

Mediations

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Novel Theory, Century Old

The erstwhile Marxist literary critic Franco Moretti has recently expressed a consensus that the seminal work of Marxist literary criticism, György Lukács's *The Theory of the Novel* (1916), is less a theory than a history, less a commanding generalization about forms and genres and more a local insight into an epochal break in literary production.¹ Upon this 100th anniversary of its publication, this "history" now has its own history, in the shadow of which this special issue of *Mediations* aspires to ask what that historicizing gesture looks like a century later, and whether the theoretical tentacles of Lukács's analysis might now intensify into tenets. Lukács himself already provided a critique of his historicization as insufficiently historical and insufficiently materialist, but he also steadfastly pursued the project of a theory of art; this issue also presents two works by Lukács, "Art and Society" and "Art as Misunderstanding," which illuminate and advance the theoretical project announced by *The Theory of the Novel*.

As history, *The Theory of the Novel* chronicles the temporal coincidence of capitalist modernity and the new art form of the novel, raising the question of the causality behind this coincidence, and of the mediations that thwart facile answers. As theory, *The Theory of the Novel* traces the contours of the anti-generic genre, its "abstraction," its "mutual determination" of "the contingent world and the problematic individual," its conspicuous and self-conscious "form-giving," its "special dissonance" of "a formal nature less obvious than other art," its "composition... a paradoxical fusion of heterogeneous and discrete components into an organic whole which is abolished again and again."² These generalizations about forms give us finally a distinct enterprise of projective production of a riven world.

So perhaps the contrast to be drawn is not between a history and a theory, but between theorizing literature and literary theorizing, between giving an account of literary origins and operations, and giving an account of the specific theorizing that the novel can undertake. After all, *The Theory of the Novel* mostly dwells on the speculative questions that drive this distinct kind of artistic representation — questions of contingency, immanence, totality. Speculating is arguably the main definition Lukács offers of the form:

the novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality.³

Lukács offers less the determinants of a form than the problems the form sets to work upon; his theory of the novel offers us the novel as theory.⁴ One hundred years on, we have little fathomed, let alone exhausted, the possibilities of this definition. How can we read the *Gesinnung*, the disposition, cast of mind, or thought-patterns, of aesthetic representation? What kind of thinking is it that novels do? What kind of thinking frames itself in terms of totality, addresses itself to the terminus of totality? What kind of thinking contends with the terminal, what is not or no longer, while holding on to the historicity of belatedness, the “still”? What reading methods honor these terms? What differentiates what Lukács repeatedly calls “the world of forms” from the world’s structure?

The essays in this issue honor simultaneously the historicizing endeavor and the theorizing gambit of *The Theory of the Novel*. They ask what *The Theory of the Novel* predictively but unpredictably tells us about modernism’s self-concept, how the specter of world war constitutes the novel genre, how novels disclose that history can never be their content because history as such is not available as a referent. They also ask how *The Theory of the Novel*’s theories are or become accentuated elsewhere: in *History and Class Consciousness*, *Soul and Form*, or the writings on realism or on Rosa Luxemburg; in the very novelistic modes Lukács explicitly rejected; in the oeuvre of Fredric Jameson; in, wonderfully, poetry. The issue begins with its own historicizing gesture, placing its celebration of *The Theory of the Novel* in the context of two little-read essays by Lukács, both reprinted with the kind permission of the *New Hungarian Quarterly* (now simply *Hungarian Quarterly*), where they were first translated.⁵ The first historicizes Lukács’s intellectual trajectory in its own terms and in those of his momentous historical period; the second offers a glimpse of the systematic context of the project of *The Theory of the Novel*. Threaded across the issue are sustained readings of literary texts – Azuela’s *Los de abajo*, Baudelaire’s “Paysage,” Dos Passos’s *U.S.A.* trilogy. Theoretical reflections on genre and on historicity are here inseparable from close literary reading, from attention to protagonicity and plot structure, to lyricism and ironization, to point of view and closure, to the uniquely novelistic mode of non-conceptual sensuous thinking.

The first essay by Lukács, “Art and Society,” is an occasional piece, originally written as the preface to a Hungarian-language volume of selected writings of the same name. In it Lukács gives a sense of his own biographical, geographical, and intellectual itinerary over half a century, roughly 1910-1960. This is itself of considerable interest, but as Lukács puts it, “individual development can only be truly understood in terms of the struggle with, the acceptance of, further development of or rejection of the currents of the age,” and it is in terms of Lukács’s relationship to larger currents in

European political and intellectual history, in particular his ambivalent position during the Stalin period and its aftermath in the Soviet Union and Hungary, that the essay snaps into focus.⁶ In providing a rough sketch of his intellectual trajectory, Lukács provides us — at a moment when the “political” is invoked as a value with astonishing facility — a striking reminder of what it looks like when art and the philosophy of art are matters of real political urgency.

In 1912-14 Lukács began work on what has been called the “Heidelberg Philosophy of Art,” his first attempt at a systematic aesthetic theory. The project was interrupted by the First World War — and by *The Theory of the Novel* — and when he resumed the project in 1915-17 he had reformulated its plan. The surviving chapters of each attempt comprise Volumes 16 and 17 of Lukács’s collected works. These volumes are of the greatest interest, and we are reminded that what we are accustomed to think of as Lukács’s major works on art are — while they are indeed major works — embedded in a project of systemization to which Lukács remained committed all his life, and of which, in English, we have virtually no sense. “Art as Misunderstanding” is the first chapter of the earlier plan, his first version of a foundation for the entire system.⁷ Lukács begins from “the existence of the work of art as the one and only fact relevant to aesthetics.”⁸ The movement of the essay is, for most of its length, more aporetic than dialectical: as with certain passages in Hegel, the same problems keep cropping up in places that had seemed to be solutions — one jumps from the fat into more fat. It is only in the final pages that the essay undertakes a vertiginous dialectical widening of standpoint. Since the main question is how to distinguish the work of art from the heterogeneous sphere of experience (and from its other and corollary, the homogeneous spheres of communication), “Art as Misunderstanding” ends up producing a proleptic critique of some of the most conspicuous currents in contemporary aesthetic theory in our “post-critical” moment, from the affective turn to the idea of art as process. Not all of these need to be called out by name, but readers may be gratified and surprised to find here a satisfying account, a century *avant la lettre*, of the aesthetic ideology of spoken-word performance.

Commencing the critical essays, Ignacio Sánchez Prado reprises Lukács’s own historicization of *The Theory of the Novel* in situating that work with respect to both the general crisis of modernity and the specific crisis of the First World War. Reading *The Theory of the Novel* in dialogue with its brother text, Mariano Azuela’s *Los de abajo*, Sánchez Prado finds a straddling of this general-specific history and an improvisational formalization of interregna which open on to the potential of the novel to harken new totalities.

Ben Parker sublimes the regular opposition between *The Theory of the Novel* and *History and Class Consciousness* by educating a theory of the novel immanent in the latter text itself. Parker’s reading of *History and Class Consciousness*’s radical account of class consciousness as the unmaking of reification and the loss of social determination reveals the consubstantial form between subject-formation and the logics of

anagnorisis that drive literary realist narrativity.

Tom Eyers reads *The Theory of the Novel* against itself, searching for a dialectic that would refuse any assimilation of form to history as easily as Lukács might seem to do, and finding upon further reflection in Lukácsian irony the prospect of the lack of fit between literary form and history. This prospect hinges upon the novel's self-consciousness, which makes thinkable the gap between the aspiration to formal integration and the reality of persistent disjuncture, the gap that is the ultimate form of history as such, and which is opened even more forcefully by non-narrative poetry.

Robert Tally treats the rhetorics of spatial orientation and world-projection *The Theory of the Novel*, ultimately situating it as the ur-text of the quintessential Marxist critico-aesthetic procedure: cognitive mapping. The literary cartography that *The Theory of the Novel* theorizes attests to the palpable Marxist impulses in this text oft-maligned as idealist, and illuminates a path forward for Marxist literary criticism to focus more sharply on the utopian undertakings of the novel genre.

Elvira Godek-Kiryluk reads across Lukács's oeuvre to find resources for revalorizing modernism, specifically by appraising the internal logics of subordination and composition that were Lukács's highest aesthetic criteria for realism. Not all compositional aesthetics look alike, but Lukács's philosophy of composition (in dialogue here with Poe's) ought to countenance John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy, with its unique strategies for defying readerly subjectivity, advancing critical distance, and narrating dialectics.

Finally, Jan Mieszkowski zooms in to the Marxist poetics of the slogan as they portend Lukácsian futures, the possibility for non-instrumental, non-reified, non-referential, non-historicizable language to conjure new solidarities. The slogan, like the novel, is indicative and subjunctive, conjunctive and disjunctive, situated and of indeterminate time, and as such demands a properly dialectical Marxian literary theory of its own.

The century that has unfurled since 1916 finds the Marxist literary criticism of 2016 under fresh assault not only from the recision of the humanities and the gutting of public higher education, but more pointedly from academic literary studies itself. The self-styled "post-critical turn" disdains equally the historicizing and theorizing trajectories animated by *The Theory of the Novel*, repudiating materialist dialectics and abstract thinking in favor of accuracy, affect, facts. In their ingenuity and variegation, the essays in this special issue powerfully substantiate what the past of Marxist literary criticism will still have offered the present, will still have promised the future.

The book review section of this issue was edited in part by Joshua Clover. The three books under consideration in his dossier — *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capital* (ed. Diane Elson, reviewed by Clover), *Art and Value* (Dave Beech, reviewed by Sarah Brouillette), and *Capitalism in the Web of Life* (Jason W. Moore, reviewed by Juliana Spahr) — approach the value question from three different and interconnected perspectives: economics, aesthetic production, and ecological disaster. In the final

review, Ross Wolfe assesses The Invisible Committee's second book, *To Our Friends*.

A final note: the deadline for this year's Michael Sprinker Graduate Writing Competition is Monday, May 17, 2016. The competition was established to remember Michael Sprinker's commitment to Marxist intellectual work and to graduate teaching and students. The award recognizes an essay or dissertation chapter that engages with Marxist theory, scholarship, pedagogy, and/or activism. Submissions are judged by a committee composed of members of the Marxist Literary Group. The winner receives professional recognition and a prize of \$500. Traditionally the article is, after peer review, published in *Mediations*. Please send your documents as attachments in Word (no pdfs, please) to Kevin Floyd at kfloyd@kent.edu, and send any questions to the same address. For more information, see <http://www.marxistliterary.org/michael-sprinker-prize/>.

Anna Kornbluh, for the *Mediations* editors

Notes

1. Franco Moretti, "Lukács's Theory of the Novel: Centenary Reflections," *New Left Review* 91 (Jan-Feb 2015) 39-42.
2. György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT P, 1974). "Abstraction," "dissonance," and "formal nature less obvious" 71, "contingent world and problematic individual" 78, "form-giving" 51, "composition...again" 84.
3. Lukács, *Theory of the Novel* 56. "Der Roman ist die Epopöe eines Zeitalters, für das die extensive Totalität des Lebens nicht mehr sinnfällig gegeben ist, für das die Lebensimmanenz des Sinnes zum Problem geworden ist, und das dennoch die Gesinnung zur Totalität hat." *Die Theorie des Romans* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1920) 44.
4. For further development of this hypothesis, see Tim Bewes's "Reading with the Grain: A New World in Literary Criticism," *differences* 21:3 (2010) 1-33.
5. "Art and Society," *NHQ* 8:47 (Autumn 1972) 44-56, and "Philosophy of Art," *NHQ* 8:47 (Autumn 1972), 57-87, translated by Bertha Gaster, Ottó Beőthy, Károly Ravasz, and Charles Newman. Both pieces have been lightly edited for clarity.
6. György Lukács, "Art and Society" 7.
7. "Die Kunst als 'Ausdruck' und die Mitteilungsformen der Erlebniswirklichkeit," *Werke* Bd. 16, *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst* (1912-1914) 7-41.
8. György Lukács, "Art as Misunderstanding" 19.

Art and Society

György Lukács

The studies collected in this volume cover fifty years of my development.¹ Thoughts dealing with the theory of literary history were written and published in 1910, while the manuscripts of the *Aesthetics* went to print around 1960. The half century reflected here shows not only my individual development, though it primarily shows that in an immediate sense, but also that of the age. And yet, even individual development can only be truly understood in terms of the struggle with, the acceptance of, further development or rejection of the currents of the age.

The first pieces, "The History of the Development of Modern Drama," and the summing up of its methodology, were in clear opposition to the then prevailing trends in literary history as practiced in Hungary. Geza Feleky, in his criticism of the book, referred to the fact that it proved equally uncomfortable for the official view as for the opposition. At that time the dominant official views were to a very great extent those of Zsolt Beőthy; the university regarded the invitation extended to the Taineist positivist Frigyes Riedl as an almost revolutionary deed. The majority of the literary opposition were under Taine's influence. Also positivist, though somewhat more modern, was the theory of literature and art associated with the magazine *Huszadik Század* (*Twentieth Century*). The positivism of the *Nyugat* (*West*) writers, on the other hand, often ended up in subjectivist impressionism, under the influence of French critics, and also of Alfred Kerr. My essays at that time were in sharp opposition to all these trends. It would be a mistake, however, to connect the endeavor to find an objective social foundation too closely with Marxism, though the influence of Marxism can be detected in it. A proper scholarly use of my knowledge of Marx was greatly influenced by the philosophy and sociology of Simmel, who was experimenting with the fitting in of certain aspects of Marxism into the German *Geisteswissenschaft* which was then in its early stages. The bourgeois idealist character of my writings even showed itself in the fact that it took as its starting point not the immediate and real connections between society and literature, but rather attempted to conceptualize and make conscious a synthesis of the academic disciplines — sociology and aesthetics —

which dealt with this question. No wonder that such an artificial position gave birth to abstract constructions. Although the literary historical starting point, which aims at explaining dramatic form by the immediate mass effect is a generalization of correct observations, and although the book undoubtedly contains analyses which have been proved right, the idea underlying the whole, that is dramatic (tragic) conflict as the ideological manifestation of class decline is, precisely because of its abstraction, an empty construction. Although it is undoubtedly true that real drama can only come about when in society itself moral imperatives necessarily produced by society come into an acute, mutually exclusive relationship with each other, to deduce this insight directly from the decline of a class and to make this appear necessary is nevertheless already an abstract and, consequently, an empty construction.

It was not mere chance, therefore, that at the same time, and shortly after finishing this work, I experimented with a less abstract interpretation of literary facts. (Such attempts can be found in my volume of essays *Soul and Form*.) Working toward the concrete only manifested itself in my attempt to understand the inner structure and general nature of certain typical human forms of conduct, and by depicting and analyzing the conflicts of life, to bring them into connection with literary forms. This is how I arrived at the question of making tragic conduct concrete in my paper, "The Metaphysics of Tragedy." Giving conduct such a central place in the philosophy of art did not in the least mean that I now wished to move nearer to the psychologizing of the positivists or the impressionists. Just the contrary. The basis of this attempt was the product of the constantly growing influence of Hegelian philosophy. I was influenced primarily by *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* (and also by Hegel's other works) aiming to clarify it, through finding out the inner dialectic of the "Spirit" on the basis of the relationship between man (the individual) and society. This is how the analysis of tragic conduct came about; readers today can see that despite the strongly mystical nature of the discussion, it, on one hand, always deals with the essential connections of the typical conduct of man, rather than with the empirical description of ephemeral, merely individual or merely average reactions, or of immediate outward manifestations and, on the other, that this typifying interpretation of conduct always assumes and analyses an objective world state which is in a mutual dialectic relationship with it. Thus in the end — just like Hegel — it assumes the mutual influence of human and social and historical development. This tendency is manifested most clearly where it emphasizes the worldly, purely, and closely human character of tragedy, in contrast with every other-worldly, transcendental, religious world-view. I was able to produce an analysis of tragic conduct that accords with tragedy only as a Marxist. Readers can find a genuine concretization of the problem in my Chernishevsky study written forty years later.

Despite this approach this study still largely isolates the quality of tragedy from real historical events. It opposes the abstract sociological nature of my first attempts by a philosophical generalization which is no less abstract, but is abstract in the

opposite direction. My further development — naturally for the time being still under the influence of Hegel — again experimented in the direction of a concrete content. *The Theory of the Novel* is already much more expressly of the nature of a philosophy of history. Here a whole view of world history is sketched in order to illuminate the notion that the epic and the novel belong together but are, at the same time, opposites, in a philosophic manner. This widening and deepening of the problem was the result of work on philosophy and the social sciences I did in the intervening four years. This meant not merely a thorough study of Hegelian philosophy, including the writings of Kierkegaard as a criticism of Hegel, but also attempts to scrutinize the contradictions of capitalism; at that time the syndicalist writings of Sorel and the work of Tönnies and Max Weber arrested my attention. This would not, however, be a truly faithful account of the writing and the central questions of *The Theory of the Novel* if I failed to emphasize that the outbreak of the First World War and my immediate passionate rejection of it gave me the concrete impetus for writing. In contrast with the majority of the anti-war pacifists my position was opposed as much to the Western democracies as to the Central Powers. I saw the World War then as the crisis of the whole of European culture; I regarded the present — in the words of Fichte — as the period of perfect sinfulness (“*Zeitalter der vollendeten Sündhaftigkeit*”), as a crisis of culture from which the only way out was a revolution. Naturally this whole world-view still rested on purely idealist foundations and the “revolution” could accordingly only manifest itself on the intellectual plane. The period of the bourgeois novel, from Cervantes to Tolstoy, therefore is, on one hand, in a philosophical and historical opposition to the past, to the age of epic harmony (Homer) and, on the other, gives a perspective where the possibility of a future human solution to social antagonism appears. I then regarded the works of Dostoyevsky as the forerunners of this “revolution,” which — as I then saw them — were not novels any longer. In this preface I naturally cannot go into the criticism of the contradictions which arise from this approach. I must be content with outlining the ideological approach which gave rise to this work.

The selection now skips a long period (1915-1931). This is not mere chance. The events of the war, and primarily the Russian, then the Hungarian revolution, caused a deep change in my social views, in my ideology. I became a Marxist. I attempted to give a detailed analysis of this process, including the failure of my first attempt at Marxist philosophy (*History and Class Consciousness*) in the preface to the second volume of my collected works, published in German. Even a sketchy discussion of connected questions, which have no immediate reference to this collection, would take us too far. I will rest content to say that this process ended in 1930 as a result of my studies on Marx written in the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow. Since the period stretching between 1918 and 1930 was also that in which I was politically active, it is understandable that aesthetic and literary questions are hardly present in my writing dating from that time. They acquire a greater role, however, in the period when I familiarized myself with genuine Marxism. In the Marx-Engels Institute I met

Comrade M. Lifshitz, with whom I then worked and discussed in a friendly fashion the basic questions of Marxism. The most important thought produced by this clarification was that a suitable systematization of aesthetic questions is also part of the systematic aspects of Marxism, in other words that there is an independent and integral Marxist aesthetic. This proposition, which is accepted as a matter of course in wide circles today, appeared to be a paradox, even for many Marxists, at the beginning of the thirties. The great debates following the revolution of 1917 revolved around political, strategic, and tactical problems; Lenin was regarded by public opinion, even within the revolutionary workers' movement, principally as an outstanding political leader, a great tactician. There were hardly any criticisms of the views that took shape in the Second International unless they were directly connected with important daily issues. In the theoretical evaluation of aesthetic facts the dominant views were, therefore, still those of Plekhanov and Mehring, neither of whom thought of aesthetics as a vital aspect of the Marxist system; Plekhanov relied mainly on French positivism and the critical traditions of the Russian revolutionary democratic movement, and Mehring on the writings on aesthetics of Kant and Schiller. These were the views which Lifshitz and I opposed, and most Marxists accepted our position within a few years with a speed which surprised us, despite the resistance shown by the Plekhanov and Mehring orthodoxy. My book, *Contribution to the History of Aesthetics*, includes an account of the theoretical debate that Marx and Engels conducted with Lassalle on the subject of the latter's play, *Franz von Sickingen*, in which this new point of view was first made public.

However necessary it is to state these facts to make my later activities comprehensible, they would nevertheless remain incomprehensible without a rudimentary outline at least of the concrete circumstances. Naturally at this point the objective delineation of circumstances meets serious objective obstacles. The history of the ideological development of the Stalin era has not yet been written. A great many are still content with a mere general denunciation of the "cult of personality," with at the most emphasizing a few officially admitted mistakes, making it appear that in the main the development of Marxism continued smoothly after Lenin's death. Bourgeois ideologists see the situation as if the Stalin period were the "logical" continuation of Marxism-Leninism. Both add to their incorrectness by interpreting the Stalin era unhistorically, seeing it not as a process of development: after Lenin's death Stalin created the "personality cult" and this was dominant until the 20th Congress put an end to it. Whether this unhistorical approach is on the side of Stalin or of those who opposed him makes no difference. The kind of Stalin criticism which nowadays attempts to justify Trotsky or Bukharin in a theoretical war, gets no nearer to real history than the view which — with fewer or more reservations — apologizes for Stalin.

Naturally this preface cannot contain even an attempt at offering a detailed analysis of this important complex of questions. I have to restrict myself to attempting

to indicate briefly those ideological developments without which the historical starting points of the positions I then assumed would remain incomprehensible. The struggle for power was decided in favor of Stalin, between Lenin's death and 1928. The question — Can socialism survive if it can only be realized in one country? — stood at the center of the ideological struggle. Stalin won, and it has to be said that he won — however many administrative measures he took in concrete party struggles — primarily because his viewpoint alone was tenable, it alone provided direction and a perspective for the building of socialism at the end of the world-revolutionary wave. What is involved here is not the theoretical and practical mistakes in the concrete building of socialism but a theoretical foundation for the whole period. The next step, as we now see it, was to ensure that in the new period thus established Stalin should be seen as a worthy successor to Lenin. However, the theoretical precondition was that public opinion should accept Lenin not merely as the great tactician of the revolutionary struggle, but as the man who put back in its rightful place and further developed Marxist theory, overcoming the ideological errors of the Second International. The philosophical debate of 1930-31 served this end and — despite every incident which could rightly be criticized later — it served this end successfully. Of course, what played the theoretically truly decisive role was that in 1931 Lenin's philosophical notes were published (mainly his criticism of Hegelian philosophy) and also the writings of the young Marx, which had not until then been published, or published only in the form of extracts, in unreliable texts. It was the study of this material which altered my intellectual outlook. Until then I attempted to interpret Marx correctly in the light of the Hegelian dialectic, now, on the other hand, I aimed at utilizing, with the aid of the Marxian and Leninist materialist dialectic, the results and the criticism of the limitations of Hegel, and of bourgeois philosophical thinking which culminated in him. While most of the leaders of the Second International saw Marx exclusively, or at least primarily, as the man who revolutionized economics, we now started to understand that a new era had begun with him in the whole history of human thought. This was made actual and effective by Lenin. The acceptance of the independence and theoretical originality of Marxist aesthetics was the first step I took toward the understanding and realization of the new change in ideology.

Those were my views when I moved to Berlin in the summer of 1931 where actual literary questions came to occupy the forefront of my interests. Two of the papers published here are a part of the ideological struggle of German revolutionary proletarian literature. As regards the opposition of tendentiousness and partisanship, it is clear that aesthetics founded on materialist dialectics had to turn against tendencies stuck on literary works from the outside. The opposition, therefore, is between the partisanship that stems from the essence of artistic conduct and creation and tendentiousness, which has no organic connection with the problems of genuine portrayal, but on the contrary, falsifies the inner truth of the persons and events depicted. The fact that the Stalin-Zhdanov theory later called precisely this sort of

tendentiousness true partisanship, that it turned an article written by Lenin in 1905 on the reform of the party press into the ten commandments of this “partisanship,” did nothing to prevent me, even subsequently, from defending the right position. Readers of my *Aesthetics* will appreciate that, in the course of several decades, I only endeavored to work out the details of this idea, without ever abandoning it. In the meantime Lenin’s widow and closest associate, Krupskaya, testified that this oft-mentioned article had not been meant to apply to literature. Another article dating from this time also deals with a topical question of basic significance, with that of true realism. Here again a motive emerges which played a leading part in my later work: skepticism as regards the fashionable trends of current bourgeois literature’s ability to help our writers in those cases when the official theory wants to divert them from the road of true artistic creation. I have never since ceased to voice this skepticism: socialist literature can only find itself through a truly artistic absorption in reality. Running after Western fashions involves no fewer inner dangers than obeisance to sectarian dogmatism.

Soon after Hitler attained power I moved to the Soviet Union where I was a staff member of *Literaturny Kritik* until the journal ceased publication (1940). My theoretical articles on the essence of realism were published without exception in this journal. It probably seems peculiar to the reader today that such articles could regularly appear at this already well-developed stage of Stalinism. Naturally, certain tactical compromises were involved; I think every one of my articles written at that time contains a few quotes from Stalin; today’s unbiased reader can see, of course, what the censor then failed to notice, that these quotes have hardly any relevance to the real, essential, content of these articles. This is, of course, a superficial explanation. I must expand it into a brief outline of the actual situation. While I was in Berlin there was a furious discussion in the Soviet Union directed against the Union of Proletarian Writers (RAPP), which dominated literature. It is well known that this discussion was aimed at the sectarian tendency of RAPP. The organizational conclusion reached was to abolish the special organization of proletarian writers and to unite all Soviet writers into one association. The literary goal was outlined at the founding congress of this association by Gorky himself, the central aim to be achieved having been named as the great art of socialism (socialist realism). This also meant a struggle against what was called literary Trotskyism, which only recognized the possibility of a propagandistic literature in the transitional period before the full realization of socialism. It does not matter how justified friends and enemies are in referring to Trotsky in this matter; such outstanding theoreticians of the Second International as Mehring unquestionably represented that point of view. The organizational solution gave away a great deal about Stalin’s real intentions as regards this complex of questions. I only mention in passing that those leaders of RAPP who were politically expressly Trotskyites, especially Averbach, who disappeared finally at the time of the Great Trials, ceased to take part in the management of literature. It

is much more important that it was possible to recruit Gorky and a few other famous writers, who were kept out by RAPP, into the union. At the same time those of the old RAPP leadership who were sectarians in literature, but politically obedient from a Stalinist point of view (Fadeyev, Yermilov, and so on) were given leading roles in the union, with the result that they aimed at realizing, within the unified organization of the whole of literature, the old RAPP line, namely, the creation of a literature that would propagate whatever were the party's latest decisions at any one time, by means which were said to be literary. However, this propaganda now had to be rechristened the great art of socialism, which gave not only Gorky far-reaching critical freedom in the last years of his life, but also made possible the following of modern Western, even anti-realist, trends as long as the writer in question accepted without reservation on any issue that had a political content, the party's concrete goals at any one time. Ilya Ehrenburg's novels in the thirties are an example.

The situation which thus arose was, of course, full of internal contradictions. For example, it proclaimed loyalty to principles, but only recognized as "principles" the party's latest decisions; it spoke of wanting artistic perfection from writers, but in fact it declared even the most pedestrian naturalism high-grade art, as long as party loyalty was maintained. Despite everything, this contradictory situation assured — for a while at least — freedom of movement for the sort of criticism which really demanded socialist realism, the great socialist art, and wanted to grasp theoretically and to carry out its artistic principles and criteria. This is how a group came into being, made up of staff members of *Literaturny Kritik*, whose intellectual focus was provided by Lifshitz, Ushievich, and myself. Other members of this group included I. Shatz, Grib, who has since died, and Alexandrov. It was as a member of this group that I wrote the bulk of the papers from this period that appear here, examining the way in which the basic aesthetic problems of artistic portrayal grow organically out of the real reflection of the problems of social existence. Naturally I can only account for my intentions here and for the circumstances which helped or hindered their realization. How far I succeeded in achieving this is not for me to judge. It is certain, however, that the circumstances depicted here made possible this sort of activity between 1934 and 1940.

In 1939-40 a vehement debate started after the publication in Russian of my work *A Contribution to the History of Realism*. (This book contains my studies of Goethe, Holderlin, Buchner, Heine, Balzac, Tolstoy, and Gorky.) The debate, which lasted almost a year, revolved mainly around the question of how far it is permissible to employ in literary criticism the principle of the victory of realism, which Marx had already raised in *The Holy Family*, which played a great role in the late letters of Engels, and which became the dominant idea in Lenin's Tolstoy studies. Is it injurious to the "principled nature" of literature if the measure of literary value is the artistically created picture of the world, as manifested in the work, and not the consciously held ideology of the writer, in which the party's given position is directly expressed? This

debate was preceded by attacks — on topical issues — against Ushievich, mainly because of an article he wrote on political poetry, in which he condemned the output of that time as most inferior, both in human and poetic terms, as compared to the poetry of Mayakovsky. It has to be said that neither debate had direct “administrative” consequences. It is a fact, though, that in 1940 *Literaturny Kritik* ceased publication, though the decision did not expressly refer to these debates.

That, however, shut the doors of the Russian literary press in practice to me; not as result of the text of the decision, just *de facto*. From then on I could publish literary studies only in *Internationale Literatur*, which appeared in German, and in *Új Hang* (*New Voice*) in Hungarian. Since these are not included in the collection I shall not speak of them. I merely mention that I devoted the “freedom” thus gained to philosophical studies. Nor shall I speak of my writings discussing topical questions of principle in Hungarian literature, which were published before and after my return to Hungary; I hope that one day these can be published in a separate volume. If, nonetheless, I briefly touch on my experiences in Hungary I do so chiefly because in the literary debate that took place in 1949–50 these writings played a great part. József Révai in particular attempted to show that what were called the Blum theses (1929) formed the theoretical and political basis for all my literary activities; that they were right to criticize my view of the relationship between ideology, partisanship, and artistic creation in the Russian debate; and that I was wrong in looking on the policy of the Popular Front as strategy and not merely tactics. Márton Horváth, on the other hand, found that the expression “revolutionary romanticism” does not occur once in the whole of my critical output and he is certainly right in that; and that, where I deal with socialist writers — *Quiet Flows the Don* was mentioned in particular — I select those whose conduct is not truly typical of Soviet literature and does not play a decisive role in it. Nor did he make a secret of the fact that he opposed them by the Azhaev-type novel, and defended it against the charge of naturalism, because in this naturalism, according to him, the deeply democratic character of Soviet art was manifested, *et cetera*, *et cetera*. I do not refer to these criticisms to make a debating point, but it does no harm if the reader can also see that it is not I who claim that for decades I opposed the naturalist way of portrayal, of Stalin’s day and of Western manipulated capitalism alike, but that the qualified experts on these questions had already stated that in those days.

The outcome of the Rudas debate made it possible for me to retire from direct literary activities (as critic, editor, and so on). I had to accept that the political methods introduced in “the year of the decisive turn” made impossible any literary criticism that deals with principles. The so-called self-criticism which facilitated my withdrawal was purely formal. This had already been emphasized by József Révai and Márton Horváth, and my later sectarian critics reproved the Rakosi regime for its “leniency” toward me. Since the few articles written after the debate are the direct, organic continuation of my activities up till then it is not necessary to comment

on them here. What is more important, the free time thus gained made it at last possible for me to work out my aesthetic views in detail. Although the final part of this collection includes certain of these works I do not think the reader will expect me to attempt even a brief summary of the theoretical questions connected with this systematization. What makes this even less necessary is the fact that the preface to the *Aesthetics* analyses in detail the connection between the theoretical foundation and structure of these works and the fundamental methodological questions of Marxism. If the reader is perhaps surprised that, on one hand, I attribute a decisive significance to particularity in the structure of the aesthetic world-view and, on the other hand, I connect artistic creation and the true enjoyment of works of art with the particular and correct reflection of reality, then I may be permitted a few remarks as regards these two connected questions. First of all: particularity is just as much a material, objective category of the objects and processes of reality as individuality and universality. It is one of the most important achievements of Marxism that the process of abstraction that creates universals — for example, socially necessary work as opposed to concrete individual work — is not primarily the product of intellectual abstraction; what is more, that this itself is nothing but a reflection in the consciousness of the objective social process. This situation is only one instance of man — no matter what he does — always confronting the same uniform reality (its categories and so on). On the other hand, our different ways of reacting to reality urge us to grasp and arrange these categories, as far as possible, in accordance with the nature of the aims of correct reflection. A hunter notices different things in a wood from one who goes there to gather mushrooms; the direct differentiation does not, of course, stop the shared objective reality of the total surroundings. This is the role particularity plays in all our relationships with every reality. Its prime, dominant role in artistic creation and reception serves the fulfillment of a great social need: the desire for the contradictory but inseparable unity of singularity and universality, of individuality and sociality, whose fulfillment is primarily the task of art. The more developed a human being is, the more he is an individual, but this can only be realized truly, seriously, and deeply in him if this individual is more and qualitatively different from the random combination of accidental individual features; if therefore what is manifested in him is not merely the deaf and dumb purely natural endowments of the human species, but if the species's truly human articulation gains an intelligent voice in his deeds and words; in other words if the human species's otherwise dumb continuity — transmitted by the concrete society — becomes a road toward human fulfillment, as a species, and at the same time social and individual fulfillment. The aesthetic type, therefore, in which particularity is most artistically manifested signifies the road of the concrete fulfillment of human existence as a species. It is the central category of artistic creation because it is through this category that artistic creation becomes the sensually unfolded and united concrete reflection of the embodying of a stage in the great road of the human species seeking and finding itself. An artistic category,

even the most abstract one, grows out of the deepest needs of human life, determines their — positive or negative — forms of realization, and is determined by them.

This is why the artistic reflection of reality is at the center of aesthetics. I well know: every bourgeois and bourgeois-influenced dogmatic subjectivism passionately protests against this; they see the debasement of “sacred” subjectivity and of “unrestrained” creativity in an artistic imagination tied to reality by objective necessity. Yet, if one considers the matter carefully, everything that we do, everything that we know, everything that we are is, in the final analysis, the product of our reactions to reality. Lenin, one of the most original, most individual men of action said: the road of revolution is always “more cunning” than the notion of it held before it occurs, even by the best party (and even more so by individuals!), and he regarded it as the mark of a real politician that he is able, even if only approximately, to recognize and utilize this “cunning” for his own actions. Is this not true of art also? Is not what is created by the greatest ones, a Leonardo da Vinci, a Cézanne, a Shakespeare, or a Tolstoy, “realization” in Cézanne’s sense? Is it not the stealing of the cunning with which the slope of a hillside uncovers the peculiar structure of a whole landscape in a new and unexpected manner, or of the cunning of the gesture or word through which some important aspect of the development of humanity is embodied in a momentariness that appears accidental? Man is a responding creature; in every sphere his existence and activity express their greatness and their ability to progress not by subjectivist imaginings, which are without exception weak and particular, mirror images without perspective, but of course still mirror images of a clumsily grasped piece of reality, but precisely in their ability to reformulate the “cunnings” of reality into questions addressed to it; in that they are able, by analyzing them, to find that answer in which the questions that affect man regarding the development of humanity are clearly expressed. Art is the peculiar, at once contradictorily and inseparably individual and social, and therefore typical, type-creating manifestation of this general tendency. That is why a chapter could call it already in its tide the self-awareness of human progress. If we are able to discover the road of the human species and to utilize this for our own individual development, this is due not least to art, to the realizations of artistic reflection, in the same way as we could not progress as individuals either if our individual memory and the consciousness that grows out of it were not fixing, interpreting, and evaluating our own development.

In my aesthetic writings I aimed at determining the place and function of productive and receptive aesthetic conduct and theorizing within the real order of human actions. From this point of view the supposedly insoluble dualism of the bourgeois view of the world and of art prove to be pseudo-problems. I begin with the subjectivity-objectivity duality mentioned here. Man lives his individual life also in an external world which exists independently of him. Human practice, therefore, cannot know either pure subjectivity or pure objectivity. Even the most objective discovery is the product of great and original subjective endeavors, while subjectivity can only

become diverse and profound, full and productive, through the faithful discovery of objective reality. And since these activities of man always take place within the framework of social existence, unceasingly influencing each other, every abstract duality which interprets man, as an individual and as a social being, as rigid and exclusive contrasts, see for example Heidegger's view of man "thrown into" reality, is false. According to Marx man can even become isolated only in society. Not only loneliness, the inner need for solitude, but also its feasibility down to the most subtle questions of form are the products of social progress. Truly great art and its genuine experiencing equally reject both the sectarian-dogmatic view that the human essence can only truly manifest itself in directly social activities, as if what is called private life were only its, perhaps omissible, "adjunct," and that prejudice deriving from manipulated alienation that holds that the ego in itself can be the basis of its own success or failure. Marxism is separated from bourgeois sociology, milieu-theories, et cetera not only by its radical criticism of society and historicism, but also by the recognition of this dialectical unity of individual and society: it is human activity that shapes society and the objective motion of society can only be realized through individuals. It is as a social being that man could become a human individual, and not stay a mere natural entity.

The careful and unbiased reader of the pieces assembled here will probably notice that my attempts of fifty years ago — though with faulty and in complete foundations — guessed at such questions. This is what possibly justifies their publication in the company of more mature works. Perhaps it is not entirely unconnected that their fate always repeated a pattern through the greatest crises and inner transformations: if the beginnings were uncomfortable for official literary views and those of the *Nyugat* circle alike, then the many critics of my more mature years — with Laszlo Rudas at the one and Garaudy at the other pole — react to it in the same way. Therefore, to that extent, despite all the changes that took place, my development had a certain unity of direction.

Notes

1. Preface to a volume of selected writings, *Művészet és társaldom (Art and Society)* (Budapest: Magreto, 1968).

Art as Misunderstanding

György Lukács

"The first plan of an independent systematic aesthetics occurred to me in Florence in the winter of 1911/2. I worked on it in Heidelberg between 1912-14... Looked at from the outside this work was interrupted by the outbreak of the War." Thus Lukács, in the Preface to *Die Eigenart des Aesthetischen*, the major work of his old age. A few months before his death he handed three chapters of this early work, the only ones which, it was thought at the time, had survived, to some of his disciples, with the request that they prepare them for the printer as part of an edition of his early work. After his death, when looking through his papers, further parts of the manuscript were found, four chapters altogether. Some of the material is in holograph, some is typed, some is in both forms.

One thing is unambiguously supported by Lukács's correspondence of that period: the outbreak of the First World War only temporarily interrupted work on the "first" aesthetics. In 1915, after completing *The Theory of the Novel*, he went back to it, and started to rewrite the work as a whole on the basis of a plan that he had changed in many respects. The surviving material is really part of two works: the 1912-14 MS, one of the typed copies of which carries the title *Philosophie der Kunst*, and the 1915-17 one, which Lukács always referred to as the *Aesthetics*.

What follows is the first chapter of the 1912-14 *Philosophie der Kunst*.

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Any aesthetics which are to be set up without illegitimate assumptions must begin with the following question: "Works of art exist — how are they possible?" This formulation of the question, however, does not in itself provide the possibility of answering it. The manner in which the "fact" of art presents itself to us remains unclarified, despite the recognition of this facticity of art and the need to formulate the questions that consequently arise. The whole of the following argument depends on the extent to which we succeed in making clear the existence of the work of art as the one and only fact relevant to aesthetics, and thereby indicating the correct way of

progressing to further questions. If we now proceed to reflect on what the fact that works of art exist really means, we have to affirm that there are certain things created by man which, although they bear the mark of the personality that created them, are able to exercise a direct effect entirely independent of that personality through the force of their inherent complex of form and material: effects which in their nature as experience cannot be clearly differentiated from those of the ordinary world of experience, but which nonetheless show aspects of a normative attitude, that is, a reference to value.¹ There is little to object to in this determination of the work of art, of which the immanent complete-in-itself character (*In-sich-Vollendetsein*) of its structure and the direct yet normative manner of its effect are the essential features; only the actual viewpoint itself could be called in question, which regards the work as the “fact” of aesthetics and taking this fact as the point of departure attempts to construe aesthetics with the use of the Kantian formulation of the problem. Here, we have two other important possibilities. In the first place it is possible in theory that one does not wish to acknowledge aesthetic value in the work of art, not even in its highest or exclusively significant manifestations, but to find this value in a — consciously or unconsciously — metaphysically conceived concept of beauty, and one then proceeds to examine its objectivations in art and nature more closely, with the result that the only importance ascribed to the work of art is the realization of the aesthetic value and it remains an open question whether the work of art is a higher type of objectivation of beauty than nature. Or, in the second place, one can start from the types of human attitudes toward “the beautiful” (or, possibly, toward art) and attempt to discover the normative element in them, and then only acknowledge as art all those works which regularly evoke this normative attitude. It is certainly not our intention here to attack these two views, which in themselves give rise to many ramifications, nor to justify our question by criticizing them; the argument that follows should include the debatable points as well as the justification as an immanent whole, and it is only occasionally, when elucidating particular questions, that we intend to discuss contrary views more closely. At this point we are only trying to make the following introductory remarks.

The concept of “the beautiful” is undoubtedly of metaphysical origin. In a metaphysical systematization of the totality of existence this concept can certainly be treated purely in accordance with its hierarchical connection with concepts placed above it or subordinated to it, and its own specific objectivations (natural and artistic beauty) deduced from it. The only question is whether this system does not lead to the elimination of art, that is, to the result that the immanent enclosed-in-itself work of art, created by human effort, is bound to appear as something ephemeral, or even something to be rejected. The metaphysical justification of this view can only be decided in a different context; here it is only necessary to emphasize that such a metaphysical approach will not explain the fact of the existence of such works of art, but will only judge (or condemn) it. Our first concern here is to understand how

works of art are possible, and therefore, for methodological reasons, any view that cannot explain its admitted facticity must be rejected, and, as already mentioned, the metaphysical problem of art can only be discussed after its possibility and its essence have been apprehended. But if the systematic-metaphysical deduction of “the beautiful” (and from beauty, art) is not to be accepted as something that methodologically precedes aesthetic investigations, then the question must be asked: how do aesthetics, which are centered on the value of beauty, arrive at a clear concept of beauty at all? To infer the norm itself from the normative attitude is obviously a vicious circle, for how is one justified in investing certain types of attitude with the — unknown and undefined — value corresponding to the norms, and neglecting others, when the value itself, which makes this choice possible, has not yet been found? Nor — let us add — can it be found this way. Every new system of aesthetics that is less interested in the final metaphysical attitude to the “fact” of art than in the apprehension of its totality, is confronted with ever-increasing difficulties resulting from the historically intensified ambiguity of the concept of the beautiful. In the first place, beauty is only one element in the generally acknowledged aesthetic attitude; many others, the sublime, the comical, et cetera, are found in juxtaposition with it; secondly, the domain of validity of this central aesthetic value (in itself ambiguous) must not only cover the attitude toward art, but also the attitude toward nature. Two ways of clarification are possible here: either the metaphysical concept of beauty will be unconsciously selected as the guiding principle of choice, or the historically acknowledged types of attitude toward the work of art will be examined, and those attitudes toward nature that are similar to them will also be included in aesthetics. In the first case, a return has been made, in a veiled form, to deductive-metaphysical aesthetics, though due to the more imprecise premises put forward, in an essentially less lucid manner; in the second case, it is our original question that is formulated, but again more ambiguously. That natural beauty exists at all can only be demonstrated if either a receptive attitude toward nature is shown to be both necessary and regular, and necessarily identical with the attitude adopted toward works of art (and this attitude has to be assumed as already recognized), or if the objective inner structure of the beauty of nature and of the beauty of art is the same in its essence (and this could only be demonstrable in a metaphysical philosophy of nature, which however, even for the sake of a pure comparison, could avoid facing our question about the work of art). As we can see, the question of whether the methodology of aesthetics should be centered on the work of art or on the beautiful immediately brings the problem of natural beauty, which is the vital question for aesthetics as a whole, to the fore.

