear instead on the one hand as abstract examples of a species that are in principle indistinguishable from other examples of their species, and on the other hand as isolated objects, the possession or non-possession of which is dependent on rational calculation.'⁴⁰ Their social being is defined by their abstraction and their relation to other items. Consequently, Lukács sees this social form—not any 'real' labour underneath—as the motor of society, the principle genuinely governing the production of commodities. In other words, the commodity structure not only determines the properties of individual objects, but rather provides the logic of capitalism—and hence the overarching image of society as an integrated whole.

It is the specific manifestation of society as a whole disclosed through the commodity form that constitutes objective reification. Mirroring the double-disclosure of an individual commodity as rational, abstract, socialized value, and as irrational, concrete, particular use value, society itself appears in a double form—both as rational, determined totality, and as fragile, fragmentary, and disconnected. Lukács's analysis here once again points back to certain elements of the phenomenologically framed aesthetic theory of his Heidelberg drafts. Recall his use of Alois Riegl's terminology to critique the naturalistic *Kunstwollen*. Different *Kunstwollen* present different 'realities'—that is, they set the terms of what counts as 'real' in divergent ways. 'Reality' in this case, of course, does not refer to any bare, formless, noumenal world; rather, it describes the world as it has (in the Laskian sense) come to truth through being clad in valid form. Thus, a work of art may comprise a 'reality' if its formal structure achieves full coherence, leaving no crack that undermines the impression that a complete picture is being given. Naturalism, Lukács argues, ultimately fails at the artistic task of manifesting a self-contained totality or world within the artwork because of its goal of depicting 'reality' with a minimum of distorting stylization. This commits naturalistic artworks to depicting each individual object purely on its own terms; it is difficult to show any organic connections between them by subordinating them to an overall scheme, so undermining the work as a unified world.⁴¹

The objective reality of a society governed by the commodity form echoes that of the naturalistic *Kunstwollen*. Under capitalism, social reality consists of a set of commodity-objects separate from one another and (as quantitatively defined Value) infinitely divisible into smaller parts. This is echoed in the individual's daily labour under Taylorist work processes that break workers' actions into discrete steps; this, Lukács insists, destroys 'the organic-irrational, constantly qualitatively-determined unity of the product.'⁴² Such isolation extends to workers (as private vendors of labour power rather than members of a community that produces and consumes together) and to the general phenomenon of the specialization of different social spheres around their own internal principle. In each case, a world of contents defined as *sui generis*, cut off from broader processes, comes into being. This produces a society that appears as a set of isolated phenomena, so that 'every image of the whole is lost.'⁴³ It stems directly from the separation of form and content at the heart of the commodity structure. Everything specific and concrete is externalized; indeed, any non-formal ('organic') social bonds whatsoever are excluded from social

reality as a whole; confined to their own sphere, they cannot be brought together in a coherent social whole.

The consequence of this extreme externalization of content is that the rational forms of the economy themselves appear to operate entirely without human intervention—and this is the objective manifestation of Lukács's central concept of reification. Because all irrational content has been expunged from the formal social being of the commodity, the interactions of those commodities necessarily operate according to predictable and rational laws. Thus, 'for the individual the commodity structure of all "things" and the "natural law" character of their relations is something already finished, something unshakably given.'⁴⁴ Immediately, social reality appears law-governed, predictable, and unalterable precisely because of its rational formalism: within a particular sphere, socially determined objects interact according to rationally predictable laws operating independently of any intervention by the individual. As a specific action or object is disclosed and socially determined, anything that is not part of the formal-rational system of social relations is sloughed off. The mediating forms of social interaction permit only very specific relations between people and things: to the extent that such entities stand in a social relationship to one another, their interactions are determined by this system. Within any *one* area of society, these logical, predictable relations may hold. But at the same time, their very formalism means that qualitatively different areas of society cannot be brought into anything more than a fortuitous relationship with one another: there is no way, for example, for the economic commodity form to mediate the substance of, say, legal relations. Consequently, 'the interrelatedness of [society's] elements and its partial systems is a matter of chance even in their most normal functioning.'⁴⁵ As a whole, therefore, social reality is *irrational* insofar as its various elements are held together by purely formal relations—while within any one area, individual interactions are subject to rigid laws.

In explaining reification, then, Lukács identifies a basic principle of validity governing the objectivity of objects, or the manner in which they may be disclosed. Individually, this produces the divided objects I described in the preceding section. These forms do not mask the object—they determine what it *is* by specifying its properties to the extent that it is constituted within social relations. They determine too the very categories of social existence as a whole. Under capitalism, only the most abstract categories are possible—above all, that of Value. Thus, Lukács insists that this phenomenological account of the way society is disclosed is indeed social

reality—or, as I have described it, Lukács gives an ontic account of the commodity form. This is no mistaken understanding of a hidden reality or social substance beneath; the relations between commodities are the real social relations, the ones that govern social processes *within the society governed by the commodity form*. Any material properties that the object may be assumed to have outside of social relations are irrelevant; its social being is determined purely by the relational categories of the commodity form. Second, this reality is generated by the commodity structure itself, and not by the labour of the proletariat. In particular, this means that reification is a formal problem, one of a particular manner of disclosing social relations. It is not the case that labour produces a social reality that is then alienated or put away from the workers by their own action. Rather, it is the commodity structure itself that externalizes the individual workers, excluding them (as specific content) from the abstract relations of society.

3 TOTALITY AND THE STANDPOINT

I have argued, then, that Lukács offers a phenomenological and aletheiological account of reification: the categories of reification are not categories through which the commodity is *known*, but rather those by which it *exists* as a meaningful, structured object. Transposing Husserl from mental acts to social ones, Lukács describes it as constituted by a series of intentional practices, in which we act towards as objects *as* commodities (or, in other social forms, *as* crowns, works of art, or sacred relics), so generating their meaning. The social relations of capitalist society as a whole follow this same pattern, such that domains as different as law, the economy, and the bureaucratic state relate people in terms of abstract, universal categories. Such abstraction becomes in the Neo-Kantian sense the principle of validity of social being: it is the only way it is possible for entities to enter into relations with one another, and hence the only way they can meaningfully exist within society. This predetermines the intentional practices that are possible towards such objects: what the subject can do is limited by the commodity structure as the form of valid meaning. The commodity structure therefore shapes ‘reality’ in the sense that it governs the very way in which entities are socially disclosed.

However, in order to justify his claims for the effects of reification, Lukács needs to show that it does more than effect a limited region of society, but that it constitutes a society as a whole—in other words, becomes the only *possible* reality imaginable. It is the realness of this reality—what it

is that makes it seem like the only possible coherent, integrated world—to which I shall now turn. I shall refer to this as the ontological level of his account: it describes what it means for a given set of social-relational categories to appear as *the* reality. I will outline this in four stages. First, I shall turn to the basic notion of a totality, arguing that societies should be understood as *intensive* rather than *extensive* totalities: Lukács does not use the word ‘totality’ to refer to ‘the sum total of social objects,’ but to describe the underlying validity structure that governs the way such objects may be disclosed through institutions and practices. Second, I shall examine the ways such a totality becomes *self-enclosed*, drawing borders around itself that define what can and cannot be included within social relations. Third, I shall suggest that all such realities presuppose a *standpoint* from which they cohere as a totality—which Lukács describes in language remarkably similar to those he used in describing the same terms in his Heidelberg aesthetics. Finally, I shall argue that in the specific case of capitalism, the double determination of objects as both rational/social and irrational/personal is necessary for this reality as a whole to function: capital accumulates only in its circulation across this border. The commodity structure casts us as isolated individuals on the border of society—because this is essential to its functioning as a complete reality.

Reification is so pervasive, Lukács argues, because it infects capitalist society as a *totality*. What he means by this is, quite simply, that a single structural principle increasingly determines every area of social relations. The ‘Reification’ essay starts out by praising Marx for attempting to understand capitalist society in its totality, but—as indicated previously—this does not imply that Marx knew everything there was to know about capitalism. Though Lukács obviously leant towards such an understanding of ‘totality’ in the first version of the ‘Orthodox Marxism’ essay, as indicated in the previous chapter, the later essays of *History and Class Consciousness* mean it in a rather different way. Here, Lukács uses the term ‘totality’ to indicate a complete social reality: to grasp such a totality is to understand its fundamental structural principles, rather than to catalogue every detail. Capitalist society is governed *throughout* by the commodity form: every one of its ruling institutions is built on the same separation of form and content as the commodity, as the ‘universal form of the structure of society.’²⁴⁶ He highlights the ‘structural similarity’ between capitalism as an economic form and its legal and political forms—pointing to Weber in support, for his account of rationalization as the core of modern society as a whole. This posits a specific kind of relationship between the capitalist

economy and its legal-political apparatuses. Rather than see the state and law as, say, the ‘executive committee of the bourgeoisie,’ a repressive apparatus in place to enforce conformity, Lukács sees its connection to the economy as lying in its formal-structural similarity. Lukács’s focus of analysis here is Neo-Kantian in his concern with validity as an additional dimension beyond and not reducible to subject or object. But in transposing this problem to social institutions, he oddly parallels Riegl, to whom he refers in glowing terms in the middle of the ‘Reification’ essay, in seeing a single principle as defining reality as a whole.⁴⁷ Riegl suggests that a *Kunstwollen* is but one form of a more general human *Wollen* that may dominate at a particular point in time—and that ‘[t]he character of this *Wollen* is always determined by what may be termed the conception of the world at a given time [*Weltanschauung*] (again in the widest sense of the term), not only in religion, philosophy, science, but also in government and law.’⁴⁸ Lukács follows Riegl in interpreting this common thread tying different elements together in terms of a formal principle that organizes a reality as a whole: it aims to depict this reality in art, but it may formalize this social reality through the ordering of social relations too. I referred to this in the previous chapter as an intensive totality rather than an extensive one: when Lukács seeks to analyse society as a totality, he does not simply include every possible element of society (a potentially limitless set), but aims instead to identify the common principle of the formal determinations of all kinds social relations within a given epoch or society. To grasp the totality is to grasp the way this structure governs appearances.

In his Heidelberg writings, Lukács had, of course, described the work of art not just as a totality but as a *self-enclosed* totality: if a work is unified into a coherent whole by virtue of its central standpoint, it follows that it excludes anything that cannot be subordinated to that formal principle. The same is true of capitalist society as a totality. The dominance of the commodity structure altered even those elements of society that were superficially similar in capitalism and ancient societies. For example, while mass labour projects seemingly like those of capitalistic industrial production had, of course, been present in ancient societies, these had been isolated phenomena within a ‘differently (naturally) producing and hence living community’—that is, their social relations took other, more direct forms, ones in which form and content were not disclosed separately.⁴⁹ The individual’s determinate social being might be built on specific qualities that were framed as ‘natural’: Lukács was quite obviously aware that such characteristics as aristocratic lineage or gender were not as ‘natural’

as they purported to be, but this at least allows social forms to be drawn from a number of principles rather than one single internal rule. Such societies were not yet fully self-enclosed totalities: exogenous elements not fully determined by the endogenous formal principle governing social relations were nevertheless permitted as the basis of links between people. His Marxian focus perhaps blinds Lukács to the possibility that other, not solely economic, principles might be equally self-enclosing and exclusionary—such as particular theological conceptions, which might divide the world into ‘believer’ and ‘infidel,’ ‘sacred’ and ‘profane,’ or ‘divine’ and ‘demonic’ (to take three distinct variations). But even if he is empirically incorrect, his general theoretical point would only be reinforced: a basic formal principle of social relations may exclude certain elements from social relations, ensuring that social relations permit an object or individual to enter formal social relations only in certain respects.

It is, though, capitalism that is the most perfectly self-enclosed system for Lukács, and hence the one that is most rigid in determining what can and cannot be manifest within social reality. Indeed, whereas such self-enclosure is desirable in treating artworks, it is distinctly problematic for capitalism that it aspires towards such a condition. Past societies may have comprised a range of different, even contradictory principles, perhaps drawn from their interactions with their neighbours. What marks out capitalism, Lukács argues, is that it aspires to create a world after its own image (as Marx remarked of the bourgeoisie): for the first time, one structural principle of social relations seems ready to overwhelm all the others. The commodity form reduces all such heteronomous elements to one uniform standard; anything that cannot be reduced to quantitative form cannot be incorporated. Recall Lukács’s statement that ‘the human qualities and peculiarities of the worker appear more and more as *mere sources of error*’: this indicates the need to exclude anything that cannot be reduced to a quantity from economic processes.⁵⁰ A similar law of abstraction applies in every social relation structured in the same way. Nothing specific or concrete—religious beliefs, interpersonal bonds, substantive ethical values—can serve as the basis of social bonds, which must only be expressed in universalist ways, as, say the rights of the citizen. Such heterogeneous elements are therefore determined as external to the system of social relations: they become private matters, dividing people rather than a source of social solidarity. Cast outside the rationalized system of social relations, they are moreover defined as *irrational* and indeed not rationalizable—and so may come into conflict with social structures. A particularly acute

example of this might be seen in particular manifestations of French *laïcité*, such as attempts to prohibit the wearing of religious symbols or clothing in public areas: here, the non-universalizability of such elements means they come to be actively excluded from social relations as disruptive elements. This drawing of clear boundaries, placing certain elements beyond the borders of social relations, constitutes the self-enclosedness of society as a totality, determining what can and cannot come to full social reality.

In treating such abstraction as the very principle structuring social relations, Lukács offers an account of rationalization that goes beyond that of Weber, despite frequently citing his mentor's insightful analyses of rationalized phenomena. Weber's concept of rationalization is transhistorical: he defines certain types of rationality a priori and then applies them to the interpretation of a range of different social forms. In particular, he focuses on the rise of instrumental rationality as concerns of efficiency in achieving goals through the use of abstraction and calculation come to predominate. Such rationalization is, he suggests, universal—though it originated in Western Europe, Weber argues, it is a matter of importance for the entire globe.⁵¹ It progresses, he insinuates, simply because of the greater efficiency of instrumentally rational practices: though such behaviour may in some cases have value-rational origins (as in the case of the Protestant ethic), its practical successes and gradual institutionalization mean even those who do not share these values will have to follow suit. Weber's concern with instrumentality makes rationalization a matter of *individuals'* relation to the objective world in the final analysis: goal-oriented subjects arrange the means to their selected end in the most efficient and consistent way. In contrast, by linking abstraction and universalization to the commodity structure and its attendant social relations, Lukács implies that they apply only to the *specific* social reality of capitalism: they are the form of rationalization of this society, or the *ratio* governing social relations. By implication, other forms of rationalization are possible—ones that do not necessarily entail such a stark separation of form and content as that required by the commodity structure.

This separation of form and content has a further effect: by banishing anything that cannot be mediated through universal forms to beyond the borders of society, it posits the distinction between public and private characteristic of bourgeois society. Anything that cannot be disclosed within the commodity form thus must, by definition, fall outside the public sphere as that which is 'private.' At the same time, this liminal private realm beyond the bounds of the commodity structure is not entirely excluded. It remains,

Lukács insists, a necessary component of social reality as a whole. That is, capitalist social relations always presuppose something outside themselves. It is (similarly) essential that every object intended through the commodity structure as standing within social relations can at the same time be intended outside that structure, and as belonging to the private sphere. This proposition is contained within the very definition of the commodity as both use value and exchangeable Value: the item must have a use for someone, or it will not find a purchaser. The problem, however, is hidden within capitalist economics, which suffers a ‘methodologically necessary incomprehensibility of use-value, of real consumption.’⁵² Because the commodity structure relates items only to other quantitatively comparable objects without regard to any of their specifics, it cannot incorporate consumption into its relations, so designating it as irrational (or unrationalizable). In so doing, it may produce ever-more commodities—and ever-more surplus value in principle—even as these commodities lie on the market without a buyer. But if items remain unsold, the capitalist realizes no profit. Capital must circulate in order to accumulate; it must pass from the sphere of commodity relations to the private realm on the borders of society where it exists as a use value for its ultimate purchaser.

Indeed, it is not even sufficient to say that the commodity depends on that which it externalizes as irrational. More exactly, it depends on this very externalization as such. Capital lives and grows by placing itself as the parasitic moment of mediation between individuals—as the only possible way they can satisfy their material needs and relate to one another. Where social relations are capable of incorporating the specificity of use values, capital has no opportunity to grow. Parents’ duties of care to their offspring are one example of this: parent and child relate through definite social relations that incorporate their personal needs and bonds. The parent directly meets the infant’s needs; there is no scope for capital to come between them and grow through the accumulation of surplus value. This does not imply that such social relations are at all ideal—feudal social relations, for example, entail a similar direct satisfaction of need between two individuals without being a desirable model of human interaction. But they help pick out what is distinct about capitalistic social relations. As Lukács puts it, our interactions are reduced to the ‘form of rational and isolated acts of exchange between isolated commodity owners.’⁵³ Capital has interposed itself as the *sole* mediator of social relations precisely by externalizing everything that cannot be quantified, giving it a monopoly over our interactions; it valorizes itself by its constant circulation across this border.

At the same time, this same externalization is what ultimately ensures that the social relations of the commodity structure cohere as an impenetrable *reality*. Because people are incorporated into social relations only in the most abstract form of the commodities they sell in isolated, individual acts, they are excluded in their particularity from those relations. As Lukács repeatedly puts it, we are determined as ‘isolated individuals.’ We are not related to one another except through the commodity, and are not substantively included within social relations in our particularity. Consequently, the individual’s perspective on society is that of an outsider—which explains ‘the *contemplative* character of the attitude of the subject in capitalism.’⁵⁴ Here, as in his Heidelberg analyses of the attitudes of creator and percipient of the work of art, Lukács uses the term *Verhalten*, indicating a general attitude that is not limited to mental acts. Echoing Husserl, Lukács ties together the meaning-structure of the object with a particular stance or intentionality towards it. Knowledge is but *one* way of intending social reality, as a ‘thing known and regarded dispassionately’—but under capitalism, it becomes the *primary* attitude, instead of one of practical engagement. All that is open to the individual determined as outside the system, he argues, is recognition of the ‘laws’ governing the movement of commodities, and positioning oneself most advantageously relative to them.

But this very externalization of the individual is inseparable from the very conditions that externalize them. Lukács’s argument here draws quite explicitly on Riegl. As I noted in Chap. 2, he makes a sly but startling reference to the art historian in the third section of the ‘Reification’ essay, describing him as one of three ‘truly important historians of the nineteenth century’ for his examination of ‘those *structural forms* by means of which the confrontation of humans with their environment take place at any given moment, and which determine the objectivity of both their inner and their outer lives.’⁵⁵ This allusion alerts us to his renewed focus on the role of a single central structure in shaping an entire phenomenological social reality. Riegl, of course, defined *Kunstwollen* as that which governs ‘the relation between man and objects as we perceive them with our sense; this is how we always give shape and colour to things.’⁵⁶ The nature of this reality is determined by the way it is depicted relative to a viewing subject: thus, the sharply delineated figures of Egyptian art, placed next to one another with only minimal interaction and uninterrupted by shadow or perspective, were supposed to depict objects in their own unchanging essence, rather than distorted by the mutable perspective of a subject.

Lukács's argument parallels Riegl's focus on a single principle, but goes further: where *Kunstwollen* only determine artistic form, Lukács suggests that similar principles can determine social reality as a totality. They do so in both their relation of objects to one another, and in their assignation of a particular attitude to the subject towards that objective reality. Each total worldview entails definite ways of intending and interacting with objects and objectivity as a whole. Just as in his aesthetic writings, then, Lukács describes the totality as being determined by a *standpoint*. Most obviously, he refers to the 'standpoint of the proletariat' as the perspective from which the contradictions of capitalism come to seem resolvable—but he refers also to the 'standpoint' of historians such as Rickert, and (even more tellingly) remarks that 'every mediation must necessarily produce a standpoint from which the objectivity it generates takes on the form of immediacy.'⁵⁷ Rather than a position outside of social reality, the standpoint is the immanent subject-pole that 'makes sense' of a reality as a totality—that is, what permits it to appear as the real world rather than merely more-or-less accurate knowledge of that world. It is analogous to the *Kunstwollen*: it is that which determines the reality of a society, the subjective attitude to a particular kind of objective reality. In terms of practices, the standpoint might be understood as the activity expected of the subject. A system of commodity exchange yields a standpoint that expects the subject to treat objects as things to be bought or sold, determined by a universal standard of value; for the individual occupying that place in the system of practice, reality is in practice made up of commodities—this is the only valid way such individuals can participate in formal social relations. There may be different standpoints within a given socio-historical complex, but within each, the world might make sense in a number of ways. For the isolated individual of capitalism, objects and their interactions are sufficiently defined by their quantitative relations to one another; this social world thereby appears whole and real to these individuals.

But, finally, this indicates the significance of understanding reality as a totality of subject and object. As he explained, the most vital interaction is 'the *dialectical relation between subject and object in the historical process*.'⁵⁸ This interaction is not one between two distinct entities, but between two different poles of one phenomenological whole. What this means is that social reality cannot be understood merely objectively. By definition, it requires a particular standpoint or perspective on it—a manner of understanding or approaching it by which it makes sense. That standpoint is determined by the structural form of subject-object whole—

and not by the activity or knowledge of the subject. In the case of capitalism, this whole consists of (irrational, private) subjects standing outside a realm of objects relating to one another automatically and according to universal rules. These subjects are defined as external to the objects by the commodity structure itself; it is this structure that separates the form of social being from its content, and this that externalizes the subject as a private individual. The ontic social reality of reification is explained ontologically as the result of a particular objectively determined relation of subject and object. They are not separate a priori, but are instead divided and related by the commodity structure that governs their relationship and defines the totality.

4 CONCLUSION

Lukács's account of social reality relies, I have argued, on three levels of analysis. First, his account is phenomenological. The forms in which society appears are not the forms of *knowledge*; it is not the case that societies 'exist' independently of our awareness of them, and are known through institutions and forms that only imperfectly convey their true reality. Rather, these forms are what society and social objects *are*, because they govern the intentional practices that constitute objects as socially meaningful. This leads to the second level of Lukács's analysis. I have described this as 'ontic,' describing the way in which such social forms constitute a lived reality with (following Lask) a validity of its own independent of both the brute natural world and any psychological or epistemological subject. His focus is on the commodity structure and its logic. This structure is unique (Lukács believes) both in the unprecedented extent to which it dominates the entirety of society, and in the absolute separation it generates between the form and the content of determinate social entities. Objects come into social relations only as abstractly determined, quantifiable, homogeneous receptacles of a universal standard. This abstraction means that the social interactions of objects are governed (at least immediately) by seemingly unalterable laws derived from their logical form. The exclusion of any content, any element of spontaneity or decision, leaves them reified—they are entirely depersonalized, seeming to operate without any human intervention. Society itself becomes dehumanized: the commodity structure externalizes actual people from the network of purely objective socio-economic relations.

But this ontic reality can itself be explained from a deeper ontological standpoint, from which that reality coheres as a totality that makes sense on its own terms. It is the self-enclosedness of such totalities that determines the factuality of facts, or the way by which it appears that they are ‘true’ or the only valid and possible form truth can take. Implicitly, any ontic reality is a reality-for-a-subject, a world that is taken to be the case: every such reality posits as part of itself a particular kind of subject standing in a specific relation to objectivity.

Lukács’s analysis of the commodity form thus harks back to the analytical model he developed in his Heidelberg drafts, using Husserl and Lask to formulate his answer to Hegelian and Marxian problems. Marx provides the foundational claim that society can be examined through its structure of relations and practices—that is, it is manifest in what we *do*. What is Hegelian in Lukács’s account is that he treats society as a level of being: he (rightly) discovers Hegelian ontological categories in Marx’s social analysis, and uses this to distinguish between different modes of being in a way that allows him to treat social being as irreducible to bare material objects. But Husserl and Lask are needed to make this analysis semantic, and to show how meanings as such—not just the very general ontological categories Hegel develops—are integral to social practices. Lukács’s account of the commodity structure as a complete, logical system of validity shaping the being of objects draws on Lask’s model. But he uses the term ‘consciousness’ to refer to the social practices that determine objects, and moves away from Lask by paying close attention to the subject-pole of the system of meaning: this, I suggest, echoes Husserl, and renders Lukács’s account phenomenological rather than straightforwardly Neo-Kantian.

The particular determinations of subjectivity will be my focus in the following chapter. It is, however, worth pausing for a moment to consider the difference between Lukács’s account of reification and Marx’s account of alienation in the Paris Manuscripts. Though Lukács’s theory has often been treated as a variant of alienation, there are crucial differences. These texts were, at the time, unknown to Lukács, and he explained later that it was reading them that led him to reject *History and Class Consciousness* for its inadequate attention to labour. This is striking precisely because those who reject Lukács (from Althusser to Postone) have frequently suggested that his error is in adhering too closely to the model of a subject externalizing itself through labour and then becoming alienated from its product that Marx’s early work suggests. The interpretation offered here suggests that the later Lukács was right to interpret his earlier work as largely ignor-

ing labour. In this case, the formal-phenomenological reading of Lukács's reading of commodity fetishism makes more sense: the division between material and social being is not produced by the subject, but is the consequence of the commodity structure itself. Social reality is not the product of the subject, but is determined by an asubjective structure; it is the commodity that externalizes and 'alienates' the subject, rather than the labouring subject alienating its own product.

Lukács's late *Ontology of Social Being* aimed to remedy what he saw as the defect of *History and Class Consciousness* by placing labour at the very heart of its analysis. I will compare Lukács's two works in Chap. 6, where I will suggest that his earlier book offers greater scope for understanding the relation of the social and the natural than is normally assumed. But the crucial point of my analysis thus far for my reinterpretation of Lukács is that his account emphatically does not rely on the creative powers of any subject external to objectivity—Promethean, expressive, creatively labouring, proletarian, or otherwise. Rather, he describes social reality in terms of a structure of meaning that dictates the possibilities of subjectivity itself. The subject does indeed play a role in Lukács's ontological framework, but it is one determined *within* social being, rather than as the creator that 'realizes' itself through the society it produces. The ontological structure of ontic reality determines not only the relations of objects, but also the position of the subject vis-à-vis objectivity as a whole. It is, therefore, to the ontic and ontological determinations of subjectivity that I shall now turn.

NOTES

1. Georg Lukács, *Werke*, (W) 18 vols., ed. György Márkus & Frank Benseler. Darmstadt: Luchterhand. ii.32; Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin, 1971), xxx.
2. The latter consists of 'Gelebtes Denken' ('Lived Thought'), a set of biographical notes Lukács prepared on learning of his illness, and a series of taped interviews based on the notes, transcribed and edited by István Eörsi. See Georg Lukács. 1983. *Record of a Life*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. Istvan Eörsi. London: Verso.
3. Lukács, *Record of a Life*, 77.
4. See, for example, Habermas, Jürgen, 1987. *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* trans. Frederick G. Lawrence. Boston Mass: MIT Press. 75–82; Postone, Moishe. 1993. *Time, Labour, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

5. Postone, *Time, Labour, & Social Domination*, 125.
6. Postone, *Time, Labour, & Social Domination*, 47.
7. Postone, *Time, Labour, & Social Domination*, 73.
8. Lukács, *Wii*.19: 'Daß die ontologische Objektivität der Natur, die die seinsmäßige Grundlage dieses Stoffwechsels bildet, verschwinden muß, versteht sich von selbst. Es verschwindet aber damit zugleich auch jene Wechselwirkung, die zwischen der echt materialistisch betrachteten Arbeit und der Entwicklung der arbeitenden Menschen obwaltet.' Lukács, *HCC* xvii.
9. Lukács, *Wii*.358; Lukács *HCC* 173.
10. Lukács *Wii*.358: 'eine mechanisch-naturalistische Psychologie.' *HCC* 173
11. Lukács, *Wii* 306; *HCC* 127.
12. Lukács, *W ii*.336: 'Was dabei erreicht werden kann, ist bestenfalls eine formelle Typologie der Erscheinungsformen von Geschichte und Gesellschaft, wobei die historischen Tatsachen als Beispiele herangezogen werden können, wobei also zwischen dem System des Begreifens und der zu begreifenden objektiven geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit ein gleicher, bloß zufälliger Zusammenhang bestehenbleibt'; *HCC* 154.
13. Lukács *Wii*.261: 'zum realen Prinzip des tatsächlichen Produktionsprozesses der Waren wird.' Lukács *HCC* 87.
14. Lukács, *W ii*.231: 'und ökonomische Kategorien sind nach Marx "Daseinsformen, Existenzbestimmungen."'; Lukács *HCC* 57.
15. Lukács, *Wii*.275: 'als Gegenständlichkeitsform einerseits und aus dem ihr zugeordneten Subjektverhalten andererseits ergeben.' *HCC* 84.
16. Feenberg, Andrew. 1981. *Lukács, Marx, and the Sources of Critical Theory*. Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1981; see also Feenberg, Andrew. 1981. 'Culture and Practice in the Early Marxist Work of Lukács,' in *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 26, 27–40, and Feenberg, Andrew. 2014. *The Philosophy of Praxis: Marx, Lukács, and the Frankfurt School*, London: Verso. 70.
17. Lukács, *W ii*.192: 'die Forderung von Marx, die "Sinnlichkeit," den Gegenstand, die Wirklichkeit als menschliche sinnliche Tätigkeit zu fassen, bedeutet ein Bewußtwerden des Menschen über sich als Gesellschaftswesen.' *HCC* 19
18. Lukács, *W ii*.257: 'Denn es gibt kein Problem dieser Entwicklungsstufe der Menschheit, das in letzter Analyse nicht auf diese Frage hinweisen würde, dessen Lösung nicht in der Lösung des Rätsels der *Warenstruktur* gesucht werden müßte.' *HCC* 83
19. Lukács, *W ii*.275: 'Erst der Kapitalismus hat mit der einheitlichen Wirtschaftsstruktur für die ganze Gesellschaft eine formell einheitliche Bewußtseinsstruktur für ihre Gesamtheit hervorgebracht.'
20. Lukács, *Wii*.258: 'Denn sämtliche subjektiven wie objektiven Erscheinungen der betreffenden Gesellschaften erhalten diesem Unterschied gemäß qualitativ verschiedene Gegenständlichkeitsformen.' *HCC* 84

21. Marx, Karl. 1954. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Moore, Samuel and Aveling, Edward. Moscow: Progress Publishers. three vols. i.78.
22. Lukács, *W* ii.263: 'Infolge der Rationalisierung des Arbeitsprozesses erscheinen die menschlichen Eigenschaften und Besonderheiten des Arbeiters immer mehr *als bloße Fehlerquellen* dem rationell vorherberechneten Funktionieren dieser abstrakten Teilgesetze gegenüber.' Lukács *HCC*, p.89.
23. Lukács *W* ii.275: 'Erst der Kapitalismus hat mit der einheitlichen Wirtschaftsstruktur für die ganze Gesellschaft eine – formell – einheitliche Bewußtseinsstruktur für ihre Gesamtheit hervorgebracht.' Lukács *HCC* p.100.
24. Lukács, *W* ii.271: 'ein Bruch mit den empirischen, irrationellen ... subjektiv auf den handelnden Menschen, objektiv auf die konkrete Materie zugeschnittenen Methoden von Rechtsprechung, Verwaltung usw.' Lukács *HCC* p.96
25. Lukács, *W* ii.271 'Es entsteht eine rationelle Systematisation aller rechtlichen Regulierungen des Lebens.' *HCC* 96
26. Lukács, *W* ii.284 'Jedoch der Zusammenhang dieser Gesetze ist rein formell: *was* sie aussprechen "der Inhalt der Rechtsinstitute ist aber niemals juristischer, sondern stets politischer, ökonomischer Natur.'" *HCC* 108
27. Weber, Max, *Economy & Society*, 2 vols. trans. G. Roth & C. Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), i.4–13.
28. Lukács, *W* ii.11: 'Marx – gesehen durch eine weitgehend von Simmel und Max Weber bestimmte methodologische Brille.' Lukács, *HCC*, ix.
29. Simmel, Georg. 2009 [1908]. *Sociology: Inquiries into the Construction of Social Forms*. Trans. Anthony J. Blasi, Anton K. Jacobs, & Mathew Kanjirathinkal. Leiden & Boston: Brill. Two vols. At i.53–138.
30. Simmel, Georg. 1950, 'The Stranger' in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Trans. Kurt Wolff. New York: Free Press. 402–408; Margaret Mary Wood, *The Stranger: a study in social relationships* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934)
31. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore, David Frisby, & Kaethe Mengelberg, (London: Routledge, 2004).
32. Lukács, *W* ii.270: 'in Einzelheiten sehr interessanten und scharfsinnigen Buch'; Lukács *HCC* 95; *W* ii.269 '[Sie] bleiben bei der Analyse der Unmittelbarkeit der Verdinglichung stehen und machen keinen Versuch, von den objektiv abgeleisteten, vom eigentlichen Lebensprozeß des Kapitalismus entferntesten, also von den am meisten veräußerlichten und entleerten Formen zu dem Urphänomen der Verdinglichung vorzudringen.' Lukács *HCC* 94; Lukács *W* ii.269: 'als einen zeitlosen Typus menschlicher Beziehungsmöglichkeiten überhaupt.' Lukács *HCC* 95.
33. Marx, *Capital* iii.324; cited in Lukács *W* ii.259; *HCC* p.85

34. Marx, *Capital* i.78.
35. Marx, *Capital* i.78.
36. Lukács, *W* ii.261: 'der Austauschbarkeit qualitative verschiedener Gegenstände' 'diese formale Gleichheit der abstraktien menschlichen Arbeit.' Lukács *HCC* 87.
37. Lukács, *W* ii.262: 'die Gegenständlichkeitsform sowohl der Objekte wie der Subjekte der so entstehenden Gesellschaft.' Lukács *HCC* 88.
38. Lukács, ii.346: 'nichts von außen (subjektiv) in die Gegenstände Hineingetragenes, ist kein Werturteil oder Sollen, das ihrem Sein gegenüberstände, *sondern ist das Offenbarwerden ihrer eigentlichen, objektiven, gegenständlichen Struktur selbst.*' Lukács *HCC* 162.
39. Marx, *Capital*, i.79.
40. Lukács, *W* ii.266: 'Die Gegenstände der Bedürfnisbefriedigung erscheinen nicht mehr als Produkte des organischen Lebensprozesses einer Gemeinschaft (wie z. B. in einer Dorfgemeinde), sondern einerseits als abstrakte Gattungsexemplare, die von anderen Exemplaren ihrer Gattung prinzipiell nicht verschieden sind, andererseits als isolierte Objekte, deren Haben oder Nichthaben von rationellen Kalkulationen abhängig ist.' Lukács, *HCC*, 91.
41. Lukács, *W*, xvi.104.
42. Lukács, *W* ii.262: 'ein Brechen mit der organisch-irrationellen, stets qualitativ bedingten Einheit des Produktes selbst.' Lukács, *HCC* 88.
43. Lukács *W* ii.279: 'Durch die Spezialisierung der Leistung geht jedes Bild des Ganzen verloren.' Lukács *HCC* 103.
44. Lukács, *W* ii.267: 'wobei für das Individuum die Warenstruktur aller "Dinge" und die "Naturgesetzlichkeit" ihrer Beziehungen etwas fertig Vorgefundenes, etwas unaufhebbar Gegebenes ist.' Lukács, *HCC* p.92. I opted for the ugly 'unsublateably' for 'unaufhebbar' to highlight the echoes of Hegel.
45. Lukács, *W* ii.276: 'weil das Aufeinanderbezogensein seiner Elemente, seiner Teilsysteme auch bei dem normalsten Funktionieren etwas Zufälliges ist.' Lukács, *HCC*, p.101.
46. Lukács, *W* ii.259: 'universeller Form der Gestaltung der Gesellschaft.' *HCC* 84.
47. Lukács *W* ii.336, *HCC* 153.
48. Riegl, Alois. 1985. *Late Roman Art Industry*, [*LRAI*] trans. Winkes, Rolf. (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore.) 231.
49. Lukács, *W* ii.265: 'Die Massenarbeit konnte dort aber einerseits nirgends zur rationell mechanisierten Arbeit werden, andererseits blieben diese Massenbetriebe isolierte Erscheinungen innerhalb eines anders (naturwüchsig) produzierenden und dementsprechend lebenden Gemeinwesens.' Lukács, *HCC* 90

50. Lukács, *W* ii.263: 'Infolge der Rationalisierung des Arbeitsprozesses erscheinen die menschlichen Eigenschaften und Besonderheiten des Arbeiters immer mehr *als bloße Fehlerquellen* dem rationell vorherberechneten Funktionieren dieser abstrakten Teilgesetze gegenüber.' Lukács *HCC*, p.89.
51. Weber, Max, 1992. *The Protestant Ethic & the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons. London & New York: Routledge. xxviii.
52. Lukács *W* ii.282: 'methodisch notwendigen – Unerfaßbarkeit des Gebrauchswertes, der wirklichen Konsumtion.' *HCC* 106.
53. Lukács *W* ii.267: 'nur in dieser Form der rationellen und isolierten Tauschakte zwischen isolierten Warenbesitzern abspielen.'
54. Lukács *W* ii.273 'Wodurch einleuchtenderweise auch hier der *kontemplative* Charakter des kapitalistischen Subjektverhaltens in Erscheinung tritt.' *HCC* 97.
55. Lukács, *W* ii.336: 'Dabei besteht – wie dies den wirklich bedeutenden Historikern des XIX. Jahrhunderts, wie z. B. Riegl, Dilthey, Dvorak, nicht entgehen konnte – das Wesen der Geschichte gerade in der Änderung jener Strukturformen, vermittels welcher die Auseinandersetzung des Menschen mit seiner Umwelt jeweilig stattfindet, die die Gegenständlichkeit seines inneren wie äußeren Lebens bestimmen.' Lukács *HCC*, 153.
56. Riegl, *LRAI*, 231.
57. Lukács, *W* ii.339: 'D.h. jede Vermittlung muß notwendigerweise einen Standpunkt ergeben, wo die durch sie erzeugte Gegenständlichkeit die Form der Unmittelbarkeit aufnimmt.' Lukács, *HCC* 156.
58. Lukács, *W* ii.173: '*die dialektische Beziehung des Subjekts und Objekts im Geschichtsprozeß.*' Lukács, *HCC* 3.

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The Interpellation of the Subject

Lukács's ontico-ontological analysis of capitalist social reality was not intended simply as a description of a determinist system, or as a moral indictment of a soulless social world. *History and Class Consciousness* was a revolutionary book: in it, Lukács sought to explain both the passivity of the proletariat in 1918–1919 and the possibility that they might nevertheless be able to rise to action in the future. Moreover, he set himself the particularly difficult task of explaining why it was the *proletariat* who were capable of overcoming the effects of reification and seeing the need to transform society—rather than, say, the bourgeoisie.

It was, of course, precisely this identification of the proletariat as the subject capable of transforming society where many of those who learn from Lukács's analysis of reification drew the line. For the first generation of the Frankfurt School, the widespread support for Nazism among the working classes and the obvious horrors of Stalinism led them to reject any such faith in the working class as naïve. As I have elaborated, Anglophone commentators such as Postone or Arato and Breines have tended to attribute Lukács's error to the excessive influence of German Idealism: paralleling the Prometheanism they see Fichte et al., they suggest that he sees social structures as the externalized product of the labouring class that have become distanced or alienated from them; by an act of will, they are capable of annulling this alienation and taking control of their creation once again. For many of these critics, Lukács's argument rests on a subject

external to social reality—one that at the least has a better knowledge of society that enables it to see through reification. As the creator of social structures, it must logically have existed prior to and hence independently of its product, thus offering the possibility that it could seize control of its work once again. It was the proletariat's failure to do so, they suggest, that led Lukács to turn instead to a centralized Leninist party that laid the groundwork for Stalinist totalitarianism.

I suggested in the previous chapter that Lukács does not analyse objective social structures as the product or reflection of a more 'real' labour underneath, and I shall argue in the following chapter that they misrepresent Lukács's theory of the party too. But the fundamental error of such critiques is that they misunderstand Lukács's account of subjectivity as such. His examination of German Idealism is not an attempt to show that Marxism can accomplish what Kant, Fichte, and Hegel set out to do—but rather to argue that their goals were misguided and stemmed from a false starting paradigm that produced insoluble problems. Their error was to presuppose the separation of subject and object, and to direct their attention towards the ways a subject could know or relate to an object that was essentially detached from it. It was this that he referred to in noting the 'overcoming of epistemological standpoints' as the aim of his thought in the period leading up to *History and Class Consciousness*. Yet this does not mean Lukács entirely jettisoned subjectivity from his account—indeed, as a theory of revolution it could hardly do without some kind of subject. I argued at the end of the previous chapter that his description of ontic social reality is ontologically grounded on a totality of subject and object; from the perspective of objectivity, subjectivity is that standpoint from which reality makes sense as a totality, as it were. To explain subjectivity as a possible source of revolutionary action, however, means exploring it on its own terms: what is the nature of a subjectivity defined within a totality of this kind?

In contrast to those who assume Lukács defines the subject in essentialist or aprioristic fashion, I contend that he treats it purely in relation to certain kinds of objectivity. The subject is not an entity with its own properties, but is instead a defined position within the overall phenomenological organization of consciousness, oriented towards objectivity in specific ways. Different ontic social realities presuppose various subjectivities: just as for Husserl, every noema is correlated with a noetic act, so too does every form of social being entail a corresponding subjective stance towards it, manifest in distinct kinds of practice. It is because he defines the subject as intra-consciousness that he is able to explain the way varied positions

within that system could produce alternative possibilities for agency. This is the great strength of Lukács's approach: he explains both objective social reality and the first-person perspective of the subject in ways that do not reduce either subject or object to one another, and that steer clear of a naïve overestimation of the subject. He shows how experience, identity, and agency can be shaped by society, while still leaving scope for the subject to act in society in turn. While objective social forms may determine the rules of the game, they do not dictate the exact moves one makes.

