

despair did not lead in the same direction as did those of their contemporaries who found holistic answers in the nation-state. Some became imperialists or pan-nationalists. Others, like the anarchist Gustav Landauer,¹⁹⁷ sought a solution in left-wing communitarianism, which tried to remedy the failings of orthodox Marxism through a benign rendering of the *völkisch* tradition. Still others were less willing to equate Marxism with its "orthodox" incarnation, and thus abandon it entirely. Accepting that description of the modern predicament most keenly rendered by Simmel, but scornful of his pessimism; impatient with the mechanistic assumptions of Second International Marxism, but still inspired by Marx's general analysis; aware of the inadequacies of bourgeois holism, but sharing its desire for a new totality—they sought an answer in the radical rethinking of Marxist theory that became known as Western Marxism. The exemplary figures in this new departure were Lukács, Korsch and Gramsci. Of the three, Lukács was most insistent on the importance of totality as the critical category that would restore Marxism's theoretical vigor, enabling it to match the practical achievements of Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution. And so, it is to Lukács that we must turn first to perceive the intimate relation of the concept of totality with the birth of Western Marxism.

197. The best recent treatment of Landauer is Eugene Lunn, *Prophet of Community: The Romantic Socialism of Gustav Landauer* (Berkeley, 1973). See also Charles B. Maurer, *Call to Revolution: The Mystical Anarchism of Gustav Landauer* (Detroit, 1971) and Ruth Link Salingar (Hymen), *Gustav Landauer: Philosopher of Utopia* (Indianapolis, 1977).

Georg Lukács and the Origins of the Western Marxist Paradigm

Had Georg Lukács ceased writing in 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution, he would be remembered solely as a particularly intense contributor to the creative ferment of pre-war bourgeois culture.¹ Among his earliest

1. The literature on Lukács' early career has grown to substantial proportions in recent years. Among the more noteworthy contributions are Lucien Goldmann, "The Early Writings of Georg Lukács," *Trigarterly* 9 (Spring 1967); Andrew Arato, "Lukács' Path to Marxism (1910–1923)," *Telos* 7 (Spring 1971); David Kertler, "Culture and Revolution: Lukács in the Hungarian Revolution," *Telos* 7 (Spring 1971); Gareth Stedman Jones, "The Marxism of the Early Lukács," *New Left Review* 70 (November–December 1971), reprinted in *Western Marxism: A Critical Reader*, ed. *New Left Review* (London, 1977), from which the following citations come; Paul Breines, "Lukács, Revolution and Marxism: 1885–1918," *The Philosophical Forum* 3, 3–4 (Spring, Summer 1972); Andrew Arato, "Georg Lukács: The Search for a Revolutionary Subject" in *The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism Since Lenin*, ed. Dick Howard and Karl E. Klare (New York and London, 1972); Jörg Kammler, "Ästhetizistische Lebensphilosophie," *Text + Kritik*, 39/40 (October 1973); Silvie Rücker, "Totalität als ethisches und ästhetisches Problem," *Text + Kritik*, 39/40 (October 1973); Lee Congdon, "The Unexpected Revolutionary: Lukács' Road to Marx," *Surrey*, 10, 2–3 (Spring–Summer 1974); James Schmidt, "The Concrete Totality and Lukács' Concept of Proletarian Bildung," *Telos* 24 (Summer 1975); György Markus, "The Young Lukács and the Problem of Culture," *Telos* 32 (Summer 1977); Ferenc Feher, "The Last Phase of Romantic Anti-Capitalism: Lukács' Response to the War," *New German Critique* 10 (Winter 1977); Dennis Crow, "Form and the Unifications of Aesthetics and Ethics in Lukács' *Soul and Form*," *New German Critique* 15 (Fall 1978); and Paul Breines, "Young Lukács, Old Lukács, New Lukács," *Journal of Modern History* 513 (September 1979). There are also valuable discussions of Lukács' pre-Marxist phase in G. H. R. Parkinson, ed. *Georg Lukács: The Man, His Work and His Ideas* (New York, 1970); István Mészáros, *Lukács' Concept of Dialectic* (London, 1972); Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Forms Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, 1971); Lucio Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, trans. Lawrence Garner (London, 1973); Michael Löwy, *Georg Lukács: From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London, 1979); Andrew Arato and Paul Breines, *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism* (New York, 1979); and Lee Congdon, *The Young Lukács* (Chapel Hill, 1983).

These works supplement and correct parts of Lukács' own somewhat tendentious reminiscences in his new prefaces to *The Theory of the Novel* (1962) and *History and Class*

Marxism 8 (Spring 1971): The Adventures of Lukács
+ *Hebrewman Critique* (University of California Press)
CHAPTER TWO

works, many written under the aristocratic name von Lukács,² were several short essays on drama, a spirited appreciation of the Magyar poet Endre Ady, and an unfinished treatise on aesthetics.³ All of these, however, were composed in his native Hungarian, and it was only with the collection of essays, *Soul and Form*, translated into German in 1911, and *The Theory of the Novel*, published in a German journal in 1916, that he reached a Europe-wide audience.⁴ Although a concern for social and political issues appeared in the Hungarian writings, it was almost entirely absent from those that were available to that larger public. As a result, Lukács was known as a thinker for whom cultural, ethical and philosophical problems were far more central than social, political or economic ones. There were few, if any, indications in his published work of anything but scorn for the theory and practice of the Second International.

Methodologically as well, Lukács before the Revolution was firmly, if uneasily, within the confines of bourgeois culture, specifically the neo-Kantianism of the Heidelberg to which he had moved in 1912. His primary theoretical mentors were Dilthey, Simmel, Weber and Lask, his approach to cultural questions largely that of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, and his general prognosis for the future similar to that of the normally right-wing purveyors of cultural despair. He counted among his friends such conservative figures as the dramatist Paul Ernst,⁵ as well as more radical ones such as Ernst Bloch. While interested in political questions, he nonetheless enthusiastically supported the writings of that great "un-

political" defender of German *Kultur*, Thomas Mann, who returned his praise in kind.⁶

Unlike many of his contemporaries within the Hungarian Jewish upper middle-class, whose intellectual organs were significantly called *Nyugat* (*The West*) and *Huszadik Század* (*The Twentieth Century*), Lukács held out little hope for the "westernization" of central and eastern Europe. Although drawn to religious figures like Kierkegaard, he had no use for either traditional or heterodox spiritual consolations. Nor did he find very attractive the chauvinist "Ideas of 1914," which seduced others of similar outlook, including men he admired such as Lask, Mann and Ernst. When the war came, he was later to recall, Marianne Weber challenged his despair with little success:

My only reply was: "The better the worse!" When I tried at this time to put my emotional attitude into conscious terms, I arrived at more or less the following formulation: the Central Powers would probably defeat Russia; this might lead to the downfall of Tsarism; I had no objection to that. There was also some probability that the West would defeat Germany; if this led to the downfall of the Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs, I was once again in favor. But then the question arose: who was to save us from Western civilization?⁷

The only herald of a possible new age Lukács could acknowledge was the ambiguous figure of Dostoevsky,⁸ whose writings seemed to prefigure a new cultural configuration, although one whose outlines were not yet clearly visible.

Had Lukács' voice then been stilled during the war, he would be known today as one of a large number of radical critics of bourgeois culture, whose radicalism was still incoherent in political terms. But, of course, Lukács lived and wrote well beyond the war, indeed up until his

¹ *Consciousness* (1967) and his earlier essay, "Mein Weg zu Marx," (1933), reprinted in *Georg Lukács, Schriften zur Ideologie und Politik*, ed. Peter Lütz (Neuwied and Berlin, 1967). They also avoid many of the weaknesses of Victor Zitter's *ad hominem* and reductive attack on Lukács in his *Georg Lukács: Marxism: Alienation, Dialectics, Revolution: A Study in Utopia and Ideology* (The Hague, 1964), and the hurried judgments of George Lichteim in his *Georg Lukács* (New York, 1970).

² Lukács' father, a prominent Budapest banker, had been ennobled in 1899. Lukács continued to use the German form "von Lukács" for some of his writings until 1918. For a discussion of the complicated history of ennobled Hungarian Jews, see William O. McCagg, Jr., *Jewish Nobles and Geniuses in Modern Hungary* (New York, 1972), which tries to explain the extraordinary frequency of gifted thinkers among this group.

³ For a complete bibliography of Lukács' early works in Hungarian, see Mészáros, p. 153f. For a discussion of his work on Hungarian literature, see Peter Nagy, "Lukács and Hungarian Literature," *New Hungarian Quarterly* 60 (Winter 1975). Löwy's treatment of the Hungarian revolutionary intelligentsia, at once Jacobin and anti-bourgeois, is invaluable for understanding Lukács' debt to Ady and other Hungarian radicals.

⁴ Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass., 1974); Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass., 1971). The latter was first published in the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* in 1916, and as a book four years later.

⁵ Their correspondence has been published in *Paul Ernst und Georg Lukács: Dokumente einer Freundschaft*, ed. Karl August Kurzbach (Düsseldorf, 1974). For a discussion of the friendship, see Fehér.

⁶ Lukács first wrote on Mann in 1909 for *Nyugat*, where he praised his work for its ability to grasp the objective connectedness of all things. (Quoted in Mészáros, p. 42). He continued to praise Mann throughout his life; see his *Essays on Thomas Mann*, trans. Stanley Mitchell (London, 1964). Mann, for his part, was generally positive towards Lukács as a culture critic, although he had no use for his politics. He signed the 1919 appeal to prevent the Austrian government from extraditing Lukács to Horthy's Hungary, but portrayed Lukács in a very ambivalent light as the character Naphta in *The Magic Mountain* a few years later. For more on the Mann-Lukács relationship, see Judith Marcus Tar, "Thomas Mann und Georg Lukács" (Ph.D. diss., U. of Kansas, 1976). For an extensive discussion of the Naphta-Lukács link, see Löwy, p. 56f.

⁷ Preface to *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 11; for more on Lukács' attitude towards the war, see Fehér.

⁸ Notes for Lukács' projected book on Dostoevsky were recovered after his death in a suitcase in Heidelberg containing much unpublished material. See the discussion in Fehér, "Lukács' Response to the War," p. 104f. For an analysis of the general interest in Dostoevsky during these years, see Leo Lowenthal, "Die Auffassung Dostojewskis in Vorkriegsdeutschland," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 3, 3 (1934). See also Zoltan Fehér, "Lukács and Dostoevsky," (Ph.D. diss., U.C.L.A., 1977).

death in 1971 at the age of 86. And having found in 1918 an answer to his despondency in the Communism he championed for the rest of his long life, he is best remembered as a Marxist theoretician of uncommon breadth and power. More significant for our purposes, he is of central importance as the founding father of Western Marxism, the theoretician who placed the category of totality at its heart. His work of 1923, *History and Class Consciousness*, has been generally acknowledged as the charter document of Hegelian Marxism, the highly controversial inspiration of a loyal (and sometimes not so loyal) opposition to institutional Marxism in this century.

