

their separate ways because classical philosophy was unable to complete its programme, this process which had been designed to be suprahistorical, inevitably exhibits a historical structure at every point. And since the method, having become abstract and contemplative, now as a result falsifies and does violence to history, it follows that history will gain its revenge and violate the method which has failed to integrate it, tearing it to pieces. (Consider in this context the transition from the logic to the philosophy of nature.)

In consequence, as Marx has emphasised in his criticism of Hegel, the demiurgic role of the 'spirit' and the 'idea' enters the realm of conceptual mythology.⁶⁴ Once again—and from the standpoint of Hegel's philosophy itself—it must be stated that the demiurge only seems to make history. But this semblance is enough to dissipate wholly the attempt of the classical philosophers to break out of the limits imposed on formal and rationalistic (bourgeois, reified) thought and thereby to restore a humanity destroyed by that reification. Thought relapses into the contemplative duality of subject and object.⁶⁵

Classical philosophy did, it is true, take all the antinomies of its life-basis to the furthest extreme it was capable of in thought; it conferred on them the highest possible intellectual expression. But even for this philosophy they remain unsolved and insoluble. Thus classical philosophy finds itself historically in the paradoxical position that it was concerned to find a philosophy that would mean the end of bourgeois society, and to resurrect in thought a humanity destroyed in that society and by it. In the upshot, however, it did not manage to do more than provide a complete intellectual copy and the *a priori* deduction of bourgeois society. It is only the *manner* of this deduction, namely the dialectical method that points beyond bourgeois society. And even in classical philosophy this is only expressed in the form of an unsolved and insoluble antinomy. This antinomy is admittedly the most profound and the most magnificent intellectual expression of those antinomies which lie at the roots of bourgeois society and which are unceasingly produced and reproduced by it—albeit in confused and inferior forms. Hence classical philosophy had nothing but these unresolved antinomies to bequeath to succeeding (bourgeois) generations. The continuation of that course which at least in method started to point the way beyond these limits, namely the dialectical method as the true historical

method was reserved for the class which was able to discover within itself on the basis of its life-experience the identical subject-object, the subject of action; the 'we' of the genesis: namely the proletariat.

III

The Standpoint of the Proletariat

In his early *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx gave a lapidary account of the special position of the proletariat in society and in history, and the standpoint from which it can function as the identical subject-object of the social and historical processes of evolution. "When the proletariat proclaims the dissolution of the previous world-order it does no more than reveal the secret of its own existence, for it represents the effective dissolution of that world-order." The self-understanding of the proletariat is therefore simultaneously the objective understanding of the nature of society. When the proletariat furthers its own class-aims it simultaneously achieves the conscious realisation of the—objective—aims of society, aims which would inevitably remain abstract possibilities and objective frontiers but for this conscious intervention.¹

What change has been brought about, then, socially by this point of view and even by the possibility of taking up a point of view at all towards society? 'In the first instance' nothing at all. For the proletariat makes its appearance as the product of the capitalist social order. The forms in which it exists are—as we demonstrated in Section I—the repositories of reification in its acutest and direst form and they issue in the most extreme dehumanisation. Thus the proletariat shares with the bourgeoisie the reification of every aspect of its life. Marx observes: "The property-owning class and the class of the proletariat represent the same human self-alienation. But the former feels at home in this self-alienation and feels itself confirmed by it; it recognises alienation as its own instrument and in it it possesses the semblance of a human existence. The latter feels itself destroyed by this alienation and sees in it its own impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence."²

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It would appear, then, that—even for Marxism—nothing has

changed in the objective situation. Only the 'vantage point from which it is judged' has altered, only 'the value placed on it' has acquired a different emphasis. This view does in fact contain a very essential grain of truth, one which must constantly be borne in mind if true insight is not to degenerate into its opposite.

To put it more concretely: the objective reality of social existence is *in its immediacy* 'the same' for both proletariat and bourgeoisie. But this does not prevent the *specific categories of mediation* by means of which both classes raise this immediacy to the level of consciousness, by means of which the merely immediate reality becomes for both the authentically objective reality, from being fundamentally different, thanks to the different position occupied by the two classes within the 'same' economic process. It is evident that once again we are approaching—this time from another angle—the fundamental problem of bourgeois thought, the problem of the thing-in-itself. The belief that the transformation of the immediately given into a truly understood (and not merely an immediately perceived) and *for that reason* really objective reality, i.e. the belief that the impact of the category of mediation upon the picture of the world is merely 'subjective', i.e. is no more than an 'evaluation' of a reality that 'remains unchanged', all this is as much as to say that objective reality has the character of a thing-in-itself.

It is true that the kind of knowledge which regards this 'evaluation' as merely 'subjective', as something which does not go to the heart of the facts, nevertheless claims to penetrate the essence of actuality. The source of its self-deception is to be found in its uncritical attitude to the fact that its own standpoint is conditioned (and above all that it is conditioned by the society underlying it). Thus—to take this view of history at its most developed and most highly articulated—we may consider Rickert's arguments with regard to the historian who studies "his own cultural environment". He claims that: "If the historian forms his concepts with an eye on the values of the community to which he himself belongs, the objectivity of his presentation will depend entirely on the accuracy of his factual material, and the question of whether this or that event in the past is crucial will not even arise. He will be immune from the charge of arbitrariness, as long as he relates, e.g. the history of art to the aesthetic values of his culture and the history of the state to its political values and, so long as he refrains from making unhistorical *value-judgements*, he will create

a mode of historical narrative that is valid for all who regard political or aesthetic values as normative for the members of his community."³

By positing the materially unknown and only formally valid 'cultural values' as the founders of a 'value-related' historical objectivity, the subjectivity of the historian is, to all appearances, eliminated. However, this does no more than enthrone as the measure and the index of objectivity, the "cultural values" *actually* "prevailing in his community" (i.e. in his class). The arbitrariness and subjectivity are transformed from the material of the particular facts and from judgements on these into the criterion itself, into the "prevailing cultural values". And to judge or even investigate the validity of these values is not possible *within that framework*; for the historian the 'cultural values' become the thing-in-itself; a structural process analogous to those we observed in economics and jurisprudence in Section I.

Even more important, however, is the other side of the question, viz. that the thing-in-itself character of the form-content relation necessarily opens up the *problem of totality*. Here, too, we must be grateful to Rickert for the clarity with which he formulates his view. Having stressed the methodological need for a substantive theory of value for the philosophy of history, he continues: "Indeed, universal or world history, too, can only be written *in a unified manner* with the aid of a system of cultural values and to that extent it presupposes a substantive philosophy of history. For the rest, however, knowledge of a value system is irrelevant to the question of the scientific objectivity of purely empirical narrative."⁴

We must ask, however: is the distinction between historical monograph and universal history purely one of *scope* or does it also involve *method*? Of course, even in the former case history according to Rickert's epistemological ideal would be extremely problematic. For the 'facts' of history must remain—notwithstanding their 'value-attributes'—in a state of crude, uncomprehended facticity as every path to, or real understanding of them, of their real meaning, their real function in the historical process has been blocked *systematically* by methodically abandoning any claim to a knowledge of the totality. But, as we have shown,⁵ 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 historical 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 unrecognised—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.