To explain Lukács's theory of subjectivity, I will start by directly considering the critical reading of Lukács that sees him as embracing an essentially Fichtean subjectivism. While this interpretation is fundamentally incorrect in its reading of both Lukács and Fichte, it will allow me to outline the basic problematic that his own theory sought to resolve. I shall then explain Lukács's actual treatment of subjectivity as a resolution of the subject-object problem through a phenomenological model that does not start with the irrational assumption that they are separate a priori. As with his account of objective social reality, Lukács's argument can be analysed at three levels—the phenomenological, the ontic, and the ontological. The phenomenological aspects of his argument were perhaps what led many of his readers to connect him to certain existentialist themes. As a result of the mis-structuring of the subject-object relationship, the object seems alien to the subject, something that must be known across a *hiatus irrationalis*, leaving the subject in a purely contemplative relation towards 'reality.' This echoes his analyses of the creative and receptive relationships to the artwork in his Heidelberg drafts. Second, I will turn to his argument that the problem stems from the ontic structures of social reality, which determine the relation of subject to object—in which, I will argue, he closely parallels Riegl's formalist account of the subject-position. Third, his argument offers an ontological account of the possibilities of *agency* as an active participant in the constitution of objectivity: because the subject is neither defined purely epistemologically, nor separated a priori from the object, Lukács dissolves the problem of such interaction by showing that it stems from a foundational misconception. Finally, I shall argue that these same ontico-ontological structures create not just the possibility but also (in some circumstances) the demand to act. Highlighting Lukács's debt to Kierkegaard, I will suggest that ethical imperatives are built into the structure of a socially interpellated subjectivity—thus suggesting that revolution may be, for Lukács, an ethical duty demanded by the socio-historical totality.

1 FICHTE *REDIVIVUS?*

Lukács's account has long been plagued by the accusation that he resolves the problem of reification by resorting to a concept of the subject derived from German Idealism—and above all, from Fichte rather than Hegel. Critics such as Martin Jay, Tom Rockmore, and others have complained of the residual influence of Fichte on Lukács's revolutionary theory; as Arato and Breines put it, 'Lukács's consideration of Hegel's discovery of the historical dialectic does not amount to an abrogation of the Fichtean roots of his concept of the subject.'¹ Fichte is, of course, known for his *Addresses to the German Nation*, delivered in response to Napoleon's invasion of German lands, but the cultural chauvinism and nascent anti-Semitism represented by these lectures is not the source of the particular opprobrium that Lukács's critics wish to heap on him by invoking Fichte's name. Rather, it is the apparent omnipotence of the subject in the earliest versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (or 'Science of Knowledge'). Fichte seems to epitomize the worst excesses of Idealism, apparently presenting reality as the projection or creation of the subject; Lukács's critics charge him with the parallel error of overcoming reification by showing that social structures are the creation of the proletariat as labouring subject. Such an interpretation is incorrect: it misrepresents not only Lukács, but also Fichte. But before showing this, it is worth reviewing the exact problem that Lukács is alleged to have turned to Fichte to resolve.

Lukács's discussion of Fichte occurs in the middle section of the 'Reification' essay, 'The Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought.' It is here that he sets out the problem of subject and object in the most formal and explicit way. The problem is endemic to capitalist social being in general, but it appears in its clearest form in classical German philosophy—above all Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. The conceptual knots in which these philosophers tied themselves were a result of a starting point that led them into insoluble contradictions, but which might at first glance seem like methodological humility. Earlier philosophy, Lukács explained, had made ontological claims: the likes of Aristotle or Aquinas investigated what they believed to be the real essence of things. But from Kant onwards, 'bourgeois' philosophy concerned itself with questions of epistemology, and gave up on any attempt to develop a 'science of Being.'² As Kant put it, 'hitherto, it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to the objects. ... Therefore let us for once attempt to see whether we cannot reach a solution to the tasks of metaphysics by assuming that the objects

must conform to our knowledge.³ Kant's method presupposes from the outset that subject and object are separate, and that philosophy's task is to identify the categories relating these two distinct entities—categories which, moreover, are merely a lens through which the object is viewed, not part of its being. This necessarily produces the Kantian distinction between the phenomenon (the object as it appears to us) and the noumenon (the thing-in-itself, beyond our very capacity to know it). Form has become entirely separated from content: forms are derived a priori, based on purely rational grounds that pay no heed to content, and applied *post festum* to a recalcitrant reality. (This, Lukács argues, is directly homologous to the commodity's reduction of every concrete use value to an abstract value.) But this means that one foundational element of the object always remains beyond the grasp of the categories of knowledge to which it is supposed to conform: its very existence remains as an irrational residue that cannot be deduced from the categories—separated from the subject by a 'dark chasm,' or (drawing from Fichte) a *hiatus irrationalis*.⁴ The only way to resolve the problem, Lukács suggests, is to overcome 'the indifference of form to content'—that is, rather than deriving forms on their own and then applying them to content, philosophy must relate the two, making form itself fluid and changeable.⁵ Only Hegel's dialectic comes close; however, Lukács argues, in Hegel's account these transformations were driven purely by contradictions of logical form, not content. The actual history in which *Weltgeist* unfolded itself was irrelevant to the machinations of abstract categories.

In the first systematic published version of his theory, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), Fichte seemingly resolves the problem by building not only knowledge, but all existence itself out of the subject that posits itself. As he puts it, 'the self's own positing of itself is thus its own pure activity. The self *posits itself*, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion, it *exists*; and conversely, the self *exists* and *posits* its own existence by virtue of merely existing. It is at once the agent and the product of action; the active, and what the activity brings about.'⁶ On the basis of this self-positing, Fichte supposedly deduced all reality as the subject's own creation. The object—indeed, objectivity as such—is in fact the projection of the subject; though they might seem separated, they are of the same essence. Subject and object need no longer be cut off from one another.

This last point explains the relevance of Fichte for the neo-Romantic reading of *History and Class Consciousness*. Recall Simmel's diagnosis of the 'tragedy of culture': in the course of its development, life expressed

itself in objective cultural institutions that then became fixed and frozen, experienced as oppressive by the subject. If the subject could recognize culture as its own expression, it should, in principle, be able to take back control of its creation, alienated from it no more. The same applies, Lukács's critics insinuate, to reification. In this interpretation, the proletariat is the expressive subject of reified social structures, as the source of the labour that valorizes the capitalist commodity. Reification is overcome, therefore, by this Promethean proletariat simply recognizing or becoming conscious of this, allowing it to take back control of those relations and live with absolute freedom. Certainly, Lukács's repeated references to Fichte, along with some of the rhetoric of central section of the 'Reification' essay, might give this impression. Seemingly in support of this, Lukács also twice cites in passing Vico's claim that we can know and understand human history because we have made it.⁷ Thus, Jay, for example, describes Lukács's totality as 'expressive,' explaining it as the claim that 'the whole expresses the intentionality and praxis of a creator-subject, who recognizes itself in the objective world around it. ... For Lukács, at least in certain moments in *History and Class Consciousness*, the subject of history and the object of history are ultimately one.'⁸ For Lucio Colletti, such an expressive subject, unilaterally decreeing the conditions of its own social existence, is entirely irrational.⁹ Some go even further, accusing Lukács of absurdity: Alfred Schmidt implies that Lukács's subject is so Fichtean that it creates not only society but nature itself.¹⁰ But even the more moderate version of a Fichtean subject would be problematic. For Postone or Arato and Breines, the failure of the proletariat to act so freely in practice led to Lukács's turn instead to a centralized Leninist party that laid the groundwork for Stalinist totalitarianism.¹¹ By treating the identity of subject and object, human and social structure, as a sameness of substance, they argue, Lukács collapses all difference into a single, monolithic, identitarian totality that leaves no room for diversity and dissent.

Andrew Feenberg has already offered a number of arguments against this interpretation. In the first edition of his book on Lukács (1981), Feenberg argues that Lukács's identical subject-object is *Hegelian* rather than Fichtean. Feenberg places less emphasis on Hegel's more obviously subject-centred *Phenomenology* or his philosophy of history, and more on the depersonalized *Science of Logic*—particularly the Doctrine of Essence. For Feenberg, to say the proletariat is the identical subject-object is just as much to recognize that its subjectivity is also shaped by objectivity, not only that the subject seizes control over the object. The subject in this

respect is not the centre of an expressive totality, Feenberg argues, but rather the mediation of a decentred totality that includes both subject and object—and hence not unilaterally able to transform society. It is the site of cultural *practice*, not the source of creative action.

Despite this, Martin Jay rejects Feenberg's more sympathetic interpretation. For Jay, if Lukács did indeed treat the subjective aspect of the identical subject-object as the mediation of the totality (as Feenberg interprets it) this 'would not really overcome the Kantian thing-in-itself-problem, which Lukács clearly set out to solve.'¹² *Something*, it is implied, must be out there to be mediated—that 'something' is the noumenon. Jay's counter-argument unfortunately seems to rely on a misrepresentation of Hegel's Doctrine of Essence, on which Feenberg draws (although as Jay's case is regrettably confined to a footnote, his explanation remains unclear). For Hegel, of course, the relation of *Erscheinung* (appearance) to *Wesen* (essence) is not analogous to that of phenomenon to noumenon in Kant. Mediation is the way essence *is*; it does not hide anything behind itself. As Hegel puts it in characteristically limpid prose, 'the world of Appearance and the essential world are each in themselves the totality of self-identical reflection and reflection-into-an-other, or of being-in-and-for-self and Appearance. Both are self-subsistent wholes of Existence; the one is supposed to be only reflected Existence, the other immediate Existence; but each *continues* itself in its other and is therefore in its own self the identity of these two moments.'¹³ *Wesen* is indeed revealed through *Erscheinung*, as the totality of mediating relations. Thus, when Feenberg speaks of the proletariat as mediating social reality, this does not mean that they subjectively reinterpret it. To take social reality immediately means to treat it as a group of isolated individual phenomena; its mediation means understanding the nature of the relations between these phenomena, *and thereby to understand its essence*. No noumenon remains behind these appearances.

At any rate, Feenberg himself seems not to have been persuaded by Jay's rebuttal. In the thoroughly revised 2014 reissue of his book, he offers five significant pieces of textual evidence against the notion that Lukács relies on an expressivist or creative subject. First, Lukács insists that proletarian subjectivity presumes capitalist society as its precondition, and is thus not able (as Fichte's subject is) to create a world *ex nihilo*; second, Lukács explicitly states the proletariat is an object as well as a subject—that is, it is determined as well as determining within the dialectical process; third, Lukács directly rejects any kind of 'humanism' that treats humans as an absolute that transcends society; fourth, Lukács makes very clear that

even in a postrevolutionary world, objectivity remains in full, acting on the subject just as much as the subject acts on it; finally, he directly defines the overcoming of reification is not a one-time *act* but rather a constantly renewed dialectical process in which ossification, contradiction, and movement alternate.¹⁴ The evidence Feenberg amasses is fatal to the claim that Lukács's subject is in any way expressivist or unilaterally subjective; there are simply too many occasions on which Lukács expressly rejects this kind of subjectivity. In the absence of any serious attempt by Lukács's more sceptical readers to reinterpret or explain away the evidence Feenberg offers, his case must be taken as decisive.

Moreover, even Lukács's direct references to Fichte do not provide the kind of evidence his critics suppose. In the first place, Lukács's citations of Fichte are not intended to indicate *approval* of Fichte's approach as some kind of solution to the problems of Kantianism. Rather, he presents those elements of Fichte's thought that tend towards a creative subject as a dialectically necessary development of the internal problems of the Kantian philosophical paradigm—steps that are not improvements, but which lead in fact to a dead end. For example, Jay states that 'Lukács specifically praised Fichte's impatient dismissal of the impenetrability of the Kantian noumenon and his belief that the subject was the creator of the object and not its passive observer.'¹⁵ But in the quotation from Lukács that he adduces to support this, there are in fact no words of praise—Lukács's tone is one of neutral observation of a tendency within this philosophical school: 'in a general sense, this philosophical tendency emerges: to push towards a conception of the subject that can be thought of as the producer of the totality of content.'¹⁶ At no point does Lukács's language imply this is a *good* thing—in fact, it merely reproduces the problems of Kant's thought in a different form by turning to action, a solution that must also fail. Significantly, when Lukács states that Fichte could never locate 'the subject of "action,"' he uses the term *Tathandlung*—referring specifically to the act of self-positing by the ego in the early versions of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, wherein the ego posits itself unconditionally out of nothing.¹⁷ The problem with Fichte's subject is not that it is not historical, but that it tries to act in this absolute and unconditioned manner. Instead, as Lukács states explicitly a few pages later, simply abandoning the contemplative attitude in the name of practice is not enough. Rather, the problem is to identify a praxis that can be 'adapted to the concrete, material substratum of action,' such that the indifference of the form of action to its content can be overcome.¹⁸ In other words—just as Feenberg

argues—Lukács is not looking for a subject capable of acting with absolute freedom in a world that no longer resists it, but for one that recognizes objectivity and difference in its practice. Lukács's citations of Fichte, therefore, are meant to show his thought as symptomatic of the contradictions of German Idealism, not as a step towards its solution.

There is a greater problem for the accusations of Fichteanism: Fichte's own thought was complex and protean, changing its emphases over the years. For sure, studies of Fichte have historically focused on the works of his early years in Jena (1794–1799), which do indeed emphasize the role of the subject. However, recent scholarship has turned to the significantly different versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre* produced in his later years in Berlin, which had been obscured by the rise of Schelling and Hegel.¹⁹ Above all, Fichte's later works give a substantially smaller role to the ego, which is no longer presented as the self-positing creator of reality. While Lukács himself had, of course, no access to this recent work, he was exceedingly familiar with a much earlier version of this view—for it was central to the interpretation offered by none other than Emil Lask in his *Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte* that Fichte's thought underwent a dramatic change (*Umschwung*) around 1797 (two years before the end of the Jena period).²⁰ Frederick Beiser summarizes Lask's claim thus:

Suffice it to say that Lask's interpretation was directed against the prevalent interpretation of Fichte as a radical rationalist intent on deriving all reality from the absolute ego. While Lask accepts this as an interpretation of Fichte's early 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*, he argues that Fichte rejected this position in 1797 when he saw that it is impossible to derive the particularity of the empirical world from his first principles. In all his later writings, Lask maintains, Fichte stressed the *hiatus irrationalis* as the fundamental problem for the philosophy of history.²¹

It will not escape the attention of readers of *History and Class Consciousness* that Lukács himself directly cites the *hiatus irrationalis* as the central problem of Fichte's thought.²² One such mention of it is in the context of a critique of revolutionary utopianism such as that of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists: characterizing their approach as 'a subjective and therefore undialectical utopia [which] approaches the historical reality with the intention of influencing it, changing it,' Lukács states that such unilateral subjectivism without regard to objectivity will necessarily meet the problems of the *hiatus irrationalis*. Here he directly rejects any

notion of an all-powerful subject able to change the objective world at will.²³ Lukács's own references to Fichte thus draw on a broad range of his works, such as the very late *Transcendental Logic* of 1812 or the 1804 version of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.²⁴ In the latter (from where Lukács draws his first citation of the *hiatus irrationalis*), Fichte replaces of the self-positing ego with the fundamental division of the Absolute into Being and Thinking. As Fichte explains, 'no being is possible without thinking and vice versa – wholly being and wholly thinking *at the same time*, and nothing can occur in the manifest sphere of being without simultaneously occurring in the manifest sphere of thinking ... and vice versa.'²⁵ This mutual dependence, such that the subjective side of the Absolute alone cannot be thought without its objective pole, is a far cry from the self-positing subject of a decade earlier—and suggests a more complex picture of Fichte than the caricature that Lukács's critics use to belabour him. Even to the degree that he does draw on Fichte, then, it would be wrong to assume that this would commit Lukács to an expressive subject.

What, though, of Vico? Jay emphasizes Lukács's citation of Marx's quotation of Vico's claim that humans can know history because they have made it.²⁶ But Jay himself rightly notes an important difference between Vico and a Fichtean Lukács. As he explains, 'to Vico, [human] institutions were not the product of conscious and deliberate contrivance'—and consequently he offered no suggestion that we should or could aspire to such conscious control in the future.²⁷ In contrast, Jay claims, 'Lukács, like Hegel before him, contended that the *verum-factum* principle applied only when a universal totalizer made history in a deliberate and rational manner.'²⁸ Lukács certainly envisaged rationality and conscious deliberation as part of the future organization of society, but the claim that this means *making history* in the sense of a unilateral act of creation by a 'universal totalizer' rests on a reading of both Lukács and Hegel through the lens of the alleged Fichtean subject. This argument is at risk of circularity. Since Vico himself did not look for a subject capable of making history consciously, the claim that Lukács drew on Vico in his own alleged identification for such an agent depends on the assumption that he aims at a subject similar to the Fichte's 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre* and merely confirmed this by drawing on Vico; at the same time, the claim that Lukács's concept of subjectivity is close to that of the early Fichte draws strength chiefly from the assumption that he had an inflated understanding of Vico's *verum-factum* principle. Given the weaknesses of the accusation of Fichteanism, the claim that his Vichianism was of this kind is implausible.

In sum: the accusation that Lukács aimed at a Fichtean subjectivity capable of entirely free action and self-expression in the spontaneous creation of society is unsustainable. Feenberg's recent restatement of this case makes clear that Lukács repeatedly and explicitly rejected such a notion of subjectivity. Though Lukács does indeed cite Fichte, the context of these citations gives no reason to believe he did so because he saw Fichte's solutions as satisfactory. Indeed, Fichte himself was never satisfied with them—as Lukács was fully aware thanks to Lask, and as he showed in his focus on Fichte's later works. The supposed 'expressive subject' is not only inapplicable to Lukács—it is not really applicable to Fichte with any consistency. This has implications for our understanding of Lukács's use of Hegel too. Given Lukács's direct criticisms of Hegel's mythical identification of *Geist* as the force behind world history, any claims that he relies on a subjectivist, emanationist reading of Hegel would themselves depend on the assumption that he did so by wrongly reading him through Fichtean lenses. Without that foundation, the claim that Lukács read Hegel as seeking a 'universal totalizer' capable of making history itself is seriously undermined. Konstantinos Kavoulakos thus rightly concludes that Lukács's proletarian subject, ever required to struggle against renewed reification rather than simply becoming free to transform social reality at will, cannot be as monolithic and identitarian as it is assumed to be.²⁹ Instead, I will argue, restoring the phenomenological dimensions of Lukács's argument helps reveal his real intention. Such an analysis of social relations can explain how subject and object can be part of a totality in which they mutually constitute one another—and, I will suggest, how the freedom of the subject can be understood not as *Tathandlung* but as *praxis*.

2 THE PROBLEM OF THE SUBJECT-OBJECT RELATIONSHIP

Lukács's critics have often read his theory as an attempt to find a solution to the problems identified by classical German philosophy. On this reading, Lukács basically accepts the classical adumbration of the problem as one of relating subject and object, and differs from them only in locating a material class subject rather than an ideal individual subject as the agent capable of annulling this difference. I will argue in contrast that Lukács sees the problem very differently: instead of seeking to relate a subject and object that are mistakenly assumed (in theory and philosophy) to be separate a priori, he treats them from the outset as part of the totality of experience. Analysis must begin with what is indubitably there—structured,

meaningful phenomena—rather than the supposed existence of a subject and of objects thinkable in isolation from one another, even though they do not and cannot appear directly in experience. From this perspective, classical German philosophy ties itself in knots because its problem is misconceived; rather than solving the problem on its own terms, Lukács overcomes it by relativizing it—that is, he claims that the separation of subject and object itself is simply one particular configuration of their mutual determination. In making this argument, he returns once again to the phenomenological model of his Heidelberg philosophy of art: epistemology embodies a particular *intentionality* towards the object, which in turn defines the subject in relation to it. The subject was never separate from the object in the way classical philosophy supposed; by identifying the source of the apparent separation, Lukács was able to overcome it.

Lukács's preoccupation with the subject-object relationship dated back at least as far as his Heidelberg philosophy of art. As we saw in Chap. 1, his focus on the logical possibility of the artwork as such led him to relegate both artist and audience to phenomenologically structured attitudes towards the work. Neither creator nor percipient has an epistemically inadequate *knowledge* of the work—certainly not the creator, who 'knows' it rather too well! Rather, the structure of their relationship to the work determines the meaning they perceive in it. The creator is unable to grasp the work as a self-enclosed totality because they remain permanently aware of the tension between the reality of experience they sought to express on the one hand, and the harmonious utopia presented in the work on the other. Conversely, to the receptive attitude, the work might appear only in relation to their own experienced reality, its elements significant because of their relation to something in the receiver's own life instead of their arrangement according to the work's immanent standpoint. Both artist and audience occupy standpoints external to the work. Drawing on the mereology of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, Lukács indicates that the meaning of the work changes depending on whether we relate to it as a self-sufficient whole or only as a part of our own lives; similarly, the meaning of individual parts of the work will vary if they are considered in relation to the work alone, or within the life-context of creator or percipient. These alternate stances manifest the same object differently—neither is untrue per se, but these different stances produce quite incompatible noema, with variable meanings. There are two significant implications of Lukács's argument. First, the problem Lukács explores here is not one of a subject seeking to bridge the gap between it and an object opposed to it:

their relationship is presupposed, and does not need to be established by knowledge. Second (and in consequence), this relationship is *not* shaped or conditioned by anything intrinsic either to the subject (whether transcendental epistemological categories or psychological tendencies) or the artwork as object. Rather, the problem is to do with the form under which the work is understood—ideally, as a self-enclosed totality. A ‘correct’ stance towards the artwork and a ‘misguided’ one might therefore perceive all the same properties and attributes—but relate to them differently, and so perceive the overall meaning of the work in quite incompatible ways.

Having deployed such a paradigm for understanding the work of art in his Heidelberg years, Lukács was able to turn to the same models to explain why capitalist society seemed so unchangeable. Here too he explains the problem in terms of different phenomenological standpoints towards the object, in which the same set of properties may result in different noema depending on *how* they are intended. This can be seen in several of Lukács’s discussions of specific phenomena. For example, he notes the apparent paradox that ‘that the “law” of primitive forms of society, which has barely changed in hundreds or even thousands of years, has a fluid, irrational character, constantly renewed with every judicial decision.’³⁰ However, this contradiction disappears when we consider that it is merely the product of the same situation being seen from two different standpoints [*Standpunkte*]—‘on the one hand from the standpoint of the historian (whose standpoint lies methodologically “outside” the developing process itself), on the other hand from the standpoint of the co-experiencing subject, from the standpoint of a consciousness directly affected by the social order in question.’³¹ The historian seeking only to know the law is contrasted with the *miterlebende Subjekt*, the subject living in and through this traditional legal system as a daily reality, for whom this stability must constantly be renewed and recreated. Lukács claims the same for ‘traditional-empirical craft production’—which may seem ‘objectively relatively stable’ to the viewer outside it, but which ‘preserves a fluid, constantly self-renewing character of being produced by the producers’ to the artisans involved in it.’³² Here too it is the standpoint that determines how the self-same process appears—from the outside, as something fixed and known, or from the inside as performed and hence flexible. Notice here the way Lukács uses the term ‘standpoint.’ As with the work of art in his Heidelberg drafts, it refers not to what one knows, but to the way one intends a set of practices. It is quite possible that the historian knows more about the legal system and its historical development than the person living within it, but

their intentions towards it are different, and so the whole makes sense in a different way. Similarly, where artisanal practices demand some unique input from the individual, factory work (Lukács argues) requires only the most repetitive actions: the factory worker is thus entirely replaceable. They differ as subjects because the practices they are involved in intend their activity in different ways. That of the factory worker is essentially contemplative, even as they act, because they are, in effect, observing their bodies going through the motions of actions that are determined outside of them. These different intentional stances present objective reality either as a world with which one is involved, or as an objective system from which we are forever sundered, able only to observe it.

Once again, Lukács finds the problem expressed most clearly in classical German philosophy. In his words, ‘it is from the reified structure of consciousness that modern critical philosophy emerges.’³³ His choice of words here is significant: he describes both Kant’s epistemology and Fichte’s ethics as a ‘*Struktur des Bewußtseins*’ in which the subject’s relation to objectivity takes on a definite form. Lukács’s analysis recalls his comparison of the subjects of logic, ethics, and art in the Heidelberg drafts, wherein each field presupposed different inputs from the individual—passively mouthing necessary laws in the case of logic, for example.³⁴ In the case of Kant’s epistemology, the deduction of the categories of knowledge a priori, for a subject assumed to be separate from the object, produces only the most general systematic categories of knowledge, leaving particular things as mere instantiations, ungraspable in their specificity. But the same problem afflicts Fichte’s ethical transformation of Kant, which simply ‘repeats the insolubility of the question of classical German philosophy on a philosophically higher level.’³⁵ Here, the ‘Reification’ essay reproduces the same dichotomy that the Heidelberg drafts had identified in the ethical subject. On the one hand, to the extent that ethics ultimately aims at determining the will of the subject by right motives, it becomes an internal affair, just as he had argued in the philosophy of art: whether or not an ethical act is successful in changing the world is insignificant next to the question of whether the will was aligned with the good. On the other hand, ethical maxims derived from reason were just as unable to grasp the particular case as the categories of epistemology, and left the subject similarly determined by objective laws. Finally, even Hegel’s attempt to demonstrate the ontological unity of reason and existence failed to bridge the gap between subject and object. In his system, Lukács argues, the driving force of dialectical change is purely rational: it is a logical necessity that brings about historical change. It is

ultimately *Weltgeist* that transforms reality, merely making use of particular *Volksgeiste* or world historical individuals to bring about the change it demands. This means that ‘the deed becomes transcendent for the doer themselves, and the freedom that has seemingly been attained transforms itself silently into the fictional freedom of to reflect on self-moving laws that a stone would have, for Spinoza, if it had consciousness.’³⁶

Kant’s epistemology, Fichte’s ethics, and Hegel’s logical ontology, then, all represent the same mistaken structure of consciousness and the same mistaken separation of subject and object. In each case, the subject is assumed to stand over against an object that it then seeks to grasp through categories it derives from within itself—but in so doing, produces the *hiatus irrationalis* that exercised Fichte and Lask. Therefore, rather than accepting the terms of question and merely identifying a better candidate for the subject of action, Lukács shows that the question itself is misconceived, and that it is this that led it on a futile quest for a creative subject. By understanding instead that subject and object are correlated poles of the same intentional whole, Lukács overcomes this problem, treating the Kantian separation of the two as only one possible structure or configuration of consciousness. What follows from Lukács’s critique of bourgeois philosophy is that the subjective position must be explained as part of the composition of objective forms: instead of being separate object, it is the very point around which objectivity is gathered as it is disclosed.

3 THE ONTIC INTERPELLATION OF THE SUBJECT

The separation of subject and object manifest in classical German philosophy was no mere academic error, Lukács suggests. Less still was it the result of an error on the part of individual subjects who might, by an act of will, alter their attitude. Rather, this is simply the most explicit manifestation of a broader problem of social structure. This separation is not produced in practice by the subject but by the ontic structure of social reality. Analysis of this structure reveals the standpoint from which it might be said to make sense—that is, the position allocated to the subject in this formally constructed reality. Subject and object are determined as separate within a broader structure that ultimately relates them from the outset.

In this respect, Lukács’s resolution to the subject-object problem differs from that of Hegel. Like Hegel, Lukács resolves the contradiction by showing that it disappears when viewed from a higher perspective. But the nature of this resolution is different. For Hegel, reality is always consti-

tuted by how a thinking subject comes to terms with an object from which it is seemingly distinct. The subject comes to discover the principles of its own rational thought at work in the world, in society, and in history; reality as a whole is revealed to reflect the self-same *Geist* that the subject has discovered in itself. Hegel's resolution, then, aims at identity (albeit a differentiated identity): the subject discovers that the object was of the same kind or essence as itself all along. Lukács's solution, in contrast, eschews both identity and essence: subject and object remain distinct, but as parts of a definite system of reality that relates them in a variety of ways. They may be reconciled in the sense that their relationship may be understood as part of this greater, structured whole.

Lukács's solution runs surprisingly parallel to Alois Riegl's account of the spectator position in works of art. We saw in the previous chapter that Lukács's objective analysis of capitalist social reality echoes his explicitly Rieglian critique of the naturalistic *Kunstwollen* in literature. But his similarities with Riegl go further. Recall: he praised Riegl (along with Dilthey and Dvořák) for noting that 'structural forms' determine reality by the way they govern 'the confrontation of humans with their environment.'³⁷ That is, subjectivity is determined just as much as objectivity by these structural forms. I shall therefore first examine Riegl's account of the spectator position as related to the understanding of reality governing a particular work of art. This will help clarify Lukács's own account—which I shall first explain in relation to consciousness as such (in Kantian philosophy) and then relative to the commodity structure of social relations. In each instance, the subject is defined relationally, as a standpoint within a system, rather than essentially, by certain a priori characteristics. We may say, then, that subjectivity is interpellated within the ontic structure of reality. The term 'interpellation' is historically associated with one of Lukács's most virulent critics, Louis Althusser, and does not appear in Lukács's work; I shall justify borrowing this more fully below, but for now, it helps to emphasize the fact that Lukács's subject is defined within a total structure of meaning, rather than existing outside that system.

Riegl's more concrete account of subjectivity as a formal position helps clarify Lukács's argument by comparison. For Riegl, the objective reality depicted in a work of art is determined by the expected position of the subject: the work comes together and makes sense only from the perspective of a particular kind of viewer. Most straightforwardly, certain works of visual art simply seem incoherent if we stand too near or too far from them; they presuppose spectators standing in a specific position relative to the work.

A monumental Egyptian sculpture clearly expects a different type of viewer from that of intimate Impressionist works, painted for the homes of the rising French middle class of the late nineteenth century.³⁸ For Riegl, such differences in the subject characterize the art of whole epochs. His *Late Roman Art Industry* explains the transition from Egyptian art to that of the later Western Roman Empire by identifying three different ‘standpoints’ for subjects relative to the work—*Nahsicht*, *Normalsicht*, and *Fernsicht* (or ‘close view,’ ‘normal view,’ and ‘distant view’ respectively)—indicating quite literally how close the subject was expected to be to the object in order to make sense of it.³⁹ Egyptian art and architecture is quintessentially *nahsichtig*. Its haptic qualities—depicting objects with the clarity of border that would be apparent to the sense of touch—present the object as if to a spectator examining it closely. But the overall coordination of figures is weak: a viewer who steps back, expecting to find some composition of individual objects in a broader schema, will see only a gang of discrete entities whose interactions obey no clear rules. It is only from close-up that such art makes sense: the viewer can examine each object in its own right, but the relations of objects are not and cannot be depicted. Classical art—that of the early Roman empire, for example, relies on *Normalsicht*, on a viewer closer enough to examine details, but far enough away that different elements of the work could be gathered together in the eye of the subject. A sculptural group, for example, might include a number of interacting figures. In such a case, the dynamism and detail of each figure were an integral part of the work—a viewer too far away would lose them. But at the same time, the viewer needed to stand sufficiently far back to see how figures interacted—at a ‘middle’ distance from the work. Finally, late Roman art is *fernsichtig*: it makes most sense viewed from afar. Long derided as a period of decline as the graceful motion of earlier Roman art was replaced by more static figures, this epoch had, Riegl argued, simply been misunderstood. While its individual components appear crude, the intent is increasingly oriented towards the ‘mass composition’ and so makes sense viewed from further away.⁴⁰ It is the overall impression made by a number of distinct entities that is important. The sharply carved figures, which seem harsh and inept seen too closely, create an impression of highlight and shadow, light and dark, when viewed by a spectator standing further afar. And this, Riegl argues, was precisely the intention: the composition as a whole makes sense in the rhythm of alternating light and dark—something not visible when examining the detail of each individual figure. The work depends on a particular kind of subject situated sufficiently far from the object to see this.

Where Kantian epistemology grounds the categories of experience in the subject, then, Riegl does the reverse: the formal meaning-structure of the work defines and positions the subject in relation to objective reality. But he does not treat spectators simply as an empty position that the forms of the work point to; rather, they may have a specific role *as subjects* in assuring the coherence and significance of those forms. Thus, *fernsichtig* art assumes a *thinking* subject, capable of gathering up a set of impressions in a visual field and perceiving their interactions. This is even clearer when the dimension of time is introduced, granting an ‘increased role for intellectual thought in a work of art.’⁴¹ Earlier iconography presented events set at different times within a single image viewed at one moment. Indeed, Egyptian art has deliberate timelessness: the starkly delineated objects it presents, impervious to shadow and highlight with their implications of mutability and reliance on a subjective perspective, seem to exist outside of time, and thus have no need for a viewer capable of understanding temporal and narrative sequence. In contrast, later Roman art would present such scenes individually and sequentially. It assumed a viewer able to recall from one moment to the next what they had seen, and to take responsibility for gathering and ordering these images meaningfully.⁴² The image as a whole thus presupposes a subject capable of contributing the temporal dimension to a work in a way that Egyptian art did not; conversely, applying the temporal subjectivity of late Roman art to Egyptian icons would produce only confusion. It is not the case that these subjects have more or less accurate knowledge of the works confronting them—rather, what they are as subjects is defined by the relation they are expected to have to the work.

Riegl’s account is useful for clarifying a number of points in Lukács’s explanation of subjectivity: there are several homologies between the former’s account of art and the latter’s analysis of social reality. Where Riegl focuses on compositional forms, Lukács is interested in social forms, understood as the way in which social reality is composed in and for consciousness—and in particular the commodity structure. His general interest in social form is, I have argued, due to the Simmelian spectacles through which he initially read Marx, but he goes beyond Simmel’s account of such forms just as Riegl goes beyond conventional formal analysis of art—by identifying the specific subject-position interpellated by a structure or set of forms. Simmel takes a classically Kantian approach to subjectivity, defining it in terms of a subject standing over against a world that it seeks to know. The categories of knowledge shape the world, but the subject remains as a definite entity pre-existing that consciousness.⁴³

Thus, the money form re-presents objects quantitatively as abstract utilities—but this form affects the objects alone, not the subject for whom they appear in this manner. Conversely, where he does suggest that individuals are shaped by their position in a formal system—as, for example, in the analysis of dyads and triads in *Sociology*—these forms operate *objectively*, regardless of consciousness; they are not conditions of the appearance of objects, but underlying structures that govern how they operate. That nature of this objectivity—what kinds of objects there are, and the basic principles governing their interaction—are taken for granted.

Lukács's account is strikingly different. For him, social forms are defined in relation to a subject-position from which reality is disclosed: the subject is required for this form of objectivity to make sense. Riegl offers the warp of specific examples to Lukács's argument, and Husserl provides its philosophical weft. What he takes from the latter is the inclusion of a subject-pole to every meaningful phenomenon of consciousness: the intentional act is an inherent part of the way object is structured. Husserl's clarification of the 'act' character of mental acts in the fifth of the *Logical Investigations* is useful here. He describes intentionality in terms of an 'act' but clarifies that in using this term 'all thought of activity must be rigidly excluded.'⁴⁴ Rather than describing the subject and then deducing how it acts, Husserl suggests instead that the ego lives through its acts. Lukács's account of the subject echoes this model: in place of a pseudo-Fichtean subject that creates the world through its *Tathandlung*-type act, he draws on a Husserlian sense of 'act' as the subject-pole of a structured, meaningful phenomenon. This applies both to mental phenomena and to social practices understood as producing semantically significant social objects in the way described previously: the latter naturally presuppose an actor performing the practices that constitute objects meaningfully.

However, in seeking to characterize the practices of an entire epoch by a single kind of meaning-structure that define a 'reality' as a whole, Lukács needed to go beyond Husserl's still-general theorization of individual acts. Riegl's accounts of different *Kunstwollen* give more concrete examples of how different intentionalities may be analysed formally, and how they might govern an image of reality as a whole rather than being confined to individual phenomena. Paralleling Riegl, Lukács suggests that the kind of subject required and its specific relation to objectivity are itself determined by the structures governing that complete ontic social reality. Lukács's most systematic account of this comes, as we saw, in his critique of classical German philosophy. Such philosophy 'will no longer take the world as

something that has emerged independently of the knowing subject (for example, created by a God), but will rather understand it as *its own product*: its concept of reality is one seen from the perspective of a subject.⁴⁵ To clarify this, recall the difference (for Riegl) between Egyptian art and Renaissance painting: while the former aims to present the real, sempiternal essence of objects, making no concessions to the perspective of a subject, the latter offers the view of one particular artist on the world—how objects look from an individual’s view. Epistemology is like the latter: it aims only to show how things appear *to us*. But in order to accomplish this, Lukács suggests, it relies on rationally derived categories that are so universal that they are detached not only from the objects to be known, but also from the individual subjects for whom they manifest the world. Lukács’s language for describing this is telling: he states that this transforms ‘the knower into a pure – purely formal – subject,’ which is at best ‘a *point of view from which to judge* internal states of affairs.’⁴⁶ The universal and rational necessity of the categories of knowledge thus externalizes the individual subject, causing it stand outside even its own personal experience. Lukács thereby frames the problem in a way that combines subject and object in a single structure determining them simultaneously. The position of the subject is more a better or worse perspective on an object that exists separately in principle; it is a qualitative position, or specific role allocated to the subject by the objective structures of reality. Thus, he takes the basic question of post-Kantian thought—how do subjects relate to objects?—and relativizes it by locating both subject and object within a structure that determines that relation.

What can be seen in bourgeois philosophy, Lukács suggests, is an echo of the forms of social reality. In this case, it is not just the subject of mental acts (in the Husserlian sense) that is defined by the meaning-structure of objectivity; it applies here to the subject of social practices that construct objects as meaningful. Society appears in different ways depending on the formal position allocated to the subject: just as bourgeois philosophy reduced the viewer to a formal spectator of social processes, so too does the commodity structure reduce the individual to passive observation or interaction. In both cases, though, this subject-position—however passive—is essential for the system as a whole. This has a material manifestation, Lukács believes, in factory work, wherein the worker’s ‘activity loses ever more of its character as action, and turns in to a contemplative attitude,’ in which they are expected only to perform the actions required of them by the machinery of production.⁴⁷ Indeed, under Taylorism, the

worker is reduced to the most formal kind of subjectivity—infinately replaceable, expected only to carry out a limited set of activities determined by the overall system. This is objectively automated—but it presupposes at least a formal input from the subject around whom it is built in producing the commodity as a value.

The experience of everyday life in the factory is echoed at the level of social relations as a whole. The commodity structure demands only a limited input from the subject. The subject-pole of practice consists of no more than carrying out a circumscribed set of actions demanded by the system as a whole. Thus, the total social reality governed by this structure comprises objects defined by their quantitatively determined relationships to one another—their respective values. Classical Marxian theory understood this value in terms of a specific quantity of socially necessary labour required for the production of a particular item; such a subjective input is necessary for the commodity to be valorized. Of course, through Weber, Lukács would have been well aware of the decline of the productivist labour theory of value and its replacement with the consumption-oriented theory of marginal utility. But this represents no change in the structure of subjectivity: as he explains, ‘the formal-universal act of exchange which remains as the basic premise of marginal utility theory similarly suppresses use-value as use-value, and equally posits a relation of abstract equality between concretely unequal and indeed incommensurable materials.’⁴⁸ Lukács’s identification of a structural homology between marginal utility theory and the labour theory of value is further evidence that he does not depend on any notion of labour as the underlying substance of society, rebutting critics such as Postone or Habermas. Whether labouring producer or marginalist consumer, the structural determination of subjectivity in terms of a predetermined and abstract input is what counts—not whether or not one puts in actual labour.

This has an important implication for Lukács’s concept of the standpoint. A standpoint is not a position from which more or less of society is known; equally, it is not inherently related to the kinds of objective interests that might be imputed to those who occupy a particular place in social structures (as Lukács himself had suggested in the ‘Class Consciousness’ essay). Instead, it describes the particular intentional stance expected of the subject-pole in the practical construction of meaningful social objects, such that society in general seems to cohere and appear as fundamental reality. Reification—to take the most obvious example—has both a subjective and an objective aspect. Social practices governed by the commodity

structure demand only the most limited and abstract input from individuals; from this standpoint, society as a whole appears as a machine operating in a way that permits no real intervention. Alternative social practices—such as that of the artisan—yield other standpoints, from which entirely different realities would appear. ‘Reality,’ then, describes the way a set of meaning-structures present a coherent (valid) world; ‘standpoint’ refers to the subjective intentionality correlated with objects defined within a given system of reality. What makes the situation of the proletariat so distinct in Lukács’s eyes, I will argue later, is not that their standpoint gives them greater knowledge of social structures assumed to exist objectively; rather, it is that the contradictory way in which they are defined fractures the coherent self-enclosure of society that makes it appear ‘real.’ Instead of seeing the *truth* about the society, the proletariat instead glimpses its *falsity*; it is this that breaks through reification, even though this is only the first step in the transformation of society.

In determining the input expected of the subject, ontic structures define the subject itself. As Lukács explains, ‘the immediate, practical, and intellectual confrontation of individual with society ... can only take place in this form of rational and isolated acts of exchange between isolated commodity owners.’⁴⁹ Again, the problem is the same for marginal utility theory: because its goal is to develop knowledge of a set of predictable economic ‘laws,’ it presupposes a ‘subject of exchange that is just as abstract, formal, and reified as its object.’⁵⁰ Thus, to the degree that the subject participates in these mechanized social relations, its social being—our existence within society—is necessarily abstract and formal. We are disclosed as quantities of capital or labour, exchanging our commodities according to the objective laws of the market. But at the same time, the rationalized forms of such acts as part of the totality of social relations presuppose irrational, specific subjects outside of that system: it assumes those with a demand for the use value of the commodities offered for sale, or nothing would ever be traded. Consequently, the commodity form’s effect on subjectivity is to interpellate us as isolated individuals, separated from a society that we participate in formally and abstractly, but are excluded from as specific, concrete individuals. There is no subject existing ‘before’ or ‘producing’ social relations; it is, rather, interpellated by the structure of society.