That *History and Class Consciousness* was a milestone in Marxist theory is undisputed; what is far less certain is its status as a purely Marxist exercise. Schematically put, the main question is whether or not it represents a recapitulation of Lukács' bourgeois preoccupations in Marxist guise or a recapturing of Marx's own most fundamental arguments in an original and explosive form. For those who hold the former position, *History and Class Consciousness* was little more than a kind of irrationalist Marxist version of *Lebensphilosophie*, "the first major irruption of the romantic anti-scientific tradition of bourgeois thought into Marxist theory."⁹ For those favoring the latter view, the book was an extraordinarily prescient recovery of those humanist elements in Marx's early work whose existence would be confirmed with the publication of his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* a decade later.¹⁰ For those defending the former position, Lukács' subsequent repudiation of *History and Class Consciousness* was a mark of his theoretical maturation, which accompanied his abandonment of the messianic sectarianism of the immediate

9. Jones, "The Marxism of the Early Lukács," p. 33. This contention is challenged in Alvin Gougher, *For Sociology: Renewal and Critique in Sociology Today* (New York, 1973), p. 365, where Marx's own indebtedness to Romanticism is stressed. For an extension of this argument, see Paul Breines, "Marxism, Romanticism and the Case of Georg Lukács: Notes on Some Recent Sources and Situations," *Studies in Romanticism* 16, 4 (Fall 1977).

10. For a debate over how prescient Lukács really was, see Henry G. Shue, "Lukács: Notes on His Originality," and Georg Luchheim, "Reply to Professor Shue," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34, 4 (October–December 1973). For an excellent discussion of the similarities and differences between Lukács and the young Marx, see Andrew Feenberg, *Lukács, Marx and the Sources of Critical Theory* (Totowa, New Jersey, 1981).

The literature on *History and Class Consciousness* is even more extensive than on the pre-Marxist Lukács. For a bibliography until 1972, see Mészáros, *Lukács' Concept of Dialectic*. Among the works not included there that I have found particularly useful are Andrew Arato, "Lukács' Theory of Reification," *Telos* 11 (Spring 1972); Paul Piccone, "Dialectic and Materialism in Lukács," *Telos* 11 (Spring 1972); Andrew Feenberg, "Lukács and the Critique of Orthodox Marxism," *The Philosophical Forum* 3, 3–4 (Spring–Summer 1972); Andrew Arato, "Notes on History and Class Consciousness," *The Philosophical Forum* 3, 3–4 (Spring–Summer, 1972); István Mészáros, ed., *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness* (London, 1971). Several of the works cited in note 1 also deal insightfully with *History and Class Consciousness*.

post-war period. For their opponents, his later career was marred by an ambiguous reconciliation with the very theory and practice denounced by *History and Class Consciousness*; his rejection of that book is thus an indication of a "devil's pact"¹¹ with power and authority.

Lukács' own attitude hovered between these extremes. In a 1967 preface to a long-delayed republication of the book, he expressed his thoughts more honestly than was possible during his earlier, more ritualized denunciation in 1933. While acknowledging a number of irretrievable errors, most of them centering on the idealist residue in his argument, and regretting that "it is precisely those parts of the book that I regard as theoretically false that have been most influential,"¹² he nonetheless defended those other parts that he felt were still valid. Prime among these was the argument that defines the importance of the book for the present study:

It is undoubtedly one of the great achievements of *History and Class Consciousness* to have reinstated the category of totality in the central position it had occupied throughout Marx's works and from which it had been ousted by the "scientism" of the social-democratic opportunists.¹³

Lukács then went on to contrast his own use of totality unfavorably to Lenin's in the latter's *Philosophical Notebooks*, admitting that he had erroneously placed "totality in the center of the system, overriding the priority of economics."¹⁴ But he clearly resisted the imputation that a stress on totality *per se* was evidence of non-scientific "romantic anti-capitalism."¹⁵ And indeed in all of his later work, totality remained an absolutely central category.

But did the same word mean different things at various stages of his career? Was there a shift from an essentially bourgeois use to a more authentically Marxist one? Or if the phrase "more authentically Marxist" begs too many of the questions this study will try to answer, can one discern a shift from one Marxist use of totality to another? To answer these questions and place *History and Class Consciousness* properly in both Lukács' own intellectual development and the history of Western Marxism, it is necessary to explore the ways in which the concept of totality entered Lukács' work in its pre-Marxist phase, most notably in *Soul and*

11. The term is George Steiner's from *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman* (New York, 1967).

12. Preface to *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), p. xxvii.

13. *Ibid.*, p. xx.

14. *Ibid.*

15. This phrase was Lukács' own; see *ibid.*, p. x. It has been used by commentators to characterize his entire pre-Marxist period.

Form and The Theory of the Novel.¹⁶ For only by doing so can one recognize both the continuities and discontinuities in his remarkable career, as well as understand the subtle relationship between Western Marxism and bourgeois culture.



As has often been remarked, *Soul and Form* is a work permeated by the atmosphere of bourgeois culture in crisis. Its eleven essays, written between 1907 and 1910, were composed in a lyrical and frequently over-wrought mood. Although engendered in part by Lukács' troubled love affair with Irma Seidler, the agony expressed in the work had a far more universal source. The choice of the essay form itself, as Lukács explained in the open letter to his friend Leo Popper that began the collection, was the appropriate means of expressing the problematic nature of contemporary culture. Reflecting the subjective vision of the writer, the essay, Lukács argued, is a precursor form, anticipating an objective truth that has yet to become manifest. In the meantime, its tentative and fragmentary nature captures the painful reality that Simmel characterized as the "tragedy of culture," the inability of subjective and objective meaning to coincide.

In *Soul and Form*, Lukács explicitly described this dilemma in terms close to Simmel's *Lebensphilosophie*:

Life is an anarchy of light and dark: nothing is ever completely fulfilled in life, nothing ever quite ends; new, confusing voices always mingle with the chorus of those that have been heard before. Everything flows, everything merges into another thing, and the mixture is uncontrolled and impure; everything is destroyed, everything is smashed, nothing ever flowers into real life. To live is to live something through to its end: but *life* means that nothing is ever fully and completely lived through to the end.¹⁷

All of the essays express this basic insight: the chaotic richness of life struggles to achieve coherent form, but it can do so only at the cost of what makes it alive. System and life, form and fullness, conventional ethics and authentic existence (or "soul"), all of these are antinomies whose resolution can only be sought, but never achieved. When, for example, Kierkegaard tried to give his life coherent form through the public gesture of spurning his fiancée, he merely created a new series of ambiguities that

16. Markus points to places in Lukács' unpublished Heidelberg manuscripts on aesthetics where totality also played a critical role (Markus, "The Young Lukács," p. 96).

17. Lukács, *Soul and Form*, pp. 152–153. Lukács confirmed the importance of Simmel for his early work in his 1918 obituary, "Georg Simmel" in *Buch des Dankes an Georg Simmel: Briefe, Erinnerungen, Bibliographie*, ed. K. Gassen and M. Landmann (Berlin, 1918). Much later in the far cruder polemic of *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (Berlin, 1954), Lukács castigated Simmel as an irrationalist in the tradition that culminated in Nazism.

mocked his attempt at closure. Similarly, when modern writers try to compose true tragedies, they must fail, because tragedy seeks to depolarize the rush of life and to give it an essential meaning, whereas neither goal can be accomplished short of death. Normative totalization can, in fact, come only at the cost of life, never in accord with it.

Because of this pessimistic appraisal of the antinomies of culture, Lukács had little patience with those who claim to have found an underlying meaning in life. Echoing Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel's theodicy, he refused to acknowledge a hidden rationality behind the incoherence of experience.¹⁸ Nor did he sympathize with those who attempt to escape from that incoherence into an alternate reality in which normative totality allegedly can be found. In his essay on Novalis, Lukács singled out the Romantics for special criticism in this regard:

They looked for order, but for an order that comprised everything, an order for the sake of which no renunciation was needed; they tried to embrace the whole world in such a way that out of the unison of all dissonances might come a symphony. To combine this unity and this universality is possible only in poetry, and that is why poetry for the Romantics became the center of the world. . . . The actual reality of life vanished before their eyes and was replaced by another reality, the reality of poetry, of pure psyche. They created a homogenous, organic world unified within itself and identified it with the real world. . . . The tremendous tension that exists between poetry and life and gives both their real, value-creating powers was lost as a result.¹⁹

Although recognizing that art could create a simulacrum of wholeness through perfect form, Lukács rejected the pan-poetic aestheticization of reality as an illusion.

Nor did he have any tolerance for the claim that totality could be achieved on an individual or personal level. Unlike most mainstream vitalists, he held to the Idealist assumption that the objectification of subjectivity, the entrance into Objective Spirit, was necessary to achieve authentic wholeness. In his essay on Richard Beer-Hofmann, he pondered the meaning of a friend's death and concluded that it painfully brought home the interconnectedness of all men: "The sense that I can do nothing without striking a thousand resonances everywhere, most of which I do not and cannot know, so that each action of mine—whether I am aware of it or not—is the consequence of many thousands of waves which have met in

18. Lukács was, in fact, absorbed in Kierkegaard's writings during this period. In 1913, he began a work on Kierkegaard and Hegel that was never completed.

19. Lukács, *Soul and Form*, pp. 48–50. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács returned to the same issue, this time with Schiller as the major exponent of the aesthetic totalization of reality (pp. 137–140).

me and will flow from me to others."²⁰ In short, as James Schmidt has noted,²¹ the traditional German ideal of *Bildung*, of self-formation through entrance into the world of intersubjectivity, was a guiding ideal of Lukács in *Soul and Form* and beyond.

Lukács' rejection of individual solutions to fragmentation extended as well to the assumption that personal wholeness or its absence could be understood in psychological terms.²² Lukács' life-long antipathy to psychology, particularly to its philosophical misuse, expressed itself in *Soul and Form* in a distinction between monumental deeds and gestures, which perfectly reveal their essential meaning, and psychological explanations of those deeds and gestures, which are infinitely regressive in their search for hidden motives:

Where psychology begins, monumentality ends: perfect clarity is only a modest expression of a striving for monumentality. Where psychology begins, there are no more deeds but only motives for deeds; and whatever requires explanation, whatever can bear explanation, has already ceased to be solid and clear. . . . Life dominated by motives is a continual alternation of the kingdoms of Lilliput and Brobdingnag; and the most insubstantial, the most abysmal of all kingdoms is that of the soul's reason, the kingdom of psychology. Once psychology has entered into a life, then it is all up with unambiguous honesty and monumentality.²³

Tied to his distaste for psychology, which he shared with the later Dilthey,²⁴ Husserl,²⁵ and most of the defenders of the *Geisteswissenschaft*-

20. Ibid., p. 112.

21. Schmidt, "The Concrete Totality."

22. Remark on Lukács' aesthetic conservatism of the 1930s, Ferenc Fehér notes, "In its proclamation of the unquestionable and unproblematic supremacy of reason over our whole personality structure, Lukács' classicism revealed a naïveté reminiscent of the most over-confident periods of the Enlightenment. In this sense Lukács may be called the Anti-Freud: the theoretician of the 'pure' Ego for whom the whole problematic of the Id ('psychological character' as opposed to moral character) is dismissed with a single gesture. A constant character trait of Lukács since his youth recurs here, namely the hatred of psychology as an empirical branch of learning incapable of adequately explaining the 'soul' (later the substantial personality)" ("Lukács in Weimar," *Telos* 39 [Spring 1979], p. 124). That this trait of his youth was preserved into Lukács' old age is shown in his remarks in his interview in *New Left Review* 68 (July–August 1971), where he claimed:

I must say that I am perhaps not a very contemporary man. I can say that I have never felt frustration or any kind of complex in my life. I know what these mean, of course, from having read Freud. But I have not experienced them myself. (p. 58)

The only time Lukács dealt with Freud at some length was a review in 1921 of *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* reprinted in György Lukács, *Literature, Philosophy, marxisme, 1922–1923*, ed. Michael Löwy, (Paris, 1978).