In the essay referred to above we used Sismondi's theory of crisis to illustrate how the real understanding of a particular phenomenon can be thwarted by the misapplication of the category of totality, even when all the details have been correctly grasped. We saw there, too, that integration in the totality (which rests on the assumption that it is precisely the *whole* of the historical process that constitutes the authentic historical reality) does not merely affect our judgement of individual phenomena decisively. But also, as a result, the objective structure, the actual content of the *individual phenomenon—as individual phenomenon—is* changed fundamentally. The difference between this method which treats individual historical phenomena in isolation and one which regards them from a totalising point of view becomes even more apparent if we compare the function of the machine in the view of bourgeois economics and of Marx: "The contradictions and antagonisms inseparable from the capitalist employment of machinery, do not exist, they say, since they do not arise out of machinery, as such, but out of its capitalist employment! Since therefore machinery, considered alone shortens the hours of labour, but, when in the service of capital, lengthens them; since in itself it lightens labour, but when employed by capital, heightens the intensity of labour; since in itself it is a victory of man over the forces of Nature, but in the hands of capital, makes man the slave of those forces; since in itself it increases the wealth of the producers, but in the hands of capital, makes them paupers—for all these reasons and others besides, says the bourgeois economist without more ado, it is clear as noonday that all these contradictions are a mere semblance of the reality, and that, as a matter of fact, they have neither an actual nor a theoretical existence."⁶

Ignoring for the moment the aspect of bourgeois economics

that constitutes an apologia on class lines, let us examine the distinction solely from the point of view of method. We then observe that the bourgeois method is to consider the machine as an isolated unique thing and to view it simply as an existing 'individual' (for as a phenomenon of the process of economic development the machine as a class rather than the particular appliance constitutes the historical individual in Rickert's sense). We see further that to view the machine thus is to distort its true objective nature by representing its function in the capitalist production process as its 'eternal' essence, as the indissoluble component of its 'individuality'. Seen methodologically, this approach makes of every historical object a variable monad which is denied any interaction with other—similarly viewed—monads and which possesses characteristics that appear to be absolutely immutable essences. It does indeed retain an individual uniqueness but this is only the uniqueness of mere facticity, of being-just-so. The 'value-relation' does not at all affect this structure, for it does no more than make it possible to *select* from the infinite mass of such facticities. Just as these individual historical monads are only related to each other in superficial manner, one which attempts no more than a simple factual description, so too their relation to the guiding value principle remains purely factual and contingent.

And yet, as the really important historians of the nineteenth century such as Riegl, Dilthey and Dvořak could not fail to notice, the essence of history lies precisely in the changes undergone by those *structural forms* which are the focal points of man's interaction with environment at any given moment and which determine the objective nature of both his inner and his outer life. But this only becomes objectively possible (and hence can only be adequately comprehended) when the individuality, the uniqueness of an epoch or an historical figure, etc., is grounded in the character of these structural forms, when it is discovered and exhibited in them and through them.

However, neither the people who experience it nor the historian have direct access to immediate reality in these, its true structural forms. It is first necessary to search for them and to find them—and the path to their discovery is the path to a knowledge of the historical process in its totality. At first sight—and anyone who insists upon immediacy may never go beyond this 'first sight' his whole life long—it may look as if the next stages implied a purely

intellectual exercise, a mere process of abstraction. But this is an illusion which is itself the product of the habits of thought and feeling of mere immediacy where the immediately given form of the objects, the fact of their existing here and now and in this particular way appears to be primary, real and objective, whereas their 'relations' seem to be secondary and subjective. For anyone who sees things in such immediacy every true change must seem incomprehensible. The undeniable fact of change must then appear to be a catastrophe, a sudden, unexpected turn of events that comes from outside and eliminates all mediations.⁷ If change is to be understood at all it is necessary to abandon the view that objects are rigidly opposed to each other, it is necessary to elevate their interrelatedness and the interaction between these 'relations' and the 'objects' to the same plane of reality. The greater the distance from pure immediacy the larger the net encompassing the 'relations', and the more complete the integration of the 'objects' within the system of relations, the sooner change will cease to be impenetrable and catastrophic, the sooner it will become comprehensible.

But this will only be true if the road beyond immediacy leads in the direction of a greater concreteness, if the system of mediating concepts so constructed represents the "totality of the empirical"—to employ Lassalle's felicitous description of the philosophy of Hegel. We have already noted the methodological limits of formal, rational and abstract conceptual systems. In this context it is important only to hold on to the fact that it is not possible to use them to surpass the purely factual nature of historical facts. (The critical efforts of Rickert and of modern historiography also focus on this point and they too have successfully proved this.) The very most that can be achieved in this way is to set up a formal typology of the manifestations of history and society using historical facts as *illustrations*. This means that only a chance connection links the theoretical system to the objective historical reality that the theory is intended to comprehend. This may take the form of a naïve 'sociology' in search of 'laws' (of the Comte/Spencer variety) in which the insolubility of the task is reflected in the absurdity of the results. Or else the methodological intractability may be a matter of critical awareness from the beginning (as with Max Weber) and, instead, an auxiliary science of history is brought into being. But in either case the upshot is the same: the problem of facticity is pushed back into history once again

and the purely historical standpoint remains unable to transcend its immediacy regardless of whether this is desired or not.

We have described the stance adopted by the historian in Rickert's sense (i.e. critically the most conscious type in the bourgeois tradition) as a prolongation of the state of pure immediacy. This appears to contradict the obvious fact that historical reality can only be achieved, understood and described in the course of a complicated process of mediation. However, it should not be forgotten that immediacy and mediation are themselves aspects of a dialectical process and that every stage of existence (and of the mind that would understand it) has its own immediacy in the sense given to it in the *Phenomenology* in which, when confronted by an immediately given object, "we should respond just as immediately or receptively, and therefore make no alteration to it, leaving it just as it presents itself".⁸ To go beyond this immediacy can only mean the genesis, the 'creation' of the object. But this assumes that the forms of mediation in and through which it becomes possible to go beyond the immediate existence of objects as they are given, can be shown to be *the structural principles and the real tendencies of the objects themselves*.

In other words, intellectual genesis must be identical in principle with historical genesis. We have followed the course of the history of ideas which, as bourgeois thought has developed, has tended more and more to wrench these two principles apart. We were able to show that as a result of this duality in method, reality disintegrates into a multitude of irrational facts and over these a network of purely formal 'laws' emptied of content is then cast. And by devising an 'epistemology' that can go beyond the abstract form of the immediately given world (and its conceivability) the structure is made permanent and acquires a justification—not inconsistently—as being the necessary 'precondition of the possibility' of this world view. But unable to turn this 'critical' movement in the direction of a true creation of the object—in this case of the thinking subject—and indeed by taking the very opposite direction, this 'critical' attempt to bring the analysis of reality to its logical conclusion ends by *returning to the same immediacy that faces the ordinary man of bourgeois society in his everyday life. It has been conceptualised, but only immediately.*

Immediacy and mediation are therefore not only related and mutually complementary ways of dealing with the objects of reality. But corresponding to the dialectical nature of reality and

the dialectical character of our efforts to come to terms with it, they are related dialectically. That is to say that every mediation must necessarily yield a standpoint from which the objectivity it creates assumes the form of immediacy. Now this is the relation of bourgeois thought to the social and historical reality of bourgeois society—illuminated and made transparent as it has been by a multiplicity of mediations. Unable to discover further mediations, unable to comprehend the reality and the origin of bourgeois society as the product of the same subject that has 'created' the comprehended totality of knowledge, *its ultimate point of view, decisive for the whole of its thought, will be that of immediacy*. For, in Hegel's words: "the mediating factor would have to be something in which both sides were one, in which consciousness would discern each aspect in the next, its purpose and activity in its fate, its fate in its purpose and activity, *its own essence in this necessity*".⁹

It may be hoped that our arguments up to this point have demonstrated with sufficient clarity that this particular mediation was absent and could not be otherwise than absent from bourgeois thought. In the context of economics this has been proved by Marx time and time again.¹⁰ And he explicitly attributed the mistaken ideas of bourgeois economists concerning the economic processes of capitalism to the absence of mediation, to the systematic avoidance of the categories of mediation, to the immediate acceptance of secondary forms of objectivity, to the inability to progress beyond the stage of merely immediate cognition. In Section II we were able to point out as emphatically as possible the various intellectual implications flowing from the character of bourgeois society and the systematic limitations of its thought. We drew attention there to the antinomies (between subject and object, freedom and necessity, individual and society, form and content, etc.) to which such thought necessarily led. It is important to realise at this point that although bourgeois thought only landed in these antinomies after the very greatest mental exertions, it yet accepted their existential basis as self-evident, as a simply unquestionable reality. Which is to say: bourgeois thought entered into an unmediated relationship with reality as it was given.

Thus Simmel has this to say about the ideological structure of reification in consciousness: "And therefore now that these counter-tendencies have come into existence, they should at least strive towards an ideal of absolutely pure separation: every

material content of life should become more and more material and impersonal so that the non-reifiable remnant may become all the more personal and all the more indisputably the property of the person."¹¹ In this way the very thing that should be understood and deduced with the aid of mediation becomes the accepted principle by which to explain all phenomena and is even elevated to the status of a value: namely the unexplained and inexplicable facticity of bourgeois existence as it is here and now acquires the patina of an eternal law of nature or a cultural value enduring for all time.