The double face of the commodity as use value and exchange value takes Lukács’s account beyond Riegl. Because the commodity form presupposes the very irrationality that it seeks to exclude, it produces a split

in the subject itself—so that it appears as both ‘public’ and ‘private.’ Objectively, as described in the previous chapter, whole spheres such as religion or morality are excluded from social relations and confined to the ‘private’ sphere because they cannot be assimilated to the formal system of relations generated by the commodity form. The same phenomenon occurs at the level of the individual, who is only incorporated into the public realm as a formal, universal, and abstract subject. It is this that produces the contrast between the ‘soul’ and coldly rational ‘form,’ or between the ethical demands of objective social structures and those of the ‘spirit’ that had so concerned the young Lukács in *Soul and Form, Theory of the Novel*, and his Dostoevsky notes. There is no room for social relations based on substantial particularities—such as feelings of love. As evidence, Lukács points to Kant’s infamous statement that ‘[s]exual community ... is the reciprocal use made by one person of the sexual organs and faculties of another. ... [M]arriage ... is the union of two people of different sexes with a view to the mutual possession of each other’s sexual attributes for the duration of their lives.’⁵¹ What is important here is the exclusion of individual emotion or sentiment from the relationship as it is disclosed socially: feeling as such is assigned a place outside the rationalized social structure. As far as the institutional forms of social relations are concerned, marriage must be treated as a contract, Lukács suggests; whether or not love is involved cannot be part of the social meaning of such a relationship, which is treated ever more on the model of a business partnership by such institutions. It is only cast as ‘irrational’ because of the particular form of rationalization embodied by the commodity structure. The exclusion of all such aspects of the living individual—anything that cannot be incorporated to abstract social relations—splits the subject into a rational, abstract ‘citizen’ and a particular spiritual content that must necessarily come into conflict with social forms defined entirely in opposition to it. Even the ‘soul’ that had so preoccupied Lukács in his earlier writings is not a substantial entity existing before a set of abstract social relations from which it has become alienated. Rather, reification splits the subject into public and private, rational and irrational, calculated and emotional or spiritual, integrating us abstractly into society and leaving our particular feelings as an isolated residue on the border of social relations. It is this residue that is the ‘soul’: it is just as much a product of reification as the individual commodity.

4 AGENCY AND SUBJECTIVITY

I have used the word ‘interpellated’ above to describe Lukács’s explanation of subjectivity as the standpoint or position within an ontic reality from which that reality ‘makes sense’ or coheres. This choice merits some explanation, as it is typically associated with one of Lukács’s most vehement critics, the structuralist Louis Althusser. Althusser uses the term in minimizing the role traditionally assigned to the subject.⁵² His classic example is the police officer who hails an individual in the street with a loud ‘Hey! You there!’ The individual, realizing that they are hailed, performs one of the accepted responses—turning to answer the officer’s call. This is what positions us as ‘subjects’: our seemingly free reaction defines us as acting in a particular kind of way. And this can be seen throughout all kinds of ideological apparatuses: advertising, say, interpellates us as consumers who can choose which brand to purchase, but not to reject purchasing altogether. Defining subjectivity solely through these structures, Althusser criticizes the likes of Lukács for ‘humanism’—he is one of many who assumes that Lukács holds fast to an authentic, truly human, subject existing outside of ideology and consciousness, capable of acting against it. Such a subject is a myth, Althusser charges: subjectivity is no more than this definite position in the whole.

My use of interpellation in analysing Lukács deliberately draws on this notion. Clearly, if my reading of Lukács is correct, Althusser’s accusation must be wrong: rather than relying on any kind of subject external to consciousness, Lukács treats subjectivity as a structurally defined intentional stance within conscious social reality, in which the relation between the first-person perspective and objective reality is governed by a historically variable principle that structures the whole.⁵³ But Lukács goes beyond Althusser in two important points. First, his phenomenological approach allows him to incorporate the first-person perspective, that from within consciousness. For Lukács, social forms only cohere as a whole because they appear from a certain perspective: there is a subject-pole to every social practice that intends its objects in this way, making the subject a necessary part of the social totality. In contrast to Althusser’s reduction of the subject to mere responsiveness, Lukács’s model does justice to the fact that our lived reality is from the perspective of individual consciousness. Lukács’s multi-layered explanation takes account of the fact that social reality is only accessed from the perspective of subjects; it does not float in detached objectivity to be theorized about without subjects, but is necessarily a subject-object totality.

As a theorist of revolution, Lukács goes beyond Althusser in a second way—by demonstrating the possibility of agency as a structural component of social forms. If the subject is indeed interpellated by the system of ontic reality and cannot be described as a being acting on structures that are external to it, this might seem to foreclose the possibility of freedom and agency. Nevertheless, Lukács's framework provides a comprehensive account both of how agency may be denied—but also how it may be incorporated within social forms. At one level, this is trivially obvious. Different forms of society offer or even demand varying degrees of spontaneous activity, giving individuals more or less leeway in what they do. The capitalist, for example, has the discretion to buy or sell a particular commodity, or to dispose of their capital in different ways. But Lukács means more than this. Because he sees the separation of form and content as itself a structural error, he sees forms as variable and in constant need of reproduction through performance. Andrew Feenberg's brilliant interpretation of Lukács's theory through the anthropological lens of cultural practice, on which I have drawn extensively above, captures this well: forms are not fixed and independent, but instead depend on subjective interaction.⁵⁴ Understanding these practices phenomenologically, in terms of intentional acts that constitute the object as meaningful, helps to understand better why it is that Lukács refers to such practices with the term 'consciousness': he analyses practices semantically, to explain how they produce social objects as meaningful. Moreover, this Husserlian reading also suggests a way that Lukács can describe activity that might overcome reification without falling back into the absolute constitutive subjectivity supposedly found in Fichte. The problem with reification is that it detaches form so completely from content that form comes to seem fixed and unalterable—so Lukács's goal is the restoration of fluidity to the forms of practice, such that participation in the construction of social reality is integrated into its structure. Ontologically, agency presupposes the fluidity of ontic forms so that their reproduction is a deliberate process.

Curiously, it is once again Riegl whose theory offers important illustrative parallels that help explain how Lukács aims to accomplish this. I shall, therefore, first give a brief summary of the way Riegl discerns the rise of subjectivity in the history of art. I shall then point to parallels in Lukács's analysis of different social forms: commodity fetishism is analogous to Riegl's account of internally coherent compositional forms, while Lukács explains active engagement in society in ways similar to Riegl's description of external coherence. Ultimately, this notion of agency shapes his theory

of the revolutionary Party: it should not be understood as a cadre of professional revolutionaries acting on behalf of the proletariat, but instead as an active, content-inclusive social form. Far from the orthodox Leninist he is sometimes assumed to be, Lukács describes a party organized from the bottom up, one that could only lapse back into reification if it became too centralized.

The notion that forms can incorporate agency can be found in Riegl's *Group Portraiture of Holland*.⁵⁵ Here, he argues that Dutch artists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries sought to incorporate viewers of the painting as more than just a formal standpoint from which the image made sense. Instead, by breaking the fourth wall, they were able to draw the viewer into the content of the image as an equal member of the democratic-civic groups depicted in the group portraits commissioned by civic institutions (such as charities or merchants' guilds) to celebrate their members. However undistinguished such paintings appear next to the contemporaneous works of a Michelangelo or a Bronzino, Riegl argues that they made a particularly innovative step that transforms the depiction of reality. Dutch art differed from Italian in the basic principle at play in making its elements cohere—the *Kunstwollen* of the former attempted an *external* coherence, while that of the latter aimed at *internal* coherence. This is best illustrated by concrete example. Raphael's *Transfiguration*, a masterpiece of the high Renaissance, depicts two sequential Bible stories: above, Christ, Moses, and Elijah are raised up to the sky, while the Apostles Peter, James, and John observe the scene; below, the Apostles await the return of Christ while failing to cure a possessed boy. These two narratives are unified by the interactions and gestures of the people therein. The figures in the picture form a series of nested pyramids, at the apex of which sits Christ, the central organizing principle of the image; minor figures point and gesture to reinforce the lines of the pyramid, guiding the viewer's eye towards the divine presence at the top. While Raphael makes obvious use of linear perspective to create a realistic picture, those depicted pay no attention to the viewer: they are preoccupied with one another. The spectator remains essentially outside the picture, as if having stumbled on the scene; they serve only as to organize the perspective of the visual image. In other words, it is elements *within* the painting that are responsible for its formal unity—hence *internal coherence*. The viewer is formally interpellated in a way that grants them only a spectatorial role; in principle, if they were absent, the action would continue unchanged without them.

In contrast, Dutch painting of the same epoch directly gestures towards the spectator. This can be seen in germinal form in an early painting such as Jan van Scorel's *Pilgrims to Jerusalem from Utrecht during the Years 1520 to 1524*, in which a group of Dutch devotees stand in a poorly spaced line, some looking out warily at the viewer.⁵⁶ This outward glance is crucial: the painting is organized by this principle of the individual at whom they are looking. It makes sense only if we assume this spectator—hence *external* coherence. Over the next century and a half, Riegl argues, Dutch painting sought to refine such external coherence, culminating in the work of Rembrandt, who achieved this by balancing external and internal coherence. Riegl examines three of Rembrandt's works—*The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632), *The Night-Watch* (1642), and *De Staalmeesters* (aka *Syndics of the Drapers' Guild*, 1662)—finding in the last the consummate expression of the Dutch *Kunstwollen*. Here, five drapers sit around a table (a sixth, a servant, hovers behind), evaluating a cloth sample by comparing it to a swatch book. What Riegl finds so compelling is the subtle, patient manner Rembrandt achieves coherence. Internal coherence is assigned to the figure at the centre, who is shown while speaking to his colleagues; the others are clearly listening to his words. Importantly, his dominance is marked in no other fashion: he is not placed separately from the group, nor does he bear any insignia indicating his position. At the same time, external coherence is established by his colleagues: with the sole exception of the central figure, they are depicted looking out towards the viewer, with whom the drapers are (presumably) negotiating. Thus, they are listening to the dominant internal figure while simultaneously gazing at the spectator, as if to assess the effect of their colleagues' words on the subject. Internal and external coherence are in balance: neither is subordinated to the other. The viewing subject is both formally and substantially incorporated into the world shown by the work: its coherence depends on the spectator understanding themselves as interacting productively with those depicted.

Riegl's account has phenomenologically significant implications. First, it suggests a unity of form and content derived by making the content its own principle of coherence, rather than either subordinating content to a universal formal scheme or leaving it entirely bereft of significant form to coordinate the parts. Italian painting already accomplished this in part, using the interactions of the figures—their looks and gestures—to organize the content of the painting. In Rembrandt's works, this is extended to include the viewing subject: the spectator is incorporated in the work not

only by the forms of the painting but also by its content, by the interaction of figure and spectator—and is hence as a specific, not merely a formal, subject. Second—as a result—form itself comes to depend on the subject’s active participation, rather than existing independently. For Riegl, this directly represents a quintessentially Dutch democratic-republican spirit. Rembrandt’s *Syndics of the Drapers Guild* depicts a social world of equals (including the viewer) interacting with attentiveness to one another—and it is a world they all contribute to making. Both internal and external coherence rely on the coordination of equal subjects, and not on subordination. In contrast to Raphael’s *Transfiguration*, whose viewers are able only to contemplate the events unfolding before their eyes, the audience of *De Staalmeesters* is called to participate and engage. For the first spectator, the world can be seen from the outside but never altered; the second find themselves already in the world and involved in its constitution.

There is, obviously, something very Hegelian about Riegl’s account, but he differs from Hegel in important respects in manifesting the subject-object relationship—and it is Riegl’s model, I will argue, that Lukács follows here. Of course, Riegl’s suggestion that each people (Dutch or Italian) has a distinctive *Kunstwollen* plainly echoes Hegel’s *Volksgeist*, the national spirit embodying itself in cultural products. More profoundly, Riegl’s historical method is dialectical in that he describes the epochs he examines as the unfolding of a single idea until it reaches its perfection—and its limits. His is no linear theory of steady, unidirectional progress, but of distinct eras, each governed by a central *Kunstwollen* that must be taken to its extreme. Above all, like Hegel he finds in the history of art a gradual rise in subjectivity. But they differ in how they theorize this rise. For Hegel, all art is distinctly free and human: it is ‘born of the Spirit and born again,’ meeting needs that are higher than those of our natural body.⁵⁷ It is intrinsically related to free subjectivity, which can be seen developing (he claims) across three great epochs. Symbolic art (such as that of Egypt) presents abstract concepts through simple, direct symbols: a lion might signify ‘strength.’ This art reaches its limits in its abstraction: the general idea of strength is never instantiated in a specific lion, simply in lions in general. Thus, it is superseded by Classical art, which focuses on the individual as an embodiment of particular ideals: the ‘Doryphoros’ of Polykleitos is the epitome of beauty in a specific human. This too reaches its limits because it only depicts human ideals *externally*, in physical form. It is in turn succeeded by Romantic art, which turns to the internal psychology of its individuated subjects—that is, to their most *geistlich* aspect.

Subjectivity as such is the very theme of Romantic art: its novels depict the inner struggles and personal development of their heroes; its paintings convey the deeper turmoil behind the face of its figures; its music expresses emotional states. The history of art, then, is one of ever-greater spirituality and subjectivity in what is depicted—and Riegl’s concern with subjectivity in art clearly echoes this.

Yet Riegl goes further in one important aspect. For Hegel, subjectivity is expressed purely *within* the work of art as such: it is portrayed for the audience’s recognition, a diorama of freedom within which they can recognize something that is not alien to them. Riegl surpasses this by incorporating the role of this audience in the very form of the work itself, rather than limiting the rise of subjectivity to objective depictions thereof. Rather, as I have shown, he describes this development in terms of the relation between the subjective viewer and the objective work of art, as revealed by formal analysis. *Fernsichtig* late Roman art relies more on the subjectivity of the viewer to reveal the whole image at once than *nahsichtig* Egyptian art, with its depiction of entirely discrete entities; Dutch portraits take this further by treating the subject not just as a formal position from which the image is contemplated, but as a real individual participating with the (identifiable) burghers depicted therein. The rise of subjectivity does not, therefore, entail identitarian reduction of the object to a reflection of the subject; instead, it depends on greater incorporation of subjective agency in composing the forms by which it relates to a still-different objectivity.

It is the model of subjectivity Riegl offers in his analysis of Dutch paintings that Lukács’s account most closely parallels. Indeed, in the middle of his survey of bourgeois philosophy, Lukács pointedly refers to the significance of art for thinking through social and philosophical problems. ‘When Schiller extends the aesthetic principle far beyond aesthetics itself and looks in it for the key to the solution of the question of the meaning of human determinate social existence,’ he argues, ‘the basic problem of classic philosophy is plainly evident.’⁵⁸ Schiller’s play instinct aims at the reunification of form and content. Art or aesthetic education alone cannot resolve the problem of the fragmentation of the subject by reification, Lukács insists. However, by treating social structures in ways analogous to Riegl’s account of compositional ones, Lukács identifies similar patterns of agency. Social structures may incorporate subjectivity to the degree that subjects are formally interpellated in their constitution. To the degree that form is independent of both content and of perceiving subject, society can be said to exclude significant agency; where the determinants of social

being visibly depend instead on their constant reproduction by formally integrated members of society, agency, I will suggest, is ontically real.

Lukács seeks to distinguish himself from Hegel precisely on this question of the predetermination of forms. Though the latter sought to explain a gradual rise in subjectivity throughout history, the fact that he portrayed this as the necessary dialectical unfolding of a logical idea meant that he excluded real subjective participation: the transformation of logical forms was accomplished by their own immanent logic, not by actual historical action. Thus, Lukács argues, Hegel achieves only an objective demonstration of subjectivity that we watch passively.⁵⁹ The same is true of capitalist society. Our social being is formally free: the individual is defined by a set of legal rights, economically free to sell their labour as they wish. No ties comparable to those of the feudal system bind us to others; no merely natural properties determine our position in society. But at the same time, these determinants of social being are entirely disconnected from us. In the case of the legal system, for example, ‘there arises a rational systematization of all legal regulation of life, which ... at least tend towards manifesting a closed system that can be applied to all possible and conceivable cases.’⁶⁰ As a ‘closed system,’ the law claims dependence on nothing other than itself: its forms become self-sustaining and self-defining.⁶¹ Consequently, the system as a whole is lifted beyond our control: it operates on us, rather than allowing subjects to participate in constituting it. The problem is that forms are defined in terms of other forms: definition follows a self-valorizing circle.

What is true of law is even more the case with the commodity: in determining the value of an item, it makes no reference to subjective intervention. Thus, reading Marx as a labour theorist of value, the commodity’s value is defined first by the amount of socially necessary labour required to produce it: at once, the subjective activity required to produce it is reduced to a socially determined homogeneous measure that has nothing to do with the actual labour involved. This is then translated to a value for exchange by its comparison with the value of other commodities, all of which mutually determine one another without regard to any subjective intervention: the object is valuable to the degree it enables us to purchase other commodities. As Lukács puts it, ‘objectively ... a world of fixed things and relations between things springs in to being (the world of commodities and their movements on the market).’⁶² Commodities are determined and arranged in relation to one another; the subject plays no role in the composition of their forms. Even the labour of the worker or the

preferences of the consumer in marginal utility theory are incorporated only in the most abstract, formal sense, like the idealized spectator of a painting deploying linear perspective.

In Lukács's account, then, law and the economy exhibit something analogous to Riegl's internal coherence: objects are determined through mutual relations, rather than by subjective intervention; the system of social forms is completely self-enclosed. Social relations exist over and above both contents and members of society: they are reified. The objective determination of social being as a set of relations between things, not people means, subjectively, the systematic exclusion of the subject from the constitution of social forms. Society becomes something that *is*, rather than something we *do*; rather than depending on us, its forms are entirely self-sustaining. There is no possible point of intervention: 'the individual necessarily confronts objective reality as a complex of fixed things, which it encounters as ready-made and unalterable, and which only permit subjective judgments of recognition or rejection.'⁶³ Whether the entrepreneur assesses the market, the worker confronts the machine, or the Kantian subject knows phenomenal reality, subjects are limited to mere contemplation.⁶⁴ Reification is thus an internally coherent structure of ontic social reality that places the subject outside the constitution of its forms.

It follows that Lukács seeks social forms with external coherence, able to incorporate subjectivity substantially in their constitution. While he offers no blueprint for a complete society in which this would be possible, he does identify one institution capable of offering something of this kind: the revolutionary Party. Lukács in fact seems to have changed his mind about the institution best able to fulfil this role. The earlier essays of *History and Class Consciousness* still show traces of the influence of Ervin Szabó, the Hungarian anarcho-syndicalist: here, Lukács places his faith in the soviet as the way the proletariat could reorganize its social relations. But even when he turns to the Party itself in the final essay in *History and Class Consciousness*, 'Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization,' he is primarily concerned with describing it in ways similar to external coherence. As the title suggests, the essay is more an outline of the theoretical presuppositions of organization than an exact plan for the party.

Of course, for critics such as Arato and Breines, Lukács's preoccupation with the Party seems like a problematic embrace of Bolshevik claims to an enlightened dictatorship in the name of the ignorant masses. But this ignores Lukács's repeated and explicit criticisms of any Party seeking to lead or act on behalf of the workers: its role is not, he insists, that of a

proxy subject standing in for the proletariat. He makes this clear in his thoughtful critique of Rosa Luxemburg. He criticizes Luxemburg for overestimating the potential of spontaneous revolutionary consciousness, arguing instead that revolution requires a Party as the ‘organizational form of this class consciousness.’⁶⁵ But, he clarifies, this is more than simply a matter of ‘making conscious what was unconscious, or bringing forth what was latent,’ which only applies at a very early stage.⁶⁶ That is, its role is not to tell the proletariat things they were *unaware* of. Rather, the Party is there ‘so that, for the whole class, its own existence as a class can be raised to the level of consciousness.’⁶⁷ Lukács’s terminology is significant, showing the interplay of Hegel and Lask in his thought. For ‘existence,’ he has *Dasein*, or determinate existence in terms of Hegelian ontology (rather than prefiguring Heidegger). But in Laskian vein, form (through organization) is necessary for the class to reach this level of being: it is not really meaningful to talk about the existence of the class until it acquires such determinacy. Rather than an agent acting on behalf of workers who may be thought of as a group without them, the Party is the validity form of the class, and a necessary component of its existence. It is the sphere in which the proletariat achieves determinate social being, and individuals see themselves united as a class.

This might seem to confirm the worst fears of Lukács’s critics regarding his overinflation of the role of the Party. However, his explanation of the logic of this form is telling. Consider what he finds valuable in Rosa Luxemburg’s approach: her rejection of vanguardism by a cadre of professional revolutionaries. ‘Even in theory,’ Lukács insists, ‘the Communist Party does not act on behalf of the proletariat.’⁶⁸ He warns against excessive centralization, lest it lead to ‘a merely *observing*, contemplative’ attitude that leads to ‘the voluntaristic overestimation of the active significance of the individual (the leader) and the fatalistic underestimation of the significance of the class (the masses).’⁶⁹ Here Lukács echoes his critique of reification, which may reappear if the Party’s organizational structures become too fixed. This would reduce the proletariat once more to the role of spectator; its objective form is determined for it by Party professionals. It would, in effect, establish the validity structures of the class a priori, and then impose them from above on the workers.

Instead, the Party should be understood as the sphere in which the proletariat determines its own forms—which he describes as ‘the proletariat’s becoming independent, its “organisation of itself into a class.”’⁷⁰ By connecting organization as a structure of social existence with free self-

determination, Lukács proposes a route out of reification. It is only ‘insofar as Party becomes a world of activity for every one of its members,’ that ‘it can overcome the contemplativity of bourgeois man.’⁷¹ Lukács’s ‘activity,’ *Tätigkeit*, here studiously avoids the spontaneous, self-grounding *Tathandlung* of the early Fichte, with its misleading implication that reification might be overcome in a single act by an entity that pre-exists the object it seeks to change. Rather, it is in acting that that Party member is free: following Husserl, Lukács treats these subjects as living in their intentional acts. As the subject-pole of continued practices that intend a unified class, the proletariat can truly ‘act,’ constantly participating the reconstitution of the forms of its social existence. In contrast to the exclusively internal coherence of the commodity structure, the Party incorporates external coherence too, remaining dependent on the subjective participation of its members to realize and renew its forms. If cultural practices (to borrow Feenberg’s interpretation) are to be dereified, Lukács implies, they must be manifest as dependent on agents for their constant renewal and reformation; subjects must be consciously interpellated as co-creator of their determinate social being.

The subjectivity Lukács sees in the Party, then, provides a useful indication of an agent-inclusive ontic social reality. By understanding a specific social institution as a determinate form of social existence, and opening those forms to constant reevaluation and reconstitution, Lukács suggests a practical freedom to ameliorate the alienation and anomie of contemporary society. Organizational work—deciding on the forms in which we come together, intersubjectively and consciously constructing the social—is, for Lukács, the overcoming of reification. The ontological significance of the Party is that it affords the opportunity to participate in the constitution of the forms of social being: the proletariat engaged in organizational work would be shaping the terms of their own inclusion in society.

But Lukács’s theory has implications beyond the revolutionary Party: it demands more transparency and fluidity in social relations more generally. Take, for example, language as a way humans relate to one another. Obviously, it depends on some degree of semantic fixity: we cannot recreate the meanings of words or grammatical structures each time we use them, nor can we do so unilaterally. But it is possible, over time, to revise the sedimented meanings of words, to replace them with others or to change their meaning. In recent decades, racist or sexist language has become increasingly unacceptable; gender-neutral pronouns have come to be preferred; certain words once used as slurs, such as ‘gay,’ have been

reclaimed as positive terms of identity by those at whom they were once hurled. Gradually, these social relations have been transformed. In line with Lukács's explicit rejection of Party centralism, these changes could not be mandated from above. They must instead be the result of a shared change in practice, one that grants people control over the terms they use and that categorize them, rather than simply having such labels imposed from above. Just as Lukács notes of social relations, their forms may be fixed for a time, but must remain open to change, in an unbroken cycle of ossification and dissolution. In this sense, the aim of the revolution is evolution: in order to make steady, conscious change possible, it is first necessary to overthrow the reification that limits it today. Thus, Riegl's notion of external coherence helps reimagine the structure of social relations: instead of being governed and restricted by them, Lukács suggests, it is possible for us to shape the terms of our own social environment—but only if we first cast off the forms restricting us at present.

5 THE MORAL IMPERATIVES OF HISTORY

Of course, Lukács wanted to show not only that the proletariat *could* achieve subjective engagement in society, but also that they *should*: revolution was a moral imperative. Where is a consistent Marxist to derive such moral demands? For one committed to materialist and historicist premises, there is no rational ground capable of sustaining a moral imperative. If morality is viewed as historically contingent—associated with particular social arrangements, or (for a more vulgar Marxist) part of bourgeois ideological domination—it is difficult to see why the moral demands made by revolutionary parties are any different. On what grounds can Communist morality claim to be 'true,' and all other norms merely part of an ideological superstructure?

My interpretation of Lukács's answer to this problem is highly speculative, drawing on his reading of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky in preparing his book on the latter in 1915. On the one hand, his account rests in part in a theory of identity and self-consciousness built on the particular experiences of the proletariat in capitalist society; I shall examine this in depth in the following chapter. What I will argue here is that Lukács's account of the *formal* possibility of moral imperatives parallels his argument for agency: the structure of social reality interpellates the subject as standing under a demand to act. Like Kierkegaard, he grounds this imperative in a structure of reality that incorporates temporality. Where social forms are

manifest as temporally unstable, their abstract autonomy is undermined, defining these forms as dependent on the subject in a way that is obscured in the normal operation of society. I shall thus briefly outline the relevant arguments from Kierkegaard, before pointing to the homologies in Lukács's case.⁷² By adding the dimension of history, Lukács presents social forms in a constant state of transformation; formally, this transformation itself interpellates subjects with the responsibility to either sustain or replace social structures.

Lukács's interest in Kierkegaard was long-standing, and predated the Dane's broader popularity: as early as *Soul and Forms*, he had devoted an entire essay to Kierkegaard's aborted engagement to Regine Olsen. Ágnes Heller reads this essay as expressing Lukács's anguish over his own relationship to Irma Seidler; it clearly expresses his earlier Simmelian preoccupation with a conflict of feeling and impersonal moral demands. But this rather emotional response to Kierkegaard's life was replaced by a more sophisticated appreciation of his philosophy by the time he came to write the Dostoevsky book in 1915. Kierkegaard is the second-most cited source in the notes for this book, only exceeded by Dostoevsky himself. Tellingly, Lukács cites most frequently his more problematic works concerned with the responsibility of the subject to act in a situation of anxiety or despair, such as *The Sickness unto Death*. This work is concerned with the tension between possibility and necessity: the self that feels fatalistically governed by necessity will despair, and can be saved only by the freely chosen leap of faith. Lukács's use of Kierkegaard is tied up with his reading of Dostoevsky as the source of an ethical model. He turned to them to resolve the problem of moral responsibility at a time when objective social structures had decayed to such a degree that their ethical demands felt alien and oppressive.⁷³

While Lukács soon realized that Russian literature offered no real solution to social problems, he did not leave Kierkegaard's understanding of action behind entirely. Kierkegaard is often quite wrongly depicted as decisionistic, particularly in Western Marxism. Unfortunately, this claim comes through in some of the worst, most embarrassing works of the tradition—Lukács's own *Destruction of Reason* is the most egregious example, but Adorno's superficially more serious *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* is little better as a scholarly reckoning with his philosophy.⁷⁴ George Pattison persuasively rejects such arguments, suggesting that they are mostly a result of the association of Kierkegaard with reactionary strands of German thought in the years after the First World War.⁷⁵

In fact, far from the spontaneous subject of decisionism, Kierkegaard's act of freedom appears in response to definite temporal circumstances. This is illustrated by his concept of the 'moment' in *The Concept of Anxiety*—which Lukács closely parallels. For Kierkegaard, the moment changes our experience of temporality. Typically, we experience time simply as a linear progression; the present is the point travelling along that line where future turns into past. Day by day, we repeat the same patterns of behaviour; it does not cross our mind to think whether our situation is alterable. In Kierkegaard's theologically slanted account, it is anxiety—the fear that we might sin—that changes this: sin means being held accountable, not stumbling thoughtlessly through life. Through sin, we become conscious of eternity (in the form of eternal damnation!), transforming our sense of the flow of time. Thus, the moment is where 'time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time': it disrupts the temporal flow, casting responsibility on us for matters that had seemed predetermined.⁷⁶ It is thus an 'ambiguity'—a point at which anything could happen. At once, this transforms both past and future: we become aware that our situation was not inevitable, but was created by our previous actions (however passive)—but in consequence feel free towards the future, which is now resignified as the endlessly open possible.

Kierkegaard suggests a phenomenology of freedom *avant la lettre*: rather than an ontological account of free will intervening in a deterministic material world, he explains how the moment of freedom is experienced through a structuring of our sense of time and history that casts the subject as responsible for what happens next. The subject-position is changed by altering the temporal structure of reality: rather than being assigned the role of endless and inevitable repetition of the same behaviour, the subject is called on to act—a vocation at once terrifying and liberating. Kierkegaard's explanation of this agency does not rely on any intrinsic properties of the subject or a metaphysical account of free will as exempt from material determinism. There is no one-sided decisionism at play here, or an entirely spontaneous subject. As Michael Theunissen lucidly shows, action is demanded as a moment in a dialectical movement through the stages of anxiety or despair (depending on which of Kierkegaard's works is under consideration).⁷⁷ It is the structure of the moment that demands action, not the unilateral will of the subject.

It is this that Lukács draws on in explaining the structural demand for revolutionary action. This is summarized in his analysis of the concept of *becoming*:

Becoming is, on the other hand, the mediation between past and future. But it is a mediation between a concrete, i.e., historical past, and an equally concrete, i.e., also historical future. In that it dissolves itself in to a process, the concrete here and now is no longer a transitory, ungraspable moment, a fleeting immediacy, but is rather the moment of the deepest and most far-reaching mediation, the moment of decision, the moment of the birth of the new. As long as people direct their interest – purely contemplatively – towards the past *or* the future, both ossify into an alien Being, and the ‘pernicious chasm’ of the present remains between subject and object. Only when people are capable of grasping the present as Becoming by recognizing within it the tendencies out of whose dialectical opposition they are capable of creating the future, will the present, the present as Becoming, become *their* present.⁷⁸

Lukács distinguishes in Kierkegaardian vein between different configurations of the moment: on the one hand, it appears as ‘immediacy slipping away,’ the thoughtless performance of the endless same; on the other, it is manifest as a moment of decision, a ‘becoming.’ Of course, Lukács replaces Kierkegaard’s theological eternity with materialist ‘historical tendencies’ to effect this transformation of the moment—but the result is the same. If social forms are temporalized, they become ambiguous and indeterminate. Consequently, the subject is interpellated rather differently: instead of a passive performer of unalterable actions, they become responsible for the constant reproduction of these social forms. This, of course, is uniquely possible in liberal-democratic capitalism. Under feudalism, for example, social relations take on the appearance of being divinely instituted: they cannot be comprehended as being reproduced in the moment, as they are understood as the manifestation of a divine will. Capitalist societies are different: in both the productivist labour theory of value and the consumptivist theory of marginal utility, social forms are seen as produced and reproduced by individuals. Immediately, individuals appear as formal, abstract, and entirely determined—but mediated through temporality, they are revealed as necessary for the reproduction of social forms.

Lukács goes further: just as Kierkegaard’s theological perspective means that the moment is not just a *possibility* of acting, but also a *demand* to act, so too does Lukács suggest that the structural indeterminacy of a historical moment demands action and responsibility. Explaining the failure of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in *Tailism and the Dialectic*, his later defence of *History and Class Consciousness*, he denies that it was entirely due to ‘objective circumstances,’ insisting that any such circumstances were

themselves the result of previous failures to act. By reconfiguring the image of the objective situation through incorporating its genesis into its structure, Lukács echoes Kierkegaard's transformation of the present. It must be emphasized that Lukács was not simply arguing that an awareness of the historical dimension and mutability of social relations was sufficient to make it seem *possible* that they be changed. Rather, revolutionary situations—times of crisis, when social practices normally performed unthinkingly become unstable and cannot be reproduced in the same effortless way—in fact produce a *demand* to act. This is at the heart of his notion of the *moment*—which has the same sense of indeterminacy as Kierkegaard's. Asking 'what is a "moment"?' he answers thus: it is 'a situation whose duration may be longer or shorter, but which is distinguished from the process that leads up to it in that it forces together the essential tendencies of that process, and demands that a *decision* be taken over the *future direction of the process*. ... At a *particular* point, the situation demands that a decision be taken and the day after tomorrow might be too late to make that decision.'⁷⁹ Now, this implies that classic Marxist crisis theory has a place within Lukács's thought—but its role is phenomenological. Under ordinary circumstances—the daily operations of capitalism—the subject is required only to perform the usual operations required by particular social forms. But certain circumstances may destabilize this order; to return to the normally expected forms of interaction would take conscious effort. Such situations—crises in the sense implied by the etymology of the word, as decisive moments or turning points—force a decision: nothing determines that subjects should continue on their conventional paths. It is this structural indeterminacy—not any 'substantial' interests of labour, nor any intrinsic properties of a subject supposed to exist outside those structures—that interpellates the subject as *responsible*. What is at stake in such moments is precisely the social forms themselves: destabilished, fluid, open to change, they become susceptible in an extreme form to the kind of subjective constitution Riegl describes, and that Lukács finds in the Party.

For Lukács, I suggest, moral demands are intrinsic to the phenomenology of social reality: its forms can be configured so as to demand of the subject that they make a decision. Such imperatives are not transhistorical, external to society, nor general: we are not always commanded to refashion society, nor are we subject to moral rules derived from abstract universal norms. They are, rather, generated by a particular historical configuration of social structures, and are addressed to those occupying specific posi-

tions in that situation. *This or that group* is interpellated as bearing responsibility for action: the call to change society is created within the very social structures that are to be transformed.

6 CONCLUSION

Lukács's account of the subject depends on his account of social reality: the two are inextricable, in that they must be understood as part of a complete subject-object totality. The separation of subject and object under capitalism or in bourgeois philosophy is thus both real and apparent. It is real in that it forms part of the lived daily reality of individuals in capitalist society: the commodity structure as dominant social form permits only limited forms of interacting with society. But it is merely apparent in the sense that such a separation is not ontologically foundational; rather, this particular configuration of subject and objectivity is determined by the way ontic reality is structured. For a given 'reality' to make sense as a whole, a certain standpoint is presupposed; exactly how ontic structures open up or disclose reality towards a particular standpoint interpellates a definite kind of subject.

The problem of reification, then, is the particular way it determines the subject. It permits only a formal, abstract, heavily circumscribed interface with social reality: the individual is integrated into social relations only as a universal form, reduced to their similarity to others. Anything specific is, by definition, excluded: it is cast as private rather than public, emotional rather than intellectual, 'natural' rather than social, or irrational rather than rational. The individual is split into an amorphous 'soul' and a rational 'citizen.' Objective social structures cannot help but come into conflict with the 'soul,' because the latter consists of that which they exclude by definition.

These very structures, I have suggested, can demand action from the subject when cast in historical perspective. In this regard, Lukács's ontico-ontological account of subjectivity offers a possible grounding for ethical norms. But this raises the question of the specific subject of revolution: why exactly is the *proletariat* the agent of revolution? Moreover, if commodity fetishism is to be criticized because of its exclusion of content and particularity from social selfhood, how can this be reincorporated so that social selfhood is more than merely formal? To explain this requires a fuller account of the structure of self-consciousness—and, in particular, the role of the Communist Party as the conscious social being of the revolutionary working class.

NOTES

1. Arato, Andrew & Breines, Paul, 1979 *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 128. Rockmore, Tom. 1992. *Irrationalism: Lukács and the Marxist View of Reason*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press; Jay, Martin, 1984. *Marxism and Totality: the Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 106–107.
2. Lukács, Georg 1968–1981, *Werke*, (W) 18 vols., ed. György Márkus & Frank Benseler. Darmstadt: Luchterhand. ii.297: ‘in dem Sinne einer Wissenschaft vom Sein’; Lukács, Georg. 1971 *History & Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, [HCC] trans. Rodney Livingstone. London: Merlin. 120.
3. Kant, cited in Lukács *W* ii.287, HCC 111.
4. Fichte, cited in Lukács *W* ii.297, HCC 119.
5. Lukács, *W* ii.304: ‘die Gleichgültigkeit der Form dem Inhalt gegenüber.’ Lukács, HCC 126.
6. J.G. Fichte, 1982. *Science of Knowledge*, ed. & trans. Peter Heath & John Lachs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.97.
7. Lukács, *W*. ii 288; 327; HCC 112, 145. Lukács correctly does not refer to this as the *verum-factum* principle. Vico’s claim that humans make history and can therefore understand it appears in the *Scienza Nuova* of 1725, whereas the *verum-factum* principle appears in the earlier *De antiquissima* of 1710. As Morrison explains, Vico is concerned in the former to refute Descartes’s *cogito*: because we did not *create* the thinking mind, we cannot say that we *know* it; in contrast, the latter is genuinely constructivist, treating history as something we have indeed made, and so can know. See James C. Morrison, ‘Vico’s Principle of *Verum* is *Factum* and the Problem of Historicism,’ *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Oct.–Dec., 1978), 579–595, at 587.
8. Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 109.
9. Colletti, Lucio. 1973. *Marxism and Hegel*, trans. Lawrence Garner. London: Verso.
10. Schmidt, Alfred. 1971. *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, trans. Ben Fowkes. London: Verso. 69–70.
11. Postone, Moishe. 1993. *Time, Labour, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Arato & Breines *The Young Lukács*.
12. Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 109.
13. G.W.F. Hegel. 1969. *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller. New York: Humanity Books. 510.
14. Feenberg, Andrew. 2014. *The Philosophy of Praxis: Marx, Lukács, and the Frankfurt School*. London: Verso, 112–117.

15. Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 106–107.
16. Lukács, *Wii.301*; *HCC* 123.
17. Lukács *Wii.302*: ‘das Subjekt der “Tathandlung”’; *HCC* 123.
18. Lukács *Wii.304*: ‘Das Prinzip des Praktischen als Prinzip des Veränderens der Wirklichkeit muß deshalb auf das konkrete, materielle Substrat des Handelns zugeschnitten sein, um infolge seines Inkrafttretens auf dieses in solcher Weise einwirken zu können.’ *HCC* 126.
19. Most of this work on the later Fichte is in German. For an Anglophone source, see Breazeale, Daniel and Rockmore, Tom, eds. 2008. *After Jena: New Essays on Fichte’s Later Philosophy*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
20. Lask, Emil 1923–1924. *Gesammelte Schriften*. ed. Eugen Herrigel. 3 vols. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). i.99–137.
21. Beiser, Frederick C. 2011. *The German Historicist Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
22. For example, it appears at *Wii.297*, 300, and 379 (*HCC* 119, 122, and 192.)
23. Lukács *Wii.379*: ‘Wenn man aber genauer zusieht und die konkrete Auswirkung der religiös-utopischen Grundlegung der Lehre in ihren praktischen Folgen auf die Handlungen Münzers näher untersucht, so wird man zwischen beiden denselben “finsteren und leeren Raum,” denselben “hiatus irrationalis” entdecken, die überall vorhanden sind, wo eine subjektive und darum undialektische Utopie unmittelbar an die geschichtliche Wirklichkeit, mit der Absicht, auf diese einzuwirken, sie zu verändern, herantritt’; *HCC* 192.
24. Lukács cites this on *Wii.300*; *HCC* 122.
25. J.G. Fichte, 2005. *The Science of Knowing: J.G. Fichte’s 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*, trans. Walter E. Wright. New York: SUNY Press. 30.
26. Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 108, citing Lukács *Wii.288*, *HCC* 112.
27. Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 34–35.
28. Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 108.
29. Kavoulakos, Konstantinos. 2011. ‘Back to History?’ in *Georg Lukács Reconsidered: Essays on Politics, Philosophy, and Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Thompson. 151–171. New York: Continuum, 2011. 164.
30. Lukács, *Wii.272*: ‘der – scheinbar – paradoxe Tatbestand, daß das Jahrhundertere, manchmal sogar Jahrtausende lang kaum veränderte “Recht” primitiver Gesellschaftsformen einen fließenden, irrationalen, in den Rechtsentscheidungen stets neu entstehenden Charakter hat, während das sachlich fortwährend und stürmisch umgewälzte moderne Recht ein starres, statisches und fertiges Wesen zeigt.’ Lukács *HCC* 97.
31. Lukács, *Wii.272*: ‘Die Paradoxie erweist sich jedoch als scheinbar, wenn bedacht wird, daß sie bloß daraus entsteht, daß dieselbe Sachlage das eine

- Mal vom Standpunkt des Historikers (dessen Standpunkt methodisch "außerhalb" der Entwicklung selbst liegt), das andere Mal vom Standpunkt des miterlebenden Subjekts, vom Standpunkt der Einwirkung der betreffenden Gesellschaftsordnung auf sein Bewußtsein betrachtet wird.' Lukács, *HCC*, 97.
32. Lukács, *W* ii.272–273: 'Und mit dieser Einsicht wird es zugleich klar, daß sich hier auf anderem Gebiete der Gegensatz des traditionell-empiristischen Handwerks zu der wissenschaftlich-rationellen Fabrik wiederholt: die sich ununterbrochen umwälzende moderne Produktionstechnik steht – auf jeder einzelnen Stufe ihres Funktionierens – als starres und fertiges System den einzelnen Produzenten gegenüber, während die objektiv relativ stabile, traditionelle, handwerksmäßige Produktion im Bewußtsein der einzelnen Ausübenden einen fließenden, sich stetig erneuernden, von den Produzenten produzierten Charakter bewahrt.' Lukács, *HCC* 97.
 33. Lukács, *W* ii.287: 'Aus der verdinglichte Struktur des Bewußtseins ist die modern kritische Philosophie entstanden.' Lukács, *HCC* 110–111.
 34. See Chap. 2.
 35. Lukács, *W* ii.302: 'Hier wiederholt sich jedoch auf philosophisch höherer Stufe die Unlösbarkeit der Fragestellung der klassischen deutschen Philosophie.' Lukács, *HCC* 123.
 36. Lukács *W* ii.328: 'So wird aber das Tun für den Täter selbst transzendent, und die scheinbar errungene Freiheit verwandelt sich unversehens in jene fiktive Freiheit der Reflexion über die einen selbst bewegenden Gesetze, die der geworfene Stein des Spinoza besitzen würde, wenn er ein Bewußtsein hätte.' *HCC* 146.
 37. Lukács, *W* ii.336, Lukács, *HCC* 153.
 38. White, Harrison & White, Cynthia, 1993. *Canvasses and Careers: Institutional Change in the French Painting World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
 39. Riegl, Alois, *Late Roman Art Industry (LRAI)*, trans. Rolf Winkes, (Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1985 [1901]), 24–27.
 40. Riegl, *LRAI*, 224.
 41. Riegl, *LRAI*, 75.
 42. Riegl, *LRAI*, 75.
 43. Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore, David Frisby, & Kaethe Mengelberg, (London: Routledge, 2004), p.205ff.
 44. Husserl, Edmund, 2001. *Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay. London: Routledge. 2 vols, ii.102.
 45. Lukács, *W* ii.287–288: 'Anders ausgedrückt, die moderne Philosophie stellt sich das Problem: die Welt nicht mehr als ein unabhängig vom erkennenden Subjekt entstandenes (z. B. von Gott geschaffenes) Etwas hinzunehmen, sondern sie vielmehr als eigenes Produkt zu begreifen.' Lukács, *HCC*, p.111.