From a purely methodological point of view the problem can be formulated as follows: is there a necessary correspondence between the pure immanence of the aesthetic experience (the character of which we can consider, since Kant, as being clearly recognized) and an object adequate to it? If the answer is in the affirmative, two possibilities emerge. First, that natural beauty as an essential element must

be excluded from aesthetics, since in this case the immanence (the Kantian “disinterestedness”) is only the subjective attitude that necessarily corresponds to and originates from the intended and achieved immanence of the work of art, and a similar attitude towards “nature” depends entirely on a “fortunate coincidence” of events in nature which makes a similar attitude possible but — owing to its purely coincidental character — never necessary; at the most therefore there are experiences connected with nature that are like the aesthetically normative attitude, but there is no aesthetics of nature corresponding to an aesthetics of art. Second, that natural beauty is saved because it is the result of objective forces directed deliberately toward it, the aim of nature, the revelation of its essence, in a word because an aesthetics of nature exists and the categories which, because they deal with the objective structure of nature are part of the philosophy of nature, and because they create a normative-aesthetic structure, are aesthetically constitutive; in other words, aesthetics and the philosophy of nature coincide or at least jointly occupy a domain which is very important for both.

But if the question formulated above is answered in the negative, the correspondence between the objective immanence of the work of art and the subjective immanence of the aesthetic attitude has become accidental; nature, as well as art, can indeed evoke this immanence of the experience, but neither nature nor art necessarily evoke it. Art has thereby lost every value of its own: what it is able to accomplish is not its own necessary consequence, nor is it unique in accomplishing it. What is essential is the subjective immanence of the experience which as such is complete-in-itself (*in-sich-vollendet*), and which is only aroused by the object, but not produced; consequently, for the subject the decisive emphasis lies on the attitude itself, and in so far as the attitude does not remain enclosed-in-itself (*abgeschlossen*) it is a preparation for another subjective attitude: the ethical attitude. If, however, despite all this, the object here also takes on importance, it will rather be nature than art.

“But since it also interests reason... that nature should at least show some trace or give a sign that it contains in itself some ground for assuming a lawful correspondence of its products with our satisfaction that is independent of all interest... consequently the mind cannot reflect on the beauty of *nature* without finding itself at the same time to be interested in it” — says Kant.² Whether and how this also abolishes the immanence of the experience, how far it nonetheless demands an adequate object (the work of art) in order to be able to remain immanent can only be considered later. But one must emphasize at this point that the facticity of art can never be abolished by taking such a formulation of the problem as the starting point: that works of art (and a process of creation) exist remains a fact which can never be shown as necessary through the consequences of these assumptions. I am simply pointing out the leap in method which separates the passages written on genius — despite all the subtlety of these particular comments — from the fundamental sections of the “Critique of Judgment.” All that has been said so far already to a certain extent justifies the

raising of our problem, and even if it has not yet been proved that only in this way can a system of aesthetics be constructed that is devoid of inner contradictions (the proof of which will be provided by our contention as a whole), it nevertheless appears that the essence of art can only be understood in this manner. What remains to be demonstrated is only whether thereby the whole of aesthetics is exhaustively covered.

But if we concentrate our entire attention on art, a methodological danger still remains which has to be overcome before we can be in clear possession of the “fact” of art as given in all its clarity, in order to be able to proceed from that point to understanding it. The methodological danger is that art will be understood as the expression of the artist’s will, and its effect as the appropriate conclusion of an adequate process of communication. It is inherent in the “fact” of art that it is called forth by a human will seeking to achieve the work of art, and that the immediacy of its effect originates from “sensuous reception” (*Affiziertsein*), which is the immediacy of effect of the world of experience. If these two types, that is, the creative and the receptive, which are postulated as simultaneous in the existence of the work of art, and the process that extends from the creation and proceeds through the work of art to its enjoyment, are not investigated thoroughly enough, the “fact” of art can never appear in the genuine clarity necessary for further analysis. If, on one hand, the extreme improbability of the immanent perfection of the work owing its existence to a human (that is, frail and imperfect) act of creation and if, on the other hand, the remarkable character of the receptive attitude, that is, that as an experience it should correspond to eternally valid norms while retaining its immediacy, is not investigated, if therefore its inherently paradoxical character does not emerge from the whole of these facts (*Gegebenheitskomplexe*), then the serious methodological danger arises that art will be approximated too closely to the world of experience and its proper essence thereby misunderstood. The danger consequently arises that on one hand the creative process will appear as a simple, even if most intensive, continuation and completion of the process of communication taking place in the world of experience, and on the other that the work will appear as a mere vehicle of expression, which would again abolish the primary fact of its existence, its immanent enclosedness-in-itself (*In-sich-Abgeschlossenheit*). For the essence of art lies in this paradox, in its simultaneous nearness to and distance from the world of experience: if we acknowledge the existence of art we must at the same time clearly perceive the improbability of this existence and must neither approximate it too closely to other spheres of value, which would lead to false identifications and hide its genuine constitutive specificity, nor allow ourselves to postulate an equally disturbing, too close relationship between art and the world of experience, whereby both would be distorted in their most particular essence. Since our task at the moment is to maintain the “fact” of art as unclouded as possible, we must try to analyze it as it arises directly out of the ordinary world of experience, with the improbability that seems to be self-evident, and must — in so far as this is at all possible — assume nothing but the

existence of art and the existence of the world of experience, in order to show their mutual affinity and simultaneous distance.

We are, however, born into the world of experience as into something which cannot be eliminated and which can only be experienced as something self-evident. The ordinary kind of thinking therefore, which runs along clearly indicated lines to its conclusion in this reality unfolding before us in a historically given abundance, but which does not try to grasp reality in its true essence, sees everything that the historically given past of mankind has produced in an atmosphere of natural necessity and immunity from any kind of questioning. For such ordinary kind of thinking, and even more the immediate experience corresponding to it, the mere existence of something removes any real or imaginable problem. Works of art here appear self-evident, innate, friendly, and unquestioned; stimulants of a higher or lower order corresponding to all our moods are apparently to hand in a pleasant and easily accessible *harmonia praestabilita*. And the unbroken and unbreakable stream of a historically experienced continuity flows from works that have not completely achieved perfection, on which our critical acumen is advantageously sharpened, to the completely perfect works of art to which, in silence, our emotions surrender and cling; from our furniture to cathedrals, from trashy stories in newspapers to the *Divine Comedy*. In this continuity the value of the low stages is guaranteed by the indubitable value of the high stages, and their permanent connections provide us with a permanent communion with works of art, even those existing on the highest and most rarified level. From Hamann's mystical pronouncement that poetry is the mother tongue of mankind down to the silliest songs of hikers our whole world of experience is penetrated by an unshakeable faith in the power of art, binding people together, expressing their joys and sorrows, lightening their burdens and redeeming them. And taken in this broad context works of art cease to be isolated: all that the artists are trying to express in their works — adequate media of communication — flows to us in an unbroken and undistorted line and reaches us, and by virtue of these works the world surrounding us loses its often oppressive confusion and tormenting dumbness, and becomes simple, clear-cut, resonant, and self-evident. The great need men feel for communication, which is only a lessened form of their more profound longing for communion and unity with one another, here finds an abiding fulfillment in life and a positive confirmation of it. And this brotherhood of men with all other men, this answer given to the questions he asks by his world, by every man, and the whole of nature, breaks through the limitations imposed on him in space and time; he is freed from his sociological, national, and historical isolation, from his banishment to the world into which he was born, given to him as immediate experience. This human self-evidence of art thereby achieves an exalted meaning which goes far beyond the self-evidence itself: the possibility of the general and complete communicability of all that is human becomes manifested in art and is assured through its existence. As a consequence, however, art itself becomes only one vehicle of this communication

among many others. It is merely the organ through which the human soul predestined to genuine communication, that is, the genius, speaks; but what is important and decisive is the fact that such speech is possible, and the content of what is thus spoken. The work of art is still there, but it slowly disappears in this stream which murmurs from soul to soul; the outlines of its enclosed Being-for-itself (*Für-sich-sein*) increasingly dissolve, until finally nothing is left here but a kind of medium, mediating and obscuring. This is where the decisive aspect of this formation is to be discovered: the movement in which the work of art acts as a vehicle of communication must transcend the work itself; its meaning, which transcends what is agreeable and pleasant in the sphere of mere experience, abolishes the single real warrant of its existence: the work of art.

This is the great danger of defining art on the basis of such an experienced facticity; if art becomes the organ of the desire for unity, it ceases to be art, and is placed in a context which is at once based on it and abolishes it. The splendid but irresponsible flight of the spirit, from this longing for unity to its accomplishment, skips the all-decisive process by which this very longing is purified and made conscious of itself, and thereby loses the clarity necessary for a possible fulfillment. If, therefore, art for Schelling stands at the summit of the philosophical hierarchy “because it opens to him, as it were, the holy of holies, where burns in eternal and original unity, as if in a single flame, that which in nature and history is rent asunder, and in life and action, no less than in thought, must forever fly apart,” then the whole of philosophy and religion, which also strain for fulfillment, must flow into this prescribed goal.³ What was separate earlier, must unite, and the Utopian goal of thought, for which the brilliant completed perfection of art served as guide and signpost, is to be achieved in philosophy itself. But here however, despite the will of the thinker, springing from the immanent logic of this formulation of the question itself, art has abolished itself: all instances of its fulfillment are but small islands in a sea of isolation and in the struggle for unity; if the call to unite, addressed to thought from such islands, is heard, then the great stream in which all the elements are mixed together in final unity has washed away even its weak and temporary dams, and destroyed its existence — its lonely being-for-itself (*Für-sich-Bestehen*). To demonstrate that such a union is possible at all, the — indestructible — specific existence of art is the only indication and the only possible proof.

We must therefore abandon this reality and regard it from a distance, with alien eyes, in order to recognize this longing for union and its fulfillment — of which, to start with, art reveals itself as the noblest and only earthly real form — as naked facts, and to understand their true structure and true relationship to each other. The first consequence to emerge from such a changed standpoint, is that the completeness and adequacy of communication between men is an ingenuously believed but unproved and unprovable assumption. As soon as it goes beyond an attitude toward objects that is either based on real experience or is merely practical, this assumption proves to be

an ingenuous and untenable dogmatism, which, however, as a structural element of the pure world of experience, becomes at the same time its decisive and constitutive “regional” category. For the “reality” of this world consists precisely in the fact that nothing can occur in it that does not for the given moment adopt the character of the “experienced” and “experienceable,” subjective-reflective in character for the object, but solely constitutive for the subject of this reality. The profound difference that separates this domain from all others (from all types of knowledge as well as from the spheres of ethical or religious attitudes, and so on) is that in this sphere no maxims of a normative attitude toward the objects can be demonstrated; that due to the principles governing this sphere, no differences in value or validity between the different “experiences” of the most different people can be proved, that they always remain purely subjective and can never refer unequivocally to a common object which is guaranteed in some manner or other. The real differences between them are of quality and intensity, and the consequent attempt to range the different experiences of different people in order and compare them with one another is only possible by departing from the sphere of pure experience. The absence of limitations and contradictions in this sphere, which is so overwhelming that even “not-experience” can only appear as a form of experience, determines the vacillating and problematic communicability within it. For the essence of the experience can only be defined by the help of its qualitative specificity, in comparison with which every means of expression will be weak, abstract, distorting, and will ignore all that is essential.

This inconsistency between the material and the form of the expression originates from what is here the necessary absence of a normative attitude; every maxim through the acceptance of which homogeneity is achieved in any sphere presupposes a certain constitutive “belonging-together” and organic connection between the material occurring in it and the form that organizes this material. Subjecting oneself to the mastery of the maxim as one enters the sphere in question, one secures an absolute lack of ambiguity and absence of misunderstanding in it. Early Greek skepticism, which denied the unambiguous communicability of knowledge — as for instance in the third proposition of the *Gorgias* — and thereby denied the possibility of knowledge, which it considered to be extremely doubtful if not absolutely valueless, in the final analysis only referred to and was concerned with the world of experience, and not with knowledge. It was only because it was alien to the structure of the Greek spirit to make any strict division between experience and knowledge and to remove the subject and object as instruments of knowledge from the sphere of experience, that the exact description of the structure of the world of experience led to skepticism over the possibility of knowledge. For the difference between the signal and the thing signalled — for example, the word “color” and the image of “color” — only refers to the world of experience: the color which is communicated in the sphere of logic has nothing in common with the experience of the senses, and even less with the differences which are perceived concerning their quality by different individuals.

Through the will to truth, the subordination of the subject to the maxims of logic, a sphere has come into being in which the concept of “color,” as the material of the logical forms, has lost all the qualitative differences of its capacity to be experienced; it was bound to lose them, since the logical subject is postulated simultaneously with the will for logic, and this has no longer anything to do with the qualitative differences originating from the empirical subject.

If, on the other hand, one individual wishes to communicate to another his experience of a certain color, then the discrepancy between the signal and the thing signalled, as recognized by Gorgias, becomes clear: then the signal is something abstract, something transferred, which can never catch precisely what matters, what constitutes the experiential character of the thing experienced; it can never catch its special quality. There can never be any guarantee or control that the man expressing his experience has actually expressed his experience and that his communication has been understood; for if — to take the simplest case — he points out to the other individual the object itself that gave rise to the experience, then the only demonstrable fact is that two individuals experienced something in front of one and the same object and that they could describe their experience in the same words. But words are equally inadequate for the expression of qualities of experience, and it will never be demonstrable whether even in such a case the two have had the same experience or only approximately the same. Unambiguity can only be achieved if the communication of this quality is consciously relinquished and the conceptual vehicle of communication, which is abstract as opposed to qualitative, is willed as such; if an unambiguous and homogeneous sphere, defined by maxims, emerges. Each of these groups of maxims, however (the axioms and postulates of geometry come to mind) contains — viewed from the aspect of its capacity to be experienced — something arbitrary, often even something that appears to be conventional, something that neglects and violates precisely what the experience is concerned with; a reaction which is the exact opposite of the aim of logic, which is the endeavor to keep its assumptions, elements, and connections free from every criterion of experience and from every comparison with it. What is involved in both cases is the necessary self-regulation of these spheres, their involuntary tendency to elaborate everything that appears in them in accordance with their own structure, and to treat everything opposed to them as non-existent (for them). As a consequence, the necessary contradiction between the qualitative non-comparability of pure experience and any sort of conceivable expression — which, if it is to be an expression, already presupposes something in common between the two subjects of the mutual communication — is established and recognized as an essential characteristic of this sphere.

The contradiction within this sphere becomes of course obscured and only very rarely comes to light. But the reasons for this lack of clarity are widely various. On one hand, a whole body of experiences of this reality are connected with ordinary practical activities, for most of which the banal and abstract conceptualization suffices. Since

the experience translated into act is far more important in this connection than the experience itself, the question of whether the act of a subject corresponding in its consequences to the intention of another experiencing subject was indeed motivated by a will to understand what is subjectively essential in the intention cannot and will not be examined here. The consonance between intention and result is quite sufficient here, and only in the event of failure may the problem of “not being understood” arise; and even this will not necessarily happen since there are so many more practical motives available (malevolence, incapacity, et cetera) to explain a failure, and because the subject is too interested in the practical success of his intention to reflect on those reasons for failure beyond the practical sphere. On the other hand, all sorts of elements of realities already assimilated into homogeneity, colorfully mixed and boundlessly diminishing, occur in the world of experience, and normative attitudes such as the aesthetic, the religious, and so on, also demand a certain kind of capacity for being experienced that is apparently situated on the direct line extending from the world of experience. To this must be added every form of hasty intellectualism rushing toward the goal without realizing the difficulties, which regards as essential only what can be expressed conceptually, and only too speedily leaves the sphere of pure quality behind with its problems unsolved, believing it can be treated as a mere negligible quantity. The investigation of this reality is consequently almost always left to psychology, which as a science cannot have any resources to deal with the intrinsic nature of this world, nor needs any for its own purposes, and which cannot grasp our problem of the structure of this sphere at all, since an adequate power of expressing experience is a necessary and fruitful methodological assumption of psychology.

The decisive reason lies however in the essence of the world of experience itself: it is the condition “natural” to man, from which he must violently break away in order to reach one of the homogeneous spheres, for example, that of normative-ethical attitudes, to which he constantly tries to return as if by a kind of law of gravitation of the *creatura*, constantly trying to obliterate the signs of contradiction between this world and all others, in order to make the transitions easier for himself. This is the reason why the locked-in existence (*In-sich-eingesperrt-sein*) of the merely experiencing man only very rarely becomes conscious. The most alluring, enchanting, and artful aids are employed to cover the inadequacy of the content and means of expression. First of all there are the gestures and shades of accentuation which can be used in men’s communication with one another, in conversation for instance, with its varied and unlimited possibilities of minute and delicate differentiation and with its great elasticity and readiness to grasp the essential, the specific in the other individual. But no sensibility to impressions in any way proves that what is concealed behind these impressions, the experience that has brought them about and which they are designed to express, has indeed been understood; however acute and fine the complexity of the system of signals may become, these refinements will never overcome its fundamentally paradoxical character. To this must be added the

theoretically-based opposition of the self-contained, abstract concept to the intuition that completely grasps the otherwise unexpressible quality of the essence. It is, however, constantly forgotten that the emphasis laid on the exclusively constitutive force of intuition is precisely what destroys its communicability; the more the concept is reduced to something abstract, to something alien to the “essence,” the more hopeless it seems even to hint at the “essential,” at the proper content, through those instruments of language related to the concept. But that such intuition, thus condemned to dumbness, is the same in all men — that is, that the same metaphysical essence of the external world is its object, and individuals who are essentially the same in their receptive quality, whose identity is only disguised by the obscuring medium of the abstract means of expression, are its subjects — is something that can be asserted but never proved. Under the instigation of a primitive instinct of self-preservation nothing is consequently left untried in order to conceal this abyss. And practical reality with all its devices, which can only weaken but never abolish the pure appearance of what is experienced, meets this effort: within its feeble intensity everything appears to function faultlessly, and only rarely, in sad periods of great loneliness, man becomes conscious of this discord of the world of experience, and then only subjectively, since it is only “experienced,” not understood. “All these things are different, and the words which we use are different again,” says one of Hofmannsthal’s heroines.

It is not our task here to examine the extent to which this situation may influence ethical or religious behavior; in this context only the following single question is important: whether signs, in the widest and most comprehensive sense of the word, are in any way capable of expressing the quality of the experience. If this question is put clearly, that is, if by expression is understood the perfect unambiguity of the means of expression, its absolute adequacy to material and content, and the just as unquestionable power to check and control whether what was to be communicated has in fact been communicated, then this possibility must be denied the very moment the question is formulated. We are bound to affirm that we have no means of checking it at all, nor are we able to think of a means by the help of which it would be possible to establish whether a relation of similarity or even identity exists or does not exist between two experienced qualities, between the expressed and the received. The paradox of the means of expression, from which this impossibility stems, is as follows: either these means of expression are directed towards unambiguity and the ability to be controlled and checked, in which case they are abstract concepts and inadequate to the purely qualitative content; or they are adequate as qualitatively-nuanced signs and indications designed to express quality, and then it is impossible to establish whether they really communicate what was intended — unequivocally, unmistakably, and without any distortion. The fact that motor reactions appear to harmonize the accord in the moods of different people in certain situations in life cannot be here accepted as an argument, since all possibilities of controlling or verifying it are lacking; every

view that sees as the explanation of adequate communicability the same qualitative substance in these single qualitative subjects of experience — a substance comparable to ordinary experience and experienceable — assumes a metaphysics, which in this sphere can never be proved, since the paradox of content and form is just as valid for it as it is for the non-metaphysical investigation, and cannot be eliminated by simply postulating an integral substance behind the conceptual world. Nor can religious or quasi-religious experiences serve here as proof. The religious attitude of the soul creates a homogeneous sphere with normative, universally valid maxims, just as the ethical, logical, or aesthetic attitude does; it must therefore similarly possess an unambiguous communicability *sui generis* of its proper contents; but how these contents are constituted, what the content and the form of this communication are, can only be determined through the analysis of its specific structure. It is certainly inadmissible to imagine a kind of communication that might possibly be shown as also realized in the pure world of experience.

What we therefore have to find and to grasp as a fact of this structural interconnection is the ineradicable longing for communication, the universal belief that one has really communicated or received what was intended to be communicated, the dawning dismay on occasion that all means of expression are inadequate, and the vehement longing to bridge or to forget the gap which has thus come into being. To this is opposed the previously mentioned paradox of all means of expression in relation to pure quality, and the fact that the sum total of all that has been communicated nonetheless coalesces into a continuity and coherence experienced as self-evident. This fact of communication imposes on us a new concept of form, as the means of expressing the experience. Since the self-evident adequacy and immanent homogeneity of the forms of expression have been shown to be deceptive, we must first adequately clarify the premises of this concept through the separate analysis of expression and impression, in order to recognize its true structure. Considered from the aspect of reception, understanding of the signs, the form of expression proves to be something directed toward the power to evoke. Every communication may evoke in us a certain experience of a purely qualitative, subjectively non-comparable character, which we project into its point of departure — the communicating subject — and re-experience as his experience, since it was produced in us by the form of expression reaching us from without — and by its originator. The more intense this re-experience, the more spontaneous is this process of projection, and — with the sole exception of certain purely practical-emotional counter-effects which cannot be considered here — this intensity is taken by the subject as the criterion of understanding with regard to reception. The form as expression of the experience follows a similar approach, seeking to evoke and intensify; but here the drive to influence the other is of an even more purely emotional character. On one hand the degree of perfection in the communication is achieved by the accompanying feeling that one has really expressed oneself, a feeling which is determined by an experience

of similar intensity to the original experience, combined with the emotional aspect of the dynamics of expression; and on the other it is tested and controlled by the intensity of the reaction expressed in the manifest impression exerted on the recipient. We see in consequence that the essential experience of the ability to communicate and be understood depends on the spontaneity and intensity of the direct effects and counter-effects, which for their part are functions of the evocative force displayed in the forms of the expression. From the direct and never penetrable nature of the sphere of experience, therefore, follows the unavoidable illusion that a strong, rich, and spontaneous impression is the mark and warrant of genuine communication. The continuity of the world of pure experience provides another pragmatic and as far as the direct experience is concerned, even stronger guarantee. Since everything (even the absence of an experience) is still somehow an experience, an unbreakable continuity and solidity is engendered, which on account of its capacity to persist, on account of its functioning, appears to offer guarantees for the unproblematical nature of its basic structure. But this functioning is — like all pragmatic proofs — no real proof; that is, it can only demonstrate that there are structural conditions of the forms of experience in the world of pure experience that determine the practical stability, akin to ordinary experience, of this sphere; but that these forms of experience are based on, or have as their consequence, the communicability of the genuine content and the decisive quality of the experience can never be proved in this way. The subtle and profound Eastern tale of Togrul Bey and his children (from *The Book of the Forty Viziers*) illustrates most effectively what is meant here. At the court of an Oriental ruler, it runs, a Christian prelate asks questions through gestures, which finally only a dervish is able to answer, also through gestures; and they part in the belief that they have mutually understood each other, whereas both gave an entirely different content to their signs. But since the signs corresponded exactly to their mutual expectations, each saw in the gestures of the other (although their intended content was entirely different) the answer to his question. This continuity, resulting from “filling up” every foreign sign with one’s own quality of experience and from projecting the latter as the real ground of continuity into the bearer of the sign, maintains itself by the fluidity of its contents and the volatility of its forms. As long as this continuity is not brutally interrupted, everything that contradicts the expectations of the subject can nevertheless be absorbed because, as the consequence of the new experience, both the expectations of future experiences and the memories of the expectations of past experiences shift their positions toward each other in a more or less smooth transition and adjust to the altered circumstances. Thus the continuity of the world of experience has become possible precisely as a result of the steady flow of its determined and determinable content, and this fluidity is connected with the fact that it is bound to the subjective quality of the direct experience; and the empirical, experiencing subject, as long as this is possible, does not go beyond it. This indeterminate immediacy is his natural life-element as an empirical subject,

and this continuity appears sufficient for his existence: all impressions of a wide and colorful external world can be directly received by him, and the subject's incapacity to experience something outside his own quality of experience is not experienced by him as a state of being locked into the prison of his own individuality. And it has been shown that the more subtle and differentiated this particular quality of his experience is, the less it appears a prison to the individual, the less he feels the need to go beyond the immediacy of pure experience — in a word, solipsism — in order to achieve — mediate — a sphere of communion. But the external reality that presents itself to be experienced repeatedly destroys this continuity, and even the most emphatic will to remain within this continuity is countered by the course of the external world: the continuity can be destroyed with such violence and brutality that the smooth transition from expectations to memories and vice-versa can no longer be maintained, and the experiencing individual becomes aware of the reflective nature of his experiences, finding no object and only and always expressing his own subjectivity, and conscious of the fact that his coherent world is thus disappearing from his sight, and that he is faced with a reality which has become empty and meaningless. The most momentous and most clearly visible break in the continuity of experience is death: it is the main reason why there is no man in existence who never leaves the continuity of world of experience in order to find safety in a world of interconnected, equalized subjects, in a world of "togetherness" and homogeneous forms. Which is why Schopenhauer was able to say: "Death is the real inspiring genius or Musagetes of philosophy.... Indeed, without death there would hardly have been any philosophizing."⁴

But we are not here concerned so much with the effect of the awareness of his own death on the experiencing subject as with the deaths of the other individuals who intervene through all their qualitative falsifications in the life of the subject in question. In the introductory pages to my essay on Beer-Hofmann (in *Soul and Form*) I have tried to outline the phenomenology of this interruption of the world of experience: the alien character of the other man to us is suddenly revealed in his death,

because the illusion of understanding another person is fed only by the renewed miracles, the anticipated surprises of constant companionship... The sense of belonging together is kept alive only by continuity, and once this is destroyed, even the past disappears; everything one person may know about another is only an expectation, only potentiality, only wish or fear, acquiring reality only as a result of what happens later.... [E]very rupture not only cuts off the future for all eternity, but also destroys the entire past.⁵

This is precisely why death is nothing special or isolated: it only surpasses in intensity and finality “the thousand estrangements and pitfalls that may occur in any conversation between friends.”⁶ For the continuity of the world in the world of experience is only necessary for the experiencing subject, and its warrant lies only in the broad, flexible, qualitatively a priori character of the experiencing subject in so far as the possibilities of experience are concerned. There is no guarantee that the world of the realized experiences is somehow adequate to this subjectivity, while there are very weighty reasons to assume the contrary. Every individual is thus continually constrained to leave the world of experience; when its continuity is broken it appears as a dream, the worlds of togetherness as well as the worlds of true reality. This awakening however, is the abandonment of immediacy (logical thought, ethical action according to maxims, and so on), and immediacy is always felt by the subject to be his proper home.

Art, it seems, is predestined to fill this gap: all the volatility and fluidity of the sphere of mere experience has been left behind by art, which has risen to an objectivity far above men and eras, and the lonely subjects meet and unite in its direct effects. Art seems to be the sphere in which directness of effect is not achieved at the expense of its unambiguity, and as a consequence every fear and anxiety about the individual being imprisoned in his subjectivity seems to be eliminated: it appears to be only an incapacity for expression, an empirical, negotiable obstacle that separates the subjects from each other; the perfect man, the artistic genius bursts these walls asunder and can communicate himself fully and completely. As Goethe put it: “When in their anguish other men fall silent / A god gave me the power to tell my pain.”⁷

That such a desire in relation to art had to arise is understandable, but this insight is no argument that the hope is well founded. For in what does art differ from the other forms of communication of the world of experience — if we take it as a direct act of expression of the process of communication — if not in the essential point, in the unambiguous ability to check and control whether it was indeed the content to be communicated that had really been communicated? Its signs equally are only signs, and are burdened with the same perplexing curse of being signs, and the experience of its effect is — from the aspect of the world of experience — superior to other experiences only in intensity. Otherwise art provides no guarantee in itself that it has truly and without distortion communicated the “essence” of the experience that lies behind it, which it “expresses.” On the contrary, the more direct and the more profound is its effect, the more certain it becomes that precisely in regard to the certain unambiguity of its content art as expression and experience cannot differ from other types of experience: the essential stamp of the really profound effect of art is precisely that in it the experiencing subject finds himself at his most profound, that he experiences everything manifest in the work of art precisely as the manifestation of his most personal being, even if his personality appears to expand into a whole world. It is impossible to produce any evidence, or even a method of

seeking such evidence, to prove that this profound experience is identical in its quality or its content with the experience that engendered the work of art. What persuades the feelings that it is impossible for such a deep and genuine feeling to be irrelevant or even misleading brings the effect of art very close indeed to the process of communication of the world of experience, where the illusion exists that the evocative force of the forms of communication guarantees their capacity for genuine communication. Where this illusion was not recognized as an illusion, owing to the fact that the experiencing subject continued to remain in the sphere of experience and the true vehicle of communication was seen in the evocative force, the effects of art could be considered, almost without any transition, as straight extensions of the natural capacity to receive impressions. This was bound to give rise to views such as those of Hemsterhuis, that beauty is what gives us the greatest number of ideas within the shortest time. But in such a view, in which art was taken as the adequate expression of a common and communicable substance, the work of art itself had to be increasingly bypassed as a mere vehicle for this process of communication, and art degraded to a process of communication between those who create and those who enjoy.

Only if this illusion is recognized as both an illusion and a general and indispensable element in the communication of experiences can we arrive at the possibility of grasping this form conceptually. Once it has been shown that communication giving adequate expression to a content cannot be demonstrated, another guarantee will have to be sought for the irreducible fact and functioning of expression, whatever shape it takes. The form of communication will then be examined more closely and a schema discovered in it which is no more than an abstract and consequently inadequate sign, but is nevertheless a sign for the experience, and which therefore disposes of a certain power to arouse new experiences and evoke the intensity of experience. The essence of this schema is determined by its supremely qualitative and immediate character, by the circumstance that all that is general, abstract, and conceptual in it is only a necessary evil, by the fact that the more concretely it is formed the more capable it is functionally to impress and express. Both the relatively high subjective assurance with which minute and undoubtedly quite unintended details of the manifestation seem the most accurately to describe and reveal a personality (the entire Lermolieff method used to determine the attribution to painters of pictures of dubious authorship is based on this presupposition) and the strong human belief in "togetherness" and in mutual understanding, which springs precisely from these elements and not from the rational or rationalizable elements of the form of communication, indicates this in no ambiguous fashion. Forms of communication that are abstract, deliberate, and open to control are at the same time only adequate for purely practical purposes, that is, for the lowest and weakest functions of the sphere of experience. It is through this that the specific character of this form, the fact that it is clearly reaching for the qualitative, but never succeeding, is recognizable, but the necessary consequence of

this character is a misunderstanding of the content of every expression.

The paradoxical structure of this schema lies in the fact that it satisfies the illusion of the communication of content and simultaneously makes this communication impossible. This specific character of the form is due to the fact that the qualitative a priori nature of the experiencing personality expressing its experience produces its effect as a quality and an intensity, that is, as something completely concrete in the schema, and is consequently capable of transmitting intensity and evoking the quality of the experience. The quality and intensity, however, belong to the person to whom the experience is communicated, by which they become his quality and his intensity, from which the experience of the communicator differs in principle. For, compared to pure experience, every expression is inadequate, a schema, but this schema achieves a quality *sui generis* in every experiencing individual, a quality which is essentially only the projection of the subjectivity of the person who experiences into the “bearers” of his experience; it is the direct *Weltanschauung* of the individual, the coloring, the stamp that the whole of the world he experiences receives from him. The power of this schema to transform the experience proves that we are here dealing with an experience that is a priori: where other persons are concerned, everyone only directly experiences his own possibilities of action, feeling, et cetera, and he can only become aware of a motive that is entirely alien — in quality and possibility — to his own psyche in the event of very high intellectual powers and a low intensity of experience. The breadth and intensity of this schema are naturally completely different in different personalities, but every schema comprises the whole world that can be experienced by the subject in question; nothing can become existent for the subject that is not transformed by the schema. The breadth of his schema (for the experiencing subject) therefore, represents the breadth of the world, and the degree of his intensity represents the limits of the possibility of human experience. So that if a man speaks, for instance, of the deepest and strongest feelings, he means the highest intensity of feelings that he is capable of experiencing; and depth, strength, and so forth, mean the corresponding qualities of experience marked out by his schema. And if the subject encounters experiences that are very alien to his ordinary being, the functioning of his schema nevertheless continues: the “bearers” of these experiences are “equipped” with more remote and hidden possibilities of his own quality of experience, as long as his schema holds good, and the schema will thus be re-experienced directly within the quality determined a priori of the experiencing subject. Men of whom even this direct interpretation is impossible will be experienced by the subject of the world of experience as “pathological,” “morbid,” “obsessed,” et cetera. (It is hardly necessary to emphasize that this meaning of pathological as a synonym for the non-re-experienceable only refers to the directly experiencing subject and has nothing in common with the medico-psychological meaning of this concept.)

The subject’s urge for communication is determined by the same motive, but

this urge necessarily shows itself in a different way: the expressing subject will involuntarily try to express the qualitatively specific character of his experience by means more closely connected with his qualitative a priori experience, the use of gestures, nuances of accent, and so on than through the words that stem from the sphere of the community. This, however, makes for the inexorable necessity of misunderstanding. In the first place, only the quality of the experience can be expressed or suggested by this qualitative means of expression; words, which are always comparatively abstract and inadequate, are nevertheless indispensable to indicate its content. In the second place, these qualitative and “quality-free” elements of expression are mixed in the expression itself into a new unity, in which they cannot be disentangled from one another, and in which the relation of the abstract sign to the quality wrestling for expression will necessarily be different for those who receive and for those who communicate; a word for instance is chosen to denote an experience because this word is full of memories that refer to the speaker’s experiences, while the listener finds the word in question either entirely void of experience or associates his own experiences with it, and as a result the word acquires an entirely different accent from the one intended by the speaker; and since he also cannot disregard the unity of word and accentuation, the interpretation is brought into relation with his own experience. And in the third place, the effect of a qualitative means of expression can never be anything but an impression, an experience (this being also the intention of the speaker); but in so far as the experience of the listener is also concerned, everything that has been said of the experience of the speaker applies to him likewise; he can only experience his own quality of experience. The intensity of the experience can be transmitted, even if it includes the subjective projection of his own quality of experience, and this naturally appears to be a sign that the isolation of the experiencing subject is not quite as complete as has been shown in our analysis. And if we have to emphasize once again that the experience of intensity is also only an experience of one’s own intensity, it nevertheless seems that a certain kind of “togetherness” is here established which indicates that the conditions of the experience in general, or at least part of them, are common to all subjects.

It must not be forgotten, however, that the ability to transfer the intensity is also an evocation and not a communication, that it depends to a limited extent only on the real intensity of the experience and much more on the motor-emotional experience-awakening force of the means of expression, by now almost independent; that these means of expression possess — to a certain extent — the capacity to evoke strongly an intensity only faintly present in the experience, and that if they possess no motor-emotional force they are incapable of indicating, even if the quality itself is distorted, the real intensities of experience. To this must be added the impenetrability of the means of expression: if an intensity takes effect it is almost impossible to decide whether this springs from the experience or is generated by the means of expression; for the experiencing subject the experience that is being communicated and its

communication are inseparably interwoven. This possibility of transmission can therefore only refer to a quite abstract species-community, which is most important for the structure of certain spheres of activity (for example, the laws governing the motor-emotional evocation of intensity for aesthetics), but cannot constitute any real communion of the subjects within the world of pure experience.

This almost completely fluid nature of the means of expression is nevertheless essentially moderated and corrected by the continuity of the world of experience and its subjective equivalent and organ, memory. If the impressions that one subject of this sphere receives from another seem to converge into an intuitively ordered total picture (which may be formulated intellectually as well as expressed emotionally, for instance, through an assured presentiment of how the personality in question might act, feel, et cetera, in a certain situation) then something can be seen in it that appears to eliminate this isolation. Our former analysis of this continuity, however, was perhaps convincing enough to make it clear that a guarantee that one's most personal direct experience could be transmitted was sought in vain in this sphere as well. We have seen how unstable, fleeting, and precarious this convergence really is, however certain it may appear to be to the feelings. And we must add that even through the highest forms of perfection that have been achieved, the only thing that can be demonstrated is that the qualitative a priori of the experience is capable of embracing men as a whole and intricate totalities, of penetrating them with its own quality and intensity, and in this way its own subject is enriched with the interrelated reflections of other subjects. All this, however, can only possess the particular quality of the subject himself. It is not produced by any intuition that breaks through the a priori of the experience and reaches the other being, but can only be a product of the a priori itself: the prison of one's own individuality has expanded into a world — but has nevertheless remained a prison. (This is of course no argument against the possibility of a religious intuition: such an intuition refers to the objects of the religious sphere, and concerns — still on this subject — the “soul” of the individual; but there is no proof, here at least, that this “soul” is identical with the world of experience of the immediately given subject. Even if a religion existed that completely identified the concept of the soul with that of the experiencing subject, it would also only be evidence of the unambiguity of direct communication within, and *sub specie*, religious forms, and would only have their object but not their structure in common with the process of communication of the world of experience.) The paradox in the communication of experiences is that every means of expression develops its own independence and acquires its own laws; insofar as the only possibility of communicating what is immediately given in the experience is the evocative force of the forms of communication, the latter achieve an independent life. They acquire the power of arousing experiences, but do not thereby release the communicating subject from the prison of individuality, because the intensity of his experience only creates its own independent forms, but does not break through his limitations; and for the

recipient, they can only enrich his own world, but can never abolish the fact that it is locked into itself and so never allow qualities which are foreign to it to infiltrate.

This is the profound misery and ineradicable loneliness of men of the world of experience; any approach to something “general” in expression makes expression impossible from the very beginning, and what is really his “own” is given, through the fact of expression, a form independent of and separated from the communicating subject, from his will and essence, a form that possesses its own dialectics, its own independent factors of efficacy and, in addition, an impenetrable immanence. For the cruel and insidious trick of this form is precisely to press the urge for communications toward the greatest intensity in what is purely qualitative, bestowing on the latter the ravishing and alluring power of immediate effect; but the form never allows the effect, the effector, and the effected to achieve a communion and a genuine fulfillment — precisely as a result of the vehicle of the effect, the non-comparable nature of the qualitative — but rather leaves it to languish in the perpetual *chiaroscuro* of the not-quite.

Solipsism is thus — as has been made clear in the preceding analysis — the conceptual formulation of the inner structure of the world of experience, and every logic that grows out of this world or intends to return into it is forced to leave unsolved the logical possibility of solipsism as something irrefutable as well as barren. Solipsism is in Schopenhauer’s words “a small frontier fortress. Admittedly, the fortress is impregnable, but the garrison can never sally forth from it, and therefore we can pass it by and leave it in our rear without danger.”⁸ This shaky position can only be superseded by the power of the conceptual, which has definitively separated itself, relying on its own force and substantiality, from the world of experience. Whether this independent meaning of the concept, as the form of logic and the vehicle of its demonstrable and general determination, has a methodological or metaphysical overtone does not matter here; what is important is neither that the logical general validity should attempt in some way or another to master this heterogeneity of the subjects, nor that a connecting medium for the isolated subjects in the world of experience should be seen in the meta-subjective logical medium of togetherness and unambiguity that has been achieved. For on one hand, this would confuse the two spheres and burden logic with insoluble problems, which by their nature are not part of logic, and on the other, the real structure of the world of experience would be obscured and the homogeneous spheres of activity that are related to experienceability (for example, aesthetics) would be loaded from the outset, through a false concept of experience, with barren and confusing assumptions. However, neither for any normative science nor for the individual man wrestling for clarity (that is, neither phenomenologically nor psychologically) is this sharp and exact division of the world of experience and the normative sphere simply given, and the position of the world of experience, with the temptation of its immediacy and the danger of loneliness, remains an eternal problem for any system.

Whether achieving distance from experience means a — religious-metaphysical — escape into logic and ethics, or whether, once the existence of a logic and ethics entirely independent of the world of experience has been secured, a new approach is made as a foundation for a system of aesthetics or a philosophy of religion, is a detail which need not concern us here. If we nevertheless indicate a few types of solution it is only because we desire to clarify the relationship between aesthetics and the world of experience more effectively.

For Greek rationalism, the urge to escape from the world of experience was so clear and strong at this point that for it the ascent into a genuine communicability, no longer exposed to misunderstanding, was accompanied by the metaphysical overtone of participation in the Good, since it appeared impossible for man, entangled in the isolation of a world directly given to his senses, to save himself without higher help. So in the concept of the Good in which the soul can participate, a new homogeneous, and therefore adequately communicable substance emerged; and the approach to it, the growth of communicability, developed into an ethical-metaphysical hierarchy; in which the more the flickering, uncertain, and deceptive mass of what is experienced, what is non-existent, recedes, the more the isolation and separation of men caused by it ceases, and a genuine communion among them proceeds to flourish. “That is why pure and very good people have a much closer relationship with one another,” wrote Plotinus.

Kant, who clearly recognized the qualitatively non-comparable character of “passive” sensibility and its consequence in the lack of capacity to communicate, and based his logic and ethics on the “activity” and “spontaneity” of the logical and the ethical attitudes, sought a foundation for his aesthetics in the concept of taste (*Geschmack*) as *sensus communis*, a mediation between the worlds of norms and of experiences. The process of the rapid abandonment of everything touched with sensuality, the longing return home of the soul, defiled, and lonely through its defilement, to the unity of the concept, seemed rather frivolous and somewhat acrobatic to thorough, clear-sighted Kant. He investigated whether attitudes which were very like everyday experience existed, which could and had to be “expected of everyone” and which therefore might be assumed and — by their presence — proved that “in all human beings, the subjective conditions of this faculty, as far as the relation of the cognitive powers therein set into action to a cognition in general is concerned, are the same.”⁹ If the question is thus formulated, the necessity for which we shall grasp later from Kant’s system, our problem is once again evaded, even if not so crudely as in the case of Plotinus, and not solved. For what saves Kant from this ambiguity is not the attitude of the experiencing subject, but that of the person judging certain groups of experience; an attitude of logic. When he defines “taste” as what makes “satisfaction in the object... universally communicable, even without the mediation of concepts,” the formulation “without the mediation of concepts” (*ohne Begriff*) only denotes the provisional character, the slow struggle for clarity at this

stage, and not something positive.¹⁰ And its certainty, unambiguity, and therefore its communicability, are guaranteed by its unconscious but strong urge for and urge toward genuine purity, that is logic and ethics, and by its character as a judgment and its postulation of general validity; by its assumptions “being subjective conditions for the possibility of perception as such” which have to be the “same” for all men. The shortest description of the circle that has been covered here is perhaps the following: the general communicability of this attitude, which is indicated by the demand it addresses to everyone, is proved by the form of judgment of the expression and of its necessarily general and unambiguous (but just as necessarily logical) assumptions; and in consequence of the identification of the “attitude” itself with the judgment on this attitude, this universal communicability can be attributed to the attitude itself.