At the same time this means that history must abolish itself.¹² As Marx says of bourgeois economics: "Thus history existed once upon a time, but it does not exist any more." And even if this antinomy assumes increasingly refined forms in later times, so that it even makes its appearance in the shape of historicism, of historical relativism, this does not affect the basic problem, the abolition of history, in the slightest.

We see the unhistorical and antihistorical character of bourgeois thought most strikingly when we consider *the problem of the present as a historical problem*. It is unnecessary to give examples here. Ever since the World War and the World Revolution the total inability of every bourgeois thinker and historian to see the world-historical events of the present as universal history must remain one of the most terrible memories of every sober observer. This complete failure has reduced otherwise meritorious historians and subtle thinkers to the pitiable or contemptible mental level of the worst kind of provincial journalism. But it cannot always be explained simply as the result of external pressures (censorship, conformity to 'national' class interests, etc.). It is grounded also in a theoretical approach based upon unmediated contemplation which opens up an irrational chasm between the subject and object of knowledge, the same "dark and empty" chasm that Fichte described. This murky void was also present in our knowledge of the past, though this was obscured by the distance created by time, space and historical mediation. Here, however, it must appear fully exposed.

A fine illustration borrowed from Ernst Bloch will perhaps make this theoretical limitation clearer than a detailed analysis which in any case would not be possible here. When nature becomes landscape—e.g. in contrast to the peasant's unconscious living within nature—the artist's unmediated experience of the

landscape (which has of course only achieved this immediacy after undergoing a whole series of mediations) presupposes a distance (spatial in this case) between the observer and the landscape. The observer stands outside the landscape, for were this not the case it would not be possible for nature to become a landscape at all. If he were to attempt to integrate himself and the nature immediately surrounding him in space within 'nature-seen-as-landscape', without modifying his aesthetic contemplative immediacy, it would then at once become apparent that landscape only *starts* to become landscape at a definite (though of course variable) distance from the observer and that only as an observer set apart in space can he relate to nature in terms of landscape at all.

This illustration is only intended to throw light on the theoretical situation, for it is only in art that the relation to landscape is expressed in an appropriate and unproblematic way, although it must not be forgotten that even in art we find the same unbridgeable gap opening up between subject and object that we find confronting us everywhere in modern life, and that art can do no more than shape this problematic without however finding a real solution to it. But as soon as history is forced into the present—and this is inevitable as our interest in history is determined in the last analysis by our desire to understand the present—this "pernicious chasm" (to use Bloch's expression) opens up.

As a result of its incapacity to understand history, the contemplative attitude of the bourgeoisie became polarised into two extremes: on the one hand, there were the 'great individuals' viewed as the autocratic makers of history, on the other hand, there were the 'natural laws' of the historical environment. They both turn out to be equally impotent—whether they are separated or working together—when challenged to produce an interpretation of the present in all its radical novelty.¹³ The inner perfection of the work of art can hide this gaping abyss because in its perfected immediacy it does not allow any further questions to arise about a mediation no longer available to the point of view of contemplation. However, the present is a problem of history, a problem that refuses to be ignored and one which imperiously demands such mediation. It must be attempted. But in the course of these attempts we discover the truth of Hegel's remarks about one of the stages of self-consciousness that follow the definition of mediation already cited: "Therefore consciousness has become

an enigma to itself as a result of the very experience which was to reveal its truth to itself; it does not regard the effects of its deeds as its own deeds: what happens to it is not the same experience *for it* as it is *in itself*; the transition is not merely a formal change of the same content and essence seen on the one hand as the content and essence of consciousness and on the other hand as the object or *intuited* essence of itself. *Abstract necessity*, therefore passes for the merely negative, uncomprehended *power of the universal* by which individuality is destroyed".

2

The historical knowledge of the proletariat begins with knowledge of the present, with the self-knowledge of its own social situation and with the elucidation of its necessity (i.e. its genesis). That genesis and history should coincide or, more exactly, that they should be different aspects of the same process, can only happen if two conditions are fulfilled. On the one hand, all the categories in which human existence is constructed must appear as the determinants of that existence itself (and not merely of the description of that existence). On the other hand, their succession, their coherence and their connections must appear as aspects of the historical process itself, as the structural components of the present. Thus the succession and internal order of the categories constitute neither a purely logical sequence, nor are they organised merely in accordance with the facts of history. "Their sequence is rather determined by the relation which they bear to one another in modern bourgeois society, and which is the exact opposite of what seems to be their natural order or the order of their historical development."¹⁴

This in turn assumes that the world which confronts man in theory and in practice exhibits a kind of objectivity which—if properly thought out and understood—need never stick fast in an immediacy similar to that of forms found earlier on. This objectivity must accordingly be comprehensible as a constant factor mediating between past and future and it must be possible to demonstrate that it is everywhere the product of man and of the development of society. To pose the question thus is to bring up the issue of the 'economic structure' of society. For, as Marx points out in his attack on Proudhon's pseudo-Hegelianism and vulgar

Kantianism for its erroneous separation of principle (i.e. category) from history: "When we ask ourselves why a particular principle was manifested in the eleventh or in the eighteenth century rather than in any other, we are necessarily forced to examine minutely what men were like in the eleventh century, what they were like in the eighteenth, what were their respective needs, their productive forces, their mode of production and their raw materials—in short, what were the relations between man and man which resulted from all these conditions of existence. To get to the bottom of all these questions—what is this but to draw up the real, profane history of men in every century and to present these men as both the authors and the actors of their own drama? But the moment we present men as the actors and authors of their own history, we arrive—by a detour—at the real starting-point, because we have abandoned those eternal principles of which we spoke at the outset."¹⁵

It would, however, be an error—an error which marks the point of departure of all vulgar Marxism—to believe that to adopt this standpoint is simply to accept the immediately given (i.e. the empirical) social structure. Moreover, the refusal to be content with this empirical reality, this going beyond the bounds of what is immediately given by no means signifies a straightforward dissatisfaction with it and a straightforward—abstract—desire to alter it. Such a desire, such an evaluation of empirical reality would indeed be no more than subjective: it would be a 'value-judgement', a wish, a utopia. And even though to aspire to a utopia is to affirm the will in what is philosophically the more objective and distilled form of an 'ought' (Sollen) it does not imply that the tendency to accept empirical reality has been overcome. This applies, too, to the subjectivism of the impulse to initiate change which admittedly appears here in a philosophically sophisticated form.

For precisely in the pure, classical expression it received in the philosophy of Kant it remains true that the 'ought' presupposes an existing reality to which the category of 'ought' remains *inapplicable* in principle. Whenever the refusal of the subject simply to accept his empirically given existence takes the form of an 'ought', this means that the immediately given empirical reality receives affirmation and consecration at the hands of philosophy: it is philosophically immortalised. "Nothing in the world of phenomena can be explained by the concept of freedom,"

Kant states, "the guiding thread in that sphere must always be the mechanics of nature."¹⁶

Thus every theory of the 'ought' is left with a dilemma: either it must allow the—meaningless—existence of empirical reality to survive unchanged with its meaninglessness forming the basis of the 'ought'—for in a meaningful existence the problem of an 'ought' could not arise. This gives the 'ought' a purely subjective character. Or else, theory must presuppose a principle that transcends the concept of both what 'is' and what 'ought to be' so as to be able to explain the real impact of the 'ought' upon what 'is'. For the popular solution of an infinite progression [towards virtue, holiness], which Kant himself had already proposed, merely conceals the fact that the problem is insoluble. Philosophically it is not important to determine the time needed by the 'ought' in order to reorganise what 'is'. The task is to discover the principles by means of which it becomes *possible in the first place* for an 'ought' to modify existence. And it is just this that the theory rules out from the start by establishing the mechanics of nature as an unchangeable fact of existence, by setting up a strict dualism of 'ought' and 'is', and by creating the rigidity with which 'is' and 'ought' confront each other—a rigidity which this point of view can never eliminate. However, if a thing is theoretically impossible it cannot be first reduced to infinitesimal proportions and spread over an infinite process and then suddenly be made to reappear as a reality.