46. Lukács, *W*, ii.306: ‘und es in ein reines – rein formelles – Subjekt zu verwandeln’; *W* ii.302: ‘zu einem *Gesichtspunkt der Beurteilung* von inneren Tatbeständen wird.’ Lukács, *HCC*, 128; 124.
47. Lukács, *W*, ii.265: ‘Die Tätigkeit des Arbeiters immer starker ihren Tätigkeitscharakter verliert und zu einer *kontemplativen* Haltung wird.’ Lukács, *HCC* 89.
48. Lukács, *W*ii.280: ‘Der Akt des Tausches in seiner formellen Allgemeinheit, der ja gerade für die “Grenznutzentheorie” das Grundfaktum bleibt, hebt ebenfalls den Gebrauchswert als Gebrauchswert auf, schafft ebenfalls jene Beziehung der abstrakten Gleichheit zwischen konkret ungleichen, ja unvergleichbaren Materien, aus der diese Schranke entsteht.’ Lukács, *HCC* 104.
49. Lukács, *W* ii.267: ‘die unmittelbare, praktische wie gedankliche Auseinandersetzung des Individuums mit der Gesellschaft ... kann sich nur in dieser Form der rationellen und isolierten Tauschakte zwischen isolierten Warenbesitzern abspielen.’ Lukács *HCC* 92.
50. Lukács, *W* ii.280: ‘So ist das Subjekt des Tausches genauso abstrakt, formell, und verdinglicht wie sein Objekt.’ Lukács, *HCC* p.105.
51. Kant, as cited in Lukács *W*ii.276, *HCC* 100.
52. Althusser, Louis. 1993. *Lenin & Philosophy, and other essays*, trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press.
53. We might ask why Althusser failed to notice this—but given his frank confession in his autobiography that he had barely read Marx, it is not surprising that his reading of Lukács should be so inadequate. In fact, I would speculate that Lukács served mostly as a proxy for the structuralists’ attacks on the humanism they saw in Sartre et al.; given the superficial similarities between existential alienation and Lukács’s reification, they presumably lumped him along with the rest of their foes.
54. Feenberg, *Philosophy of Praxis*. 65–66.
55. Riegl, Alois 1999. *The Group Portraiture of Holland*. (*GPH*) trans. Evelyn M. Kain & David Britt. (Los Angeles: Getty Publications).
56. Riegl, *GPH*, 88–89.
57. Hegel, G.W.F. 1975. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Trans. T.M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 75–81.
58. Lukács *W* ii.319: ‘Wenn Schiller nun das ästhetische Prinzip weit über die Ästhetik hinausspannt und in ihm den Schlüssel zur Lösung der Frage nach dem Sinn des gesellschaftlichen Daseins des Menschen sucht, so kommt dabei die Grundfrage der klassischen Philosophie klar zum Vorschein.’ Lukács, *HCC* 139.
59. Lukács, *W*ii.329–330; Lukács, *HCC*, 147–148.
60. Lukács *W* ii.271: ‘Es entsteht eine rationelle Systematisation aller rechtlichen Regulierungen des Lebens, die einerseits, wenigstens der Tendenz

- nach, ein geschlossenes und auf alle irgend möglichen und denkbaren Fälle beziehbares System vorstellt.' Lukács *HCC*, 96.
61. Lukács's critique of the self-valorization of the legal order has some interesting affinities with Carl Schmitt's contemporaneous critique of the same. See Schmitt, Carl, 2005. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
 62. Lukács *W* ii.261: 'Objektiv, indem eine Welt von fertigen Dingen und Dingbeziehungen entsteht (die Welt der Waren und ihrer Bewegung auf dem Markte).' Lukács, *HCC* 87.
 63. Lukács *W* ii.380: 'das Individuum steht der objektiven Wirklichkeit notwendig als einem Komplex von starren Dingen gegenüber, die es fertig und unverändert vorfindert, denen gegenüber es nur zum subjektiven Urteile der Anerkennung oder der Ablehnung gelangen kann.' Lukács, p.193.
 64. Lukács *W* ii.271–273; ii.307–309; Lukács, *HCC* 97–98; 129–130.
 65. Lukács *W* ii.505: '[die] organisatorisch[e] Gestalt dieses Klassenbewußtseins.' Lukács, *HCC*, 328.
 66. Lukács, *W* ii.480: 'in dem es sich nur darum handelt, das Unbewußte bewußt, das Latente aktuell zu machen usw.' Lukács *HCC*, 304.
 67. Lukács, *W* ii.504: 'damit für die ganze Klasse das eigene Dasein als Klasse ins Bewußtsein gehoben werde.' Lukács, *HCC*, 326.
 68. Lukács, *W*, ii.505: 'Auch theoretisch handelt die kommunistische Partei nicht stellvertretend für das Proletariat.' Lukács *HCC*, 327.
 69. Lukács, *W*, ii.496: 'als *Gesamtkomplexe* stehen sie dem Lauf der Entwicklung bloß *anschauend*, kontemplativ gegenüber. ... [D]ie voluntaristische Überschätzung der aktiven Bedeutung des Individuums (des Führers) und die fatalistische Unterschätzung der Bedeutung der Klasse (der Masse).' Lukács *HCC*, 318.
 70. Lukács *W*, ii.490: 'so wiederholt sich dieses SelbstständiWerden, dieses "sich zur Klasse organisieren" des Proletariats.' Lukács *HCC*, 313.
 71. Lukács, *W*, ii.515: 'indem die kommunistische Partei zu einer Welt der Tätigkeit für jades ihrer Mitglieder wird, kann sie die Zuschauerrolle des bürgerlichen Menschen ... wirklich überwinden.' Lukács, *HCC* 337.
 72. For a fuller account of Lukács's debt to Kierkegaard in this regard, see my 'The Irrational Act: traces of Kierkegaard in Lukács's revolutionary subject,' *Studies in East European Thought*, December 2015. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-015-9240-7>.
 73. For a fuller account of the Dostoevsky notes, see Richard Westerman, 'From Myshkin to Marxism: the role of Dostoevsky reception in Lukács's revolutionary ethics,' forthcoming in *Modern Intellectual History*. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244317000373>.
 74. Marcia Morgan provides a fairly comprehensive demolition of Adorno's lamentable attempt at a critique of Kierkegaard, who, it is plain, he simply does not understand. See Morgan, Marcia, 2012. *Kierkegaard and Critical*

- Theory*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, & Plymouth: Lexington Books.
75. George Pattison, 2013. *Kierkegaard and the Quest for Unambiguous Life: Between Romanticism and Modernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, especially 86–114.
76. Kierkegaard, Søren. 1980. *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. H. & E. Hong. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press. 89.
77. Theunissen, Michael. 1993. *Der Begriff Verzweigung: Korrekturen an Kierkegaard*. Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp.
78. Lukács, W ii.392: ‘Andererseits ist das Werden zugleich die Vermittlung zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft. Aber die Vermittlung zwischen konkreter, d. h. historischer Vergangenheit und ebenso konkreter, d. h. ebenfalls historischer Zukunft. Das konkrete Hier und Jetzt, in dem es sich zum Prozeß auflöst, ist kein durchlaufender, unfaßbarer Augenblick mehr, die entuschende Unmittelbarkeit¹⁷⁴, sondern das Moment der tiefsten und weitestverzweigten Vermittlung, das Moment der Entscheidung, das Moment der Geburt des Neuen. Solange der Mensch sein Interesse – anschauend kontemplativ – auf Vergangenheit *oder* Zukunft richtet, erstarren beide zu einem fremden Sein, und zwischen Subjekt und Objekt ist der un-überschreitbare “schädliche Raum” der Gegenwart gelagert. Erst wenn der Mensch die Gegenwart als Werden zu erfassen fähig ist, indem er in ihr jene Tendenzen erkennt, aus deren dialektischem Gegensatz er die Zukunft zu *schaffen* fähig ist, wird die Gegenwart, die Gegenwart als Werden, zu *seiner* Gegenwart.’ Lukács, *HCC*, 203–204.
79. Lukács, Georg. 2000. *A Defence of ‘History and Class Consciousness’: Tailism and the Dialectic*, trans. Esther Leslie. London and New York: Verso. 55.

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8. ———. 2005. *The Science of Knowing: J.G. Fichte's 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*. Trans. Walter E. Wright. New York: SUNY Press.
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19. Morgan, Marcia. 2012. *Kierkegaard and Critical Theory*. Lanham/Boulder/New York/Toronto/Plymouth: Lexington Books.
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31. ———. 2018. From Myshkin to Marxism: The Role of Dostoevsky Reception in Lukács's Revolutionary Ethics. forthcoming in *Modern Intellectual History*. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244317000373>.
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Self-consciousness and Identity

Lukács's theory is pre-eminently a theory of a revolutionary proletariat: he seeks to explain the rise of a shared and collective subjectivity, and the ways a group of individuals can forge a common identity in order to act together in the transformation of society. It is this that has caused the greatest debate over Lukács's legacy: for many of his critics, it is his apparent reliance on a macrosubject of history that is most problematic about his theory. Whether because they believe he is wrong to identify this macrosubject specifically with *labour* (as for Postone), or wrong more generally to assume that there could be *any* underlying essence that unites any group of individuals as a single subject (as for poststructuralist critics of revolutionary Marxism more generally), they find the hopes he vests in the proletariat to be singularly unpersuasive, leaving him susceptible to the dangerous possibilities of a centralized revolutionary party.

Even recent sympathetic reappraisals of his theory typically stop short of reviving his faith in the proletariat, in part because his preoccupation with *class* consciousness to the exclusion of gender or race now seems quaintly anachronistic, but also because the claims he appears to make for the proletariat as 'identical subject-object' seem implausibly overinflated. Neil Larsen, for example, reads *History and Class Consciousness* as arguing that 'history itself must offer up, immanently, the subject/object synthesis that is to overcome and exist the antinomial treadmills of reification ... otherwise, in the final analysis, even the critical *theory* of reification must,

on its own standards, fall as well.¹ Larsen follows Postone in denying the proletariat's candidacy for such a subject, suggesting instead that 'society itself, the very *possibility* of the social' should serve the role of subject-object.² Timothy Hall rightly rejects Postone's claim that 'Lukács treats labour as an invariant, rather than a historically mediated category,' pointing out that Lukács's analysis extends the commodity form to 'the thinking of the subject-object relations of bourgeois society in their entirety,' and not just labour.³ But in arguing that 'what is at stake in the problem of the commodity for Lukács is not simply the extraction of surplus value and the overthrow of class-based forms of social domination, but the very possibility of a meaningful or worthwhile life,' Hall deliberately steps away from the problem of class agency, and suggests instead that '*ontological novelty* – and not identity – is the animating principle of his thought.'⁴ Konstantinos Kavoulakos perhaps comes closest to redeeming Lukács's concept in offering a new reading of the identical subject-object: while acknowledging Lukács's explicit nods to the proletariat, he suggests that 'one can evoke other passages in order to show that in effect Lukács wanted to mount – with the conceptual resources of dialectics that were available to him – a critique of the philosophy of the subject and its pretension to pin down an immutable basis of the unity of reason.'⁵ Thus, he argues, 'the "proletariat" constitutes rather a theoretical "mask," a notion which represents the *process* whereby the universal breaks forth in history.'⁶ Even Kavoulakos's nuanced and positive reading, then, treats the particular arguments Lukács makes about proletarian class consciousness as proxies for claims going beyond the proletariat, and hence not intrinsically interesting or fruitful in themselves.

While Lukács's *specific* claim he makes in pointing to the proletariat as the locus of a revolutionary consciousness is not ultimately persuasive, I will argue that the methods and arguments he develops in relation to this problem hold greater interest and potential than they are normally allowed. I argued in the previous chapter that Lukács offers a formal theory of the Party that emphasizes structural mutability and the active incorporation of agency through organizational work. What is at stake in this chapter is the question of concrete *identity*: in what sense can the Party be described as the self-consciousness of the working class? Despite its flaws, Lukács's answers offer some useful ways to think about the construction of a shared group identity in a social movement.

It is here that a phenomenological account focused on the meaningfulness of experience is most fruitful. Relying on very specific moments in

History and Class Consciousness, I claim that Lukács links the meaningfulness of one's experience with one's sense of identity, suggesting that an individual's sense of meaning may be connected to broader social webs of significance. Lukács makes neither argument explicitly, so at some points I shall be exploring what his work implies, rather than what he tells us. Moreover, the claims he *does* make regarding the contradictory consciousness of the proletariat are themselves on shaky foundations, straddling the boundary between psychology and formal phenomenology in uncomfortable fashion—though I will offer a more moderate reading that perhaps salvages some of his intent. Nevertheless, this will be my most speculative argument both as a reading of Lukács and in the social-theoretical concepts that emerge from this interpretation.

It is important to point out, though, that Lukács's argument here implies a change in emphasis in his use of terms like 'subject' and 'consciousness.' Hitherto, 'subject' has designated the subject-pole, or the structurally defined intentional act as part of the overall complex of the meaning of an object: the subject is that which is oriented towards its object in its attitude towards it. However, as Husserl had pointed out, the temporality of consciousness relies on a subject that exceeds any individual act of consciousness. When we walk around a box, for example, this phenomenon includes the images we have just had of it (*retention* of past sense-data) and our expectation that the box will continue as we make our way around (*protention* of future experiences). This is built into the momentary act of consciousness, pointing to an ego that goes beyond this act: its transcendence is immanent to this temporal continuity. It is *this* sense of the subject that Lukács now draws on to make his argument—the individual that exists across mental acts, not the particular subject-position associated with single acts. By extension, 'consciousness' comes to designate the sum total of experience of that subject across time: Lukács explores it from the perspective of the individual whose consciousness it is, rather than the meaningful objects it manifests.

The core problem of this interpretation will be the capacity for meaning in experience—the very same problem that Lukács had sought to resolve in the Heidelberg drafts by way of the work of art as a self-validating sphere of meaning. His analysis of the individual's situation under capitalism is directly preoccupied with the meaninglessness of experience. In this respect, though I see more potential in Lukács's account than do Hall or Kavoulakos, my interpretation is compatible with theirs. For Hall, it is (substantive) meaning and its absence in contemporary society that is the

guiding concern of Lukács's theory; I will suggest that it is shared meaning brought to explicit form (in ways analogous to art) in the Party that is the foundation of collective subjectivity. Both Hall and Kavoulakos, moreover, reject the notion of the proletariat as some kind of fixed and latent substance. As Kavoulakos argues, 'if the proletariat itself constitutes a collectivity that is being constantly redetermined in both its consciousness and its practice, then its idealist interpretation as a preexisting essence in search of its appropriate expression in reality is simply mistaken.'⁷ Similarly emphasizing the mutability of any potential agent, Hall states that 'only when subjectivity is thought of as historical through and through – with no aspect of subjectivity considered invariant and thereby exempt from the process of historical becoming – will the diremption of subject and object be truly overcome.'⁸ The interpretation of Lukács I will offer is in line with these stipulations (with which I am in complete agreement). The Party can be understood by analogy with Fiedler's account of the work of art: it is a collective bringing-to-form of the proletariat's lived experience, such that it constitutes them as a class. Though I shall offer serious reservations about Lukács's strict identification of the proletariat as the sole potential collective subject, his theory offers a way to think of the importance of social movements and institutions as manifestations of an ever-developing shared consciousness.

I shall outline this case in three stages. First, I shall examine the structuring of the *individual* consciousness. In effect, Lukács intends consciousness under two different aspects—both as consciousness *of* this or that and as *my* consciousness or personal experience and memories. Just as the objects contained within consciousness are disclosed through valid forms, so too is consciousness as a whole in the second sense structured and organized. These structures are what determine consciousness as meaningful (or not). Particular experiences gain their meaning by their formal relationship to one another, and to the social world perceived as a totality; this implies at least the potential for a continuity of meaning between 'internal' experience and the 'external' world. Second, Lukács applies his account of the subject-object relationship to individual experience: the relation between a subject and its experience is structured in the same way as the relation between that subject and the social world perceived as external to it. That is, the 'I' stands in a definite position relative to its determinate forms. This decides whether or not the 'I' finds continuity or disjuncture between its 'private' or 'internal' experience and its objective social being—or, put differently, whether or not it truly identifies

with its social being. This potential for disjuncture is what Lukács depends on in identifying the potential of the proletariat to disrupt reification. It is the fact that their labour time is—uniquely—determined as belonging to both their ‘private’ and their ‘public’ selves that generates a contradictory consciousness, Lukács argues. While I find this argument unsatisfactorily narrow, I will offer some suggestions for a more charitable use of his approach. Finally, I will explain the Party in terms of a progressive interpretation of the meaning of proletarian experience under capitalism. The *formal* fluidity I outlined in the previous chapter is only a precondition; the Party must bring to form the specific content of the experiences of the group it purports to represent. Insofar as it successfully discloses these experiences in coherent forms, it can be described as the conscious being of the class.

I CONSCIOUSNESS AND EXPERIENCE

Thus far, I have argued that Lukács treats consciousness as the realm or level of the social being of objects. Objectively, social things ‘exist’ through meaningful, determinate forms governed as a whole by the relations between objects, and manifest in intentional practices towards them. In this sense, the structures of consciousness apply to the objects disclosed within consciousness: they are the forms essential to the thinkable or knowable being of objects, in the sense of Lask’s aletheiology. From this perspective, the subject is treated as a position or standpoint from which the whole ‘makes sense’ in the terms determined by those structures—but otherwise it plays a relatively minimal role.

This is only half the story. In identifying the commodity structure as the defining principle of capitalist social reality, Lukács repeatedly insists that it simultaneously determines subjective experience. Thus, in his allusion to Riegl, Dilthey, and Dvořák, he notes that the forms they identify determine both the ‘inner and the outer life’ of humans in that society.⁹ Elsewhere, he argues that Marxist method means that ‘history becomes the history of the forms of objectivity which mould humanity’s environment *and inner world*.’¹⁰ ‘Inner’ here designates the sense in which consciousness or experience is *personal*: objects are not simply things perceived, but are also the contents of this or that subject’s experience (e.g. as memories). As Vajda has noted, Lukács’s explanation here has certain affinities with that made rather later by Husserl in his account of the intersubjective constitution of the lifeworld.¹¹ The forms of social being are objective

insofar as they are shared and supra-personal, but as *conscious* forms, they also at the same time imply subjects directed towards them in certain ways. Consciousness is also experience, and the forms within which objects are disclosed are, from this other perspective, the forms governing experiences as a whole. The forms that merely coordinate the objects are the direct, immanent forms of consciousness itself.

Consequently, Lukács treats the concept of ‘reification’ as directly applicable to consciousness as such. He repeatedly uses phrases such as ‘the effects of reified consciousness’ or statements such as ‘the reified structure sinks ever deeper, more fatefully, and constitutively into the consciousness of man.’¹² What is noticeable about these formulations is that it is not objects or social institutions that are reified, but consciousness *itself* as the realm of being that is so structured under the rule of the commodity form. This is most clear in our sense of *time*. Recall: for Husserl time is one of the fundamental dimensions of the appearance of objects: both retention and protention rely on an organic continuity of experience both for objects to be meaningfully composed and for subjects to have a sense of themselves as the ego that transcends this or that act of consciousness. Lukács infers, then, that restructuring temporality will restructure the self. Where the worker’s time is sold by the hour, consciousness itself undergoes a fundamental change: the contemplative attitude produced by the commodity structure ‘transforms the basic categories of the immediate attitude of a person to the world: it reduces space and time to a common denominator and brings time down to the level of space.’¹³ In consequence, Lukács argues, we relate to our own experiences in the same manner:

Time thereby loses its qualitative, changing, flowing character: it ossifies into a delimited, quantitatively measurable continuum, filled with quantitatively measurable ‘things’: it becomes a space. With such an abstract, measurable time that has become a physical space as its environment (*Umwelt*), which is at the same time both a prerequisite and a consequence of the economically-mechanically divided and specialized production of the object of work, the subject itself must correspondingly be rationally fragmented.¹⁴

Note here the transformation of experience as such through the application of a particular structure to it. It is this that Lukács means in describing ‘the reification of consciousness’: the internal structure of the individual’s experience as a whole mirrors the external fragmentation of the world of objects. Consciousness as a whole is divided up into discrete experiences—

that is, complexes of objects, events, and actions gathered into singular units by the same overall structures of consciousness that govern the disclosure of objects. The worker's temporality is reduced in both theory (as the hour of socially necessary labour producing a set quantity of value) and in practice (as the repetitive work performed in that segment of their daily experience) to a universal, measurable standard: the worker's 'performance'—the actions taken, the experience of engaging with co-workers and with the machine—all become packaged up as discrete experiences, related to one another through the commodity structure.

This has three consequences. First, it demonstrates the continuity of 'inner life' and 'external environment' for Lukács, implying that the same structural principles determine both at the same time. Consciousness of the world is at the same time experience for the subject—as Husserl's clarification of the noetic-noematic structure of experience made clear. Consequently, reified consciousness and the reification of social forms are simply two sides of the same coin; the reification of one logically entails the reification of the other. Second, it follows that the hour of experience is *at the same time* the determinate social being of the worker: it is through the sale of this hour as commodity that the worker is brought into social relations. This double determination of the labour hour as both commodity and experience plays a significant role in Lukács's explanation of the way reification is disrupted for the proletariat, as I shall explain below. Third, the reduction of experience to identical, abstractly determined hours renders that experience meaningless, and leads, as Lukács indicates, to the 'fragmentation of the subject.' It does so by reducing the formal structure of consciousness to abstract universals imposed on experience, so depriving it of any inherent meaning it might have.

Lukács's account of the meaning of experience relies here on a model similar to the one he used to analyse artworks as meaningful validities in his Heidelberg drafts. Recall his claim that it was through the *work* that the experience expressed therein first acquired significance, by the organization of each of its experiential elements around a standpoint that relates them coherently. In order to attain such a standpoint, the artist must steer a course between Scylla and Charybdis in bringing experience to form. While the 'dilettante' would seek crude and direct expression by presenting almost-raw experience in the work, Lukács also criticized the work created by a 'virtuoso' who imposed perfect form without regard to content, so choking the capacity of the substantial elements of the work to generate their own meaning. The truly meaningful work of art, he suggests, allows

meaning to flow from the coming-to-form of contents, not the subordination of the stuff of experience to a predetermined scheme.

Lukács's critique of the virtuoso is echoed in his diagnosis of the problems reification produces in the individual consciousness. The imposition of an abstract, quantitative form on the temporality of experience, negating any specific contents, is what renders it meaningless. In this case, the experience is the worker's 'performance' at the machine, defined as the repetitive labour performed per hour of wage labour. These actions do not stem from the worker: they are dictated by the machinery of production, categorized only as the addition of a small amount of labour to a product that they never see completed. The performance of one action does not produce the next action along the way; the following act is identical, not a development of the previous one. Consequently, individual experiences are linked only by their homogeneity, rather than as a coherent, developing chain.¹⁵ The result is like the virtuoso's work: the imposition of pure, abstract forms deprives both individual experiences and the whole of any substantial meaning for the experiencing subject. Instead, a 'living life' would be one in which experience was not constrained by forms, imposed *post festum* on the stuff of experience.¹⁶ This does not imply that experience could be directly meaningful without any standards of coherence: this would be to fall into the trap of dilettantism. But a meaningful life must at least ground its self-interpretation on real experiences. Under pre-capitalist production, for example, 'the traditional amalgam of empirical work experiences' gives the individual's labour such coherence—one stage of the work leads to the next.¹⁷ It is the *substance* of the work performed, rather than a purely formal succession of identical moments, that brings the work day together.

This of course raises the question of the sorts of forms appropriate to a meaningful life. Here, I think, Hall is correct to insist that 'the model for this is aesthetic reason, in the sense that aesthetic form is both nonsubsumptive and putatively rational. Through the interpretation of artworks it becomes possible to derive new discursive forms that exceed and extend existing categories of understanding.'¹⁸ Art may not be obviously 'rational': its capacity for emotional expression seems antithetical to reason. But Hall's implication is that rationality need not designate a priori abstraction or universalism. Artworks have an interpretable, coherent form; there are, bluntly, reasons for the choices the artist makes in both details and the overall scheme of the work. The work coheres—it is *valid*—according to

a structure that arises in dialogue with its content rather than being imposed from above; we can easily imagine that a particular aspect of the work might seem incongruous and hence irrational according to its internal standards. Aesthetic rationality describes this more open, polyvocal understanding of reason; it does not reify rationality itself as exclusively abstract, but opens the concept of reason up to transformation. Lukács's critique of the reification of consciousness suggests a similar attitude towards finding one's experience meaningful. But when daily life consists instead of repetitive, abstractly structured, identical moments, both the particular experience and life as a whole are emptied of significance.

Of course, the individual's experience is not exclusively internal; it may also generate significance from its relation to a broader social horizon. Lukács's explanation of why this is not the case under the sway of the commodity structure inverts his earlier explanation of the inability of creator and percipient to grasp the artwork as a self-enclosed totality of meaning. His Heidelberg drafts had argued that both artist and audience risked interpreting elements of the work in the context of their own lives, so disrupting its inner harmony. In contrast, the 'Reification' essay suggests that the individual's experience becomes problematically self-enclosed and detached from larger networks of meaning that might be found in other social forms of social labour. His complaints that modern factory production 'tears apart those bonds that had, in the time of "organic" production, bound individuals together as a community,' seem at first glance as though Lukács is pining for a prelapsarian, more 'natural' form of social bond, but the problem is again one of the tyranny of form over content.¹⁹ Capitalist manufacture represents the unity of society in a commodity in which numerous formally identical labourers contribute abstract quantities of labour. In contrast, traditional manufacture has an 'organic necessity by which related particular operations are unified in the product': it establishes substantial relations between workers who rely on concrete contributions from one another, founding cooperation on real differences in abilities, on matters of content and not only of form.²⁰ This produces a horizon of socially generated meaning: society itself appears concretely integrated, while the individual's experience acquires significance in relation to the entirety of that world. Thus, though reversing the direction of his argument here, Lukács draws on the same phenomenological theory of meaning derived from Husserl's mereology that he had used in Heidelberg. Meaning can be generated by the relation of parts and wholes; in this case,

it is desirable that the individual's life be so related to social meanings more generally, rather than enclosed in itself. The isolated individual of bourgeois society is denied the chance to enrich their experience through its relation to the broader social world.

2 THE STRUCTURE OF INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

The meaningfulness of consciousness as a whole is what, for Lukács, grounds self-consciousness and identity. Rather than assuming the substantial existence of a subject outside of consciousness, one which possesses and is reflected in its experience, Lukács defines this subject in terms of an intra-consciousness relation to its experience as its own. The 'I' emerges as a particular configuration of meaningful experience; the relations between this personal experience and the social world disclosed in consciousness determine the kind of social existence that the individual perceives itself as having. Under capitalism, Lukács implies, this produces a divided self—a public self, from which the I is distant, and a private self, the locus of personal meaning standing outside social relations. It is this division that Lukács relies on in identifying the proletariat as having the potential to surpass reification. The revolutionary role he affords the working class has, of course, been the most contested aspect of his theory: it is often assumed that his argument rests on granting the proletariat a position outside of social relations that offers a better or more accurate perspective on it. On the contrary, I will suggest that his explanation remains entirely immanent to consciousness: it is because their self-consciousness is uniquely dichotomous and contradictory that the proletariat may be the site at which reification begins to crack. While his account is still not entirely persuasive, it offers a more flexible way to think about the possibility for those in disadvantaged sectors of society to see through a dominant understanding of reality.

For many of Lukács's critics, his erroneous faith in the proletariat requires him to grant this class a substantial existence outside social relations—for example, as the source of the labour that drives the capitalist economy and hence produces social relations; his account of reification is so total, they suggest, that such an external standpoint is necessary if he is to explain its overcoming. But this apotheosizes the proletariat as *deus ex machina*, never grounding their standpoint. Such interpretations overlook Lukács's repeated insistence that the subject is located within the meaningful structures of its own experience, directly produced through the

structures of consciousness. Unlike the epistemological subject, which possesses and is hence thinkable in principle as distinct from its experience, Lukács's subject does not exist outside that experience, as a perspective on the world. Recall his claim that capitalist models of labour reduce the temporal flow of experience to 'abstract, precisely measurable ... physical space': this same structure means that 'the subjects must themselves be rationally fragmented too.'²¹ This claim—that the subject is fragmented *because its experience is fragmented*—locates the self within its own experience. Consequently, quoting Marx's statement that 'time is the space of human development,' Lukács states that the (temporal, spatial) categories governing our experiences 'must appear [*erscheint*] to the worker as the decisive, qualitative categories of his entire physical, intellectual, moral etc existence.'²² Lukács's use of the Hegelian *erscheinen* is significant here: as opposed to mere *Schein* or 'appearance,' *Erscheinung* designates a stronger sense of 'manifestation.'²³ Thus, applying Hegelian logical categories to consciousness understood on a Husserlian, phenomenological model as a realm of its own kind, he suggests the workers are not misrecognizing themselves in these categories: they are an authentic manifestation of the way their experience is governed by the commodity structure.

The particular way in which the subject exists in its experiences is, once again, in terms of an intentional stance—in this case, towards individual experiences. In analysing the relations of creator and audience to the experience crystallized in the artwork in his Heidelberg drafts, Lukács described these attitudes in terms of standpoints, albeit ones that, being external to the work as such, prevented grasping it as a self-enclosed totality. He uses the same model to explain the social subject's relation to its experience, and the kinds of meaning that this produces. As he puts it, the commodity relation 'impresses its structure on the whole consciousness of humans: their qualities and abilities are no longer bound to the organic unity of the person, but are instead manifest (*erscheinen*) as "things," which the person "possesses" and "disposes of" just like all the other objects of the external world.'²⁴ Here, reified experience is fragmented in the same way as objects in the social world: its parts become alienable, viewed as mere property to be manipulated and moved around, and no longer part of one's intimate personal experience; the subject is defined as a particular intentional stance towards this experience. As Lukács explains in a different context, for the reified consciousness, such forms of capital 'must become the true representation of its social life. ... For the reified consciousness, it thus necessarily becomes the form in which its actual immediacy is manifest, and

which – as reified consciousness – it does not even attempt to go beyond.²⁵ This focus on ‘social life,’ *gesellschaftliche Leben*, is significant: it points to the distinction between one’s public and private being—or, as he puts it in the case of the proletariat, ‘the separation of labour power from the personality of the worker, their transformation in to a thing, in to an object which they sell in the market.’²⁶ Echoing his Heidelberg-era methodological distinction between the meaning of an element of experience understood within the creator’s or audience’s life, or within the work as a self-enclosed totality, Lukács defines the meaning of experiences by the whole of which they are part. To the degree that any particular element of experience derives its meaning from its relations within the *individual* consciousness, as part of a coherent ‘biography,’ it is the subject’s own personal, ‘internal’ experience, or related to the self; if its meaning is determined instead by its position within social relations it is ‘public.’ It is the commodity structure that impoverishes experience when it defines these two wholes as mutually exclusive.

It is this absolute separation of public and private that leads, Lukács argues, to the isolation of the individual under capitalism. We experience such a complete loss of control over the social system because we perceive ourselves—as private citizens—to be entirely outside it, not in any meaningful or substantial relation to our fellow citizens. Though our experience is integrated into society, it is only in the most abstract sense, and to the degree that it is intended as separable from us. Here, however, different standpoints yield a range of possible divisions of consciousness. The proletariat, he suggests, is only integrated in the most formal and abstract way into social relations. The worker’s social being is pure and unadulterated labour: all that is required is the performance of empty, repetitive work, sold to the capitalist at a set wage for the time it is performed. The social value of the very hours of the workers’ experience—their very *meaning*—is determined solely by impersonal, quantifying structures that have nothing to do with the personal content on which they are imposed, and which treat the quirks and foibles of the individual as ‘mere sources of error.’²⁷ The blank abstraction of their socially determinate existence is entirely separate from their personal narrative.

In contrast, the labour performed by, say, journalists or bureaucrats might explicitly incorporate certain ‘personal’ properties—as Lukács puts it, ‘in other forms of work [the commodity form] is hidden behind a façade of “mental labour,” “responsibility” etc.’²⁸ He points rather harshly to journalism as the most contemptible form of such labour, stating that

‘the “lack of principles” of the journalist, the prostitution of their experiences and beliefs can only be understood as the pinnacle of capitalist reification.’²⁹ The newspaper leader writer or opinion columnist, required to deploy their supposedly distinct voice to order in producing an article arguing for the view of their employer, is, in Lukács’s eyes, selling their most personally significant elements—their voice, their style, their view—as a commodity. His language telling alludes to the notion of the virtuoso introduced in his Heidelberg drafts: ‘the specialized “virtuoso,” the vendor of their objectified and reified mental faculties become not only a passive observer of society ... but also takes on a contemplative attitude towards the functioning of their own objectified and reified faculties.’³⁰ These individuals may believe themselves integrated into social relations on the basis of their personal characteristics—the bureaucrat through a sense of ‘honour,’ the journalist by their convictions—but these elements are all still reduced to the abstraction of the commodity structure, socially determined as little more than empty value. The same dichotomy between public and private being remains, except that the bureaucrat and the journalist surrender even more of themselves to the side of the commodity.

It is the particular form of the public/private distinction in the proletariat’s experience that disrupts the reification of consciousness. Lukács explains this, in other words, through a contradiction *within* the meaning-structure of consciousness, and not (as his critics have assumed) between a reified social system on the one hand and a substantial, spiritualized subject on the other. The contradiction appears by comparison with one other class whose experience is so thoroughly divided between public and private—the bourgeoisie. Like the proletariat, their primary interface with society takes place through the exchange of value-defined commodities. But it is their relation to this commodity—the degree to which it is intended as ‘internal’ or ‘external’ to them, and whether or not they are determined as relating actively or contemplatively towards it—that drives these two classes to different perspectives. The capitalist’s interaction with society takes the form of money or capital—they are represented socially by the money they advance.³¹ This capital is entirely external: in neither form nor content is it intrinsically linked to the private experience of the subject. It appears to the capitalist simply as a means to an end—rather as Simmel had portrayed money as a social form, as fundamentally *outside* a subject defined a priori. Consequently, they remain existentially disconnected from any rise or fall in the sum of money: even if the capitalist loses all their capital, they are seemingly unaffected as *private* beings, because

what is most essential to them as *subjects* remains untouched. Conversely, they remain external to society: they place their capital within it, and it goes on its merry way, but are never changed by their social interactions. The standpoint from which they understand society, then, produces the contemplative attitude so characteristic of reification.

As vendors of labour power, proletarians are in the first instance just as isolated as any other individual exchanging commodities. But, for Lukács, the sale of labour power differs from that of any other commodity because it involves (as we saw above) a central phenomenological dimension of subjectivity—*time*, in the sense that the commodity sold is labour time. The determinate existence of the proletarian—its form within the structure of society, how it knows itself as a social being—is commodified time, temporality reified and treated as an object. But unlike money, which remains external to the subject, time is also ‘the defining existential form of their determinate being as subject, as human being.’³² It is the subjective dimension in which objectivity unfolds, within which consciousness is treated as experience. For the capitalist and others, this temporality is purely private: it is this that defines them as the *isolated* individuals of bourgeois society, because their substantial experience does not ground their relations to others. They are at least assumed to retain a private sphere outside social relations. Yet for the proletarian, this very temporality is the commodity they sell and integrate into society as a value. For the worker ‘*every* change is one of quality in its innermost essence.’³³ The increase or decrease of labour time is, in other words, *both* an increase or a decrease in the quantity of the commodity sold, *and also* a direct deprivation of the subject’s experiential being. The same element of consciousness is determined in two sharply contradictory directions.

This double determination of the labour hour makes ‘the social existence [*gesellschaftliche Sein*] of the worker and the forms of their consciousness [*Bewußtseinsformen*] dialectical.’³⁴ The proletarian experiences their consciousness as contradictory in both form and content. In the first place, the worker’s social being is unavoidably linked to their experience, in a way that is simply not the case for the capitalist. The worker’s only commodity, labour time, is ‘inseparable from his physical person,’ so its sale and integration into the economic system is, quite directly, the integration of the worker as a substantive individual into social being.³⁵ Unlike the capitalist, they cannot keep their formal subjectivity as commodity trader separate from their substantial identity. But in this very integration into social relations, the worker is treated only as a ‘number reduced to a

pure, abstract quantity, a mechanised and rationalized tool.³⁶ The contradiction of form and content is experienced within the worker's own life: on the one hand, their time remains subjective and personal; on the other hand, it is determined as nothing more than an abstract value. And, unlike the bureaucrat or the journalist, this form of objectivity is absolute: *all* that the worker is defined as contributing is the universal value of their labour, with no subjective contribution expected in its performance—nothing more than obedience to the manager's instructions and the demands of the machine. This rigidly abstract social being collides directly with the lived experience of the individual: it is a 'dialectical opposition of quantity and quality.'³⁷

At the same time, the worker experiences a formal contradiction between the self as subject and as socially determined object. Interpellated as private citizen outside of social relations, capitalists enjoy the illusion of agency in the sale and purchase of commodities separable in principle from themselves: they appear as subjective in the limited sense of manipulating the movement of objects that are nevertheless determined by a principle alien to them. At first glance, the proletariat shares this limitation of subjectivity, as the independent individual supporting themselves through the sale of their labour as commodity. But with this very transaction, 'in their social being, the workers are immediately placed *entirely* on the side of the object: they appear (*erscheint*) to themselves immediately as an object and not as the agent of the social labour process.'³⁸ The value of the worker's commodity is determined objectively in relation to the socially necessary standard of labour, while their lives are governed entirely by these impersonal economic forces. As Lukács's use of *erscheinen* indicates, the problem is one of a contradiction within phenomena, not between phenomena and a reality supposed to lie beneath them—a point reinforced by the contrast he draws between the proletariat and pre-capitalist labourers, serfs, and slaves. The latter are directly determined as objects of the social process driven by the ruling powers, whereas the commodity structure shaping the proletariat's social relations presupposes that the worker is simultaneously determined as a subject outside the system of relations. Rather than a contrast between objective social structures and a latent, hidden human essence, then, Lukács builds his case on this formal contradiction within consciousness.

The double determination of the worker produces, then, a double contradiction—which plays the decisive role in disrupting the reification of consciousness. In the first place, it is this that brings about the dialectical

overcoming of the isolated individual. Objectively determined as a commodity, the worker is made aware of the social character of labour even as they act as independent vendors of their own work. They are themselves directly commodities: as Lukács puts it, this contradiction produces the ‘*self-consciousness of the commodity*.’³⁹ Once again, his language indicates the phenomenological thrust of his argument: the proletariat really is determined as a commodity in capitalist social being; this is no epistemic error. (Indeed, he goes on to distinguish such conscious being quite sharply from ‘consciousness “of” an object’ which could appear ‘without altering the nature of the relation between consciousness and object.’⁴⁰) Conscious that they are commodities, therefore, the workers may become conscious of themselves as social, and of their class relations to capital as a whole. Moreover, this same recognition reveals that social being does not consist of a set of relations between objective things, but rather between humans. It produces something like the external coherence Riegl had identified in Dutch art: the structure of determinate social being is now shown to depend on human action, not on the formal waltz of reified capital and labour. Lukács is careful in his manner of expressing this: as he puts it, ‘*this discovery brings about an objective structural transformation in the object of its discovery*.’⁴¹ That is, when the proletariat-commodity becomes conscious, it is determined differently: it appears as *my* labour in social relation to others. These relations are thereby manifest as the kinds of cultural practice that Feenberg rightly sees in Lukács’s theory.⁴² Lukács emphatically does not mean here that the object itself changes in the sense that this recognition directly transforms society. Rather, it means simply that what had seemed ‘natural,’ automatic, and ‘real’ is revealed instead as contradictory and riddled with difference. It is at this point that it becomes possible (albeit not inevitable) for objective commodity relations to be disclosed as ‘an unbroken production and reproduction of the self-same relation,’ and for social being to be determined as something we *do* rather than something we *are*.⁴³

Lukács’s explanation of the surpassing of reification does not, therefore, depend on a proletarian subject that exists in principle outside of consciousness, theoretically capable of sloughing off the effects of reification and restoring an unsullied perspective towards and capacity to act on society. Rather, here, as throughout the ‘Reification’ essay, he determines the subject within consciousness, and in particular in relation to its own experience. It is the internally contradictory manner of this determination that breaks through reification. On this interpretation, Lukács avoids the

charge that he sought, as Arato and Breines put it, to express reality as the ‘deed of a subject.’⁴⁴ He draws in subtle ways on both Hegel and the phenomenological *mélange* of Lask and Husserl that had informed his Heidelberg works. Once again, he uses Hegel’s logical categories, identifying a dialectical contradiction between essence (*Wesen*) and appearance (*Erscheinung*) in the clash between formal and substantive subjectivity. But the contradiction appears within the distinctly phenomenological realm of meaning—not between a subject and an opposed object. The problem, I have suggested, lies within the very way reified social being intends its objects, and the subject-pole associated with this structure. His account therefore draws together these two different strands of thought in innovative ways.