But in this connection we have to ask: can the general validity of what is called the aesthetic judgment have any other basis than the logical one, even if it shows a nuance of its own as a result of the aesthetic material which is to be judged? If this question has to be answered in the negative, which seems to us unavoidable, it becomes clear, first, that the attitude expressing a judgment of taste (*Geschmacksurteil*) is already orientated toward a value; it has left the sphere of experience and has transferred back to this sphere the security which had been gained by leaving it, and has thus generalized the justified sphere of validity beyond reasonable measure; second, that any identification of the experience of taste and the judgment of taste, or even placing them too closely in proximity to each other, is inadmissible; third, it becomes clear that the universal Kantian postulate (“it is expected of everyone”) appears to be more demonstrable only by virtue of an ethical-logical interpretation to which it is not entitled, the longing for the elimination of isolation and the illusion that it is eliminated, which we analyzed earlier, and which we found to mean nothing and to refer to nothing. With Kant also the misunderstanding of the form of expression occurs through not entirely consciously leaving the world of experience, through the intellectualization of its structure. Formulated in these terms our question would sound approximately as follows: does the universal communicability of the judgment of taste offer any guarantee for a uniformity of how it is interpreted, of the experiences on which this judgment is based; that is, for the termination of the misunderstanding that we consider necessary and constitutive? This question cannot as yet even be asked here; and we cannot take the possibilities of communication discovered by Kant into consideration at all in solving our problem.

Kant’s arguments do of course contain the highly important beginnings of a fertile analysis of the structure of the world of experience. In such an analysis the negative overtones of communicability, which we have strongly stressed, remain less negative than in the present inquiry. What the positive, cohesive structural conditions in this sphere are would have to be clarified (for example, the relationship of the qualitative a priori of experiences to the empirical personality, its continuity, and the possibility of their change in connection with memory, et cetera). And, in the first

place, whether there are not certain, even if abstract, common traits in this a priori character constituting the personality that may explain the continuity of the world of experience, et cetera). Not only this problem of ours — how communication is not secured — would have to be solved, but also the question how it is in fact secured.

But we ourselves are interested in something else: we have not analyzed the possibility of expression and understanding in the world of experience as being-in-itself, but in order to establish its relations to the foundation of a system of aesthetics. The place of aesthetics in philosophy and through it the metaphysical role of art in the universe is decisively determined by this relationship: the effect of art in its immediacy appears to be closely related to the receptive experience, and highly illuminating theories of artistic creation can be constructed which see in this relationship nothing more than a purer and more intensive form of communication. But in that case a sphere of value has been attained that stems directly from the world of experience, and is not only supported in its objective and general validity by the created work of art, but also — due to the adequacy of the process of communication in the work of art — possesses in the finally independent vehicle of the perfected communication an organ transcending all subjectivity and capable of grasping directly the meaning of the world (*Weltsinn*). The aesthetics of Schelling, Hegel, and Schopenhauer should be enough to make this metaphysical overestimation of art clear; and in the final analysis the position adopted by Plato and Plotinus towards art is based on a similar viewpoint (which, however, will be discussed in more detail elsewhere).

What concerns us here is no more than that this destroys the consummation and independence of artistic creation, and consequently the autonomy of aesthetics. If aesthetics is to be a science in its own right and not a propaedeutic course for the study of metaphysics or the philosophy of religion, it must take its point of departure from the presupposition, or alternatively seek presuppositions, that make a genuine self-enclosed meaning possible for the ultimate value of aesthetics — the work of art. As long as this is possible, aesthetics must hold fast to all the immanence within its domain. It should only abandon the possibility of its immanence if it should be proved that no other presuppositions can be found except those that only allow the existence of art as a transient part in a dialectic process and not as something finished in itself, and that consequently enable aesthetics to exist, not as something immanent, but merely as a transcendent discipline. All the more as this immanence is enclosed more firmly perhaps in the essence of its ultimate value, the work of art, than in any other central value of other normative spheres; for if the immanence of the work is destroyed its existence as a work is destroyed as well. This would seem a sufficient explanation of the methodological importance of our investigation into the process of communication in the world of experience: if an adequate communication of content is possible in this process, then it is conceivable, or even inevitable, that a gradual hierarchical ascent could be constructed from the direct expression of an experience to the direct recognition of God, in which art is at best a passing stage. But if it is

shown that this process is not capable of any communication or communion, then the organs that seize the “genuine essence” are radically different, and art is placed in the paradoxically systematic position of possessing a normative and general immediacy, an objective super-individual value, which is on one hand necessarily connected with the subjective processes of its realization, but on the other never perfectly attained by them in so far as its essence is concerned. It is the paradoxical and unique place taken by the eternal misunderstanding of the work of art that makes the independence and immanence of aesthetics possible. Through the eternity, universality, and objectivity of its central value it is sharply separated from the world of experience; yet it is through the spontaneity and similarity to everyday experience of the normative effect of the work of art, through the fact of not going beyond the twilight, isolating immediacy of the world of experience, of not resolving its misunderstanding, that any possible approach to other spheres of value is excluded from the very beginning. Art as an “expression” demands a dependent aesthetics transcending its original sphere; the misunderstood and nevertheless effective work of art on the other hand demands an immanent aesthetics. (Whether and to what extent this methodological position of aesthetics is important for a metaphysics of art cannot and should not be examined here.)

Every system of aesthetics that has been created by artists, or by scholars directly interested in the existence of art, has looked in this direction for the solution to the problem. Whether the essence of art was seen in the conditions of the material, as by Semper, or in the “absolute artistic will,” as by Riegl, or in the productive homogenizing force of “artistic activity” as by Fiedler-Hildebrand, these efforts were always based on the instinctive certainty that the autonomy of aesthetics was only possible through a resolute and incisive separation of the work of art from any “expression” however constituted; that in order to understand the existence of the work of art quite particular independent laws had to be attributed to it by those investigating this field. But consciously their only desire was to discard the non-artistic content of the process of reception, the misconception that the emotional fulfillment of the recipient evoked by the content was an understanding of the intentions of the artist; and yet, in another way, they believed in a complete communicability, that is, in that of the artistic will, or perhaps in the specific laws of the material. So that for them (and especially for Fiedler) the process of creation became the absolutely normative factor: the work of art is the realization of the purified artistic will, and the receptive attitude that is close to the world of experience is only false and confusing in its content because it does not correspond to the real intentions of the artist. But this is, on one hand, to misunderstand the essence of receptivity: the longing that guides man to art, the will to rediscover a world perfect in itself, vainly sought in life, is, according to Fiedler, an error, a temporary factor, from which the “correct” attitude, the expert’s eye, the accord with the intentions of the artist, can be developed through the educational means of an aesthetics. As a result, however, art would be reduced

to a kind of studio esoterics. On the other hand, because the process of creation was taken as the most decisive, the only possible point of departure for aesthetics, the single “fact” has been eliminated: for Fiedler the process is the eternal, the work of art only a transitory stage, an objectivation, something fragmentary: “the task of art,” he says, “always remains the same, unsolved and insoluble in its totality, and must always remain the same as long as man exists.”

The old unambiguity is thus restored, but in a reversed sense: something exists that can be communicated, and art is only the vehicle of this “expression”; but the content has become more problematic, less general, less common to all men. The “fact” of art remains given, veiled in obscurity: for although the existence of the work of art postulates the artistic process as a precondition, it is impossible for it to acquire its meaning only from the process and lose its plain factual character through it. If artistic activity is the only and ultimate factor given us to explain this “fact,” nonetheless, it remains just as much something quite simply given, accepted, as it was before: the importance, however, of this “fact,” which must be faced in all its implications lies in the profound need of art felt by men who are not artistic; in the inexplicable existence of art in the systematic and metaphysical meaning of the fact of art; and in the activity that has to find its conclusion in art. If this motive is the only motive it reveals the narrow and overstressed aesthetic character of such theories of the artistic process: the final conclusion must be that there are remarkable men — the artists — structurally different from other people, and through a psychological understanding of these men their production, art, can be understood. But if art only becomes real through being understood — how is one to explain the fact of its historical effect? How is one to understand that one and the same historical cultural spirit embraces the manifestations of a given period, that people feel themselves expressed in the works of art without enquiring into the artistic will and understanding it? Riegl and his school carry the investigation of the artistic will further, but obliterate the difference between the specific artistic will and the *Weltanschauung*, which was correctly recognized by Fiedler, and approach the older theories of adequate communication and expression along other paths. Both views contain the misunderstanding, the necessarily inadequate communication; but they cannot arrive at a clear rejection of art as “expression”: Riegl, because, in a comprehensive interpretation of the philosophy of history and art, he only investigated the total will that finds expression in the works of art (for the philosopher), and not the superstructure and foundation of this system; Fiedler, because he hypostatized the — correctly recognized — principle of artistic creation into the only content of aesthetics, and consequently only saw in the inadequate experience of the recipient a fact that had to be surmounted through education, but not a structural element of aesthetics. In both cases, however, the only fact on which an aesthetics could be constructed lost its certainty; it became a means of an (in itself problematic) communication, and dissolved into a process.

Neither of these important lines of thought, consequently, developed into systems

of aesthetics: Riegl laid a significant foundation for a philosophy of the history of art, Fiedler for a phenomenology of the artist; but both their works, because they were not consciously intended as either of these, contain a certain lack of clarity and certain contradictions. This is the most obvious with Fiedler, who simply reversed the old aesthetics of “expression,” and instead of projecting the receptive experience with its misunderstood contents into the artist in order to enable an adequate stream of communication to develop, turned the technical-artistic will of the creator into the — just as adequately realizable — Ought (*Sollen*) of the recipient. We have already recognized that this Ought contradicts the norms of any possible aesthetics. But that this principle is also unable to explain the work of art — that is, that a paradoxical, inadequate relationship exists not only between the recipient and the work but also between the creative personality and the work — is shown in the methodological consequence needed by Fiedler, namely the renunciation of the work of art as attained existence, and the emphasis on its unattainability. In so doing Fiedler separated the process of creation from the work; as a consequence of his method he was forced to regard the work of art as unrealizable, instead of pointing out the paradox that although it was unattainable in terms of the process of creation, it was realized in fact. It is clear that the heterogeneity of the dynamic movements of expression can as little be eliminated in terms of production as in terms of reception, that a necessary precondition for the concept of the work of art is the heterogeneity of the intentions directed towards the work: the misunderstanding.

Only if this misunderstanding is recognized as the only possible direct form of communication will it become possible to understand the existence of the work without difficulty; it then becomes simply a problem to be solved, and it is no longer incomprehensible how a world comes into being out of the double misunderstanding (of the “expression” and of the “understanding”), a world that is not adequately attained by either of them, but which has a necessary normative relationship to both. For while the man of the world of experience never truly recognizes the true character of his schema of expression, but at the best endures it and seeks to rid it of its fluid character through his indistinct longing, and all other human attitudes destroy the qualitative specificity of the schema of expression for the sake of adequate and unambiguous communicability, replacing it by other, conceptual means, in art it is precisely this essential element of the schema that possesses the unique substance. The special dialectics of this schema and its means of expression, which are independent of will and effect, and which cause the deepest confusion in communications concerned with the adequacy of content, are here completely purified and achieve a self contained homogeneity. The confused “not-quite” of both proximity and separation due to the schema is here translated into the sharply divided duality of the work of art, rising in solitude above life and man’s longing for intimacy with it. It was Leo Popper’s great achievement clearly to have recognized this fundamental fact of art, even if his short life, shot through with illness, prevented him from developing this idea in his own

deeply artistic and distinguished style, and even if it was alien to his personality, more orientated toward the arts than towards a system of philosophy, to construct an aesthetic system from this recognition. But in his clairvoyance he clearly recognized the separate life of the work of art and equally clearly the necessary connection of the two inadequate attitudes, that of the creative personality and that of the recipient, to the work of art. From this viewpoint, all one-sidedness can be surmounted; for Leo Popper the theory of technique and material was the true starting point to a metaphysics of art; for in his opinion the technical will and the laws inherent in the material are meta-subjective “bearers” of the will to the work of art, which is forced to realize itself beyond the willing and devoted subjects, and which takes on substance in the work of art in order to establish an earthly paradise longed for by men, created by men but never attainable through their will and their experience.

Through the recognition of this unique and paradoxical character of the work of art, the concept of its existence has been clarified and reached. We have had to advance to this concept of its existence in order to enable us, from this point, truly to see and to understand its real essence, unconfused with other realms of life.

Notes

1. “World of experience” seems to be the most adequate translation of the German term *Erlebnis-wirklichkeit* [Trans.].
2. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 180.
3. F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter L. Heath (Richmond: U of Virginia P, 1993) 231.
4. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 2, trans E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966) 463.
5. György Lukács, *Soul and Form*, eds. John T. Sanders and Katie Terezakis, trans. Anna Bostock (New York: Columbia UP, 2010) 129.
6. Lukács, *Soul* 130.
7. Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, *Selected Poetry of Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe*, ed. and trans. David Luke (New York: Penguin, 2005) 209.
8. Schopenhauer, *The World*, Vol. 1 103.
9. Kant, *Critique* 170.
10. *Critique* 173.

Novel, War and the Aporia of Totality: Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* and Azuela's *Los de abajo*

Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado

The near coincidence in the centenary of Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo* (*The Underdogs*, 1915), the foundational work of the twentieth-century Mexican novel, and György Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* (1914-1916), the departing point of the theoretical task known as the "sociology of literature," reminds us that both were born out of the same concern: the impact of an Evental war in the experience of modernity inherited from the global expansion of capitalism in the nineteenth century.¹ *Los de abajo* occupies a contradictory place in Mexican literary and cultural modernity and a double temporality in literary history. It was written in 1915, in El Paso, Texas, in the middle of a whirlwind of revolutionary turmoil, as distinct political forces were reorganizing in the wake of the Aguascalientes Convention. Although typically read as a book, it was in fact originally published as a serial in the border town's newspaper *Paso del Norte*.² A reluctant revolutionary, Azuela had already written a few novels on the subject, but *Los de abajo* represented a major formal and intellectual leap in Mexican literature. The novel is not quite a realist chronicle of the revolutionary movement, nor a properly vanguardist book of the kind that would flourish after 1920. Rather, it crystallizes the moment of revolutionary indecision into a form tinged with both anachronistic *modernista* gestures and forward-looking avant-garde techniques. Azuela deploys these estranging techniques to narrate not a chronicle of the Revolution or a personal history within it, as many novels would do a decade later, but rather the baffling experience of being modern when the uneven nature of capitalist modernity explodes and renders visible and material the traumatic remnants of its inequality. Its formal novelty was such that the novel circulated in a near-underground manner for a decade, until 1925, when a group of conservative intellectuals discovered and reclaimed *Los de abajo* as a model for a national literature to come, an institutionalized literature that, in Jorge Aguilar Mora's description, sought to exalt an abstract Revolution to undermine the real Event.³ This would ultimately put under erasure *Los de abajo*'s

true revolutionary nature, which has generally been confined to its position as a foundational text of the “novel of the Mexican Revolution,” an unremarkable genre of texts generally aligned to officialist ideology. If there is any sense to re-read it in its one-hundredth anniversary, it stems from the need to reclaim the intellectual strength of its narrative against the grain of Azuela’s limits as a revolutionary, and the elements that allowed the book to enter the space of hypercanonicity.

The Theory of the Novel was an equally baffling and revolutionary text, written in a moment of historical and aesthetic indecision similar to the one that informed Azuela. In many ways, the book was still caught in the most abstract legacies of a nineteenth-century romantic worldview, although grounded in a not-yet-Marxist awareness of the historicity of intellectual experience. It is generally recognized as the first book in a lineage that turned the relationship between form and historicity into a central strain of literary criticism, but its flustering abstractions lack the intellectual focus of his Marxist *oeuvre*. This has undoubtedly led to a history of baffled readings of the *Theory*. As Arpad Kadarkay documents, Karl Jaspers complained of the book’s “transcendental topography” and the demanding austerity of his thinking, Ernst Troeltsch also lamented the difficulty of a book “full of abstractions.”⁴ This theme — the purportedly forbidding difficulty of the text and the futility of its abstractions — remains very much present in today’s criticism. In a text apropos of its centenary, Franco Moretti writes:

When György Lukács is still mentioned nowadays in connection with the study of the novel, it is either for *The Theory of the Novel*, composed between 1914 and 1916, or for *The Historical Novel*, written exactly twenty years later. Either, or: because the two books couldn’t be more different. *The Historical Novel* is a very good book — a very *useful* book — written by a serious Marxist professor. The *Theory* is not useful at all. It is an “attempt” [*ein Versuch*], declares the subtitle; but “Essay” would be more to the point.⁵

From Jaspers to Moretti, *The Theory of the Novel* is faulted for not delivering either the pedagogical definition of the genre necessary for his book to become part of a high-theory toolbox, or the kind of positive characterization of a politico-revolutionary novel form that would emerge with post-1917 theory, not only in his own works on realism and the historical novel, but also in the writings of Viktor Shklovsky and other Russian formalists. This lineage has delivered undeniably fair criticisms at what can only be described as the *Theory*’s diffident and imprecise formulations. Yet, to fully gather its theoretical strength, this skepticism must be bracketed in order to unfold Lukács’s gesture. Like Azuela’s novel, the *Theory* is one of those texts that we do not historicize enough: reading it as method fails to account for the radicality of its form and premises vis-à-vis the Event of the First World War.

Indeed, as Lukács himself states in his 1962 preface, the *Theory* “was written in a mood of permanent despair over the state of the world.”⁶ Although Lukács was yet to reach the illumination that the October Revolution provided to his thinking, the story of “metaphysical dissonance” is, like in Azuela, an account of being modern when the war-inflected collapse of nineteenth-century modernity (both The First World War and the Mexican and Russian Revolutions) rendered visible a rift in the fabric of Being and the experience of totality.⁷ Both texts represent the experience of collapse of nineteenth-century culture in a peripheral site of the world-system, as well as the failure of literary form to fully account for the complexity of the Event. Lukács’s historical account modernity, as David Cunningham has noted, substantially coincides with that of the *Communist Manifesto*, and his history of the novel can be thusly characterized as a conceptual grasp of the “immanence of an actual idealism to the modern social relations refracted by the novel (as materially lived), for all that the novel’s relation to capitalism is more clearly foregrounded as a central problematic within the latter.”⁸ If anything, the *Theory*’s style is unable put forward a “useful” methodology for the study of the novel, precisely because the book was picking up on the paradigmatic exhaustion of idealism. Lukács’s account concludes with the undeveloped affirmation of a “new world” present in Dostoevsky’s work, after discussing Tolstoy’s “polemical, nostalgic and abstract” intimations of a possible break-up with Romanticism.⁹ In a way, one could affirm that *Los de abajo* presents one of the most important and suggestive representations of the fall of the “epoch of absolute sinfulness,” given that its detached yet intimate account of the Mexican Revolution is almost a demonstration of one of the key Lukácsian injunctions: “the great epic is a form bound to the historical moment, and any attempt to depict the utopian as existent can only end in destroying the form, not in creating reality.”¹⁰ *Los de abajo*’s location in a historical moment of intense undecidability offers a glimpse of the consequences of depicting the utopian without grasping it. What it destructs is not so much the form in general, but the form’s self-reflective relationship with metaphysical dissonance.

Los de abajo is fundamentally structured in the dialectic between its two protagonists: Luis Cervantes, a medical student and Azuela’s *alter ego*, who becomes part of the Villista contingents after deserting the federal army, and Demetrio Macías, a Zacatecan peasant who joins the Revolution unwittingly when the local *cacique* tells the *federales* that he was plotting an uprising. As Ángel Rama has painstakingly argued in a magisterial essay on Azuela, it is patently obvious that the novel is set up from the get-go as a representation of a particular form of class struggle within the Revolutionary ranks.¹¹ On the one hand, Cervantes, like Azuela, was part of an educated middle-class intelligentsia that formed under the auspices of the capitalist boom fostered by the Porfirista regime and who saw in the movement led by Francisco I. Madero the possibility to challenge a social stratification that excluded everyone but the highest bourgeoisie from the control of the means of production. Macías,

on the other hand, belonged to a peasantry exploited by longstanding structures of land ownership, in many cases dating back to colonialism. From this perspective, it is clear that the novel's narration is as much a story of the Mexican Revolution as it is a representation of the consequences of the redistribution of the means of production that may emerge as a result of the historical movement. This, of course, never happened, given the movement's devolution into factional conflict. Yet, this never-materialized future is a central part of Azuela's story. As both Rama and Max Parra point out, Cervantes is motivated by greed, realizing that the ulterior victory of the revolutionaries would leave spoils of war to be collected by people like him.¹² And, since Azuela's perspective functionalizes Demetrio's story to Luis's rationalizing perspective, the legitimacy of the petty bourgeoisie to ultimately overtake control of both power and the means of production is indeed a central message of the novel.

This ideological operation is what allowed *Los de abajo* to become an ideologically expedient document for the purposes of Mexico's conservative intelligentsia. As Parra argues, "the antithesis between popular revolution and intellectual rationalism (or nature versus culture) in this canonical text once again establishes the structural limits on how the revolutionary phenomenon may be interpreted." Intellectuals like Octavio Paz would ultimately consecrate through a crucial narrative behind Mexico's twentieth-century political institutionalism: "the campesino masses are an invigorating force, but they are not nor can they be the brains of the revolution."¹³ This ideology-critique does say a lot about both Azuela's own stance and about the ulterior uses of his novel as a foundation of official national culture. I would nonetheless contend that *Los de abajo*, as a novel, has elements that cannot be fully accounted for by this analysis, but that become legible when we read the book centering not in its overt ideological message, but in the terms established by the moment of ideological undecidability when it was written.

Like *The Theory of the Novel*, *Los de abajo* is a book always already mediated both by the history of its reception and by post-factum authorial revision and commentary. Both texts were written in the heat of war, and subject to revisionisms that better suited the ulterior ideological trajectory of their authors, as well as a myriad of a posteriori reinterpretations of the historical Event of their concern. Many contemporary readings of the *Theory* echo Lukács's own revision in 1962, where he denounces his book as "a typical product of 'intellectual science' [that] does not point the way beyond its methodological limitations."¹⁴ A similar fate takes place in *Los de abajo*: the original 1915 publication in installments was generally lost and forgotten until Stanley Robe recovered it in 1979, and our contemporary text, the one canonized in 1925, dates back to a significantly revised 1920 edition. I will not get into a philological argument here, particularly because the tracing of versions has already been done in Spanish editions.¹⁵ But, among the changes that led to the final version of the novel, mostly occupied in fixing issues related to the rushed nature of its original writing, two stand out: an intensification of phonetic mimesis in order

to better convey the popular (and thus perceived as uneducated) orality of lower-class characters and the crucial rewriting of the novel as thoroughly narrated in the past tense, when the original edition, written in the heat of conflict, had many passages narrated in the present. Besides the general stylistic precisions which had to do with Azuela's own aspiration to become a recognized writer, it is clear that these two modifications have a clear ideological consequence: the assertion of the difference between the rationality of the lettered class and the barbarism of the troops, and a change of the novel's "reality effect" from the experiential sense of the present to the preterit's connotation of established history.¹⁶ In both cases, canon-inflected readings put under erasure the war-informed undecidability of both their form and content. In the ulterior alignment of the texts to the demands of both literary history and political ideology, the richness of the books' respective inner dialectics becomes erased. As Aguilar Mora points out, in one of the theoretical problems set forward by the Mexican Revolution (and one could indeed argue that this is also the case of Lukács and the *Theory* vis-à-vis the First World War), literature surrounding the event is defined by a "horizon of failure" that "does not proceed from a historical horizon, but from the recognition that a collective consciousness of the events did not take place, much less a renovation of language."¹⁷ Nonetheless, the ulterior failure of the historical event does not cancel the utopian potential of the source text: the "horizon of failure" is the historical limit of both Lukács's and Azuela's inescapable historicities, but does not cancel the conceptual openings that sought to point towards the Event.

At the core of *Los de abajo* and the *Theory of the Novel* resides a sense of the crisis of the modern subject in the early twentieth century, as armed conflicts betrayed an exhaustion of the very forms of political subjectivity that structured bourgeois dominance in the nineteenth century. In the 1962 afterword, Lukács states that

the immediate motive for writing [the *Theory*] was supplied by the outbreak of the First World War and the effect which its acclamation by the social-democratic parties had upon the European left. My own deeply personal attitude was one of vehement, global and, especially at the beginning, scarcely articulate rejection of the war and especially enthusiasm from the war.¹⁸

Lukács's reminiscence has two fascinating moments. First, he recalls a conversation with a friend who tried to challenge his rejection by telling him "of individual, concrete acts of heroism." Second, after describing his predictions for the conflict, Lukács describes his younger self wondering "who was to save us from Western civilization?"¹⁹ The aporia in Lukács's thought resides in the philosophical question of totality: the historical crisis of modernity was the subject's extrication from the whole, but the philosophical instruments at hand (at least before the Russian Revolution) belonged to the same intellectual tradition that propitiated that crisis

and the awareness of it. This is why, as Eva Corredor describes, Lukács was drawn to Ernst Bloch, who expressed “the utopian belief that nature and society would ultimately overcome their imperfection and come close to the achieving material, spiritual and cosmic unity.”²⁰ Ivan Boldyrev further observes that, in his dialogue with Bloch, Lukács “somehow depicted in the *Theory of the Novel* all the moments of the crisis experienced in his times: disintegration of unity, the loss of subject, the collapse of traditional literary forms.”²¹ Beyond the specifics of intellectual genealogy, what is clear here is that Lukács’s *Theory* confronts a philosophical problem of the wartime present with a diagnosis of a cultural *malaise* that has always already been at the heart of modern subjectivity. The cultural anxiety resulting from the awareness of this intellectual task (a significant departure from the possibility of identification between soul and form that he described in his 1911 letter to Leo Popper) projects unto the novel a double historicity: one regarding the macrohistorical status of the form as the site of “metaphysical dissonance” and the temporal location of its theorization within a historical period that renders such dissonance painfully visible.²²

In the chapter entitled “The Romanticism of Disillusionment,” devoted to nineteenth-century French novelists, the novel appears as one of the last stances in which that unity could be configured into form. Apropos of Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education*, Lukács poses that the “victory” of an accomplished form “is rendered possible by time. The unrestricted, uninterrupted flow of time is the unifying principle of the homogeneity that rubs the sharp edges off each heterogeneous fragment and establishes a relationship — albeit an irrational and inexpressible one — between them.”²³ This explains, in Lukács’s account, why some nineteenth-century novels managed to overlap with the epic. But they do so with a twist. While “drama, lyric poetry and the epic, whatever the hierarchy in which we may place them, are not the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis of a dialectical process,” given that each form “appears positive because it fulfills its own structural laws,” the novel can ultimately capture a form of secular totality, because “the objective structure of the world of the novel shows a heterogeneous totality, regulated only by regulative ideas, whose meaning is not prescribed but given.”²⁴ This is one of those particular passages that illustrate why Lukács would eventually find his answers in Marxism. Flaubert’s book, published only two years after the first volume of *Capital*, sought to make sense of the historical Event of 1848, and Lukács’s description very much suggests the possibility of a novel form able, in itself, to recognize the laws of history as manifestly immanent to its own material reality (“regulative ideas whose meaning is not prescribed [i.e. transcendental] but given”) confined within a totality whose heterogeneity is the condition of possibility of dialectical engagement. This coincides with a 1919 text, in which Lukács very much describes Marx’s theory as informed by a similar impulse: “the primary truly epoch-making significance of Marx’s social theory is that the development of social consciousness has been effected in this way within, and only within, the confines of society.”²⁵ While Hegel created a “world system” characterized

by “its view of nature and history as one great homogeneous process,” Marx was able to search, and find, “consciousness” precisely “in the process of homogeneous development of society.” Marx triumphs where the novel fails, in providing a form, class consciousness, that would ultimately reconcile subject and history and deliver the experience of totality.

The *Theory*, we must not forget, preceded this corollary. In reading Leo Tolstoy, Lukács begins by pointing out that the “immanence of form” is disrupted when “it imputes a substantiality to the world it describes which that world is in no way capable of sustaining and keeping in a state of balance.”²⁶ The war (and the great Russian novel as some form of civilizational symptom of its genealogy) was precisely the sign of a world incapable of delivering the utopian expectations of the modern subject, which explains why the young Lukács, at least in the account of his older self, was unimpressed by his friend’s purportedly epic accounts of individual heroism and moved to wonder as to whether humanity could be saved from Western civilization. One could find guidance here in Timothy Bewes’s essay on *The Theory of the Novel* and Lukács’s writings on cinema. Resisting the stark division between a pre-Marxist and a Marxist Lukács, Bewes argues the centrality of the “promise of immanence” in his intellectual trajectory, something that coincides with the continuity between the *Theory* and the 1919 essay described above. Bewes argues that Lukács’s reading of Tolstoy leads to the conclusion that the “new world” mentioned at the very end of his book “is achievable precisely as a mode of reading, one that ‘binds’ the work to the world in a relationship that is far more intimate than that of depiction or presentation.”²⁷ If one accepts this reading, it is possible to claim that Lukács was not so much articulating the idea of a nostalgic return to pre-modern times or even to the epic nature of the nineteenth-century novel, but rather formulating the philosophical crisis raised by the historical insufficiency of form. If the novel is a “perspective,” as Bewes argues, the First World War amounts to a moment of civilizational turmoil that questions the historical manifestations of the form as a suitable vehicle to immanently restore the lost totality. The revolutionary stance that would more adequately deliver an answer to this question was yet to take place, which is why Lukács’s philosophical reflection operates at this point in time as basically an aesthetic program. Later, in the *Studies in European Realism*, he would reinterpret Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education* as the first adequate representation of a “darkening of the horizon” tied to nineteenth-century bourgeois culture which, presumably, found its moment of crisis in the War.²⁸

This older Lukács does recognize something that remained a blind spot in the *Theory*, the relationship between war, civilizational collapse, capitalism, and the novel. *Los de abajo* is the novel that emerged from the coincidence of diverse crises and interregna, a book that responded, perhaps unwittingly, to the sudden erosion of literary forms organic to nineteenth-century Mexican capitalism. The work that preceded it as the archetypal national novel, Federico Gamboa’s *Santa* (1904), was a naturalist text inspired by Émile Zola’s *Nana*.²⁹ In his famous dismissal of Zola, Lukács derides his

“‘scientific’ method in which society is conceived as a harmonious entity and the criticism applied to society formulated as a struggle against the disease attacking its organic unity, a struggle against the ‘undesirable features’ of capitalism.”³⁰ This is what made Zola so appealing to a conservative writer like Gamboa, who, without lacking certain departures from official ideology, was nonetheless as much an organic intellectual of Porfiriato as there ever was. Without belaboring on Gamboa, the notable thing about his novel is that literary form operates as a way to imagine the disciplining of excessive bodies, through the story of a prostitute that personifies the immoral excess of urban modernization.³¹ Even though Gamboa seems to be an aesthete rejecting the modern noise brought forward by capitalism, it is important to remember that Latin American literature between 1880 and 1910 directly resulted from the expansion of capitalism in the region, and that the *modernism* that ruled literary aesthetics at the time was a manifestation of a larger-scale process in which culture democratized to incorporate newly ascendant middle sectors while embracing aristocratic values.³² This is the world in which Azuela, who was nearing forty years of age when the Revolution began, was raised, and his earliest works definitely fell within well-established *modernista* aesthetics. The point to be made out of this is that, when he writes *Los de abajo*, Azuela was facing the civilizational collapse that rendered *modernista* aesthetics outdated, but, like the historical juncture that informed Lukács, had yet to produce the forms that would eventually convey the ideologies of an emerging order. However, unlike the spiritual orphanhood shown by Lukács, Azuela is able to resolve the exhaustion of nineteenth-century form by unfolding the hero into two distinct subjectivities: Cervantes and Macías. While it is true that this division responds to the historical experience of class struggle within the revolutionary movement itself, the glimpses of political subjectivity in *Los de abajo* envision a contemporaneity fundamentally different from the one Lukács experienced.

The historical juncture that led to the writing of *Los de abajo* was the moment in which the Revolution threatened the very heart of Mexican sovereignty as such. In 1914, after the overthrowing of Victoriano Huerta, the peasant armies of Villa and Zapata (and Azuela among them) acquired control of Mexico City and an agreement between the factions was sought at the Aguascalientes Convention. However, the factional struggle would eventually prevail, leading to the US recognition of Venustiano Carranza’s constitutionalist movement and the persecution of both Villa and Zapata.³³ The struggle between “rational” intellectuals and “barbarous” revolutionaries at the core of Azuela’s novel was in fact a fight for economic resources. The Carrancistas were in control of Mexico’s means of production, and sought to use the revolution as a platform for introducing new forms of capitalist modernization. The Zapatistas and Villistas, in contrast, remained active due to the revolution’s failure to deliver land reform, and the general redistribution of resources monopolized by entities still very much exercising colonial and neocolonial modes of domination. 1914, nonetheless,

was a traumatic historical moment for intellectuals like Azuela, because it is the one year in which the possible rule of the masses becomes palpable. As Gareth Williams describes, the “space of mutual contamination and indeterminateness between sovereign law and peasant insurrection in 1914,” as embodied by the famous picture of Villa sitting in the presidential chair, “is the very ground of the emergent political subjectification that lies at the heart of the Mexican Revolution’s social curve.”³⁴ The allegorical mode that dominated the Mexican and Latin American novel in the nineteenth-century, and that Doris Sommer has called “foundational fictions,” was constitutively unable to account for this new form of political subjectification.³⁵ What I want to suggest here is that, after experimenting himself the paradigm-shaking turmoil of 1914, Azuela became one of the first Mexican writers to fully assume the exhaustion of naturalist and *modernista* narrative paradigms. *Los de abajo* was profoundly intertwined as a text with the historical development of this period in the Revolution to the point that in November 21, 1915, the very day when the final installment of Azuela’s novel was published in *El Paso*, a Villista newspaper printed the “Naco manifesto,” the document in which Villa denounced the US endorsement of Carranza.³⁶ At that juncture, more so than in the moment of its canonical consecration in 1925, it was clear that the fundamental task of a novel like *Los de abajo* was in articulating a form that could account for the fundamental rift of the Revolution, and for the political subjectification that was out of reach for intellectuals like Azuela but nonetheless visible in the Villista and Zapatista armies.

In *The Antinomies of Realism*, Fredric Jameson observes that “war offers the paradigm of the nominalistic dilemma: the abstraction from totality or the here-and-now of sensory immediacy and confusion.” Jameson thusly argues, in an analysis of Stendhal’s *The Charterhouse of Parma*, that war narratives may introduce estrangement, in the Russian formalist sense of defamiliarization, “in which a preexisting stereotype is dismantled and brought before us in all its nameless freshness and horror. Whether this is to be grasped as an essentially modernist operation, or on the contrary to something all the realisms are by definition called upon to do is a question we will for the moment leave open.”³⁷ Azuela’s response to this question is that both alternatives are actually simultaneous: a realist novel must indeed be called upon to operate this estrangement, but in the concrete historical juncture of the Mexican revolution this was only possible by a radical, if at times hesitant, rendering of a new novel form. This was not in itself achieved by the precariousness of its original distribution, since installment novels in the press were a common feature of late nineteenth-century Mexican literature. Rather, it resides precisely in the construction of perspective. In the *Theory*, Lukács characterizes *Don Quixote* as a novel in a historical transition, where the values of the epic order had vanished but there was not yet a full awareness of it.³⁸ The consequence of this is that the hero is not a subject who can think totality, but rather a man for whom totality is not longer thinkable nor sensible, which, in turn, renders visible the limits of his historical position. That Azuela harnesses this

in his alter ego is patently obvious, announced by the use of the name Cervantes. But Azuela's novel recognizes that the underlying revolutionary force calls for a totally different symbolic economy in his narrated world. Even if one notices that Azuela and his narrator are on the side of a bourgeois rationality as the only possibility to found the sovereign in a new Mexico, it is also true that "*los de abajo*" as a social subject are no longer available for the sovereignty of the bourgeoisie. Don Quixote, an *hidalgo*, a mid-society man who does not quite belong to the aristocratic rule, can nonetheless rely on Sancho Panza's rationality and fidelity. Luis Cervantes, in contrast, is always seduced by, and secondary to, the epic of Demetrio Macías. When they first meet in the novel, Cervantes's subjective privilege is promptly deflated. After deserting the army, he is arrested by Demetrio's forces:

Demetrio did as a matter of fact want to find out what was going on, so he had the prisoner brought to him.

"It's a disgrace, dear leader, just look, Look!" Luis Cervantes exclaimed, showing Demetrio the blood on his pants and his swollen mouth and nose.

"Enough, enough. For God's sakes then, just tell me, who are you?" Demetrio demanded.

"My name is Luis Cervantes. I am a medical student and a journalist. I was pursued, trapped, and made a prisoner — all for having said something in favor of the revolutionaries."

The story that he proceeded to tell of his most recent adventure, in his bombastic style, made Pancracio and Lard double over with laughter.

"I have sought to make myself understood, to convince your men here that I am truly a coreligionist."

"A co-re a... what?" Demetrio inquired perking up his ears.

"A coreligionist, dear leader, which is to say, that I am a believer of the same ideals and that I fight for the same cause as you and your men."

Demetrio smiled.

"Well, tell me, then: what cause exactly are we fighting for?"

Disconcerted, Luis Cervantes did not know how to answer.³⁹

The notable element in this exchange is the utter inability of Cervantes to articulate any possible ideological stance vis-à-vis Demetrio and his soldier. His identity as a member of the bourgeoisie, as a fellow revolutionary, as a political prisoner, as a coreligionist, gets erased in just one gesture, laughter, puncturing the fantasy of the very Maderista version of the revolution that Cervantes (and Azuela) represented. Demetrio is no Sancho: his refusal to even entertain Cervantes's chivalric fantasy is the crucial detonator of the narrative. Rather, the quixotic bourgeois revolutionary ends up at the service of this popular subject. The key element of the war trope in *Los de abajo*, the fundamental "estrangement" that is brought to us in all its "freshness

and horror,” to cite Jameson’s formulation, is a popular subjectivity, born out of the revolutionary interregnum, that no longer folds itself to the philosophical musings of the modern subject lost in the world, like Sancho, nor embodies a “national allegory” of the “foundational fiction” kind or an allegory of the decadence of the social body, in the way of Gamboa’s *Santa*. If Azuela is able to inaugurate the twentieth-century Mexican novel, it is because *Los de abajo* meaningfully articulates, for the first time, the fact that the essential dissociation between subject and world does not lie in the ontological rupture of the modern subject with totality, but in the roaring, eventual emergence of a new, previously unthinkable totality. This totality is embodied by an excessive subjectivity that the novel can only partially grasp, but that is ultimately defined not by its reference to the “ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible maps” from the beginning of the *Theory*, but by the horizon of futurity that Lukács only implies when he speaks of the “signs of a world to come, still so weak that it can easily be crushed by the sterile power of the merely existent.”⁴⁰ The grand paradox here is that Cervantes embodies, precisely, that “sterile power.”

There is a dialectical tension between Luis Cervantes, the intellectual whose consciousness of the existent impedes the experience of totality in the sphere of the sensible, and Demetrio Macías, the revolutionary that represents future revolutionary totality, in part due to the impossibility of his “capture” (in the Deleuzian sense) by either the post-revolutionary State apparatus or by the equally territorializing apparatus of national literature. The major intensities in *Los de abajo*, where we can briefly and imperfectly glimpse the horizon of futurity, emerge from fleeting moments of synthesis in which Cervantes becomes ephemerally subjectified by Demetrio’s unnamable cause. In a climatic scene at the center of the novel, Demetrio and his army march to Moyahua, his homeland, to pursue Don Mónico, the cacique whose exploits led him to his uprising. The scene begins with a description of Demetrio’s officers marching against the backdrop of a cordillera that embodies the affect of war:

Gradually the cordilleras emerge like variegated monsters with sharply angled vertebrae: hills like the heads of Aztec idols — with giant faces, grimacing frightfully and grotesquely — which alternately make one smile or leave one with a vague sense of terror, something akin to a mysterious foreboding.

At the head of the troop rides Demetrio Macías with his general staff: Colonel Anastasio Montañés, Lieutenant Colonel Pancraccio, and Majors Luis Cervantes and Towhead Margarito.⁴¹

The squad enters Moyahua, and finds Don Mónico, who begs for his life. Demetrio declines to execute him, but surprisingly, also refuses to allow the townsfolk to sack the cacique’s house, a common symbolic gesture of redistribution in similar situations. When a young man disobeys and moves towards the house, Demetrio shoots him, and

disperses the rest of the crowd. With the gun smoking in his hand, he utters an order:

“Burn the house down,” he orders Luis Cervantes when they reach their quarters.

Luis Cervantes, with rare solicitude and without passing the order on to anyone else, makes sure to carry it out himself.

When a couple of hours later the small town plaza was full of black smoke and enormous flames lapped up from Don Mónico’s house, no one understood the general’s strange behavior.⁴²

This scene illustrates one of those rare moments in which the dissonance between Demetrio and Luis temporarily subsides, and Luis fleetingly manages to meet a duty of the Event unfolding in front of his eyes. This moment recedes quickly in the following section, when he seeks to persuade Demetrio to take some of the spoils, given that leaders like Villa or Carranza will not respond for them when the time comes to face the future. This, of course, is a result of the fact that Azuela writes the scene with the benefit of hindsight, retroactively providing Cervantes a wisdom about the imminent internal conflicts between revolutionary forces. But their dissonance is not about contingent contexts but rather a different historico-philosophical location of their subjectivities: Demetrio inhabits the world of the epic, of the man whose soul and destiny coincide in the revolutionary whirlwind, while Luis experiences modernity in its horizon of failure, from a consciousness that, despite of the glimpses of heroism and futurity, can only stare at the Event as a form of horror. This is why it is crucial that the passage above is framed by a dissonant, estranging description of the *cordillera*: the strength of the destruction of the cacique’s house is framed by the specters of a terrifying time and space (the mountains that look like Aztec idols, the foreboding sense of doom) that ultimately pre-empt any sense of justice. When Don Mónico cowardly begs for his life and when Luis burns the house, we clearly know that there is no such thing as restitution.