It is, however, no mere chance that in its attempt to find a way out of the contradictions created by the fact that history is simply given, bourgeois thought should have taken up the idea of an infinite progression. For, according to Hegel, this progression makes its appearance "everywhere where *relative* determinants are driven to the point where they become antithetical so that they are united inseparably whilst an independent existence is attributed to each *vis-à-vis* the other. This progression is, therefore, the *contradiction* that is never resolved but is always held to be simply present."¹⁷ And Hegel has also shown that the methodological device that forms the logical first link in the infinite progression consists in establishing a purely quantitative relationship between elements that are and remain qualitatively incommensurable but in such a way that "each is held to be indifferent to this change."¹⁸

With this we find ourselves once more in the old antinomy of

the thing-in-itself but in a new form: on the one hand 'is' and 'ought' remain rigidly and irreducibly antithetical; on the other hand, by forging a link between them, an external, illusory link that leaves their irrationality and facticity untouched, an area of apparent Becoming is created thanks to which growth and decay, the authentic theme of history, is really and truly thrust out into the darkness of incomprehensibility. For the reduction to quantitative terms must affect not only the basic elements of the process but also its individual stages, and the fact that this procedure makes it appear as if a gradual transition were taking place, goes unobserved. "But this gradualness only applies to the externals of change, not to their quality; the preceding quantitative situation, infinitely close to the succeeding one yet possesses a different existence qualitatively. . . . One would like to employ gradual transitions in order to make a change *comprehensible* to oneself; but the gradual change is precisely the trivial one, it is the reverse of the true qualitative change. In the gradualness the connection between the two realities is abolished—this is true whether they are conceived of as states or as independent objects—; it is assumed that . . . one is simply external to the other; in this way the very thing necessary to *comprehension* is removed. . . . With this growth and decay are altogether abolished, or else the In Itself, the inner state of a thing prior to its existence is transformed into a *small amount of external existence* and the essential or conceptual distinction is changed into a simple, external difference of magnitude."¹⁹

The desire to leave behind the immediacy of empirical reality and its no less immediate rationalist reflections must not be allowed to become an attempt to abandon immanent (social) reality. The price of such a false process of transcendence would be the reinstating and perpetuating of empirical reality with all its insoluble questions, but this time in a philosophically sublimated way. But in fact, to leave empirical reality behind can only mean that the objects of the empirical world are to be understood as aspects of a totality, i.e. as the aspects of a total social situation caught up in the process of historical change. Thus the category of mediation is a lever with which to overcome the mere immediacy of the empirical world and as such it is not something (subjective) foisted on to the objects from outside, it is no value-judgement or 'ought' opposed to their 'is'. *It is rather the manifestation of their authentic objective structure.* This can only become

apparent in the visible objects of consciousness when the false attitude of bourgeois thought to objective reality has been abandoned. Mediation would not be possible were it not for the fact that the empirical existence of objects is itself mediated and only appears to be unmediated in so far as the awareness of mediation is lacking so that the objects are torn from the complex of their true determinants and placed in artificial isolation.²⁰

Moreover, it must be borne in mind that the process by which the objects are isolated is not the product of chance or caprice. When true knowledge does away with the false separation of objects (and the even falser connections established by unmediated abstractions) it does much more than merely correct a false or inadequate scientific method or substitute a superior hypothesis for a defective one. It is just as characteristic of the social reality of the present that its objective form should be subjected to this kind of intellectual treatment as it is that the objective starting-point of such treatment should have been chosen. If, then, the standpoint of the proletariat is opposed to that of the bourgeoisie, it is nonetheless true that proletarian thought does not require a *tabula rasa*, a new start to the task of comprehending reality and one without any preconceptions. In this it is unlike the thought of the bourgeoisie with regard to the mediaeval forms of feudalism—at least in its basic tendencies. Just because its practical goal is the *fundamental* transformation of the whole of society it conceives of bourgeois society together with its intellectual and artistic productions as the *point of departure* for its own method.

The methodological function of the categories of mediation consists in the fact that with their aid those immanent meanings that necessarily inhere in the objects of bourgeois society but which are absent from the immediate manifestation of those objects as well as from their mental reflection in bourgeois thought, now become objectively effective and can therefore enter the consciousness of the proletariat. That is to say, if the bourgeoisie is held fast in the mire of immediacy from which the proletariat is able to extricate itself, this is neither purely accidental nor a purely theoretical scientific problem. The distance between these two theoretical positions is an expression of the differences between the social existence of the two classes.

Of course, the knowledge yielded by the standpoint of the proletariat stands on a higher scientific plane objectively; it does

after all apply a method that makes possible the solution of problems which the greatest thinkers of the bourgeois era have vainly struggled to find and in its substance, it provides the adequate historical analysis of capitalism which must remain beyond the grasp of bourgeois thinkers. However, this attempt to grade the methods objectively in terms of their value to knowledge is itself a social and historical problem, an inevitable result of the types of society represented by the two classes and their place in history. It implies that the 'falseness' and the 'one-sidedness' of the bourgeois view of history must be seen as a necessary factor in the systematic acquisition of knowledge about society.²¹

But also, it appears that every method is necessarily implicated in the existence of the relevant class. For the bourgeoisie, method arises directly from its social existence and this means that mere immediacy adheres to its thought, constituting its outermost barrier, one that can not be crossed. In contrast to this the proletariat is confronted by the need to break through this barrier, to overcome it inwardly *from the very start* by adopting its own point of view. And as it is the nature of the dialectical method constantly to produce and reproduce its own essential aspects, as its very being constitutes the denial of any smooth, linear development of ideas, the proletariat finds itself *repeatedly* confronted with the problem of its own point of departure both in its efforts to increase its theoretical grasp of reality and to initiate practical historical measures. For the proletariat the barrier imposed by immediacy has become an inward barrier. With this the problem becomes clear; by putting the problem in this way the road to a possible answer is opened up.²²

But it is no more than a possible answer. The proposition with which we began, viz. that in capitalist society reality is—immediately—the same for both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, remains unaltered. But we may now add that this same reality employs the motor of class interests to keep the bourgeoisie imprisoned within this immediacy while forcing the proletariat to go beyond it. For the social existence of the proletariat is far more powerfully affected by the dialectical character of the historical process in which the mediated character of every factor receives the imprint of truth and authentic objectivity only in the mediated totality. For the proletariat to become aware of the dialectical nature of its existence is a matter of life and death, whereas the bourgeoisie uses the abstract categories of reflection, such as

quantity and infinite progression, to conceal the dialectical structure of the historical process in daily life only to be confronted by unmediated catastrophes when the pattern is reversed. This is based—as we have shown—on the fact that the bourgeoisie always perceives the subject and object of the historical process and of social reality in a double form: in terms of his consciousness the single individual is a perceiving subject confronting the overwhelming objective necessities imposed by society of which only minute fragments can be comprehended. But in reality it is precisely the conscious activity of the individual that is to be found on the object-side of the process, while the subject (the class) cannot be awakened into consciousness and this activity must always remain beyond the consciousness of the—apparent—subject, the individual.

Thus we find the subject and object of the social process co-existing in a state of dialectical interaction. But as they always appear to exist in a rigidly twofold form, each external to the other, the dialectics remain unconscious and the objects retain their twofold and hence rigid character. This rigidity can only be broken by catastrophe and it then makes way for an equally rigid structure. This unconscious dialectic which is for that very reason unmanageable "breaks forth in their confession of naïve surprise, when what they have just thought to have defined with great difficulty as a thing suddenly appears as a social relation and then reappears to tease them again as a thing, before they have barely managed to define it as a social relation."²³

For the proletariat social reality does not exist in this double form. It appears in the first instance as the pure *object* of societal events. In every aspect of daily life in which the individual worker imagines himself to be the subject of his own life he finds this to be an illusion that is destroyed by the immediacy of his existence. This forces upon him the knowledge that the most elementary gratification of his needs, "his own individual consumption, whether it proceed within the workshop or outside it, whether it be part of the process of reproduction or not, forms therefore an aspect of the production and the reproduction of capital; just as cleaning machinery does, whether it be done while the machinery is working or while it is standing idle."²⁴ The quantification of objects, their subordination to abstract mental categories makes its appearance in the life of the worker immediately as a process of abstraction of which he is the victim, and which cuts him off

from his labour-power, forcing him to sell it on the market as a commodity, belonging to him. And by selling this, his only commodity, he integrates it (and himself: for his commodity is inseparable from his physical existence) into a specialised process that has been rationalised and mechanised, a process that he discovers already existing, complete and able to function without him and in which he is no more than a cipher reduced to an abstract quantity, a mechanised and rationalised tool.