23. Lukács, *Soul and Form*, p. 39.

24. The early Dilthey, however, had hoped that psychology might be integrated into the historical sciences. Lukács criticized this position in his obituary of Dilthey in 1911 in *Szélelem*. See Markus, "The Young Lukács," p. 102.

25. For a discussion of his general relation to Husserl, see Mihály Vajda, "Lukács' and Husserl's Critique of Science," *Telos* 38 (Winter 1978–79).

ten, was an equally strong hostility to the principles of natural science assumed to underlie it. Lukács leveled the same charge of infinite formlessness against science in general as he had against psychology in particular and significantly juxtaposed the work of art to both:

The crucial difference between a work of art and a scientific work is perhaps this: the one is finite, the other infinite; the one closed in upon itself, the other open; the one is purpose, the other is a means. The one—we are judging now by consequences—is incomparable, a first and a last, the other is rendered superfluous by a better achievement. To put it briefly, the one has form and the other has not.²⁶

In discussing the "new solitude" expressed in Stefan George's poetry, Lukács remarked, "Our knowledge of humanity is a psychological nihilism: we see a thousand relationships, yet never grasp any real connection."²⁷

That such connections might ever be perceived and psychological nihilism overcome, *Soul and Form* seemed to deny; not surprisingly Lucien Goldmann and others saw it as an anticipation of the bleak perspectives of a later existentialism.²⁸ But in at least three places in the text, Lukács did hint at the possibility of change. His proto-existentialist metaphysics of tragedy was subtly challenged by a still inchoate sense of historical mutability.²⁹ In the essay on Beer-Hofmann, he mused:

There have been times—at least, we believe there have been—when the thing we call form today, the thing we look for so feverishly, the thing we try to snatch from the continual movement of life in the cold ecstasy of artistic creation, was simply the natural language of revelation—an unstilled scream, the untrammelled energy of a convulsive movement. In those times, no one asked questions about the nature of form, no one separated form from matter or from life, no one knew that form is something different from either of these; form was just the simplest way, the shortest path to understand between two similar souls, the poet's and the public's.³⁰

In his appreciative discussion of Theodor Storm, he talked of his own generation's "impotent nostalgia"³¹ for the days of Storm's bourgeois so-

26. Lukács, *Soul and Form*, pp. 73–74.

27. Ibid., p. 87.

28. Goldmann, "Early Writings of Georg Lukács" and Alberto Asor Rosa, "Der junge Lukács: Theoretiker der bürgerlichen Kunst," *Alternativ* 12 (1969). One expression of his proto-existentialism was his obsession with the importance of death, especially clear in his 1911 essay "On the Poverty of Spirit." The suicide of his former lover, Irma Seidler, was his inspiration. See the discussion in Arato and Breines, *The Young Lukács*, p. 43f; and Congdon, *The Young Lukács*, p. 66f.

29. This shift in emphasis has also been detected by Fehér and Markus in the unpublished manuscript, "Zur Aesthetik der 'Romance,'" written in 1911, which they claim presents a more optimistic counterpoint to the bleakness of "The Metaphysics of Tragedy" essay in *Soul and Form*.

30. Lukács, *Soul and Form*, p. 114.

31. Ibid., p. 55.

lidity; like Thomas Mann's character Tonio Kröger,³² he longed for the seemingly "healthy and unproblematic"³³ life of Storm and his kind.

And if the past contained such totalities, perhaps the future might as well; history may seem chaotic,

yet there is an order concealed in the world of history, a composition in the confusion of its irregular lines. It is the undefinable order of a carpet or a dance; to interpret its meaning seems impossible, but it is still less possible to give up trying to interpret it. It is as though the whole fabric of fanciful lines were waiting for a single word that is always at the tip of our tongues, yet one which has never yet been spoken by anyone.³⁴

In *Soul and Form*, Lukács refused to venture beyond this vague intimation of a possible new totality. He knew himself incapable of uttering that single word which would reveal the figure in the carpet, the design in the dance.

In his next work *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács' reluctance grew only marginally less firm, but now he was ready to probe with greater specificity the historical ground of the gap between form and life. The terrain on which he operated was the novel, which he recognized in *Soul and Form* as providing what the short story or the drama could not: "the totality of life by its very contents, by inserting its hero and his destiny in the full richness of an entire world."³⁵ Moving beyond his neo-Kantian indifference to history as the mediator of antinomies, he now adopted Hegel's aesthetic outlook in which the truth of art was its expression of objective historical ideas. Kant's formalist aesthetics, which still dominated his unfinished treatise on aesthetics of the war years,³⁶ was replaced by a new stress on content. Kant's emphasis on subjective judgment, which was preserved without its universal dimension in Lukács' earlier defense of the essay form, was now shunted aside in favor of an essentially mimetic theory of culture. Indeed, as Lukács later recognized, his reliance on mimesis went beyond even that of Hegel, who had contrasted problematic art with non-problematic reality:

The idea put forward in *The Theory of the Novel*, although formally similar, is in fact the complete opposite of this: the problems of the novel form are here the mirror-image of a world gone out of joint.³⁷

32. Mann, in fact, was to single this essay out for special praise in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Berlin, 1918), p. 149.

33. Lukács, *Soul and Form*, p. 59.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

36. Markus, "The Young Lukács," p. 104.

37. Preface to *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 17. The mimetic bias of the book has been challenged by Paul de Man, who points to Lukács' emphasis on irony as the dominant principle of the novel:

Accordingly, he chose a phrase from Fichte's *Characteristics of the Present Age*, "the epoch of absolute sinfulness,"³⁸ to describe present reality, rather than anything more affirmative from Hegel.

In making his case for the congruence of problematic art and problematic reality, Lukács divided the history of the West into four loosely demarcated eras: the era of the Homeric epic, that of the transition from the epic to the novel identified with Dante, that of the bourgeois novel, and finally, the post-novel era, only dimly anticipated in the works of Dosztoevsky. The era of the novel Lukács further subdivided into several subcategories: the novel of abstract idealism, epitomized by *Don Quixote*; the novel of disillusionment, whose most characteristic exemplar was *The Sentimental Education*; the *Bildungsroman*, best seen in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*; and the novel that "attempts to go beyond the social forms of life," quintessentially those of Tolstoy. In his 1962 preface to the work, Lukács admitted that these categories were generated by the imprecise methods of the *Geisteswissenschaften* elaborated in such works as Dilthey's *Lived Experience and Literary Creation* of 1905:

It became the fashion to form general synthetic concepts on the basis of only a few characteristics—in most cases only intuitively grasped—of a school, period, etc., then to proceed by deduction from these generalizations to the analysis of individual phenomena, and in that way to arrive at what we claimed to be a comprehensive overall view.³⁹

But unlike the other members of the *Geisteswissenschaften* school, Lukács had turned from Kant to Hegel and thus closed the gap between allegedly timeless aesthetic values and the flow of history. The often quoted opening sentences of the first chapter of *The Theory of the Novel*, "Integrated Civilizations," expressed with lyric poignancy Lukács' very anti-Kantian belief that normative totalities in which pure and practical reason had been united were in fact an historical reality:

Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths—ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is

If irony is the determining and organizing principle of the novel's form, then Lukács is indeed freeing himself from preconceived notions about the novel as an imitation of reality. Irony steadily undermines this claim at imitation and substitutes for it a conscious, interpreted awareness of the distance that separates an actual experience from the understanding of this experience. The ironic language of the novel mediates between experience and desire, and unites ideal and real within the complex paradox of the form. This form can have nothing in common with the homogeneous, organic form of nature; it is founded on an act of consciousness, not on the imitation of the natural object. (*Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* [New York, 1971], p. 56)

What de Man fails to understand is that for Lukács the novel imitates a heterogeneous, inorganic form of society, not a "homogeneous, organic form of nature." Its irony is an appropriate expression of the irreconcilable antinomies of that society.

38. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 152.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to one another, for fire is the soul of all light and all fire clothes itself in light. Thus each action of the soul becomes meaningful and rounded in this duality: complete in meaning—in *sense*—and complete for the senses, rounded because the soul rests within itself even while it acts; rounded because its action separates itself from it and, having become itself, finds a center of its own and draws a closed circumference round itself.⁴⁰

Lukács concluded this paragraph with Novalis' remark that "Philosophy is really homesickness; it is the urge to be at home everywhere,"⁴¹ by which he suggested that truly integrated civilizations knew no philosophy. Like Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, to which he did not however refer, Lukács saw philosophy as a mark of degradation, a falling off from the wholeness of pre-philosophical times. And like Nietzsche, he found those times in the classical era before Socrates and Plato. Whereas in his earlier work on the theater he had contrasted the Greek tragedy favorably to its modern counterpart,⁴² now he moved back beyond the age of Aeschylus and Sophocles to that of Homer, contending, this time unlike Nietzsche, that "great epic writing gives form to the extensive totality of life, drama to the intensive totality of essence."⁴³ Contrasting it to the epic, Lukács claimed the drama reflected a period in which human relations had already grown problematic; indeed the very distinction between essence and appearance suggested a lack in existence as it was experienced:

The concept of essence leads to transcendence simply by being posited, and then, in the transcendent, crystallizes into a new and higher essence expressing through its form an essence that *should be*—an essence which, because it is born of form, remains independent of the given content of what merely *exists*. The concept of life, on the other hand, has no need of any such transcendence captured and held immobile as an object.⁴⁴

The epic provided a narrative complete and meaningful in itself, without the tension between what was and what should be that the drama evinced.

Whereas in *Soul and Form*, Lukács had pitted the chaos of life against the yearning for coherent form, he now contended that the two had been

40. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

41. *Ibid.* By denigrating philosophy as inherently less capable than epic narrative of expressing a fulfilled totality, Lukács showed how non-Hegelian he still was, even in this, his most Hegelian work.

42. Markus, p. 110.

43. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 46. In *Soul and Form*, Lukács argued a similar position: "The inner style of the drama is realistic within the medieval, scholastic meaning of the work [universal essences were most real], but this excludes all modern realism" (p. 159).

44. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 47.

fused in the lives of the Homeric Greeks, which was in turn reflected in their epics. This conclusion, however, was based far more on the image of the Greeks in German culture, for example in the writings of Hegel and Friedrich Theodor Fischer,⁴⁵ than on any legitimate historical analysis of the Homeric period. In fact, for all his belief that art expressed the lived experience of an era, Lukács derived that presumed experience solely from the evidence of the art itself. The material basis of the Homeric normative totality was completely ignored; the class analysis he had previously used in certain of his Hungarian writings was nowhere to be seen. The mimesis he invoked—and in this sense he was close to Hegel—was of the idea of an integrated civilization, rather than of its material foundation. The Greeks were thus as romantically depicted as in any of the earlier fantasies of Winckelmann and his followers.