The title of the novel, “those from below,” names a social subject that modern political discourse is unable to name, and the English word “underdogs,” which has been used as a title since the first translation, does not capture.⁴³ The sense of David bravely fighting Goliath or of a group fighting an impossible fight does not adequately account for the way in which Azuela conceives Demetrio and his army’s political subjectivity. “Los de abajo” frames the narrative in terms of the explosion of the vivid social stratification that defined Porfirian society, while asserting the telluric, primal nature of the revolutionaries. It is not about the challenge of uprising, but about the ontological condition of oppression and the way this informs the historical Event of the rebellion. Many of the novel’s best readers have underscored the way in which the novel captures an Evental feature of the Revolution: the pre-emption of liberalism as an organizing principle, one that became hegemonic since at least 1857,

when the doctrine of popular sovereignty became embedded in the constitution.⁴⁴ According to Max Parra:

Azuela's greatest distinction, despite his lack of clarity and his moralizing, is to have captured the equalizing force of the masses, armed and on the move, tumultuous, disorderly, and destructive. The text reveals a world of intense passions, naked violence, looting and hatreds, friendship spurred by alcohol, promiscuity, and libertine desires. And this despite the narrator's somewhat incongruent longing for moderation and order in the midst of chaos and war.⁴⁵

Juan Pablo Dabove takes this point even further and, in his brilliant Deleuzian reading, notes that the "absence of class consciousness" signals to the revolution as something that is both exterior and anterior to the State form, an "excess of the state that is always singular (resists categories) and is never possible to render it positive." That is, the novel articulates a particular politics: "The resistance to name the sense of the war (lacking a 'cause' different than war itself) therefore is the specific political dimension of those from below." Dabove concludes arguing that this provides "a nomadic politics: a politics that exceeds the signs of the nation and its forms of sovereignty."⁴⁶ Both Parra and Dabove deploy subalternist theory to make sense of these politics, which manifest themselves in the novel as an excess to Azuela's own attempts at rationalization. In the context of my argument, I would add that, insofar as "los de abajo" names the "nomadic politics" materially embodied in the chaos described by Parra, the ideological limits of Azuela's task as a novelist become evident when he resolves the novel through the tropes of horror and defeat.

Here, Jameson provides a useful insight in his discussion of Grimmelhausen. Discussing a utopian moment in which we attest representations of primeval bliss, Jameson concludes: "war, perceived at this existential proximity of the Scene, is virtually non-narrative, and that this raw material seeks to appropriate its missing protagonist from any number of narrative paradigms."⁴⁷ In Azuela's representation of the cordillera, the primeval Scene was present (Aztec idols), but not as a space of bliss but of foreboding horror: a historical foundation that places Mexico in a permanent state of war. The "virtually non-narrative" nature of war spells in Azuela the demand of an ethical demand that is inherently inconsistent with the social subjectivity his novel discloses but fails to grasp. Consequently, the only way in which he can engage with the semantic void of nomadic politics, with the terrifying and chaotic subjectivity of "los de abajo," is through a reterritorialization of the safety of liberalism, the blind faith in reconciling the subjective rift through a symbolic act. In order to do so, and to save Cervantes's soul, the novel opts to demonize war and to assert failure as the founding act of the nation to come. The novel concludes with a scene in which Demetrio dies fixated in his gesture of resistance: "At the foot of a craggy

hollow — enormous and magnificent as the portico of an old cathedral — Demetrio Macías, his eyes fixed forerever, continues to aim with the barrel of his rifle...”⁴⁸ *Los de abajo* ends with an ellipsis, after describing the sierra as a bride and Demetrio as a groom, about to meet his destiny in the portico of a magnificent cathedral. This is a telling utopian moment, placing Macías ephemerally in a foundational position, but ultimately freezing him in time: eyes fixed together, always aiming his gun, the signal of a war that may never end. This prophetic moment, though, is foreshadowed by a stunningly apocalyptic set of developments. The novel’s third and final part is narrated with Cervantes removed from the scene. After Demetrio learns from General Nátera that Villa was to rise against Carranza, we transition into a letter by Cervantes to a fellow revolutionary, dated in El Paso, and suggesting that his life would progress in the United States removed from the revolutionary process that he just left behind.⁴⁹ With the Villista movement facing imminent defeat, Azuela brings Demetrio’s troops to the town of Juchipila, where one of the first outbursts of the Revolution in 1910 took place. Although the town receives the troops with a deceivingly “joyful” tolling of the church bells, the reality in the ground is disastrous:

Juchipila was in ruins, just like the other towns through which they had passed since Tepic, including Jalisco, Aguascalientes and Zacatecas. The black traces of fire could be seen on roofless houses and burnt porticos. The remaining houses were still boarded up. And occasionally a store would still be open, as if sarcastically, to show its empty shelves, which resembled the white skeletons of the horses scattered along every road. The awful mark of hunger could already be seen on the dirt-ridden faces of the people, in the bright flame of eyes that burned with the fiery hatred whenever they beheld a passing soldier.⁵⁰

Even if one recognizes that Azuela grants Demetrio an epic ending worthy of his epic status, Cervantes’s withdrawal and Juchipila’s ruins are the two key ideologems here. Unlike Lukács, who eventually found Marxism to depart away from the bourgeois *malaise* of the soul, Azuela, like his protagonist, could only envision as future a restoration of the bourgeois myth at the top of the ruins of the Event. Azuela glimpses a totality that lies not in the memory of a distant past but in the horizon of futurity underlying Demetrio’s revolution, but he ultimately fails to recognize it. Thus, he would become the founder of a model of nation that opted to restore liberalism (in the 1917 constitution that would verbatim reproduce the popular sovereignty doctrine from 1857) and allow its revolution to persist in the memory of its failure and defeat.⁵¹

Regardless of this problematic resolution, I think that reading *Los de abajo* next to *The Theory of the Novel* posits an important lesson regarding the way in which their peculiar formal and intellectual choices manifest interregna, moments of suspension of the political, and of change between historical paradigms of modernity. Failure,

tellingly, is also a central trope in the *Theory*, particularly in Romantic narratives where “the completely pre-determined nature of this failure is the other objective difficulty of purely epic form-giving.” Lukács speaks here of “the artistic task of [that] consists of revealing the point at which such a character’s being-there and being-thus coincides with the inevitable failure.”⁵² *Los de abajo* unfolds this failure in two: the contemplative character of Luis Cervantes and historical necessity as embodied by Demetrio. If the epic of the Mexican Revolution never crystalizes into literary form, it is due, at least in part, to the unthinkability of Utopia in a nomadic revolution. Yet, the theorization of failure in both texts is a condition of possibility for theorizations and novels to come, given that their undecidability, both formal and intellectual, introduce an aporia in the notion of totality set forward from Romanticism onwards that cannot be ignored. In Lukács’s case, the aesthetic rift would evolve into a theory of consciousness that, in Edward Said’s words, sought to enact “a revolutionary will committed to wordliness and change.”⁵³ Similarly, Azuela’s novel became the condition of possibility of a modern Mexican novel inasmuch as it contributed to the territorializing imagination of national culture. It would not be until the 1940s and 1950s when Demetrio Macías’s dissonance would find worthy successors in José Revueltas’s lumpenproletarian characters and Juan Rulfo’s spectres.⁵⁴ Neither Lukács’s announcement of the “new world” nor Azuela’s transformation of Demetrio into a monument enacted a closure. They were, rather, openings: constant reminders of the inevitable rift on capitalist modernity that inaugurated both the twentieth century and the genealogies of our contemporaneity.

Notes

1. György Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT P, 1971); Mariano Azuela, *Los de abajo*, ed. Jorge Ruffinelli (Madrid: ALLCA XX, 1988); English edition: *The Underdogs: A Novel of the Mexican Revolution*, trans. Sergio Waisman (New York: Penguin, 2008). Although I will only cite the book in English, I provide reference to the Spanish edition so speakers of the original language may refer back to it. However, for reasons discussed below I will keep referring to Azuela's book with the Spanish title, since I feel that the translated title misses a dimension fundamental to my analysis here. Otherwise, all translations of materials from Spanish-language sources are mine. I am very grateful to Anna Kornbluh for inviting me to this dossier.
2. For readers not familiar with the Mexican revolution, Adolfo Gilly's unsurpassed bottom-to-top materialist history *The Mexican Revolution* (New York: The New Press, 2006) remains the best source to understand the world narrated by Azuela. A more concise and recent history may be found in Stuart Easterling, *The Mexican Revolution: A Short History 1910-1920* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012). For a recent authoritative history of the Revolution as a whole, see Gilbert M. Joseph and Jürgen Buchenau, *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution: Social Upheaval and the Challenge of Rule since the Late Nineteenth Century* (Durham: Duke UP, 2013). For a detailed publication history of Azuela's novel, see Stanley L. Robe, *Azuela and the Mexican Underdogs* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1979).
3. Jorge Aguilar Mora, *Una muerte sencilla, justa, eterna. Cultura y guerra en la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico: Era, 1990) 54. For a detailed account of the 1925 debates on "national literature" see Víctor Díaz Arciniega, *Querella por una cultura "revolucionaria"* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1925).
4. Arpad Kadarkay, *Georg Lukács: Life, Thought, and Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1991) 191-92.
5. Franco Moretti, "Lukács's Theory of the Novel: Centenary Reflections," *New Left Review* 91 (January-February 2014) 39.
6. Lukács, *Theory of the Novel* 12.
7. A version of this reading led Lucien Goldmann to a fascinating and underexplored comparison between the young Lukács and the first Heidegger. See Lucien Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2009).
8. David Cunningham, "'Very Abstract and Terribly Concrete': Capitalism and *The Theory of the Novel*," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 42.2 (2009) 311-17.
9. *Theory of the Novel* 152.
10. *ibid.*
11. Ángel Rama, "Mariano Azuela: ambición y frustración de las clases medias," *Crítica literaria en América Latina*, comp. Carlos Sánchez Lozano (Medellín: Ediciones de la Universidad Nacional de Antioquia, 2006) 206-58.
12. Max Parra, *Writing Pancho Villa's Revolution: Rebels in the Literary Imagination of Mexico* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2005) 30.
13. Parra, *Writing Pancho Villa's Revolution* 35.
14. *Theory of the Novel* 15.
15. The edition used here, funded by the ALLCA XX Project and established by Jorge Ruffinelli is based in a thorough comparison of sources, which Ruffinelli himself discusses in Azuela, *Los de abajo*, XXXV-XLIII. A new philological edition by Víctor Díaz Arciniega (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2015) was

released in late 2015, but I was not able to consult it prior to the writing of this essay. Sergio Waisman does not specify which version he uses for his translation, but it is very likely the established Fondo de Cultura Económica text established in the 1960s, which is the basis of the mass market editions of the text ever since. I use Ruffinelli's philological essay as the basis of my assertions here.

16. I use "reality effect" in the terms developed by Roland Barthes, for whom realism is the "acceptance of speech acts justified by their referent alone," something that hides the resistance of the "real" to structure. See Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986) 141-48.
17. Jorge Aguilar Mora, *El silencio de la Revolución y otros ensayos* (México: Era, 2011) 20-21.
18. *Theory of the Novel* 11.
19. *ibid.*
20. Eva L. Corredor, *György Lukács and the Literary Pretext* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987) 72.
21. Ivan Boldyrev, *Ernst Bloch and his Contemporaries: Locating Utopian Messianism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) 58.
22. György Lukács, *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (Columbia: Columbia UP, 2010) 16-34.
23. *Theory of the Novel* 125.
24. *Theory of the Novel* 128.
25. György Lukács, *Tactics and Ethics 1919-1929*, trans. Michael McColgan (London: Verso, 2014) 15-16.
26. *Theory of the Novel* 144.
27. Timothy Bewes, "How to Escape from Literature? Lukács, Cinema and *The Theory of the Novel*," *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence*, ed. Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (London: Bloomsbury, 2011) 7.
28. György Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (New York: The Universal Library, 1964) 3.
29. Federico Gamboa, *Santa* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006). English edition: *Santa: A Novel of Mexico City*, trans. John Charles Chasteen (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2010).
30. Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* 86
31. For a discussion in this regard, see Elzbieta Sklodowska, *Todo ojos todo oídos. Control e insubordinación en la novela hispanoamericana (1895-1935)* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997) 95-128.
32. For the general historical account of this process, see Ángel Rama, *Las máscaras democráticas del modernismo* (Montevideo: Fundación Ángel Rama / Arca, 1985). A more recent account that more precisely connects literature to capital can be found in Ericka Beckman, *Capital Fictions: The Literature of Latin America's Export Age* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2013).
33. For a narrative of this period, see Joseph and Büchenau, *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution* 63-78.
34. Gareth Williams, *The Mexican Exception: Sovereignty, Police and Democracy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 86.
35. Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991).
36. Aguilar Mora, *Una muerte sencilla, justa, eterna* 52.
37. Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013) 232-33.
38. *Theory of the Novel* 101-105.
39. Azuela, *Los de abajo* 19; *The Underdogs* 20.

40. *Theory of the Novel* 29, 153.
41. *Los de abajo* 88; *The Underdogs* 86-87.
42. *Los de abajo* 93; *The Underdogs* 90.
43. For a discussion on the term, see Waisman, "Introduction," *The Underdogs* xiv.
44. For a discussion on popular sovereignty and liberalism in Mexico, see Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, "Democracy, Rule of Law, a 'Loving Republic,' and the Impossibility of the Political in Mexico," *Política Común*, 7 (2015). <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/pc/12322227.0007.004/--democracy-rule-of-law-a-loving-republic?rgn=main;view=fulltext>
45. Parra, *Writing Pancho Villa's Revolution* 46.
46. Juan Pablo Dabove, "La fiesta popular, la banda de bandidos, la 'bola': la Revolución y sus metáforas en *Los de abajo*," *Heterotropías. Narrativas de identidad y alteridad latinoamericanas*, eds. Carlos A. Jáuregui and Juan Pablo Dabove (Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2003) 180-81.
47. Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* 251.
48. *Los de abajo* 140; *The Underdogs* 134.
49. *Los de abajo* 123-24; *The Underdogs* 119-20.
50. *Los de abajo* 135; *The Underdogs* 131.
51. For studies of this trope see John Ochoa, *The Uses of Failure in Mexican Literature and Identity* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2004), and Brian L. Price, *Cult of Defeat in Mexico's Historical Fiction: Failure, Trauma, Loss* (New York: Palgrave, 2012).
52. *Theory of the Novel* 116.
53. Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983) 231.
54. José Revueltas, *Human Mourning*, trans. Roberto Crespi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990), and Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo*, trans. Margaret Sayens Peden (New York: Grove, 1994).

History and Class Consciousness as a Theory of the Novel

Ben Parker

"The approach of literary history is the one best suited to the problems of history."

György Lukács

"[I]n the last resort no one can be slain *in absentia* or *in effigie*."

Sigmund Freud

György Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* is not usually seen as advancing an aesthetic theory in its own right. Apart from some scattered remarks on the anticipatory insights of Aeschylus and Shakespeare, these "studies in Marxist dialectics" attest no interest in literature or art whatsoever. Faced with this absence of an explicit aesthetic program, commentators have tried to provide one for *History and Class Consciousness* (HCC) by linking it with Lukács's more obviously literary writings. Consequently, HCC has been handled as a political epistemology or sociological toolkit in search of literary-aesthetic application, as when Jay Bernstein examines Lukács's "pre-Marxist theory of the novel from the perspective of his Marxist social theory," or Fredric Jameson contends that "[t]he analysis of the subjective precondition of [literary] realism forms a parallel to the analysis of the preconditions of knowledge of the totality in *History and Class Consciousness*."¹ That is, HCC has been taken to provide a vocabulary that can be extended to literary and ideological analysis, but whose own "narrative" concerns are limited to the unaesthetic, for example, the grand récit of the proletariat as the Subject of History.²

However, especially in the essay "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," HCC implicitly advances a theory of the novel independent from either Lukács's earlier *The Theory of the Novel* (TN) or his later studies on realism. Although overlooked by critics, the literary-theoretical specificity of HCC is hiding in plain sight. The central moment of his argument — the self-recognition of the proletariat as a world-historical subject from out of "the riddle of commodity-structure" — is

Lukács's only elaboration of dramatic *anagnorisis*, or recognition scene, a central structure in narrative theory since Aristotle's *Poetics*.³ What is aesthetic in *HCC* is therefore immanent in the very categories of "reification" and "the consciousness of the proletariat," since these make up the terrain of that recognition. In what follows, I read the decisive moment of "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" as a paradigmatic recognition scene, whereby "in the commodity the worker recognizes himself and his own relations with capital."⁴ In this pivotal instant, the worker becomes self-conscious in that very location (the commodity) where he has been produced as an unconscious thing: "in his social existence the worker is immediately placed *wholly* on the side of the object."⁵ By this logic, reification should be seen as a structural misrecognition, "the split between subjectivity and objectivity induced in man by the compulsion to objectify himself as a commodity."⁶

To be sure, I am not the first to see recognition as a central category in Lukács's analysis of reification in *HCC*. Axel Honneth, in a significant reinterpretation of Lukács's concepts, has argued that "the core of all forms of reification" is the "forgetting [of] our antecedent recognition."⁷ However, the effect of Honneth's analysis is to gut the Marxist account of reification and replace it with a theory of communication as a socio-behavioral practice.⁸ To this end, reification is behaviorized as "a habit of mere contemplation and observation," in which one perceives one's surroundings in "a merely detached and emotionless manner."⁹ Along these same lines, Honneth defines recognition as "an affirmative, existentially colored style of caring comportment," an intersubjective relation of "engaged praxis" and empathy.¹⁰ So, for Honneth (following Cavell, Habermas, and Levinas) recognition means *acknowledgment*, or the reciprocal awareness of others.¹¹ However, in order to pursue these tendentious redefinitions, Honneth has to jettison nearly all of Lukács's argument — the decisive casualty being the connection between subjectivity (the consciousness of the proletariat) and the commodity-form. Honneth ignores or misreads Lukács's account of subjectivity, such that reification's effect on subjectivity is read simply as a regrettable "mode of behavior."¹² But if we turn to Lukács's text, we see that he scrupulously argues that reification is *constitutive of subjectivity* as such, that is, the very categories of knowing and acting.¹³

For the present essay, recognition is to be understood as dramatic or narrative *anagnorisis*, not as intersubjectivity or Neo-Hegelian acknowledgment. To put this distinction in terms of Aristotle's preferred example: within Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, recognition and acknowledgment are clearly distinct dramatic actions. *Anagnorisis* occurs when Oedipus discovers his true breeding and finds his past to be steeped in incest and parricide. This retrospective self-knowledge is not to be confused with the subsequent scene where Oedipus, having gouged out his eyes and re-emerged a transformed figure, foists on the Chorus a demand for *acknowledgment* of his outrageous sufferings. (Another familiar shorthand for recognition, the master-slave dialectic in Hegel, also will not do here. The life-or-death encounter Hegel describes is

really closer to Oedipus's confrontation with Laius on the road from Corinth — a game of chicken where each party demands that the other give way — than to Aristotle's model of *anagnorisis*.)

Once we can see Lukács's subjectivity argument as a "recognition scene," though, we can also measure its distance from Aristotle's rationalist prescriptions for ancient drama. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle defines *anagnorisis* as the discovery of identity, arising from ignorance, immanent in events themselves, and coincident with a reversal of the situation. These four features will also hold for the consciousness of the proletariat. But HCC adds several features of recognition which I take to be specifically *novelistic*: the question of possible modes of objectification, the representation of social totality, and the cognitive form (as opposed to the content) of narrative knowledge.

Unfortunately, there is no similar *locus classicus* for the concept of "reification." The term appears perhaps five times across the three volumes of Marx's *Capital*, taking up considerably less space than the analysis of lesser-known topics such as the increasing organic composition of capital, differential rent, or the eighteenth-century distinction between fixed and circulating capital. Whereas associated words like "fetishism" and "alienation" are extensively discussed in Marx's 1844 manuscripts, "reification" [*Versachlichung* or *Verdinglichung*, interchangeable in Marx's use] first comes into use only in the specifically economic writings of the late 1850s, the *Grundrisse* and *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In *Capital*, "reification" only appears as part of a set formula: "personification of things and reification of persons." Although the term would be extended by Lukács and subsequently the Frankfurt School, for Marx, reification is not an ontological or epistemological term.

Rather than rehearsing the HCC argument here, I should be forthright about my eccentric and polemical reading of Lukács's essay. Keeping in mind the objective of constructing a "theory of the novel" — rather than a full reconstruction of the reification analysis — I offer below a few theses just to clarify *how* I am (or am not) using "reification," and what I take to be a usable through-line through Lukács's at times unwieldy text.

- Notwithstanding Lukács's own heavy reliance on the Weberian vocabulary of "rationalization" in Section I of the reification essay, *the concept of reification should not for a moment be assimilated to rationalization* — as most notably in Jürgen Habermas's writing on Lukács.¹⁴ While Lukács's withering observations linking the drudgery and passivity of factory labor to journalism, bureaucracy, and scientific expertise are some of the most memorable parts of the essay, what Lukács so forcefully *describes* as "rationalization" would better have been *analyzed* in terms of Marx's "real subsumption" and the production of relative surplus-value.¹⁵
- *Neither should reification be confused with "alienation"* — again, notwithstanding Lukács's own admission of this "fundamental and crude error," in the 1967

Preface.¹⁶ Rather, Lukács interprets reification as the specifically capitalist mode of objectification — in Marx’s terms, as the scaffolding in which production is the “valorization” of abstract labor time. The basic criticism here (Habermas again) is that Lukács — by failing to distinguish non-reified forms of objectification from his criticism of its degraded, alienated forms — jettisoned all reason and science as hopelessly contaminated by capitalist rationalization.¹⁷ Theodor Adorno puts the stakes of this terminological confusion as starkly as possible: for Lukács, “thingness” is “radical evil.”¹⁸ If it were so, it was a grievous fault. But this is a strange criticism, since alienation does not play an important role in the reification essay. Apart from citations of Marx, Lukács’s only use of “alienation” in the reification essay is in Part III, Section 4, on the dialectic of “facts” and “totality.”¹⁹ Lukács analyzes commodity production as the production of surplus-value, and never as “alienation.”

- In keeping with this analysis of surplus-value production, reification (as Lukács constantly insists) is a category of *totality*, and so cannot be ripped out of the process of reproducing capital as a social form to cover any irksome conceptual stubbornness or fixity. Adorno, in particular, is fond of construing reification as something like “identity thinking” or “positivism,” terms considerably untethered from the commodity analysis and the subjectivity argument that govern the concept in *HCC*.
- The role played by the proletariat in Lukács’s analysis should not be assigned to an *empirically-given agent* (the industrial working class). Nor can the role of the Subject of history simply be transferred to Capital, as in Moishe Postone’s reading — a travesty of Hegel’s understanding of the subject-substance identity.²⁰ I take the decisive question here to have been posed by Neil Larsen in his essay “Lukács sans Proletariat”: starting from “(class) consciousness as *form*, as *structured* in its relation to reification,” what is “the *immanent* standpoint of a critique of reification”?²¹ Today, the looked-for revolutionary subject is no longer recognizable as belonging to the industrial site; the subject of history is rather *surplus-value in its dispersed, obscured, and de-collectivized* social reproduction.²² *HCC*’s Subject is not an empirically pre-existing (not even *qua* “alienated”) agent to which consciousness has only to be added, imported, or located. Class consciousness is not the ceremonial donning of the mantle of History, it is the anticipatory canceling of the very placement of consciousness and agency in capitalism.

On my reading, then, the reification argument in *HCC* is about the ongoing objectification of a structural misrecognition, in which capital makes over the world in its own image, bodying forth only an impotent chain of sameness (the tiresome grind of M-C-M), while subjectivity is split off and unconscious. Reified subjectivity thus misrecognizes itself in transcendental terms (as in Hegel’s figure of the “unhappy consciousness”), not understanding that the subject is perpetually *under construction*

elsewhere. Reification is not only a description of the bad, contemplative-idealist bourgeois subject — it is also an account of how the “objective” dialectic of capital (including the class struggle) is a kind of inverted narrative of collective subjectivity.²³

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It is notable that the reification essay should turn upon such a moment of recognition, because Lukács, in his literary criticism proper, shows no real interest in the category of *anagnorisis*. Wherever Lukács discusses recognition scenes, his remarks are fairly textbook and cursory.²⁴ For example:

The great scenes in classical literature clarified situations that were previously confused and obscure. The purpose of Aristotle’s recognition scene was to illuminate such obscurity. In major literary works of the past there were always crises in the composition at which the past and future were illuminated.²⁵

In *The Historical Novel*, the crisis in Oedipus Rex is described only as a “calling to account” or “day of reckoning,” not as self-knowledge in otherness.²⁶ In this, Lukács is only following Hegel’s theory of drama, in which recognition scenes play no real part, being subordinated to the collision of ethical structures.²⁷

My specific contention is that the non-appearance of recognition as a category in *TN* is not a mere incidental oversight, but clarifies the internal problematic of that work, while it is precisely the introduction of recognition in *HCC* that allows an advance in narrative terms over Lukács’s earlier novel theory. If the dramatic climax, so to speak, of *HCC* is a moment of self-consciousness arising from the mute objectification of external structures — the coming-to-awareness “on the side of the object” — the entire structure of *TN* is predicated upon the impossibility of this kind of recognition. In the earlier work, the novel is organized instead around an irreparable split between “soul” and “world,” where *form* is the ever-renewed but foredoomed attempt to bridge “the chasm between cognition and action, between soul and created structure.”²⁸ Lukács follows Hegel in seeing this barrier not as an *a priori* limitation of consciousness (as in Kant) but as a historical *result*, the condition of “a world that has been abandoned by God.”²⁹

This dualism holding the hero asunder from an indifferent external world is the starting point for what might be considered as the main current of the nineteenth-century European novel, which is continually taking up the questions, “What is my place in the world? How can I make my inner life into an external reality?” This is the situation of Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*, Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, Pierre Bezukhov in *War and Peace*, as well as of the heroes in the prototypical *Bildungsromane* of Goethe, Balzac, and Stendhal. The answer almost always involves the lowering or adjusting of one’s expectations; the difficulty is to wedge one’s life into

its eventually limited niche, to “find one’s place.” Instead of recognition, the operative term here is the *reconciliation* of the individual with reality, as paradigmatically in *Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship*.

We can now put our finger on the specific difference between *TN* and *HCC*. In the former, the structuring principle is the coming-to-terms with “the discrepancy between the interiority and the world,” an insurmountable opposition that can be domesticated only as a matter of the hero’s social “fit.”³⁰ Because “soul” or “interiority” is by definition split off from the stubbornly resistant “outside world,” which it contemplates as a separate order of being, there is no possibility of its grasping itself *from within* the discrete, obstinate persistence of reality.³¹ This exclusion of “self-surmounting subjectivity” (other than in the doomed form of irony) is an organizing *limit* for *TN*.³² *HCC*, however, posits the dialectical *identity* of “soul” and “world,” where the subject is able to reflexively seize its own determinations and “overthrow... the objective forms that shape the life of man.”³³ The Marxist analysis of subjectivity yields a picture where the “unbridgeable gap opening up between subject and object” is revealed as a *perspective* or *framing* that is just as much productive of the subjective-observing position itself.³⁴ Instead of the accommodation, irony, and romantic defeatism of *TN*, the subject of *HCC* is charged with the unrecoverable loss of its placement in the world — it must unmake the determining structures of its social being and annul the supports of that original perspective — and the staggering charge of constructing a new world.

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The contours of *HCC*’s recognition scene have been obscured by subsequent criticism of Lukács’s conception of the proletariat — including remarks by Lukács himself in his 1967 preface to *HCC*.³⁵ A recent characterization by Slavoj Žižek captures the consensus: “Lukács remains all too idealist when he proposes simply replacing the Hegelian Spirit with the proletariat as the Subject-Object of History.”³⁶ Some version of this objection — that casting the proletariat as the Subject of History is an illegitimate move, a *deus ex machina* — is now an almost compulsory concession, the price of entry to any discussion of *HCC*. However, in providing an *aesthetic* account of this moment, I hope to reconstruct Lukács’s conception of the proletariat in such a way as to meet these charges.

Although issuing in incompatible theoretical conclusions, the criticisms detailed by Louis Althusser, Postone, and Žižek (among others) coincide in two critical points.

1.) For the proletariat to overcome alienation and achieve itself as the subject-object of history, would mean only *recovering an original, lost, and transhistorical essence*. For Althusser, Lukács’s “‘religious’ conception of the proletariat” assures the messianic recovery of “the human essence itself.”³⁷ For Postone, the proletariat’s self-realization could only mean installing openly, without its “alienated” trappings, the transhistorical essence of “labor” (as the “history-making practice of humanity”).³⁸

The apotheosis of the proletariat would only be the elevation of an “alienated social form,” namely, labor as determined by capitalism.³⁹ And for Žižek, what would be reclaimed in Lukács’s “dis-alienation” are the subject’s *self-positing* “substantial presuppositions,” that is, the subject as its own origin.⁴⁰

2.) In that case, revolutionary class consciousness would not be a deduction from the reified structures of capitalism, as claimed, but a kind of *external agent parachuted from the realm of essences*. According to Postone, “Lukács grounds the possibility of self-awareness and oppositional subjectivity ontologically — that is, outside of the social forms.”⁴¹ And for Žižek, it is as though for Lukács “the subject somehow precedes its alienation — what this misses is the way the subject emerges through the ‘self-alienation’ of the substance, *not* of itself.”⁴² This external imposition would also be an illegal theoretical move according to Althusser’s Spinozist rulebook.

Against these characterizations, I argue:

1.) The self-recognition of the proletariat does not recover any lost essence or pre-existing (and then alienated) identity. The criticism, that Lukács’s Subject simply retrieves itself after a period (or structure) of mystification, confuses HCC’s model of recognition with the ending of a gothic novel like Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, where the rationalist unmasking of illusion is also a complete restoration of rights, a kind of “sorting” operation where exhaustive explanation of the sinister machinations of supernatural entrapment (hidden passageways, disguises, mysterious visitations) yields the “true” alignment of narrative agents. Everything here is put back in order: in the daylight, all relations are made transparent, and the heroic agent can retrospectively survey and comprehend the astonishing events that came before. Above all, our hero is slotted into his destined social role, no longer threatened by secret plots or buried genealogies. We have passed from insecurity (the story) to security (the ending).

But does Lukács really conceive of reification and its annulment in terms of these Gothic tropes? It is an oversimplification to say (*pace* commentators like Postone and Norbert Trenkle) that dereification in HCC is only seen as demystification, the dispelling of illusion, unmasking, and so on. To be sure, there is scattered textual support for this reading, where Lukács does speak of “illusions,” or a “cloak spread over the true essence,” and interprets proletarian labor as the living core of an over-quantified society, concealed under a crust of quantification.⁴³ (Such moments, which rely on the Weberian terminology of rationalization that we bracketed earlier, are the touchy-feely soil in which Honneth’s reading takes root.) But this is not the whole story. Reification is not an obscuring fog that has only to be lifted — as Lukács understands all too well: “this process [dereification] is no single, unrepeatable tearing of the veil that masks the process.”⁴⁴ The dire mistake of Postone and Trenkle is to confuse HCC’s “class consciousness” with some unreified essence of “labor” which is then uncovered.⁴⁵ Again, Lukács anticipates this misunderstanding: “If the attempt is made to attribute an immediate form of existence to class consciousness, it is not possible to

avoid lapsing into mythology.”⁴⁶ Nothing could be clearer than his specification that the “position of the proletariat in the production process” is only the determinate “point of view” — not the hidden essence — of its class consciousness.⁴⁷ The praxis following from this consciousness can only be conflated with the praxis of labor at the cost of a total misreading. But since even the devil can quote scripture to his purpose, let me just say: Lukács simply does not confuse some concealed-mystified essence of labor with the consciousness of the subject’s recognition.

2.) HCC’s recognition scene is not a *deus ex machina*, an undialectical imposition and deification of an external agent. Rather, Lukács implies the *negation*, the “barredness” of the subject — not its straightforward identity. Lukács no sooner introduces the notorious expression, “identical subject-object,” than he names it as the “dissolution” of the very framework (advanced capitalism) within which it arises.⁴⁸ In this sense, class consciousness is “equally the struggle of the proletariat *against itself*,” that is, against the conditions of its possibility.⁴⁹ I will come back to this subjective destitution in section V.

The “recognition scene” in HCC is therefore neither reconciliation nor restoration, that is, a move entirely within consciousness, the mere shuffling of mental furniture and nominations. It is rather the unmaking of reified objectivity.⁵⁰ The recognition scene is at once a moment in the process of “becoming-subject” and the undermining of the subject’s placement in the world. At the same time, the subject discovers itself as implicated in the fallen world of its emergence — not from some Archimedean point of view, but as its product, “the pure object of societal events.”⁵¹ The legacy of this recognition is “the future that is to be created but has not yet been born,” the uncertain freedom to be carried forward from this moment.⁵²

So far I have been arguing for a reinterpretation of HCC that would rescue its subjectivity argument from the objections of Althusser, Honneth, Postone, et al. To really make this argument would entail a reading of the structures of surplus-value production in Marx’s *Capital* as moments of misrecognized class subjectivity — a task for another day, perhaps. To be totally explicit: the most important contribution *both to Marxism and to novel theory* of HCC is its account of reified subjectivity and the dereifying dialectic of the subject: the subject is the self-imposed loss of its constitutive determinations. For now, I want to take the picture of subjectivity outlined just above — the subject as 1.) *undermined* by recognition, as 2.) *implicated* in the fallen world of its emergence, and as 3.) *destined* for further self-construction and transformation in an uncertain future — as the rudiments of a “theory of the novel.”

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Turning now to the novel, it is apparent we will need a different archive than the works comprising TN’s typology of thesis (*Don Quixote*), antithesis (*Sentimental Education*), and synthesis (*Wilhelm Meister*). The features we have identified — recognition scene, the undermining of the subject’s placement, the rootedness in

the fallen world, and the destiny of future self-unmaking — make up no part of Lukács's earlier theory of the novel, which is predicated on the abyss separating self and world; *TN* never countenances subjectivity as a moment of the external object-world. But these features are (I would argue) not simply a checklist for matching certain novelistic plots with an inventory derived from *HCC* — a kind of Bechdel Test for Hegelian Marxists. I would venture that we also have here a periodization: the culmination of (one trajectory of) literary realism. I am thinking of a specific cluster of works that refuse the terms of accommodation between the subjective ideal and resistant reality offered by *TN*: Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, and Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. In these works, we have nothing like the dualism of problematic "interiority" on one hand and "inessential, empty reality" on the other.⁵³ In these novels, recognition never leads to the restoration of a prelapsarian identity, nor are their conclusions conciliations with or accommodations of reality. Instead we find that interiority is decentered; the "soul" is not something self-given, but a product of external processes and supports that can be seized reflexively. This is the work of the recognition scenes. Daniel Deronda's Jewishness, the pre-history between Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond (and also the role of Ralph Touchett in securing Isabel Archer's inheritance), the confession of Smerdyakov to the murder of Fyodor Pavlovich, or Nekhlyudov's responsibility for the "fallen" woman on whom he is to pass judgment — in each instance we discover the roots of the self surprisingly *exposed* and *external* to the self; self-consciousness is "wholly on the side of the object," in the language of *HCC*.

Take for example *Resurrection*. The recognition scene occurs almost right away, as the aristocrat Nekhlyudov, while serving jury duty, discovers that the sorry and ruined woman standing on trial for murder is the same Maslova he seduced and abandoned nine years before. The recognition is not simply the identification of this figure from Nekhlyudov's past, but also the troubling implication of his own (caddish) responsibility for the chain of events that has issued in the wreck of Maslova's life and the present threat of her conviction. The bored, purely contemplative perspective of the juror-spectator is upended — Nekhlyudov feels "as if he were going not to judge, but to be judged."⁵⁴ In the further development of the plot, Nekhlyudov takes conscience of the unreflective vanity, insularity, and selfishness of his class position (a Czarist-era landowner socially contiguous with influential governors and administrators). All the while contesting Maslova's wrongful conviction, Nekhlyudov is drawn further into relinquishing his privilege, so as to wrench a truthful mode of being from the entrenched corruption of his milieu and his own moral formation and cultural insertion. Finally, in the novel's conclusion, Nekhlyudov is untethered from the all-consuming project of liberating Maslova — not only does he not succeed in overturning her sentence, but she dismisses him from this field of action by refusing to marry him; their involvement is at an end. And yet the last pages of the novel teem with restless promptings and a cascade of insights into his human purpose.

Nekhlyudov is to begin a new life, “not because he had entered into new conditions of life, but because everything he did after that night had a new and quite different significance than before.”⁵⁵ To gloss this in Lukács’s terms, “the act of becoming conscious turns into a *point of transition in practice*,” so that “*the act of consciousness overthrows the objective form of its object*.”⁵⁶ (Incidentally, Lukács in his analysis of Tolstoy in the final chapter of *TN* does not even attempt an adequate characterization of this last of Tolstoy’s novels.)

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the recognition scene (Smerdyakov’s confession to the murder of Fyodor Pavlovich) does not only illuminate the empirical “facts of the case,” in the process clearing away the ambiguous (not to say raving) indications of guilt which land Dmitri in Siberia for the murder of his father. Beyond this “solution” of the novel’s central mystery, the recognition presents the figure of the despised, uncanny Smerdyakov to the “innocent” brothers as a mirror of their own Oedipal imbrications. If the rousing ending of the novel “makes a subject” out of the brothers, it is starting from this recognition of identity with Smerdyakov. That is to say, while none of the brothers *did* kill their father, their late collective identification is with the vanishing position of this non-brother. The recognition of how “we are all Smerdyakov” is simultaneously a dissolution of that place (he commits suicide) and a struggle *against* this identity, in their newfound solidarity.

The recognition scene in *Daniel Deronda* has the strange consequence of triggering what we might call a *second-hand* subjective destitution: when Daniel, raised as the adopted nephew of Sir Hugo Mallinger, learns that his parents were Jews, and is prompted to travel to the East to promote a vague Zionism, this is experienced as a “sort of crisis” in the life of the other protagonist, Gwendolen Harleth:

she was for the first time feeling the pressure of a vast mysterious movement, for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world, and getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence with which her own was revolving.⁵⁷

Not for Daniel but for Gwendolen is the open-ended project stretching beyond the novel’s conclusion felt as “the bewildering vision of these wild-stretching purposes.”⁵⁸ And also for Gwendolen is the rootedness in the fallen world and the destiny of future self-unmaking; Deronda, who in F.R. Leavis’s judgment combines “moral enthusiasm” with “essential relaxation,” and “has no ‘troubles’ he needs a refuge from,” more or less translates his new identity into a self-evident and unproblematic sense of duty.⁵⁹ It is Gwendolen who is plunged in the icy bath of self-humiliation and emerges with no definite way marked ahead, with the minimal sense that somehow life will be different — better, but harder — going forward. And unlike in *Middlemarch*, there is no sagacious confirmation that this destiny ever takes place. The purposes are left as though hanging in history, mere vectors or first steps.

In *The Portrait of a Lady*, the recognition scene is quite explicitly Isabel Archer's recognition of her own reification: "the dry staring fact that she had been an applied handled hung-up tool, as senseless and convenient as mere shaped wood and iron."⁶⁰ But this realization of how she has been treated like a *thing* (married for her money under false pretenses) is at the same time the realization that her very subjectivity is only a produced effect of prior stage-management. Far from being an abstract autonomy whose placement or determination is infinitely deferred, she is determinately placed not only by the conspiracy of her husband Gilbert Osmond and his former lover Madame Merle, but also by the observing perspective of her invalid cousin Ralph Touchett. The latter discovery discloses the ideal spectator for whom Isabel's "freedom" was enacted as just this frail, dying, heartbroken man — a combination of Prospero (weaving her fate from behind the scenes) and Caliban (cynical and shattered in body). Isabel's fate is usually taken as a stern lesson warning against the aestheticism of the self inhering in the idealist doctrine of an unbounded, self-created consciousness. But what I would like to emphasize is that the entire topic of unconditioned freedom is not just a fallacious perspective one might unwisely *adopt*, but is a subjective mode "always already" fixed by the voyeuristic gaze of Ralph Touchett. (And I would argue that this logic is also figured in the "house of fiction" metaphor in the preface to the New York Edition of the novel, where the key is that every observer has an *obstructed view looking out* — there is simply no "content" inside the house of fiction except the "form" of the window's angle and situation opening upon the external scene.) Isabel is implicated in the fallen world insofar as she invests her placement in this enchanted construction with a quasi-providential mandate, the projected and idealized obligation to grandly and freely *do*, that is, implicated to the degree that she posits some symbolic addressee of her fate and self-performance. (This transcendental perspective is essentially the mistake of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, regardless of his supposed "atheism.") And in the conclusion of the novel, Isabel can only recover her self-determination retrospectively, by restoring intention to the discontinuity and fumbling of a botched life. When faced with the concealed machinery behind her apparently free choices, Isabel does not retreat from them, does not plead that she did not mean it. Robert Pippin nicely captures the paradox here: for Isabel "to have achieved a self-determined life is to 'recover' her past as her own."⁶¹ The point is *not* to recover somewhere an un-barred subject. Instead, she affirms her own meaning within what she can only regret, claiming a mangled outcome as something desired: "One must accept one's deeds. I married him before all the world; I was perfectly free; it was impossible to do anything more deliberate."⁶² In saying this, and in returning to Osmond, Isabel writes herself into her own history as free within the long wreck of her past.

Here is a table summarizing these features as they appear in these works.