Thus for the worker the reified character of the immediate manifestations of capitalist society receives the most extreme definition possible. It is true: for the capitalist also there is the same doubling of personality, the same splitting up of man into an element of the movement of commodities and an (objective and impotent) observer of that movement.²⁵ But for his consciousness it necessarily appears as an activity (albeit this activity is objectively an illusion), in which effects emanate from himself. This illusion blinds him to the true state of affairs, whereas the worker, who is denied the scope for such illusory activity, perceives the split in his being preserved in the brutal form of what is in its whole tendency a slavery without limits. He is therefore forced into becoming the object of the process by which he is turned into a commodity and reduced to a mere quantity.

But this very fact forces him to surpass the immediacy of his condition. For as Marx says, "Time is the place of human development".²⁶ The quantitative differences in exploitation which appear to the capitalist in the form of quantitative determinants of the objects of his calculation, must appear to the worker as the decisive, qualitative categories of his whole physical, mental and moral existence. The transformation of quantity into quality is not only a particular aspect of the dialectical process of development, as Hegel represents it in his philosophy of nature and, following him, Engels in the *Anti-Dühring*. But going beyond that, as we have just shown with the aid of Hegel's *Logic*, it means the emergence of the truly objective form of existence and the destruction of those confusing categories of reflection which had deformed true objectivity into a posture of merely immediate, passive, contemplation.

Above all, as far as labour-time is concerned, it becomes abundantly clear that quantification is a reified and reifying cloak spread over the true essence of the objects and can only be regarded as an objective form of reality inasmuch as the subject is

uninterested in the essence of the object to which it stands in a contemplative or (seemingly) practical relationship. When Engels illustrates the transformation of quantity into quality by pointing to the example of water changing into solid or gaseous form²⁷ he is in the right so far as these points of transition are concerned. But this ignores the fact that when the point of view is changed even the transitions that had seemed to be purely quantitative now become qualitative. (To give an extremely trivial example, consider what happens when water is drunk; there is here a point at which 'quantitative' changes take on a qualitative nature.) The position is even clearer when we consider the example Engels gives from *Capital*. The point under discussion is the amount needed at a particular stage of production to transform a given sum into capital; Marx observes that it is at this point that quantity is changed into quality.²⁸

Let us now compare these two series (the growth or reduction in the sum of money and the increase or decrease in labour-time) and examine their possible quantitative changes and their transformation into quality. We note that in the first case we are in fact confronted only by what Hegel calls a "knotted line of proportional relations". Whereas in the second case *every* change is one of quality in its innermost nature and although its quantitative appearance is forced on to the worker by his social environment, its essence for him lies in its qualitative implications. This second aspect of the change obviously has its origin in the fact that for the worker labour-time is not merely the objective form of the commodity he has sold, i.e. his labour-power (for in that form the problem for him, too, is one of the exchange of equivalents, i.e. a quantitative matter). But in addition it is the determining form of his existence as subject, as human being.

This does not mean that immediacy together with its consequences for theory, namely the rigid opposition of subject and object, can be regarded as having been wholly overcome. It is true that in the problem of labour-time, just because it shows reification at its zenith, we can see how proletarian thought is necessarily driven to surpass this immediacy. For, on the one hand, in his social existence the worker is immediately placed *wholly* on the side of the object: he appears to himself immediately as an object and not as the active part of the social process of labour. On the other hand, however, the role of object is no longer purely immediate. That is to say, it is true that the worker is objectively

transformed into a mere object of the process of production by the methods of capitalist production (in contrast to those of slavery and servitude) i.e. by the fact that the worker is forced to objectify his labour-power over against his total personality and to sell it as a commodity. But because of the split between subjectivity and objectivity induced in man by the compulsion to objectify himself as a commodity, the situation becomes one that can be made conscious. In earlier, more organic forms of society, work is defined "as the direct function of a member of the social organism":²⁹ in slavery and servitude the ruling powers appear as the "immediate mainsprings of the production process" and this prevents labourers enmeshed in such a situation with their personalities undivided from achieving clarity about their social position. By contrast, "work which is represented as exchange value has for its premise the work of the isolated individual. It becomes social by assuming the form of its immediate antithesis, the form of abstract universality."

We can already see here more clearly and concretely the factors that create a dialectic between the social existence of the worker and the forms of his consciousness and force them out of their pure immediacy. Above all the worker can only become conscious of his existence in society when he becomes aware of himself as a commodity. As we have seen, his immediate existence integrates him as a pure, naked object into the production process. Once this immediacy turns out to be the consequence of a multiplicity of mediations, once it becomes evident how much it presupposes, then the fetishistic forms of the commodity system begin to dissolve: in the commodity the worker recognises himself and his own relations with capital. Inasmuch as he is incapable in practice of raising himself above the role of object his consciousness is the *self-consciousness of the commodity*; or in other words it is the self-knowledge, the self-revelation of the capitalist society founded upon the production and exchange of commodities.

By adding self-consciousness to the commodity structure a new element is introduced, one that is different in principle and in quality from what is normally described as consciousness 'of' an object. Not just because it is a matter of self-consciousness. For, as in the science of psychology, this might very well be consciousness 'of' an object, one which without modifying the way in which consciousness and object are related and thus without changing the knowledge so attained, might still 'accidentally' choose itself for

an object. From this it would follow that knowledge acquired in this way must have the same truth-criteria as in the case of knowledge of 'other' objects. Even when in antiquity a slave, an *instrumentum vocale*, becomes conscious of himself as a slave this is not self-knowledge in the sense we mean here: for he can only attain to knowledge of an object which happens 'accidentally' to be himself. Between a 'thinking' slave and an 'unconscious' slave there is no real distinction to be drawn in an objective social sense. No more than there is between the possibility of a slave's becoming conscious of his own social situation and that of a 'free' man's achieving an understanding of slavery. The rigid epistemological doubling of subject and object remains unaffected and hence the perceiving subject fails to impinge upon the structure of the object despite his adequate understanding of it.

In contrast with this, when the worker knows himself as a commodity his knowledge is practical. *That is to say, this knowledge brings about an objective structural change in the object of knowledge.* In this consciousness and through it the special objective character of labour as a commodity, its 'use-value' (i.e. its ability to yield surplus produce) which like every use-value is submerged without a trace in the quantitative exchange categories of capitalism, now awakens and becomes *social reality*. The special nature of labour as a commodity which in the absence of this consciousness acts as an unacknowledged driving wheel in the economic process now objectifies itself by means of this consciousness. The specific nature of this kind of commodity had consisted in the fact that beneath the cloak of the thing lay a relation between men, that beneath the quantifying crust there was a qualitative, living core. Now that this core is revealed it becomes possible to recognise the fetish character of *every commodity* based on the commodity character of labour power: in every case we find its core, the relation between men, entering into the evolution of society.

Of course, all of this is only contained implicitly in the dialectical antithesis of quantity and quality as we meet it in the question of labour-time. That is to say, this antithesis with all its implications is only the *beginning* of the complex process of mediation whose goal is the knowledge of society as a historical totality. The dialectical method is distinguished from bourgeois thought not only by the fact that it alone can lead to a knowledge of totality; it is also significant that such knowledge is only attainable because the relationship between parts and whole has

become fundamentally different from what it is in thought based on the categories of reflection. In brief, from this point of view, the essence of the dialectical method lies in the fact that in every aspect correctly grasped by the dialectic the whole totality is comprehended and that the whole method can be unravelled from every single aspect.³⁰ It has often been claimed—and not without a certain justification—that the famous chapter in Hegel's *Logic* treating of Being, Non-Being and Becoming contains the whole of his philosophy. It might be claimed with perhaps equal justification that the chapter dealing with the fetish character of the commodity contains within itself the whole of historical materialism and the whole self-knowledge of the proletariat seen as the knowledge of capitalist society (and of the societies that preceded it). [*Capital I*, Chapter 1, Section 4].

Obviously, this should not be taken to mean that the whole of history with its teeming abundance should be thought of as being superfluous. Quite the reverse. Hegel's programme: to see the absolute, the goal of his philosophy, as a *result* remains valid for Marxism with its very different objects of knowledge, and is even of greater concern to it, as the dialectical process is seen to be identical with the course of history. The theoretical point we are anxious to emphasise here is merely the structural fact that the single aspect is not a segment of a mechanical totality that could be put together out of such segments, for this would lead us to see knowledge as an infinite progression. It must be seen instead as containing the possibility of unravelling the whole abundance of the totality from within itself. But this in turn can only be done if the aspect is seen as aspect, i.e. as a point of transition to the totality; if every movement beyond the immediacy that had made the aspect an aspect of the dialectical process (whereas before it had been nothing more than the evident contradiction of two categories of thought) is not to freeze once more in a new rigidity and a new immediacy.