Lukács also neglected to do what that other great commentator on the realism of the Homeric epic, Erich Auerbach, was later to do in the brilliant first chapter of his *Mimesis*.⁴⁶ That is, he confined classical civilization to the Greeks and failed to examine another seminal ancient text, the Hebrew Bible. If he had, he might have noted that some of the same characteristics that he had attributed to the modern novel, and which he saw as reflections of the "epoch of absolute sinfulness," were present in the great document of an age of absolute faith, albeit faith in a transcendent rather than immanent God.

Be that as it may, Lukács' idealized characterization of the Homeric era nonetheless provided him, as István Mészáros has put it, with "an abstract regulative principle"⁴⁷ by which to measure later periods. And it provides us with an invaluable series of clues to his image of normative totality during this period of his intellectual development. First of all, for the Lukács of *The Theory of the Novel*, normative totality lacked any ontological differentiations; the Homeric world was "a homogeneous world, and even the separation between man and world, between 'I' and 'You' cannot disturb its homogeneity."⁴⁸ In this homogeneous world, there are no Kantian distinctions between morality and inclination, duty and desire, form and life:

Totality of being is possible only where everything is already homogeneous before it has been contained by forms; where forms are not a constraint but only the becoming conscious, the coming to the surface of everything that had been lying

45. For a discussion of the links between Fischer and Lukács, see Horst Althaus, *Georg Lukács oder Bürgerlichkeit als Vorstufe einer marxistischen Ästhetik* (Bern, 1962), p. 7.

46. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953).

47. Mészáros, *Lukács' Concept of Dialectic*, p. 61.

48. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 32.

dormant as a vague longing in the innermost depths of that which had to be given form; where knowledge is virtue and virtue is happiness, where beauty is the meaning of the world made visible.⁴⁹

The Homeric world is so homogeneous that the very distinction between transcendence and immanence is overcome; it is "empirical and meta-physical, combining transcendence and immanence inseparably within itself."⁵⁰

Second, the Homeric world is without any historical change; in the narrative of the *Iliad*, there is "no beginning and no end."⁵¹ In fact, in both the drama and the epic, "the past either does not exist or is completely present. Because these forms know nothing of the passage of time, they allow of no qualitative difference between the experiencing of past and present."⁵² The later introduction of temporality into art mirrors the decay of the integrated civilization that spawned the epic. Where the Homeric Greeks had only answers, their successors posed troubling questions, which could only be resolved at some future date. The very existence of an ethical imperative, the "ought," "in whose desperate intensity the essence seeks refuge because it has become an outlaw on earth,"⁵³ means that the present needs the future to complete it. In short, time is a form of corruption and normative totality requires its suspension.

Third, the Homeric Greeks knew no real individuality. Epic heroes were eponymous, standing for all men. In the world of the epic, "an individual structure and physiognomy is simply the product of a balance between the part and the whole, mutually determining one another; it is never the product of polemical self-contemplation by the lost and lonely personality."⁵⁴ Moreover, the "I" of the epic was empirical rather than what Lukács called intelligible, as it was in the drama. That is, the epic subject lived in an immediate and fulfilled manner; he was never equivalent to a principle that transcended and was in tension with his existence. Accordingly, the role of subjectivity in the epic was minimized. The subject was receptive and passive, the beneficiary of divine grace. "In the epic," Lukács contended, "totality can only truly manifest itself in the contents of the object; it is meta-subjective, transcendent, it is a revelation and grace."⁵⁵ In fact, once the subject becomes active and dominant, the epic is lost: "The subject's form-giving, structuring, delimiting act, his sovereign dominance over the created object, is the lyricism of those epic forms which are without totality."⁵⁶

49. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 51. This extremely passive view of subjectivity makes it difficult to accept Arai's characterization of Lukács' pre-Marxist period as a "search for a revolutionary subject."

Finally, the epic reveals a world in which man and nature are at one. There is no meaningful split between the social or historical and the natural. Thus, totality in the epic must be understood organically. The community underlying it is "an organic—and therefore intrinsically meaningful—concrete totality."⁵⁷ In fact, the very distinction between nature and society, or a first and "second nature,"⁵⁸ is a mark of detotalization. "The first nature," he wrote, "nature as a set of laws for pure cognition, nature as the bringer of comfort to pure feeling, is nothing other than the historico-philosophical objectivation of man's alienation from his own constructs."⁵⁹

With this highly idealized image of the Homeric Greeks as his standard, Lukács then proceeded to mark the process of decay that followed it. In his account, there is none of that complicated dialectical awareness of the necessity of alienation that can be found in Schiller, Hegel and Marx, with their secularized versions of the Christian myth of the fortunate fall. Although Lukács uses the same metaphor as Marx did in assigning the epic to the childhood of man and the novel to the age of "virile maturity,"⁶⁰ he shared none of Marx's unsentimental preference for maturation. Instead, the modern era is a period of "transcendental homelessness;"⁶¹ men live in a world that had been "abandoned by God."⁶² In that world, the first and second nature, the latter experienced as a "chapel-house of long-dead interiorities,"⁶³ are irrevocably split; men perceive their "self-made environment as a prison instead of a parental home."⁶⁴ As Lukács himself later admitted,⁶⁵ this attitude was far closer to Kierkegaard's than to Hegel's or Marx's, even though on the descriptive level it echoed Marx's distinction between "living" and "dead" labor and anticipated his own later discussion of capitalist reification.

The art work that best expressed this dismal reality was the novel, "the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem,

57. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

61. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (1857–8), of mankind appeared in the *Grundrisse* (1857–8).

62. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 41.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

65. *Ibid.* If any evidence is needed to demonstrate Lukács' indebtedness to the Romantic tradition, these images clearly provide it. Compare, for example, this description of Teufelsdröckh's vision of wholeness in "The Everlasting Yes" chapter of Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*: "The Universe is not dead and demoniacal, a chapel-house with spectres; but godlike and my Father's" (*Sartor Resartus* [London, 1881], p. 130).

66. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 18. For a critique of this work from a position close to Lukács' own later beliefs, see Ferenc Feher, "Is the Novel Problematic? A Contribution to the Theory of the Novel," *Telos* 15 (Spring 1973).

yet which still thinks in terms of totality."⁶⁶ After passing quickly over the transitional phenomenon of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in which religion, even in its transcendent form, provided certain features of the Homeric era, Lukács began his highly schematic analysis of the novel with *Don Quixote*, the novel of abstract idealism. He then proceeded through the other types mentioned above, and concluded with the ambitious, but ultimately unsuccessful, attempts of Goethe and Tolstoy to transcend the limitations of the form. It would take us too far afield to recapitulate his typology and examine its specific implications, but certain aspects of his general discussion of the novel *per se* merit our attention.

In virtually all of its respects, the novel, as Lukács presented it, is the antithesis of the epic. Its formal properties manifest the fragmentation and dissonance of the world that it reflects. Nostalgia for lost unity or longing for a new one animates the novel; as a result, it lacks the perfect stillness of the epic: "Only the novel, the literary form of the transcendent homelessness of the idea, includes real time—Bergson's *durée*—among its constitutive principles."⁶⁷ The subject of the novel, untouched by grace, at odds with his world, driven by an ethical imperative that transcends his existence, is necessarily impelled on a quest for immanent meaning, but one that is doomed to frustration. The novel's attempt to grasp life whole leads to a limitless aggregation of disparate elements, very much like Hegel's notion of a "bad infinity," "whereas the infinity of purely epic matter is an inner, organic one."⁶⁸ Because the novel seeks totality, but cannot achieve it, its characteristic posture is self-referential and reflective, "sentimental" in Schiller's well-known distinction, rather than "naive." In fact, "the need for reflection is the deepest melancholy of every great and genuine novel."⁶⁹ The novelist himself cannot transcend the ironic implications of this situation. "Irony, the self-surmounting of a subjectivity that has gone as far as it was possible to go," Lukács contended, "is the highest freedom that can be achieved in a world without God."⁷⁰

66. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 56. For a recent and arresting analysis of the novel's inability to achieve totalizing closure that reformulates and particularizes this argument in deconstructionist terms, see D. A. Miller, *Narratability and its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton, 1981). Miller, to be sure, remains solely within the texts themselves whereas Lukács sought his answers outside them.

67. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 121. The only way the corrosive power of time is overcome in the novel is through memory, which Lukács sees as injecting an epic quality into certain novels. In his very stimulating chapter on *The Theory of the Novel in The Subject in Question: The Languages of Theory and the Strategies of Fiction* (Chicago, 1982), David Carroll shows how Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* typifies this process. But he then assigns it the role of leading Lukács out of his pessimism, an honor that more properly belongs to Dostoevsky's works.

68. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 181.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

In *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács held out only a very tentative hope that anything better might be achieved. His final chapter, "Tolstoy and the Attempts to Go Beyond the Social Forms of Life," examined the great Russian novels of the nineteenth century. His wife at this time, to whom he dedicated the book, was Yelena Andreyevna Grabenko, a Russian "social revolutionary." He seems to have been captivated by the possibility that Russia might "save us from Western Civilization," although precisely how he did not know. Because of the "greater closeness of nineteenth century Russian literature to certain organic natural conditions,"⁷¹ he speculated, it expressed the normative totality present in the Homeric epic better than any other novels. Although his work was in one sense the "final expression of European Romanticism,"⁷² Tolstoy was able at certain moments to explode the limitations of the novel to show a "clearly differentiated, concrete and existent world, which, if it could be spread out into a totality, would be completely inaccessible to the categories of the novel and would require a new form of artistic creation: the form of the renewed epic."⁷³ The major flaw in Tolstoy's vision derived from his over-reliance on nature as the arena of totalization, whereas "a totality of men and events is possible only on the basis of culture."⁷⁴

Intimations of a new normative totality capable of sustaining a renewed epic were more clearly present, Lukács concluded, in the messianic antinomian world of Dostoevsky, for a critique of whom *The Theory of the Novel* had originally been intended as a preface. In fact, "it is in the words of Dostoevsky that this new world, remote from any struggle against what actually exists, is drawn for the first time simply as a seen reality. That is why he, and the form he created, lie outside the scope of this book."⁷⁵ But whether or not the vision of a new normative totality present in Dostoevsky really foreshadowed a radical change, Lukács chose not to say. *The Theory of the Novel* ended on a note only marginally more hopeful than that sounded in *Soul and Form*; Lukács was still mired in the problematic of bourgeois culture in disarray and could see no easy and immediate way out.

He does seem to have felt certain, however, that the answer lay within the realm of culture. His chastisement of Tolstoy for failing to see that totality was an affair of culture rather than nature was characteristic of his intense preoccupation with the idea of culture during the years immediately preceding and following his sudden embrace of Marxism. His concomitant hostility to socio-economic categories was evinced as well in his

71. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

depiction of the new world foreshadowed by the Russian novelists: "This world is the sphere of pure soul-reality in which man exists as man, neither as a social being nor as an isolated, unique, pure and therefore abstract interiority."⁷⁶ For Lukács, social was equivalent to what Tönnies had called *gesellschaftlich*, connoting a world of alienation and disharmony. *Gemeinschaft* (community) was a cultural, not social phenomenon. It was the realm of those direct and immediate confrontations between pure souls prefigured in Dostoevsky's fictional world.