	Recognition scene	Undermining of the subject's placement	Rootedness in the fallen world	Destiny of future self-unmaking
<i>Resurrection</i>	Maslova on trial	Corruption and complacency of class-insertion	Seduction and abandonment of Maslova	Christian brotherhood
<i>Brothers Karamazov</i>	Smerdyakov's confession	Identification with Smerdyakov at moment of his self-negation	Oedipal antagonisms of brothers	New solidarity of brothers echoed in Alyosha's speech to village boys
<i>Daniel Deronda</i>	Daniel's Jewishness	Marginal placement of Jews in England	Expressed second-hand in Gwendolen's humiliation and regrets	Zionism
<i>Portrait of a Lady</i>	Merle and Osmond lovers; Ralph the architect of Isabel's inheritance	"Freedom" not ontological but effect of voyeuristic gaze	Investment in project of autonomous "doing"	Returning to Rome; repeating the past decision now as "her own"
<i>History and Class Consciousness</i>	Worker becomes aware of himself as a produced commodity	Subject "split": consciousness found wholly on side of object	Forms of relative surplus-value are proletariat's unconscious objectification	Non-mechanistic, unguaranteed <i>praxis</i> overturns forms of objectivity

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I do not mean to suggest for a moment that (of all texts!) *HCC* endorses an individualistic program for the ethical rectification of bourgeois or aristocratic subjects, even if that is the unmistakable payoff of some of the novels in question. I have been guilty, certainly, of translating the perspective of "proletarian class consciousness" into the situations of an Isabel Archer or an Ivan Karamazov. But Marxism is not, after all, an allegory for Jamesian "doing" or the defiles of Dostoevsky's "salvation." I argued above that only the narrative model of the "recognition scene" allowed us to grasp the picture of subjectivity in *HCC*. It is equally true that the "novel theory" in question cannot be understood without Lukács's theory of reification — which means in terms of class, ideology, history, totality, etc. But none of these concepts should be taken as

reflections of positively-given social contents (or context). For instance, I would say that the truly political concept in *TN* is actually the formal notion of “Irony,” not any of the remarks directly expressing its romantic anti-capitalism. And so in *HCC*’s theory of the novel, Marxist categories should be understood as topics of representation rather than topics *for* representation.⁶³

I would like to return for a moment to the translation, so to speak, from the class subject of *HCC* to the individual subject of the novels (or novel theory) in question. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson famously announced that “all literature must be read as a symbolic meditation on the destiny of community.”⁶⁴ It is not too difficult to read *Daniel Deronda* or *Resurrection* along those lines, since they are “about” radical political projects: Zionism and Tolstoy’s anarchist non-violence (so that *Resurrection* was only written to raise funds for the emigration of the pacifist Doukhobors from Czarist Russia). James and Dostoevsky, on the other hand, are aligned together by their shared hostility to Utopian or radical politics (although both authors might equally be seen as incisive critics of reification). But it is not the logic of the collective — even at some allegorical level of Jameson’s “positive hermeneutic” — which I see as the key social projection in *HCC*’s theory of the novel. (And the same could be said for the positive hermeneutic of *HCC* itself, where the essays on organization hang together awkwardly with the reification analysis.)

So, does our theory of the novel leave us with the same old individualist subject (the production of which has been claimed as the novel’s great accomplishment by Foucauldian critics like D.A. Miller and Nancy Armstrong)? Not at all. But to see this, we need to look at two facets of “dereification” which are in no way individualist — and which will lead to the question of how far our novels are engaged in “dereification” (not, by the way, a Lukácsian term). Namely, we will look at *reality*, specifically the renovation of *TN*’s concept of reality and the connection to realism, and *subjective destitution*, which I take to be a moment of social being, since the Lukácsian subject is not a mere ephemeral “effect” of structure but a necessary if misidentified support of its reproduction.

“Reality” plays a complex role in *TN*. On one hand, Lukács’s entire argument depends on reality *not being granted the status of “totality.”* Reality has fallen off from the homogeneous world of the epic, to become abstract, fragile, incomplete, and discontinuous.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the problematic of the novel — its specific “dissonance” — means “positing the fragile and incomplete nature of the world as ultimate reality,” or “the paradoxical fusion of heterogeneous and discrete components into an organic whole which is then abolished over and over again.”⁶⁶ In other words, the novel’s meaning and completeness result from “ruthlessly... exposing” the world’s meaninglessness and incompleteness even at the moment when reality triumphs over ideal.⁶⁷ The novel depicts said triumph as hollow, momentary, and glib.⁶⁸

HCC also depicts (reified) reality as fragile, riddled by contradiction, and rent by gaps — threatened by the outbreak of irrational crises and “unmediated

catastrophes.”⁶⁹ The conceptual scaffolding of reification (the “iron laws” of bourgeois political economy) never yields — and capitalism can never succeed in doing so — a social order where reason actually holds sway. Reification only succeeds in sweeping under the rug the irrational contents of bourgeois social forms, which are constantly re-emerging as new, heightened contradictions. The difference between *TN* and *HCC*, on the question of reality, is that in the earlier work reality *emerges* only when challenged. Its appearance depends upon the resistance offered by subjectivity. That is, “outside reality... reveals itself as it ‘really is’ only as an opposition to every one of the hero’s actions.”⁷⁰ But in *TN*, this “refusal of the immanence of being” is definite and actual: the subject has no part to play in the totality, and must find its consolations within itself. In *HCC*, reality works the other way around. Reification in *HCC* has the passive, automatic *appearance* of proceeding “*without the intervention of the subject*,” while (as I will argue in a moment) really *depending on* the barred subjectivity and misrecognized objectifications of the proletariat.⁷¹

HCC’s picture of reality is to a large extent carried over by Lukács in his writings on realism and the historical novel: hence the emphasis on reality as *process* or *becoming* rather than a totality of *facts*. (Although one can go seriously wrong here and equate *becoming* with the dialectic, and reification with any instance of rigidity and intransigence. Lukács is very clear elsewhere in the essay that capitalism is not “unchanging” or absolute in that sense, given “the unceasingly revolutionary forces of the capitalist economy.”⁷²) It is for this reason that Lukács’s “realism” is not a copy or reflection of reality, but a kind of dialectical scalpel that identifies fissures and anomie in their historical dynamic.⁷³ One way to read Lukács’s great essay, “Realism in the Balance,” is as an extended meditation precisely on everything disruptive, fleeting, fragmented, subjective, dissimulating, delayed, anticipatory, out of sync, false, and merely-apparent in the contingent flux of history. But the crucial difference between the realism essays and *HCC* is the question of the Archimedean standpoint examined above in the context of class subjectivity and totality. In “Realism in the Balance,” an obstructed view of totality, the necessary mediation of perspective, is *written into realism*; the point is to grasp these existential or experiential vicissitudes of perspective *as conditioning the literary form itself*.⁷⁴ However, the “standpoint” which is to seize upon these mediations is no longer the barred subjectivity immanent to reification. Lukács’s realist author undertakes a “a deeper probing of the world,” with his aim “to penetrate the laws governing objective reality and to uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated, not immediately perceptible networks of relationships that go to make up society.”⁷⁵ We are dealing here with what Althusser criticizes as “empiricism,” the abstraction of a conceptual essence from the given, real object of knowledge.⁷⁶ Absent from this probing, scalpel-wielding, uncovering perspective is *the fundamental claim* of the “standpoint” argument as it is articulated in *HCC*: that this standpoint belongs to the *object*, it is the unconscious and misrecognized *vantage point of objectivity upon itself*. And what is crucial about our literary texts — from

Deronda to *Resurrection* — is that the recognizing subjectivity is revealed to be not an Archimedean empiricist, but rather a *produced* and constrained position within the determinacies of the object-world. The subject of HCC's theory (and this is the whole point of Hegel) is sought in what is unpromisingly objective or substantial, precisely what is *unreflective* and pre-structured in the situation of a Nekhlyudov, an Isabel Archer, and so on.

Having addressed de-reification "objectively," in terms of reality, I now want to look at HCC's *subjective destitution*, which I read as a moment of social being, since the subject is not only subordinated to structure but is a misrecognized pillar of its reproduction, capable of (Samson-like) interruption. This destitution should not be confused with the negative effects of reification upon the (bourgeois) subject, for example, the contemplative stance assigned to the rational observer of reified processes. (Nor should the subject in question be confused with the Althusserian topic of interpellation as subject.) I wrote above that "the subject is the self-imposed loss of its constitutive determinations." In keeping with the Hegelian position that the course of objective development ("the Absolute conceived not only as substance...") is also the unconscious path of consciousness or Spirit ("but also as subject"), Lukács insists that, "[f]or the proletariat," the ongoing reproduction of capital on an expanded basis, "means its own emergence as a class."⁷⁷ But this positive moment *only* describes its misrecognized, unconscious being, its bad objectification under capital. Class consciousness, then, has to be understood not as the achievement of some potential contents, but as a void: "For it is itself nothing but the contradictions of history that have become conscious."⁷⁸ Žižek therefore is too quick to draw a contrast between Lukács and Hegel where the former supposedly offers "an absolute Subject which, in total self-transparency, appropriates or internalizes all objective substantial content."⁷⁹ (What is interesting here is that Žižek, who has spent his career combating the received mythological version of Hegel, simply transfers these misconceptions onto Lukács, as though *somebody* had to make the mistakes that Hegel is being absolved of.) For this reason the last feature of HCC's theory of the novel, the destiny of future self-unmaking, is in a sense *unrepresentable*, projected beyond the novel form.

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One of the sturdiest axioms of literary criticism after structuralism is the equation of *narrative* closure with *ideological* closure. In Roland Barthes's *S/Z*, the "writable" is atemporal: "without structure," "reversible," "never shut," and "without reference to a big final grouping or ultimate structure."⁸⁰ What is "readable" is by contrast "fundamentally submitted to logico-temporal ordering," committed "to announcing the end of every action (conclusion, interruption, closure, denouement)."⁸¹ In Franco Moretti's reading of the Sherlock Holmes stories, the "disenchantment" (in a Weberian sense) resulting from the detective's solutions betrays "totalitarian aspirations towards a transparent society."⁸² In D.A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police*, even the failures and

dilations of closure are taken to be emanations of power's grip on interiority. Likewise in Mary Poovey's *Genres of the Credit Economy*, novelistic closure serves a functionalist role in capitalism, soothing and naturalizing the anxieties arising from new economic forms. A Marxist version of this is Fredric Jameson's reading of *telos* (for instance Hegel's "Absolute Spirit") as a "strategy of containment."⁸³

On my reading of *HCC*, its theory of narrative closure does not function as an imaginary resolution, phantasmatic compensation, or functionalist adaptation — in other words, it is neither a reconciliation with nor a displaced symbolic transcendence of reification. Eliot, Dostoevsky, James, Tolstoy, and Lukács are not uplifting or pedagogical. The recognition in *HCC* and in these novels is terrifying, revealing the utter lack of a safety net — the risk already run and lost, the (oblivious) destitution of long standing. The demands of this recognition are destabilizing and harsh. This would argue the inversion, I think, of the usual "ideological" role of literary closure. Reification itself, by populating objectivity with categories, rule-governed processes, and social atoms, can even seem warm by comparison to the emotional nudity of the moment of recognition. What is left intact along the path of the subject is not embellished; it is, as yet, a wasteland.

Notes

1. J.M. Bernstein, *The Philosophy of the Novel* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) viii, and Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) 202.
2. So, for Jameson, in *HCC*, “the construction of Utopia henceforth no longer falls to literature” (as it did in *Theory of the Novel*’s “nostalgic vision of a golden age in which an epic wholeness was still possible”), but now devolves upon “praxis and political action itself.” Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 190.
3. György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1971) 83.
4. Lukács, *HCC* 168.
5. *HCC* 167.
6. *HCC* 168.
7. Axel Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (New York: Oxford UP, 2008) 58.
8. For criticisms of Honneth, see Andrew Feenberg, “Rethinking Reification,” *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence: Aesthetics, Politics, Literature*, eds. Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall, (London: Continuum, 2011), and Timothy Bewes, “Capitalism and Reification: The Logic of the Instance,” *Reading Capitalist Realism*, eds. Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2014).
9. Honneth, *Reification* 25.
10. *Reification* 38.
11. *Reification* 51.
12. *Reification* 25-6.
13. *HCC* 168.
14. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. I, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1984) 356-63. See also Andrew Feenberg, *The Philosophy of Praxis* (London: Verso, 2014) 61-9.
15. On “real subsumption,” see Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977) 1023-5, 1034-8.
16. *HCC* xxiv
17. Habermas, *Communicative Action* 360.
18. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 2003) 191.
19. *HCC* 184.
20. Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge: U Cambridge P, 1996) 75.
21. Neil Larsen, “Lukács sans Proletariat,” *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance* 83, 92.
22. See Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital* (London: Verso, 2011).
23. *HCC* 171.
24. For example, in *TN*, the only mention of recognition scenes occurs in the context of the epic’s “timelessness”: “This is the formal meaning of the typical scenes of revelation and recognition which Aristotle shows us; something that was pragmatically unknown to the heroes of the drama enters their field of vision and, in the world thus altered, they have to act otherwise than they might wish to act. But the force of the newly introduced factor is not diminished by a time perspective, it is absolutely homogeneous with and equivalent to the present.” György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971) 126-7.

25. György Lukács, *Writer and Critic*, trans. Arthur D. Kahn (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1971) 177.
26. György Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983) 101-2.
27. "[A]nagnorisis [does] not arise in the categories Hegel prefers." Terence Cave, *Recognitions* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 156.
28. Lukács, *TN* 97, 34.
29. *TN* 88.
30. *TN* 136.
31. "Because of the purely reflexive nature of the soul's interiority, outside reality remains quite untouched by it." *TN* 100.
32. *TN* 79.
33. *HCC* 186.
34. *HCC* 158.
35. *HCC* xxiii.
36. Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing* (London: Verso, 2012) 220.
37. Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2006) 221-2.
38. Postone, *Time* 82.
39. *Time* 80.
40. Žižek, *Nothing* 258.
41. *Time* 275n41.
42. *Nothing* 261.
43. *HCC* 166.
44. *HCC* 199.
45. "[P]roletarian self-consciousness removes the veil and reveals the alleged core of social relationships. In this respect, the overcoming of this reification represents the liberation of labor from the compulsion of the commodity structure." Norbert Trenkle, "The Metaphysical Subtleties of Class Struggle: On the Unspoken Premises of an Odd Retro-Discourse," *Krisis* (2005). <http://www.krisis.org/2005/the-metaphysical-subtleties-of-class-struggle>
46. *HCC* 173.
47. *HCC* 209. See also *HCC* 190.
48. *HCC* 149.
49. *HCC* 80.
50. *HCC* 199.
51. *HCC* 165.
52. *HCC* 204.
53. *TN* 92.
54. Leo Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, trans. Louise Maude (London: Oxford UP, 1916) Ch. XIX.
55. Tolstoy, *Resurrection* Ch. XXVIII.
56. *HCC* 178.
57. George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (London and Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1876) Ch. LIX.
58. Eliot, *Deronda* Ch. LIX.

59. F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948) 84.
60. Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, vol. II (New York: Modern Library, 1951) 379.
61. Robert Pippin, *Henry James and Modern Moral Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 142.
62. James, *Portrait*, vol. II 284.
63. This is perhaps the place to differentiate my approach from Anna Kornbluh's in her essay "Marx's Victorian Novel," *Mediations* 25.1 (Fall 2010) 15-37. Kornbluh's analysis demonstrates that the rhetorical figures and tropes of big-C *Capital* also belong to little-c capital; e.g. the dialectic of capital is itself "metaleptic." I have also attempted a "literary" analysis of reification and class struggle, but my sense of "novel theory" is confined to the kinds of problems broached in *TN*: specifically, the subject-object problem and its neighbor, totality. Another difference: Lukács is not what we would call a "close-reader" — in fact he barely manages to name the books he is discussing — nor have I tried to be one here. Kornbluh's essay is a model of close reading.
64. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) 70.
65. See "The Inner Form of the Novel," *TN* 70-83.
66. *TN* 71, 84.
67. *TN* 72.
68. The discussion of Tolstoy in the last chapter of *TN* clarifies what is going on here. The epiphanies and enlightenments of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* are unsustainable; here it is the subjective side which is glib, discontinuous, and momentary: "Such paths cannot be trodden" (*Theory* 150).
69. *HCC* 165.
70. *TN* 100.
71. *HCC* 128.
72. *HCC* 97.
73. Fredric Jameson has recently offered a quartet of distinctions to parse this dialectic: transcendental immanence, transcendental transcendence, immanent immanence, and immanent transcendence. *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso 2013) 210-6.
74. György Lukács, "Realism in the Balance," *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Fredric Jameson (Verso: London, 2007) 33-6.
75. Lukács, "Realism" 38.
76. Louis Althusser, "Du 'Capital' à la philosophie de Marx," *Lire le Capital*, vol. I, eds. Althusser and Étienne Balibar (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1968) 38-45.
77. *HCC* 171.
78. *HCC* 178.
79. *Nothing* 258.
80. Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1976) 11, 16
81. Barthes, *S/Z* 53-4.
82. Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders* (London: Verso, 1988) 155, 136.
83. Jameson, *Political* 53.

Form as Formalization In/Against *Theory of the Novel*

Tom Eyers

In this essay, I will mobilize a reading of György Lukács's still-crucial *Theory of the Novel* to argue for a new way of thinking literary form.¹ I'll argue for literary form as, first, a process, rather than a thing or set of things; and, second, as a process or set of processes that attends specifically to the *formalization of history*, where the latter is understood as in some fundamental sense already formal, already structured, never quite the "content" to literature's "form." In the third and fourth sections of this essay especially, I will propose an account of the relation between literary form and history that finds in moments of apparent formal withdrawal or stasis moments where literature actively intervenes in history, formalizing the already-formal structures of the latter. Such claims are to be distinguished from the argument influentially advanced by Fredric Jameson, for whom history is to be understood as "the content [literature] has to take up into itself in order to submit it to the transformations of form."² The latter formulation paints, I claim, an overly neat picture of what is a messy and inchoate process, one that is nonetheless amenable to analysis when the organicist and textualist errors of prior formalisms are challenged.

I will resist any violent imposition of an a priori theoretical framework onto Lukács's text, a text that is vital in part because of its curious ability to fend off just such appropriative attempts. Or, I will at least signal where my critical project explicitly veers away from Lukács's, frequently at points where my appropriative hold on the text becomes especially tight. Part 1 teases out the status of form in *Theory of the Novel*, while part 2 attends more specifically to Lukács's privileging of narrative. Part 3 contrasts Gustave Flaubert and Charles Baudelaire as case studies, one narrative and the other prosodic, for thinking the literary formalization of history. While my analysis in part 3 will largely, if not entirely, depart from Lukács's priorities, the concluding section will make explicit where my own theories of literary form and formalization touch a subterranean current in *Theory of the Novel*, one that takes history itself to already be formally structured in uncanny and conducive ways.

One should not lose sight, in any case, of the transcendent *weirdness*, the motivating

singularity of this book. I hope that my putting it to use here will be as respectful of that galvanizing eccentricity as it will nonetheless open us onto more general questions that have relevance to recent discussions of urgent interest in the theoretical humanities. Such conversations have especially coalesced, of late, around categories — form, history, worldliness — that haunt us despite, or perhaps because of, their also being so portentously ancient and intractable, so apparently out of time, so seemingly unexorcisable. I don't wish to blast this text out of history, but neither do I think smothering its curious argumentative turns in a normalizing narrative of development does much to reveal its secrets. (Which is just one way to say that, despite its obvious centering on the narrative form, *Theory of the Novel* may well bear within it non- if not anti-narrative theoretical resources, more of which anon). Equally, a minimal commitment to the materialist dialectic must, I think, refuse any ahistorical or philosophical hypostatization of formal categories. Rather, one must insistently inquire after those forms, which is to say those processes, conspicuously left outside of attentive critical-historical analysis, so long as, nonetheless, one also attends to how such forms-in-motion also operate upon, which is to say formalize, the historical conditions within and against which they emerge. Perhaps the most contestable claim I will make, because the most liable to tip into essentialism, is that it is poetry rather than prose that is best able to demonstrate the power of literature to formalize, rather than merely passively present, its historical outsides, and this despite the numerous limit-cases that make any strict or final separation of poetry from narrative impossible.

This is never a conveniently symmetrical process, needless to say; there is never an easy circle here for us merely to trace or square. Rather, history and form are, in their varied attempts at the formalization of each other, rather more elusive of each other's clasp as they may otherwise tend toward any mutual embrace. But it may be this very elusiveness, the stasis produced by apparent moments of literary solipsism or withdrawal, that paradoxically results in any non-mimetic transfer of meaning between the distinctive logics of literature and historical time. What I hope will result is a vision of both form and history that leaves such categories humbly quasi- if not non-transcendental, avoidant of both metaphysical bloat and historicist "contextualization" or what I will come to call narrativization. Such an account of literature in its agonistic interaction with history will be most fully fleshed out in readings of Flaubert and Baudelaire, but Lukács will provide surprising resources both for and against such a theory.

The contemporary debates I mention above have, at least since the turn of the new millennium, often settled under the banner of the "new formalism." If this apparently new "turn" is in fact the latest iteration of an ongoing haunting, the latest uncanny reappearance of age-old conundrums and symptomatic impasses, one would do well to ask what is specific, and what is pointedly excluded, in this latest iteration. I take Caroline Levine's recent book *Forms* to be the most sophisticated intervention yet in

this debate, and so her text may stand in here for what is an increasingly sprawling conversation.³ A brief discussion of the book will show how different my own take on the form-history debate is. At the very opening, Levine presents what a standard formalist analysis of *Jane Eyre* might look like. Such a reading would, we're told, attend to "literary techniques both large and small, including the marriage plot, first-person narration, description, free indirect speech, suspense, metaphor, and syntax."⁴ History, then, would be pregnant by its very absence in such an analysis. By contrast, Levine's new formalism would rather trace the often-agonistic parity between those forms seemingly enclosed within the bounds of the literary text, and the forms and structures into which social life sediments. Levine draws our attention to the following passage in *Jane Eyre*: upon the ringing of a school bell, schoolgirls "all formed in file, two and two, and in that order descended the stairs." Responding to a verbal command, the children arrange themselves into "four semicircles, before four chairs, placed at the four tables; all held books in their hands."⁵ Critics, Levine writes, are used to "reading Lowood's disciplinary order as part of the novel's content and context... But what are Lowood's shapes and arrangements — its semicircles, timed durations, and ladders of achievement — if not themselves kinds of *form*?"⁶

Levine meets the first obvious objection rather well. "One might object," she writes, "that it is a category mistake to use the aesthetic term *form* to describe the daily routines of a nineteenth century school."⁷ And yet as she rightly points out, "form" as a term has hardly been restricted to aesthetics. Rather, in its very generality, "form" has traveled through innumerable domains other than aesthetics, and it may nominate a particular object or describe a general property of a class of things. But does this malleable usage justify treating with the same analytical brush Brontë's use of metaphor, say, and her description of the spatial outlines of a social institution? Levine argues her case forcefully, noting that: "it is the work of form to make order. And this means that forms are the stuff of politics."⁸ Thus, Levine's new formalism, far from shutting out questions of social and political import, should rather widen their pertinence, to include the rhyming couplet as much as the disciplinary enclosure of space or the distribution of self-regulating bodies. As a consequence

[t]he traditionally troubling gap between the form of the literary text and its content and context dissolves. Formalist analysis turns out to be as valuable to understanding sociopolitical institutions as it is to reading literature. Forms are at work everywhere.⁹

But hasn't a crucial question been elided here? Even as Levine celebrates the "dissolving" of the barrier between text and context, she presumably wouldn't wish to claim that there is, as a result, absolutely no distinction to be made between the words that make up Brontë's narrative and the arrangements of space that are her referent. Presuming this much, we are still to learn how it is that these different

things are to be explained according to the same, now highly capacious definition of “form.” Even more importantly, how do these different forms come to relate to one another at all? Even as it may be tempting to pose this problem as a question of reference, or as, say, a problem of the epistemology of reading, I’d prefer to leave those terms aside and turn instead to Lukács, who may well help us re-thematize the dilemma as that of the historicization of form and the formalization of history, this latter chiasmus an expansive way of describing what I mean by “formalization” per se. If Levine threatens to leave hanging the question of how different forms gain a hold on one another while nonetheless retaining something of their autonomy and distinctiveness, Lukács, I will claim, risks dissolving what is specific about the literature-history relation in the acid bath of narrative recuperation and resolution, and this despite the continued usefulness of his analysis for contemporary debates.

Form’s Fate in *Theory of the Novel*

On Fredric Jameson’s estimation, and fairly uncontroversially, *Theory of the Novel’s* dialectical axis pivots around two key terms, that of (formal) essence and that of life, or, as Jameson summarizes, “of meaningfulness on the one hand, and the events and raw materials of daily existence on the other.”¹⁰ The binary gives out onto the broad sweep of Lukács’s argument, one that is familiar enough: while, in Ancient Greece, formal essence was immanent to life, such that literature, and most pertinently epic, neatly encompassed the meaning already abundant in the lifeworld, by the ascension of Platonic philosophy to prominence, life and meaning had become irreconcilable. The novel, of course, is only the most recent form to try, and productively to fail, to suture this tragic faultline that makes of modernity its own, immanent negation, its own repudiation of the dreams of progress that stick resolutely to its ideological self-image. As Jameson rightly emphasizes, it is narrative more than anything else that for Lukács most successfully mediates between the now opposed claims of distinct formal-literary imperatives and the deadened, alienated spaces of the socius, even as “success” must, by the time of the novel’s arrival, very much be taken in a relative sense.

This, at any rate, is one version of Lukács, and it stands as a perfectly reasonable summation of the broad thrust of *Theory of the Novel*. But I’d like to argue, at least in part, for a different Lukács, one that is less attached to the now surely anachronistic terms of phenomenology, Hegelian or otherwise. My aim is not to produce a Lukács of the negative dialectic, but rather to try and imagine a new dialectic of formalization that is inassimilable either to the standard story told of *Theory of the Novel*, as above, or to that teeming and easily translatable agon of literary and social forms that one may associate with the “new formalism.” We get a first clue as to what that alternative may look like with the following, taken from the chapter “The Epic and the Novel” in *Theory of the Novel*:

All the fissures and rents which are inherent in the historical situation must be drawn into the form-giving process and cannot nor should be disguised by compositional means... The epic world is either a purely childlike one in which the transgression of stable, traditional norms has to entail vengeance which again must be avenged *ad infinitum*, or else it is the perfect theodicy in which crime and punishment lie in the scales of world justice as equal, mutually homogenous weights.¹¹

There are, for Lukács, few such “fissures and rents” in the “historical situation” proper to ancient epic, whereas the historical situation of the novel is, in a sense, made up of nothing but such fractures. History, on this account, is not to be covered over, made artificially smooth, by the ruses of the “compositional means” or style at hand. But it remains unclear, presuming that one takes the power of form-giving to be not entirely nominalistic, which is to say not entirely defined by each historical period within which it arises, why form should be fissure-free in one historical moment, smooth and non-antagonistically contoured in another. Or to put it another way, might Lukács risk collapsing his very foundational distinction between formal essence and life, or in our terms form and history, by assuming a comprehensive transitivity between the already-formal qualities of the historical lifeworld — expansively meaningful in the ancient context, barren in the modern — and the distinct formal imperatives or processes of the literary?

Even as it is apparently in the very dissonance of the relation between the two that the novel derives its power, there nonetheless seems to be an easy transfer of qualities at play here, such that “fissures and rents” in the historical lifeworld are rather seamlessly reproduced within the apparently nonetheless distinguishable bounds of literary form. To collapse the distance between literary form and the particular lifeworld, as such a theoretical maneuver seems to do, no matter how implicitly or unintentionally, is to negate the very explanatory power of Lukács’s analyses, given that it is in the growing incommensurability between the two poles that the historical narrative central to *Theory of the Novel* takes hold; we move seamlessly, or so we’re told, between the tight fit of ancient commensurability to the agitated fracturings of modernity. If, on the contrary, we were to assume that form, or form-giving, in Lukács names nothing but the particular, relative ways in which literature appears at a given moment, then, again, form disappears into history, or at best becomes passive putty upon which history may leave its mark. But this was surely not the broader ambition of the book, the residual Kantianism of which, at a minimum, would suggest that a rather less nominalist vision of form was intended.

In a strange twist, it could well be that, in an earlier and very different theoretical-critical moment, Lukács stumbled in a fashion similar to the new formalists, who also risk, as I have already suggested above with reference to Levine, suggesting that form and history are amenable partners, even ultimately indistinguishable from one

another. This is an all too understandable caesura, given the laudable desire to avoid, on one hand, the exultation of form into an airlessly metaphysical space outside its historical “content,” or the form-denying boosting of history on the other, this latter the ultimate consequence of much that came under the banner of the new historicism and much that now congregates under the carapace of the digital humanities.¹² In the second half of the quote above, one finds something like a symptomatic expression of this anxiety expressed at the level of Lukács’s discussion of the narrative content of epic, as when the critic ironically attributes to epic form, otherwise construed as the most developed and capacious of forms, a childlike indecision, hurtling between a neurotic picturing of punishment — the staging of a formal retribution for the betrayal of the lifeworld’s norms — and an utter placidity, a perfect balance between the law and its transgression. I take this to be an especially telling sign of the theoretical crisis identified above, not least because what I take to be the constructive incommensurability of formalization, the constitutive character of the lack of fit between literature and its histories, would by definition avoid the shutting down of possibilities implicit in Lukács’s hystericization of epic content, its reduction to an impotent vacillation between equally unlikely opposites. To put this otherwise, and to repeat a claim already made by many of Lukács’s admirers and critics, both history and form alike seem thinned out here, made awkwardly to conform to ultimately ahistorical and atextual metaphysical priorities only implicitly announced in the body of the book.

Before reorienting Lukács’s emphasis on “fissures and rents” to my own purposes, I’d do well to pursue this seeming aporia a little further; it may well be definitional of much of the confusion around form and history noticeable in much modern and recent literary criticism. For, at other key moments in the book, a rather more active role is given to literary form, the latter becoming something like a salve to history, a cold cloth upon its fevered brow. At times, Lukács tasks the novel, not just with the unflinching reproduction of modernity’s antagonisms, but rather with the formal amelioration of just those fractures, or so it initially seems:

The irony of the novel is the self-correction of the world’s fragility: inadequate relations can transform themselves into a fanciful yet well-ordered round of misunderstandings and cross-purposes, within which everything is seen as many-sided, within which things appear as isolated and yet connected, as full of value and yet totally devoid of it.¹³

Such is the compromise-formation proper to the novel, whose impotence, at least when held up against its predecessor form of the epic, is nonetheless raised to a higher power as it persists as simultaneously alive to and inadequate to the meaning of its age. Just as the novel-form apparently “self-corrects” the incoherence of its times, so it also smuggles in the isolation and anomie truly proper to its age. As

well-ordered as novelistic structures may seem, they remain fanciful; as capacious as their viewpoints may appear, as malleable as free indirect style, say, may seem, what results is ultimately only apparently full of value. Or, rather, it is both full of value *and* entirely lacking in it, the two vacillating imperatives rather canceling each other out in a whiplash movement ironically not unlike that imputed to the epic above. It is worth underlining the repetition of the deceptive symmetry that, again, also characterized Lukács's diagnosis of epic. (And the latter meant to register as a favorable feature of the ancient form!) What seems an either/or — value or valuelessness, form or formlessness — degrades into a flaccid simultaneity, into the frictionless reproduction of a choice that is ultimately no choice at all. Form only *appears* to in-form its content when it comes to the novel, but in truth it serves only to limply mimic the suspicious *laissez-faire* of modernity's own slack self-presentation, its ideological shell-game, its lashing out at, and its falling wide of the mark of, the nourishment of meaning or spiritual assurance.

And so again, Lukács seems to have de-formed form, and this at the very moment at which his gaze seems most trained on form's fertility, its power. Just as in the discussion of the "fissures and rents" of modernity, and just as in his hystericization of epic, the attempt to particularize formal procedures — there the ancient epic, here the novel — results only in a troubling evacuation of form's constructive power. To be clear, form's formativeness is not reliant in my account on the exultation of the latter to the status of a metaphysical intransitive outside or against history, as I hope will become clear in what follows. And neither is my ambition merely to "prove Lukács wrong," as vain and irrelevant as such an ambition would be in 2016. Rather, in Parts 3 and especially 4, I will positively appropriate resources from *Theory of the Novel*, if only to turn the book against itself. Before I do so, a brief reflection on some tensions in the theory of narrative and time offered in the book should be apposite.

Narrative and the Assimilation of Form to History

Literary critics have tended to stay away of late from broad pronouncements about the differing effects of narrative and poetic forms. The reasons for this are legion, but the admirable concern for significant differences in the cultural reception and transformation of such forms is surely paramount. According to this recent anti-structuralist, nominalist consensus, there is no ideal type of form named "narrative" or "poetry" that one may extract from their actually-occurring, specific instances. Against this consensus, I will risk some general comments both here and in part 3 on the differing effectivities of narrative and verse form, both for and against Lukács's own remarks in *Theory of the Novel*. One would be mistaken, of course, to accuse Lukács of neglecting poetry in his great book, not least because epic verse plays such a signal role, as already noted. The status of the lyric, the form whose final ascendancy in the nineteenth century assured its becoming synonymous with poetry per se, is less clear cut, although it is quite wrong to claim, as Carl Freedman has, that "lyric poetry

barely exists for Lukács.”¹⁴ In what the latter calls the “world of distance,” in which the gap between subject and object earlier closed in the ancient context now widely looms, lyric poetry tends to inflate the subjective domain at the expense of the latter’s union with its putatively objective correlate. As he writes, “only in lyric poetry do... direct, sudden flashes of the substance become like lost original manuscripts suddenly made legible; only in lyric poetry is the subject, the vehicle of such experiences, transformed into the sole carrier of meaning, the only true reality.”¹⁵

This is hardly a claim original to Lukács, although few other critics of the time would so boldly cling to the notion that lyric poetry is able to make the metaphysical appear, no matter how attenuated that appearance may become by virtue of its baleful encasement within an exaggeratedly subjective form. Theodor Adorno, of course, would later embark from a similar premise — the inherent subjectivism of the lyric — to reach an opposite conclusion, namely that the very distortions of lyrical subjective voice are paradoxically revelatory of what the lyric “I” struggles to exclude: not any “substance” per se, but rather the lyric’s objective conditions of social and historical possibility.¹⁶ Leaving such dialectical subtleties aside for a moment, it has been well established that, for Lukács, prose contains formal possibilities that render it suppler, more elevated, more attuned to its age, than lyric could ever possibly be. As he writes, “Only prose can... encompass the suffering and the laurels, the struggle and the crown, with equal power; only in its unfettered plasticity and its non-rhythmic rigor can... embrace the fetters and the freedom, the given heaviness and the conquered lightness of a world henceforth immanently radiant with found meaning.”¹⁷

I’m especially interested in the notion of a “non-rhythmic rigor,” a phrase that brings into relief the bold narratological claim that pervades *Theory of the Novel* without ever quite being named, namely that poetry’s seemingly aristocratic exceptionality must be challenged in the name of narrative. Such a challenge coalesces with the curious idea that a lack of formal rigor, a rigor that historically at least has most often been associated with the disciplining of prose by formal poetic limitations, makes of prose, paradoxically, something especially rigorous. If one associates form, in this context, with poetic meter, say, it is difficult indeed to understand how, for Lukács, the alternative slackness of narrative — if, indeed, slackness is quite right — is instead to be accorded the virtue of rigor. In his earlier *Soul and Form* from 1910, Lukács tasks the “art of writing” with “lead[ing] to a great door — through which there is no passage... This is the most profound meaning of form: to lead to a great moment of silence, to mold the directionless, many-colored stream of life as though all its haste were only for the sake of such moments.”¹⁸ “Writing,” we can infer, refers here to narrative more specifically, whose haste will become important to us below. For now, suffice to notice how form is conducive for both the Lukács of 1910 and the Lukács of just a few years later in *Theory of the Novel*; conducive of, conducive of, life itself, a term broadly substitutable for our preferred term, history. If, for Lukács, the rigor of narrative is such that it waves history through its contours with a minimum

of interruption, feedback, or white noise, it is these very latter that will, in a non-mimetic moment proper to the formal meeting of literature and history, be the very condition on our account for literature's formalization of the latter.

Of course, there are numerous formal decisions ingrained into narrative forms, and one risks excessive credulity in accepting at face value such a discredited hierarchy — aristocratic poetic refinement and “rigor” over and against populist narrative bagginess. The more pertinent distinction to be drawn in this context, and one that will reserve a place within it for a rather different theory of formal rigor, is in the relative rate of the absorption of history that either form affords. By “relative rate of absorption,” I simply mean the relative lack of, or presence of, resistance to the assimilation of textual form inherent to each literary structure. To preview, where Lukács would seem to crown narrative “rigorous” by virtue of its ability to rapidly mainline history, its capacity to yield in the face of history's onrush, perhaps tidying the latter's contradictions in the process, I would prefer to find in the arbitrariness of the poetic line break, in the defiantly *artificial* abstractions of poetry, a resistance to history that, paradoxically, incites the formalization of history all the better. My aim is certainly not to denigrate narrative, or to induce some ahistorical literary-critical choice of one form over the other. Rather, I hope a somewhat polemical counter position of poetry to Lukács's literary form of choice may, by some process of back-projection, help better illuminate Lukács's own critical positions, his own investments.

But let's stick with narrative for a little while longer. Why does Lukács so privilege narrative, and what is the specific relationship between narrative form and history in *Theory of the Novel*? As I've already suggested, narrative quickens history, filtering it through its arrhythmic structures so as to amplify the broadly reflective power of fiction. But there is a sense in which narrative also contains, for Lukács, a certain tendency toward stasis too, perhaps even a kind of resistance, albeit one that is directly borrowed from an allied stasis proper to the external world of which narrative aspires to be the mirror. If epic form neatly communicates the organic self-sufficiency of the world of which it is a part, the novel betrays what Lukács calls the “fundamentally conceptual pseudo-organic nature of the material of the novel,” such material organized in such a way that it is “heterogeneously contingent and discrete.”¹⁹ If epic, on such a reading, “is homogeneously organic and stable,” the novel calls attention to its parts, parts that have a “strict compositional and architectural significance.”²⁰ One might put this another way by saying that the novel flaunts its forms, makes a scene of its tricks and folds that allow narrative to correct, but also somehow to reveal, the dihesences proper to its external worlds.

Unexpectedly, perhaps, Lukács makes the novel form as such embody what would, by scholarly consensus, be understood to be the main characteristics of the so-called post-modern novel of the 1990s. For what is this formal calling attention to itself if not a version of a kind of self-reflexivity, a heightening of compositional

artificiality and starkness, albeit one conducted in the vain hope of an authentic heightening of meaning in conditions of the perilous lack of the latter? With this introduction of contingency into novelistic form, this is to say, Lukács gives back a certain agency to form. Instead of merely transposing a certain historically-specific disconnectedness from world to text, the novel asserts a certain independence, a certain self-containedness. Lukács gives the example of “hidden motifs” buried in a narrative, the decisiveness of which only becomes apparent by the narrative’s end.²¹ Of course, this seeming autonomization of novelistic form, one that arrives in part through the knowingly artificial centering of narrative upon an individual’s trajectory — “[t]he novel overcomes its bad infinity by recourse to the biographical form” — is paradoxically only in the service of a broader deflation of literature’s independence, insofar as it is precisely the disjunction between the aspiration toward integration and totality and the reality of relatively autonomous parts that makes of the novel a mirror of a history itself composed of just such parts and just such thwarted ambitions toward totality.²²

One may nonetheless identify a tension, or perhaps a series of tensions, between this apparent formal contingency of novelistic form and the broader success that the novel apparently achieves for Lukács — a success, remember, only to be measured by its conveyance of the failures of totalization and integration. What underpins and unites these subtly different claims is a certain novelistic temporality, what I want to call narrative’s quickening, its ability to overcome a certain stasis and resistance that poetry, in certain conditions, may more stubbornly hold on to. We get a sense of this quickening of narrative in the chapter on “The Romanticism of Disillusionment,” where Lukács meditates on the “discrepancy” between idea and reality, this disjunction of course definitional for the critic of modern times. Indeed, it is time itself that is the medium through which this aporia is revealed. As he writes, “[t]he most profound and most humiliating impotence of subjectivity consists not so much in its hopeless struggle against the lack of idea in social forms... as in the fact that it cannot resist the sluggish, yet constant progress of time... That is why only the novel, the literary form of the transcendent homelessness of the idea, includes real time... among its constitutive principles.”²³

It is not simply the inability of the modern individual to find a symbolic home that is at stake here, or not only that. Rather, it is the ineluctability of the movement of duration (Lukács makes direct reference to Bergson) that exacerbates the anomie proper to the modern condition and its most quintessential form, the novel. Both the modern subject and its artistic corollary have barely gained a footing, a transcendental point from which to fully measure the proximity or distance between subject and object, between individual and history, before time and the demands of novelistic reinvention sweeps away whatever precarious outpost had been secured. We may need to modify, then, our prevailing claim that, for Lukács, the quickening of narrative is what makes of it a successful conductor of its times. This much is true, but only as long

as one also acknowledges the constitutive failure that must go along with this success, the failure of the center to hold in the face of the formal and temporal onrush of sentence after sentence. Roland Barthes had the measure of this, when he commented on the anxiousness of Flaubert's sentences, each meticulously corrected, but each never quite a success in its own right, the failures of the one inevitably requiring the writing of another, and another... Barthes wrote: "it is... a matter of vertigo: correction is infinite, it has no sure sanction. The corrective protocols are perfectly systematic... but since their points of application are endless, no appeasement is possible: they are groups at once structured and floating."²⁴ Something about the sentence, its inevitable move toward an end marked by the finality of the period, makes it unperfectable, making of novelistic structure a kind of pure duration. Before detouring Lukács's transcendentalism in order to help construct my own take on literary formalization, I will take a detour through Flaubert's neurotically corrected narrative and Baudelaire's verse in order to make good on my earlier promise to draw out what I take to be some crucial formal differences between verse and prose, differences that are rather covered over in Lukács's generalization of narrative as the *ur*-form of literature's encounters with historical time.

Immobility, Mobility and History in Literary Form: Flaubert, Baudelaire (and Lukács)

In his recent *The Antinomies of Realism*, Fredric Jameson offers a peculiar and intriguing account of the interaction of two definitional modes of nineteenth-century narrative realism. The argument turns on the status of affect, defined against determinate emotion and understood as resistant to capture in language; as I hope will become clear, "affect" on Jameson's understanding has something significantly to do with what I have discussed above as narrative's quickening, and the more general temporal-historical consequences of different literary forms. "The new implication," Jameson writes, "is that affect (or its plural) somehow eludes language and its naming of things (and feelings), whereas emotion is preeminently a phenomenon sorted out into an array of names."²⁵ If emotion, then, is easily integrated into a typology, affect "seems to have no context," but rather "float[s] above experience without causes and without the structural relationship to its cognate entities which the named emotions have with one another."²⁶ If Balzac, in his *La Père Goriot* of 1835, uses elaborate description to, as Jameson phrases it, offer a "sign or allegory of the moral or social status of a given character," Flaubert, a few decades later in the century, would turn such descriptions to the service of "non-meaningful non-symbolic objects."²⁷ Jameson explains this shift according to a change in how bodies and feelings were constructed historically, in the light of newly-bourgeois conceptions of individuality and autonomous self-identity. The details of this causal argument, only indirectly and insufficiently presented in his book, need not concern us here.