This reflection leads us back to our concrete point of departure. In the Marxist analysis of labour under capitalism that we have sketched above, we encountered the antithesis between the isolated individual and the abstract generality within which he finds mediated the relation between his work and society. And once again it is important to emphasise, that as in every immediate and abstract form of existence as it is simply given, here, too, we find bourgeoisie and proletariat placed in an immediately similar

situation. But, here too, it appears that while the bourgeoisie remains enmeshed in its immediacy by virtue of its class role, the proletariat is driven by the specific dialectics of its class situation to abandon it. The transformation of all objects into commodities, their quantification into fetishistic exchange-values is more than an intensive process affecting the form of every aspect of life in this way (as we were able to establish in the case of labour-time). But also and inseparably bound up with this we find the extensive expansion of these forms to embrace the whole of society. For the capitalist this side of the process means an increase in the quantity of objects for him to deal with in his calculations and speculations. In so far as this process does acquire the semblance of a qualitative character, this goes no further than an aspiration towards the increased rationalisation, mechanisation and quantification of the world confronting him. (See the distinction between the dominance of merchant's capital and that of industrial capital, the capitalisation of agriculture, etc.) Interrupted abruptly now and again by 'irrational' catastrophes, the way is opened up for an infinite progression leading to the thorough-going capitalist rationalisation of society as a whole.

For the proletariat, however, the 'same' process means *its own emergence as a class*. In both cases a transformation from quantity to quality is involved. We need only consider the line of development leading from the mediaeval craft via simple co-operation and manufacture to the modern factory and we shall see the extent to which even for the bourgeoisie the qualitative changes stand out as milestones on the road. The *class meaning* of these changes lies precisely in the fact that the bourgeoisie regularly transforms each new qualitative gain back on to the quantitative level of yet another rational calculation. Whereas for the proletariat the 'same' development has a different class meaning: it means the *abolition of the isolated individual*, it means that workers can become conscious of the social character of labour, it means that the abstract, universal form of the societal principle as it is manifested can be increasingly concretised and overcome.

This enables us to understand why it is only in the proletariat that the process by which a man's achievement is split off from his total personality and becomes a commodity leads to a revolutionary consciousness. It is true, as we demonstrated in Section I, that the basic structure of reification can be found in all the social forms of modern capitalism (e.g. bureaucracy.) But this structure

can only be made fully conscious in the work-situation of the proletarian. For his work as he experiences it directly possesses the naked and abstract form of the commodity, while in other forms of work this is hidden behind the façade of 'mental labour', of 'responsibility', etc. (and sometimes it even lies concealed behind 'patriarchal' forms). The more deeply reification penetrates into the soul of the man who sells his achievement as a commodity the more deceptive appearances are (as in the case of journalism). Corresponding to the objective concealment of the commodity form, there is the subjective element. This is the fact that while the process by which the worker is reified and becomes a commodity dehumanises him and cripples and atrophies his 'soul'—as long as he does not consciously rebel against it—it remains true that precisely his humanity and his soul are not changed into commodities. He is able therefore to objectify himself completely against his existence while the man reified in the bureaucracy, for instance, is turned into a commodity, mechanised and reified in the only faculties that might enable him to rebel against reification. Even his thoughts and feelings become reified. As Hegel says: "It is much harder to bring movement into fixed ideas than into sensuous existence."³¹

In the end this corruption assumes objective forms also. The worker experiences his place in the production process as ultimate but at the same time it has all the characteristics of the commodity (the uncertainties of day-to-day movements of the market). This stands in contrast to other groups which have both the appearance of stability (the routine of duty, pension, etc.) and also the—abstract—possibility of an *individual's* elevating himself into the ruling class. By such means a 'status-consciousness' is created that is calculated to inhibit effectively the growth of a class consciousness. Thus the purely abstract negativity in the life of the worker is objectively the most typical manifestation of reification, it is the constitutive type of capitalist socialisation. But for this very reason it is also *subjectively* the point at which this structure is raised to consciousness and where it can be breached in practice. As Marx says: "Labour . . . is no longer grown together with the individual into one particular determination";³² once the false manifestations of this unmediated existence are abolished, the true existence of the proletariat as a class will begin.

It could easily appear at this point that the whole process is nothing more than the 'inevitable' consequence of concentrating masses of workers in large factories, of mechanising and standardising the processes of work and levelling down the standard of living. It is therefore of vital importance to see the truth concealed behind this deceptively one-sided picture. There is no doubt that the factors mentioned above are *the indispensable precondition* for the emergence of the proletariat as a class. *Without* them the proletariat would never have become a class and if they had not been continually intensified—by the natural workings of capitalism—it would never have developed into the decisive factor in human history.

Despite this it can be claimed without self-contradiction that we are not concerned here with an unmediated relation. What is unmediated is the fact that, in the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, "these labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce". And the fact that this commodity is able to become aware of its existence as a commodity does not suffice to eliminate the problem. For the unmediated consciousness of the commodity is, in conformity with the simple form in which it manifests itself, precisely an awareness of abstract isolation and of the merely abstract relationship—external to consciousness—to those factors that create it socially. I do not wish to enter here into a discussion of the conflict between the (immediate) interests of the individual and the (mediated) interests of the class that have been arrived at through experience and knowledge; nor shall I discuss the conflict between immediate and momentary interests as opposed to general long-term interests.

It is self-evident that immediacy must be abandoned at this point. If the attempt is made to attribute an immediate form of existence to class consciousness, it is not possible to avoid lapsing into mythology: the result will be a mysterious species-consciousness (as enigmatic as the 'spirits of the nations' in Hegel) whose relation to and impact upon the individual consciousness is wholly incomprehensible. It is then made even more incomprehensible by a mechanical and naturalistic psychology and finally appears as a demiurge governing historical movement.³³

On the other hand, the growing class consciousness that has been brought into being through the awareness of a common

situation and common interests is by no means confined to the working class. The unique element in its situation is that its surpassing of immediacy represents an *aspiration towards society in its totality* regardless of whether this aspiration remains conscious or whether it remains unconscious for the moment. This is the reason why its *logic* does not permit it to remain stationary at a relatively higher stage of immediacy but forces it to persevere in an uninterrupted movement towards this totality, i.e. to persist in the dialectical process by which immediacies are constantly annulled and transcended. Marx recognised this aspect of proletarian class consciousness very early on. In his comments on the revolt of the Silesian weavers he lays emphasis on its "conscious and theoretical character".³⁴ He sees in the 'Song of the Weavers' a "bold battle cry which does not even mention the hearth, factory or district but in which the proletariat immediately proclaims its opposition to private property in a forceful, sharp, ruthless and violent manner". Their action revealed their "superior nature" for "whereas every other movement turned initially only against the industrialist, the visible enemy, this one attacked also the hidden enemy, namely the banker."

We would fail to do justice to the theoretical significance of this view if we were to see in the attitude that Marx—rightly or wrongly—attributes to the Silesian weavers nothing more than their ability to see further than their noses and to give weight to considerations whether spatial or conceptual that were rather more remote. For this is something that can be said in varying degrees of almost every class in history. What is crucial is how to interpret the connection between these remoter factors and the structure of the objects immediately relevant to action. We must understand the importance of this remoteness for the consciousness of those initiating the action and for its relation to the existing state of affairs. And it is here that the differences between the standpoints of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are thrown sharply into relief.

In bourgeois thought these remoter factors are simply incorporated into the rational calculation. They are conceived of as being similar to the factors that are within easy reach and which can be rationalised and quantified. The view that things as they appear can be accounted for by 'natural laws' of society is, according to Marx, both the highpoint and the 'insuperable barrier' of bourgeois thought. The notion of the laws of society

undergoes changes in the course of history and this is due to the fact that it originally represented the principle of the overthrow of (feudal) reality. Later on, while preserving the same structure, it became the principle for conserving (bourgeois) reality. However, even the initial revolutionary movement was unconscious from a social point of view.