In the period after *The Theory of the Novel* was published, Lukács shed his pessimistic evaluation of the possibilities of change, but his preference for cultural rather than socio-economic solutions continued. An essay he published in December, 1918, the very month of his "conversion"⁷⁷ to Marxism, was entitled "Bolshevism as a Moral Problem."⁷⁸ In it, he pondered the dilemma presented by the Leninist adoption of evil means to achieve good ends, "or as Razumikhin says in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, that it is possible to lie our way through to the truth."⁷⁹ With a concern for the ethical authenticity that had motivated much of his earlier work, Lukács refused to adopt Razumikhin's logic, and specifically rejected the Bolsheviks' "credo quia absurdum est—that no new class struggle will emerge out of this class struggle."⁸⁰ Although in a second essay published two months later entitled "Tactics and Ethics"⁸¹ Lukács did justify that leap of faith by accepting the sacrifice of individual ethical purity in the name of "an imperative of the world-historical situation, an historico-philosophical mission,"⁸² he nonetheless continued to focus on cultural and moral issues, if now with a revolutionary intent.

76. *Ibid.*

77. Most commentators follow the lead of Lukács' friends from this period, such as Arnold Hauser and Anna Lesznai, who saw his change as sudden and unexpected; in Lesznai's words, "from Saul became Paul" (quoted in Kertler, "Culture and Revolution," p. 69). Goldmann's later stress on the irrational Pascalian "wager" at the heart of Marxism was possibly stimulated by Lukács' example. Jameson, however, argues that the notion of a semi-religious conversion experience mystifies the essential continuities in Lukács' position, which he sees as "a continuous and lifelong meditation on narrative, on its basic structures, its relationship to the reality it expresses, and its epistemological modes of understanding" (p. 163). As this chapter attempts to show by focusing on the continuities and discontinuities between Lukács' uses of totality, neither extreme captures the nuances of his development.

78. Appearing first in December, 1918 in *Szabadgondolat* (*Free Thought*), the official journal of a group of Hungarian radical intellectuals known as the "Galileo Circle," the article has been translated with an introduction by Judith Marcus Tar in *Social Research* 44, 3 (Autumn, 1977).

79. *Ibid.*, p. 424.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 423.

81. English translation in *Political Writings, 1919–1929*, trans. Michael McGolgan, ed. Rodney Livingstone (London, 1972).

82. *Ibid.*, p. 10. Here too, Lukács relies on a Russian example to make his point. But instead of a character from Dostoevsky, he chose the real-life terrorist, Ropshichin (Boris Savinkov), who justified terror by defining "the ultimate moral basis of the terrorist's act as

In fact, before committing himself entirely to Marxism, he went through a period that David Kertler has aptly called "revolutionary culturalism."⁸³ His stance was shared in varying degrees by other members of the Budapest "Sunday Circle,"⁸⁴ such as Karl Mannheim, Arnold Hauser, Béla Balázs, Frigyes Antal and Béla Fogarasi, to which Lukács had belonged since returning to Hungary during the war. It combined elements of extreme left-wing and extreme right-wing critiques of bourgeois society and culture. With leftists like Ervin Szabó,⁸⁵ the Hungarian anarcho-syndicalist from whom Lukács learned of Sorel, the revolutionary culturalists expressed contempt for parliamentary politics, indeed all politics, and believed instead in apocalyptic and total change. With conservatives such as Thomas Mann, they endorsed Alfred Weber's distinction between culture and civilization, equating the latter with the prosaic achievements of mechanistic technology characteristic of the Western industrial democracies. And like both, the revolutionary culturalists stressed the special role of intellectuals, with their ability to know the whole, in leading society out of its current dilemma.⁸⁶

the sacrifice for his brethren, not only of his life, but also his purity, his morals, his very soul. In other words, only he who acknowledges unflinchingly and without any reservations that murder is under no circumstances to be sanctioned can commit the murderous deed that is truly—and tragically—moral" (p. 11). Lukács' ascetic and self-abnegating streak, which appeared again in his remarks on party discipline in *History and Class Consciousness* as well as in his actions after its denunciation, can perhaps be traced back to this earlier identification with the higher morality of justifiable terrorism.

83. Kertler, "Culture and Revolution," p. 36. It derives, he claims, "intrinsic interest from striving to advance the distinctly humanist values without succumbing to the ethical callousness, if not inhumanity, which normally mars the aristocratic culturalist view." For a recent defense of the cultural emphasis throughout Lukács' work, see Feenberg, *Marx, Lukács and the Sources of Critical Theory*, Chapters 5 and 6.

84. This extraordinary group of intellectuals met every Sunday from 1915 to 1918 in the home of Béla Balázs. In 1917, they organized a series of lectures given under the auspices of a "Free School for Studies of the Human Spirit." The Hungarian word for spirit (*szellem*) became an informal way of referring to the circle, which was colloquially called "The Sprites" (*Szellemtétele*). The best account of them in English can be found in Congdon, *The Young Lukács*, Chapter 2.

85. See György Litván, "A Moralist Revolutionary's Dilemma: In Memory of Ervin Szabó," *Radical History Review* 24 (Fall, 1980).

86. After his embrace of Marxism, Lukács continued to wrestle with the role of intellectual leadership. In a 1919 essay entitled "Intellectual Workers and the Problem of Intellectual Leadership," he argued against the claim that socialism disparaged the intellect. Linking Marx very closely to Hegel, he concluded: "We Marxists not only believe that the development of society is directed by the so often-disparaged Spirit, but we also know that it was only in Marx's work that this spirit became conscious and assumed the mission of leadership." But then, as if anticipating his friend Mannheim's celebration of the free-floating intellectualism, he added: "But this mission cannot be the privilege of any 'intellectual class' or the product of 'supra-class' thinking. The salvation of society is a mission which only the proletariat, by virtue of its world-historical role, can achieve" (*Political Writings, 1919–1929*, p. 18).

Lukács' revolutionary culturism was most clearly expressed in his essay "The Old Culture and the New Culture," first published in Hungarian in *Internationale* on June 15, 1919, and then in German in the ultra-left journal *Kommunismus* on November 7, 1920.⁸⁷ Written when Lukács was Minister of Education in Béla Kun's revolutionary government and sponsoring moralistic (and counterproductive) policies such as the prohibition of alcohol,⁸⁸ the essay expresses many of the ambiguities of his transitional period. Here, unlike in *The Theory of the Novel*, a specific link between the crisis of capitalism and crisis of culture was an explicit theme. But the characterization of capitalism was couched in terms closer to the right-wing critique of civilization than to the traditional Marxist language of economic exploitation. "Civilization, and its most developed form, capitalism," Lukács wrote, "has brought to its peak man's slavery to social production, to the economy. And the sociological precondition of culture is man as an end in himself."⁸⁹

Like Gramsci, with his contention that the Russian Revolution was a revolt "against Capital,"⁹⁰ although without Gramsci's more complicated mediation of politics and culture, Lukács interpreted the economic determinism of orthodox Marxism as a mistaken universalization of the unique, and regrettable, situation of capitalism. In fact, he went so far as to challenge the priority of economics during the pre-revolutionary period as well, arguing that "the culture of the capitalist epoch had collapsed in itself and prior to the occurrence of economic and political breakdown."⁹¹ And he claimed that with the onset of the revolution, the importance of culture increased even more dramatically: "During capitalism every ideological movement was only the 'superstructure' of the revolutionary process which ultimately led to the collapse of capitalism. Now in the proletarian dictatorship, this relationship is reversed."⁹² The new culture that is now being created will end the rule of civilization, the division of labor, and the primacy of the economy over man. It will restore the conditions that had generated "the greatness of old cultures (Greek, Re-

87. Lukács, "The Old and the New Culture," *Telos* 5 (Spring 1970) with an excellent introduction by Paul Breines, and in Georg Lukács, *Marxism and Human Liberation*, ed. with intro. E. San Juan, Jr. (New York, 1973). The following quotations are from the latter.

88. Rudolf L. Tokés, *Béla Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic: The Origins and Role of the Communist Party of Hungary in the Revolutions of 1918-1919* (New York, 1967), p. 153.

89. Lukács, "The Old and the New Culture," p. 15.

90. "The Revolution Against Capital," first published in the Milan edition of *Avanti* (November 1917); in English in *History, Philosophy and Culture in the Young Gramsci*, ed. Pedro Cavalcanti and Paul Piccone (St. Louis, 1975).

91. Lukács, "The Old Culture and the New Culture," p. 4.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

naissance)," which "consisted in the fact that ideology and production were in harmony; the products of culture could organically develop out of the soil of social being."⁹³ When Communism ends anarchic individualism, Lukács concluded, "human society will form an organic whole."⁹⁴

Understood in terms of the later debate over whether Marx thought freedom lay in the realm of de-alienated labor, a position expressed in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, or beyond labor altogether, as claimed in the third volume of *Capital*, Lukács (who, of course, had not yet seen the 1844 *Manuscripts*) can be placed clearly in the latter camp. He in fact defined culture as "the ensemble of valuable products and abilities which are dispensable in relation to the immediate maintenance of life,"⁹⁵ and argued that it was accessible only when strenuous labor ended and "free energies are at the disposal of culture."⁹⁶ Such opportunities may have been open only to an elite in earlier times, but Communism would universalize them. In fact, one of Lukács' primary goals in the Kun government was the democratization of culture, which, to be sure, did not mean toleration for all varieties of cultural expression.⁹⁷

Revolutionary culturalism thus suggested a continuity with Lukács' "romantic anti-capitalist" phase because of his stress on culture over economics and politics, but it also suggested a movement away from it in his linking of a "new culture" with the triumph of the proletariat. That movement grew more pronounced in the years following the publication of "The Old Culture and the New Culture," years in which Lukács was able to reflect on the failure of the Kun government and his own messianic ultra-leftism. Although Lukács' concern for culture, *Bildung*, and ethics was by no means left behind, his new emphasis on proletarian class consciousness and reification signified a firmer grasp of Marx's method and intentions. For the first time in his thinking, political as well as cultural transformation came to play a central theoretical role. The lessons of Lenin, as he understood them, directed his attention to issues of praxis and organization. The result of these changes was a book whose stress on the methodological importance of totality was given credence by its author's ability to link cultural, political, social, and (albeit to a lesser ex-

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

96. *Ibid.*

97. For more on Lukács' role in the cultural politics of the Kun regime, see Béla Köpeczi, "Lukács in 1919," *New Hungarian Quarterly* 20, 75 (Autumn 1979). Köpeczi discusses accusations of dictatorial intolerance leveled at Lukács by some of his Party comrades, most notably Commissar for Public Education Zsigmond Kunfi, but generally defends Lukács against them.

tent) economic issues in one powerful argument. *History and Class Consciousness* put the relationship between theory and practice at the center of the Marxist debate in a way that transcended the limitations of both revolutionary culturalism and the orthodoxy of the Second International. It is to that extraordinary work, the seminal text of Western Marxism, that we may now finally turn.