What is more important in Jameson's analysis is his characterization of narrative

affect as weightless, free-floating, untethered from the materialities of both language and the world, and thus somehow as outside the quickening effects of narrative that I have described. Even as Flaubert features prominently as an example of this most important feature of affect, Jameson puts Zola much more extensively to use in justifying this characterization. But it is entirely possible to bear out Jameson's argument by reference to any number of passages in Flaubert's novels. Take, for instance, the following from *L'Éducation sentimentale*, a famously cloudy and amorphous novel, already buckling at the limits of the realist form:

The street-lamps shone in two straight lines, stretching away into the distance, and long red flames flickered in the depths of the water. The river was the color of slate, while the sky, which was brighter, seemed to be supported by the huge masses of shadow that rose on each side of the river. Buildings which the eye could not distinguish intensified the darkness. Further away, a luminous haze floated over the roof-tops; all the noises of the night melted into a single murmur; a light breeze was blowing.²⁸

Quite clearly, this picturing of a city scene serves no urgent narrative purpose. But more than this, it, and many other such paragraphs dotted throughout the novel, maintains a certain singular texture of its own, not just indifferent to but autonomous from the travails of the characters caught up in the wisp of a plot that is forwarded elsewhere. In the above quotation, the parallel lines of light projected by the street lamps establish visual perspective. The bottom of the frame is drawn by reference to the murky depths of the water as the light reflects within it. And yet this apparently static vision soon melts into a "single murmur," an amorphous jumble rhymed with that "luminous haze" that floats over the roof-tops. It is almost as if Jameson had lifted his account of affect from Flaubert's phraseology; the critic, too, will refer multiple times in *The Antinomies of Realism* to the "amorphous" quality of affect. Incidentally, there is no apparent subject of the narrative of the kind lamented by Lukács above, one who might nonetheless take sustenance from this apparent freeze in forward motion of the plot. Or rather, the only subject in question is that of the omniscient narrator, one who nonetheless seems unable to secure the binding effect one might usually associate with such a device. Rather, as Lukács insightfully notes, this is a novel in which "no attempt is made... to counteract the disintegration of outside reality into heterogeneous, brittle, and fragmentary parts by some process of unification."²⁹ Time, once again, ensures this brittleness, although it is also celebrated by Lukács with allowing a single "unifying principle of... homogeneity that rubs the sharp edges off each heterogeneous fragment."³⁰ Is the passage above the example of a "heterogeneous part," one nonetheless unified by the narrative time of which it participates? One need not subscribe to Lukács's idealism here to recognize the

insight: it is the formal time of narrative itself that prevents the above passage and the many others like it in the novel attaining a genuine stasis or a truly weightless affective charge of the kind described by Jameson.

One should not lose sight, nonetheless, of the equally important formal variables that condition the increasingly liquid texture of Flaubert's scene: narrative itself, in its ineluctable temporal movement, seems, at the least, to render these autonomous moments fleeting and ephemeral, easily and quickly drained away by the next paragraph with its reassuring reintroduction of narrative movement. Poetry also moves, of course, but its ability to isolate elements of its structure, the capacity of its constrictive patterns, meters, or suggestive repetitions to particularize even trace elements that stand in contradiction with the seeming thematic consensus of the verse — these latter are enough to open it up to a species of materialism different in kind to that enabled by prose, and thus, perhaps, to a different kind of formal accounting, a different kind of formalization proper to the literature-history relation. More specifically, I would like to claim that while the onrush of narrative time risks assimilating form to history, the particular capacity of poetry to induce a sense of immobility or stasis, linked in some way to Jameson's theorization of affect, protects poetic structure from dissolving into its contexts. But if Jameson's affect seems particular to narrative, and if it is meant after all to represent an interregnum in historical time, the kinds of immobility I will now locate in Baudelaire are eminently historical, albeit at moments in the poetry where poetic form seems most sealed within itself, most unlike narrative.

Before approaching a particular poem by Baudelaire, I should sharpen just what is meant by "history" here, at least as the category relates to the poet's verse. In general terms, and insofar as Baudelaire is so often understood as a figure of transition between French Romanticism and Stéphane Mallarmé's subtractive *symboliste* experiments, history would seem to denote both intra- and extra-poetic concerns. The first, clearly enough, refers to the strikingly *late*, at least when compared to the British context, challenging of prior seventeenth-century, Racinean metrics by post-Romantic poets, Baudelaire very much included. The second would involve the gradual distancing of French poetry from its prior imbrications within the vicissitudes of French Revolutionary politics. Mallarmé will, in 1867, famously call for poetry to renew itself far from the public square, remarking as he did so the historical gulf between his historical standing and that of 1789.³¹ Baudelaire, then, would appear stuck productively in-between: he did, of course, participate in the Revolution of 1848 and he wrote for a revolutionary newspaper, but the individualizing imperative of the *flâneur*, of the leisured classes chasing ecstasis apart from, but somehow still within, the city crowd, already seems to ineluctably place him on a trajectory toward Mallarmé's inward-turning poetics, and away from (collective, political, fractious) history proper.

But the importance of Baudelaire's verse lies just as much in its resistance to these

kinds of narrative accounts of literary-critical history. The poems, that is, put the non-narrative resources of poetic structure to work against such fluid historical emplotments, against the inevitability of narrative time so keenly traced by Lukács, and in so doing they point toward a different, characteristically poetic envisioning of history even in its most political of forms. Adorno's and Walter Benjamin's allegorical accounts of Baudelaire's historicity are a significant advance on the narrative account just mentioned, especially in their attention to the importance of lyric form in both registering and resisting its historical moment. We, however, would wish to go further in highlighting the internal formal features that are not only ironizing of external historical pressures, but are rather productive of an immanent historical logic of their own; that are productive of the *formalization* of historical elements that are, as they approach literary form and convention, already formal, already structured. It will be no surprise that Baudelaire's famed irony will be an important variable in that process, especially as the latter inflects the poet's crucial ruminations on landscape, and in particular as it foregrounds the survival of pastoral forms within a now-urban poetics.

I'll begin with the liminary poem of the *Tableaux Parisiens*, fortuitously entitled "Paysage."³² Often noted for being out of step with the poems that Baudelaire composed up to his trial for obscenity, scholars have focused on the "riot" announced, seemingly out of the blue, in the twenty-first line. The riot will prove important to us, too, but we gain no truly poetic — rather than simply historicist, or perhaps historical-narrative — knowledge of its effect without attending to the quasi-pastoral form that it apparently interrupts.³³ The poem, so it conveniently informs us in the first line, is an eclogue, albeit one that self-consciously translates the Virgilian convention into a form appropriate to the "belfreys," the "chimney pipes," the "steeple" of the city. J.A. Hiddleston, synthesizing a brief analysis of the poem itself with an attention to Baudelaire's various *Salons*, argues that the pastoral for the new modern poet substantially risks a "mindless cult of nature at the expense of structure and imagination."³⁴ At the least, it seems in need of "renovation." One might expect, then, a certain irony to attend the wrenching of this rural form into the starker environs of the city. But there is a productive quality to this ironic transposition which is missed if one takes only at face value Baudelaire's more general and often haughty dismissal of landscape poetry, expressed in those *Salons* and usefully catalogued by Hiddleston and others.

The first, merely satiric mode of irony may be traced from any number of vantages in the poem. One of the most striking of these is the placing of the poetic voice indoors, at the very moment that it hymns the "hymns / Of all the neighbouring belfries, carried on the wind," The lyric "I" wishes to "lay me down, like the astrologers, / Next to the sky," and yet, unlike the astrologers, the poet is "up in my attic room." Far from being immersed in the landscape as, say, William Wordsworth so frequently recalled in the form of childhood memory, urban reverie must be taken indoors here, even as

the objects of that reverie remain encased in something still resembling an affective landscape, albeit a decidedly urban one. The winter, when it comes, is to be negated by a further interiorization: no longer are we simply behind attic windows, but we're faced with the deeper interiority of a "fairy palace for myself at night," one of "bright horizons in the blue / Where fountains weep in pools of alabaster hue, / Of kisses in the glades, where birds sing night and day." If, in the poem's first stanza, the regular end-rhyme eases the reader into the state of alert contemplation proper to the poet's outward gaze, the same now, in the long concluding stanza, intensifies the sense of artifice, of fantasmatic desperation, that this further retreat carries with it. The broadly Adornian conclusion that follows from this first, most explicit mode of irony seems clear: the emergence of a city built up around the demands of capital no longer permits a sincere celebration of its affective properties. Rather, the hyper-mediation of city life (allegorized by the physical mediation of the attic window) renders the sensitivities of the pastoral excessive, even ridiculous and cloying in advance. Not surprisingly, the famed excessiveness of Baudelaire's style is in full evidence here: we read of "conjuring the spring with all the poet's might, / Of hauling forth a sun out of my heart, with care / Transmuting furious thoughts to gently breathing air." (Indeed, we're not so far from the centrality of irony to Lukács's arguments around the discrepancy between the novel's totalizing ambitions and the paucity of its historical materials.)³⁵

And yet whereas, say, in the later and lesser of Wordsworth's nature poems, the politicality of history threatens to be fully obscured by the poet's excessively dewy gaze, here there is a striking, ironic in a fuller sense, incursion of a political event that makes of the very end of the poem in particular — the already-quoted "transmuting" of "furious thoughts to gently breathing air" — seem rather less empty than it initially appears.³⁶ The sudden appearance of the "riot" in the twenty-first line is self-consciously presented as just another city sight, the violence of which is not sufficient to disturb the now-interior fantasia already described: "Riot, that rages vainly at my window glass, / Will never make me raise my forehead from my task." Despite the equanimity with which political history enters the frame (leaving that languid frame very much intact, despite the riot's "rage"), its appearance alerts us retrospectively to another temporal logic than the spatially mediated one already analyzed. If, in the latter, the onrush of historical time seems stilled by spatial mediation, by the city's "misty gloom" as much as by shutters locked "neat and tight," this alternative logic appears to effect a sudden contraction of space and time, a sudden clearing away of those mediating layers. It's there in the instantaneous shift from extreme distance to up-close domestic presence in "A star born in the blue, a lamp lit in a room," a zoom that opens up the potential, realized eleven lines later, for the equally vertiginous appearance of political history.

If Baudelaire's famous "À Une Passante" makes of its most seemingly atemporal frame, that of the freezing fetish of the widow's fashionable figure, its most historical

event, here a seemingly progressive interiorization and distancing from history becomes the ephemeral ground for the very emergence of history proper; and yet this emergence, when considered fully, is much less punctual, event-like, than the incursion of dramatic events would usually warrant.³⁷ When only the first, generic layer of irony is taken into consideration — the poem's satire of pastoral from the perspective of the urban shutaway in his garret — the final line, "Transmuting furious thoughts to gently breathing air," seems at least partially assimilable to the broader ironic calming of urban chaos in the now-belated, out-of-time affect of the oblivious Romantic aesthete. But when read as an aftershock of the riot of the twenty-first line, one prefigured by the gliding collapse of space and time mentioned above (a collapse that would be quickly covered over by narrative's onward flow), we discover that, for all that the poet has indulged his inner calm, history has made those thoughts "furious," even if that furiousness, a close relative of the riot's "rage," is pointedly not in contradiction with the "gently breathing air" that is its willing conduit. To the contrary, the "gently breathing air" explicitly points us toward the poem's formal equanimity, and more generally to poetry's ability to arrange images and historical events in non-narrative, even non-lyrical montage.

To reiterate, history emerges here not in the form of the rushing urban streets whose kinesis chafes at the limitations of the lyric; and neither is the riot just another point of irony, Baudelaire playfully inflating a late-romantic mode of aesthetic contemplation to the extent that even a riot appears as a mere distraction to the serious business of inward reflection. Instead, the poem would have us locate history in images and logics other than those that appear most readily to us, such as shock, rupture, or interruption to the general run of things. Rather, history demurely takes its place alongside various other kinds of equanimously arranged, montage-like appearances — cosmological ("a star born in the blue"), domestic ("my attic room"), fantasmatic-mythological ("kisses in the glades, where birds sing night and day") — that make of history and its incursion in the figure of the riot dramatic in its very lack of drama, in the noticeable lack of the push of time that Lukács associates with novelistic duration.

One may sharpen one's sense of this new vision of historicity in Baudelaire through a reading of perhaps the greatest contemporary inheritor of allegorical reading, and the Baudelaire poem through which he advances an especially acute reinvention of the Adornian/Benjaminian consensus. Jameson's "Baudelaire as Modernist and Postmodernist" takes as its initial focus the first part of Baudelaire's sonnet "Chant d'automne," and the reading that results also finds in Baudelaire's invention of different means of figuring landscape a key to his imagination of history.³⁸ Our own reading will take some distance from Jameson's conclusions, in the course of which the non-narrative reading of lyric's historical force that I've only intimated up to now will become clearer. In the course of the reading, my hope is that this non-lyrical reading of lyric historicization will also take a distance from what I've established

to be Lukács's distinct privileging of history as narrativization. Nonetheless, in the concluding and final section of the essay, something of a rapprochement with Lukács will become possible.

The first part of the sonnet reads as follows:

*Bientôt nous plongerons dans les froides ténèbres;
Adieu, vive clarté de nos étés trop courts!
J'entends déjà tomber avec des chocs funèbres
Le bois retentissant sur le pavé des cours.*

*Tout l'hiver va rentrer dans mon être: colère,
Haine, frissons, horreur, labeur dur et forcé,
Et, comme le soleil dans son enfer polaire,
Mon coeur ne sera plus qu'un bloc rouge et glacé.*

*J'écoute en frémissant chaque bûche qui tombe;
L'échafaud qu'on bâtit n'a pas d'écho plus sourd.
Mon esprit est pareil à la tour qui succombe
Sous les coups du bélier infatigable et lourd.*

*Il me semble, bercé par ce choc monotone,
Qu'on cloue en grande hâte un cercueil quelque part
Pour qui? — C'était hier l'été; voici l'automne!
Ce bruit mystérieux sonne comme un départ.*

[Soon cold shadows will close over us
and summer's transitory gold be gone;
hear them chopping firewood in the court —
the dreary thud of logs on cobblestone.

Winter will come to repossess my soul
with rage and outrage, horror, drudgery,
and like the sun in its polar holocaust
my heart will be a block of blood-red ice.

I listen trembling to that grim tattoo —
build a gallows, it would sound the same.
My mind becomes a tower giving way
under the impact of a battering-ram.

Stunned by the strikes, I seem to hear, somewhere,
 a coffin hurriedly hammered shut — for whom?
 Summer was yesterday; autumn is here!
 Strange how that sound rings out like a farewell.]³⁹

For Jameson, the poem both exemplifies and extends the critical potential of the allegorical reading of Baudelaire, while also demonstrating how the same poetic materials can be conscripted to significantly different readings. The latter insight is of less moment to us than Jameson's claim that the poem stages the passing of rural into urban, the archaic into the definitively modern:

Nature on the one hand, the city, the urban, on the other, and a moment in the interrelationship of these two great contraries in which the first, the archaic cyclical time of an older agriculture and an older countryside, is still capable of being transmitted through what negates it, namely the social institutions of the city itself, the triumphantly un- or anti-natural.⁴⁰

For all the dialectical finesse of Jameson's essay, amply represented in this single, long sentence, the argument here is not so distant from the familiar allegorical one. Baudelaire is, once again, a figure in and of historical transition, between pre-modern agricultural and properly modern urban economies, between romanticism and modernism. Intriguingly, Jameson makes much of the apparent resonance of the sound evoked in the poem's first stanza, an auditory indeterminacy that the critic eventually concludes is the sound of "logs striking the courtyard paving," an interpretation ironically rendered moot by the very translation that Jameson provides of the French.⁴¹ In that translation, the sound is unambiguously attributed to the "chopping" of "firewood," but Jameson finds something much more mysterious in the phenomenon:

The irreducible, the sonorous vibration, with its peculiar hollowness and muffled impact, is here a pure positivity which must be handled or managed in some fashion. This will first be attempted metonymically, by tracing the association of this positive yet somehow ominous sound with something else, which is defined as absence, loss, death — namely the ending of summer.⁴²

Baudelaire's poem may be read as modernist insofar as it permits the semi-autonomy of this sound, lets its resonances play out without any immediate assignation of symbolical content or allegorical purpose. Prior to modernism, Jameson provocatively claims, true sense-perception independent of its rhetorical recuperation simply didn't

exist in literature. But the recuperation nonetheless comes, albeit in a manner quite distinct from the “rhetorical transparency” of pre-modernist forms. A measure of openness will remain with the sound and its sensory effects, even as it becomes a sign — a sign, more precisely, of absence, loss, and death. Insofar as “Chante d’automne” is a historical poem, and Jameson quite clearly thinks it records a shift in history, from early to high modernity, its historicity is registered by the ways in which the poem’s very form struggles to cope with the trickiness of its (historical) content, the poem beset by a lack of adequate rhetorical devices to sufficiently integrate and transmit its message. The latter claim is, of course, close enough to the practice of allegorical reading defended by Adorno and Benjamin: the poem finds itself caught between an earlier Romanticism that would have privileged the pastoral over the urban, and a fully mature Modernism that would have developed a new symbolical language of fragmentation and alienation proper to the poem’s urban setting. For our purposes, and for all the reading’s power, it remains essentially an attempt to narrativize history, to produce the latter as the (narrative) content to poetry’s form.

But what is distinctly effaced in Jameson’s reading is the extraordinary sense of violent materiality that punctuates Baudelaire’s poem. It announces itself, obviously enough, with the strike of axe on wood, but it soon spins out across the poem as a whole, culminating in the bruising image of a mind caved in as if by a battering ram: “My mind becomes a tower giving way / under the impact of a battering ram.” In immediately searching for meaning, if only to then register how the poem (meaningfully!) defers it, Jameson (and, perhaps, narrative-historical reading more generally) must remain deaf to the very physicality of this verse, its imposing material presence above and beyond whatever interpretation we may wish draw from it. In Paul de Man’s useful terms, Jameson is too quick to read the poem lyrically, and insodoing misses what is most poetic about it, those elements least assimilable to the temptations of narrative-historical recuperation. Even before the axe hits the wood, something of the poem’s transformative materiality is apparent: notice how the shadows that “will soon close over us” are cold, as if chimera were to be temporarily granted the power to effect a material shift in temperature. There is a stunning quality to these lines, one that seems to arrest the temporal movement necessary for the positing, elaboration, and conclusion of any more or less traditional lyric recollection or sentiment. We are, it is true, alerted from the very beginning of the gradual slide from summer to autumn, the latter threatening the “polar holocaust” of winter, but the poem’s purview remains at the cusp of this movement; we are not in the midst of winter by the end of the poem’s first part, but are rather still preoccupied with the concussive blows of coffins hammered shut, this latter clearly a metaphoric substitution for the sound that rings out of the very first stanza. We remain, that is, temporally, spatially, and historically held fast by the event of the poem’s beginning even as we reach the fourth stanza. The section ends having hardly begun, with stasis and a kind of stunned inertia having won out over thematic development.

When we read the poem's second section, entirely neglected by Jameson, we find ourselves still at the cusp of change, still on a teetering verge, and yet the tenor of the verse has decisively changed. Gone are the stark physical patternings of the first section, those images of impact underpinned by the quasi-iambic churn of "chopping firewood in the court — / the dreary thud of wood on cobblestone." Instead, we're faced with a fantasmatic tone not unrelated to the dreamily interiorized second half of "Paysage." The first two stanzas of the second section are as follows:

How sweet the greenish light of your long eyes!
But even that turns bitter now, and nothing
— not love, the boudoir, nor its busy hearth —
can match the summer's radiance on the sea.

Love me still, my darling! mother me,
ungrateful though I am, your naughty boy.
Sister and mistress! be the fleeting warmth
of a sumptuous autumn or a setting sun.⁴³

A kind of movement has occurred in the break between the first and second parts of the poem, for sure, but it is resolutely not of the changing of seasons, or of the allegorical-historical shift from an agrarian to an urban economy. Rather, we have been transported from impressions registered by an immobilized sensory apparatus oriented outward, picking up the uncanny thwack of axe on wood but unable to allegorically or symbolically move beyond its physical reverberations, to an interiorized sensory apparatus whose perceptions are now entirely self-referring, and thus explicitly cancelling of whatever allegorical-narrativizable implication we might still wish to draw from them. Those characteristic exclamation points are always a sure sign in Baudelaire that whatever domain of materiality that might previously have been the poem's concern has been definitively left behind. In "Chante d'automne," the personification in the second section's first line is equivalent to the inbound reverie of the latter half of "Paysage," where outer landscape is replaced with inner dreamscape. The equivalence holds not simply because, in both poems, what had seemed an outwardly oriented poetic aperture is directed sharply inwards, but because this movement seems, in both cases, to be a defensive reaction to an impasse that refuses to give out onto a narrative account of its historical resolution. But my strong claim is that this impasse is no less historical for all that; at the moment at which the poem seems to withdraw from its own historical implications, from its embeddedness in history, it dramatizes that very embeddedness, makes of its distance a beacon for that from which it has apparently departed.

For Jameson, the sound that defines the beginning of "Chante d'automne" is, in the latter stages of the poem's first part, "driven back inside the body of Baudelaire: a

unique event taking place there and utterly alien to anything whose ‘experience’ we might ourselves remember.”⁴⁴ This corporeal indeterminacy is enough, we’re told, to indicate the relative lack of older symbolic resources with which to place the uncanny sound within the narrative-continuum of history. What replaces that objective symbolization is a retreat into the body, into what scholars have in more recent years tagged with the suitably indeterminate category of “affect.” This is not to say that the sound and sensation in question isn’t processed for Jameson, but its processing is to be interpreted allegorically; the direction of travel of what Jameson calls “symbolic reunification” is set by the “collapse of the older system of rhetorical language and traditional literary meaning.”⁴⁵ Leaving aside the suspicious generality of “traditional literary meaning” — what could this concretely mean? — the relevant argumentative move is, once again, the allegorical/pro-lyrical/narrative one, one only at a minimal remove from Lukács’s vision of literary history as narrativization, whereby what is taken to be a determined shift at the level of the poetic line is related, albeit after a complex machinery of mediation has done its work, to a similarly determinable, and narrativizable, historical move.

The second part of “Chante d’automne” places some significant pressure on this reading. There, recall, we’re faced with what I’ve characterized as a defensive personification — “How sweet the greenish light of your long eyes!” — which is, nonetheless, intriguingly distinct from the inward bodily turn — itself a metonym for the modern detachment of bodily perception from symbolic content — thematized by Jameson. For what is in question is the turn to an other, a figure distinct from the subjective “I” of the lyric voice or from its imputed body, an other whose symbolic relation to the poem’s first part is, at least initially, hard to parse. One is reminded of the fetishization of the widow’s body in Baudelaire’s “À Une Passante”: there, as here, an initial gaze outward at an urban landscape is intercut with or ultimately replaced by a fixation on the features of a female figure. Unlike in “À Une Passante,” however, there is no immediate historical sign or signs to relate this freezing gaze to what is objectively, historically, transpiring outside it. (This link is very much that of fashion in “À Une Passante,” the poem linking intertextually with Baudelaire’s famous reflections on fashion as sign of historical change in his essay “The Painter of Modern Life.”)

Rather, the lines immediately following the reference to the female figure suggest the failure of this defensive personification, and a reversion to the lament for the passing of summer that defines the first part, albeit now in the language of apparently ahistorical fantasia that we also found in the latter half of “Paysage.” The attempt to hold on to summer through its personification itself “turns bitter,” and is replaced by language of a distinctly ruder hue, at once regressive, motivating a further defensive reversal into the dependent state of childhood, and yet expressive of a distinctly adult sexuality, one that is nonetheless parasitic on childhood for its stock images and for its less than convincing come-hithers: “mother me / ungrateful though I am, your

naughty boy.” The somewhat schlocky intimation of incest consolidates this running together of childhood and adulthood, of the innocence and ingenuousness of the apostrophic form, this challenge to the narrativization of a life — “How sweet,” “Love me still!” and so on — mingled, here, with the darker hues of perversion: “Sister and mistress! be the fleeting warmth / of a sumptuous autumn or a setting sun.” If, as Jonathan Culler has argued, apostrophe is an inherently embarrassing form in its apparent emotional overload, its excessive ingenuousness, it becomes doubly so when paired with these tonally ambivalent sexual signs.⁴⁶

Far from signaling a merely intra-generic irony, the stylistic overload of the second section — its punctuation, the just-mentioned apostrophe — are spanners in the allegorical works, rhetorical devices, in Paul de Man’s sense, that arrest the production of a certain kind of historical sense; especially poetic tics, that is to say, that disrupt any attempt to make of this poem the vehicle for a moving historical *narrative*. But this is not to say that history drops out of the frame altogether. Rather, the overwhelming sense of stasis, of a cancelled and then interiorized historical moment, overlaid with fantasy, with regressive sexual fantasy, testifies to a fear of historical movement that can, even in its negation, only be historical. Nonetheless, this defensiveness and fear in the face of history cannot so easily be transmuted into a sign that change is, nonetheless, on the way, or that a shift that has, in fact, already happened has been only imperfectly repressed. Rather, the effect is total, and it is non-negotiable: at least within the bounds of this poem, nothing of time and history will happen, at least insofar as the latter is figured narratively. Or, perhaps better, a certain nothingness, an uncanny mode of historical stasis, buried within historical scenes and within moments of apparent significance and change, will here find its poetic staging — and nothing else.

Conclusion — History as Quasi-Transcendental Form in Theory of the Novel

It may appear that we’ve traveled quite far from *Theory of the Novel*. By counterposing a moment of apparent narrative ephemerality in Flaubert with the means by which Baudelaire’s poetry formalizes history at the apparent withdrawal of the latter, I hope to have shown a way to think the relation between literary form and historical time that rejects familiar dichotomies between literary-critical formalisms and historicisms. But more importantly, I hope to have begun to show how the easy equation of narrative time with historical eventuality, with the becoming-literary of history, is challenged by the (only apparently) ahistorical moments to be found within the starker environs of verse form. This can only remain something of a promissory note, however; the full details of this story of literary formalization must be worked out elsewhere.⁴⁷ It remains for me to briefly return to Lukács, if only to flesh out a claim I have made more than once in this essay, but which I have yet to fully justify, namely that historical time itself is always-already formal. The latter, that is, is never the complementary “content” to literary form, but is rather the form upon which a

distinctively literary formalization works.

This notion is already implicit in my claim, above, that literature comes to formalize history at moments when it is most apparently withdrawn from any mimetic relation to its historical conditions; think, for instance, of the manner in which the second half of “Chante d’automne” undercuts the historical-narrative temptations of the first half. What would count as the historical “content” here? There is none: the apparent naturalization of change through the figures of summer and winter in the first half are, clearly enough, always-already literary-figural; they become historical only at the point at which the second half challenges them, exposes their narrative artificiality, reveals their contingency, and thus opens the poetry up to a different kind of poetical-historical logic.

But my claim is borne out, too, in those narrative-allegorical readings of literary form’s historicity that I have been pushing against. To presume that history is the content to literature’s form is already, implicitly, to locate history as narrative form, to make of history a kind of narrative duration. In Jameson’s reading of “Chante d’automne,” the uncanny sound reverberates and disrupts precisely because it is inassimilable, at least at first blush, to the historical-narrative content of the seasons’ changes that makes up the rest of the poem’s first half. But this inassimilable sound is quickly reappropriated as an itself-narrativizable sign that history has moved on, that older symbolic resources no longer work, and that new materials, new narratives, are required. In Caroline Levine’s suggestive account as discussed at the very opening of this essay, one encounters an agon of forms — literary, social, historical — that nonetheless tessellate with ease; Levine, at least, recognizes the formality of her extra-literary variables, although I think she is too quick to assume that it is in moments of encounter rather than withdrawal or disjunction that the literary makes its historical mark. It may well be, then, that my theory is not especially novel: all theoretical accounts of the literary tarrying with history presume history to be formal, even if these presumptions are not always made explicit. Even as I have seen fit to disagree with his own, distinct narrativization of the form-history relation, Lukács offers us other, more congenial resources to render more concrete this already-formal character of the historical, especially in his suggestive notion of the transcendental governance of historical-literary intelligibility.

Recall how, in *Theory of the Novel*, differing historical periods offer different levels of cultural, historical, and subjective integration. If the period proper to the epic afforded a “starry sky” acting as the “map of all possible paths,” an age where “everything [was] new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own,” any era where philosophy is required is already one where subject and object are torn asunder, where there is a “rift between ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’ a sign of the essential difference between the self and the world.”⁴⁸ This is, clearly, enough an unabashedly idealist thesis, but I’d like to risk the thesis that, when given only a slight twist, this recognition of the transcendental ordering of history is eminently amenable to a

materialist reading. Just as I think the idealist temptation of collapsing history into narrative is only avoidable by conceding the already-formal character of history upon its indirect interaction with literary form, so I think one must recognize the operations of a kind of transcendental in any meeting of distinctly literary and distinctively historical-temporal forms. But when Lukács employs the Kantian machinery of the transcendental, he openly risks collapsing the latter into the transcendent, into a full-blown metaphysical condition. Thus, when he famously describes the modern condition as one of “transcendental homelessness,” he exalts this condition into a position not merely of a priori conditionality, but of transcendence — this is no mere subjective limit upon possible knowledge, but is rather a world-defining frame, one fixed and definitional of any literature that might attempt to grasp its limits.

Is it possible to imagine a quasi-transcendental logic of the literary-historical relation? Such a logic would refuse Lukács’s metaphysical exultation, even while taking sustenance from his recognition of history’s conditionality. But a further turn of the argument is necessary, for what compromises history, makes of it only a *quasi*-transcendental, are those other forms with which it must parry, not the least of these being literature itself. Recall the first part of “Chante d’automne”:

[Soon cold shadows will close over us
and summer’s transitory gold be gone;
hear them chopping firewood in the court —
the dreary thud of logs on cobblestone.

Winter will come to repossess my soul
with rage and outrage, horror, drudgery,
and like the sun in its polar holocaust
my heart will be a block of blood-red ice.

I listen trembling to that grim tattoo —
build a gallows, it would sound the same.
My mind becomes a tower giving way
under the impact of a battering-ram.]⁴⁹

If my argument above about these lines above holds, there are at least two distinct formal logics at work here. One is clearly enough the passing of historical time, figured in the more benign terms of an inevitable change in the seasons. Needless to say, this logic doesn’t reach us unfiltered, but is rather already formalized, already comingled with distinctively literary pressures, namely the seasonal imagery just mentioned. Other formal-literary logics exert themselves, this time with more consequence: the assonance of the second half of the second line of the final quoted stanza above colluding with the violence of the imagery, for instance, crowned by

that final battering-ram. Narrative-historical readings would ultimately resolve this tension — the punctual materiality of the assonance and its associated imagery, the seductive pull of history's ever-changing durations — by placing interpretive weight on the latter. To do so is to implicitly neuter literary form to the benefit of history. History hurts, as we've so often been told, but it does so in literature only when limited to the status of a quasi-, not full, transcendental, a form partly defanged by literature's own quasi-transcendental efforts. Caroline Levine's highly suggestive account of such formal interactions, referenced at the very outset of this essay, properly recognizes their always-already formal character, while nonetheless not quite doing enough to specify how literature, in its specificity, may resist and withdraw as much as it colludes with its own historical narrativization, producing a quite distinct historical logic in turn. The alternative, as I hope to have shown, is not a mere ahistorical textualism or literary solipsism. Rather, there is a historical logic proper to literary form, one best detected in moments of poetic retreat and tension, or when literary form appears placid and unmoved, as outside the pressure of narrative duration. It is, at any rate, the virtue of *Theory of the Novel* to continue to provoke new ways of thinking the form-history relation, usefully apart from tractionless appeals to historical context or anecdote.

Notes

1. György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT P, 1971).
2. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) 81.
3. Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015); I partially draw here on a long review-essay of the book forthcoming in *boundary 2*.
4. Levine, *Forms* 1.
5. Qtd. in *Forms* 1.
6. *Forms* 2.
7. *ibid.*
8. *ibid.*
9. *ibid.*
10. Fredric Jameson, "The Case for George Lukács," *Salmagundi* 13 (Summer 1970) 10. Jameson's views on Lukács have surely evolved since 1970, but his now commonplace reading of the central theoretical thrust of *Theory of the Novel* was rather less common upon its original publication, and it serves our purposes as what has become scholarly commonsense, against which our rather more heterodox reading of the critic will proceed.
11. Lukács, *Theory of the Novel* 61-2.
12. For my thoughts on both recent schools of thought, see my "The Perils of the Digital Humanities: New Positivism and the Fate of Literary Theory," *Postmodern Culture* 23.2 (January 2013).
13. *Theory of the Novel* 75.
14. Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2000) 26. For some deliberately provocative comments on this recent history of the (ahistorical?) generalization of lyric, see the editors' entries in Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (eds.), *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2014).
15. *Theory of the Novel* 63.
16. Theodor Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," *Notes to Literature* Volume 1, ed. R. Tiedemann, trans. S.W. Nicholsen (New York: Columbia UP, 1991) 37-54.
17. *Theory of the Novel* 58-59.
18. György Lukács, *Soul and Form*, ed. J.T. Sanders and K. Terezhakis, trans. A. Bostock (New York: Columbia UP, 2010) 135.
19. *Theory of the Novel* 76.
20. *ibid.*
21. *ibid.*
22. *Theory of the Novel* 81.
23. *Theory of the Novel* 121.
24. Roland Barthes, "Flaubert and the Sentence," *New Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990) 75.
25. Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013) 29.
26. Jameson, *Antinomies of Realism* 37.
27. *ibid.*
28. Gustave Flaubert, *A Sentimental Education*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 1964) 60.

29. *Theory of the Novel* 125.
30. *ibid.*
31. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Divagations*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard UP, 2009).
32. Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 167; all further quotations from “Paysage” refer to this page.
33. There is some debate as to exactly which street disturbance is being referred to in the poem. For an enlightening discussion of these debates, one that makes the intriguing claim that the city described may well be Lyon and not Paris, see R.D.E. Burton, “Baudelaire and Lyon: a Reading of ‘Paysage,’” *Nottingham French Studies* 28.1 (March 1989) 26-38.
34. J.A. Hiddleston, *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 183.
35. See *Theory of the Novel* 74-5.
36. This argument is made with some force in Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985).
37. “Around me roared the nearly deafening street / Tall, slim, in mourning, in majestic grief, / A woman passed me, with a splendid hand / Lifting and swinging her festoon and hem // Nimble and stately, statuesque of leg. / I, shaking like an addict, from her eye, / Black sky, spawner of hurricanes, drank in / Sweetness that fascinates, pleasure that kills.” Charles Baudelaire, “À Une Passante,” *The Flowers of Evil* 189.
38. Fredric Jameson, “Baudelaire as Modernist and Postmodernist,” *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso 2007) 223-238.
39. I have provided the translation of the poem that Fredric Jameson uses in his discussion. Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal: The Complete Text of the Flowers of Evil in a New Translation*, trans. Richard Howard (Boston: David R. Godine, 1982) 61-2.
40. Jameson, “Baudelaire” 225.
41. “Baudelaire” 227-228.
42. “Baudelaire” 229.
43. *The Flowers of Evil* 117. I here revert to McGowan’s translation, as Jameson does not discuss the second part of the poem.
44. “Baudelaire” 228.
45. “Baudelaire” 229.
46. Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, 2nd Ed. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002) 135-155.
47. I begin such a project in my forthcoming *Speculative Formalism: Literature, Theory, and the Critical Present* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2016).
48. *Theory of the Novel* 29.
49. See note 38.

Lukács's Literary Cartography: Spatiality, Cognitive Mapping, and *The Theory of the Novel*

Robert T. Tally Jr.

It may seem strange to put it this way, especially given the prominence of his later critique of the ideology of modernism, but György Lukács's magnificent "historico-political essay on the forms of great epic literature" strikes me as a profoundly modernist work, drawing upon a vast array of cultural resources in response to the feelings of generalized anxiety and uncertainty associated with the historical moment of its emergence. Indeed, one might say that *The Theory of the Novel*, first published in 1916 (the same year that James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* appeared in book form), is a sort of modernist novel. In Lukács's words (from the 1962 Preface), "it was written in a mood of permanent despair over the state of the world," particularly in response to the outbreak of the First World War and its well nigh universal acclaim among so many Europeans.¹ The text itself is vividly experimental, even though Lukács had at first imagined an even more bizarre presentation, a *Decameron*-like dialog among "a group of young people withdraw[ing] from the war psychosis of its environment."² The finished product, ostensibly a more straightforward essay (*Versuch*) on the ways in which the epic and novel forms of literature give shape to human experience and to the world, is a still remarkable and eccentric exploration. In its attempt to map out the history of those form-giving forms and, more implicitly, the history of the present situation of Western civilization in the early twentieth century, *The Theory of the Novel* represents both a study and an example of literary cartography.

Was there ever a more striking, evocative opening to a work of literary theory, history, or criticism?

Happy are those ages when the starry sky is a map of all possible paths — ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like a home, for the fire that burns in the soul is

that of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to one another, for fire is the soul of all light and all fire clothes itself in light. Thus each action of the soul becomes meaningful and rounded in this duality: complete in meaning — in *sense* — and complete for the senses; rounded because the soul rests within itself even while it acts; rounded because its action separates itself from it and, having become itself, finds a centre of its own and draws a closed circumference round itself. “Philosophy is really homesickness,” says Novalis: “it is the urge to be at home everywhere.”³

Lukács’s initial reference to this stellar cartography is, of course, metaphorical, but then, so is cognitive mapping or, indeed, any form of mapping. Figuration is a necessary part of the project itself. It is precisely in the figurative discourse of *The Theory of the Novel* that what I will refer to as his *literary cartography* is at its most forceful, since the image of the literal map is somewhat confusing under the circumstances. Literary cartography is not a literal form of mapmaking, after all; rather, it involves the ways and means by which a given work of literature functions as a figurative map, serving as an orientating or sense-making form. In this sense, I would argue that Lukács’s project in *The Theory of the Novel*, which is so often rightly considered a historical or temporal project, also involves a profound sense of spatiality. *The Theory of the Novel* is an early and influential study of the processes and forms underlying literary cartography.

Crucial to Lukács’s theory of the epic and the novel, form-giving forms by which human beings make sense of their world and invest it with meaning, is the relationship between the individual subject and the milieu in which he or she is situated. Although Lukács does not directly emphasize the particularly spatial aspects of this condition, it is clear that what Lukács refers to poetically as “transcendental homelessness,” the disorientation and angst associated with living in a “world abandoned by God,” has many aspects in common with what Derek Gregory has referred to as the “cartographic anxiety” of modernity.⁴ In his attention to the way in which the subject makes sense of and gives form to his world through narrative, Lukács’s theory resonates well with Fredric Jameson’s conception of cognitive mapping, insofar as the individual subject attempts to project a map-like figure, a tentative, contingent, and provisional image of the unrepresentable space (for Jameson, the social totality or perhaps even History itself).⁵ Similarly, but with respect to narrative in particular, literary cartography requires the projection of a figural map through which individual or collective perception and experience may be coordinated with a larger social and spatial totality in meaningful ways. If, as Lukács would have it, “the task of true philosophy” is “to draw that archetypal map,” establishing a connection between subjective experience and objective existence, then the narrative forms of the epic and novel operate as

examples of differing modes for engaging in literary cartography.⁶

Jameson develops the concept of cognitive mapping in relation to his reflections on the postmodern condition, yet the origins of its practice lay in narrative analysis more generally. As I note in my study of his work, Jameson was already using the metaphor of the map (and not *merely* metaphorically, it should be pointed out) as early as 1968.⁷ In a brief essay published that year, "On Politics and Literature," Jameson asserts that the would-be political writer in the United States "has to make something of a map," by which he or she can

coordinate two different zones of experience and bring them into a coherent relationship to each other. On the one hand he has to do justice to his own lived experience, to the truth of the individual life, of the monad, to the domain if you like of psychology and of the psychological problem. But that isn't enough: then he has to situate that subjective dimension with respect to the objective, he has to bring the point in relation to the coordinates of the map, he has to give a picture of the objective structure of society as a whole and deal with matters that ordinarily have nothing to do with my own subjective experience, my own psychology, but which are rather ordinarily dealt with in political science textbooks, sociological or economic studies — all those basic questions about how the country is organized, what makes it do what it does, who runs it, and so forth — things I may *know* about intellectually but which I can't translate into the terms of my personal experience. The opposition is between subjective and objective, between mere abstract knowledge and lived experience; and the problem for the political writer — perhaps well-nigh impossible to solve — is to find some kind of real experience in which these two zones of reality intersect. But such experiences are very rare: and generally they are only abstract, or allegorical, or somehow symbolic.... Basically, the only way we can think our own individual lives in relationship to the collectivity is by making a picture of the relationship. The notion of a map was such an image, or picture, or the image of an airplane from which you can look down and see masses of life, of houses and cities, disposed out below you like a map.⁸

How different is this idea from Lukács's sense of a "transcendental homelessness" in a "world abandoned by God"? Projecting a map-like image of a totality that is not or is no longer accessible through any individual's lived experience, the storyteller fashions a narrative that can somehow approximate in figurative form the absent totality. In Lukács, of course, this follows from a fundamental breakdown in the relationship of the individual subject to his or her social totality (or *Lebenstotalität*), which in the "integrated" civilizations of the great Homeric epic is taken to be unified

and which in the “problematic” civilizations of the modern novel is viscerally rent. Again, the language is not especially spatial or spatiotemporal, but the phenomenon under consideration is not unlike that spatial confusion or sense of being at sea in the world which Jameson emphasizes in his analysis of postmodern hyperspace.