For the proletariat, however, this ability to go beyond the immediate in search of the 'remoter' factors means the *transformation of the objective nature of the objects of action*. At first sight it appears as if the more immediate objects are no less subject to this transformation than the remote ones. It soon becomes apparent, however, that in their case the transformation is even more visible and striking. For the change lies on the one hand in the practical interaction of the awakening consciousness and the objects from which it is born and of which it is the consciousness. And on the other hand, the change means that the objects that are viewed here as aspects of the development of society, i.e. of the dialectical totality become fluid: they become parts of a process. And as the innermost kernel of this movement is praxis, its point of departure is of necessity that of action; it holds the immediate objects of action firmly and decisively in its grip so as to bring about their total, structural transformation and thus the movement of the whole gets under way.

The category of totality begins to have an effect long before the whole multiplicity of objects can be illuminated by it. It operates by ensuring that actions which seem to confine themselves to particular objects, in both content and consciousness, yet preserve an aspiration towards the totality, that is to say: action is directed objectively towards a transformation of totality. We pointed out earlier in the context of a purely methodological discussion, that the various aspects and elements of the dialectical method contain the structure of the whole; we see the same thing here in a more concrete form, a form more closely orientated towards action. As history is essentially dialectical, this view of the way reality changes can be confirmed at every decisive moment of transition. Long before men become conscious of the decline of a particular economic system and the social and juridical forms associated with it, its contradictions are fully revealed in the objects of its day-to-day actions.

When, for example, the theory and practice of tragedy from Aristotle to the age of Corneille, regard family conflicts as provid-

ing the most fruitful subject-matter for tragedy, we glimpse lying behind this view—ignoring its technical merits such as concentration—the feeling that the great changes in society are being revealed here with a sensuous, practical vividness. This enables their contours to be drawn clearly whereas it is subjectively and objectively impossible to grasp their essence, to understand their origins and their place in the whole process. Thus an Aeschylus³⁵ or a Shakespeare draw pictures of family life that provide us with such penetrating and authentic portraits of the social upheavals of their age that it is only now, with the aid of historical materialism, that it has become at all possible for theory to do justice to these artistic insights.

The place in society and hence the viewpoint of the proletariat goes further than the example just cited in one vital qualitative way. The uniqueness of capitalism is to be seen precisely in its abolition of all 'natural barriers' and its transformation of all relations between human beings into purely social relations.³⁶ Bourgeois thought, however, remains enmeshed in fetishistic categories and in consequence the products of human relations become ossified, with the result that such thought trails behind objective developments. The abstract, rational categories of reflection which constitute the objectively immediate expression of this—the first—socialisation of the whole of human society, appear in the eyes of the bourgeoisie as something ultimate and indestructible. (For this reason bourgeois thought remains always in an unmediated relation to such categories.) The proletariat, however, stands at the focal point of this socialising process. On the one hand, this transformation of labour into a commodity removes every 'human' element from the immediate existence of the proletariat, on the other hand the same development progressively eliminates everything 'organic', every direct link with nature from the forms of society so that socialised man can stand revealed in an objectivity remote from or even opposed to humanity. It is just in this objectification, in this rationalisation and reification of all social forms that we see clearly for the first time how society is constructed from the relations of men with each other.

But we can see this only if we also remember that these human interrelations are, in Engels' words, "bound to objects" and that they "appear as objects", only if we do not forget for a single moment that these human interrelations are not direct relations

between one man and the next. They are instead typical relations mediated by the objective laws of the process of production in such a way that these 'laws' necessarily become the forms in which human relations are directly manifested.

From this it follows, firstly, that man, who is the foundation and the core of all reified relations, can only be discovered by abolishing the immediacy of those relations. It is always necessary, therefore, to begin from this immediacy and from these reified laws. Secondly, these manifestations are by no means merely modes of thought, they are the forms in which contemporary bourgeois society is objectified. Their abolition, if it is to be a true abolition, cannot simply be the result of thought alone, it must also amount to their *practical* abolition as the *actual forms of social life*. Every kind of knowledge that aspires to remain pure knowledge is doomed to end up granting recognition to these forms once again. Thirdly, this praxis cannot be divorced from knowledge. A praxis which envisages a genuine transformation of these forms can only start to be effective if it intends to think out the process immanent in these forms to its logical conclusion, to become conscious of it and to make it conscious. "Dialectics", Hegel says, "is this *immanent* process of transcendence, in the course of which the one-sidedness and the limitation of the determinants of the understanding shows itself to be what it really is, namely their negation."³⁷

The great advance over Hegel made by the scientific standpoint of the proletariat as embodied in Marxism lay in its refusal to see in the categories of reflection a 'permanent' stage of human knowledge and in its insistence that they were the necessary mould both of thought and of life in bourgeois society, in the reification of thought and life. With this came the discovery of dialectics in history itself. Hence dialectics is not imported into history from outside, nor is it interpreted in the light of history (as often occurs in Hegel), but is *derived* from history made conscious as its logical manifestation at this particular point in its development.

Fourthly, it is the proletariat that embodies this process of consciousness. Since its consciousness appears as the immanent product of the historical dialectic, it likewise appears to be dialectical. That is to say, this consciousness is nothing but the expression of historical necessity. The proletariat "has no ideals to realise". When its consciousness is put into practice it can only breathe life into the things which the dialectics of history have forced to a crisis;

it can never 'in practice' ignore the course of history, forcing on it what are no more than its own desires or knowledge. For it is itself nothing but the contradictions of history that have become conscious. On the other hand, however, a dialectical necessity is far from being the same thing as a mechanical, causal necessity. Marx goes on to say, following the passage already quoted: The working class "has only to *liberate* (my italics) the elements of the new society that have already grown within the womb of the disintegrating society of the bourgeoisie".

In addition to the mere contradiction—the automatic product of capitalism—a *new* element is required: the consciousness of the proletariat must become deed. But as the mere contradiction is raised to a consciously dialectical contradiction, as the act of becoming conscious turns into a *point of transition in practice*, we see once more in greater concreteness the character of proletarian dialectics as we have often described it: namely, since consciousness here is not the knowledge of an opposed object but is the self-consciousness of the object *the act of consciousness overthrows the objective form of its object*.

Only with this consciousness do we see the emergence of that profound irrationality that lurks behind the particular rationalistic disciplines of bourgeois society. This irrationality appears normally as an eruption, a cataclysm, and for that very reason it fails to alter the form and the arrangement of the objects on the surface. This situation, too, can be seen most easily in the simple events of everyday. The problem of labour-time has already been mentioned but only from the standpoint of the worker, where it was seen as the moment at which his consciousness emerges as the consciousness of the commodity (i.e. of the substantive core of bourgeois society). The instant that this consciousness arises and goes beyond what is immediately given we find in concentrated form the basic issue of the class struggle: the problem of *force*. For this is the point where the 'eternal laws' of capitalist economics fail and become dialectical and are thus compelled to yield up the decisions regarding the fate of history to the conscious actions of men. Marx elaborates this thought as follows: "We see then, that, apart from extremely elastic bounds, the nature of the exchange of commodities itself imposes no limit to the working day, no limit to surplus-labour. The capitalist maintains his right as a purchaser when he tries to make the working day as long as possible, and to make, whenever possible, two working days out of

one. On the other hand, the peculiar nature of the commodity sold implies a limit to its consumption by the purchaser, and the labourer maintains his right as seller when he wishes to reduce the working day to one of definite normal duration. There is here, therefore, an antinomy, right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchanges. Between equal rights force decides. Hence it is that in the history of capitalist production, the determination of what is a working day, presents itself as the result of a struggle, a struggle between collective capital, i.e. the class of capitalists, and collective labour, i.e. the working class."³⁸

But here, too, we must emphasise that force, which appears here concretely as the point at which capitalist rationalism becomes irrational, at which its laws fail to function, means something quite different for the bourgeoisie and for the proletariat. For the former, force is simply the continuation of its daily reality: it is true that it is no novelty but at the same time and for that very reason it is not able to resolve any single one of the contradictions the bourgeoisie has created itself. For the latter, on the other hand, its use, its efficacy, its potentiality and its intensity depend upon the degree to which the immediacy of the given has been overcome. No doubt, the fact that it is possible to go beyond the given, the fact that this consciousness is so great and so profound is itself a product of history. But what is historically possible cannot be achieved simply by a straightforward progression of the immediately given (with its 'laws'), but only by a consciousness of the whole of society acquired through manifold mediations, and by a clear aspiration to realise the dialectical tendencies of history. And the series of mediations may not conclude with unmediated contemplation: it must direct itself to the qualitatively new factors arising from the dialectical contradictions: it must be a movement of mediations advancing from the present to the future.³⁹