Because the general tenor of what follows will be critical of Lukács' argument in *History and Class Consciousness*, it must be stressed at the outset how remarkable an achievement the work really was. At a time when Marxist theory still lagged behind many of its bourgeois counterparts in reflective sophistication, Lukács almost single-handedly succeeded in raising it to a respectable place in European intellectual life. The widespread dismissal of Marxism in the 1890s as another variant of scientism or positivism was now no longer tenable, at least in German-speaking countries where Lukács' book could be read at first hand. As one of his staunchest critics, Lucio Colletti, later acknowledged, it was "the first Marxist book after Marx (Labriola was too isolated a phenomenon) which deals with Hegel and German classical philosophy at a European level and with a thorough knowledge of the subject; it is the first book in which philosophical Marxism ceases to be a cosmological romance and thus, a surrogate 'religion' for the 'lower' classes."⁹⁸ Indeed, along with Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy*, it reestablished the possibility of exploring Marxism's philosophical dimension, rather than seeing it as a science that had overcome the need for philosophical reflection.⁹⁹ Although, to be sure, it remained largely just a possibility for many years, the fuse had been lit which ultimately ignited Marxism's critical potential. Moreover, *History and Class Consciousness* anticipated in several fundamental ways the philosophical implications of Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*, whose publication it antedated by almost a decade. It was also the first work by a Marxist of European-wide stature to develop the insight, anticipated in the writings of Mondolfo, Brzozowski, Koigen, Plenge and He-lander,¹⁰⁰ that Marx and Engels should not always be conflated into advo-

98. Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, p. 178.

99. Ironically, among the Soviet critics of Lukács and Korsch were a group of philosophers around Abram Deborin, who were shortly thereafter themselves attacked for overemphasizing the philosophical nature of Marx's thought. See the informative discussion in Russell Jacoby, "Toward a Critique of Automatic Marxism: The Politics of Philosophy from Lukács to the Frankfurt School," *Telos* 10 (Winter 1971), p. 134f.

100. Rodolfo Mondolfo, *Il Materialismo storico in Federico Engels* (Genoa, 1912); Stanisław Brzozowski, *Idee* (Ideas) (Lemberg, 1910)—see the discussion in Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 2: *The Golden Age*, trans. P.S. Falla (Oxford,

cares of an identical position. And finally, it offered a brilliant, if ultimately false, explanation of and justification for the success of the Bolshevik Revolution at a time when Lenin and his followers were too busy or too confused to provide an adequate one themselves. As such, *History and Class Consciousness* can be seen as the most articulate expression on a theoretical level of the world-historical events of 1917, sharing in fact all of their fateful ambiguities. It thus presented a twentieth-century parallel to Kant's *Critiques* and their relation to the French Revolution. In fact, as we will see, the high-water mark of Hegelian Marxism came with the cresting of the revolutionary wave; its decline, which can already be discerned in the last sections of Lukács' book, followed swiftly the postwar revolutions' reversal of fortune. Its partial revival had to await an apparently comparable revolutionary wave in the 1960s.

In short, *History and Class Consciousness* has to be regarded as one of those rare synthetic visions that launch a new paradigm or problematic in thought, in this case Western Marxism. In fact, it was so synthetic in harnessing Hegelian Marxism for Bolshevik purposes that a distinctive Western Marxism did not really emerge until after the book was condemned by the Soviet authorities in 1924 at the fifth World Congress of the Comintern. For Lukács, like Korsch and Gramsci, saw himself as a loyal follower of Lenin, so much so, in fact, that when the condemnation came, Lukács chose the Party over the complete integrity of his own ideas.

But those ideas, of course, came very quickly to have a life of their own, despite their author's second thoughts. In what follows, we will concentrate on only one of them (although, to be sure, a central one). Indeed, for Lukács, it was so central that he insisted:

It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality. The category of totality, the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts, is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel and brilliantly transformed into the foundations of a wholly new science. . . . Proletarian science is revolutionary not just by virtue of its revolutionary ideas which it opposes to bourgeois society, but above all because of its method. *The primacy of the category of totality is the bearer of the principle of revolution in science.*¹⁰¹

1978); David Koigen, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Kultur* (Munich and Leipzig, 1910); Johann Plenge, *Hegel und Marx* (Tübingen, 1911); Sven Helander, *Marx und Hegel* (Jena, 1922), first published in Swedish in 1922. For a recent study making this same point, see Norman Levine, *The Tragic Deception: Marx Contra Engels* (Santa Barbara, 1975). For a powerful critique of this argument in Levine and elsewhere, see Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* (New York, 1980).

101. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 27.

As this paragraph reveals, Lukács' concern for totality was part of his even more fundamental assumption that methodology was the critical determinant of a revolutionary intellectual posture. In fact, the essay which opened with this statement posed the question "What is Orthodox Marxism?" and answered it by claiming that orthodoxy lay not in the acceptance of Marxist doctrine, but rather in the use of the correct method. Lukács carried this argument to the dubious extreme of saying that even if all of the conclusions to which the method led were shown to be false, the method would nonetheless still be valid. This position, it might be noted in passing, was one he never repudiated.¹⁰²

The main targets of this contention were Eduard Bernstein and the Revisionists, who believed Marx's alleged predictions had been invalidated by contrary factual evidence. In an earlier version of "What is Orthodox Marxism?" Lukács had ridiculed the fetish of facts in particularly vehement terms, arguing in a way reminiscent of Sorel that "decisions, real decisions, precede the facts. To understand reality in the Marxist sense is to be master and not the slave of the imminent facts."¹⁰³ He finished this earlier draft by flinging the provocative challenge of Fichte at the vulgar Marxists: "So much the worse for the facts."¹⁰⁴ In the version of the essay printed in *History and Class Consciousness*, Fichte's words were deleted, but the same argument against the passive fetishism of facts remained. Lukács linked action and knowledge, contending that the inert immediacy of facts had to be overcome by mediating them through a dynamic understanding of the whole:

Only in this context, which sees the isolated facts of social life as aspects of the historical process and integrates them in a *totality*, can knowledge of the facts hope to become knowledge of *reality*. This knowledge starts from the simple and (to the capitalist world) pure, immediate, natural determinants described above. It progresses from them to the knowledge of the concrete totality, i.e., to the conceptual reproduction of reality.¹⁰⁵

What from a positivist point of view would seem oxymoronic, linking concreteness with totality, was accepted by Lukács because of his Hegelian notion of the concrete. Instead of equating it with discrete entities or individual facts, he followed Marx's Hegelian usage: "The concrete is concrete because it is a synthesis of many particular determinants, i.e.

102. *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

103. Lukács, *Political Writings, 1919–1929*, p. 26.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 27. Much later, in his 1963 piece "Reflections on the Sino-Soviet Dispute," reprinted in *Marxism and Human Liberation*, Lukács singled out this Fichtean phrase (p. 79) as the epitome of the left sectarianism he had abandoned after Lenin's rebuke.

105. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 8.

a unity of diverse elements."¹⁰⁶ The totality could be concrete precisely because it included all of the mediations that linked the seemingly isolated facts.

What is perhaps most striking in these arguments is Lukács' new confidence in his ability, using the right method, to achieve a "conceptual reproduction of reality." The change was due to a number of revisions of his attitude towards the historical process, as well as a more complex use of the concept of totality itself. It is these changes that warn us against seeing *History and Class Consciousness* as merely a transposition of Lukács' earlier viewpoint into a Marxist key.

Whereas in *The Theory of the Novel* Lukács had rejected Hegel's optimistic vision of the historical process as a whole, agreeing with Fichte instead that the modern age was one of absolute sinfulness, he now saw history as a coherent and meaningful unity, what we have called a progressive longitudinal totality. Instead of viewing time as an agent of corruption and equating normative totality with the stillness of the epic, he now saw dynamism as an integral part of the whole. In the earlier draft of "What is Orthodox Marxism?" he wrote, "Like the classical German philosophers, particularly Hegel, Marx perceived world history as a homogeneous process, as an uninterrupted, revolutionary process of liberation."¹⁰⁷ In the revised version, he asserted in a similar vein that Marx "concretely revealed the real substratum of historical evolution and developed a seminal method in the process."¹⁰⁸ Later, in the central essay of the collection, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," Lukács referred the reader back to this earlier contention:

As we have shown, the question of universal history is a problem of methodology that necessarily emerges in every account of even the smallest segment of history. For history as a totality (universal history) is neither the mechanical aggregate of individual events, nor is it a transcendent heuristic principle opposed to the events of history, a principle that could only become effective with the aid of a special discipline, the philosophy of history. The totality of history is itself a real historical power—even though one that has not hitherto become conscious and has therefore gone unrecognized—a power which is not to be separated from the reality (and hence the knowledge) of the individual facts without at the same time annulling their reality and their factual existence. It is the real, ultimate ground of their reality and their factual existence and hence also of this knowability even as individual facts.¹⁰⁹

106. *Ibid.*, p. 9. The quotation is from Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. N. I. Stone (London, 1904), p. 293.

107. Lukács, *Political Writings, 1919–1929*, pp. 24–25.

108. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 17.

109. *Ibid.*, pp. 151–152.

In short, for Lukács, the past, present and future were all to be understood as moments in a coherent and meaningful process of emancipation, an argument which, as we will see, later Western Marxists were to question as a theodicy.

In *The Theory of the Novel*, to point to another contrast, Lukács had argued that certain novels were able to approach the epic's cessation of temporal corruption through memory: "The genuinely epic quality of such memory is the affirmative experience of the life process. The duality of interiority and the outside world can be abolished for the subject if he (the subject) glimpses the organic unity of his whole life through the process by which his living present has grown from the stream of his past life dammed up within his memory."¹¹⁰ This vision of a retrospective totalization, with its echo of Hegel's Owl of Minerva flying only at dusk and Dilthey's idea of death as the sole moment of personal totalization, was absent from *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács' stress on deeds, action and praxis meant that those who make history were no longer separated from those who came later to understand it. Although, as we will see when looking at Marcuse's notion of totality, the redemptive power of memory was not entirely abandoned by all Western Marxists, it was clearly subordinate in *History and Class Consciousness* to a stress on the convergence between acting and knowing.

This revision necessarily entailed a radical rethinking of the subject for Lukács. No longer did he talk of a passive, receptive subject who achieves totality through some kind of grace. From what in Dilthey's well-known lexicon might be called the "objective idealism" of *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács now turned to Dilthey's "idealism of freedom," an attitude bringing him in some ways closer to Fichte than to Hegel. Fichte, in fact, had held a fascination for Lukács for some time, possibly because of Lask's extensive exploration of his ideas.¹¹¹ In one of his pre-Marxist works, "Towards a Sociology of Drama," Lukács had claimed that "in its basic essentials . . . Marx's whole philosophy sprang from one source—Fichte."¹¹² Although he no longer held this drastic estimation of Fichte's sole influence, the notion of the subject in *History and Class Consciousness* bore unmistakable traces of Fichte's subjective activism. In fact, 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 merely its passive observer: "In the most general terms we see here the origin of the philosophical tendency to press forward to a conception of the subject which can be thought of as a creator of the totality of content."¹¹³ Although elsewhere in the text Lukács lapsed into the more orthodox notion that "history" controlled men,¹¹⁴ his quasi-Fichtean emphasis on subjectivity lent itself to a humanist interpretation of the historical process.