Jameson’s use of this spatial analogy indicates the degree to which he was already concerned with a recognizably cartographic anxiety of the late modern (or postmodern) existential condition, but the figure of cognitive mapping is particularly relevant to his understanding of realism, and hence one can find in Lukács’s writings, from *The Theory of the Novel* to *Realism in Our Time* and beyond, clear precursors to the distinctively Jamesonian concept. For example, Jameson acknowledged that his 1977 article “Class and Allegory in Mass Culture,” an essay ostensibly on the grittily realist crime drama *Dog Day Afternoon*, was an earlier attempt at illuminating the processes of a cognitive mapping, *avant la lettre*.⁹ And Jameson’s first use of the phrase “cognitive mapping,” arguably, appeared in connection to realist narrative in *The Political Unconscious*, where he observes that “realism... unites the experience of daily life with a properly cognitive, mapping, or well-nigh ‘scientific’ perspective.”¹⁰ Yet, for all its value to forms associated with realism, modernism, and perhaps especially postmodernism, cognitive mapping as a figure for what Jameson elsewhere calls “the desire for narrative” can be viewed in retrospect as a critical element of the representational project that Lukács investigates in *The Theory of the Novel*.¹¹

Lukács’s cultural history imagines three distinctive moments or periods, beginning with the “closed” (*geschlossene*) or integrated civilization represented by the Homeric epic, moving toward the more problematic relationship between individuals and the *Lebenstotalität* visible in the medieval epic form of Dante’s *Commedia*, and on to the more-or-less modern condition of abstract idealism in a “world abandoned by God” so well rendered in the novel form of *Don Quixote*. In the aftermath of Quixote’s peregrinations, the modern novel registers the distinctive break between self and world, a unbridgeable chasm between subjective and objective reality, which will require a new kind of literary map — the novel itself — best suited to give form to, or make sense of, this condition. In the latter half of his book, Lukács examines the ways in which this works itself out in Goethe, Balzac, Flaubert, and Tolstoy, before declaring that we have not entirely exited the stage of the “romanticism of disillusionment” and coyly suggesting that Dostoevsky’s work lies outside the scope of the study, for he “did not write novels,” and only time will tell whether he is “already the Homer or Dante” of a new world or merely one voice among many that will herald its arrival.¹²

Lukács establishes a fundamental opposition between the “age of the epic,” that happy era in which the starry sky is the map of all possible paths, and the age of the novel, in which the breakdown of subjective experience and objective reality — a phenomenon Lukács will not be able fully to theorize until he writes his monumental essay on reification in *History and Class Consciousness* a few years later — necessitates a new form. The Homeric epic, which Lukács also refers to as “strictly speaking”

the only true epic form, typifies the condition of this ancient Greek “integrated” civilization.¹³ The *oikoumene* made visible in Homer’s narratives is part of a historical plenum, a literary world filled with stories to be woven together in various ways and with various effects, but which all appear to fit within a cognizable totality. Thus Lukács characterizes the age of the epic in terms of “closed” civilizations in *The Theory of the Novel*, which partly also explains why various stories may be pieced together in such different ways, with some seemingly significant narratives left out entirely and others placed in the foreground. The absence of the Trojan Horse from Homer’s *Iliad*, for example, is a shock to many modern readers who had every reason to expect its appearance as the climactic moment of the war itself, but because the world of the ancient Greek epic contained that tale in no way required the form of Homer’s epic to include it. In *The Poetics*, Aristotle praises Homer for recognizing that the unity of a plot does not involve the exhaustive account of a single character’s career:

In composing the *Odyssey* he did not include all the adventures of Odysseus — such as his wound on Parnassus, or his feigned madness at the mustering of the host — incidents between which there was no necessary or probable connection; but he made the *Odyssey*, and likewise the *Iliad*, to center round an action that in our sense of the word is one.¹⁴

Unified at its core in a world directly governed and conditioned by the gods, the ancient Greek epic’s space was philosophically stable, and various parts of the map could be examined without disrupting or even touching on the others.

Similarly, what Lukács considers the *Lebenstotalität* of the classical epic makes available to the epic bard that spatial form which, among other things, allows for virtually any entry point in a given narrative to be as valid as any other. The classic epic begins in medias res, but as Edward Said astutely observed some time ago, this is merely “a convention that burdens the beginning with the pretense that it is not one.”¹⁵ Obviously, chronology alone — in some monolithic, rigid, and inconsiderate version of this or that “In the beginning” genesis leading to an absolute, unchanging, and ineluctable *telos* — has never dictated the form of narrative, and even if the storyteller wishes, naturally enough, to employ chronology as a structuring device, the vicissitudes of time tend to thwart the effort again and again. As Lukács puts it, “[t]he way Homer’s epics begin in the middle and do not finish at the end is a reflexion of the truly epic mentality’s total indifference to any form of architectural construction.”¹⁶

This epic indifference to architectonics is reflected in what Joseph Frank famously identified as the genre’s “spatial form.”¹⁷ Among other effects of this spatiality, Lukács observes that both character and narrative form are relatively static. “Nestor is old just as Helen is beautiful or Agamemnon mighty.”¹⁸ After all, in Lukács’s view, since the epic world is already an integrated totality, the narrative need not project or

organize the world's disparate elements into a totality. One might say that a map is fixed in the mind beforehand, and it is not necessary to create new ones. This is Lukács's point about the age of the epic having "no philosophy," since there is no need for that "archetypal map." Mikhail Bakhtin, in an essay on the distinction between epic and novel, makes a similar assertion: "the epic past is absolute and complete. It is as closed as a circle; inside it everything is finished, already over. There is no place in the epic world for any openendedness, indecision, indeterminacy."¹⁹ For these critics, the contours of the ancient map are more or less fully established prior to the epic's representation of these spaces, so the Homeric epic is not required to organize the elements of this world into a sensible totality but merely has the duty to present the already-constituted portions of the map or of the history in various, interesting ways.

As I have discussed elsewhere, for Lukács as for Jameson, the desire for such maps arises only when accompanied by that uncanny sense of alienation that could be literalized in the feeling of being lost.²⁰ The key transition between the epic epoch and the age of the novel for Lukács is represented by Dante's *Commedia*, itself an epic but also a form that is developing toward a more novelistic or *romantische* form, perhaps typified in its dramatic opening lines in which the pilgrim finds himself literally and figuratively "lost" in a dark forest (*selva oscura*), the first sign of a large, symbolic system operating at a level beyond that of the individual subject.²¹ As Lukács argues,

The totality of Dante's world is the totality of a visual system of concepts. It is because of this sensual "thingness," this substantiality both of the concepts themselves and their hierarchical order within the system, that completeness and totality can become constitutive structural categories rather than regulative ones: because of it, the progression through the totality is a voyage which, although full of suspense, is a well-conducted and safe one; and, because of it, it was possible for an epic to be created at a time when the historico-philosophical situation was already beginning to demand the novel.²²

Dante's world is structured according to rigid principles, and yet it is also — as Erich Auerbach so forcefully argued — a profoundly "worldly world" (*die irdische Welt*), powerfully connecting the abstract moral geography of an Aristotelian or Thomist variety with a human, physical, and visceral experience.²³ In Canto XI of the *Inferno*, for example, the canto in which Virgil explains to Dante just how the lower circles of Hell are organized according to this moral geography, one also notes that the pilgrims are forced to pause because of the irrepressible stench emanating from below. No matter how abstract or idealistic the philosophy, Dante nevertheless situates his hero in the most materially substantial conditions, even in the otherworldly realms.

The abstract yet corporeal experience of the *Commedia* suggests a sort of dialectical advance in the literary cartography of the epic. Whereas the already well-known

tales of Odysseus's wanderings furnished the raw materials for the Homeric bard to weave into a new whole, Dante's itinerary is largely restricted by the predetermined, logical structure of the otherworldly territories through which he travels. Literary mapmaking now relies on an impersonal, supra-individual, or even objective body of knowledge to determine its "truth." In Lukács's history of epic forms, this represents a powerful break from the earlier epic tradition and a distinctive move in the direction of modern novel. As he puts it,

Dante is the only great example in which we see the architectural clearly conquering the organic, and therefore he represents a historico-philosophical transition from the pure epic to the novel. In Dante there is still the perfect immanent distancelessness and completeness of the true epic, but his figures are already individuals, consciously and energetically placing themselves in opposition to a reality that is becoming closed to them, individuals who, through this opposition become real personalities. The constituent principle of Dante's totality is a highly systematic one, abolishing the epic independence of the organic part-unities and transforming them into hierarchically ordered, autonomous parts.²⁴

Ironically, perhaps, for such an important religious poem, this is not unlike the technological or scientific developments in the history of cartography, whereby the subjective attempts to orientate oneself in a given space (such as Dante's *selva oscura*) must embrace supra-individual or non-subjective means in order to achieve a more accurate representation.

Another modern (or postmodern) example might be useful. In his elaboration of the concept or practice of cognitive mapping, which he took to be an existential and political strategy for coming to grips with the alienating spatial anxiety of the postmodern condition, Jameson illustrates his point by providing historical examples of similarly cartographic practices from earlier epochs.²⁵ This "digression on cartography" starts by examining the ancient itineraries or *portulans* charts, which in effect were "diagrams organized around the still subject-centered or existential journey of the traveler, along which various significant key features are marked." With the advent of a more abstract science, aided by such technical developments as the use of a compass or sextant, mapping introduces a new element, "the relationship to the totality," which will "require the coordination of existential data (the empirical position of the subject) with un-lived, abstract conceptions of the geographic totality."²⁶ Although the Aristotelian ethical order and late-medieval Catholic moral theory are not what we would normally associate with technological or scientific advances in geography and astronomy, Dante's literary cartography in the *Inferno* does just this, as it coordinates the pilgrim's supernatural itinerary with an abstract totality that ultimately shapes the entire terrestrial (and celestial) space and furnishes its

significance through the interactions of the individual traveler's experience and the objective reality. For Dante, this vision can therefore be "true."

Jameson continues to a third stage, just after Dante's era but still well before the postmodern epoch in which mapmaking abandons all hope of achieving the sort of true maps that Jorge Luis Borges's imperial cartographers dreamed of.²⁷ With the advent of the first terrestrial globe in 1490 and the subsequent Mercator projection, "a third dimension of cartography emerges," which occasions a practical crisis of representation with respect to what Jameson calls "the unresolvable (well-nigh Heisenbergian) dilemma of the transfer of curved space to flat charts." The "naïvely" mimetic maps — that is, those in which cartographers have honestly attempted to depict the figured space as "realistically" as possible — are not really possible, and indeed are no longer particularly useful. It rapidly becomes apparent that there can be no "true maps," but it also becomes clear that "there can be scientific progress, or better still, a dialectical advance, in the various moments of mapmaking."²⁸ Maps based on the Mercator projection notoriously distort the spaces presented, but they become much more useful for navigators plotting courses over long distances. Jameson asserts that this moment represents a watershed in the history of mapmaking, as the impossibility and undesirability of perfectly mimetic maps opens up the possibility of better and more useful maps, maps which are, it may be added, by design expressly figurative or metaphorical.

The logical, hierarchical, and almost scientific vision of Dante's literary cartography must succumb to the spatiotemporal vicissitudes of a "world abandoned by God" and in an age "in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem."²⁹ In such an epoch, the "age of the novel," the literary cartography of the world system cannot help but reflect the interiority of the mapmaker.³⁰ The novelist is a cartographer, insofar as she or he must coordinate the various elements of human experience and the world in order to form a new unity, however provisional it may be. "The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality."³¹ But, as Lukács insists a bit later, the "organic whole" into which the novelist has fused "heterogeneous and discrete elements" is "abolished over and over again."³² Or, to put it more positively, this uncertain situation also makes possible infinitely new and different maps.

From this perspective, the advent of the age of the novel coincides with the fragmentation of this imagined, ancient coherence or totality. Whereas the epic could reflect the integrated civilization of the ancient Greeks, the novel will have as its vocation the projection of an imaginary, perhaps provisional and contingent, totality, since there is no longer one that we can simply assume. In Lukács's evocative phrasing, "The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God."³³

Lukács's image of the unified totality of the ancients is both romantic, inasmuch

as it posits a lost organic wholeness for which we moderns yearn in vain, and largely erroneous, since it is certain that the ancient world also required the surveying of spaces, knitting these spaces together, and projecting a world.³⁴ But it really does not matter whether Lukács — or Hegel or Novalis, for that matter — is “correct” about this historical moment. As Franco Moretti has observed, this is mostly a matter of periodization, of establishing the parameters of a modern world in which meaning is itself the problem. In Moretti's words, notwithstanding the vast amount of knowledge to be found in the book, “[t]he *Theory [of the Novel]* is not after knowledge: it is after *meaning*.”³⁵ The novel for Lukács is above all a form-giving form, whose fundamental vocation is to make sense of, find meaning in, the world and our experience of it. Lukács's romantic notion of the novel form as an expression of “transcendental homelessness” is of direct relevance to much of the more directly spatial discourse in twentieth-century philosophy and literary theory. So different a thinker as Martin Heidegger postulated that the sense of anxiety, tied to the uncanny (*unheimlich*) reflected a profound sense of being “not-at-home” (*nichtszuhause-sein*) in *Being and Time*.³⁶ Whether from a strictly existential perspective or from a more broadly historical and philosophical point of view, this sense of “homelessness” occasions the need for a kind of mapping, which is also the purpose of a literary cartography.

The artistic forms associated with literary cartography undoubtedly derive their force and their desirability from the general unease with respect to our sense of place, what Lukács would have likened to a loss of a sense of totality:

Art, the visionary reality of the world made to our measure, has thus become independent: it is no longer a copy, for all the models have gone; it is a created totality, for the natural unity of the metaphysical spheres has been destroyed forever.³⁷

The representation of reality in a world abandoned by God relies upon a cartographic imperative, by which the novelist projects a figurative map that can, if not restore a sense of transcendental homeliness (assuming that were even desirable at this stage in historical development), at least allow one to become more accustomed to and familiar with the life in exile. Hence, one can see the profound modernism of *The Theory of the Novel*, less in its nostalgia for the premodern unities than in its embrace of the utopian possibilities of a new world to be mapped and remapped.

This, in turn, makes possible new visions as well. Referring to Joyce's *Ulysses*, perhaps the most elaborate reinvention of Homer's epic in modern literature, Jameson has observed that

it is not the meaning of the *Odyssey* which is exploited here, but rather its spatial properties. The *Odyssey* serves as a *map*: it is indeed, on Joyce's reading of it, the one classical narrative whose closure is that of the map

of a whole complete and equally closed region of the globe, as though somehow the very episodes themselves merged back into space, and the reading of them came to be indistinguishable from map-reading.³⁸

In apprehending the world of the *Odyssey* in its totality as a spatial form, the modernist artifice becomes a representational mode suited to the far more complex geopolitical system in the twentieth century. The map, like the narrative, is ultimately a means of making sense of the world it depicts, which is why both have such persistent value as tools of knowledge. But above all, the map fosters interpretation and exploration, making it more suited to narrative than to epistemological ends.

In spite of its close association with postmodernism and postmodernity, Jameson has conceded that *cognitive mapping* is ultimately a “modernist strategy,” for it “retains an impossible concept of totality whose representational failure seemed for the moment as useful and productive as its (inconceivable) success.”³⁹ Unlike the more properly postmodern celebration of the fragmentary or of the incessant play of difference, the necessarily representational project of cognitive mapping cannot help but shore these fragments upon modernity’s ruins, and thus it cannot help but also involve a distinctively utopian dimension.⁴⁰ The value of the novel form’s literary cartography lies in a similarly utopian, and perhaps therefore impossible, project, since it must constellate the disparate stars which in themselves offer no sure map of any possible paths into a meaningful ensemble that we may use to make our own way in the world. Here, utopia is not the ideal state to be realized, but — as Jameson has stated in various places — a boundary by which we come to comprehend our own imaginative limits, a frame for the map that we create and re-create in various moments along the way.⁴¹ The novel as form thus exceeds the epic, since the latter had a kind of transcendent reality to be represented, whereas the novel’s literary cartography generates its own territories at it allows us to explore them. Lukács’s warning about art’s inability to transform the world — “the great epic is a form bound to the historical moment, and any attempt to depict the utopian as existent can only end in destroying the form, not in creating reality” — is well taken, but the final word of *The Theory of the Novel* offers the barest hope of a new world resistant to “the sterile power of the merely existent.”⁴² In a characteristically modernist and Marxist formulation, then, we see the dialectic of modernity played out in the literary forms of its age. The maps are no longer laid out in the firmament before our eyes, but the promise of new, different, and hitherto unimaginable cartographies impels us to give form to, and make sense of, those radically alternative spaces and places that we will ineluctably occupy and attempt to represent.

Notes

1. György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1971) 12.
2. Lukács, *Theory of the Novel* 11–12.
3. *Theory of the Novel* 29.
4. See Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) especially 70–75.
5. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) 51–54.
6. *Theory of the Novel* 29–30.
7. See Robert T. Tally Jr., *Fredric Jameson: The Project of Dialectical Criticism* (London: Pluto, 2014) 100–102.
8. Fredric Jameson, “On Politics and Literature,” *Salmagundi* 2.3 (Spring-Summer 1968) 22–23.
9. Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1990) 54.
10. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) 104.
11. Fredric Jameson, “Introduction,” *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays, 1971–1986, Volume 1: Situations of Theory* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988) xxviii.
12. *Theory of the Novel* 152–153.
13. *Theory of the Novel* 30.
14. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S. H. Butcher (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961) 67.
15. Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 43.
16. *Theory of the Novel* 67.
17. See Joseph Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991).
18. *Theory of the Novel* 121.
19. Mikhail Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 16.
20. See Robert T. Tally Jr., *Spatiality* (London: Routledge, 2013) 1–7.
21. As Jonathan Arac points out, citing Friedrich Schlegel’s “Letter on the Novel,” the German word *romantische* could be translated either as “romantic” or “novelistic,” and hence referring to a work as a “romantic novel” (a potentially oxymoronic expression for some English readers) would seem almost a tautology — that is, a “romantic romance” or a “novelistic novel” — in German. See Arac, “‘A Romantic Book’: *Moby-Dick* and Novel Agency,” *boundary 2* 17.2 (1990) 44.
22. *Theory of the Novel* 70.
23. See Erich Auerbach, *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: NY Review of Books P, 2001).
24. *Theory of the Novel* 68.
25. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) 51–54.
26. Jameson, *Postmodernism* 52.
27. See Jorge Luis Borges, “On Exactitude in Science,” *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1999) 325.
28. *Postmodernism* 52.
29. *Theory of the Novel* 88, 56.
30. For Lukács, this “age” has begun by the time Don Quixote makes his first sally, but Arac has used this phrase to name a more recent epoch extending from the early nineteenth to the middle twentieth

centuries, a period in which the novel — over and against, say, poetry, drama, or other forms — dominated Western cultures; see Jonathan Arac, *Impure Worlds: The Institution of Literature in the Age of the Novel* (New York: Fordham UP, 2011).

31. *Theory of the Novel* 56.
32. *Theory of the Novel* 84.
33. *Theory of the Novel* 88.
34. See, e.g., François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988).
35. Franco Moretti, “Lukács’s *Theory of the Novel*: Centenary Reflections,” *New Left Review* 91 (Jan–Feb 2014) 41.
36. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 233.
37. *Theory of the Novel* 37.
38. Fredric Jameson, “Modernism and Imperialism,” *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso, 2007) 167.
39. *Postmodernism* 409.
40. See, e.g., Robert T. Tally Jr., *Utopia in an Age of Globalization: Space, Representation, and the World System* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
41. See, e.g., Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005) 232–233.
42. *Theory of the Novel* 152–153.

Modernism in the Balance: Lukács with Dos Passos

Elvira Godek-Kiryluk

The narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Man of the Crowd" (1840), passes time at a London café in idly sorting the passers-by by social type. When an elderly man's face arrests his "whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression," the narrator abandons his post at the window to track this individual for the next twenty-four hours.¹ It turns out that the eccentric merely follows the crowds and as soon as one crowd disperses, he seeks out a new one. The narrator pursues, but he learns nothing about his would-be protagonist except the traffic patterns in which he participates. Nevertheless, the narrator finds himself "in the wildest amazement, resolute not to abandon a scrutiny in which... [he] now felt an interest all absorbing."² When he finally gives up the chase, it is not because he satisfies his curiosity or achieves a resolution to his narrative, but because he grows "wearied until death."³

Once the reader realizes that Poe's narrator describes his subjective experience of immediacy and that he records it on par with the objective movements of the protagonist, she must realize also that the mode of narration represented in "The Man of the Crowd" contradicts the precept that the author himself sets in his 1846 critical essay, "The Philosophy of Composition." Poe declares that any author who begins a narrative without having first conceived its dénouement commits a "radical error."⁴ An author must know where the narrative is heading so that he can appropriately muster his resources in anticipation of a climax that produces the resolution for his narrative, which, in turn, makes the totality of the work intelligible. Poe makes this point explicit early in the essay: "It is only with the dénouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation" by making all constituent parts "tend to the development of intention."⁵ He defends his argument further by demonstrating the advantage of having written the climactic stanza of "The Raven" first, so that "by establishing the climax, I might the better vary and graduate, as regards seriousness and importance, the preceding" parts.⁶

When we look at “The Man of the Crowd” however, we find that the narrator, in defiance of the author’s principles, delivers himself of his observations only a few steps behind his character. Because this mode of narration instantiates “the radical error” by renouncing the methods of a deliberate composition, it brings the despairing narrator to a declaration that the object of his pursuit is illegible: “It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds.”⁷ It really is “vain to follow” because even if the narrator were to learn something, it would be too late to subordinate what he has already told to what he might yet discover. The narrative is a running record of our narrator’s experiences and not a composition. About the protagonist we learn only what is given by the cautionary frame, which is that “*er lässt sich nicht lesen*,” but the fault lies not at the level of content with character development, but with the order of writing.⁸ To tell it intelligibly, Poe’s narrator ought to have figured out the point of his tale before he began the telling of it. As it is, the narrator’s epiphany, “It will be in vain to follow,” serves as the climax to an allegory of composition, in which Poe makes his narrator’s quest for the immediacy of effect understood as a failure to mediate his experience and thereby as an object lesson about the failure to meet the conditions of narrative legibility.⁹

“The Man of the Crowd” represents exactly the kind of experience that the constraint upon length to the limit of one sitting ought to preempt in the genre of the short story, namely the intrusion of life upon the effect of composition. Poe recommends the length limit to preserve the unity of poetical effect, “for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and everything like totality is at once destroyed.”¹⁰ “The Man of the Crowd” can be read in one sitting, but it records exclusively those “affairs of the world” that interfere with the composition, that is, immediate impressions and traffic patterns. Consequently, the story demonstrates that the unity of effect does not follow inevitably from formal constraints and subordination emerges not only as immanent and necessary, but also as the sufficient condition for a composition. Poe theorizes this point with “The Raven,” a poem, dramatizes it in the “Man of the Crowd,” a short story, and opens “The Philosophy of Composition” with a nod to his 1842 review of *Barnaby Rudge*, a novel, in which he praises and criticizes Dickens precisely to the extent that his novel stands as composition. The review first presents a chronologically reconstructed outline of events and follows with an account of narrative withholdings and disclosures plotted to optimize the effects of the murder mystery.¹¹ Poe’s basic point is that Dickens achieves his aesthetic effects by subordinating the order of events to the order of writing, which, we learned from “The Man of the Crowd,” is distinct from the order of impressions experienced by the narrator. Poe admires some of the effects in *Barnaby Rudge* even upon rereading when he already knows the plot and when the narrative illuminates for him the graduated construction of the novel. These effects testify to the artistry of the composition, but there are also effects that are simply casualties of serial publishing that do not require of an installment to apprehend the totality

of a finished work. Those effects mystify the reader only for the sake of absorption. Whether the conditions of production require any integrity of composition or not, Poe insists that the philosophy of composition demands subordination to count as a composition at all. This we have to accept if we are to understand Poe's "radical error" as an error that is in fact radical.

Whereas Poe's review of the novel is invested in the autonomy of composition for art's sake, György Lukács revisits *Barnaby Rudge* in *The Historical Novel* (1955) worried by a literary development that understands the historical novel as a genre. Although it seems at first glance that no two people could be drawn to *Barnaby Rudge* by interests more divergent than Poe, who scoffs at the novel's historical ambitions, and Lukács, who is alarmed by the erosion of "the artistic expression of an historicized attitude to life," both are mobilized by the same threat posed to the formal unity of a concrete work by a formalization of that unity, or, in Lukácsian terms, by the problem of totality threatened by reification.¹² Both find in Dickens's treatment of historical material in *Barnaby Rudge* an incipient formalism that spurs them to develop their respective accounts of formal autonomy. We saw already that Poe separates the order of events from the order of composition. Lukács identifies in the Dickensian social critique a weakness for applying an "abstract-moral attitude towards concrete social-moral phenomena."¹³ He complains that when the historical aspect of the novel is reduced to a setting of "purely accidental circumstances for 'purely human' tragedies," then neither critical nor aesthetic judgment of a concrete case arising in its essential social totality is possible.¹⁴ What offers itself instead is the temptation to moral judgment that belongs entirely to the reader and the propriety of which is categorically questionable with regard to fiction. Lukács concludes that this is the kind of subjective distortion that "was only an occasional blurring of line," but that becomes "an essential defect in the entire composition" when historicity is reducible to a generic formula.¹⁵ Whereas Scott's historical novel addressed itself to a "growing historical understanding for the problems of contemporary society," this new historical novel finds the present unknowable, and when it turns to the past to write about history, it yields either "dead facts" or "subjective arbitrariness."¹⁶ At this point, Lukács's objections to a trend that formalizes the historical novel as a genre dedicated to the past start to sound a lot like Poe's critique of the mode of narration set too closely in the present to the narrator's experience: subjective arbitrariness chasing after dead facts could very well serve as the subtitle for "The Man of the Crowd." Lambasting as a dead fact the kind of objective immediacy that can be indexed by means of a costume and dismissing as arbitrariness the subjective immediacy of the reader's moral judgment, Lukács arrives at the same account of the wrong way to write fiction as the art-for-art's-sake Poe.

It would have surprised Theodor Adorno, certainly, to see Lukács in the company of Poe, the American vanguard of French and Russian decadence, and even more so, to entertain the Lukácsian commitment to realism as a commitment to form.

Adorno misses this crucial point entirely. And yet, Adorno's surprise would have been no greater than Lukács's, as I will later show, upon a discovery of a disciple of Poe and an able exponent of his own aesthetic theory in John Dos Passos. The substance of Adorno's critique is that Lukács, committed as he is to "the great philosophical tradition that conceives of art as knowledge which has assumed concrete shape," discounts those concrete shapes of aesthetic stylization that properly belong to art and "satisfies himself with the dregs, namely with the subject-matter."¹⁷ In other words, Adorno's Lukács fails to maintain "'aesthetic distance' from existence."¹⁸ Although the thrust of his critique presents Lukács as an ideologue without a valid aesthetic claim, Adorno actually concedes to Lukács those tenets that are in fact constitutive of Lukácsian aesthetics. He places Lukács in the Hegelian dialectical tradition that posits the concrete artwork as a legitimate object of knowledge insofar as it mediates an immediate experience of the empirical phenomena. He also recognizes Lukács as the "first dialectical materialist to apply the category of reification systematically to philosophy."¹⁹

Lukács argues in the *History of Class Consciousness* (1923) that the processes of rationally cooperative production that transform the relations between people into relations between things have their equivalents in every sphere of social activity. This is most visible in the stratified systems of bureaucratic governance that make use of quantitative protocols to manage individual cases predictably without a qualitative justification for them, but reification infiltrates ethics, science, and art as well.²⁰ The result is that "the whole which diverges *qualitatively and in principle* from the laws regulating the parts" is irrational because "the concrete material totality of what can and should be known" is not in the end reducible to rational forms.²¹ It is because of this irreducibility that Lukács denies that knowledge of the formal structures that organize social life constitutes an understanding of the total social organization of society and claims that totality should be the aim of understanding. History serves as an alternative model of knowledge because it organizes its subject matter causally. It is much more interested in the conditions of possibility for a historical genesis of specific social logics than it is in the rational reduction that uses social facts to illustrate a schema of understanding.²² Adorno seizes at Lukács's commitment to history and, regardless of Lukács's professed loyalty to immanent critique, accuses Lukács of locating his totality outside of the work of art.²³

Adorno's critique has a weakness. When he accuses Lukács of reducing the "notion of 'the immanent meaning of life' from *The Theory of the Novel*" to a "dictum that life in a society building up socialism is in fact full of meaning," Adorno seems to forget that Lukácsian injunction to "master the arbitrary" is in place precisely as a check to keep the literary critique immanent.²⁴ This shows most conspicuously in the opening pages of "Narrate or Describe?" (1936) where Lukács argues for the "absolute divergence of intentions" between the horse race scenes in Émile Zola's *Nana* and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.²⁵ The problem that Lukács finds with Zola lies precisely in that the author is

true to life and that this kind of authenticity produces a description of indexical value. Its purpose is to vouch that it accurately describes its referent, but it “has nothing to do with the lives of characters” and “[a]rtistically, it is superfluous.”²⁶ In contrast, it matters little what the audience knows about horse races in *Anna Karenina*; Tolstoy narrates the race in such a way that the scene becomes integrally necessary to the advancement of the plot. Like Poe who emphasizes the development of intention, Lukács insists on mediation, which he distinguishes from historical causality by discussing the status of chance in fiction: “Objectively, attendance at or participation in a race is only an incident in life. Tolstoy integrated such an incident into a critical dramatic context as tightly as it was possible to do.”²⁷ The horse racing scene in *Anna Karenina* merits Lukács’s praise because it justifies its place in the novel instead of verifying its relation to reality. The task of realism, as Lukács would have it, is to narrate the essential conflict of the age rather than validate the authenticity of its props. Realism is no more real than any of the movements comprising modernism, but, Lukács believes, unlike modernism, realism can support mediation.

Disaffected as Adorno may have been with Lukács’s particular set of political commitments before as well as after the Second World War, he could not dismiss easily the exhortation to socially committed literature that was implicit in the censure that “lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.”²⁸ The enduring legacy of Adorno’s essay on “Commitment” (1961) is his claim that “autonomous rather than committed art should be encouraged” because “committed works all too readily credit themselves with every noble value, and then manipulate them at their ease.”²⁹ Less satisfactory is Adorno’s development of that argument. He acknowledges that the aesthetic distance commanded by the artwork converts whatever the artwork represents into a reader’s aesthetic experience and recognizes this as a distinct problem for committed art: “The so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle-butts contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it.”³⁰ He seeks an antidote to the problem of pleasure in the works written by Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett that can “arouse the fear which existentialism merely talks about.”³¹ If, by valorizing existential fear, Adorno evades the pleasure that aesthetic distance makes possible as well as the trap of self-congratulation that a committed work lays out for the author and reader alike, he does not escape the more fundamental problem that he creates for himself by turning to affect. A preference for one kind of affect over another profiles the reader as a certain kind of consumer, but it does nothing to establish the autonomy of the artwork.³² Adorno has a better account of modernism than Lukács, but when he takes up the problem of commitment, he fails to imagine a version of the committed work that is theoretically more sound than the one proffered by Lukács.³³

Near the end of “Commitment,” Adorno proclaims that “the principle that governs autonomous works of art is not the totality of their effects but their own inherent structure.”³⁴ Adorno and Lukács do not disagree on this point. In fact, Lukács draws a

distinction between those effects that belong to the work of art and those that belong to the spectator:

Description contemporizes everything. Narration recounts the past. One describes what one sees, and the spatial “present” confers a temporal “present” on men and objects. But it is an illusory present, not the present of immediate action of the drama. The best modern narrative has been able to infuse the dramatic element into the novel by transferring events into the past. But the contemporaneity of the observer making a description is the antithesis of the contemporaneity of the drama.³⁵

Since action in drama unfolds in the presence of the spectator, it necessarily materializes itself in the spectator's present. Lukács rightly notices that this condition of theatrical production obscures the difference between two different kinds of effects. There are outcomes produced by the drama that belong to the diegetic present of represented action and there are effects that the observer experiences as present to herself. The subjective effects of the second type constitute a description antithetical to drama, according to Lukács, and we delude ourselves when we think that they are part of the artwork. Let us remember that Poe dedicates “The Philosophy of Composition” to advice about the kinds of effects upon the audience that writing can create, but that he also stages a contradiction in “The Man of the Crowd” with a narrator who records his impressions, but produces no diegetic effects. In Lukácsian terms, his subjective narration yields only a description. It is a description of a narration in which the formal structure of narration materializes, but nothing obtains a concrete form as a result of that narration. Fundamentally, Poe and Lukács agree that effects that belong to the spectator do not belong to the artwork. Lukács sees an opportunity in the novel to circumvent the intrusions of the descriptive mode by employing the device of past tense, but this solution is merely formal and the problem reasserts itself in the historical novel under a different guise. The contemporaneity of present effects plagues modernism with what Lukács calls spurious subjectivism. Since a contemporaneity of the effects set in the past gives rise to spurious objectivism, we should recognize it as a challenge peculiar to naturalism as well as a threat to the historical novel.³⁶ More concerned about separating the effects of art from the effects of life than he is about the time in which the contemporaneity of these effects occurs, Lukács exposes the difficulty that, in his view, modernism and naturalism have with sustaining the autonomy of the artwork. In the context of my argument, the attention that he pays to the contemporaneity of these effects serves to demonstrate a commitment to totality in the work that is predicated on a commitment to autonomy.

To have vindicated Lukács from Adorno's indictment that he is a demagogue without a valid aesthetic theory is one thing; to reconcile him to modernism is another. Lukács relies on understanding to cohere the totality of the work and to evaluate its autonomy

against reification and arbitrary intrusions. He is not satisfied that the novel produces literary effects, but requires it to justify the effects that it produces with regard to the meaning of the whole. The fact that Adorno seeks in the experience of existential terror a refuge from the effects of aesthetic distance does not exactly validate Lukács's fears that modernism's tendency to evacuate content from the work of art leads to the immediacy of affect, but it does make those fears intelligible as a concern about form.³⁷ But from Lukács's own theoretical perspective, it should not matter whether the immediacy of the reader's experience is provoked by positive content or the absence of content. Either way, the immediate experience constitutes an intrusion upon the mediated form and any such intrusion is by definition arbitrary. Lukács seems to have underestimated the strength that his aesthetic theory draws from the principle of immanent necessity. The modernist tendency to evacuate mimetic reflection from the artwork does not invariably result in the lack of meaning. If the artwork has a subordinate structure, then the legibility of purpose that the parts obtain in the constitution of the whole lends itself to understanding and the formal relationships become the work's content. The mediation that this kind of modernist work sustains is formally reflexive, but it is immanent. It may fail to meet Lukács's political objectives, but it does not stand in contradiction to his aesthetics the way that the immediacy of affect does. What must become crucial to a Lukácsian critique, by the logic of Lukács's own theory, is not the presence of a particular formal structure at the level of content, such as plot, but the presence of a subordinating structure that organizes the content in such a way as to close the form of mediation against the intrusions of subjective and objective immediacy.

We saw in "The Man of the Crowd" a case in which narration lacks internal means to produce a resolution because a narrator who does not know the end himself does not know what he needs in the narrative and for what purpose. The question that now remains to be settled is whether a modernist work that looks like an open structure, such as John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*, might nevertheless sustain a resolution of form if it does have an end toward which everything tends. Although critical analyses of the *U.S.A.* trilogy implicitly pay tribute to its open form, particularly those that attend to the author's technical innovations and focus on the work's modal structure, panoramic vision, collective representation, architectural honeycomb, the ironies of juxtaposition, the technique of montage, and the network model, the author himself declared a commitment to Poe's principle that the end is "where all works of art should begin."³⁸ In a 1968 interview for the *Paris Review*, Dos Passos admits to David Sanders that *U.S.A.* was not originally intended as a trilogy, but "there was so much that I wanted to get in that it got to be three books very soon... before *42nd Parallel* was finished." However, when pressed whether he began "with the idea of just taking the years up to the war," Dos Passos responds: "No, I had the basic idea for the whole thing."³⁹ In other words, closure is built into the work by a design that imagines the limits of "the whole thing" and is therefore formally independent from the limits

imposed on the work by its capacity to accumulate content. A work that is closed by design remains closed in principle even if it balloons from one to three or even to a hundred volumes, whereas the open work keeps on going until, for some arbitrary reason, it cannot go on any more.

When interviewed by Frank Gado that same year, Dos Passos defends the trilogy as a closed form by invoking Poe. He recalls that he “did have a plan about the end particularly” and leaves the interviewer with this word of advice: “Poe, you know, gives a very good maxim in one of his critical pieces: an author should always know what the end of a story is going to be before he starts the beginning.”⁴⁰ Of course, the author’s endorsement of a critical principle does not guarantee a successful execution of its commitments in the finished form of the work, but it solicits more than a phenomenological description of that form: it warrants an interpretation. Since we know that Dos Passos wanted to bring *U.S.A.* to a resolution, we can examine the trilogy to identify what would formally count as a resolution. We can still describe how the work is put together, but we are now also invited to interpret what the work means. If Dos Passos’s trilogy can be demonstrated to have a formal resolution as Poe prescribes, its diverse parts must be subordinated to support a reading that is not only possible, but necessary and sufficient to account for the meaning of the work.

Clearly, there are similarities between Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” and Dos Passos’s *U.S.A.* trilogy. Both authors recognize the basic expectation of the reader that to read a fictional narrative is to follow a character or a group of characters. There is nothing remarkable about that. But it is noteworthy that both authors fulfill this expectation in ways that produce fatigue. The representations of a reader and a writer are collapsed in the figure of Poe’s narrator because he narrates his reading, or rather his inability to read the character whom he follows. We remember that he learns nothing about his protagonist and that he gives up exhausted. The reader of *U.S.A.* learns plenty, but to no avail. The burden of information is exhausting, but somehow not exhaustive. The critical question that emerges now with some force is how can characters whose lives are so full and about whom we know so much nonetheless fail to absorb us? And how can this happen consistently not in one fictional narrative, but in twelve? Let us turn to the early reviews for answers. In 1930, in a review of *42nd Parallel* for the *New Masses*, Upton Sinclair insists that “[w]hat we have really is five novelettes, tied together with frail and slender threads” with “a lot of vaudeville material” in between.⁴¹ He complains that Dos Passos ignores “the fundamental fact of human psychology, that when we have got interested in a person we want to know more about him” and that we resent an author who chooses to “just shunt us off to some other character.”⁴² Writing for the *New York Herald* in the same year, Mary Ross agrees with Sinclair that the fictional characters “are picked up and set down like marionettes handled by an erratic puppeteer” and observes that the “book abandons the ordinary structures of fiction for a form as intricate as that of a symphony. It gives no satisfaction at all for those who would know how the story

'comes out.'"⁴³ It is not a defensible position that readers want to know *more* about any of the characters in *U.S.A.* There is an excess of information for any one of them as it is. What we want is a resolution that will make what we already know worth knowing. Dos Passos produces no grounds for us to anticipate a dénouement for his narratives, so readers are frustrated when one narrative for which we eagerly await a resolution is interrupted by another, also without a resolution in sight.

Whereas Ross expects the resolution in terms of a plot structure that forces the meaning to "come out" of the narrative, Sinclair wants the resolution to be psychologically motivated. The difference between critiques launched by Ross and Sinclair helps us understand precisely what expectations Dos Passos frustrates, but, to be clear, Dos Passos does not admit a resolution of either kind. If Dos Passos is committed to closed form, that closure is not to be had in the fictional narratives. He evacuates every opportunity for a dénouement and goes so far as to deny to death its prerogative to confer meaning upon a complete life. Because Dos Passos is not finally concerned with how individuals come to understand the world from their subject positions, no event of the plot emerges for the reader as psychologically meaningful. Eveline's apparent suicide does not even conclude her own narrative. It is reported by telephone as hearsay at the end of Mary French's narrative where Mary dismisses the news with, "I have too much to do to spend my time taking care of hysterical women on a day like this."⁴⁴ Dos Passos does not dramatize Eveline's experience of the events leading to her death.⁴⁵ Instead, he stages a death that formally tests the legibility of her intentions. Suicide is an act that invites speculations about its meaning. The reader tacitly understands that a self-inflicted death admits of some kind of failure, even if it is only an accidental failure to administer the correct dosage of the medicine. Eveline has failed as an artist and those aspirations are recognized posthumously with the kind of null generosity that befits a eulogy: "so talented, an artist really."⁴⁶ She also fails as a patron of the arts, but this is not generally legible to her social circle. Dos Passos represents her failed ambition by imagining the societal conditions that would have to obtain for it to succeed. Eveline would have to have in attendance guests looking to invest in art and inspire them with confidence against the risk of investment. Moorehouse is the one who spells out for the reader the fact that Eveline does not meet these conditions: "I like to help old friends... but it occurred to me that if the Shuberts thought there was money in it they'd be putting it in themselves.... Of course Mrs. Johnson's very artistic."⁴⁷ He allows that Eveline possesses talent and taste, but will not put up the money for her project.

Dos Passos produces in Eveline a character to whom other characters grant liberally her artistic nature as long as this recognition does not entail an obligation that would bind them to action. But, of course, Eveline's ambition is to compel people to action. She is frustrated because she is unable to mobilize any of the forces in the world to any consequence. In other words, she cannot make her personal adventures mean anything more than her personal adventures. She would have a Parisian salon, but she

only has a Prohibition era cocktail den. Commendations of Eveline's artistic nature amount to no more than a formulaic acknowledgment of her subjectivity. People accept it regardless of evidence, and rightfully so, because evidence cannot prove a subjective experience wrong. At the same time, an actual recognition ought to have produced an obligation and this obligation does not materialize. Dos Passos suppresses Eveline's account of reasons for her suicide to reveal the gap between the recognition of a person who understands herself as an artist and a person who is an artist. This difference, the difference that produces an obligation, provides a sufficient objective explanation for Eveline's suicide. Dos Passos doubts that a subjective experience of the world can be a real force in it and he confirms this stance as programmatic when he draws a distinction between himself and Joyce with the declaration that his "interests were the opposite: I wanted to write objectively."⁴⁸

If we accept that Dos Passos's idea of writing objectively entails a representation of historical forces and should be understood in opposition to subjective writing that depicts mental states, we have to account for his choice to use free indirect discourse in the first place. Is not the whole point of this kind of narration to represent the inner states of a character and yet deliver them filtered through the subjectivity of the narrator? The most compelling explanation of Dos Passos's narrative style is not his own, but Jean-Paul Sartre's.⁴⁹ Sartre compares the reading of a novel to diving into a mirror. People and things in a reflection only resemble reality, but they speak to us, whereas we find the real world mute when we close the book. Dos Passos invents "an art of story-telling," Sartre explains, when he discovers that the writer can make the reflected world speak the language of the real world and that this innovation creates aesthetic distance.⁵⁰ He demonstrates:

Yesterday you saw your best friend and expressed to him your passionate hatred of war. Now try to relate this conversation to yourself in the style of Dos Passos. "And they ordered two beers and said that war was hateful. Paul declared he would rather do anything than fight and John said he agreed with him and both got excited and said they were glad they agreed. On his way home, Paul decided to see John more often." You will start hating yourself immediately. It will not take you long, however, to decide that you *cannot* use this tone in talking about yourself.⁵¹

That this is a language of "ritual statements and sacred gestures" is one way of putting it; that it is the language of sound bites in "the style of a statement to the Press" is a way of saying the same thing without resorting to a religious metaphor.⁵² Dos Passos's style of narration rebuffs sympathy with every utterance and with every utterance claims us as participants in social discourse. Sartre argues that whenever a cliché is at all intelligible to us, we "play the role of the obliging chorus."⁵³ This, Sartre explains, is "the source of the shame and uneasiness with which Dos Passos knows how to fill

the reader.”⁵⁴ The genius of Sartre’s reading lies not in deconstructing the discourse of the press or ritual, but in recognizing that Dos Passos invents the “art of story-telling” when he withholds from the reader the pleasure of immediacy. He solves the problem of aesthetic distance identified by Adorno, but does it in the way urged by Lukács: he defies the subjectivity of the reader and produces a work in which precisely those elements of construction that create aesthetic distance also invite critical judgment.