This in turn presupposes that the rigidly reified existence of the objects of the social process will dissolve into mere illusion, that the dialectic, which is self-contradictory, a logical absurdity as long as there is talk of the change of one 'thing' into another 'thing' (or of one thing-like concept into another), should test itself on every object. That is to say, its premise is that *things should be shown to be aspects of processes*. With this we reach the limits of the dialectics of the Ancients, the point at which they diverge from materialist and historical dialectics. (Hegel, too, marks the point of transition, i.e. he, too, combines elements of both views in a

not fully clarified manner.) The dialectics of the Eleatic philosophers certainly lay bare the contradictions underlying movement but the moving object is left unaffected. Whether the arrow is flying or at rest its objective nature as an arrow, as a thing remains untouched amidst the dialectical turmoil. It may be the case, as Heraclitus says, that one cannot step into the same river twice; but as the eternal flux is and does not become, i.e. does not bring forth anything qualitatively new, it is just a becoming that confronts the rigid existence of the *individual objects*. As a theory of the whole eternal becoming eternal being; behind stands revealed as the flowing river stands an unchanging essence, even though it may express itself in the incessant transformations of the individual objects.⁴⁰

Opposed to this is the Marxian dialectical process where the objective forms of the objects are themselves transformed into a process, a flux. Its revolutionary character appears quite clearly in the simple process of the reproduction of capital. The simple "repetition or continuity imbues the process with quite novel characteristics or rather causes the disappearance of some apparent characteristics which it possessed as an isolated discontinuous process". For "quite apart from all accumulation, the mere continuity of the process of production, in other words simple reproduction, sooner or later, and of necessity, converts every capital into accumulated capital, or capitalised surplus-value. Even if that capital was originally acquired by the personal labour of its employer, it sooner or later becomes value appropriated without an equivalent, the unpaid labour of others materialised either in money or in some other object."⁴¹

Thus the knowledge that social facts are not objects but relations between men is intensified to the point where facts are wholly dissolved into processes. But if their Being appears as a Becoming this should not be construed as an abstract universal flux sweeping past, it is no vacuous *durée réelle* but the unbroken production and reproduction of those relations that, when torn from their context and distorted by abstract mental categories, can appear to bourgeois thinkers as things. Only at this point does the consciousness of the proletariat elevate itself to the self-consciousness of society in its historical development. By becoming aware of the commodity relationship the proletariat can only become conscious of itself as the object of the economic process. For the commodity is produced and even the worker in his quality

as commodity, as an immediate producer is at best a mechanical driving wheel in the machine. But if the reification of capital is dissolved into an unbroken process of its production and reproduction, it is possible for the proletariat to discover that it is itself the *subject* of this process even though it is in chains and is for the time being unconscious of the fact. As soon, therefore, as the ready-made, immediate reality is abandoned the question arises: "Does a worker in a cotton factory produce merely cotton textiles? No, he produces capital. He produces values which serve afresh to command his labour and by means of it to create new values."⁴²

4

This throws an entirely new light on the problem of reality. If, in Hegel's terms, Becoming now appears as the truth of Being, and process as the truth about things, then this means that the *developing tendencies of history constitute a higher reality than the empirical facts*. It is doubtless true that in capitalist society the past dominates the present—as indeed we have shown elsewhere.⁴³ But this only means that there is an antagonistic process that is not guided by a consciousness but is instead driven forward by its own immanent, blind dynamic and that this process stands revealed in all its immediate manifestations as the rule of the past over the present, the rule of capital over labour. It follows that any thinker who bases his thought on such ideas will be trapped in the frozen forms of the various stages. He will nevertheless stand helpless when confronted by the enigmatic forces thrown up by the course of events, and the actions open to him will never be adequate to deal with this challenge.

This image of a frozen reality that nevertheless is caught up in an unremitting, ghostly movement at once becomes meaningful when this reality is dissolved into the process of which man is the driving force. This can be seen only from the standpoint of the proletariat because the meaning of these tendencies is the abolition of capitalism and so for the bourgeoisie to become conscious of them would be tantamount to suicide. Moreover, the 'laws' of the reified reality of capitalism in which the bourgeoisie is compelled to live are only able to prevail over the heads of those who seem to be its active embodiments and agents. The average profit rate is the paradigm of this situation. Its relation to individual capitalists whose actions are determined by this

unknown and unknowable force shows all the symptoms of Hegel's 'ruse of reason'. The fact that these individual 'passions', despite which these tendencies prevail, assume the form of the most careful, farsighted and exact calculations does not affect this conclusion in the least; on the contrary, it reinforces it still further. For the fact that there exists the illusion of a rationalism perfected in every detail—dictated by class interests and hence subjectively based—makes it even more evident that this rationalism is unable to grasp the meaning of the overall process as it really is. Moreover, the situation is not attenuated by the fact that we are not confronted here by a unique event, a catastrophe, but by the unbroken production and reproduction of the same relation whose elements are converted into empirical facts and incorporated in reified form in the web of rational calculation. It only shows the strength of the dialectical antagonism controlling the phenomena of capitalist society.

The conversion of social-democratic ideas into bourgeois ones can always be seen at its clearest in the jettisoning of the dialectical method. As early as the Bernstein Debate it was clear that the opportunists had to take their stand 'firmly on the facts' so as to be able to ignore the general trends⁴⁴ or else to reduce them to the status of a subjective, ethical imperative. In like fashion the manifold misunderstandings in the debate on accumulation should be seen as part of the same phenomenon. Rosa Luxemburg was a genuine dialectician and so she realised that it was not possible for a purely capitalist society to exist as a tendency of history, as a tendency which inevitably determines the actions of men—unknown to them—long before it had itself become 'fact'. Thus the economic impossibility of accumulation in a purely capitalist society does not show itself by the 'cessation' of capitalism once the last non-capitalist has been expropriated, but by actions that force upon the capitalist class the awareness that this (empirically still remote) state of affairs is on its way: actions such as feverish colonialisation, disputes about territories providing raw materials or markets, imperialism and world war. For dialectical trends do not constitute an infinite progression that gradually nears its goal in a series of quantitative stages. They are rather expressed in terms of an unbroken *qualitative revolution* in the structure of society (the composition of the classes, their relative strengths, etc.) The ruling class of the moment attempts to meet the challenge of these changes in the only way open to it,

and on matters of detail it does appear to meet with some success. But in reality the blind and unconscious measures that seem to it to be so necessary simply hasten the course of events that destroy it.

The difference between 'fact' and tendency has been brought out on innumerable occasions by Marx and placed in the foreground of his studies. After all, the basic thought underlying his *magnum opus*, the retranslation of economic objects from things back into processes, into the changing relations between men, rests on just this idea. But from this it follows further that the question of theoretical priority, the location within the system (i.e. whether original or derivative) of the particular forms of the economic structure of society depends on their distance from this retranslation. Upon this is based the prior importance of industrial capital over merchant capital, money-dealing capital, etc. And this priority is expressed historically by the fact that these derivative forms of capital, that do not themselves determine the production process, are only capable of performing the negative function of dissolving the original forms of production. However, the question of "whither this process of dissolution will lead, in other words, what new mode of production will replace the old, does not depend on commerce, but on the character of the old mode of production itself".⁴⁵

On the other hand, merely from the point of view of theory it would appear that the 'laws governing these forms are in fact only determined by the 'contingent' empirical movements of supply and demand and that they are not the expression of any universal social trend. As Marx points out in a discussion of interest: "Competition does not, in this case, determine the deviations from the rule. There is rather no law of division except that enforced by competition."⁴⁶

In this theory of reality which allots a higher place to the prevailing trends of the total development than to the facts of the empirical world, the antithesis we stressed when considering the particular questions raised by Marxism (the antithesis between movement and final goal, evolution and revolution, etc.) acquires its authentic, concrete and scientific shape. For only this analysis permits us to investigate the concept of the 'fact' in a truly concrete manner, i.e. in the *social context* in which it has its origin and its existence. The direction to be taken by such an investigation has been outlined elsewhere,⁴⁷ although only with reference to