Nevertheless, such a formulation of his case brings new problems of its own. At one level, Lukács simply ignores the possibility that workers might find any kind of fulfilment whatsoever in their work, or any localized or limited camaraderie with their fellow workers. He describes proletarian labour patronisingly as so entirely mindless and bereft of any possible satisfaction that it must necessarily come into complete contradiction with subjective existence. He ignores too any other possibilities for the individual to relate subjectively to social being in ways that might compensate for the loss of subjectivity involved in the sale of one’s labour—for example, as a consumer with the capacity to choose between a range of items or brands offered for sale. Such interactions offer some kind of subjectivity, however limited; Lukács’s account must remain incomplete as long as he looks only at one side of the worker’s existence, as producer. (And even an analysis of consumption might leave out the determinations of subjectivity and objectivity entailed by, for example, gendered or racialized forms.)

These substantial problems reflect the logical aporias in his argument. The problem Lukács identifies can be described in two ways—as the workers’ lived experience of a lack of control over their life, and as a logical contradiction between subject and object. It is not clear that the experience of the former necessarily brings the latter to consciousness in the sense Lukács’s argument seems to need. Expressed theoretically, the problem here is, ironically, one of appearance and essence in the Hegelian sense: this suffering might be the necessary manifestation of the contradiction in personal experience, but it does not follow that the rational essence of the contradiction itself is similarly conscious. In this case, reality might still appear as reified—and the suffering and self-division it entails would seem like an eternal existential problem, not the product of

a particular set of social relations. Even if the experiential contradiction and the rational contradiction were identical, too much rests on the modality of Lukács's claim: is it the case that the worker *necessarily* experiences this double determination as contradictory—or, more strongly, that this contradiction is conscious as contradiction? Or is it merely *possible* for the worker to do so? Where Lukács's argument suggests that this contradiction *itself* should rise to consciousness, it seems that he falls into the very same trap of which he accuses Hegel: it may be logically necessary that this come to pass, but it does not necessarily lead individuals to acquire an advanced awareness of the nature of social forms.

Read stringently, Lukács does not do enough to show that a contradiction internal to experience should *necessarily* lead to a revolutionary consciousness; his theory under my reinterpretation is still ultimately unsuccessful. This does not mean we need to jettison his general phenomenological analysis of social relations—that general method does not depend on the specific claim that capitalist social relations produce a contradictory and revolutionary consciousness, particularly since the latter argument in fact relies on adducing a second sense of subject and consciousness, as I have explained. But there are still good grounds not to reject the revolutionary portion of his theory *tout court*. First, there is little reason to believe that Lukács saw the possibility of this contradiction as itself *directly* producing revolution or transforming society. In charging him of idealism, certain of his critics (such as Stedman Jones) have assumed he sees the emergence of class consciousness itself as immediately overthrowing reification in its entirety.⁴⁵ As Löwy has rightly pointed out in rejecting such claims, though, Lukács explicitly states only that such consciousness offers the *possibility* of such a transformation.⁴⁶ Lukács repeatedly clarifies that 'their supersession ... cannot therefore be merely a movement of thought, it must also amount to their *practical* supersession as the *actual forms of life in society*.'⁴⁷ The same is true even of the contradiction that might give rise to consciousness: 'the mere fact that this commodity has the possibility of becoming aware of itself as a commodity does not resolve the problem at once.'⁴⁸ Indeed, Lukács even qualifies such self-consciousness as merely a 'possibility,' not something that *necessarily* emerges. Reading Lukács's account as more fluid, then, he sees the situation of the proletariat as perhaps a necessary, but not in itself a sufficient condition for the disruption of reified consciousness. Such disruption is at best highly unlikely (if we relax his conditions here too) for those in other situations, such as the journalist or the bureaucrat, because they do not

experience the contradiction between their subjective and objective social being in so stark a fashion: the commodity they sell has at least the veneer of subjective expression, even if performed in mechanized fashion. While Lukács's forceful language may give the impression that this contradiction will *necessarily* arise in its fullest form, there is ample textual support to read him as suggesting no more than that it is possible. If so, this points towards a nuanced theory of the party as a way that a personal, substantial experience of suffering under capitalism can be raised to consciousness of the formally contradictory structure of reification as a whole. His theory of the party, I shall suggest in the following section, is intended to address precisely this problem.

Moreover, even stripped of his arguments for a revolutionary mass party, there is potential in Lukács's suggestion that contradictions *within* consciousness are what help dominated or sidelined groups emancipate themselves from hegemonic ideologies. At one level, this might help to explain the vexed old problem of why it was so often those of distinctly non-proletarian backgrounds—like Lukács himself, son of a banker of immense wealth—who most loudly proclaimed the need for a total revolutionary transformation of society in the name of the workers. Michael Löwy's brilliant sociological analysis of Lukács as an exemplar of the social category of 'intellectuals' gives some idea of such an argument.⁴⁹ Like the petty bourgeoisie, intellectuals were direct producers, not wage labourers—and they shared the petty bourgeoisie's fear of incipient proletarianization and industrialization, which threatened to cut away their way of life. The intellectual, Löwy suggests, is a producer of ideology—one whose commodity is qualitative values, substantive rather than formal; this would inevitably conflict with the quantifying structures of capitalistic social relations. They too might directly experience capitalist social reality as contradictory, therefore, by virtue of their standpoint upon it. Of course, as Löwy explains, the opposition of many of these intellectuals to bourgeois society took on neo-Romantic and potentially reactionary forms (though he sees Lukács as overcoming this tendency). But a less deterministic reading of Lukács's theory—one justified by his continued insistence that such contradictions produce only the *possibility* of a truly revolutionary consciousness—could include such examples. Contradictions within consciousness do not produce a clear revolutionary consciousness; they only put cracks in the apparently seamless 'reality' of society, as the precondition of further questioning and analysis. Lukács's own account, then, need not be dismissed on the ground that he is not proletarian; while the work-

ers may have a particularly raw experience of the contradictions of capitalist society, other standpoints too may reveal some of the fractures within a given social reality. These standpoints—that of the proletariat or of the intellectuals—do not reveal the absolute truth about society; rather, they are important because it is from these perspectives that social reality *loses* its appearance of completeness and is disclosed instead as inconsistent.

This might be applied outside the specific analysis of capitalistic relations structured by the commodity that are the target of Lukács's own critique. For example, the domination of one part of society by another may continue indefinitely without that producing a consciousness in the dominated part that social structures as a whole need to be transformed. Lukács himself points to the examples of slavery and other dominated classes in earlier forms of society.⁵⁰ Those trapped in such positions may be fully aware that their suffering is due to their social position and may seek to improve their individual situations, without necessarily seeking to overturn the structures that place them there: their situation seems to be the result of an impersonal fate, the will of the gods, or merely the greater power of those oppressing them. So long as their positions are not determined contradictorily, it may be that the majority even embrace the role they are placed in. Thus, though gendered oppression was the norm for the majority of human history, it was not necessarily the case that the majority of women throughout that time sought to overthrow such domination. Because their position was treated as though determined as by 'nature' or 'divine will,' no contradiction was involved in accepting it and living a life in accordance with such norms. As the likes of Phyllis Schlafly illustrate, it was quite possible for women to embrace this position and all that it entailed.

But in a society that determines individuals primarily as active *subjects*, bearers of legal, political, and social rights, the contradiction between subjective and objective social being emerges. There is a clear contradiction between claims of the universal dignity and rights of all humans, and the experience of being objectified by gender, sexuality, race, and so on. The appearance of such a contradiction might thus be expected to give rise over time to more widespread demands for recognition and respect. If this is the case—and I offer this only as a tentative suggestion—this suggests a reinterpretation of Axel Honneth's attempt to reground Critical Theory on notions of respect and recognition. Honneth's argument assumes certain prerequisite transhistorical forms of personal recognition; when these are violated, he suggests, social movements may emerge demanding such

respect.⁵¹ In place of Honneth's ultimately universalist approach, relying on certain a priori assumptions about human nature that apply across time, this interpretation of Lukács suggests a more historically grounded expansion of the way we think about such demands. It is when social relations come to determine the individual in contradictory forms, such that their subjective and objective social being are in conflict, that the demand for progressive change may grow too loud to ignore. But such contradictory consciousness is only the precondition of revolutionary consciousness—it indicates the problem, but not yet the solution.

3 SELFHOOD AND SOCIAL BEING

In the case of the consciousness of the proletariat at least, Lukács acknowledges (I have suggested) that the experience of contradiction alone is only the beginning of the process that culminates in a revolutionary consciousness. An organizational form is necessary if this potential is to be fulfilled—and Lukács places the greatest emphasis on the Party as this form. I argued at the end of Chap. 4 that such a party must be fluid in its forms, such that its members are determined as co-creators of its structures in a manner analogous to Riegl's account of external coherence. But my account there only used the Party as a formal example of an emancipatory social structure. Here, I shall seek to explain Lukács's belief in the need for such a Party if reification is to be overcome. I shall do so by first considering what might happen in the absence of such a Party. Lukács himself considers this problem only briefly, explaining its consequences only in negative terms as a failure to seize the opportunity of revolution. He does not explicitly consider how proletarian experiences of suffering and fragmentation through reification might develop further in concretely harmful ways, such that a reactionary working class movement develops in place of a revolutionary one. However, drawing on some telling comments he makes on the role of the 'great man' figure in bourgeois historiography, I will argue that his theory implies the growth of certain forms of authoritarian populism in response to commodity fetishism—if there is no socialist movement in place as the rational form of working class consciousness. Building on this, I shall then argue that the Party is the way the proletariat exists consciously, in the sense that it comes to rational form—that is, instead of an immediate, shapeless unity, it comes to validity through its self-organization. Just as Fiedler had presented the work of art as a mode of being in which the raw stuff of existence came to organized and mean-

ingful form, so too does Lukács treat the Party as the formed substance of proletarian existence. And, just as the artist's formative work is never complete, so too must the Party constantly transform its structures—at the risk of reverting to reification.

There is, then, a gap in Lukács's narrative: while proletarians may subjectively experience the fragmentation and distress of alienation in its rawest form, it does not *necessarily* follow that they will be conscious of the source of their suffering in the structures of capitalism. Even if they recognize the cause of their deprivation and adopt an anti-capitalist stance, there is no intrinsic reason for this to take a progressive rather than a reactionary form. It is for this reason that Lukács places such emphasis on particular kinds of party organization—and to understand this, it is worth extrapolating from Lukács's argument to understand what might happen in the absence of a party. Notably, his opinion underwent a complete reversal in the years between his conversion to Marxism and the publication of *History and Class Consciousness*: in 'Party and Class,' marking the inauguration of the Hungarian Council Republic and the practical unification of the Social Democrat and Communist Parties in 1919, he had gone as far as to state that '*the parties have ceased to exist – now there is a unified proletariat.*'⁵² By the 'Reification' essay, in contrast, he argues that 'if one tries to attribute an immediate form of existence to class consciousness, one will unavoidably get caught up in mythology: an mysterious species-consciousness (just as mysterious as the "national spirits" of Hegel), whose relation to and effect on the consciousness of the individual is entirely incomprehensible ... appears to be the demiurge governing the process.'⁵³ For this reason, he moderated his general praise of Rosa Luxemburg with the criticism that 'she only overestimated the organic character of this process, and underestimated the significance of conscious, consciously-organisatory elements in it.'⁵⁴ In downplaying the potential role of a Party, Luxemburg assumed that the proletariat could themselves spontaneously arrive at a revolutionary consciousness. This, Lukács suggests, leaves the proletariat open to the risk that their struggle will be co-opted and taken over by other (bourgeois or petty bourgeois) elements. He recognizes, therefore, that the proletariat's direct experience of suffering will not necessarily lead to a revolutionary consciousness in the absence of a party, but offers little explicit analysis: he presents it almost exclusively as a practical problem, without systematic connection to his philosophical account of reification.

It is, though, possible to extrapolate from his account in ways that, I suggest, help understand mass support for totalitarian or authoritarian movements, such as the various fascist governments of the 1930s or populist leaders such as Trump, Erdogan, Orban, or Duterte today. Lukács offers a hint in this direction with a revealing comment on ‘bourgeois’ historiography. From its reified perspective, he states, it treats history in one of two ways: it explains history either through ‘the “Great Men” as self-determining creators of history,’ or as a process of “natural laws” of the historical environment.’⁵⁵ Consequently, ‘the logic of every bourgeois view of history leads to mechanizing the “masses” and irrationalizing the hero.’⁵⁶ This distinction obviously parallels that of the impersonalized, predictable, rational functioning of reified social relations on the one hand, and the ‘irrational’ isolated individual designated as standing outside the borders of society on the other: the sharpness of this distinction is reflected in these two contradictory accounts of historical processes. Needless to say, Lukács’s criticism of such figures precludes the kind of hero-worship entailed by the personality cults of Stalin, Mao, or the Kim dynasty: whatever his own later ethical compromises, *History and Class Consciousness* itself could only condemn such phenomena.

This same insight may partly explain the direction taken by proletarian consciousness in the absence of a party. To take our contemporary example: the 2008 economic crisis led to widespread anger at globalized capitalism far beyond the activist, progressivist left. It produced a general sense of dissatisfaction at the suffering caused by the rationalized, reified structures of late capitalist society—but without the recognition that it was intrinsic to capitalism as such. The fact that the traditional parties of labour (such as the Democrats in the United States or Labour in the UK) had moved to the political centre throughout the 1990s, and that the labour unions that had formed their organizational base had been disempowered by anti-union legislation from governments of both right and left, exacerbated the situation. These older forms of labour organization were undoubtedly flawed, but at least offered the possibility that the working classes could have a rationalizable form. That is, they were brought together with institutional forms that set the terms of validity for presenting their needs, and for understanding their situations. ‘Rational’ in this sense does not presuppose any particular goal, nor does it imply an instrumentally rational attitude towards achieving goals; instead, I mean only that a substantial mass of people was brought to social existence through

determinate practices that regularized their interactions and modes of bringing their grievances to light.

Lacking any coherent organizational form of their own, the working classes since the 1990s directly experienced the problems of capitalism without any way to understand them as a structural feature of a society of isolated individuals. Consequently, it entailed rejection of many individual aspects of the global economy (e.g. hostility to NAFTA in the United States, or formerly industrial areas of the United Kingdom voting heavily to leave the European Union) without questioning the foundations of capitalism as such. Their class consciousness was only immediate and hence irrational: rather than passing through practices that would validate and make coherent their complaints, it was directly associated with signifiers crudely stapled together. It might entail identification of oneself as a ‘decent, hardworking American,’ one of millions simply trying to get by, for example. Moreover, the specific content of this immediate class consciousness can be expected to contain all those elements *excluded* by the abstract social relations that are the source of this plight. In place of these rational forms, society seems to consist of an undifferentiated, irrational unity of shared features: we are joined in society with those who are similar to us, with the same values, ways of life, religious beliefs, lifestyles, and routines. Rather than a structure of relations that coordinates heterogeneity, society comes to be seen as defined by immediate homogeneity—with the result that anything different is viewed as necessarily outside the possible bounds of social relations. Nativism and xenophobia surge: social being takes precisely that ‘mysterious’ form of ‘species-consciousness’ that Lukács identified with Hegel’s *Volksgeist*. It is based on pure, spontaneous subjectivity, on the direct expression of the ‘will of the people’ without any attempt to give this expression a coherent form as such. In certain respects, such class consciousness parallels the failed artwork of the dilettante in Lukács’s Heidelberg drafts. The latter, recall, simply projects their experience into the work without seeking to give it a coherent form—just as such immediate class consciousness simply consists in the direct expressions of a supposed popular spirit.

Corresponding to immediate and expressivist class consciousness, of course, is a rejection of the formal structures of reified capitalism—and of the general demand for validity, coherence, and consistency as such. To the degree such rational forms specifically exclude all the irrational elements that have come to signify group identity, those forms are themselves perceived as alien and threatening. Expertise, rational argumentation, sci-

entific method and evidence—all are denounced in favour in spontaneous expressions of will and feeling. The alienation of people (individuals and ‘the people’) from manifest rational forms is total. Yet the material threat of the global economy to the well-being of individuals remains, no matter how much the retreat into spontaneous and immediate social being entails denying it. This produces two opposed ways to deal with it—which could find no clearer embodiment than the opposing candidates in the 2016 US presidential election. On the one hand, Hillary Clinton represented a technocratic response: accepting the ‘natural laws’ of the socio-economic environment as fundamentally unalterable, she offered measured responses that might ameliorate its problems without damaging the system overall. Her campaign was predicated on her own outstanding credentials and capacity to understand this system from within—and on warning against an irresponsible opponent whose stupidity might lead to the collapse of long-standing institutions. Donald Trump, on the other hand, stood quite proudly as the antithesis of an expert, as epitomized by his claim that ‘nobody knew healthcare could be so complicated’ when seeking to replace the Affordable Care Act without any coherent plan of his own. But Clinton’s criticisms of him missed the point; indeed, for many of his supporters, her warnings against the damage he could do to established rational institutions may only have contributed to his appeal. He stood instead as pure, potent will, untrammelled by formal reason—as the ‘great man’ who could operate outside of these regularized structures. Promising to ‘make America great again,’ and ‘so much winning, you’ll get bored with winning,’ he offered to demolish the global structures that his supporters viewed as the source of their woes by, for example, dismantling NAFTA. His frequent racist and misogynistic utterances were seen only as a tendency to ‘tell it like it is,’ without being bound by ‘political correctness.’ Consequently, his supporters could see in him a champion who might, by sheer strength of character, destroy the same structures that they perceived as the source of their suffering.

From the perspective of Lukács’s theory of the party, the widespread support enjoyed by the likes of Trump and his ilk across the globe is a consequence of the immediacy of class consciousness—its lack of formed, conscious being. Lukács assigns to the Party the task of providing precisely this: it offers a rationalizable structure that discloses the proletariat as a class. His account is continuous with his Fiedlerian understanding of the role of the artist in his Heidelberg drafts. For Fiedler, immediate raw existence was formless; it was only through the artist’s never-completed task of giving

form that the artwork came to be. Though it would be too much to argue that Lukács's account of the party is a direct transposition of Fiedler's thought to revolutionary organization, his theory has the same shape as his earlier account of art. The Party can be described as the bearer of proletarian class consciousness or as the rational form of the proletariat because it is the formed, organized way in which the proletariat exists. It consists of determinate, coherent practices that act as the validity forms of proletarian behaviour. The particular shape of such forms cannot be determined in advance—there is no a priori standard of rationality—but it is nevertheless essential for there to be some mechanisms for organization and formulation of experiences, interests, and demands. As the locus of such self-clarification, the Party is 'rational' in contrast to formless, immediate, validity-free group identity. This does not imply that its members are somehow wiser than the masses they purport to represent; as I indicated in Chap. 4, Lukács repeatedly rejects any idea that the Party acts 'on behalf of the proletariat.'⁵⁷ 'Rational' in this case simply means 'coherently organized, with standards of validity,' as opposed to immediate, 'expressive,' and direct.

Because such forms entail intentional practice, the Party represents more than just knowledge of an objective situation: as Merleau-Ponty rightly states, Lukács does not treat consciousness in the form of an 'I think.'⁵⁸ Rather than being a *cause* of increased class consciousness, the Party *is* that consciousness—it is 'organizational form of this class consciousness,' the way the proletariat has form as a class.⁵⁹ Lukács's argument here is ontological, not epistemological: the Party is not the conveyor of knowledge as much as it is the conscious manifestation—the determinate social form—of the daily life experience and position of the proletariat. It is no mere representation of the proletariat's class position, a diorama for the proletariat to watch and recognize itself in—as he explains, it cannot consist of merely as 'making the unconscious conscious, or the latent, actual.'⁶⁰ Instead, following Lask, he treats the coming-to-form of the proletariat as a qualitative ontological step: strictly speaking, there is no (thinkable) class without organizational form. Thus, 'the organizational independence of the communist party is necessary, in order that the proletariat can see its own class consciousness, as a historical form ... so that, for the whole class, its own existence as a class can be raised to the level of consciousness.'⁶¹ *Bewußtsein* indicates a distinct level of being, or existence within coherent forms; it is not simply *knowledge*, but the mode in which the class *exists* through its intentional practices.

This argument necessarily precludes the leader figure—whether revolutionary or authoritarian populist. Class consciousness cannot be the possession of an individual mind, whether a proletarian or a leader, because it is manifest in social practices which presuppose others with whom one interacts. Where authoritarian populists claim to represent the group immediately and directly, class existence is by definition social: it entails explaining the relation of the group to the rest of society. Rather than simply expressing the will of the proletariat, then, the Party explores its situation within social being, explicating the structure of its experiences in relation to society as a whole: it is inherently mediating. Only the group as a whole can lay claim to such ‘consciousness,’ because it exists in the explicit and formal organization of the group as such. In the first instance, such organization may be motivated by the achievement of this or that immediate practical goal: Lukács states that class consciousness might equally well emerge from a small, disciplined party interacting with the masses, or from a broad mass movement that gradually coalesces into a communist Party.⁶² But in the longer term, such goals are of less importance than that the class comes to an explicit form or understanding of its social being. In other words, consciousness *as such* is more important for the overcoming of reification than any particular objective it helps to attain. Thus, class consciousness can be defined as the determinate social form of the class as a whole—rather than of individual members thereof—and therefore as the way the class exists. Lukács’s language points to a distinct sense of self-consciousness: it does not indicate knowledge of an opposed object, but instead a mode of *being*.

This rejection of consciousness as knowledge prepares the road for the second step of Lukács’s analysis: he insists that this consciousness must be continually performed and carried out. Insisting that ‘freedom ... is something practical, it is an activity,’ he declares that the party must become ‘a world of activity’ for its members.⁶³ The use of ‘world’ here is significant: it is not simply that the party should take up great deal of the workers’ time. Rather, ‘world’ indicates the general principle of a reality as a whole—a social world. Whereas commodity fetishism produces a world of passivity, the Party constitutes a world in which subjects are fully engaged, and not cast outside as isolated individuals. This ‘world’ is constituted differently both at the level of individual experience and in relation to the social world. For the individual, the meaning of experience comes to be determined by their own substantial acts, rather than by the abstract standard of the commodity form. It is experience over which they have a say, rather than shaped

by an external principle; it is complete and integrated, rather than fragmented. Moreover, it produces direct, positive continuity between their personal experience and their social being, in contrast to the contradictory determinations of reified experience. This personal activity is at the same time their social being: it has the same meaning both as part of the individual's life, and within the broader context of social relations: it thereby overcomes the isolation of the individual and shows how subject and object are reconciled in a mutually determining whole. It is this that differentiates Party existence from normal social being—as active agents, individuals are able to relate to the world in a different way. This is well captured, as I have suggested, by Andrew Feenberg's argument that Lukács's use of 'class consciousness' is closely analogous to anthropological notions of culture: consciousness for Lukács is vested in practices, not in contemplative (and hence reified) knowledge.⁶⁴ In particular, such activity is self-directed: it is engaged in the constitution of their collective form, in a bringing-to-being in the Fiedlerian sense.

Just as the work of Fiedler's artist is never done, so too should the workers constantly reshape the party that constitutes their conscious being in an 'unbroken alternation of ossification, contradiction and setting-in-motion' in which the party cycles through a series of fixed forms.⁶⁵ For Lukács, then, the proletariat (and perhaps *any* social movement) needs the institutional form of the party as a place to work on itself, so to speak. As he explained in the *Lenin* book, collective party activity—debate, interpretation, and self-organization—is the practice within which the proletariat can be itself as a class; what it is, it is consciously, through its activity, rather than merely expressing an inherent essence.⁶⁶ The party is the systematization of practices by which the class comes to know itself collectively; these practices change the collective subject so formed, and provoke further change. Consequently, 'it too, *is* not but *is becoming*.'⁶⁷ By giving itself form in the Party, the proletariat is raised to a higher ontological level. Lukács's language once again blends consciousness with ontological implications: rather than *Klassenbewußtsein*, the Party is the proletariat's act of (*Klassen*)*bewußtwerden*.⁶⁸ In phenomenological fashion, he implies that it is only as a meaningful complex that the class truly exists—and it should not, therefore, be understood as a simple representation of a class or group that supposedly exists outside consciousness, or could be directly expressed without formal mediation. The objective form of objective reality is overthrown: at least within the ontic world of Party work, social reality is performed and decided upon by all those involved. To work in a Party, then,

is for Lukács an emancipatory practice as such, because it entails the constant overcoming of reification by the transformation of the structures of their practices.

4 CONCLUSION

Lukács's Communist Party may no longer seem plausible as the answer to all problems of social form—if nothing else, his purely economic focus seems rather quaint in a period that has discovered the importance of identity categories such as gender or race as part of the basic structure of society. But his reasons for focusing on this class are more interesting and fruitful than they are normally assumed to be: rather than locating the revolutionary subject in some undefined Archimedean standpoint outside society in order to understand and act on it, Lukács points to a formal contradiction within the structure of the lived experience of the proletariat. As I have illustrated, he locates the existence of the subject inside its own experience as a structured, meaningful whole; it relates to or intends its experience in ways that define its meaning. Experiences may be 'private' or 'public,' not because of any intrinsic qualities or relation to the subject, but because that is how they are determined within the structure of consciousness. Certain elements of experience are designated as belonging to the subject, while others are defined as social. The reification of consciousness—and in particular, the sale of one's own temporality in the abstract form of labour—is no an epistemological error; it is a fundamental assault on the very self, fragmenting the subject directly. For the proletariat, however, this produces a lived contradiction between one's social and personal being. It is this, he suggests, that disrupts the reification of consciousness—but it can at first only disrupt, not entirely remove or replace it. Overcoming it, I have suggested, is possible only through a specific kind of Party that does not seek to represent the proletariat, but instead to provide the locus for its self-organization as the very social being of the class and its members.

For obvious historical reasons, it is not possible to share Lukács's belief in the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, even if we acknowledge that he saw this only as a possibility, one that could be stymied by the absence of any party structure. Nevertheless, this phenomenological account of his theory fails more productively than the outdated interpretation of *History and Class Consciousness* as a neo-Romantic theory of subjectivity. I shall briefly mention two possible avenues for further exploration—one, directly theoretical; and two, with practical implications

for progressive movements. I offer these only as suggestions in need of much further elaboration—but they indicate some of the potential richness in Lukács's thought.

First, the phenomenological frame of Lukács's argument offers a non-essentializing way to speak about personal and social identity, grounded on similarity of shared experience. What determines the proletariat as a group has nothing to do with characteristics (such as an inherent capacity to labour) it may be supposed to have outside of consciousness understood in sense of meaning-constitutive practices. It lives in its intentional practices, not as a single essence outside of that. Nor is the group united by similarity of its goal (at least not in the final instance). Instead, it is the common meaning of its experience that unifies its members. Their experiences are not only similar—they are subject to the same formal determinants and structures. A common identity that might form the basis of emancipatory claims can therefore be built on the interpretation of these shared experiences as disclosed through self-organization in a party or social institution. Such organization directly shapes the meaning of experience for its individuals, bestowing it with a social significance. This permits the incorporation of a group identity into the individual's sense of their own biography. This in turn produces the group, as it were: it is when the group's existence is raised to the level of consciousness—given institutional form—that it truly starts to *exist* as such. But the constant reinterpretability of experience means that such an identity will never remain fixed, by definition. If an organizational form claims to manifest the meaning of a group's experience, it will change that meaning at the very moment of its disclosure. The significance of the experience in isolation is altered by the understanding of its meaning relative to other experiences. This requires new, altered organizational forms—which in turn alter the new reality they claimed to represent. The phenomenological account of meaningful experience that Lukács suggests therefore points to a fluid and open group identity. To the degree that it becomes fixed, such an identity will come into conflict with the personal experiences of those it purports to represent. Any shared identity is, therefore, possible only if it is made conscious—but then left open to continual revision.

Second, Lukács's account of the party suggests that progressive movements or parties claiming to act in the interests of large groups should be understood as ways of forming that group through a mass democratic organization. The specific objectives to be achieved by any such party are less important in the long term than the degree to which they are capable

of elevating the group or class to conscious being, or by giving mediated, clear form to that group. I mean this as a criticism of technocratic social democratic parties that, when in government, prioritize the implementation of specific social and economic policies aimed at ministering to disadvantaged sectors of society—but in doing so become detached from the groups they are supposed to represent. Such policies can be materially beneficial: the problem is not with them as such. Rather, it is the focus on expertise that is dangerous. As I noted above, in the 1990s major social democratic parties in the capitalist west moved to the political centre. The bureaucratization of their party structure and their takeover by well-meaning technocrats left the working classes disconnected and lacking any manifestation of their social being. However effective such governments were in enacting their policies, their actions could only seem imposed from above upon those they aimed to help: they were reified. This, I suggest, was a major contributory factor in rise of right-wing populist movements: because social democratic and liberal parties aimed to act *for* the masses, instead of mediating their common existence in conscious form, the working classes fell back on irrational and immediate being, focused on right-wing authoritarian populist leaders. Despite the inefficiencies and difficulties of a mass-based movement, then, it is a far better bulwark against the slide into political danger than a focused, technocratic, but detached elite party acting ‘for’ the people.

Moderate technocrats and triangulators might seem like the unlikeliest Leninists, but they share a tendency to act for those they claim to represent. Lukács clearly seems to have been far too optimistic about the tendencies of the Bolshevik party—perhaps conflating it too easily with the soviets—but his theory at least is very different from the reality. The ultimate implication of his theory of the Party is that a mass movement should never be built on a passive mass left only to follow their leaders. Group identity cannot be understood as directly expressing a unity that pre-exists its representation; rather, it is an ever-reconstructed collaborative effort building on shared experience. By focusing on the interactions of people as they generate their own determinate social form together, Lukács shows how the isolation of the individual may be abolished in the creation of a shared and fluid social being. The individual’s identity is constructed as a co-creator or co-member of society, and neither as someone entirely detached or detachable from it, nor as part of a group existing in essence already and in need only of representation. It is this idea of the fluid, open, ever-changing self that Lukács offers as the remedy to reification.

NOTES

1. Neil Larsen. 2011. 'Lukács *sans* Proletariat, or Can *History and Class Consciousness* be Rehistoricized?' in *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence. Aesthetics, Politics, Literature* ed. Bewes, Timothy & Hall, Timothy 81–101. London: Continuum. 85.
2. Larsen, 'Lukács *sans* Proletariat,' 96.
3. Hall, Timothy. 2011. 'Justice and the Good Life in Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*' in *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence. Aesthetics, Politics, Literature* ed. Bewes, Timothy & Hall, Timothy. 121–138. London: Continuum. 135 n.9; 125.
4. Hall, 'Justice and the Good Life,' 127, 131.
5. Kavoulakos, Konstantinos. 2011. 'Back to History? Reinterpreting Lukács' Early Marxist Work in Light of the Antinomies of Contemporary Critical Theory.' *Georg Lukács Reconsidered: Critical Essays in Politics, Philosophy and Aesthetics*. ed. Michael J. Thompson. 151–171. London: Continuum, 162.
6. Kavoulakos, 'Back to History?' 163.
7. Kavoulakos 'Back to History?' 163.
8. Hall 'Justice and the Good Life' 131.
9. Lukács, Georg 1968–1981. *Werke, (W)* 18 vols., ed. György Márkus & Frank Benseler (Darmstadt: Luchterhand), ii.336: 'seines inneren wie äußeren Leben.' Lukács, Georg. 1971 *History & Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, [HCC] trans. Rodney Livingstone. London: Merlin. 153.
10. Lukács *W* ii.375: 'die Geschichte wird zur Geschichte der Gegenständlichkeitsformen, die die Umwelt und die innere Welt des Menschen bilden, die er gedanklich, praktisch, künstlerisch usw. zu bewältigen sich bemüht.' HCC 188, my italics.
11. Husserl, Edmund. 1970 [1954] *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), 172 *et passim*; Vajda Mihály, 1983. 'Lukács and Husserl,' 107–124 in *Lukács Revalued*, e.d Heller, Ágnes et al. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.
12. Lukács, *W* ii.268: 'die Verdinglichungsstruktur [senkt sich] immer tiefer, schicksalhafter und konstitutiver in das Bewußtsein der Menschen hinein.' HCC 98.
13. Lukács *W* ii.264: 'Das kontemplative Verhalten ... verwandelt auch die Grundkategorien des unmittelbaren Verhaltens der Menschen zur Welt: es bringt Raum und Zeit auf einen Nenner, nivelliert die Zeit auf das Niveau des Raume.' HCC 89.

14. Lukács, *W* ii.264: 'Die Zeit verliert damit ihren qualitativen, veränderlichen, flußartigen Charakter: sie erstarrt zu einem genau umgrenzten, quantitative meßbaren, von quantitative meßbaren "Dingen" ... erfüllten Kontinuum: zu einem Raum. In dieser abstrakten, genau meßbaren, zum physikalischen Raum gewordenen Zeit als Umwelt, die zugleich Voraussetzung und Folge der wissenschaftlich-mechanisch zerlegten und spezialisierten Hervorbringung des Arbeitsobjektes ist, müssen die Subjekte ebenfalls dementsprechend rationell zerlegt werden.' *HCC* 90.
15. Lukács's argument here is later echoed by Walter Benjamin, who draws comparisons between gambling and factory work in this regard. See Benjamin, Walter. 1990. 'On some motifs in Baudelaire,' in Benjamin, *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zorn. 52–90. London: Pimlico.
16. Lukács, *W* ii.313: 'lebendigem Leben,' *HCC* 134.
17. Lukács *W* ii.263: 'traditioneller Verknüpfung empirischer Arbeitsfahrungen.' *HCC* 88.
18. Hall, 'Justice and the Good Life,' 131.
19. Lukács *W* ii.264: 'Andererseits zerreit die mechanisierende Zerlegung des Produktionsprozesses auch jene Bande, die die einzelnen Subjekte der Arbeit bei "organischer" Produktion zu einer Gemeinschaft verbunden haben.' *HCC* 90.
20. Lukács *W* ii.263: 'die organische Notwendigkeit der aufeinander bezogenen und im Produkt zur Einheit verbundenen Teiloperationen.' Lukács, *HCC* 89.
21. Lukács, *W* ii.264: 'In dieser abstrakten, genau mebaren, zum physikalischen Raum gewordenen Zeit ... mssen die Subjekte ebenfalls dementsprechend rationell zerlegt werden.' Lukács, *HCC*. 90.
22. Lukács *W* ii.350: 'Die quantitativen Unterschiede der Ausbeutung ... mssen fr den Arbeiter als die entscheidenden, qualitativen Kategorien seiner ganzen physischen, geistigen, moralischen usw. Existenz erscheinen.' Lukács. *HCC* 166.
23. On the distinction in Hegel and Marx, see Hanzel, Igor. 2014, 'The circular course of our representation': *Schein, Grund, and Erscheinung* in Marx's Economic Works,' *Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic: a Reexamination* in Fred Moseley and Tony Smith eds, 214–239. Leiden: Brill.
24. Lukács *W* ii.275: 'Sie drckt dem ganzen Bewutsein des Menschen ihre Struktur auf: seine Eigenschaften und Fhigkeiten verknpfen sich nicht mehr zur organischen Einheit der Person, sondern erscheinen als "Dinge," die der Mensch ebenso "besitzt" und "verufert," wie die verschiedenen Gegenstnde der useren Welt.' Lukács *HCC* 100.
25. Lukács *W* ii.268: 'mssen sie fr das verdinglichte Bewutsein zu den wahren Reprsentanten seines gesellschaftlichen Lebens werden ... sie wird also fr das verdinglichte Bewutsein notwendigerweise zur Erscheinungsform

- seiner eigentlichen Unmittelbarkeit, über die es – als verdinglichtes Bewußtsein – gar nicht hinauszugehen trachtet.’ Lukács, *HCC* 93.
26. Lukács, *W* ii.274: ‘Die Trennung der Arbeitskraft von der Persönlichkeit des Arbeiters, ihre Verwandlung in ein Ding, in einen Gegenstand, den er auf dem Markte verkauft, wiederholt sich auch hier.’ *HCC* 99.
 27. Lukács, *W* ii.263: ‘*als bloße Fehlerquellen.*’ Lukács, *HCC* 89.
 28. Lukács *W* ii.356: ‘während in den anderen Formen diese Struktur hinter einer Fassade der “geistigen Arbeit,” der “Verantwortung” usw.’ Lukács, *HCC* 172.
 29. Lukács *W* ii.275: ‘Die “Gesinnungslosigkeit” der Journalisten, die Prostitution ihrer Erlebnisse und Überzeugungen ist nur als Gipfelpunkt der kapitalistischen Verdinglichung begreifbar.’ Lukács, Lukács, *HCC* 100.
 30. Lukács *W* ii.275: ‘Der spezialistische “Virtuose,” der Verkäufer seiner objektivierten und versachlichten geistigen Fähigkeiten, wird aber nicht nur Zuschauer dem gesellschaftlichen Geschehen gegenüber ... sondern gerät auch in eine kontemplative Attitude zu dem Funktionieren seiner eigenen, objektivierten und versachlichten Fähigkeiten.’ Lukács, *HCC* 100.
 31. Lukács, *W* ii.349–351; Lukács, *HCC* 165–167.
 32. Lukács, *W* ii.351: ‘bestimmende Existenzform seines Daseins als Subjekt, als Mensch.’ Lukács, *HCC* 167.
 33. Lukács, *W* ii.351: ‘*jede* Veränderung ihrem inneren Wesen nach eine qualitative ist.’ Lukács, *HCC* 167.
 34. Lukács, *W* ii.352: ‘Hier zeigen sich jene Momente, die das gesellschaftliche Sein des Arbeiters und seine Bewußtseinsformen dialektisch machen und dadurch über die bloße Unmittelbarkeit hinaustreiben, bereits deutlicher und konkreter.’ Lukács, *HCC* 168.
 35. Lukács, *W* ii.349: ‘seine Ware von seiner physischen Person unabtrennbar ist.’ Lukács, *HCC* 166.
 36. Lukács *W* ii.349: ‘worin er als eine rein auf abstrakte Quantität reduzierte Nummer, als ein mechanisiertes und rationalisiertes Detailwerkzeug eingefügt ist.’ Lukács, *HCC* 166.
 37. Lukács *W* ii.353: ‘dialektische Entgegengesetztheit von Quantität und Qualität.’ Lukács, *HCC* 169.
 38. Lukács *W* ii.351: ‘Denn einerseits ist der Arbeiter in seinem gesellschaftlichen Sein unmittelbar *vollständig* auf die Seite des Objekts gestellt: er erscheint sich unmittelbar als Gegenstand und nicht als Akteur des gesellschaftlichen Arbeitsprozesses.’ Lukács, *HCC* 167.
 39. Lukács *W* ii.352: ‘*das Selbstbewußtsein der Ware.*’ Lukács, *HCC* 168.
 40. Lukács *W* ii.353: ‘Denn dieses könnte – wie z. B. in der wissenschaftlichen Psychologie – sehr wohl dennoch ein Bewußtsein “über” einen Gegenstand

- sein, das bloß, ohne die Art der Beziehung von Bewußtsein und Gegenstand und dementsprechend die Art der so erlangten Erkenntnis zu verändern, "zufällig" sich selbst zum Gegenstand erwählt.' Lukács, *HCC* 168.
41. Lukács *W* ii.353: 'diese Erkenntnis vollbringt eine gegenständliche, struktive Veränderung am Objekt ihrer Erkenntnis.' Lukács, *HCC* 169.
 42. Feenberg, Andrew. 2014. *The Philosophy of Praxis: Marx, Lukács, and the Frankfurt School*. London: Verso. 65–66.
 43. Lukács, *W* ii.367–368: 'eine ununterbrochene Produktion und Reproduktion desselben Verhältnisses.' Lukács, *HCC* 182.
 44. Arato, Andrew & Breines, Paul. 1979. *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism*. New York: Seabury, 130.
 45. Stedman Jones, G. 1977. 'The Marxism of the Early Lukács,' in *Western Marxism: A Critical Reader*. Eds. Stedman Jones et al. 11–60. London: New Left Books.
 46. Löwy, Michael. 1979. *Georg Lukács: From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, trans. Patrick Camiller. (London: NLB) 176.
 47. Lukács, *W* ii.362: 'Ihre Aufhebung, wenn sie ihre wirkliche Aufhebung sein soll, kann also keine einfache Gedankenbewegung sein, sondern muß sich zu ihrer praktischen Aufhebung als Lebensformen der Gesellschaft erheben.' Lukács, *HCC* 177.
 48. Lukács *W* ii.357: 'Und dadurch, daß diese Ware die Möglichkeit besitzt, zu einem Bewußtsein über sich selbst als Ware zu gelangen, ist dieses Problem noch lange nicht erledigt.' Lukács, *HCC* 173.
 49. Löwy, *Georg Lukács*.
 50. Lukács, *W* ii.352; Lukács, *HCC* 168.
 51. Honneth, Axel, 1995 *The Struggle for Recognition: the Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson. Cambridge: Polity.
 52. Lukács, Georg 'Party and Class,' 28–36 in Lukács, Georg. *Tactics and Ethics: Political Essays, 1919–29*, trans. Michael McColgan; ed. Rodney Livingstone, 36.
 53. Lukács *W* ii.358: 'Daß hier die Unmittelbarkeit verlassen werden muß, ist selbstverständlich. Versucht man hier dem Klassenbewußtsein eine unmittelbare Daseinsform zuzuschreiben, so gerät man unabwendbar in die Mythologie: ein rätselhaftes Gattungsbewußtsein (genau so rätselhaft wie die "Volksgeist" Hegels), dessen Beziehung zu dem und Wirkung auf das Bewußtsein des Einzelnen völlig unbegreifbar ist ... erscheint dann als Demiurg der Bewegung.' Lukács, *HCC* 173.
 54. Lukács, *W* ii.494: 'Sie hat bloß den organischen Charakter dieses Prozesses überschätzt und die Bedeutung des bewußten, bewußt-organisatorischen Elementes in ihm unterschätzt.' Lukács, *HCC* 316.
 55. Lukács *W* ii.341: 'die "großen Individuen" als selbstherrliche Schöpfer der Geschichte und die "Naturgesetze" des geschichtlichen Milieus.' Lukács, *HCC* 158.