In fact, he criticized Fichte and Idealism in general for their transcendental and ahistorical notion of the subject. And like Marx, he chastised Feuerbach for correcting this fallacy only to the point of substituting an equally abstract anthropological notion of man for the Idealists' Spirit. To grasp the subject of history, he insisted, was to recognize which social groups, which classes, were practically active and which were not.

Throughout all previous history, Lukács contended, no social group could legitimately lay claim to the role of universal subject, although some had attempted to do so. Only now, Lukács thought, with the rise of the proletariat to power an imminent prospect, could such a claim be justly entertained. The implications of this new universal subject for Lukács were profound. Whereas in the past, Simmel's "tragedy of culture" accurately described the gap between a particular subject and the residues of other subjects' objectifications, now the situation had changed drastically. The assumptions underlying Lukács' belief in that change were ultimately traceable to a strictly humanist reading of Vico's *verum-factum* principle. Although Fredric Jameson has discerned traces of it in the last chapter of *The Theory of the Novel*,¹¹⁵ it was not really until *History and Class Consciousness* that Lukács' new view of the subject allowed him to

113. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 122–123.

114. "The totality of history is itself a real historical power—even though one that has not hitherto become conscious and has therefore gone unrecognized—a power which is not to be separated from the reality (and hence the knowledge) of the individual facts without at the same time annulling their reality and their factual existence. It is the real, ultimate ground of their reality and their factual existence and hence also of their knowability even as individual facts" (p. 152). "The active and practical side of class consciousness, its true essence, can only become visible in its authentic form when the historical process imperiously requires it to come into force, i.e. when an acute crisis in the economy drives it to action" (p. 40). Statements like these prepare the observer of Lukács' career for his later *modus orienti* with orthodox dialectical materialism. They also give some credence to the somewhat exaggerated accusation of Mihály Vajda that "Lukács' concept of history in general is purely an economic-deterministic one" ("The State and Socialism" in *Political Essays* [London, 1981], p. 49). Ironically, passages like that also allow Andrew Feenberg to argue that Lukács' concept of totality was never completely expressive, because they show that he believed "the proletariat is not a free will expressing itself in history, but is still bound in an order of objective constraints" ("Culture and Practice in the Early Marxist Work of Lukács," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 26 [1981], p. 34).

115. Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 181.

110. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 127.

111. Lask's doctoral dissertation was entitled "Fichtes Idealismus und die Geschichte" (1902); reprinted in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 3 vols. (Tübingen, 1923, 1923 and 1924).

112. Quoted in Breines, "Lukács, Revolution and Marxism: 1885–1918," p. 414. See also the discussion in Arato and Breines, p. 26f.

see Vico's argument as central. Quoting Marx's own citation of Vico in *Capital*,¹¹⁶ Lukács built his refutation of Simmel's acceptance of the tragedy of culture, which Lukács now called "the antinomies of bourgeois thought," on the belief that man knows history better than nature because he can know what he has made better than what is made outside of him.

Vico, as we have seen, did not worry about distinguishing man in general from specific historical subjects. Nor did he confine the process of making to intentional, conscious and rational action. 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. To know the whole was thus dependent on the existence of a collective historical subject who could recognize itself in its objectifications:

Only when a historical situation has arisen in which a class must understand society if it is to assert itself; only when the fact that a class understands itself means that it understands society as a whole and when, in consequence, the class becomes both the subject and the object of knowledge; in short, only when these conditions are all satisfied will the unity of theory and practice, the precondition of the revolutionary function of the theory, become possible.

Such a situation has in fact arisen with the entry of the proletariat into history.¹¹⁷

Capitalism, to be sure, had laid the groundwork for the proletariat's entrance by its relentless socialization of the world, its incorporation of more and more of the globe into its economic system. But knowledge of the whole was denied to the capitalists themselves because they were not the true makers of history, however much they may have parasitically benefited from the labor of those who unconsciously were. Accordingly, although there were a few bourgeois thinkers who tried to think holistically—Lukács mentioned the psychologist Wundt in this regard¹¹⁸—mainstream bourgeois thought could not transcend its individualist, analytic and formalist biases. An adequate theory had to be understood as "essentially the intellectual expression of the revolutionary process itself,"¹¹⁹ and clearly bourgeois theory could only be in opposition to that process.

Because of Lukács' reliance on the *verum-factum* principle and his contention that theory expressed the revolutionary process, the view of totality he was advocating has justly been called "expressive" by his more recent structuralist critics.¹²⁰ According to this notion, the whole expresses the intentionality and praxis of a creator-subject, who recognizes

116. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 112.

117. *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3. 118. *Ibid.*, p. 110. 119. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

120. Jones, "The Marxism of the Early Lukács," p. 39. For an analysis challenging the applicability of the expressive totality category to Lukács, see Feenberg, "Culture and Practice in the Early Marxist Work of Lukács." Arguing against the existence of a strong Fichtean influence in *History and Class Consciousness*, he claims that Lukács believed "subjectivity is

itself in the objective world around it. Other ways of making the same point are to call it a "genetic" or "reflective" or "self-activating" view of totality, because the whole is understood as a reflection of its own genesis, the product of its own praxis. For Lukács, at least in certain moments in *History and Class Consciousness*, the subject of history and the object of history are ultimately one. The Western Marxist use of totality can be said to have begun with this expressive view of totality although, as we will soon see, it certainly did not end with it.

In adopting an expressive notion of the whole, Lukács was able to achieve seemingly valid resolutions of the antinomies of bourgeois thought and culture that had been plaguing him since he began to write. The source of these intellectual and spiritual contradictions, he claimed, lay in the contradictory nature of bourgeois existence. Extrapolating from Marx's discussion of the "fetishism of commodities" in *Capital*, and applying insights from Bergson, Simmel and Weber, he introduced the notion of reification to characterize the fundamental experience of bourgeois life. This term, one not in fact found in Marx himself, meant the petrification of living processes into dead things, which appeared as an alien "second nature." Weber's "iron cage" of bureaucratic rationalization, Simmel's "tragedy of culture" and Bergson's spatialization of *durée* were thus all part of a more general process. Lukács was able to move beyond the stoic pessimism of

situated in a *decentered* totality of which it is not so much the source as the *decentered* mediation" (p. 28). Rather than holding on to a constitutive concept of subjectivity, Lukács, according to Feenberg, agreed with Hegel's doctrine of essence in the *Logic*, which posited a relational immanence that did not annihilate the specificity of the entities bound together in the relation. As a consequence, Lukács argued that the proletariat could never create the social world out of itself and recognize itself in its objectifications. Instead, Feenberg contends, he argued only that the proletariat "alters the social signification and function of its objects" (p. 34). Accordingly, "Lukács argues that under socialism society could become increasingly subject to conscious control, but not that the tension between man and society would disappear" (p. 37).

This reading of Lukács seems to me truer to Lucien Goldmann's revision of his work than to Lukács himself. Feenberg, who was a student of Goldmann, is more generous than the texts allow. Indeed, as he himself concedes, "The critique of Lukács is by no means entirely misplaced. Unfortunately, Lukács' constant use of the language of productive subjectivity suggests that even though he defines this concept in a Hegelian manner, he wants it to bear the burden of solving the sort of problems Kant first posed, and Fichte later resolved with the undialectical concept of expressive totality" (p. 38). Perhaps the most telling piece of evidence against Feenberg's reading is that a subjective mediation of objective reality that merely "alters" its social signification and function would not really overcome the Kantian thing-in-itself problem, which Lukács clearly set out to resolve. It seems therefore correct to conclude with Arato and Breines that "Lukács' consideration of Hegel's discovery of the historical dialectic does not amount to an abrogation of the Fichtean roots of his concept of 'subject'" (p. 128). For yet another discussion of those roots, see Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London, 1981), p. 31. In his book, Feenberg comes close to recognizing this point when he acknowledges that there are two competing models of practice in Lukács' work, practice as production (basically Fichtean) and practice as mediation (essentially Hegelian). He prefers, of course, to emphasize the latter. See the discussion on p. 126f.

Weber and Simmel by linking their intellectual dilemmas to the reified nature of bourgeois life, an explanation that grounded them historically. And he was able to offer a similar explanation for the infection of Second International socialist thought by the same antinomies; the Revisionists with their neo-Kantian split between facts and values and the orthodox with their economic fatalism and failure to consider subjective praxis were both ideological expressions of a still non-revolutionary age, an age before the collective totalizer achieved self-consciousness.

The central antinomies Lukács identified as characteristic of the bourgeois era were the separation of facts and values; the distinction between phenomena, or appearances, and noumena, or essential things-in-themselves; and the oppositions between free will and necessity, form and content, and subject and object. For Lukács, as we have seen in examining his pre-Marxist writings, the gap between "is" and "ought" was a source of particular distress. The epic was distinguished from the drama and novel by its incorporation of morality into immediate life. To regain this unity was possible only if a transcendental and ahistorical morality in the Kantian sense was replaced by the more Hegelian notion of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) as the concrete customs (*Sitte*) of a specific historical totality. The answer to the moral relativism haunting bourgeois thought was thus not a flight into an imagined world of transcendental values, as attempted by Rickert and other neo-Kantians. It was instead an acceptance of the partial relativism of the historical process in which collective values were posited by specific historical subjects.¹²¹ To Lukács the "is" and the "ought" would merge once the subject of history, the proletariat, objectified its ethical principles in the concrete mores of Communist society. Recognizing itself in the world it had created, it would no longer be subjected to the moral alienation plaguing bourgeois culture. As part of a collective subject, the individual would no longer be troubled by the types of doubts Lukács himself had voiced in "Bolshevism as a Moral Problem."

121. In his seminal study of Lukács in the "'Western' Marxism" chapter of *Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. Joseph Bien (Evanston, 1973), Merleau-Ponty recognized the importance of this answer, which he says was directed at Lukács' "teacher," Weber: He does not reproach him for having been too relativistic but rather for not having been relativistic enough and for not having gone so far as to "relativize the notions of subject and object." For, by so doing, one regains a sort of totality. Certainly nothing can change the fact that our knowledge is partial in both senses of the word. It will never be confused with the historical-in-itself (if this word has a meaning). We are never able to refer to completed totality, to universal history, as if it were not within it, as if it were spread out in front of us. The totality of which Lukács speaks is, in his own terms, "the totality of observed facts," not of all possible and actual beings but of our coherent arrangement of all the known facts. When the subject recognizes himself in history and history in himself, he does not dominate the whole, as the Hegelian philosopher does, but at least he is engaged in a work of totalization. (p. 31)

Although Merleau-Ponty reads Lukács through the lenses of an existentialist Marxist for whom open-ended totalization has priority over finished totality, he nonetheless perceives with considerable acuity the answer Lukács tried to give to neo-Kantian transcendentalism.