56. Lukács, *W* ii.341 n.1: 'Daß die logische Stellung einer jeden bürgerlichen Geschichtsauffassung auf die Mechanisierung der "Masse" und auf die Irrationalisierung des Helden zustrebt.' Lukács, *HCC* 217 n13.
57. Lukács, *W*, ii.505: 'Auch theoretisch handelt die kommunistische Partei nicht stellvertretend für das Proletariat.' Lukács *HCC*, Lukács, 327.
58. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1973, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. Joseph Bien. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. 50.
59. Lukács, *W* ii.505: 'organisatorisch[e] Gestalt dieses Klassenbewußtseins.' Lukács, *HCC* 327.
60. Lukács, *W* ii.480: 'das Unbewußte bewußt, das Latente aktuell.' Lukács, *HCC* 304.
61. Lukács, *W* ii.504: 'die organisatorische Selbständigkeit der kommunistischen Partei ist notwendig, damit das Proletariat sein eigenes Klassenbewußtsein, als geschichtliche Gestalt, unmittelbar erblicken könne; ... damit für die ganze Klasse das eigene Dasein als Klasse ins Bewußtsein gehoben werde.' Lukács, *HCC* 326.
62. Lukács, *W* ii.507–508, Lukács, *HCC* 330.
63. Lukács, *W* ii.515: 'zu einer Welt der Tätigkeit für jedes ihrer Mitglieder wird.' Lukács *HCC* 337.
64. Feenberg, *Philosophy of Praxis*, 65–66.
65. Lukács, *W* ii.199: 'der ununterbrochene Wechsel von Erstarrung, Widerspruch, und In-Fluß-Geraten.' Lukács, *HCC* 199.
66. Lukács, *W* ii.540–545; Lukács, Georg. 1997. *Lenin: A Study in the Unity of His Thought*, trans. Nicholas Jacobs. London: Verso. 32–38.
67. Lukács, *W* ii.545: '*auch sie ist nicht, sondern sie wird.*' *Lenin* 37–38.
68. Cf. Lukács, *W* ii.363: 'Akt der Bewußtwerdens.' Lukács, *HCC* 178.

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PART III

Beyond the Proletarian Revolution



CHAPTER 7

The Social and the Natural

Lukács's account of reification and its resolution does not, I have argued, need to rely on a subject outside the phenomenological totality of social being. Because he understands the subject as a structurally defined position from which society makes sense as a complete reality, and which entails certain possible actions or attitudes towards society, Lukács has no need for the sort of neo-Romantic demiurge that many of his critics have claimed to find in his work. It is possible to explain everything—the structure of capitalist society, the clash of private and public, 'soul' and society, and the disruption of reification—from within social being as such.

But having steered clear of the Scylla of subjectivism, Lukács risks the Charybdis of too immanent an argument. By explaining everything from within society itself, he offers little way to explain the impact of anything outside society. If the social being of things is determined within a set of relationships, and the logic of these relationships (rather than anything about the thing outside of these structures) determines their interactions, then there seems to be no scope even to think about the *existence* of, say, the natural world or of the human individual who occupies a particular position in society—except as formless, indeterminate being. Consequently, there is no theoretical scope to explain any interaction between society and that reality—either the effect of nature on society or the manner in which society relates to nature.

Perhaps the most striking example of such criticisms is that of Lukács himself towards the end of his life: as I noted previously, looking back on *History and Class Consciousness* he insisted that ‘the fundamental ontological error of the book is that I only recognize existence in society as true existence,’ ignoring the independence of nature and the role of labour as the mediating factor between the social and the natural.¹ The older Lukács portrayed this relationship in fundamentally positive terms: the error of *History and Class Consciousness* was to ignore that dimension of human flourishing that lies in the domination of nature. Andrew Feenberg offers a rather different perspective. For him, this same omission means that *History and Class Consciousness* fails to explain the ways rationalized social and technological systems are at risk of producing a malign domination of nature—both in the sense of the external natural world, and our own natural drives. While Lukács’s vision of a postrevolutionary world might bring about social freedom, therefore, it risks restoring the oppression of nature by the social in turn if those systems are not open to transformation. For different reasons, then, both the later Lukács and Feenberg see the omission of nature as a fatal flaw in the argument of *History and Class Consciousness*: rather than relying too much on entities or substances existing outside of social relations, the younger Lukács ignores them to the detriment of his argument.

These criticisms are significant and persuasive. Nevertheless, I suggest that the phenomenological reading of *History and Class Consciousness* offers profitable ways to think about society’s relation to nature that are less apparent in the conventional reading of Lukács’s theory. The guiding question in this case is the particular designation of or intention towards the world as ‘natural,’ in opposition to the ‘social.’ The meaning and extent of the category ‘nature’ is not pre-given or eternal, but is instead governed by phenomenological social structures. Under capitalism, Lukács suggests, determining something as ‘natural’ designates it as irrational, non-human, and beyond the bounds of social relations: when we intend objects as natural, we conceive of and behave towards them in a certain fashion. It is this classification that governs the relations of humans—as individuals and as society—towards those entities that fall within it. A reconfiguration of social forms would not, of course, mean anything like the overcoming of the laws of nature, but instead a different—and non-coercive—relationship to the material world.

To make this argument, I shall begin by examining these two critical perspectives on Lukács's account in *History and Class Consciousness*—that offered by Lukács himself late in life and supposedly corrected by his *Ontology of Social Being*, and that of Andrew Feenberg. Lukács's *Ontology* offers too restrictive an account of the relation between society and nature to count as an improvement on *History and Class Consciousness* because it depends on a factual claim rather than a methodological paradigm; in contrast, Feenberg's more nuanced account points to the earlier book's relatively scanty account of domination inherent in society's attitude towards the natural, posing serious questions for Lukács's argument. However, I shall then argue that the 'Reification' essay offers sufficient material to show how its ontology of *social* being might be opened up to the problem of being *outside* society. First, Lukács describes socially determined objects as phenomenologically divided. The social determination of an entity involves the specific exclusion of particular elements that are thereby deemed as 'natural': the object exists in a double form as both natural and social, irrational and rational. This indicates that Lukács's interest in 'nature' is with the value-laden socially defined category, not with the material world as such. Second, I shall examine his direct analysis of 'nature' as a principle of reality: echoing the split in individual objects, he finds that it is defined antinomically, as both predictable and chaotic. Here too he is not trying to say anything about the material world, but only the contradictory way it is intended and constituted as a meaningful object. Finally, at the ontological level, Lukács explains this opposition as a contingent feature of capitalistic social reality alone. Only capitalism is so completely self-enclosed so as to define social relations in a way that excludes that which it designates as merely 'natural.' Lukács offers hints of other social forms that are more accepting of externality—pointing to art as a different way to relate to nature. Though Lukács may appear to be describing only social forms of existence and making no allowance for anything outside, this is simply because the commodity form determines capitalist society thus. The commodity structure is unique to the degree to which it closes society off from externalities, and attempts to set itself up as the autopoietic determinant of all social being—and it is this that explains the domination of internal and external 'nature' that it entails.² When it defines the natural world as an irrational substance in opposition to society, Lukács implies, the commodity structure presents it as open to use by being brought beneath form.

I THE DOMINATION OF NATURE

The later Lukács and Andrew Feenberg may agree that *History and Class Consciousness* is wrong to omit extended consideration of ‘nature,’ but they disagree on why this is wrong. For the later Lukács, it meant that he ignored Marxism’s ‘derivation of the organic from inorganic nature and of society from the organic realm through the category of labour.’³ From this perspective, nature is to be understood as the world that humans work over: it is the means to their own development. In contrast, Feenberg presents such an instrumentalizing approach to nature as a problem in itself, both for the external environment and for our own natural drives. I will first consider Lukács’s own attempt to remedy the perceived deficiencies of his earlier work in his *Ontology of Social Being*, but will argue that this work falls behind *History and Class Consciousness* in its account of nature. I shall then turn to Feenberg’s critique, which offers significant and robust reservations about Lukács’s approach.

From the outset, the treatment of nature in *History and Class Consciousness* was a matter of controversy. Much of this focused on Lukács’s (justified) critique of Engels’s account of the dialectic of nature, for which he was savagely condemned by the defenders of orthodoxy in the 1920s.⁴ Engels had suggested that ‘experiment and industry’ could resolve the problem epitomized by Kant’s noumenon, stating that ‘the chemical substances produced in the bodies of plants and animals remained such “things-in-themselves” until organic chemistry began to display them one after the other.’⁵ Engels’s remark is one of the most fatuous statements in the entire Marxist corpus, betraying a staggering misunderstanding of Kant’s central concept that is not even remotely accurate. As Lukács explains, ‘even a complete knowledge of all phenomena would still be merely a knowledge of phenomena (in contrast to things-in-themselves).’⁶ But Engels’s more important error, Lukács states, was his equation of scientific experimentation with a full notion of praxis: the setting up of experimental conditions that exclude all extraneous ‘irrational elements’ so as to allow the scientist ‘to be able to observe undisturbed the untrammelled workings of the laws under examination’ places that scientist in a merely contemplative attitude towards nature.⁷ Looking back on his argument in 1967, Lukács (rightly) stood by his criticism of Engels’s interpretation of Kant, but stated that he had been wrong to deny that scientific experimentation counted as praxis. Like any kind of work, scientific experimentation entails ‘setting a teleology’—something particular to

conscious, human labour.⁸ Consequently, the sprawling *Ontology of Social Being* on which he worked in his final years sought to remedy this deficit, basing its explanatory model on labour as the defining human form of activity. This opens the way for a rather Promethean Marxism, one focused on ‘the development of people who labour,’ in which human development is construed in terms of the growth of the productive capacities of humanity as part of a gradual emancipation from and assertion of control over the natural world.⁹

Originally intended as merely the preface to a comprehensive Marxist ethics, the late *Ontology* grew to a sprawling work of over a thousand pages. Though completed in draft form and discussed with his closest students, it was never published in his lifetime. Given the length of the text, it is impossible to give a full account and evaluation of it here. It should be noted, though, that Lukács’s own students were highly critical of the contradictions, imprecisions, and loss of sophistication in the work—a verdict I am inclined to share.¹⁰ What is relevant here in distinguishing this later theory from *History and Class Consciousness* is the central role played by labour in his account: it is the nexus of humanity’s interaction with nature, ‘an interrelation between humans (society) and nature, and, to be precise, with inorganic nature (tool, raw material, object of labour etc.) as well as organic.’¹¹ Human labour is distinguished by its conscious character, entailing deliberation, forethought, and a degree of planning. In order to carry out such a plan, individuals must identify tools—which requires them, as Lukács puts it, to posit a teleology in natural objects. He explains that ‘both the means and the object of labour are in themselves natural things subject to natural causality, and only in the teleological positing, only through this, can they take on the positedness of social being in the labour process, although they remain natural objects.’¹² Their existence as tools, as social objects, is qualitatively and ontologically different from their natural existence. This is the root of more complex forms of teleology, which Lukács sees at the root of social relations. A task too great for one worker alone (Lukács suggests hunting large animals as an example of this) requires the positing of a teleology within a group of people; the leader must ‘bring another person (or group of people) to carry out concrete teleological positings for their own part.’¹³ Thus, labour is the beginning of social being: it is in the new form of existence acquired by the tool, or by individuals as part of a labouring group, that more developed aspects of social existence may first appear, and hence brings about the ontological ‘leap-like transition, from one level of being

to another, which is qualitatively different.¹⁴ Whereas the consciousness of animals merely serves biological existence, human consciousness is at least semi-autonomous, more than merely an epiphenomenon in the ontological sense.¹⁵ In this respect, the *Ontology* advances a rather traditional position. Humans are conscious, free, *geistlich* beings, distinct from an unconscious, determined natural world. It is through labour that humans are emancipated, because human labour presupposes conscious planning. Humanity becomes more free, the more conscious it is in its control of social relations and the natural world.

Intriguingly, there are certain striking continuities with *History and Class Consciousness*. Most significantly, the *Ontology* treats subjectivity as an emergent position within the overall structure of consciousness, rather than as something a priori. Labour requires the individual to be able to reproduce reality in their mind, and to distinguish themselves from the world they seek to control—from which Lukács draws an important inference, stating that ‘this consciously-developed separation of subject and object is a necessary product of the labour process.’¹⁶ This produces an ‘objectively-effective but ontologically-relative independence of consciousness from the body,’ as we come to see ourselves as something more than our material being.¹⁷ Note here the parallels with the earlier work: the subject is ontically separate from the material world, but ontologically constituted as a totality of subject-position and objective reality.

But the difference in how this is explained is pivotal. The late *Ontology* makes a direct factual claim that aspires to transhistorical validity: it is the labour process that is the source of subjectivity, social relations, and human emancipation more broadly. It rests its explanation on a single source: ultimately, more complex phenomena are traceable back to labour as the *Ur*-form of all social relations. This explanatory dependence on a single factor is what undermines Lukács’s final work: his theory stands and falls on the plausibility of this claim—which can be formulated in empirically testable ways. For example, the point in its development at which the infant become aware of itself as separate from the world (producing the separation of subject and object in consciousness) is something that can be evaluated and tested by psychological methods. There are a number of competing explanations of this grounded in systematic observation, some of which have been taken up in subsequent Critical Theory—for example, Axel Honneth’s adaptation of Donald Winnicott’s object relations theory.¹⁸ Whatever the merits of any particular one of these, they illustrate the kind of evidence that might be needed for Lukács’s own argument to hold

up—none of which he offers. In this context, Feenberg’s critique of the labour-centric approach of the young Marx applies just as well to Lukács’s later ontology: as he points out, ‘[i]n everyday coping, play, aesthetic appreciation, recognition and contemplation humans relate to being perhaps just as fundamentally as they do in labor without attempting to remake objects in their own image.’¹⁹ Whatever the manifest form of, say, romantic relationships between people or aesthetic relationships between spectator and artwork, there is no real evidence to suggest they developed out of the labour process—let alone to reduce them *tout court* to the model of teleological positing that Lukács identifies with labour.

Because the *Ontology* places such weight on the categorical claim that labour is the single causal source for a range of social phenomena, its entire argument stands and falls with the plausibility of that claim. In contrast, *History and Class Consciousness* clearly and explicitly attempts something different from the very outset—indicated by Lukács’s famous statement that Marxism could survive even if ‘the latest research had demonstrated the factual inaccuracy of every one of Marx’s individual claims,’ because it ‘refers rather to the *method*.’²⁰ As I have argued, the central problem for this method is the way reality is construed in different social forms. It offers an interpretive model for understanding the patterns of social relationships, institutions, and cultures—and above all the ontic reality and corresponding subject-positions they entail. It does not claim to offer an ultimate causal explanation or source for these patterns that applies across history. Where the *Ontology* offers a single answer to all questions about society, *History and Class Consciousness* offers new questions about the interpretation of society. Even if Lukács’s particular answer to these questions—his claim that the commodity structure was the sole, hyper-dominant form of such relations in contemporary society—is more or less false, the kind of exploration he attempts (even if unsuccessfully) might still reveal something about social relations. Contemporary social practices might not intend social objects as abstractly valuable commodities, but this does not mean that we can never enquire into the semantics of social practice. Equally, even if the social relations of capitalistic liberal democracies are more complex and offer more subjective engagement than Lukács concedes, this might in fact be revealed by the same kind of analysis that Lukács offers. Statements of fact like that of the *Ontology* may easily be falsified; methodological questions like those of *History and Class Consciousness* cannot be dismissed so quickly, unless they can be shown to be incoherent.

However, the relative flexibility of the methodology of *History and Class Consciousness* and the weaknesses of the *Ontology's* answers are not enough to invalidate the central point of the criticism of the earlier work—that it concentrates so much on social relations and on the subjective role formally permitted by social practices that it fails to address the relation between the social and that which is outside it, whether the material earth or the biological human. The strongest version of this critique is that offered by Andrew Feenberg—who, however, evaluates this relationship quite differently from the verdict offered in the *Ontology*. From Feenberg's perspective, the sort of control over nature so important to the *Ontology* would itself be a form of repressive domination: it suggests a model of subject-object relations in which the former bends the latter to its will, rather than a genuine interaction. What makes Feenberg's criticism so telling is that he does not reduce Lukács to a materialist version of German Idealism, as so many of his critics do; rather, as I have suggested, Feenberg's interpretation is in many respects compatible with my own in locating subjectivity within social structures instead of outside them. Though broadly sympathetic to Lukács's theory, Feenberg nevertheless finds it lacking because it fails to address the problem of the domination of nature, and the reification of the structures by which we relate to the natural world. Rightly rejecting the criticism that Lukács sought an identical subject-object capable of transforming the natural world at will, Feenberg insists correctly that Lukács 'nowhere denies the independence of nature or the validity of the sciences that study it.'²¹ Of course, in his own retrospective critique of *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács criticized himself precisely for having implicitly denied the ontological independence of nature. In this case, though, Feenberg's evidence is more persuasive than Lukács's autocriticism: while Lukács may not have examined the problem explicitly, his comments on the matter are entirely compatible with the assumption of a material world existing outside the sphere of social relations. Lukács's claim, he argues, is simply that the increase in our understanding of nature is a social phenomenon, facilitated by and itself having effects on social structures. Feenberg offers two possible explanations for those places where Lukács seems to hint that social change might also transform science and our relation to nature more generally.²² First, just as Marxism reveals the historicity of social forms, so too might we recognize historical aspects to the natural world—Feenberg points to thermodynamics (presumably entropy) and evolution as examples. Where this concerns the *results* of scientific enquiry, Feenberg's second angle focuses on the forms and methods

of that enquiry itself. In this case, we might become aware that our ways of construing the natural world (such as the ‘mechanical view of nature’) is linked to social structures.²³ This second interpretation is quite consonant with certain elements of my interpretation of Lukács—particularly those aspects where I have highlighted parallels with Riegl’s notion of *Kunstwollen*. If different societies have contrasting basic ideas of reality, it would make sense to assume that these ideas were reflected in the explanatory frameworks that shaped their scientific enquiry about that reality.

However, the first interpretation poses problems. It is not clear to me that evolution and thermodynamics represent ‘history’ in any significant sense: while both describe changes occurring over time, such changes involve the working out of objective natural laws that do not themselves change. Specific phenomena may be altered, but the underlying laws are not: there is, therefore, no ontological change of the kind that Lukács sees in the historical emancipation of society. What this implies—as Feenberg makes clear—is that nature as a whole cannot be ‘derefied’ in the way that society can: we will always relate to it as a system operating on laws that we cannot alter. As Feenberg sees it, ‘the social totality contains a reified moment – nature – that is not cancelled by self-consciousness, but which rather opens a realm of irreducible facts and theories. Nature may not be derefied by human practice on the same terms as society, but its participation in the dialectic reveals it to be fundamentally historical.’²⁴ It is a necessary moment of Lukács’s historical dialectic, but one requiring a different kind of practice from that possible in society. While consciousness transforms practice in society, ‘we will always stand in a technical relation to nature.’²⁵ But this means that Lukács fails to analyse the negative effects of such a relation. Feenberg (himself a philosopher of technology) thus reproaches Lukács for the ‘rather small place occupied by technology and social psychology in his argument.’²⁶ Consequently, one of the Frankfurt School’s most important improvements on both Marx and Lukács is that they move beyond the domination of human beings in society to the problem of the domination of nature:

Lukács addresses the problem of social domination. The concrete content that breaks out of the conceptual straitjacket of reification is the laboring human being, not nature. For the Frankfurt School this is no minor omission. They argue that the central issue of the twentieth century is the domination of nature. This realization requires a certain humility. As a natural being, the conqueror of nature is himself among the conquered.²⁷

Human liberation must also entail the liberation of nature—taken in Marcusean vein to include ‘naturalistic’ aspects of humanity such as erotic drives, as well as the natural world more broadly. The form of liberation to which we must aspire is one that also liberates the erotic and imaginative faculties, as well as basing itself on a non-coercive relationship between the human and the natural; Marcuse’s work provides a model for this.²⁸ A Critical Theory that aims at an adequate account of human emancipation therefore cannot confine itself to social relations, but must also show how a ‘natural’ reality outside society is to be liberated. Indeed, it should be teleological insofar as it identifies a certain potential for flourishing that exists, in some sense, independently of social forms that currently restrict it.

Feenberg himself is less Romantic about nature, but instead turns to the notion of the ecological niche in his own explanation. Humans occupy a particular place in an ecosystem, one defined in part by our technological engagement with the material world; our subjectivity is defined relative to that niche. Anything we do to nature will affect us as subjects in turn—including, for example, pollution. Feenberg suggests, therefore, that the apparatuses with which we engage with nature—the way we choose to deploy our scientific knowledge, for example—must themselves be dero-ified by being rendered more open to broader public critique. Even though nature itself remains as a self-governed system whose principles and laws cannot be altered, our practices towards it can be altered, such that our ecological niche can be sustained.

Feenberg may not agree with the later Lukács’s normative framework, but both criticize *History and Class Consciousness* for the inadequacy of its account of the relation of society and nature. For the later Lukács, his earlier failure to account for existence outside of social forms of being foreclosed any understanding of human emancipation as a development of our conscious control over the natural world. From Feenberg’s perspective, this aspect of Lukács’s *Ontology* must be reprehensible: it determines the relation to the material world as one of control. But while *History and Class Consciousness* is not so explicit in this regard, Feenberg finds enough in it to suggest that it offers basically the same relation to nature—and one that thus reproduces repression even when purely social forms of domination are overcome. While the weaknesses of the *Ontology*’s own model mean that it cannot supplant *History and Class Consciousness*, the criticism as reformulated by Feenberg is potentially significant: if Lukács’s earlier work does indeed only offer one definition of the relationship of society,

this risks reproducing reification in regard to our ‘natural’ being. Unless Lukács’s theory can be shown to offer alternative forms of the relation between society and nature, his account of emancipation risks reproducing the split between the ‘private’ individual, bearer of its personal and natural qualities, and the social being—now more free, perhaps, but effectively oppressing the natural individual to which it corresponds.

2 THE DUALITY OF NATURE AND SOCIETY

Nevertheless, while Lukács touches on these issues only lightly, I suggest he does so sufficiently to indicate ways around this problem. Feenberg is right both in arguing that Lukács fully accepts the existence of a material world outside society about which it is possible to have ‘objective’ knowledge, and in stating that Lukács pays only scanty attention to the relation between society and the earth outside it. But there is more potential to address these issues in *History and Class Consciousness* than Feenberg allows—and to take Lukács’s account further. For Feenberg, rationalization and rationalized forms of technology are harmful to the extent that they abstract away from a specific content that is assumed to have some kind of existence before or outside this rationality. Imposed as the governing principles or society and our own nature, such rational structures are like a Procrustean bed, constraining, distorting, and mutilating the nature on which it is imposed. This, though, implies the possibility of defining this ‘nature’ in its own terms—even essentialistically—and without reference to the dialectical relationship that defines it as ‘natural.’ For Lukács, this very concept of ‘nature’ and the ‘natural’ is itself in question. While he certainly presupposes some kind of material existence independent of social being, it is the qualification of this materiality as ‘natural’—a concept laden with significance—that is at stake. The logic of the commodity structure as phenomenological form is one of inclusion and necessary, liminal exclusion: the specific sense of ‘natural’ used in particular contexts determines whether something is within or outside social relations. Like *any* object in the ontic reality of capitalism, nature has a double signification equivalent to the use value/exchange value of the commodity, or the private/public of the individual. It is this that—for Lukács—explains the relation of society and nature. While Feenberg’s account implies that nature exists ‘out there’ already, undisturbed until it comes to be dominated by the logic of a rationalization that expands and seeks to encompass everything within its borders, Lukács’s analysis of the commodity offers an explanation as to how

certain aspects of materiality are determined outside the borders of society, portrayed as primordial, and pre-social, and ultimately designated as that which must be dominated. While earlier social forms certainly made use of nature, their logic did not rule out a more curatorial approach to the natural world, for example. In contrast, Lukács's argument implies that capitalist social relations intend nature *almost exclusively* as a thing to be exploited.

Lukács's approach is visible in a number of examples of the social determination of 'naturalistic' beings—that is, of entities or relations that might be assumed to have some kind of existence outside of social relations. But when they appear in society, the forms of such objects are determined by social relations. In each case, the social determination of the object entails a necessary deprivation: all content and particularity must be cut off from the social being of the being concerned. But rather than remaining hidden behind its own intrasocial manifestation (in some manner analogous to the noumenon), this content remains as a necessary residue. Lukács alludes to a number of examples in passing: while he provides no extended or systematic analysis, such instances provide sufficient evidence to deduce a broader account of the relation between a set of social relations and that which stands outside it. His account rests on the same double-sense of subject and consciousness as his account of the contradictions in proletarian consciousness. Subjectivity is, on the one hand, merely the subject-pole of the intentional practices that constitute social relations; on the other hand, it is the ego that immanently transcends those intentional acts. While Lukács's analysis in *History and Class Consciousness* concentrates mostly on the objective practices and their determination of formal subjectivity (with the exceptions I have already noted), he is in one respect closer to Husserl than Lask: he recognizes that all of these meaning-structures point towards a subject that lives in its acts, but transcends any single one of them. *These* aspects are those, Lukács implies, that are excluded from capitalist social relations. As far as social being is concerned, they are excluded—but this does not mean that they simply do not exist at all. I shall focus on three of Lukács's examples: the relation of *marriage*, or the social determination of biological reproduction; the individual's *faculties* and capacities, or their 'internal' being; the object of natural-scientific enquiry.

The first of these, marriage, is the most straightforward. Lukács quotes Kant's characteristic description of marriage as 'the union of two persons of different sex aimed at the life-long exchange of each other's sexual attributes,' presenting it as a fairly typical example of bourgeois attitudes to marriage.²⁹ He describes this in telling terms, stating that 'there is no natu-

ral form of the relation of people to one another, no possibility for a person to bring their physical and psychic “qualities” to bear, in which they would not be increasingly subordinated to these forms of objectivity.³⁰ Lukács here identifies a tension between ‘qualities’ and ‘natural’ relations, and the way in which such things can be said to exist within society. His use once again of the distinctly Neo-Kantian *Gegenständlichkeitsform* (‘forms of objectivity’) emphasizes the ontological depth of the problem, a sense perhaps reinforced by the idiomatic ‘zur Geltung bringen,’ or ‘to bring to bear’—the use of *Geltung*, ‘validity,’ echoing Emil Lask’s aletheiology. ‘Marriage’ is not simply the way we ‘know’ such naturalistic desires or relations; it is their determinate social being, or (in terms of Feenberg’s focus on cultural practices) the actual practice through which they exist in society. In this case, such qualities can only come to valid social being through the specific forms of objectivity of capitalist society. They are, in effect, shut out of the system of relations that constitutes social reality. Of course, even Kant’s desiccated description presupposes the sexual desire underlying marriage—but as the objective social form of this desire, marriage is reduced to a formal contract between identical partners. We see here, therefore, the same doubling-up as in the commodity’s separation of substantive use value and formal exchange value, wherein it is only the latter that enters social relations while at the same time presupposing the former.

The same logic is at play in Lukács’s references to the qualities, needs, and drives of the individual—including those elements of our individual psychological ‘natures’ that Feenberg identifies as repressed by rationalized systems. Here too Lukács acknowledges the extra-social being of such qualities, while insisting that they are only socially valid within certain forms that deprive them of their specific content. He makes a number of references to this. For the worker, the modern (Taylorist) work process ‘extends in to the “soul” of the worker: even their psychological qualities are separated from their complete personality, objectified in opposition to it, so as to be able to integrate them into specialized rational system and reduce them to calculable concepts.’³¹ Note here the double determination of the ‘soul’: it is manifest at once as both quantifiable, abstract capacities standing in relation to the entire work process (and so ‘social’), and as a substantial ‘total personality’ that remains outside this system on the other. By implication, anything that cannot be assimilated to the system must be excluded: there is no valid form of social existence for individual peculiarities, which—once again—are not hidden but instead determined as ‘mere sources of error.’³² In fact, Lukács suggests that the proletarian

has a distinct advantage in this regard. The bureaucrat or the journalist, whose honourable sense of duty or political ‘convictions’ respectively are the nexus of their integration into society, cannot distance themselves from this system in order to cast a critical eye over it. In contrast, though this ‘atrophies and cripples [the worker’s] “soul,”’ this ‘soul’ itself is not treated as a commodity—it is only as empty, repetitive labour requiring no ‘personal’ engagement that the worker is socially determined.³³ What remains outside society, then, is the formless, irrational ‘soul’—a term that Lukács here, as almost invariably in the ‘Reification’ essay, places within scare quotes. He is clearly not alluding to some quasi-Romantic notion of an expressive, creative, feeling ‘soul’ defined by some eternal essence that comes into conflict with empty rational structures that have nothing to do with it. Rather, ‘soul’ refers to the semantic residue, the content that is left outside the structures of social being through the abstraction that generates social forms. The ‘soul’ is the by-product of societal rationalization; the latter is (dialectically) possible only through the exclusion of the former. Inherent to Lukács’s conception of social being, then, is that it excludes and conflicts with certain qualities of the individual that it designates as non-social—those aspects of us that might include drives, desires, and anything personal to us, or ‘private’ matters under the commodity structure.

Finally, even the material world itself is determined differently when manifest in social relations. This comes through in Lukács’s account of scientific experimentation in his critique of Engels’s dialectic of nature. Such experimentation, he states, is determined by total socio-economic system that stipulates what needs to be investigated. It manifests in a ‘product’ that is entirely socially determined. Lukács explains it thus:

The experimenter creates an artificial, abstract milieu in order to be able to *observe* undisturbed the untrammelled workings of the laws under examination, removing all the intrusive irrational elements on both the side of the subject and of the object. He strives to reduce the material substratum of his observation – as far as possible – to the purely rational ‘product,’ to the ‘intelligible matter’ of mathematics.³⁴

Of note here is that the ‘Milieu’ (the German is identical) determines the object in certain ways: it posits a purified, rationalized object stripped of anything that cannot be assimilated to the rational forms of objectivity. The very artificiality of this occurrence of the object highlights the problem.

The matter under investigation must be isolated, treated as a single fact rather than integrated into the world as a whole; it is cut off from all external factors. Scientific experimentation thus brings such elements of nature within the broader set of social structures by as limited, isolated facts or complexes of rules. These elements are given a new meaning by their incorporation in the whole set of social relations; their significance as part of the whole of nature—for example, as part of an ecosystem—is effaced as they are reinscribed with a new meaning as part of the production of commodities. Thus, the needs of nature as a whole are ignored. Considered as part of nature, the tree may be a habitat for animals. The scientist, in contrast, may only wish to find out its strength so it may be used in building houses or furniture; the effects of removing it from its ecosystem are ignored when it is intended solely in this commodified form. Such isolation of the fact makes it available for instrumentalization: its role as part of a system of material relations and processes is nullified, leaving it ready for the industrial-economic system that produced it within this milieu. Once again, this means stripping off all ‘irrational’ factors both of subject-scientist and objective material under investigation: they are not concealed, but remain present as the excludans, that which the scientist must ensure does not distort the experiment.

In all three cases, then—the biological relation of reproduction, the drives and capacities of the individual, and the material object of investigation—social determination entails particular forms of objectivity that exclude anything about the object that cannot be incorporated in society. The externalized residue is, of course, presupposed and implied by the formally constituted social object, which depends on the very substance it negates. Marriage implies the sexual desire that it constrains; the laboratory setting presupposes the external world it seeks to exclude from the investigation of the truth. What this shows is that Lukács is fully aware of existence ‘outside’ or ‘separate from’ social relations; materiality as such is the stuff of such relations. These relations cannot, however, be viewed as merely epistemological categories: it is not the case that Lukács treats them as simply the way such material is imperfectly ‘known’ in society. This is not only because of Lukács’s language and framework as outlined in the preceding chapters. Rather, exclusion of that which is deemed irrational is central to such categories: the irrational, particular, and ‘natural’ are manifest through social being as ‘sources of error,’ or that which is perpetually expelled from the system of social relations. This deprivation is manifest in the social being of the object, by the very designation of material particularity as ‘irrational,’ or

as that which must be effaced in order to bring objects into social relations with one another. Every object thus has a two-faced existence: its rationalized social form in relation to other objects, and its particularity, which stands outside these relations. Lukács's phenomenological account of this dichotomy of the object therefore not only acknowledges the natural or material outside society—it presupposes such externality.

3 THE ONTIC ANTINOMY OF NATURE

This division within the object is mirrored, Lukács argues, within the concept of nature as a whole. It has two incompatible definitions under capitalism, as both rational and irrational, determined and spontaneous, and formal and substantial. The concept of nature and the natural is so fundamental to the ontic social reality of capitalism that this antinomy shapes the relations of humans to society, and of social relations to the external world. I shall first outline the two different senses of nature that Lukács identifies, before arguing that these should be understood not as mistaken *knowledges* of nature (in the epistemological sense), but as different noema, intended (in the phenomenological sense) in quite different ways. They are thus real objects, incorporating a particular stance towards them: whatever Lukács's thoughts on material being outside of social relations, 'nature' is an (antinomic) socially defined category incorporating particular intentionalities. What he says about 'nature' cannot, therefore, be explained without that intentional aspect.

Lukács points to the concept of nature as a central example of the tendency of 'bourgeois' thought to fall into antinomies. He identifies two opposed conceptions of 'nature' emerging from the discourses of the eighteenth century onwards (and, later, a third that emerges as the idealistic reconciliation of the two through art). The first refers to a reality governed by formal, predictable laws:

We have already pointed out the definition of nature as 'embodiment of conformity with law' governing all events, formulated most clearly by Kant but essentially unchanged from Kepler and Galileo to the present day. ... For here 'nature' clearly shows the marks of the revolutionary struggle of the bourgeoisie: the 'law-bound,' the calculable, the formal and abstract character of the approaching bourgeois society seems natural next to the artificiality, the caprice, and the disorder of feudalism and absolutism.³⁵

‘Nature’ in this sense is the object of the natural sciences: it is increasingly understood to be governed by universal laws, applicable in all places and at all times. The laws of nature are entirely stripped of the moralizing tone they have even in, say, Hobbes; the cosmos as a whole is understood as governed by an abstract set of laws, rather than by the will of a deity, or by magical forces. (Lukács points, intriguingly, to Ernst Cassirer in support of his argument that the bourgeois epoch entailed such a mathematized understanding of nature, but there are also obvious similarities to Husserl’s account of Galilean science in his *Crisis* essay.³⁶) It is conceived, moreover, as a total ‘system’ of such laws, governing all objects and their interactions: they are a universal account of the way different objects relate to one another. ‘Nature’ is in this respect analogous to the rational social relations of the commodity structure, whereby social relations are conceived through the exchange of abstract, quantifiable values that bring different particulars into relation to one another; *a fortiori*, it corresponds to other social forms that correlate with the commodity structure, such as the rationalized system of law mediating the relations of abstractly conceived individuals. Things are treated abstractly as exemplars of universals, their relations governed by fixed overarching laws, rather than as particulars. This produces the same problem as Kantian epistemology: focus on the general ‘laws of nature’—or what is revealed when material objects come into relations with one another—leaves the objects themselves as unknown and unknowable noumena.

In opposition to this abstract formalism, Lukács suggests that Rousseau (and, more broadly, counter-Enlightenment Romanticism) exemplifies a radically different conception of nature—one that refers to everything that is left by the stripping-away of rational categories. As he puts it, ‘with a complete reversal of meaning that never becomes conscious, nature becomes the vessel in which all these inner tendencies against the growth of mechanization, deadening, and reification are combined ... [i]t can represent that aspect of human inwardness which has remained natural, or at least tends or longs to become natural once again.’³⁷ For such a conception of nature, it is feeling, sensation, or mood that is most authentic and hence natural, ‘in contrast to the artificial structures of human civilization.’³⁸ Spontaneous expression, untrammelled by universal structures that fail to reach down to the particular, is cast as the more ‘natural’—which in this case has become a ‘value concept.’³⁹ Here, Lukács is alluding to a classic Neo-Kantian distinction: ‘nature’ comes to designate something both factual and normative (a *Wertbegriff*), two entirely different

and incompatible spheres. But he denies that this is any more the ‘reality’ of nature than the formalized version of the sciences:

What is important for us here is only the *structure of the objects* [*Gegenstandsstruktur*]: that this apparent pinnacle of the interiorization of nature is in fact precisely the renunciation of any real penetration of it. Identifying *mood* as the form taken by content implies unpenetrated and impenetrable objects (things-in-themselves) just as much as the laws of nature.⁴⁰

He refuses to endorse such an irrationalist conception of nature, whereby emotional intuition or interiority is held as more valuable than abstract rationalism: the abstract-rationalist and the concrete-emotionalist approaches provide similarly inadequate accounts of reality. Each claims to *know* the reality of the object, but each fails; indeed, it is the very fact that the first aims at form without particular content, which the second aims at particular content unsubsumed by universal form that makes each appear to be hiding some noumenal entity behind itself. But these conceptions of nature are inextricably and dialectically interrelated: they are defined by their exclusion of the other. The conception of nature as law-governed and predictably requires formalization and abstraction—in other words the exclusion of content. Conversely, the Romanticized conception of nature consists of the residue of such abstraction: it is explicitly formless, spontaneous, and opposed to abstract reason.

These two senses of ‘nature’ are not meant as different ways of knowing nature, nor as mere representations of something ‘underneath’ these definitions. Lukács’s focus on the ‘conceptual ambivalences’ of the ‘*word* “nature”’ (my emphasis) reminds us that he is not arguing that external materiality as such is affected in its internal being; rather, he is concerned with how this materiality is treated as ‘nature,’ a concept that entails certain meanings and practical orientations. In each case, ‘nature’ is a complete noema, an object intended (phenomenologically) as a total meaning-complex. Indeed, they are quite distinct *kinds* of objects. In the first sense, nature is meant in a primarily descriptive sense—systems are to be understood as operating ‘naturally,’ or in a predictable and law-governed fashion. In the second sense, nature is, as Lukács puts it, a ‘*value concept*,’ a term with normative implications used to critique existing social institutions as ‘artificial.’ This points to a crucial dimension of Lukács’s definition of nature. As he puts it, the ambivalences in the concept are ‘decisive for the self-understanding of bourgeois man in his position relative to the world.’⁴¹

That is, each conception of nature is bound up with an attitude towards it by the viewing subject (once more echoing Alois Riegl): it cannot be extricated from the expected subjective stance towards it. The two senses are not, therefore, competing empirical claims to knowledge of a natural world that exists independently of knowledge; rather, they distinguish different *attitudes* towards a material reality understood in distinct ways.

Consequently, the antinomy between these two definitions of nature produces direct practical consequences. In the first place, the equation of 'natural' with predictable universal laws means that our relation to nature is essentially 'contemplative'—just as Lukács argues in his critique of Engels. It is not that such produces *inaccurate* knowledge of nature, but simply that any such attitude places the individual outside the system of natural laws as an observer, capable only of exploiting these laws for personal benefit. There is no genuine interactive relationship between the human subject and the natural world. Second, the extension of these naturalistic laws to society, combined with the absolute antinomy between the formalist and substantial conceptions of nature, has direct implications for the individual. It is this that renders nature in the second, irrationalist sense as that which must be excluded from or repressed by social relations. Only to the extent that it can be rationalized and rendered universal can it be permitted to enter into social relations. Thus, Lukács pre-empts Feenberg's citation of Marcusean concerns with our own 'natural' drives by suggesting that it is the *way* in which such drives are deemed 'natural' that determines them as that which needs to be suppressed. Emotion is defined a priori as irrational because it is that which is specifically excluded by a rationality defined in terms of formal and universal fungibility. Therefore, it must experience any such rationality as a restriction or imposition from outside. For the individual, one's concrete particularity, spontaneity, bodily desires and so on—all that might be placed beneath the umbrella of one's character—must be suppressed in order to be a member of universal, rationalized social relations. It is not possible to bring one's individual nature (in the second sense), or one's 'soul' into society. Similarly, for abstract rational systems, the intrusion of any concrete particular risks undermining the integrity of the system as a whole: it must be eliminated. That which is outside the border of the set of social relations is, by definition, irrational and disorganized: no part of it can stand in a predictable relation to any other element.

Ultimately, then, the antinomy within the concept of 'nature' is manifest as a real opposition between the rational and the irrational, or between

the particular individual and the abstract universal. The ‘natural’ in the second sense is manifest in total opposition to the rationalized world of the first sense. Of course, as we have seen, Lukács suggests that the reduction of social relations to the model of the natural sciences interpellates the individual subject as powerless to intervene, left only as an observer of a naturalistic social system. But here we see that the same phenomenon has in addition the obverse implication. Where social relations are cast in this abstract form, humanity *as a universal category* is equated with rationalization of this kind, in opposition to the irrationality of the nature left outside. Consequently, the material world as not yet comprehended nor brought into social relations stands in opposition to humanity. Nature in this sense is manifest merely as an inert, shapeless material that must be brought beneath rational forms. As an example of this, Lukács points to Marx’s statement that ‘Descartes with his definition of animals as mere machines saw with the eyes of the manufacturing period, in contrast to the Middle Ages, for whom animals were man’s assistants.’⁴² At the same time, humanity as a whole comes to be equated with its rationality, in opposition to nature. Humanity’s telos—the unfolding of *Geist*, as it were—is emancipation from shapeless nature by ever-increasing rationalization and abstraction. Lukács’s account implies a different narrative of rationalization from that given by Weber. Where his mentor describes a rather one-sided process, Lukács suggests a dialectical development: the increasing formal rationalization of societal rationalization necessarily entails the externalization of substance as spontaneous, irrational Nature, and its presentation as formless material bereft of its own *ratio*, and hence laid before humanity to be turned to its own purposes.