A comparable resolution of the antinomy between phenomena and noumena would follow from the same coming-to-consciousness of the universal totalizer, the proletariat; for from the point of view of totality:

The two main strands of the irrationality of the thing-in-itself and the concreteness of the individual content and of totality are given a positive turn and appear as a unity. This signals a change in the relation between theory and practice and between freedom and necessity. The idea that we have made reality loses its more or less fictitious character: we have—in the prophetic words of Vico already cited—made our own history and if we are able to regard the whole of reality as history (i.e. as *our* history, for there is no other), we shall have raised ourselves in fact to the position from which reality can be understood as our 'action.'¹²²

In other words, the mysterious impenetrability of the thing-in-itself will be revealed as no more than the illusion of a reified consciousness incapable of recognizing itself in its products.

In addition, the felt distance between will and fate, freedom and necessity, would also narrow once the external world were no longer perceived as ruled by alien forces experienced as if they were a "second nature." The very opposition, popular among vulgar materialists and neo-Kantians alike, between a world of objective matter and subjective consciousness would end as men adopted a practical attitude towards the objective world. Being would then be understood as Becoming, things would dissolve into processes, and most important of all, the subjective origin of those processes would become apparent to the identical subject-object of history.

Freedom was reconcilable with necessity because it was equivalent to collective action, action which constituted the world out of itself. For bourgeois notions of "negative freedom," the freedom from interference in individual affairs, Lukács had nothing but contempt: "Above all one thing must be made clear: freedom here does *not* mean the freedom of the individual."¹²³ The very notion of the individual isolated from the social context was a mark of reification. The antinomy between form and content, which had bothered Lukács so much in his earlier writings, was itself a reflection of the reified individual's sense of his own unique life in opposition to the alien forms of social interaction. Once he recognized himself as part of the collective source of those very forms, their foreignness would dissolve. As in the Homeric world, men would live lives of immediate formal and substantive wholeness. The normative totality to which men had so long aspired would be finally achieved.

122. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 145.

123. *Ibid.*, p. 315.



Lukács' solutions to the antinomies of bourgeois culture were enormously powerful taken on their own terms. But it soon became apparent that their elegant simplicity could not bear close scrutiny. There are, in fact, indications in *History and Class Consciousness* itself that Lukács had sensed the difficulties even before his critics began to detail them. Perhaps the most obvious instance was Lukács' highly controversial notion of "ascribed" or "imputed" class consciousness, which was the philosophical correlate of Lenin's insistence in *What is to Be Done?* that, left to itself, the proletariat could only develop reformist "trade-union consciousness." By introducing this notion, Lukács admitted the gap between his ideal construction of the proletariat as the subject-object of history and the reality of its current status. In rejecting the Revisionists' fetishism of facts, Lukács invoked, as we have seen, the Hegelian distinction between essence and appearance, both of which had to be understood as mediated elements in a concrete totality. In discussing the level of awareness of the proletariat in the contemporary world of revolutionary transition, a world still ruled by capitalist reification, it was necessary to distinguish between empirical and essential class consciousness. To make his point, Lukács borrowed Weber's notion of "objective possibility,"¹²⁴ but gave it an ontological dimension absent from Weber's more neo-Kantian usage. Instead of a fictional construct produced by the observer's educated imagination, objective possibility for Lukács was rooted in the actual conditions of society. It was logically appropriate to the reality it described because that reality was ultimately the practical objectification of the collective subject of which the individual observer was a part. But because this equation was only true in an ultimate sense, it was still necessary to theorize ahead of the empirical consciousness of the proletariat. Presumably, of course, once the process of "dereification" proceeded, the gap between empirical and imputed class consciousness would narrow and finally vanish; objective possibility would become subjective actuality.

But in the transitional period, which Lukács thought would not last indefinitely, an intermediary was necessary. Here Lenin's example was crucial for Lukács, because he still believed that Lenin's professed faith in the combined power of party and soviets conformed to Bolshevik practice. The intermediary was the organizational embodiment of the theoretical self-consciousness of the proletariat's objective possibility. In the early es-

124. For excellent discussions of Lukács' use of Weber's term, see Irving Fetscher, "Zum Begriff der 'Objektiven Möglichkeit' bei Max Weber und Georg Lukács," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 106 (1973); Arato, "Lukács' Theory of Reification," p. 62f; and Francis Hearn, "The Dialectical Use of Ideal Types," *Theory and Society* 2, 4 (Winter 1975).

says of *History and Class Consciousness*, with their frequent expressions of respect for Rosa Luxemburg. Lukács favored an organizational mix in which the soviets played a key role in mediating between the masses and the leadership of the revolution. By the collection's last essays, "Critical Observations on Rosa Luxemburg's 'Critique of the Russian Revolution'" (January 1922) and "Toward a Methodology of the Problem of Organization" (September 1922), the balance had shifted clearly in favor of the highly disciplined vanguard party. Criticizing Luxemburg's "illusion of an 'organic,' purely proletarian revolution,"¹²⁵ Lukács recognized that the party must lead various revolutionary elements of society, while at the same time articulating the imputed class consciousness of the one element that could ultimately become a universal subject of history. Although protesting that the party ought not to "function as a stand-in for the proletariat even in theory,"¹²⁶ the logic of his argument, with its recognition that the revolution was an inorganic phenomenon, and the more fateful logic of events in the Soviet Union, soon made this protestation sound hollow. By the time *History and Class Consciousness* was published, the links between masses, soviets and party were virtually dissolved. The soviets remained meaningful in name only and the power of the party grew beyond all expectations. The process of substitution, against which critics of Bolshevism (including the young Trotsky) had long warned, now began in earnest.

Whether this sad course of events was produced by the exigencies of civil war and the failure of revolution elsewhere or followed inexorably from pre-revolutionary Bolshevik political assumptions, it was soon clear that the gap between empirical and imputed class consciousness had widened rather than narrowed. The workers' uprising in Kronstadt in March of 1921, ruthlessly crushed by the Soviet leadership, gave an indication of things to come. Lukács' choice was for the leadership over the workers, for imputed over empirical class consciousness. His only reference to Kronstadt in *History and Class Consciousness* was a contemptuous linking of it with the reactionary General Kornilov:

Their "critique" of the dictatorship of the proletariat is not a self-criticism performed by the proletariat—the possibility of which must be kept open institutionally even under the dictatorship. It is a corrosive tendency in the service of the bourgeoisie.¹²⁷

125. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 303. For a defense of Luxemburg against this charge, see Norman Geras, *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg* (London, 1976), p. 175f.

126. *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 327.

127. *Ibid.*, p. 293.

With this attitude towards the widening chasm between workers and party, Lukács inevitably had to modify the expressive use of totality that was at the heart of his "solution" to the antinomies of bourgeois thought, as we will see momentarily.

But the solution itself contained a number of fundamental theoretical difficulties. As Lukács himself came to understand after reading Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts* a decade later,¹²⁸ he had erroneously conflated the processes of objectification and reification in an essentially idealist way. By equating praxis with the objectification of subjectivity, instead of seeing it as an interaction of a subject with a pre-given object, Lukács had missed the importance of the dialectic of labor in constituting the social world. Thus, although stressing activity as opposed to contemplation and arguing that the abolition of contradictions "cannot simply be the result of thought alone, it must also amount to their *practical* abolition as the *actual forms of social life*,"¹²⁹ he nonetheless underestimated the material resistance of those forms. In the essay of 1919, "Tactics and Ethics," he had spoken of blind forces being awakened to consciousness, and added in a footnote:

"Consciousness" refers to that particular stage of knowledge where the subject and object of knowledge are substantively homogeneous, i.e. where knowledge takes place *from within* and not *from without*. . . . The chief significance of this type of knowledge is that the mere fact of knowledge produces an essential modification in the object known: thanks to the act of consciousness, of knowledge, the tendency inherent in it hitherto now becomes more assured and vigorous than it was or could have been before.¹³⁰

In *History and Class Consciousness*, the same basic argument remained:

The coercive measures taken by society in individual cases are often hard and brutally materialistic, but *the strength of every society is in the last resort a spiritual strength*. And from this we can only be liberated by knowledge. This knowledge cannot be of the abstract kind that remains in one's head—many "socialists" have possessed that sort of knowledge. It must be knowledge that has become flesh of one's flesh and blood; to use Marx's phrase, it must be "practical critical activity."¹³¹

128. Ibid., p. xxxvi, where Lukács writes:

I can still remember even today the overwhelming effect produced in me by Marx's statement that objectivity was the primary material attribute of all things and relations. This links up with the idea already mentioned that objectification is a natural means by which man masters the world and as such it can be either a positive or negative fact. By contrast, alienation is a special variant of that activity that becomes operative in definite social conditions. This completely shattered the theoretical foundations of what had been the particular achievement of *History and Class Consciousness*.

129. Ibid., p. 177.

130. Lukács, *Political Writings, 1919–1929*, p. 15.

131. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 262.

It is somewhat exaggerated to contend, as one of Lukács' structuralist critics has, that

The exact analogy of this procedure with the movement of Hegel's Spirit needs no emphasis. All that it omits is the brute material struggle for power—strikes, demonstrations, lock-outs, riots, insurrections or civil wars—that is the stuff of terrestrial revolutions.¹³²

But it is true that, as Lukács himself later admitted, "The proletariat seen as the identical subject-object of the real history of mankind is no materialist consummation that overcomes the constructions of idealism. It is rather an attempt to out-Hegel Hegel."¹³³ Nor, as Andrew Arato has argued,¹³⁴ was there an acknowledgement of the dialectic of concrete human needs in *History and Class Consciousness* that might have tempered the reduction of subjectivity to consciousness implicit in Lukács' position. Equally lacking, as a disillusioned former student of Lukács, Mihály Vajda, has pointed out,¹³⁵ was an awareness that the collective interest of the proletariat was based on an abstract notion of a fully unifiable class. Here Lukács' hostility to sociology, which he considered an inappropriate misuse of natural scientific methods, like psychology, had its costs. The result was a normative totality, a goal of complete constitutive subjectivity, that was little more than an "abstract negation of a totally reified world."¹³⁶

Lukács' inability to move beyond idealism was even more blatantly obvious in his treatment of nature. Here his indebtedness to Fichte, Dilthey and the *Geisteswissenschaftlichen* tradition was particularly strong.¹³⁷ Ironically, it was because of his zeal in trying to free Marxism from another variant of idealism, one in which nature was seen as the objectification of a meta-subject, that he fell prey to an idealism of a less global kind. In his opening essay, Lukács remarked in an important footnote:

It is of the first importance to recognize that the method [of Marxism] is limited here to the realm of history and society. The misunderstandings that arise from Engels' account of dialectics can in the main be put down to the fact that Engels—following Hegel's mistaken lead—extended the method to apply also to nature. However, the crucial determinants of dialectics—the interaction of subject and

132. Jones, "The Marxism of the Early Lukács," p. 45.

133. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. xxiii.

134. Arato, "Lukács' Theory of Reification," p. 65.

135. Vajda, *The State and Socialism*, p. 19. His position reflects the Budapest Circle's conceptualization of the difference between needs and interests. See Agnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx* (London, 1976).

136. Breines, "Praxis and Its Theorists: The Impact of Lukács and Korsch in the 1920s," *Telos* 11 (Spring 1972), p. 102.

137. For a discussion of this debt, see Arato, "Lukács' Theory of Reification," pp. 39–40.