For Lukács, then, Nature does not designate an organic material reality—either in the sense of the individual’s natural desires or the broader ecosystem of the natural world. He has no intention of denying or undermining the knowledge of the material world acquired by the natural sciences. Rather, his concern is with the assumption that detached knowledge (with instrumental goals in mind) is the only correct attitude towards that material world. It is the way in which ‘Nature’ is construed that determines this stance: the two antinomic senses of the word that he identifies designate different noema, each intended differently. Lukács’s second sense of ‘Nature,’ as an irrational, formless substance, includes the sort of nature that Marcuse and Feenberg see as repressed by rationalized or technological systems—but for Lukács, this formlessness is a result of the antinomy within the concept that separates its two senses and determines

such radically different stances towards them. The opposition between the organic world and rationalized social structures is therefore only ontic: if the latter attempt to dominate the former, it is because of a total structure of social reality that determines itself as absolutely distinct from an irrational and substantial nature, and presents the latter as a formless mass to be dominated by being transformed into commodities, regardless of any effects on the broader ecosystem.

4 THE HISTORICAL BASIS OF THE ANTINOMY OF NATURE

Rather than analysing the epistemological conditions of our knowledge of a nature that might be defined in essence a priori, then, Lukács is concerned with the phenomenological problem of the way ‘Nature’ is intended as an object, and the stances we might take towards it. Thus, although he explains detached scientific knowledge as one such stance, he has no intention of questioning the objective knowledge about the material world gained thereby. Instead, he explores the conditions that make such an attitude seem like the only possible relation to an external material reality defined as ‘nature,’ and deduces the consequences from this detached stance towards it.

In certain respects, Lukács’s critique of this attitude to the natural world prefigures some of the concerns later expressed by Husserl in his *Crisis of European Sciences*. Mihály Vajda has explored a number of these parallels, pointing out that the two share a scepticism about a supposedly impartial standpoint and the tendency towards total quantification, as well as seeing it as a unique product of the modern era.⁴³ Where Husserl is most concerned with the natural sciences, Vajda suggests, Lukács’s focus is predominantly on the social sciences.⁴⁴ Vajda is right to note that Lukács gives relatively little attention to the natural sciences as such, aside from his concern with the idea of ‘nature’ they assume, but to limit Lukács’s critique to the social sciences obscures the way social relations and practices more generally embody such a phenomenologically reifying stance towards the world. The omission is perhaps due to the nature of Vajda’s comparison: he juxtaposes *History and Class Consciousness* with a later text of Husserl’s to point out incidental parallels and points of contact. In contrast, I have sought to emphasize Lukács’s earlier engagement with Husserl—and suggested that this shaped Lukács’s own theory throughout. Drawing Husserl together with Simmel, Weber, and Marx (amongst

others), he suggests that such attitudes are embodied in forms of social being and the practices that manifest them.

This is an ontic problem: the structural division of human and natural such that the former is placed in a relation of domination towards the latter is the *real* principle governing their interrelationship as a whole in practice. But it is only one possible social reality: it is one, Lukács suggests, that stems from the structural principle governing capitalism—the commodity structure. This suggests that the antinomy of nature is a specific problem of capitalist society—and thus that the abolition of capitalistic social forms will necessarily result in a different relation to a nature understood in quite different ways. Indeed, Lukács’s approving reference to Marx’s observation that animals were ‘man’s assistants’ in the Middle Ages indicates his awareness of alternative models of relationship between humans and the natural world. Though he offers few concrete suggestions as to an idealized form of such a relationship, the precise problems he identifies in capitalism’s externalization of nature allow us to infer at least what would need to be fixed. I will outline this by (first) outlining the source of the problem in the self-enclosedness of capitalism, before briefly suggesting that Lukács’s comments on aesthetics suggest more positive forms of interaction between the social and the natural.

Capitalism is unprecedented in the degree to which its social relations are internally defined, Lukács suggests—and it is this that excludes ‘Nature’ so completely. Without seeking to romanticize earlier social forms, Lukács suggests that they were open at least in principle to social relations grounded on something external to society. As he explains, ‘humanity in feudal society could not yet become conscious of itself as a social being, because their social relations themselves often possessed a naturalistic character, and because society itself was far from sufficiently organized through and in its unification of all relations from person to person for it to be manifest in consciousness as *the* reality of humanity.’⁴⁵ The relations of personal loyalty between a liege and their vassals, or the transmission of authority by familial inheritance were grounded on something other than an abstractly defined social form. We might also think of the habit of aristocratic Roman families of adopting heirs, such as the emperor Nerva’s adoption of Trajan as his successor, as a further example: in this instance, social relations had to take on the ‘naturalistic’ form of the family. Of course, this does not mean that such relations have any kind of objective or a priori validity—simply that they were understood as grounded on something ‘outside’ society.

In contrast, the commodity structure at the root of capitalism produces a social order that is purely ‘autonomous, self-enclosed, and based entirely on immanent laws.’⁴⁶ Note here Lukács’s description of capitalism as ‘*in sich geschlossen*,’ ‘self-enclosed,’ the very way he had described the perfect work of art. In his Heidelberg drafts, however, he had eventually concluded that such a work of art remained utopian: it became *too* detached from experience, and so could not provide the kind of salvation from social problems that might be sought in it. In the case of capitalism, this self-enclosure has a different and far more ruinous consequence: it attempts to exclude from society anything not derived from the a priori rules of validity defined by the commodity. That is, social relations are constituted entirely immanently, on the basis of quantitative comparisons, and are completely independent of ‘the particular human qualities of people, all anthropomorphisms – whether religious, ethical, aesthetic, or of any other nature.’⁴⁷ Recall: what characterizes the commodity structure as a form of social relations is that it determines the social being of every entity by relating it abstractly (and quantitatively) to every other entity. Commodities are determined by the universal equivalence of value—while in law, for example, every citizen is determined by a set of universal rights. The social being of any entity is defined only by its connection to other, similarly determined entities, and not by any characteristics it brings to social relations from outside—properties that may be understood as adhering to the individual directly, such as their valour, or their familial connections to one another. Capitalism is thus the first entirely ‘self-enclosed, self-validating system’ of social relations: the only conceivable form of being it allows is that which can be rationalized.⁴⁸

It follows that nothing claiming to exist independently of those social relations can be conceived of as entering into society. And this, Lukács suggests, shapes our relation to anything standing outside those relations—including the formless substance of ‘Nature’ that the commodity structure itself externalizes. In the first place, it is impossible for us to have any ‘immediate interaction’ with this Nature: our subjectivity increasingly interpellated as purely social, we have no direct point of contact with that world outside it.⁴⁹ It goes without saying that no society has had a direct relation to nature as such, but what is distinct about capitalism (Lukács suggests) is that capitalism is unique in that it refuses any kind of interaction with nature or valuation of nature on its own terms; it sees nature only as something to be transformed into commodities. Thus, the self-enclosed totality of capitalist society is unable to tolerate anything external

to it: it seeks ‘the achievement of control over Nature,’ through ‘the subjugation of Nature to the categories of socialization.’⁵⁰ This socialization entails the shattering of any pre-existing bonds, and indeed the destruction of any image of ‘nature’ as a totality in its own right. The external material world is understood as having only a formal unity. The laws that determine the relations between each part of it connect these parts only isolated elements or atoms interacting in determined ways, rather than as a totality in its own right. This isolation of such parts makes each of them available for use and exchange, rather than being conceived as part of a total ecosystem with its own value. Lukács thereby implies that the notion that technology or rationality stand in a relation of domination towards nature—whether an external organic world or internal psychological drives and instincts—is, directly, a product of the separation of form and content exemplified by the commodity form.

If Lukács is correct, then, it would be wrong to conceive of the domination of internal or external nature in terms of some kind of Weberian iron cage—that is, as set of restrictions imposed from outside upon an existent entity with a set of properties, tendencies, and characteristics of its own, not defined by those restrictions. Such an interpretation would assume that humans (or nature) *would* behave in a certain manner if only they were not prevented from doing so or otherwise distorted by artificial impositions on them; in this, it is rather like the Rousseauian paradigm of ‘nature’ to which Lukács alludes. The problem stems instead from the separation of form and content in the structure of social relations that shape our confrontation with the material world by determining ‘nature’ in these contradictory ways. Though Lukács offers only very general hints as to how this might be transcended, we can infer that it must involve an ontological change in the very structure of social relations. For a society built on the commodity structure (or any analogous system that reduces social relations to abstract, quantifiable interactions), nature will always appear as an external substance to be fragmented and exploited. By extension, a change in the structure of social relations may be expected to produce a corresponding change in our relation to nature because it will manifest that material world and our relation to it differently.

Though *History and Class Consciousness* offers no comprehensive account of a redeemed relation to nature, it is possible to construct a model in the spirit of Lukács’s argument that offers ‘the prospect ... of non-reified relations from human to human and between human and nature.’⁵¹ Such a model would certainly not entail a return to social relations

grounded on naturalistic ties, such as patriarchal forms: whatever the flaws of the commodity form, its total socialization of all relations raises humans to the level of conscious social being for the first time, he argues. This at least permits the active inclusion of subjects in the constitution of social relations—in a way foreclosed by the givenness of a society purportedly organized on a naturalistic basis. Instead, Lukács looks to art as offering an idealized model of a non-coercive relation to nature—albeit one that cannot be realized simply in art as such. Noting the growing significance of the concept of art from the eighteenth century onwards, Lukács suggests that ‘in it we find above all an interaction between humans and nature.’⁵² This dialogue is in the form of aesthetics. Here we find ‘a conception of form directly orientated towards the concrete content of its material substratum,’ in contrast to the abstraction of capitalistic social forms.⁵³

Intriguingly, Lukács’s discussion of the problem in the ‘Reification’ essay is supplemented by a lengthy footnote in which he cites his own earlier piece touching on the same themes in relation to Schiller, ‘The subject-object relationship in aesthetics,’ originally written as part of the Heidelberg drafts.⁵⁴ There, of course, he had contrasted aesthetics with logic and ethics as the only real manifestation of an authentic subject-object relationship. While the subject of logic merely mouthed objective rules, and ethics was concerned above all with the subjective side over its objective worldly consequences, aesthetics posits the subject and object in a necessary interaction, defining the subject as that which *becomes a subject* in experiencing an artwork.⁵⁵ Recall here that the subject is not conceived a priori, independently of the work: Lukács continues to define it only as one moment in a subject-object totality. Relating to the work as a self-enclosed totality, Lukács argues, is no denial of subjectivity, but is instead its fulfilment. As he explains in the ‘Reification’ essay, it is crystallized in the emergence of a ‘third conception’ of nature beyond the two antinomic definitions outlined earlier. He finds it above all in Schiller’s play instinct as the overcoming of the rigid dichotomy between form-instinct and content-instinct.⁵⁶ As he explains in the earlier work, it is this that generates a ‘complete person,’ one in whom all elements and faculties are reunited—as well as the ‘person in full,’ able to experience the world as a substantial totality in their own experience.⁵⁷ Where the self-enclosed totality of capitalism only permits the most formal kind of subjectivity, that of art allows the incorporation of substance and particularity too. By accepting the self-sufficiency of the object as a complex of meaning, the subject gains a new and more fulfilling relation to reality.

Art alone cannot resolve all the problems it might be thought to. Even at the level of aesthetic, Lukács expressed doubts: in his Heidelberg drafts, he attributes this to the utopian character of the artwork; it is *too* self-sufficient, depicting a perfection that can be realized neither by the creative artist nor by the receptive audience.⁵⁸ This was even more true for the social problems examined by the 'Reification' essay: attempting to transfer aesthetic attitudes to society would result in either even more extreme contemplativeness or the 'mythologizing' of the power of the creative subject to shape objective reality.⁵⁹ But this model does perhaps offer suggestions as to Lukács's idealized relations between humanity and nature. Any interaction with nature must start from the premise of nature as a total ecosystem valid in its own right, rather than as a set of isolated fragments ready to be exploited. That is, the needs of nature must be attended to: the meaning of individual parts of nature should be understood in relation to the whole functioning ecosystem in which it is found, rather than transposing it into the economy and redefining it as a commodity or source of profit. Lukács offers no practical suggestions as to how such relations might take place to parallel his account of the Party as a realm of emancipated relations.⁶⁰ It is, though, clear that he believes that the transformation of social forms more generally will permit such a non-coercive relation to the material world. If the social being of objects is no longer determined solely by an abstract, quantifying principle, our relations to them will be more varied. It follows that this would apply to the material world more generally: 'natural' objects would no longer be determined purely as values, but as rich complexes of form and content. The formal integrity of the environment as a substantial whole could be respected. Where nature is manifest through the quantitative forms of the commodity structure, it is infinitely divisible into parts that can be extracted for their value. Treated as a form-content whole in its own right, it would no longer be so easily exploitable. This does not imply some kind of Gaia-worship, but merely that we temper our relations to the natural world by recognition that its parts have a meaning independent of their economic value.

Such a dereified determination of the external natural world could be paralleled at the level of the individual. 'Nature' in the irrational, Rousseauian, substantial sense would be an integral part of the social being of individuals, and need no longer be externalized by social relations. Rather than relations built solely on abstract quantitative forms, humans might interact as expressive, emotive individuals with a meaningful history of their own, situated in a number of substantial communal links. These

aspects of the self would not be the formless substance that commodity relations exclude, but would instead be manifest in their own significant form—emerging, like that of an artwork, out of the substance of the psyche, rather than being imposed on it from without. Indeed, even the attitude of the individual to their own faculties, emotions, and drives might change: instead of relating with reifying objectivity to such aspects as commodities that might be sold in the performance of labour, as Lukács identifies under capitalism, we would understand these aspects of ourselves as part of a complex that includes our conscious, subjective aspects. We might even surmise that the subjective seat of consciousness, surveying its own ‘inner’ drives, could relate to them in something like the way Riegl identifies in the interaction between Rembrandt’s paintings and their viewers: the conscious or rational subject would come to understand itself as equal co-constitutor of the self through interaction with the drives that come to consciousness through it. Of course, where Riegl depicted this as the promotion of the viewer to equal status with the image, in this case the reverse would be the case: the subject would no longer view itself as the sovereign exercising domination over its irrational drives, but as a partner with them. What would make this possible is a new relational structure that determines how such drives are manifest: new, dereified, more fluid social forms that permit more substantial relations between entities and are more open to active construction by subjects would generate a new relation between the subject and its own psychological interior. Overcoming the abstract, determinist formalism of the commodity structure would not only reduce social domination; it would reincorporate into social relations the psychological and natural substance that commodity fetishism deems an irrational residue to be excluded. It might, in other words, end the domination of society over ‘nature’ by ending the structurally generated dichotomy between them.

5 CONCLUSION

Even some of Lukács’s most sympathetic readers, such as Andrew Feenberg or Lukács himself later in life, have criticized *History and Class Consciousness* for largely disregarding the problem of nature. For the later Lukács, this meant a failure to understand the role of the material world as the object on which humanity labours in order to develop itself more fully. For Feenberg, Lukács’s omission meant that he ignores the danger that rationalized and technological systems will remain in place that dominate both external nature and our own internal natural drives.

I have argued that such criticisms are misplaced—above all, because they accept a certain definition of ‘nature’ as given. Lukács rejects this. Reading his account phenomenologically, it becomes clear that he sees the problem rather differently. Certain social forms—those based on the commodity structure—determine social reality so as to exclude all substantial content, and to leave it formless and outside the borders of society. It is designated as ‘irrational,’ lacking any integrity or immanent form of its own, and can be brought into social relations only by the imposition of abstract forms that fragment it into pieces that can be exploited. Lukács identifies this in his account of the antinomy in the concept of nature, contrasting predictable ‘natural laws’ with the Rousseauian image of a prelapsarian innocence. Because this contrast is rooted in social relations that only permit objects to be manifest in their abstract form, it follows that reconstituted social relations—ones that overcome the form/content dichotomy—offer at least the possibility of a less coercive, less exploitative relationship to internal and external nature. Only within such social forms could ‘nature’ be determined in a way that overcomes the antinomy by reunifying form and content.

My suggestions as to the basic theoretical structure of such relations followed Lukács in modelling them on art and the aesthetic, wherein a more integrated relationship of form and content is essential. Given the sparseness of Lukács’s own account, these must remain as no more than tentative speculation about the sort of relationship he envisaged. It is clear, though, that the kind of exploitative relationship he describes in the late *Ontology* would certainly not suffice. In that work, Lukács offers little or no consideration of the natural world as a significant complex in its own right: the subject relates to the object as an inert means to its own self-expression. Both *History and Class Consciousness* and the sections of the Heidelberg *Aesthetics* that parallel his revolutionary work offer hints of a more equal relationship, one in which the subject is more fulfilled by recognizing the integrity and self-validation of nature as such. This is, I suggest, closer to the kind of attitude towards the natural that Feenberg hopes for. But Lukács’s account goes further than Feenberg allows, I think. What Lukács is able to do is show the dialectical relationship whereby abstractly rational social and technological structures are *driven* first to exclude and then to dominate an irrational content. The coercion of an irrational nature is not merely a misguided practice that could simply be reduced or ended, but is intrinsic to the logic of the commodity structure, and to the ontic reality of capitalism for which this opposition is fundamental. It is because the commodity structure places all social relations in

this abstract form that it determines the material world as an irrational substance that must be brought into socialized relations.

Lukács's solution is not, therefore, the simple removal or reduction of rational structures. Rather, in calling for the reunification of form and content in social relations, he aims at a total transformation of the logic of social being. He certainly does not stand up for 'irrationalism,' as critics such as Colletti or Stedman Jones have suggested. Rather, he is calling for a different form of rationality—one that is itself able to combine form and content properly. Social relations defined by such rationality would no longer need to impose abstract demands on material reality; they would no longer be marked by the domination, the a priorism, and the narrow centralism of capitalistic forms. Instead of removing rationality, then, he calls for rational forms that cultivate and express their content, bringing it (like aesthetic form) to full expression. It is this possibility of a new form of reason, I will suggest in concluding, that is Lukács's greatest potential contribution to contemporary debate.

NOTES

1. Lukács, Georg. 1983. *Record of a Life*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. Istvan Eörsi. London: Verso. 77.
2. By implication, the autopoiesis identified by Luhmann et al. is itself a historical product, not a transhistorical feature of social systems as such—though this is not the place for an extended consideration of Luhmannian systems theory. On autopoiesis in general, see Maturana, H. R. & Varela, F. J. 1980. *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The realization of The Living*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel. See also Luhmann, Niklas. 1984. *Soziale Systeme: Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp. (English translation: Luhmann, Niklas. 1995. *Social Systems*, trans. Dirk Baecker, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.)
3. Lukács, *Record of a Life*, 77.
4. Feenberg offers the best account of these early critiques and their flaws. See Feenberg, Andrew. 2014. *The Philosophy of Praxis: Marx, Lukács, and the Frankfurt School*. London: Verso 124–128.
5. Engels, quoted in Lukács, Georg 1968–1981. *Werke*, (W) 18 vols., ed. György Márkus & Frank Benseler Darmstadt: Luchterhand ii.311: 'Die im pflanzlichen und tierischen Körper erzeugten chemischen Stoffe blieben solche ›Dinge an sich‹, bis die organische Chemie sie einen nach dem anderen darzustellen anfang.' Lukács, Georg. 1971 *History & Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, [HCC] trans. Rodney Livingstone. London: Merlin. 131.

6. Lukács, *W* ii.311: 'Seine "Kritik" bezieht sich bloß darauf, daß selbst eine vollendete Erkenntnis sämtlicher Phänomene – eben bloß eine Erkenntnis der Phänomene (im Gegensatz zu den Dingen an sich) ware.' Lukács, *HCC* 132.
7. Lukács, *W* ii.312: 'Der Experimentator schafft ein künstliches, abstraktes Milieu, um das ungestörte Sichauswirken der zu beobachtenden Gesetze ungehindert, alle hemmend irrationellen Elemente sowohl von der Seite des Subjekts wie von der des Objekts ausschaltend, *beobachten* zu können.' Lukács, *HCC* 132.
8. Lukács, *W* ii.22: 'eine teleologische Setzung.' Lukács, *HCC* xx.
9. Lukács, *W* ii.19: 'der Entwicklung der arbeitenden Menschen.' Lukács, *HCC* xvii.
10. See Fehér, Ferenc, Agnes Heller, György Markus, & Mihály Vajda, 1983, 'Notes on Lukács's Ontology,' *Lukács Revalued*, ed. Heller, Ágnes et al., 125–153. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983; this essay also includes an account of the circumstances under which the work was written.
11. Georg Lukács, *Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins*, vols.xiii-xiv of *W* xiv.9–10: 'Sie ist ihrem Wesen nach eine Wechselbeziehung zwischen Mensch (Gesellschaft) und Natur, und zwar sowohl unorganischer (Werkzeug, Rohstoff, Arbeitsgegenstand etc.) wie organischer.'
12. Lukács, *W* xiv.35: 'Denn sowohl das Arbeitsmittel wie der Arbeitsgegenstand sind an sich der Naturkausalität unterworfenen Naturdinge, die erst in der teleologischen Setzung, erst durch diese, obwohl sie Naturgegenstände bleiben, eine gesellschaftlich seiende Gesetztheit im Arbeitsprozeß erhalten können.'
13. Lukács, *W* xiv.46: 'der Versuch, einen anderen Menschen (oder eine Menschengruppe) dazu zu bringen, daß er seinerseits konkrete teleologische Setzungen vollziehe.'
14. Lukács, *W* xiv.9: 'sprunghaften Übergang von einem Seinsniveau in ein anderes, qualitative verschiedenes handelt.'
15. Lukács, *W* xiv.26–27.
16. Lukács, *W* xiv.29: 'Diese bewußt gewordene Trennung von Subjekt und Objekt ist ein notwendiges Produkt des Arbeitsprozesse.'
17. Lukács, *W* xiv.96: 'die objektiv wirksame, aber ontologisch relative Unabhängigkeit des Bewußtseins vom Leib.'
18. See Honneth, Axel, 1995 *The Struggle for Recognition: the Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson. Cambridge: Polity.
19. Feenberg, *Philosophy of Praxis*, 44.
20. Lukács, *W* ii.171: 'die neuere Forschung hätte die sachliche Unrichtigkeit sämtlicher einzelnen Aussagen von Marx einwandfrei nachgewiesen Orthodoxie in Fragen des Marxismus bezieht sich vielmehr ausschließlich auf die *Methode*.' Lukács, *HCC* 1.

21. Feenberg, *Philosophy of Praxis*, 131.
22. Feenberg, *Philosophy of Praxis*, 133–137.
23. Feenberg, *Philosophy of Praxis*, 141.
24. Feenberg, *Philosophy of Praxis*, 142–143.
25. Feenberg, *Philosophy of Praxis*, 135.
26. Feenberg, *Philosophy of Praxis*, 153.
27. Feenberg, *Philosophy of Praxis*, 168.
28. Feenberg, *Philosophy of Praxis*, 201–202.
29. Kant, quoted in Lukács *W* ii.276: ‘die Ehe ... die Verbindung zweier Personen verschiedenen Geschlechts zum lebenswierigen wechselseitigen Besitz ihrer Geschlechtseigenschaften.’ Lukács, *HCC* 100.
30. Lukács, *W* 275–276: ‘Und es gibt naturgemäß kein Form der Beziehung der Menschen zueinander, keine Möglichkeit des Menschen, seine physischen und psychischen >Eigenschaften< zur Geltung zu bringen, die sich nicht in zunehmendem Maße dieser Gegenständlichkeitsform unterwerfen würden.’ Lukács, *HCC* 100.
31. Lukács *W* HCC.263: ‘Mit der modernen, “psychologischen” Zerlegung des Arbeitsprozesses (Taylor-System) ragt diese rationelle Mechanisierung bis in die “Seele” des Arbeiters hinein: selbst seine psychologischen Eigenschaften werden von seiner Gesamtpersönlichkeit abgetrennt, ihr gegenüber objektiviert, um in rationelle Spezialsysteme eingefügt und hier auf den kalkulatorischen Begriff gebracht werden zu können.’ Lukács, *HCC* 88.
32. Lukács *W* ii.263: ‘bloße Fehlerquellen.’ Lukács, *HCC* 89.
33. Lukács *W* ii.356: ‘seine “Seele” verkümmert und verkrüppelt,’ Lukács, *HCC* 172.
34. Lukács *W* ii.311: ‘Der Experimentator schafft ein künstliches, abstraktes Milieu, um das ungestörte Sichauswirken der zu beobachtenden Gesetze ungehindert, alle hemmend irrationellen Elemente sowohl von der Seite des Subjekts wie von der des Objekts ausschaltend, *beobachten* zu können. Er ist bestrebt, das materielle Substrat seiner Beobachtung – soweit wie nur möglich – auf das rein vernunftgemäß “Erzeugte,” auf die “intelligible Materie” der Mathematik zu reduzieren.’ Lukács, *HCC* 132.
35. Lukács, *W* ii.316: ‘Wir haben bereits auf die – von Kant nur am klarsten formulierte, jedoch von Kepler-Galilei bis heute gleichbleibende – Definition der Natur als “Inbegriff der Gesetzmäßigkeiten” des Geschehens hingewiesen. ... Denn hier hat die Natur sehr wesentlich einen bürgerlich-revolutionären Kampfkent: die “gesetzmäßige,” die kalkulierbare, die formell-abstrakte Wesensart der kommenden, der sich entfaltenden bürgerlichen Gesellschaft erscheint als Natur neben der Künstlichkeit, der Willkür, der Regellosigkeit von Feudalismus und Absolutismus.’ Lukács, *HCC* 136.

36. Lukács, *Wii*.288, n.2; Lukács, *HCC* 210, n.3.
37. Lukács, *Wii*.136: 'Und die Natur wird – ohne daß die völlige Umkehrung der Begriffsbedeutung bewußt geworden wäre – zu dem Behälter, in dem sich alle diese gegen die zunehmende Mechanisierung, Entseelung, Verdinglichung wirkenden inneren Tendenzen zusammenfassen. ... Sie kann aber zugleich als jene Seite der menschlichen Innerlichkeit aufgefaßt werden, die Natur geblieben ist oder die wenigstens die Tendenz, die Sehnsucht hat, wieder Natur zu werden.' Lukács, *HCC* 136.
38. Lukács *Wii*.136: 'im Gegensatz zu den menschlich-zivilisatorischen, künstlichen Gebilden.' Lukács, *HCC* 136.
39. Lukács *Wii*.316: 'Wertbegriff.' Lukács, *HCC* 136.
40. Lukács *Wii*.316 n.1: 'Wichtig für uns ist auch hier bloß die Gegenstandsstruktur: daß dieser scheinbare Gipfelpunkt der Verinnerlichung der Natur gerade den vollen Verzicht auf ihr wirkliches Durchdringen bedeutet. Stimmung als Inhaltsform setzt genauso undurchdringene und undurchdringbare Objekte (Dinge an sich) voraus wie das Naturgesetz.' Lukács, *HCC* 214 n.47.
41. Lukács *Wii*.315–316: 'entscheidenden Begriffen für die Selbstverständigung des bürgerlichen Menschen über seine Stellung zur Welt.' Lukács, *HCC* 136.
42. Marx, quoted in Lukács *Wii*.310: 'Descartes mit seiner Definition der Tiere als bloßer Maschinen mit den Augen der Manufakturperiode sieht im Unterschiede zum Mittelalter, dem das Tier als Gehilfe des Menschen galt.' Lukács, *HCC* 131.
43. Vajda Mihály, 1983. 'Lukács and Husserl,' 107–124 in *Lukács Revalued*, ed. Heller, Ágnes et al. Oxford: Blackwell.
44. Vajda, 'Lukács and Husserl,' 114.
45. Lukács *Wii*.192: 'Der Mensch der feudalen Gesellschaft konnte über sich als Gesellschaftswesen nicht bewußt werden, weil seine gesellschaftlichen Beziehungen selbst noch vielfach einen naturhaften Charakter besessen haben, weil die Gesellschaft selbst in ihrer Gesamtheit viel zu wenig einheitlich durchorganisiert und in ihrer Einheitlichkeit sämtliche Beziehungen von Mensch zu Mensch umfassend war, um im Bewußtsein als *die* Wirklichkeit des Menschen zu erscheinen.' Lukács, *HCC* 19.
46. Lukács *Wii*.407: 'Kein Zufall, weil die kapitalistische Gesellschaft durch ihre waren- und verkehrswirtschaftliche Organisation dem Wirtschaftsleben eine so selbständige, in sich geschlossene und auf immanenten Gesetzmäßigkeiten beruhende Eigenart verlieh, wie sie den ihr vorausgegangenen Gesellschaften unbekannt war.' Lukács, *HCC* 231.
47. Lukács *Wii*.407: 'In ihr handelt es sich um Zusammenhänge, die von der menschlichen Eigenart des Menschen, von allen Anthropomorphismen – seien sie nun religiöser, ethischer, ästhetischer oder anderer Natur – vollkommen unabhängig sind.' Lukács, *HCC* 232.

48. Lukács *W* ii.407: 'ein selbständiges, in sich geschlossense, in sich sinnvolles System geworden sind.' Lukács, *HCC* 232.
49. Lukács *W* ii.410: 'eine unmittelbare Auseinandersetzung.' Lukács, *HCC* 234.
50. Lukács *W* ii.408: 'das Erlangen der Herrschaft über die Natur ... die Unterwerfung der Natur unter die Kategorien der Vergesellschaftung.' Lukács, *HCC* 233.
51. Lukács *W* ii.414: 'enn erst jetzt, wo sich die Perspektive zu einer Wiedererlangung von nicht verdinglichten Beziehungen zwischen Mensch und Mensch, zwischen Mensch und Natur aufat, ist es möglich geworden.' Lukács, *HCC* 237.
52. Lukács *W* ii.411: 'in ihr vorwiegend eine Auseinandersetzung des Menschen mit der Natur abspielt.' Lukács, *HCC* 235.
53. Lukács, *W* ii.317–318: 'einer Konzeption der Form, die gerade auf die konkrete Inhaltlichkeit ihres materiellen Substrats gerichtet ist.' Lukács, *HCC* 137.
54. Lukács *W* ii.321 n.1; Lukács, *HCC* 215, n.53.
55. See Chap. 3.
56. Lukács, *W* ii.316–322; Lukács, *HCC* 136–140.
57. Lukács, *W* ii.99–103. His key terms are 'Mensch ganz' and 'ganze Mensch'—which, as Márkus and Heller have both noted, reappear in his late *Specificity of the Aesthetic*. See Heller, Ágnes and Ferenc Féhér 1991 *The Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism*. New Brunswick & London: Transaction Publishers. and Márkus, György 1983. 'Life and Soul: the Young Lukács and the Problem of Culture,' *Lukács Revalued*, in Heller, Ágnes ed. 1–26. Oxford: Blackwell.
58. See Chap. 2.
59. Lukács, *W* ii.321; Lukács, *HCC* 140.
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Conclusion: Lukács in Late Capitalism

The renewed resonance of Lukács's early thought a century on despite quite different social circumstances is intriguing. Perhaps this return to reification indicates a sense of discontent with a social reality that has come to seem contradictory and no longer able to provide coherent meaningful context to the lives of individuals—rather like that which Lukács himself experienced. He was uniquely well situated to describe this condition, with an intellectual hinterland spanning literature, philosophy, and sociology even before he embraced Marxism: the first presented the affective symptoms of the problem; the second offered a framework to analyse it; the third explained the social and historical background that brought such experiences. What his early literary essays have in common with *History and Class Consciousness* is this preoccupation with the isolation and meaninglessness experienced by the individual in contemporary society. Considering the merits of his revolutionary tract in 1967, Lukács himself pointed to its role in placing alienation (*Entfremdung*) at the centre of a Marxist critique of capitalism: thanks to its concern with this 'central problem of the time we live in,' it had won a number of 'good Communists' over to the movement.¹ Lukács's continued preoccupation with this theme from at least *Soul and Form* to *History and Class Consciousness* makes it understandable that so many of his interpreters identify his thought as essentially continuous throughout this period, in a way that makes his Marxist text appear as a revolutionary, neo-Romantic solution to the problems of life in bourgeois society.

The common identification of alienation as a decisive problem does not necessarily mean a shared philosophical paradigm, however. The later Lukács himself freely acknowledged the parallels with Heidegger and Sartre in this regard—two thinkers from whom he otherwise wished to distance himself entirely.² Equally, just because *History and Class Consciousness* and *Soul and Form* also share this focus does not mean that they analyse or seek to solve it in identical ways. Lukács's works throughout this period use at least two frameworks for understanding this problem. The first, epitomized by *Soul and Form*, sits (as Stedman Jones rightly argues) within the broader tradition of *Lebensphilosophie*, criticizing the coldly artificial structures of bourgeois society for stifling the living culture beneath.³ It is possible to distinguish a slightly different version of this in Lukács's notes for a book on Dostoevsky: in this case, it is a spontaneous, immediate, and affective unity grounded on fraternal love that is restricted by social relations based on unfeeling calculation.⁴ This second version is perhaps more responsible for the 'messianic sectarianism' that the later Lukács criticized in his work of the time, and clearly visible in the essays he wrote in the first months after embracing Bolshevism.⁵ In both cases, the individual experienced such conflicts as an external restriction on their more natural, immediate existence: their natural cultural or emotional expressions were restrained and mutilated by the structures that surrounded them. The living, substantial 'soul'—cultural or affective—was distorted by forms that had nothing to with it.

This perspective treats society and the individual as entities whose existence outside and separate from these artificial relations and social structures is at least thinkable. Under this paradigm, there are direct relations between humans (and hence a general social unity) that are then perverted by the forms of contemporary society; at the level of the individual, the soul exists in its natural form until mutilated by restrictive social relations. The pre-existence of this spiritual, cultural, or affective substance explains both Lukács's normative demand and his identification of the solution of the problem. It is desirable that this substance somehow be set free from the structures that enchain it, by shedding them so it is able express itself freely. The fact that it has some kind of existence outside of the structures means that it can, in principle, act against them. As we have seen, for many of Lukács's critics, *History and Class Consciousness* follows the same model: reification entails the distortion of more natural social relations (perhaps those grounded directly on labour, as Postone argues). To overcome it (so these interpretations argue), Lukács assumes that the proletariat exists as subject outside these relations as their *creator*; this ontological priority of

the subject allows the working class to seize control of those relations once again and dominate society. In some form, this model has been the most common interpretation of Lukács's Marxist theory, shared in different variations by Arato and Breines, Habermas, Postone, or Rockmore, for whom Lukács represents some kind of broadly defined neo-Romanticism.

In place of this, I have identified a second, distinct strand of theoretical development in Lukács's work of the time, one that draws instead on his incomplete Heidelberg drafts towards a philosophy of art, and points to the importance of thinkers such as Edmund Husserl, Emil Lask, Alois Riegl, and Konrad Fiedler in shaping his thought. With the exception of Lask, Lukács's engagement with these thinkers has been largely ignored hitherto—despite their obvious presence throughout the Heidelberg manuscripts and, in the cases of Husserl and Riegl, specific instances of Lukács directly noting their importance in later work. Read through the prism of these thinkers, Lukács appears more of a phenomenologist: he interprets social being through a formal semantics of practices and the meaning of objects. Meaning cannot be reduced to a subjective projection, nor are phenomena simply representations of an object that exists outside of meaning. Instead, meaning is *sui generis*: it has its own structural logic or validity forms. These meanings necessarily entail intentionality, or a way in which subjects are oriented towards them; at the same time, any domain of meaning may have an overarching governing principle that determines what kinds of meaning are possible within that realm.

This phenomenology is explicit in his philosophy of art. The work cannot be understood as a representation of an external world, but is, rather, a sphere in which things come to formed, determinate existence directly. A work of art sets up a world within itself, structured by a principle akin to Riegl's *Kunstwollen*, and becomes its own self-enclosed source of meaning. By showing that some of Lukács's central categories—the standpoint, totality, the subject-object relation—emerged in the Heidelberg philosophy of art that engaged so explicitly with these writers, I have argued that their thought continued to shape the philosophy of social being found in the later essays of *History and Class Consciousness*. Consequently, determinate social being—the formed, conscious being of society—cannot be understood as a mere depiction of a more real social substance underneath. Reification is not a misrepresentation; it is the actual existence of objects in a society governed by the commodity structure. Such meanings are embodied in intentional practices that determine objects by the way we are oriented towards them. Moreover, it is the logic of these meanings

that drives social practice, not an underlying material or natural reality that is supposedly represented in socially significant objects.

It follows that the theory of subjectivity in this version of Lukács's thought at the time equally does not rely on a subject outside society that 'knows' or 'creates' its objective social world. Rather, subjectivity should be understood (drawing on Riegl and Husserl) as a structurally determined attitude or position relative to objectivity, from which social being appears as a 'reality.' Alienation is not the result of a conflict between structures and subjects that could be defined as ontologically distinct. Rather, it is the result of a dichotomy produced by the commodity structure, one that separates the particular, qualitative aspects of subjects and objects from their formal, abstract social being, and so manifests the individual as systematically excluded from and in conflict with these same empty forms. This produces a contradiction *within* consciousness—within the experience of the proletariat as both subject and object—which disrupts reification's appearance of natural, immutable reality. Michael Löwy is thus entirely right to describe *History and Class Consciousness* as the *Aufhebung* of Lukács's earlier neo-Romanticism. He overcomes his earlier preoccupation with the oppression of the subject by objective social structures by showing that the a priori separation of subject and object is only produced by the form of reality governed by the commodity structure. Ultimately, subject and object are related as opposite poles of consciousness, but it is of the essence of capitalism, its *Wesen* in the Hegelian sense, that it appears (*erscheint*) in this way, as separate. It is emphatically not the case that the subject re-takes possession of an objective world it created; rather, it simply realizes that it was part of the phenomenological totality governing that subject-object reality in the first place. Thus, the overcoming of reification requires the restructuring of social forms so as to offer an active, rather than a contemplative, subjectivity; drawing on Riegl, I suggested that this meant that subjects must be interpellated as co-constitutors of the fluid forms of their social existence by social practices that are more open to incorporating content as a principle of relations, and that exhibit something akin to Riegl's external coherence.

Lukács is a theorist of praxis for whom this can never mean a one-off act that brings about salvation, but must instead be manifest in continued, fluid, and free forms of social behaviour. There is always the danger that reification will return if these forms themselves freeze in such a way that individuals merely act them out without any control over them. Subjectivity, then, is an entirely intrasocial matter, rather than an external

subject seizing control of an objective world that is separate from it. In this respect, my account is compatible with the likes of Merleau-Ponty, Bernstein, Goldmann, and Feenberg: notwithstanding their differences, these accounts do not see Lukács as relying on a subject of the kind most clearly manifest in epistemology—that of an entity standing over against an objective world that it tries to grasp in thought or deed. Feenberg states that ‘Michael Löwy’s more sympathetic treatment had little influence on the image of Lukács in the English-speaking world, and my own book still less.’⁶ Such neglect is entirely unjustified: Feenberg’s application of the anthropological notion of culture to *History and Class Consciousness* is a far better explanation of Lukács’s theory of subjectivity than those who see it as a fairly vulgar form of Idealism. ‘Culture’ encapsulates the basic point that subjectivity must be realized within social forms, and cannot be conceived outside it. Though I suggested in Chap. 6 that Lukács’s account of nature is more fertile than Feenberg believes, other than this our accounts are complementary. Where my phenomenological reading breaks new ground, I think, is in restoring all the nuances of *consciousness* that may be obscured by translating it as ‘culture’—and above all in placing the question of the *formal structure* of consciousness, of social being, and of reality as a system of meaning-production at the centre of the account—as well as by returning to the existential-philosophical dimensions of Lukács’s account on their own terms.

If my account is valid, then, the standard criticisms of Lukács are simply mistaken. By reading him too narrowly through a fairly crude and inaccurate version of German Idealism and Romanticism, they reduce his theory to pastiche. Löwy and Feenberg have already offered extensive critiques of these unfortunate attempts to critique Lukács; their rebuttals are decisive.⁷ By pointing to the intellectual milieu and discourses that included Husserl, Lask, Riegl, and Fiedler as largely neglected sources of Lukács’s thought, I have significantly complicated the picture offered by less-sympathetic critics. (It is not a coincidence that Feenberg is also one of the few actually to read Lask and explore his importance for Lukács.) This transforms the received image of Lukács’s theory, making it more complex and with greater potential for understanding contemporary social problems. In what remains, therefore, I shall briefly offer some qualifications to my account, before suggesting a few ways this new Lukács might be developed further for understanding contemporary issues—and perhaps even grounding the normative standards of social critique.

I BACK TO HEGEL AND MARX

I stated at that outset that my interpretation would offer only a very limited consideration of several of the thinkers usually cited as major sources of Lukács's thought; by doing so, I aimed to bring out the importance of quite different figures as clearly as possible. This means that my argument has offered two distinct claims related in a specific fashion: the first, an intellectual-historical claim that the discourses represented by Husserl, Lask, Riegl, and Fiedler were significant for Lukács's thought; the second, a philosophical claim about the structure of Lukács's theory itself. These two are not logically interdependent: it is possible to accept the significance of these four influences while denying that Lukács's social thought takes the form I have suggested; equally, one might accept my interpretation of *History and Class Consciousness* while denying that these four played any important role in shaping it. Rather, like any ideal type, this quartet served a heuristic role in helping to pick out certain features of Lukács's Marxian theory that have hitherto gone unnoticed.

However, this has required me to downplay or ignore the role of other thinkers. The importance of some of these in Lukács's development still awaits detailed study; there has, for example, not been much sustained and systematic explanation of Heinrich Rickert's significance, despite Lukács's repeated references to him. A proper consideration of Rickert's systematic work placed next to Lukács might be very revealing. Other sources of his thought have appeared here largely in auxiliary roles—those such as Simmel and Weber, from whom I have taken particular theoretical elements in places without attempting a complete analysis. But there are two figures in particular who merit a little more consideration here—Marx and Hegel.

Marx, of course, has been omnipresent in one regard: it is his analysis of the commodity structure that is the starting point for Lukács's discussion of reification. It is Marx's class analysis that Lukács relies on in pointing to the proletariat as the potential disruptor of reification, and Marx's overall analysis is assumed throughout. But in the account I have offered here, Marx is taken for granted, as it were: he is the object viewed through a lens comprising Husserl, Lask, and Riegl. Rather than offering a complete systematic account of his thought and its effects on Lukács, I have concentrated on certain concepts refracted through this particular set of Lukács's influences. It might in principle be possible to undertake the same procedure in reverse—to ask how far Lukács's understanding of

Husserl, say, was shaped by his reading of Marx, and thereby to treat the phenomenologist as the object instead. More importantly, this raises the question of the degree to which Lukács can be thought of as in any sense an orthodox Marxist, and the ways in which he differs from Marx. Setting aside both ‘Tailism and the Dialectic,’ his defence of *History and Class Consciousness* on the one hand, and his assorted autocriticisms on the other, it is still difficult to see how Lukács could claim to represent Marx’s complete theory with any kind of fidelity. He states at the very start of the ‘Reification’ essay that he has no real intention of dealing with the economic analyses that are, in fact, the bulk of Marx’s own later theory. There is no real space here (or, at best, only marginal room) to consider matters that loom large in Marx’s thought, such as surplus value, the composition of capital, or the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. This is not a fault of my interpretation: these matters barely figure in Lukács’s text. The one that does appear does so in a distorted fashion: in Lukács’s account, the changing rate of surplus value is important because of its effect on the worker’s sense of identity.⁸ The difference between Lukács and Marx might be summed up thus: Lukács offers a theory of capitalism, while Marx gives an account of capital per se. That is, Lukács interprets the entirety of capitalist society as a totality governed by a central structure, or with *form*, while Marx is concerned with the growth in capital as such, as the motor force of the capitalist mode of production, and hence with substance. Moishe Postone is right to argue that it is capital that is, for Marx, ‘the self-grounding, self-moving Subject.’⁹ For Lukács in contrast, there is no such single agent; he explores the formal structure of practices that constitute different kinds of subjective attitude, identifying capitalism with this formal arrangement. In fact, Lukács’s account on this reading is actually less expressive and subjectivist than Postone’s version: where Postone’s description assumes that capital as such produces society around it, Lukács offers no such genetic account, seeking only to explain the formal construction of meaning found in existing practices, and to unpack their contradictions.

The relatively small attention afforded to Hegel in my interpretation of Lukács’s argument will, no doubt, be the most obviously controversial part of it. One of the most important effects of *History and Class Consciousness* was the recognition of Hegel’s profound importance for Marx, and Lukács spends several pages in the preface pointing to exactly this question. While I have discussed in several places the ways in which Lukács’s use of Hegel is interwoven with the phenomenological model he

developed in Heidelberg, I have not offered a systematic analysis of this aspect of his thought. To be clear: I have no wish to deny the significance of Hegel. Rather, I avoided lengthier consideration of him for two methodological reasons. The first is predicated on the contextualization of Lukács's work. In this relationship, Lukács is a reader, and Hegel is both a text and historical figure laden with symbolic meaning. Hegel appears in Lukács's work in each of these guises: his work is the object of an interpretation that draws on his situation as a classically 'bourgeois' figure to explain his thought. Lukács's Hegel explicitly includes aspects not included in Hegel's own text. But just as Lukács makes Hegel's standpoint clear to explain his worldview, so too is it necessary to account for Lukács's position and his particular perspective on Hegel. As a reader, Lukács is not a neutral observer: the questions he asks of Hegel, the particular tensions he identifies, and the general understanding of Hegel's problematic are all shaped by his own broader reading. He is interrogating Hegel's texts to find answers to the questions posed within his own intellectual milieu. Understanding Lukács's other works—particularly the philosophically rich Heidelberg drafts—and the other thinkers who he drew on in developing his thought helps to clarify the problems he brought to his reading of Hegel. Thus, by bringing out his early engagement with Husserl, Lask, Riegl, and Fiedler, we gain a greater understanding of the standpoint of Lukács himself as he read Hegel, and how this standpoint (which I mean in the sense of his Heidelberg aesthetics) governs the image of Hegel that emerges explicitly in his work. Of course, the same applies in reverse: as Lukács read more Hegel and Marx, his understanding of Husserl et al. would itself change in turn. Disentangling these strands, showing how each element changes and is itself changed the others, is an endless task. The complexity of Hegel's own thought makes the judgement of his significance in Lukács's thought particularly difficult to explain with any certainty, and would require a lengthy separate work of its own.

However, limiting consideration of Hegel so as to focus on other sources of the text can in fact help pick out more clearly exactly what Lukács did in fact owe to the great Idealist by showing what he did not need to take from him. In this case, I suggest, the phenomenological reading I have offered indicates that Lukács did *not* take any theory of a macrosubject of history from Hegel, as the likes of Eagleton have charged. For many of his critics, Lukács's supposed search for a subject capable of overthrowing reification led him to turn to an allegedly Hegelian ideal subject-object that could simply annul the difference between itself and the

objective world it had unconsciously created. In place of *Geist* operating behind our backs, the proletariat could instead become the conscious subject capable of shaping its objective world at will. This is a bad interpretation of certain elements of Hegel, and it is a worse one of Lukács. By picking out the phenomenological framework of the latter's thought, I have argued for an entirely different understanding of subjectivity. As Kavoulakos rightly argues, the 'idealist interpretation' of the proletarian subject 'as a preexisting essence in search of its appropriate expression in reality is simply mistaken.'¹⁰ I have shown that Lukács's theory remains coherent when stripped of these elements of Hegel.

What Lukács does instead take from Hegel is drawn from *Logic*, and not from the more superficially subjectivist *Phenomenology of Spirit*. (As I argued in Chap. 4, the same is in fact true of his use of Fichte: presumably thanks to Lask, Lukács deals more with the post-1797 Fichte, not with the earliest version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* in which the subject is assigned the role of creator.) Lukács's basic ontological question is Hegelian. He seeks to understand social reality as a whole, something constantly reproduced and transforming itself (as *Wirklichkeit*), not a fixed and stable being (*Realität*). This reality comprises subject and object in interaction, such that the social world is ultimately revealed as comprised of human practices. Like Hegel, Lukács argues that the existence of an object is necessarily determinate; it is in being determined that it can properly be said to be actualized. Not only does he draw on Hegel's terminology to explain this—terms such as *Dasein* and *Wirklichkeit* are deployed in their Hegelian sense—he also employs Hegel's dialectical method to identify possible cracks in reified social reality. It is a contradiction between essence (*Wesen*) and appearance (*Erscheinung*) that, he argues, comes to light in the consciousness of the proletariat. While the essence of capitalism is the generation of a completely self-enclosed, self-validating social sphere, its appearance at the level of subjective consciousness is one of absolute individuation: we seem to stand outside social relations as private beings, interacting only on the most limited terms. It is because the proletariat—as commodity—experiences itself as at once social and individual that reification might start to crumble. Of course, as I argued in Chap. 5, this is one of the least plausible arguments in *History and Class Consciousness*—at least in the form Lukács presents it. But it does illustrate the continued importance of Hegel in his thought, providing the underlying structure of his explanation. Though Lukács interpreted Hegel's thought as limited in crucial ways that he sought to remedy through his phenomenological

model—the abstraction of his categories, the separate and parallel development of thought and being, and the failure to make the subject-object relation much more than recognitive instead of grounding it in practice—his significance is impossible to deny. My hope is that by clearing away the charge that Lukács relied on a subjectivist Hegel it becomes more possible to appreciate his use of Hegel's objective, ontological *Logic*.

2 TOWARDS A NEW PHENOMENOLOGY OF SOCIAL BEING

The hybrid that emerges from this interpretation of Hegelian objective Spirit through Husserlian and Rieglan lenses has, I suggest, much to offer for social theory. In the following section, I shall consider its potential for a specifically critical social theory, suggesting that Lukács's theory generates a more fluid and substantive notion of rationality that can be used as the basis of critique. First, it is worth briefly considering what this paradigm offers for a more general understanding of society by comparison with the most prominent phenomenological approaches to society—those of Alfred Schütz and of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. I shall summarize the main points differentiating Lukács from their approach in order to offer some possible advantages of Lukács's paradigm, which I shall then illustrate in its specific application to a single social institution. Obviously, a full and systematic comparison is impossible in these concluding remarks, but this brief survey may indicate some ways this might be developed further.

The phenomenology of Schütz and of Berger and Luckmann is social constructionist—explicitly so in the latter instance, which acknowledges its sources in Schütz. That is, they explain society primarily from the perspective of the subject's construction of meaning. In Schütz's major published work, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, he focuses primarily on the subjective meanings of acts, both in the way such meaning emerges and in its role in facilitating interactions. The tenor of his approach is clearest in his account of our relations to others in our society. He distinguishes these relations by the nearness or shared experiences of those involved. At its purest, this is seen in what Schütz calls the face-to-face situation: when we interact directly with someone present in front of us, we are aware that our internal temporal streams are running side-by-side, as it were, and thus share a meaningful experience directly.¹¹ This generates a 'We-relationship,' one in which two individuals are directly aware of one another's presence, interacting within this shared experience. Schütz

builds out from there to progressively more distant relationships: he distinguishes our *consociates* in our immediate circle, our broader circle of contemporaries, our awareness of past members of our society, and our descendants. Social action can be understood by the way we orient our action to the meanings of our own experience and the meanings we infer others may attach to it; for those further from us, our inferences are necessarily more speculative and grounded on meanings we have come to understand as shared across our society. Schütz's approach, then, is very directly on the individual's experience of grasping the social world: marrying Husserl and Weber, he deploys an interpretive approach that describes social action in terms of the individual's relation to others.

Schütz extended his model to explain more objective social institutions in his late *Structures of the Lifeworld*, but even here his focus remained on analysis of the individual's phenomenological relation to those structures from the first-person perspective.¹² He produced this in collaboration with Thomas Luckmann, who published it posthumously, and who himself developed the theory of social constructionism in association with Peter Berger. As an example of their method, Berger and Luckmann's account of social institutions clearly exhibits the same individualist approach as Schütz: the emergence and apparent fixity of such institutions is explained in terms of the individual's attitudes towards others. Social institutions originate, they suggest, in patterns of habituation: when two subjects regularly interact in order to achieve a certain goal, they learn to repeat the same actions time and again so as to save time spent on deciding how to perform minor tasks. The same process can be seen when entering into a standardized social interaction with a stranger: while one's particular interlocutor may change, the interaction itself takes the same form. Consequently, we habitually treat those we interact with as types: the barista relates to each person who comes to the coffee shop as a 'customer,' with whom there are set forms of interaction, while each customer in turn knows the normal way to order coffee. When they do not, the interaction may fail: there is no structure outside them that 'causes' the correct interactions independently of the knowledge of the social actors involved. Thus, for Berger and Luckmann, 'institutionalization occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors. Put differently, any such typification is an institution.'¹³ The institution, therefore, is rooted in the acts of individuals. Thus, when a new generation is born, they find themselves in a world in which what was to their parents the result of a relatively deliberate choice has become a set

of fixed institutions whose origin has been lost.¹⁴ These institutionalized habits appear to have the inevitability of a natural process, reinforced by the application of sanctions to those who deviate from the accustomed ways. Thus, over time, action becomes more and more ordered and predictable, as the very possibility of doing things differently seems to recede.

Berger and Luckmann's description of originally free actions coming to be governed by fixed social forms that have slipped out of human control and taken on the appearance of eternal validity has very obvious similarities with both the standard interpretation of Lukács and with certain elements of Marx's Paris manuscripts on alienation. (Indeed, they readily admit the link with Marx, while elsewhere using the term 'reify' explicitly.¹⁵) In all three cases, social relations and institutions are a product of human activity that has somehow come to oppress and restrict us in turn. But their account differs quite sharply from the new interpretation of Lukács that I have offered. For Berger and Luckmann, any logic that social relations appear to have, or any sense in institutions seem coherent, is really only a projection by the perceiving mind, and perhaps our psychological need to see the world as ordered. As they put it, 'reflective consciousness superimposes the quality of logic on the institutional order.'¹⁶ In contrast, Lukács places this logic on the side of the object—or at any rate, within the principle that governs subject/object relations as such, and which shapes the very nature of objective social being. As outlined in Chap. 3, it can be analysed directly in order to understand what kinds of objects can appear in society and what sorts of interactions they can have, as well as the kinds of subjective relation to them that are possible. This is where Lukács's account complements (without necessarily supplanting) that of Berger and Luckmann: he offers a way to understand social relations that largely does not need to speculate on internal mental processes. (As I indicated, the point at which he *does*, in order to explain the proletariat's tendency towards revolution, is perhaps the weakest part of his argument.) Rather, he explains directly the properties of given sets of social relations and practices in terms of their own logic and semantics. He presents practices as meaning-constructing acts, or intentionalities towards objects: a particular significant practice presupposes certain kinds of participation by the subject. Thus, he can directly analyse cultural practices, the formal structures of institutions, and the shape of social objects such as the 'commodity' directly, to understand what kind of reality they present. This means that his account is more immediately specific than that of Berger and Luckmann. They present a general and transhistorical account

of social being from the perspective of a subject; this does not necessarily direct our attention to the ways subjectivity and objectivity may differ across history and cultures. Lukács in contrast looks directly for the specific features of this or that principle of objective social reality: his phenomenology of social being (as I have described it) is predicated on the differences between societal forms of objectivity. The same is true on the side of the subject. Berger and Luckmann treat the subject as an individual agent seeking to achieve certain ends in the world; habituation ensures greater efficiency in achieving those ends. They offer basically one model of the subject's approach to social reality. Lukács's account, in contrast, offers a plurality: the individual may be active or contemplative, or may be either observer or constitutor of social relations. By focusing on the determinative principle structuring subjectivity and objectivity, Lukács's theory offers a range of historically variable forms of subjectivity.

This can be illustrated (against the spirit of Lukács's preference for analysing society as a totality!) by applying this model to the interpretation of a single social institution—the world of art. Lukács's Heidelberg drafts characterize the work of art, of course, as a 'self-enclosed totality'—that is, as something whose meaning is entirely self-contained and not related to any external standard. To the degree that this is a descriptive rather than a normative claim, it now seems somewhat implausible: as much of the sociology and history of art has revealed, the meaning of even the most canonically great art depends heavily on external knowledge. For example, Michael Baxandall has shown that much Renaissance art presupposed an audience skilled in the merchant's art of 'gauging,' or of estimating the size of irregular volumes of, say, a pile of cloth by mentally breaking it down into regular shapes.¹⁷ Artists composed pictures that required these kinds of skills in order to decipher even their formal coherence. Similarly, Clifford Geertz has pointed out the peculiarity of recent Western art in being located specifically in galleries, offered for aesthetic appreciation; as he points out, art and the aesthetic are to be found throughout society in other cultures.¹⁸ Finally, we might try to salvage the claim that art is self-enclosed by recourse to the theory of the aesthetic attitude that can be traced back to Kant (and arguably beyond). Jerome Stolnitz offers the clearest definition: for him, an object is aesthetic if we look at it in a certain way, with an attitude of disinterested attention—that is, we engage with all of its properties as a whole, without any reference to the utility they might have for us individual.¹⁹ Aesthetic attitude theories fell out of fashion after a scathing critique by George Dickie, who argued that the very idea of

‘disinterested attention’ was logically incoherent, and that we could never have sufficiently clear an insight into someone’s mental states as to judge whether they were truly disinterested in the pleasure they were taking from art.²⁰

If critiques such as Dickie’s, Geertz’s, and Baxandall’s are valid, then Lukács’s claim that the work of art *is as such* a self-enclosed totality must be wrong. However, if we instead project his social-theoretical model backwards to transform his philosophy of art into an account of art as a social institution, it may yet have some worth. Western art institutions from the Enlightenment onwards often tended to present works of art out of their context, solely for aesthetic regard—as, in a sense, self-enclosed totalities. A classic example of this is the notorious “‘Primitivism” in Twentieth-Century Art’ exhibition at MoMA in 1984. The philosopher of art Arthur Danto excoriated this exhibition for presenting objects from non-European cultures as ‘works of art’; doing so without regard to the actual place of these objects in cultural practices, he argued, fundamentally misrepresented their meaning.²¹ Danto was right to say that MoMA’s exhibition gave a misleading account of these objects, but the very problem with it points to something important about the formal construction of social meanings. When we place an object in a gallery, we remove it from the context within which it may have been used, and from which it may have drawn some of its significance. In the terms of Lukács’s phenomenology of social being, it is placed in a new set of relations—to all the other objects of the art world, rather than in relation to the rest of society. This redetermines it as an art object, defined by a set of purely artistic features that are independent of the meaning it may have in other contexts. The same might be said of works such as Duchamp’s *Fountain* or Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes*: the latter was the spark that inspired Danto’s own description of the art world in terms of the kind of statements that can be made about and properties attributed to works of art as an ever-growing realm. We might use Lukács’s theory to extend Danto’s version by focusing instead on the set of meaning-creating practices around works of art.

Such a phenomenological reading simultaneously defines the specific relation of the subject to the work in a way that perhaps salvages Stolnitz’s defence of the aesthetic attitude. The visitor to the gallery is expected to behave in a particular manner towards the work—not to touch it, but rather to appreciate it by directing their attention to certain features considered in their own right as part of the whole work. This attention may indeed be counted as ‘disinterested’: we are not supposed to express sex-

ual desire for nudes, for example! The presentation of the object as a discrete, meaningful, and unique entity thus entails a corresponding subjective stance towards it that ensures it appears in this way. But it is the structured complex of social relations constituting the art world that produces both object and subject in this way. This social institution can thus be understood as itself a distinct realm of the being of objects: the same item may be a devotional icon in an Orthodox church (demanding a rather different and less detached attitude from the observer who is joined with God through devotion to it) and as the consummate specimen of fourteenth-century Muscovite painting to be appreciated disinterestedly by the aesthete. The fact that the art of the past century has sought to break down this relationship—the interactive performance art of Marina Abramovich being one striking recent example—merely serves to confirm this, as does the growing emphasis on understanding the context of individual works or items: it is a redefinition of art through altering the way an object is situated relative to the world, and the stance expected of the percipient. These are changes in the art world itself, in the way it presents objects to viewers. It is the different set of objective social relations that determines what the object *is* and how subjects are to relate to it—and not anything to do with the properties of the object or faculties of the subject outside of any such relations.

Of course, it would be possible to extend this analysis beyond art, as Lukács wishes, to society as a totality: the detached stance towards art by the aesthete seeking disinterested pleasure is analogous to the isolated individual commodity buyer of capitalism. Even without doing so, this example illustrates how this Lukácsian phenomenology of social being could be applied to understand social institutions: they may be understood as particular domains, within which objects are constructed in distinct ways that govern the kinds of properties they have, and relative to which subjects may have different stances. The two-sided nature of Lukács's explanation, incorporating both subject and object as two poles of a complete reality, has the potential to offer distinct insights into specific areas of social reality.

3 THE LATE CAPITALIST SUBJECT

Today, any attempt to extend Lukács's model to society as a totality is bound to provoke suspicion: in a world more attuned to other dimensions of oppression in gender, race, and beyond, the assertion that society is

governed by a single *economically* derived structure and that the industrial working class alone is the source of liberty both seem wildly implausible—particularly given the evidence of racist and misogynistic practices among the supposedly emancipatory proletariat. The descent into totalitarianism of Communist states supposedly organized around the proletariat serves as a stark warning against assuming that oppression can take only one form. Lukács's own preoccupation with totality has meant, as Fredric Jameson points out, that 'in the *koiné* of contemporary theoretical debate, the name Lukács has become interchangeable with those of Hegel or Stalin for the word that illustrates the enormity of all these values by uniting them in a single program.'²² Rather than a world comprehensible as governed by a single central principle or process, postmodernity is characterized by fragmentation and diversity of a kind that makes any attempt to return to class politics *alone* seem just as repressive of difference as any authoritarian society. Thus, for Jameson, late capitalism and postmodernity entail a subjective sense of dislocation, of being lost on a sea of signifiers with no governing logic behind them.²³ At the same time, this very disunity is 'celebrated in its own right as the very bonus of pleasure and libidinal investment of the new social order as a whole.'²⁴ It is not something to be overcome, but to be reinforced.

Despite its vintage, Jameson's account of postmodernity is still applicable in important respects: it picks out certain features of contemporary life that limit the applicability of Lukács's account to modern forms of subjectivity. His concentration on signifiers detached from any signified seems to capture a political situation in which markers of gender, race, or nationality play an increasingly large role. The contemporary concern with the symbols of such identity suggests quite different problems from those of Lukács's day. In particular, the question of alienation must now be given a new form. The difficulty is illustrated in Jameson's complaint that the literary form of parody has been eclipsed by pastiche.²⁵ When we read a parody of, say, Faulkner, we recognize the distinct voice or style we associate with his works more broadly, expressed in a different context to comic effect. Certain signifiers—turns of phrase, a distinct register, particular images—are used to indicate the target of the parody. Such parody presupposes the existence of the author 'behind' the text, which in turn is an expression of the former. The meaning of the parody refers back to something 'behind' it, of which it is the manifestation. In contrast, pastiche simply gathers together signifiers ad hoc, presenting them together without any claim that they represent or manifest anything other than themselves. The meaning is

derived entirely from the surface juxtaposition of these signifiers; no interiority or hinterland is implied. For Jameson, this epitomizes postmodern selfhood. Postmodern theory rejects the claim that there is a single unified subject behind our thoughts and experiences—not only as a collective subject, but even individually. Thus, the self is now almost exclusively conducted on the surface as a play of signifiers, rather than in terms of the entity that supposedly underlies them. Consequently, he suggests that ‘concepts such as anxiety and alienation (and the experiences to which they correspond, as in *The Scream*) are no longer appropriate in the world of the postmodern.’²⁶ Alienation presupposes some kind of interiority that could come into conflict with one’s social existence; where that interiority is abolished, the concept becomes meaningless.

Had Lukács presupposed some fixed human essence or ‘spirit’ (in neo-Romantic vein, as his critics allege) as the basis of subjectivity, his exploration of the problems of reification would indeed seem antiquated by the terms of this analysis. The interpretation I have offered, however, avoids this charge. Jameson himself suggests that such postmodern subjectivity should itself be understood historically rather than as itself reified as a feature of human existence: at one point, the modernist self of interiority may have dominated; at present, postmodernism better describes our conditions of selfhood. The phenomenological reading of Lukács—*particularly* those elements drawn from Riegl—offers a systematic framework for the developing Jameson’s claim here. Most obviously, Lukács provides a way to understand the form of subjectivity with which alienation is associated. The commodity structure designates certain elements of experience as ‘private,’ internal, and beyond the bounds of society. It is this that produces such interiority—it is part of the phenomenological structure of experience as such. As I pointed out in Chap. 6, Lukács repeatedly uses scare quotes around the term ‘soul’ (*Seele*) in *History and Class Consciousness*: he is at pains to stress that the ‘soul’ is not a substantial reality, but rather a part of experience designated as private and personal. Alienation can be understood, therefore, as the structurally produced conflict between those parts designated as private, and those that are public. It is a contradiction produced within the totality of experience by the structure that makes it meaningful, not one between a timeless human essence and an external world of a fundamentally different substance.

The historicism of Lukács’s account, though, suggests that the same method can be applied to other epochs, including our own. In other words, we can look for the analogous structures in contemporary experience to

understand the relation of the subject to its objective social being. Here I can offer only very preliminary and general remarks towards such an exploration. I shall proceed (for the sake of illustrating the point) on the assumption that Jameson's general diagnosis of postmodernity is correct. Objectively, social being is constructed of signifiers defined by their similarity to and difference from one another, and not by any necessary relation to the supposedly signified. Humans are determined socially by these signifiers—by brands, by markers of gender or race, by patterns of consumption, and so on. The distinctions and relations between these signifiers are what govern our relations to one another. In Lukács's original analysis, the social relations of the classic commodity structure took place between qualitatively identical and only quantitatively variable items; in this regard, postmodern social relations are different, because they are defined by substantial variation. But in another respect, the signifier structure echoes the commodity structure. The value of a commodity was, of course, defined in relation to all other commodities: it is determined by socially necessary labour, not by the actual labour put into it. Similarly, the significance of the signifier is determined in relation to other signifiers: what it means to drink Starbucks coffee is defined in relation to drinking McDonald's coffee or Folgers or directly sourced, single-origin coffee from a local coffee shop. Consequently, just as the value of the commodity varies independently of the contribution of its producer, so too does the significance of the signifier vary regardless of the intent of the purchaser: 25 years ago, IKEA may have represented a progressive modernist aesthetic for the cosmopolitan city dweller; now, it is a source of cheap fittings for student dorms.

The logic of such social relations is one of similarities and differences. We are connected to those with whom we share a signifier or signifiers; we are connected through opposition with those whose signifiers are defined in contradistinction to our own. To 'be' conservative means to be opposed to liberal, and vice versa (in the American political context, at least; the meaning is otherwise in other cultures). It barely matters what policies any particular party offers the electorate: their programmes might be almost identical in substance, but what is important is the opposition of the signifiers. This, of course, can produce strange bedfellows as groups that would otherwise be strenuously opposed come together because they are both signified in opposition to the same common foe. But the dominance of this logic produces endless differentiation: each signifier must be broken down within itself, infinitely divisible into ever-more-particular units of meaning, and new oppositions and conflicts form between those who, at a

more general level of meaning, seem otherwise identical. In their own way, signifiers share the logic of the commodity, itself broken down into smaller operations of production and microscopic fractions of value.

Just as Lukács linked the social relations of the commodity structure with a particular interpellation of the subject and its self, so too do the social relations of the signifier structure position the subject in a certain way—one that Jameson is right, I think, to see as radically different from that of the high-bourgeois era. Previously, the ‘private’ aspect of the self may have been excluded from social relations, but as such, it offered a single, substantial frame of unity for the subject, or a gathering-point for individual experience. It offered at least the demand for individual experience to be rendered as coherent whole, as a self-enclosed totality (if I may), as consistent and meaningful within itself. The collapsing of this dimension reduces the capacity of the *individual* to be a centre of meaning themselves. Instead, the self is, like pastiche, a meeting point of a jumble of signifiers with no immanent demand for coherence. Consequently, the meaning of the subject’s self constantly runs away from it: it is diffused endlessly across the chain of signifiers, each one that it takes into itself defined in terms of an opposite that stands outside the self. Jameson aptly describes the sense of dislocation produced by this infinitely ungraspable meaning in terms of hysteria.²⁷ Moreover, the tendency towards ever-greater differentiation means that even within the subject’s set of signifiers, new and ever-smaller distinctions emerge: one wishes to specify not only that one is a cocktail drinker, but to identify with a specific cocktail. In place of the fractured subject of the commodity structure, the signifier structure offers a fractal subject. Its reliance on differences and oppositions recurs at each new degree of specificity, symmetrically reproducing the distinctions found at the more general level. In place of the alienation between interior and exterior, then, the signifier structure produces an endless disintegration, a self ceaselessly collapsing in on itself to a fourth spatial dimension of signification.

I offer this account only as general adumbration to suggest that Lukács’s phenomenological method might be applied to quite different social conditions. One might reject Jameson’s account of postmodernity or consider it outdated; even if one accepts it, this account is obviously not yet sufficiently detailed. But it shows the flexibility of Lukács’s approach. The method (the core of orthodox Lukácsianism, even if every factual claim he makes is falsified!) remains the same: it rests on identifying the structures that govern meaning in society such that they validate it as an apparent

reality. In light of Lukács's own belief that high capitalism is the first and only society entirely dominated by *one* such formal principle, using his interpretive method does not even commit us to claiming to uncover the sole dominant structure of all contemporary social forms. It may simply shape particular social institutions or kinds of interaction; this claim is entirely consistent with Lukács's method. It is such principles that shape social relations and thereby define what objects *are* and how it is possible for them to interact—whether as commodities or as signifiers. Moreover, it positions the subject relative to that reality in ways that explain both how we relate to one another, and the kinds of pathologies (alienation, hysteria) that might result. There is still no need to refer to an external 'human' essence; the logic of phenomena explains it adequately.

4 THE RATIONAL CRITIQUE OF POSTMODERNITY

Lukács's theory was aimed at the critique of society, at identifying precisely what was wrong with capitalism and how it could be improved. As we saw in discussing the distinct situation of the proletariat, he sees the disruption of reification as the result of a contradiction between the 'private' and the 'public' selves within consciousness. Personal experience is designated, under capitalism, as the self-contained locus of meaning and identity; this illusion is shattered for the proletariat to the degree that the contradictions in the very structure of capitalism are revealed. Yet if the self as centre of significance has been abolished in postmodernity and value is instead diffused chaotically across the network of signifiers, this potentially abolishes the standpoint of critique. Any norm used to judge postmodernity would come to it from outside, rather than being self-generated. Just as Lukács rejected any attempt to judge works of art by notions of beauty defined externally to the work and argued that it must instead be the source of its own value-standards, so too must it be illegitimate to offer moral critique of a society based on some transcendental standards. Such norms could only appear as oppressive, however emancipatory they might claim to be. In order to offer such a critique, then, it must be possible to explain the immanent generation of such standards. In what must again remain only a preliminary survey of the territory rather than a comprehensive answer, I will conclude by suggesting some ways Lukács's formal-phenomenological approach permits this.

Of course, one very prominent figure has tried to rescue the notion of critical rationality in the face of postmodern critiques: Jürgen Habermas.

Habermas's express goal has been to identify a form of reason sufficiently universal to act as a normative standard for social change, but sufficiently flexible to avoid the identitarian logic of earlier theories. It is impossible to give a full account of his system, which draws on social and political theory, psychology, and philosophy to make its case. In essence, though, his argument rests on the centrality of communicative action in coordinating all social action: society is impossible without communication, he suggests, whereby individuals seek to persuade others to aid them or join with them in achieving goals.²⁸ Such communication has its own rationality, he argues; unlike other forms it is intersubjective, presupposing the interaction of two or more subjects, rather than the monologic cogitations seen in the likes of Kant. Communicative action aims at reaching understanding, he argues, which in turn presupposes that it takes place in a situation free of coercion or deceit, in which every interested participant is able to offer their view, and consensus is reached only by force of the better argument. Consequently, moral philosophy should restrict itself to outlining the conditions of such a free discourse: philosophers cannot claim unique insight into substantive questions of the good life, telling people how they ought to live, but can only outline the morally right formal conditions of the discourses within which such questions can be debated by others.²⁹ Sociologically, Habermas rescues Weber's rationalization hypothesis by pointing to the development of legal and democratic institutions aimed at creating precisely such conditions; he then draws on Durkheim and Parsons to explain how such institutions come to form an automated system of their own.³⁰ Elsewhere he draws on the moral psychology of Lawrence Kohlberg to argue that the process of individual maturation entails growth towards these moral standards.³¹ Both historically and psychologically, then, he argues that his communicative rationality is necessary and universal, and can therefore be demanded of any society; because he withholds judgement on any substantive *good*, he believes he avoids any claim that this entails the oppressive imposition of cultural standards.

This is not the place to offer a full examination of Habermas's theory, though it is fair to say that it has not exactly won unconditional approval. Martin Jay, who defends Habermas's paradigm on the whole, offers a succinct overview of some of the main strands of such critique: Habermas has variously (and sometimes contradictorily) been accused of excessive universalism, insufficient Kantian transcendentalism, bloodless cognitivism, abandonment of dialectical reason, a lack of conative force, a one-dimensional understanding of language solely as communication,

privileging the conscious over the unconscious mind, the overextension of German or European models to a species-wide project, and a naïveté about the very possibility of ever achieving anything like the ideal standards he puts forward.³² A lengthy charge sheet indeed! Jay, however, defends Habermas for holding fast to a *dianoetic* conception of truth and reason as opposed to the *noetic* approach of the likes of the later Adorno. For the latter, truth might be vouchsafed to us intuitively and directly—as, for example, in a sudden revelatory experience of works of art. Habermas’s approach, in contrast, emphasizes thought and deliberation as the path to truth: he finds this in the intersubjective processes of communication, rather than the single subject reasoning for itself.

Lukács’s theory as I have interpreted it may provide a way to remedy some of the deficiencies critics have found in Habermas’s thought, while retaining its dianoetic character. Curiously, Habermas is arguably closer in many ways to the radical revolutionary Lukács than to his own teachers, Adorno and Horkheimer. Lukács’s faith in rationality only grew as he aged—indeed, this faith turned into crude polemic by the time of *The Destruction of Reason* (1952). The work of both theorists draws on Neo-Kantianism—Lukács’s direct involvement with the likes of Rickert and Lask, and Habermas’s insistence on the priority of validity over value as the source of the Right. But what brings them closest together on my account of *History and Class Consciousness* is that both Lukács and Habermas treat reason as something fundamentally *social*, and vested in social relations. Habermas’s most important claim is that a particular kind of relation—communicative action—has its own inherent standards of validity, and that these standards can provide the basis for a set of norms of discourse. His theory has been criticized in this respect because it seems to impose one narrow, universalist model on a kind of activity that has many possible meanings, and for overextending this rather intellectualist view of social relations to cover all other kinds of social interaction.

What Lukács offers is a way to extend Habermas’s basic insight by searching for the differing validity forms of numerous kinds of social relationship. For Lukács, the very meaning of rationality is itself structured socially. Rationality is, for Lukács, a bringing of things into determinate relations: it entails positing the connections and possible interactions between discrete particulars, understanding the ways they stand relative to one another, through cause and effect, logical necessity, quantitative comparison, signification, and so on. In this regard, social forms are rational in the sense that they set up the principles by which objects can relate to one

another socially: they define the conditions of validity relations between things. From this perspective, it is not necessarily the case that ‘rationalization’ *must* mean abstraction, formalization, and the removal of particular content; other kinds of coherent, valid relation are possible. Lukács’s programme of social organization as the steady overcoming of ever-returning reification is in this sense a kind of rationalization: it entails the practical working out of standards of validity and social coherence over time, always subjecting those standards to renewed scrutiny rather than accepting them as unalterable.

To lay out a general theory of rationality on this basis is, of course, far beyond the scope of this work; I seek here only to suggest some ways Lukács might contribute to debates in contemporary Critical Theory, as a starting point for further exploration. One potential way forward on these lines is suggested by Timothy Hall, who argues that ‘the model for this is aesthetic reason, in the sense that aesthetic form is both nonsubsumptive and putatively rational.’³³ I do not mean by this the kind of intuitive revelation that the later Adorno sees in art. Instead, it is in composing or deciphering the formal organization of works of art that we find different kinds of validity; in other words, it is perhaps a rather cognitivist or formalist approach to art that is implied, not one grounded on emotional responses that bypass deliberative thought. In art, the principle by which the different elements of a work are brought together is clearly ‘rational’ in the sense that there are consistent, coherent reasons behind it—but at the same time, it is also far from abstract and universalist. (To give a very trivial example: no universal principle determines what colours complement or clash with one another.) Lukács’s account of the commodity structure can be described as ‘aesthetic’ (or at least ‘artistic,’ to avoid the sensory implications of aesthetics) in that he looks for the structuring principle, the *Kunstwollen* (as it were) that governs the social reality of capitalism: this is its rationality, the rule by which its elements are meaningfully determined by their relations to one another. Just as we try to understand artworks on their own terms, by the immanent standpoint through which they make sense, so too should we look to the structure determining the rationality of social relations.

Ultimately, Lukács’s approach has normative implications of its own. Aesthetically, it is necessary to fix meanings at least to a degree by bringing them to a coherent form—though, like Fiedler, we must always remember that such work is never final, never complete. In a postmodern reality that denies the private self, such meanings will necessarily be shared and collective,

grounded on common experiences. People should be socially related to one another, in other words, by way of their particularities, not only the properties they share universally with all others—but these particularities can be formalized artistically into shared identities. The aim is to rise up from such particulars to a meaning-generating form, in the manner of Lukács's artistic genius finding the standpoint that emerges from the material rather than being imposed on it: we might imagine social practices of collective storytelling that interpret the experiences of different locations in society as a whole. Jameson points to something like this in describing *History and Class Consciousness* as an 'unfinished project': we should build out from Lukács's concern with the proletariat to include the specific experiences of other oppressed groups and positions within society. But this is only the raw material: such raw experiences will need to be brought together 'artistically' in a way that manifests their meaning in the context of the whole. They can then form the basis of social relations that generate pools of meaning, rather than mutilating it in the manner of the commodity or signifier structures. A Lukácsian aesthetic reason, with its concrete grasp of varied social forms, seeks social relations that permit the generation of substantive meaning and notions of the Good—but ones that are at the same time rendered valid and right. Needless to say, if such meanings are to remain alive, these relations should also remain fluid and formally open to continuous reconstitution by the subjects whose lives they govern, in the same 'unbroken alternation of ossification, contradiction and setting-in-motion' that Lukács sought in the Party.³⁴ Only in this way can we avoid the reification of social relations, their complete detachment from and exclusion of anything specific, and the consequent isolation or fragmentation of the individual. It is Lukács's call to find new forms of objective social being, and new subjective stances correlating to it, that makes him relevant to the very different society of today.

NOTES

1. Lukács, Georg 1968–1981. *Werke*, (W) 18 vols., ed. György Márkus & Frank Benseler (Darmstadt: Luchterhand), ii.24, 'Wichtig bleibt bloß, daß die Entfremdung des Menschen als ein Zentralproblem der Zeit, in der wir leben, von bürgerlichen wie proletarischen, von politisch-sozial rechts oder links stehenden Dendern gleicherweise erkannt und anerkannt wurde. ... [I]ch kenne eine ganze Reihe von guten Kommunisten, die gerade dadurch für die Bewegung gewonnen wurden.' Lukács, *HCC* xxii.
2. Lukács *W* ii.24, Lukács, *HCC* xxii.

3. Stedman Jones, G. 1977. 'The Marxism of the Early Lukács,' in *Western Marxism: A Critical Reader*. Eds. Stedman Jones et al. 11–60. London: New Left Books.
4. Lee Congdon is the clearest example of this interpretation. See Congdon, Lee. 1983 *The Young Lukács*. Chapel Hill & London: UNC Press.
5. Lukács, Georg. 1983. *Record of a Life*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. Istvan Eörsi. London: Verso. 76.
6. Feenberg, Andrew. 2011. 'Reification and its Critics.' in *Georg Lukács Reconsidered: Critical Essays in Politics, Philosophy and Aesthetics*. ed. Michael J. Thompson. 172–194. London: Continuum. 191 n.1. Feenberg is referring to the first edition of his book, (1981. *Lukács, Marx and the Sources of Critical Theory*, Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield); it was extensively revised and reissued in 2014 *The Philosophy of Praxis: Marx, Lukács, and the Frankfurt School*. London: Verso.
7. See especially Löwy, Michael. 1979. *Georg Lukács: From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, trans. Patrick Camiller. London: New Left Books. 168–192; Feenberg *Philosophy of Praxis*, 124–149.
8. See Chap. 5.
9. Postone, Moishe. 1993. *Time, Labour, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 224.
10. Kavoulakos, Konstantinos. 2011. 'Back to History? Reinterpreting Lukács' Early Marxist Work in Light of the Antinomies of Contemporary Critical Theory.' in *Georg Lukács Reconsidered: Critical Essays in Politics, Philosophy and Aesthetics*. ed. Michael J. Thompson. 151–171. London: Continuum. 163.
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14. Berger & Luckmann, *Structure of Social Reality*, 55.
15. Berger & Luckmann, *Structure of Social Reality* 4; 170.
16. Berger & Luckmann, *Structure of Social Reality* 60.
17. Baxandall, Michael. 1988. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*. 2nd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
18. Geertz, Clifford 1993 'Art as a Cultural System' in Geertz, *Local knowledge: further essays in interpretive anthropology* 94–120, London: Fontana.

19. Stolnitz, Jerome. 1960. *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism*. Cambridge: Riverside Press.
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21. Danto, Arthur. 2006. 'Defective Affinities: "Primitivism" in 20th Century Art' in *The Anthropology of Art: A Reader*, ed. Howard Morphy & Morgan Perkins. Oxford: Blackwell.
22. Jameson, Fredric. 1988 'History and Class Consciousness as an "Unfinished Project,"' *Rethinking Marxism*, 1:1, 49–72, at 59.
23. Jameson, Fredric. 2000. 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,' in *The Jameson Reader*, ed. Michael Hardt & Kathi Weeks. Oxford: Blackwell.
24. Jameson, 'Unfinished Project,' 61.
25. Jameson, 'Postmodernism,' 202.
26. Jameson, 'Postmodernism,' 199.
27. Jameson, 'Postmodernism,' 217.
28. Habermas, Jürgen, 1984 & 1987, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, two vols., trans. Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press.
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30. Habermas, Jürgen. 1996. *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg. Boston MA: MIT Press.
31. Habermas, *MCCA*.
32. Martin Jay, 2016. *Reason after its Eclipse: on Late Critical Theory*. University of Wisconsin Press. 145–148.
33. Hall, 2011, Timothy. 'Justice and the Good Life in Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*,' 121–138 in Bewes, Timothy & Hall, Timothy. 2011 *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence. Aesthetics, Politics, Literature*. (London: Continuum). 131.
34. Lukács, *W* ii.199: 'der ununterbrochene Wechsel von Erstarrung, Widerspruch, und In-Fluß-Geraten.' Lukács, *HCC* 199.

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