All the characters in *U.S.A.* speak this language even though the particular assortment of platitudes is tailored to suit the character. “It is as if,” Sartre reports, “there were a Platonic heaven of words and commonplaces to which we all go to find words suitable to a given situation.”⁵⁵ It is deployed most glibly by J. W. Moorehouse, the fictional public relations counsel for the Morgans and the Rockefellers. His strength as a negotiator consists of a realization that his words need not represent reality; it is sufficient that they reach out to the desires of his listener. He welcomes G. H. Barrow, a labor leader who feels more at home in his role as an executive than in his commitment to labor, with an assurance that the

great leaders of American capital, as you probably realize, Mr. Barrow, are firm believers in fairplay and democracy and are only too anxious to give the worker his share of the proceeds of industry if they can only see their way to do so in fairness to the public and the investor. After all, the public is the investor whom we all aim to serve.⁵⁶

By a sleight of hand the competing interests of the working class and of the investors are brought together under the umbrella of public interest and emerge again as the sole interest of the investors who are the public.

This kind of trick is possible, says Sartre, when it no longer matters what the speaker “had in mind when he spoke that sentence. What matters is that it has been uttered.”⁵⁷ What matters to G. H. Barrow is not what is said about labor demands and work stoppage, but the gratification he derives from being coddled as an interlocutor. In the appeal that Moorehouse makes to Barrow, Dos Passos brings together a critique of political corruption with a critique of subjectivism. Because Barrow’s interest in the negotiations is limited to the interest he has vested in his own prestige, Moorehouse is able to obviate any influence Barrow may have had as a negotiator with the comforts of subtle flattery. Barrow gets his pleasure and labor gets whatever deal J. W. Moorehouse and Senator Planet work out between them as if no labor delegate were present. Barrow wants his person to count, but because that is all he wants, he counts for nothing as a representative. Like Eveline, Barrow receives the kind of recognition that does not obligate anyone to action. It is true that Eveline is a major character and Barrow a minor one, that Eveline’s professional ambitions are frustrated and Barrow’s are narrowly met, and that Eveline’s ambitions are not legible to her set and Barrow’s are to his, but these differences of positive and negative representation are

immaterial. What matters is that subjective immediacy defines neither character: Eveline is not an artist and Barrow does not count.

U.S.A. focuses its narratives around twelve major characters to whom it denies transformations and epiphanies of the kind that could define them by action or experience. Instead of plots that facilitate these effects, the novel forges its own compositional device and tasks it not with a test of character, but with a test of principle or belief. Toward the end of *42nd Parallel*, the first volume of the trilogy, J.W. Moorehouse goes to Europe as a publicity expert for the Red Cross while still under the employ of the Morgans and the Rockefellers for whom he “runs pro-war stuff through a feature syndicate.”⁵⁸ Probably no other character has a better first hand knowledge of the financial interests that the American bankers have in the European war, so as Moorehouse fans the flames of war, he already recognizes the financial advantages of the eventual peace. He deliberates

about the gigantic era of expansion that would dawn for America after the war. America the good Samaritan healing the wounds of wartorn Europe. It was as if he was rehearsing a speech, when he got to the end of it he looked at Eveline with a funny deprecatory smile and said, “And the joke of it is, it’s true.”⁵⁹

The contradiction Moorehouse notices concerns agents who have moral principles. No such contradiction arises for the banks who are motivated by profit and who hire publicists to make the unintended but anticipated consequences acceptable to the public’s moral palate. The task of the publicist is exactly the opposite from that which Lukács assigns to the novelist: the novelist brings out the conflict while the publicist makes it disappear. Dos Passos brings out the conflict by showing us how Moorehouse makes it disappear. Moorehouse’s “joke” extricates his clients from the compromising appearance of straddling a contradiction by resolving it for the public temporally as first knowing one thing and then knowing another: a commitment to peace plausibly follows a commitment to war. Even though Moorehouse knows that the money that will make profit from the reconstruction is the same money that fuels the war, he identifies surprise as a formal element of the joke’s mechanism. Surprise constitutes the form of the public’s experience of contradiction without recognizing it as contradiction.

Moorehouse’s joke works when the public discovers, with the requisite surprise and the help of a public relations campaign, that what it wants to do coincides with what it ought to do. The very idea of such discovery involves the public in self-deception. If ethical action is by definition free because its obligation is self-imposed, then the obligation is intentional, the action must be deliberate, and any action that unexpectedly fulfills one’s ethical obligation, though it may be good, has no claim to a moral principle. Whereas a principled stance cannot be adopted retrospectively,

the point of the publicist's joke is that nothing more than a pleasant surprise stands in the way of retroactively representing past action as principled or of attributing a principle to a coincidence. Insofar as this joke appeals to the subjectivity of the audience, offers pleasure without obligation, and engages the audience in self-deception, it commands the absorptive allure of fiction. It also mocks any aesthetic theory that puts a premium on affect. No matter how artful he is or how successfully he produces his effects on his audience, what Moorehouse does is not art. It is not politics either. Moorehouse is in the propagandist's business of shaping people's subjective experience. In the third volume of the trilogy, *Big Money*, the advertising campaign for Doc Bingham's line of health remedies finds an obstacle in legislation that proposes to regulate manufacture and sales of patent medicines. In order to turn the public against its own interests, Moorehouse intends to educate the American people that they "don't want their freedom of choice curtailed by any Washington snoopers and busybodies."⁶⁰ The publicist's joke escalates to a publicity stunt when the Founding Fathers' ideal of negative liberty finds expression in a sales formula.

This should give us pause. Although it turns out that Dos Passos remains faithful to the principles of founding liberalism, nevertheless *U.S.A.* marks a moment when he bankrupts the ideal of negative liberty to show that its logic constitutes a market mechanism. The charge is not that someone abuses the founding principles, or that they are ineffective; Dos Passos shows that understanding freedom primarily as freedom from constraint endorses a practice of freedom that shuns obligation, which then leaves the public good vulnerable to the abuses of the market. It is not my intention to read *U.S.A.* biographically as an expression of Dos Passos's beliefs.⁶¹ It is rather to consider the *U.S.A.* trilogy as his project of politicizing art, specifically as a project that understands that formal devices are insufficient to secure a meaning and that raises the question whether political intentions can obtain a form. Dos Passos's modernist execution of form looks different than Lukács's realist models, but my claim is not only that these forms are theoretically consistent, but also that Dos Passos's modernism resolves an impasse in aesthetic theory. While Adornian autonomy succeeds when it refuses to a modernist work a positive account of its political commitment and Lukács understands realism as the exclusive form of autonomy for the committed work, Dos Passos imagines the modernist form as capable of narrating the dialectic by means of which a political principle becomes a market value.

Lukács's argument hinges on disentangling the kind of writing that merely reflects reality, whether it be the reality of the reader's experience or of the empirical phenomena, from the writing that "consists in discovering the significant and vital aspects of social practice."⁶² To the counterargument that modernist experiments with form reflect the alienation of the modern life under the capitalist system, Lukács responds that this is still the kind of writing that is mere description because it records the subjective experience of fragmentation, but neither identifies the forces in conflict nor illuminates the contradiction that produces the alienation. It does

not matter for Lukács's critique of Dos Passos whether Lukács knew how Dos Passos characterized his own mode of narration. Regardless of Dos Passos's protests that he aims to represent the objective reality, Lukács lumps him and Joyce together as examples of the "most evolved subjectivism in the modern novel" because Lukács presupposes a totality of socioeconomic forces, and fragmentation represents for him always a subjective experience of that totality.⁶³ Fragmentation can only ever be accurate as a description of a subjective experience and not as knowledge about the world because Lukács classes it with immediacy against mediation. He criticizes the spurious subjectivity he finds in modernism as well as the spurious objectivity in naturalism for the same reason that both describe fragmentation instead of narrating a mediation. One describes the mental states and the other physical phenomena, but "a succession of subjective impressions no more suffices to establish an epic interrelationship than a succession of fetishized objects."⁶⁴ The result in both cases is a series of words that do not reveal what is important and why. Lukács's solution is the same as Poe's: formal subordination. Lukács expresses this most succinctly when he proclaims: "Narration establishes proportions, description merely levels."⁶⁵

My claim is that the fragmentation in *U.S.A.* is not spurious. Even though Lukács himself does not recognize it, Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* can be *understood* only in terms of Lukács's dialectical model of narration or Poe's closed form model of composition, but not in terms of a serial, modular, textile, or networked open form, even though it obviously can be described that way. In fact, description brings about a critical impasse in scholarship on Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* because critics routinely describe the novel's contents or structure and rarely succeed in explaining how the various formalisms of experimental technique resolve in a form that conveys what the novel means. If the trilogy itself produces an immediate experience of fragmentation by means of description, the more important and decisive fact is that it also narrates the contradiction in which we are embroiled by our ideological commitment to the founding principle of negative liberty. To have identified this principle with the mechanism of market subsumption makes Dos Passos the kind of prophet, even if a blind one, that Lukács denies to modernism.⁶⁶ In *Big Money*, the third volume that concentrates on the rise of corporate power and class struggle during the decade after the First World War, Dos Passos demonstrates that the principle of negative liberty loses its explanatory powers to the market. The Sacco and Vanzetti trial finds the foundational ideals "worn slimy in the mouths of lawyers districtattorneys collegepresidents judges," while the public utility magnate, Samuel Insull, gives the ethos of the free market a confident and public expression: "*My engineering*, he said once in a speech, when he was sufficiently czar of Chicago to allow himself the luxury of plain speaking, *has been largely concerned with engineering all I could out of the dollar.*"⁶⁷

Critics generally agree that Dos Passos began writing the novels that comprise the *U.S.A.* trilogy after the trial and execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti,

two Italian anarchists convicted, Dos Passos believed, as a result of political profiling rather than any proven wrongdoing.⁶⁸ They agree also that Dos Passos wrote *U.S.A.* with the intention to shake up the nation that could bear witness to a miscarriage of justice by the court system. He had already written *Facing the Chair: The Story of Americanization of Two Foreign Born Workmen* (1927) for The Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee. It was a 127 page pamphlet that condensed some 3,500 pages of court transcripts of sworn testimony, description of evidence, interviews, and other materials. Donald Pizer affirms that even though Dos Passos had experimented with technique in *Three Soldiers* and *Manhattan Transfer*, it is the compilation and editing of documentary sources for *Facing the Chair* that forged Dos Passos's technique of modal narration as he deploys it maturely in *U.S.A.*⁶⁹ The trial is represented in Mary French's narrative, in the newsreels, and in the last three Camera Eye chapters. There is no mention of the trial in the biographies, but the last of them, entitled "Power Superpower," reports the trial of Samuel Insull that serves as foil to the Sacco and Vanzetti trial in the novel. I submit that this is the ending to which the composition of *U.S.A.* tends from its conception and the ending that Dos Passos told Frank Gado he had in mind from the very beginning.

But how does *this* ending obtain a resolution for the novel? The ideal of negative freedom has had a successful run of legitimizing union busting, strike breaking, palm greasing, and marketing of patent commodities in *U.S.A.*, but it proves curiously ineffective when tasked with the defense of the right to a fair trial. Given that Sacco and Vanzetti were in fact executed, we must conclude that not enough people or not the right people wanted to see them acquitted or pardoned. Mary French corroborates this conclusion when she reports that, "Although most of the newspapermen who had any connection with the case thought the two had been wrongly convicted they tended to say that they were just two wop anarchists, so what the hell?"⁷⁰ Even under such conditions that allow personal motivations to be redefined as principles, Sacco and Vanzetti fail to become the exponents of American justice because there is nothing at stake in the outcome favorable to the defendants that the public wants for itself.⁷¹

The question whether Insull had embezzled the investors' money did not so much matter to the public or the jury. In this respect, that the matter of the law does not matter, Insull's trial resembles Sacco's and Vanzetti's. What matters is that Insull did not want the outcome that crumbled his financial empire. The novel reports that Samuel Insull's defense portrayed him as a "captain [who] had gone down with the ship" and argued for the lack of criminal intention:

He didn't deny he'd made mistakes; who hadn't, but they were honest errors. Samuel Insull wept. Brother Martin wept. The lawyers wept. With voices choked with emotion headliners of Chicago business told from the witnessstand how much Insull had done for business in Chicago. There wasn't a dry eye in the jury.

Finally driven to the wall by the prosecuting attorney Samuel Insull blurted out that yes, he had made an error of some ten million dollars in accounting but that it had been an honest error.
Verdict: Not Guilty.⁷²

In acquitting Insull, the public absolves itself of consistently leaving to serendipity the outcomes that obligation ought to have secured. Dos Passos' representation of the public who convicts Sacco and Vanzetti but finds Insull not guilty is cynical, but the author's decision to relegate to the background the case that actually was the catalyst for a three-volume novel testifies to his artistic restraint. Insull's trial illustrates how we have become a people who forfeit the principle of a fair trial as well as Sacco's and Vanzetti's, but the foil works better aesthetically because it condemns the power of affect with the power of positive content. If Dos Passos wants to show, and he does, that the problem with the public is that it attends to its sentiments when it ought to analyze evidence, evaluate arguments, and stand up for principles, then it stands to reason to pass judgment on it when it miscarries justice because of its sympathies in Insull's case rather than for the lack of them in Sacco's and Vanzetti's.

However, if the public is to stand trial in *U.S.A.*, the novel runs the risk of compromising its autonomy to public sentiment. The Sacco and Vanzetti trial offers opportunities to a reader who would find in her sympathy a corrective to history that exonerates her from the author's indictment. The Camera Eye sections present Dos Passos himself as an example of such spurious subjectivism. This is not a claim that the feelings that Dos Passos represents himself to have had are not real. Dos Passos's advocacy on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti testifies to their authenticity. So does the narrative device that couples the indexicality of the stream of consciousness technique with the evidentiary credentials of the camera.⁷³ The claim is that subjective immediacy is spurious because it is irrelevant to the mediation of the artistic form. The authenticity of Dos Passos's feelings means about as much to the formal integrity of the novel as Barrow's representation to the labor talks, and it defines *U.S.A.* as a work of art about as much as a eulogy makes an artist of Eveline. But while the authenticity of Dos Passos's feelings is simply beside the point, a focus on the authenticity of the reader's feelings can be disastrous for *U.S.A.* The one thing that this novel cannot afford is a reader who authenticates her own innocence against the charge of bad faith.

It is true that both trials lend themselves to the exploitation of affect: we see this in the newspapermen's pejorative dismissal of foreigners and in the crescendo rendition of Insull's verdict. Nevertheless, Insull's trial answers the purpose of the novel better because the sympathy extended to Insull stands accused of its contribution to class warfare, and this puts the immediacy of the reader's affect in check. No reader of this climactic scene can think that her experience of reading counts either as part of the work or as fulfillment of a moral obligation. Not even a sympathetic reader in a position of perfect identification with Insull, as another embezzler might be, can

think that her reading amounts to anything but reading. The moral judgment that imbued *Barnaby Rudge* with aesthetic pleasure, spurious on the grounds that it had no legitimate aim in addressing itself to a literary work, is deliberately foreclosed to the readers of *U.S.A.* Instead, Dos Passos posits principled judgment as an object of representation for the novel, both negative and immanent. It is everywhere lacking, but its structure of logical and temporal subordination of action to intent makes immanent necessity in the novel possible and legible by means of the publicist's joke. Let us indulge in a quick outline of what depends on the structure of this joke. Self-imposed obligation is a necessary condition for any kind of politics founded on the ideal of negative liberty. Without it, the individual's freedom is usurped by the freedom of the market. The structure of obligation calls for free indirect discourse because this type of narration makes it possible to ascertain when intention precedes action. With no obligation in place, we get the mechanism of the publicist's joke and the conditions of the market instead of politics. The market offers us the pleasure of self-justification, which is exposed in *U.S.A.* as a structural effect of bad faith. Bad faith gives a single form to Dos Passos's aesthetic and political concerns. Politically, it gives form to flight from the responsibilities of freedom; aesthetically, it accepts the pleasures of aesthetic distance as commitment. The Sacco and Vanzetti trial exemplifies bad faith in politics, but Insull's trial enables a concrete, historical mediation of both aspects of bad faith. The scene counts as a resolution of form because it is structurally anticipated by the various iterations of bad faith and because it conceptualizes the tension between commitment and aesthetic distance as a problem of bad faith, which it then overcomes with a rebuff to affect. The effect is a brilliantly singular climax that calls for both aesthetic and critical judgment.

After the 1938 publication of the trilogy in one volume, the meaning revealed by the mechanism of Moorehouse's joke is corroborated by the frame. The trilogy begins with a prologue entitled "U.S.A.," in which a young man unravels into many characters so that he can represent everything that the workingmen do. It ends in an epilogue in which all those separate lives collapse again into a figure of a vagrant looking up at a plane while attempting to hitch a ride. The differences between the lives of workers are a matter of description; the difference that narrates history is the claim that "we are two nations."⁷⁴ The epilogue presents a visual metaphor for the United States: the plane passenger is protected from the wants of others by the impassable chasm between those who have money and travel in the skies and those earthbound who do not. It is conceivable that those who have contributed most formatively to this picture of the U. S. would not recognize in it a result of their intentions. The subjects of the *U.S.A.* biographical sketches would likely object to an accusation that they have worked deliberately for the dispossession of the working poor even if this outcome were demonstrated to them as the inevitable outcome of their pursuits. Samuel Insull's "honest" mistake proves that their objections can be successfully defended before the law.⁷⁵ But even outside of the court, the claim that harm was not

meant falls on sympathetic ears. The political problem Dos Passos addresses is that the dominant forms of our experience do not meet any intention. No one sets out with a goal to cleave the United States with extreme class differences. People pursue success, but whether they succeed or fail, they do so by the means of socioeconomic mechanisms which necessarily expose many to want to indulge the few with surfeit.

In *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954*, Walter Rideout reports that even during the heyday of its production, the radical novel was generally considered to be weak artistically because it was tendentious and that Dos Passos was hailed by the Left as an author whose commitment to formal experimentation could recuperate the radical novel aesthetically. The hope was that Dos Passos's experiments with form could sublimate the proletarian ethos as Flaubert's stylization had sublimated the bourgeois interiority. The problem with this approach is that aesthetization does not advance the claim of autonomy for any novel that has political ambitions. On the contrary, *U.S.A.* would have to be understood on such reading as a work of propaganda that appropriates aesthetic forms for political purposes.

Dos Passos's experiment attracts the attention of both Lukács and Sartre. Lukács, for whom the stakes of the political novel lie in shifting the lens of mimetic reflection from the metaphysics of perceived reality to the history of class struggle, judges Dos Passos' work to fall short of its political ambitions.⁷⁶ Lukács objects to fragmentation because it substitutes a pseudo-philosophical exercise in epistemology for knowledge about the social world; or, to use Hegelian terms, it records the immediacy of sensation instead of synthesizing a mediation; or, to use Marxist terms, it makes knowledge a commodity that gains purchase but has no use value.⁷⁷ Since I have identified in the publicist's joke a structure of subordination that confers upon the novel the form of Sartre's bad faith and that motivates a resolution of that form in Insull's trial, I argue that there is mediation in *U.S.A.* At the level of representation, the mechanism evacuates any ideology, principle, or political belief in favor of an a posteriori construction of desire as truth. At the level of ideology, Moorehouse's joke describes the mechanism of capitalist subsumption, and Dos Passos chronicles real subsumption in the relations of ordinary people which does count as a narration of class struggle. The mechanism of the joke is the same as what Sartre describes as *mauvaise foi*—bad faith. It entails a refusal to recognize that which we wish to avoid knowing. It is the mechanism that allows Sartre to assign to everyone the responsibility for that which no one wills on the grounds that the alleged absence of intention is in fact nothing but self-deception posited as self-justification.

The remarkable fact about Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* is that in spite of its looks and Lukács's protests, it confirms the pith of Lukácsian aesthetics. Dos Passos's suppression of totalizing strategies of setting, character, and plot is not intended to prevent a resolution, but to prevent the kind of resolution that would enable a bad version of aesthetics to compromise the novel's politics and a bad version of politics to compromise its aesthetics. For this reason, *U.S.A.* frustrates the reader by

minimizing its opportunities for affective engagement. Dos Passos does this most controversially by suppressing the climax of his narratives. Neither Lukács nor Poe would condone this move, but Lukács and Poe both insist on plotting the narrative because plot requires subordination, and subordination is the formal condition for immanent necessity and for legibility of intent. If Dos Passos can be shown to deploy another formal structure of subordination that organizes his work as I hope to have shown, then his novel would refute Lukács's objections on aesthetic grounds whether or not Lukács likes the results. In letting go of the plot, Dos Passos does not abandon the closed form.

This defense of Dos Passos is also a defense of Lukács. Lukács believed the mode of narration to be best equipped for producing a concrete and autonomous work. He erred as a critic insofar that he mistook features of the work for a mode of writing, but this does not change the fact that as a theorist he distinguishes between the intelligibility of a concrete aesthetic form and a formalism that licenses universally, and often spuriously, both subjectively and objectively indexical description. If we take Lukács's aesthetic theory seriously, we cannot be satisfied with a Lukács who defends a particular literary movement and disparages another. We would then make the mistake that Adorno makes in taking Lukács's commitment to realism for a commitment to reality instead of a commitment to art. That would make of Lukács the same kind of formalist as the bourgeois who describes the historical novel as a genre.

Notes

1. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Man of the Crowd," *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. G.R. Thompson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004) 235.
2. Poe, "The Man of the Crowd" 238.
3. "The Man of the Crowd" 238.
4. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. G.R. Thompson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004) 675.
5. Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition" 675.
6. "The Philosophy of Composition" 680.
7. "The Man of the Crowd" 239.
8. "The Man of the Crowd" 239. Translation from German: he does not lend himself to reading.
9. The narrator and the protagonist, i.e., the narrator and the elderly gentleman whom the narrator follows, illustrate the same problem that I will refer to as absorption (Poe's term) or immediacy (Lukács's term). The protagonist cannot tear himself from the crowds just as the narrator cannot tear himself from his protagonist. Neither one achieves any reprieve from the immediacy of his experience, but the author secures for the reader a mediation by framing the narrative as an allegory of composition. One way Poe does this is by comparing the protagonist to *Hortulus Animæ*, a prayer book that is arguably illegible because it facilitates contemplation, or, possibly, sensuous absorption. See Isaac D'Israeli's "Religious Nouvelettes" *Curiosities of Literature* (1848).
10. "The Philosophy of Composition" 677.
11. Edgar Allan Poe, "Review of *Barnaby Rudge*," *Graham's Magazine* (February 1842), *The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore*. <http://www.eapoe.org/works/criticism/gm42dco1.htm>
12. György Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1983) 231.
13. Lukács, *The Historical Novel* 243-4.
14. *The Historical Novel* 244.
15. *ibid.*
16. *The Historical Novel* 231, 236.
17. Theodor Adorno, "Reconciliation under Duress," *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2007) 162, 172.
18. Adorno, "Reconciliation under Duress" 160.
19. "Reconciliation under Duress" 151.
20. Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," *History and Class Consciousness: Study in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: The MIT P, 1971). Lukács reiterates this point on many occasions; here is one: "This rationalization of the world appears to be complete, it seems to penetrate the very depths of man's physical and psychic nature. It is limited, however, by its own formalism. That is to say, the rationalization of isolated aspects of life results in the creation of — formal — laws. All these things do join together into what seems to the superficial observer to constitute a unified system of general 'laws.' But the disregard of the concrete aspects of the subject matter of these laws, upon which disregard their authority as laws is based, makes itself felt in the incoherence of the system in fact" (101).

21. Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" 102-3, 109.
22. "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" 144-59. "The historical knowledge of the proletariat begins with the 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 determinations 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" (159).
23. See "Reconciliation under Duress." For example: "He [Lukács] remains indifferent to the philosophical question of whether the concrete meaning of a work of art is in fact identical with the mere 'reflection of objective reality' (p. 101), a vulgar-materialist shibboleth to which he doggedly clings" (153).
24. "Reconciliation under Duress" 152-3, 162.
25. Georg Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin P, 1978) 111.
26. Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" 132, 136.
27. "Narrate or Describe?" 112. It is true that Lukács believes that the task of the novelist is to bring out the real historical causality, but real historical causality is not simply given. If it were, Lukács would not have been in conflict with Bloch. It requires artistic intention to bring out the real historical causality in a fictional world: "an author makes interesting what requires interest" (126).
28. Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. Francis McDonagh (London: Verso, 2007) 188.
29. Adorno, "Commitment" 193.
30. "Commitment" 189.
31. "Commitment." Adorno elaborates: "He over whom Kafka's wheels have passed, has lost for ever both any peace with the world and any chance of consoling himself with the judgment that the way of the world is bad" (191).
32. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 2000). Adorno and Horkheimer argue that in the absence of any valid criterion for judgment, the products of culture industry are identical. The only standards that exist are based on "classifying, organizing, and labeling consumers. Something is provided for all so that none may escape" (123).
33. This does not amount to a claim that the works of Kafka or Beckett offer nothing but or primarily affect. It is only a criticism of Adorno's argument about those works in the context of "Commitment."
34. "Commitment" 193.
35. "Narrate or Describe?" 130.
36. "Narrate or Describe?" "Matching this spurious objectivity is an equally spurious subjectivity. For from the standpoint of epic interrelationships not much is gained when a simple succession of events provides the motive principle of the composition or when a novel is based on the lyrical, self-orientated subjectivity of an isolated individual" (134).
37. I claim that Adorno seeks refuge in the experience of existential terror based on the wording of the

claim that Kafka and Beckett's works "arouse the fear which existentialism merely talks about" in "Commitment" 191.

38. "The Philosophy of Composition" 680. This is not an exhaustive list of readings that approach *U.S.A.* as an open form, but it may be as comprehensively representative of an open form as can be expected. For an invaluable discussion of Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* as a collective novel, see Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham, Duke UP, 1993). Foley is not partial to the open form and she denies that "collective novels are doctrinally more 'open-ended' than traditionally realistic texts" or that they "hold up indeterminacy as a political value or polyphony as a rhetorical strategy," but she does observe that in the collective novel "knowledge comes 'from outside'" and that "without active participation from the reader, history in *U.S.A.* is indeed nothing more than the chaotic fragments that impinge upon the characters" (401, 441, 432). I am entirely convinced by Michael Denning's argument in *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 2010) that Dos Passos tackles the formal problem of narrating the history of a Lincoln republic growing obsolescent. I am not convinced, however, that the honeycomb invoked by Dos Passos in his biographical portrait of Frank Lloyd Wright is "a more apt emblem of Dos Passos' own project" (169). The problem with the honeycomb as a critical metaphor is that this kind of cellular structure allows anything and invites everything to be said about a novel that already seems to be saying everything and anything. Denning himself abandons the honeycomb to describe Dos Passos's project in a way that shifts emphasis from the purposes of a self-described "second-class historian" to the means of a "four-way conveyor system." (170). This shift from the what of politics to the how of art represents well the dichotomy characteristic of Dos Passos criticism. Donald Pizer discusses the novel's technique in terms of modal segments, montage, and interlacing in *Dos Passos' U.S.A.: A Critical Study* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1988) 54, 65. In *Toward a Modernist Style: John Dos Passos* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), Pizer describes *U.S.A.* as a "compendium or *vade mecum* of fictional modernism" and adds to the existing repertoire of techniques the juxtapositional ironies of compilation, the panoramic vision of a social novel, the narrative clusters, and cross-stitching: "Through the interlacing of characters and cross-stitching of events Dos Passos appears to be saying that though we seem to be a nation of separate strands, we are in fact intertwined in a fabric of relatedness" (36, 45). For the network theory, please see Wesley Beal's "Network Narration in John Dos Passos's *U.S.A. Trilogy*," *digital humanities quarterly* 5.2 (2011).
39. David Sanders, "John Dos Passos, The Art of Fiction No. 44," *The Paris Review* 46 (Spring 1969). <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4202/the-art-of-fiction-no-44-john-dos-passos>
40. Frank Gado, "John Dos Passos," *First Person: Conversations on Writers & Writing*, ed. Frank Gado (Schenectady: Union College P, 1973) 43.
41. Upton Sinclair, review in *New Masses*, 5:18-19 (April 1930), *John Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Barry Maine (New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005) 87.
42. Upton Sinclair, review in *New Masses* 88.
43. Mary Ross, review in *New York Herald Tribune Books* 3-4 (23 February 1930), *John Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage* 82, 78.
44. John Dos Passos, *U.S.A.: The 42nd Parallel, 1919, The Big Money* (New York: The Library of America, 1996) 1238.

45. Dos Passos, *U.S.A.* 1231.
46. *ibid.*
47. *U.S.A.* 1186. Johnson is Eveline's husband's name.
48. John Dos Passos, "Contemporary Chronicles," *John Dos Passos: The Major Nonfictional Prose*, ed. Donald Pizer (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1988) 239. Lukács and Dos Passos may be wrong in their evaluation of Joyce as a writer who wrote subjectively, but for my purposes here, it is important simply that Dos Passos did not wish to be classified as a subjective writer, i.e., that he aspired to produce a mediation.
49. Dos Passos reserves the stream of consciousness technique of the Camera Eye sections "to distill my subjective feelings about the incidents and people described" and claims that by portraying his subjectivity directly, he keeps it from bleeding indiscriminately into his work. He characterizes the Camera Eye as a "safety valve for my own subjective feelings" and claims that it "made objectivity in the rest of the book much easier." See Sanders's "John Dos Passos, The Art of Fiction No. 44."
50. Jean-Paul Sartre, "John Dos Passos and '1919,'" *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, trans. Annette Michelson (London: Rider and Company, 1955) 89.
51. Sartre, "John Dos Passos and '1919'" 95.
52. "John Dos Passos and '1919'" 94, 93.
53. "John Dos Passos and '1919'" 94.
54. *ibid.*
55. "John Dos Passos and '1919'" 93.
56. *U.S.A.* 354, 236.
57. "John Dos Passos and '1919'" 93.
58. *U.S.A.* 354. Moorehouse goes to Europe in *Nineteen Nineteen*, but the quotation is taken from the end of *The 42nd Parallel*.
59. *U.S.A.* 551.
60. *U.S.A.* 1194.
61. Industrial development has concentrated corporate power into monopolies that are not only capable and willing to impose the conditions of necessity, but also expert at extorting consent. In "Harlan: Working under the Gun" (1931), Dos Passos documents that employers control the private life of their employees by congregating the workforce in company owned housing, for example, or by selling foodstuffs and clothing on credit against the worker's paycheck in company-owned stores. Despite the near tyrannical economic power the industrialist wields over the laborer, the *prima facie* liberal supposition remains that employment is voluntary and, therefore, not in violation of any negative right. The concept of freedom is then employed to justify the existing working and living conditions as an option the worker freely engages to earn wages. In this context, it becomes conceivable even to a liberal to petition the government for positive protections against big business instead of curbing the government's interference.
62. "Narrate or Describe?" 126. That "the significant and vital aspects of social practice" are not simply given in reality, but that they are mediated in literature by realism, is a point that anticipates Adorno's accusation of dogged clinging to the "vulgar-materialist shibboleth." See Adorno's "Reconciliation under Duress" 153.
63. "Narrate or Describe" 144.
64. "Narrate or Describe" 134.

65. "Narrate or Describe" 127.
66. György Lukács, "Realism in the Balance," *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. Francis McDonagh (London: Verso, 2007). Lukács writes, "Modernism has not, nor has it ever had, anything to do with the creation of 'prophetic figures' or with the genuine anticipation of future developments" (48). For the explanation of Dos Passos' blindness as a prophet, please see footnote 77.
67. *U.S.A.* 1136, 1210.
68. Michael Denning believes that "the night of the execution — 22 August 1927 — would remain a more important marker for Dos Passos than the October days of the 1929 Wall Street crash" (*Cultural Front* 165).
69. Donald Pizer, *Towards a Modernist Style* 35.
70. *U.S.A.* 1147.
71. Dos Passos declares himself to be "very suspicious of the fellow who claims to have a personal morality; what he means is that he has no morality at all and feels free to do you dirt." See Gado, *First Person* 47.
72. *U.S.A.* 1215.
73. I realize that the author's deployment of these particular devices testifies only to the intent of representing his feelings as sincere, that the stream of consciousness narration only represents indexicality and that the camera metaphor is not actually invested with evidentiary authority, but no one suspects Dos Passos of lying about the sincerity of his activism on behalf of Sacco and Vanzetti. Any point to be made about deception here is not about what happened in life, but with regard to how this kind of authenticity functions in a narrative.
74. *U.S.A.* 1157.
75. *U.S.A.* 1215.
76. Although Lukács responds to *Manhattan Transfer*, which is much more kaleidoscopic than *U.S.A.*, his criticism of the earlier novel can be directed at *U.S.A.* See Lukács, "Narrate or Describe?" 134-5.
77. Lukács is right about Dos Passos's politics. A writer who calls himself a "Jeffersonian liberal" in the twentieth century and seeks a restitution of liberal values by resuscitating moral obligation is not only not a radical, but is not even a writer for whom we can claim an understanding of capitalist subsumption. Nevertheless, even if Dos Passos indulges in self-deception, his novel narrates astutely the process of subsumption of ideology by the market. And, given Lukács's enthusiasm for the royalist Balzac, it does not seem that we have to demand a particular political affiliation to acknowledge the success of a novel that narrates history. For Dos Passos' self-description as a "Jeffersonian liberal" see Richard Whalen, "Conversation with Dos Passos," *New Leader* 42 (23 Feb. 1959), *John Dos Passos: The Major Nonfictional Prose* 232.

What's in a Slogan?

Jan Mieszkowski

Proletarians of all countries, unite! All power to the Soviets! Let 100 flowers bloom! If the Marxist tradition has unquestionably produced its share of memorable slogans, their significance for revolutionary theory has not always been appreciated. In *History and Class Consciousness*, György Lukács follows V. I. Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg in giving mottoes and rallying cries a crucial place in his account of the transformative power of the proletariat. For these authors, slogans blur the very distinction between knowledge and action and are regarded as integral to the dynamic of necessity and freedom that is to drive radical praxis. Others have voiced skepticism about such political "one-liners," including Marx himself. In comparison to a manifesto or a treatise, a slogan may appear inconsequential or glib, if not inherently misleading. I will begin this essay by exploring some of Marx's discussions of slogans, particularly his efforts to distinguish between revolutionary and reactionary mottoes. Turning to Lukács's reading of Luxemburg and Lenin, I will demonstrate how aspects of Marx's analysis are extended and reinterpreted in twentieth-century revolutionary theory. In a final section, I will argue that Lukács's broader reflections on Marx's understanding of language offer a new way of conceptualizing the radical potential of these pithy yet volatile statements.

Whether formulated in the service of a political program or a commercial enterprise, a slogan aims to be both an object of fascination and an exhortation, even an imperative. Striving to be infectious, it must put its rhetorical dexterity on display. Unlike an aphorism or a maxim, however, a slogan lays no claim to being a nugget of wisdom, presenting itself not as an adage to be pondered or a puzzle to be solved, but as an incitement to action. Far from asking us to ruminate on its conceptual nuances, it urges us to vote, purchase, or take up arms. At once language as verbal acrobatics and language as blunt instrument, a slogan should occupy us, like a song we can't get out of our heads, but it should also mobilize us as an ally, whether we fall under its spell in the privacy of our own homes or as part of a crowd chanting in unison at a demonstration or sporting event.

In the 1840s and '50s, Marx rarely comments on the events of the day without reflecting on the many mottoes, buzzwords, and slogans in circulation: "From now on the bankers will rule"; "Better an end with terror than a terror without end"; and of course, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," which first achieved notoriety in France in the 1790s, but only acquired quasi-official status in 1848. As Marx takes stock of what he regards as hypocritical or sanctimonious talk, the formulation "empty phrases [*leere Phrasen*]" recurs repeatedly, to the point that it starts to sound a tad empty itself. (The German *Phrase* has the sense of "phrase," but can also mean "buzzword," "catchphrase," or "platitude." Marx also uses the word *Parole*, a "slogan" or "rallying cry.") As strident as Marx's condemnation of the logics of trite sayings may be, it does not lead him to dismiss mottoes and rallying cries *tout court*. Time and again, he intervenes in these discourses by crafting his own — presumably less empty — formulations.

If in Marx's estimation the vast majority of contemporary slogans prove wanting, it is not just because he disagrees with the ideological positions that inform them. The provocation of such utterances lies not only in what they say, but in how they say it, and in what they may trigger in the process of being said. Perched between the constative and the performative, between representing and positing, political one-liners ambiguously testify to what never could be, what inevitably will be, and what will have to be. As speech acts, they either give voice to something that may have had no voice, or they create something that did not previously exist. At the very moment that we feel most confident in dismissing catchphrases as tools of mystification and deception, they may reveal themselves to be essential to shifting the line between the possible and the impossible, and hence essential to change itself.

Does Marx offer us a way to distinguish between revolutionary slogans and their bourgeois or reactionary counterparts, between the *bons mots* of change and the *bons mots* of stasis or reform? A well-known passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* seems to constitute his decisive pronouncement on the topic:

The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry [*Poesie*] from the past but only from the future... Earlier revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to anesthetize themselves to their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead. There the slogan went beyond the content — here the content goes beyond the slogan. [*Dort ging die Phrase über den Inhalt, hier geht der Inhalt über die Phrase hinaus.*]¹

Marx maintains that past revolutionaries have mobilized the culture and battle cries (*Schlachtparole*) of previous political formations, borrowing from these historic discourses in order to glorify their struggles and deceive themselves about their

own agendas. For the events of 1848, the most relevant example is naturally the adoption of Imperial Roman mythopoetics by the revolutionaries who deposed the French monarchy at the end of the eighteenth century, although Marx also mentions Cromwell and his allies, who embraced Old Testament motifs and adages. In these two cases, however, the languages of the past were appropriated only on a short-term basis. In due course, the revolutionary movements fashioned new idioms of their own, no longer feeling a need to rely on the older phraseology. In contrast, 1848 — the infamous “farce” — witnesses not another effort to use historical models as a springboard from which to engage with the “spirit of revolution,” but the resurrection of a past language with no indication that a new one will ever emerge to take its place.² Eschewing the violence and sacrifice that changing the world requires, the would-be radicals of 1848 parody past re-appropriations of the past, in the process obscuring the very distinction between phrase and content.

If the revolutionaries of the nineteenth century are to answer Marx's call and not avail themselves of past political languages, they must fashion a discourse that is not defined by dynamics of citation in which parody and pastiche are always close at hand. Marx's own remarks do not suggest that this will be an easy thing to do. In the passage just quoted, Marx's disparagement of the language of catchphrases is eminently catchy, complete with a slick chiasmus and a memorable quote from the New Testament about letting the dead bury their dead, a line flashy enough that a number of his contemporaries, most notably Mikhail Bakunin, also made use of it. When Marx does make an effort to put content ahead of slogan, he proposes that nineteenth-century revolutionaries must be relentlessly self-critical; their poetry is to be a discourse of indefatigable introspection and self-refashioning. A slogan's place in such a project is not immediately obvious. Its exhortative, directive tone would presumably be out of step with a radically self-doubting posture. If anything, what Marx is describing sounds more like Hegel's speculative sentence, in which the substance of what is articulated is less the identity of a particular figure or relationship than a movement of interruptions, repetitions, and reversals as an initial proposition is inexorably transformed into a statement or statements with which it is at odds. In showing that any sentence gives rise to inferences that contradict it, Hegelian thought ruthlessly exposes the constitutive incompleteness and instability of any individual instance of predication. Axioms, first principles, and foundational definitions all lose pride of place because no solo utterance can lay claim to independent authority, becoming significant only insofar as it serves as the impetus for further statements with which it will not accord. From this perspective, investing in one-off catchphrases, maxims, or buzzwords looks ill advised in the extreme.

Marx's own slogans may turn out to be powerful precisely because they too are speculative formulations that call their own capacities into question. One of his best-known attempts at a rallying-cry comes from *The Class Struggles in France*: “The revolution is dead! — Long live the revolution!”³ This is a rewriting of the speech act

that traditionally heralded the transfer of sovereignty in the French monarchy: “The king is dead, long live the king!” Initially, Marx’s slogan may seem to be the farce to the earlier version’s tragedy, an exercise in empty phraseology. Far from effecting a radical break with the languages of the past, it appears to be slavishly subservient to them. *The original terms of the catchy phrase are dead! Long live the catchy phrase!*

Precisely what this catchphrase is about, however, is the relationship between iteration and transformation. The French monarchist pronouncement aimed to express continuity as a coordination of particulars — one king is dead, and a new one is ready to replace him — and the general: the system of royal succession is not reducible to any individual member of the line, nor is it finite; if it is dependent on the continued existence of an indefinite number of kings, it is indifferent to the fate of any one of them. Marx’s rewriting of the slogan seems to do something similar, but the relationship between the two parts of his proclamation is uncertain: “The revolution is dead! — Long live the revolution!” In passing from the first half to the second, we do not witness an inversion or the coupling of a thesis and its negation, but rather a shift in mood from the indicative to the formulaic subjunctive. Although the two statements are balanced elegantly such that the two instances of “the revolution” frame a life-death dichotomy, the sentences remain curiously independent of one another. Neither is the premise of the other; neither can be inferred from the other. At the same time, the order in which the two sentences appear ensures that the second will be interpreted as a reaction to or comment on the first, perhaps even as a kind of boast in the face of the first, as if it read: *Nonetheless, long live the revolution!* Alternatively, we could say that the second sentence insinuates that if we had had a sharper eye, we would have seen that the particular and the general were at work in the word “revolution” in the first sentence, that is, we would have realized that what was being said about the revolution being dead was not a general truth, or at least not the whole truth, and therefore we would have known that the first proposition would require further elaboration in a subsequent remark.

Ultimately, the provocation of “The revolution is dead! — Long live the revolution!” may lie in its simultaneous conjoining and disjoining of the indicative and subjunctive moods. The dash between the two sentences highlights the precarious non-relational relationship that obtains between the statement of fact and the expression of a wish or fantasy, between a discourse of reference and a discourse that does not acknowledge a distinction between the factual and the counterfactual, between a discourse bound to the ordering authority of past, present, and future and a discourse utterly indifferent to such a periodizing schema. As a consequence, it is hard to know whether one should treat this slogan as two propositions that unfold in a sequence or as two halves of a larger form that cannot simply be read linearly and that may not even be governed by sentential syntax at all.

Although questions of grammar and syntax may seem somewhat remote from the dynamics of material praxis, a key passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* leaves

no doubt that the transformative capacities of the masses are intimately bound up with phraseological formulations that are as precarious as they are powerful. As Marx describes it, the merciless self-critique and self-refashioning of proletarian revolutionaries will continue “until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out: ‘Hic Rhodus, hic salta! / Here is the rose, here dance!’”⁴ Having presented us with this Latin quotation and its German “translation,” Marx simply begins a new paragraph without further comment.⁵ As it happens, the line comes from Erasmus’ translation of Aesop’s fable about a braggart who claims to have excelled in the long jump at Rhodes and is being challenged to “put up or shut up” and demonstrate his abilities here and now.

Erasmus’ Latin version of the Greek original is “Hic Rhodus, hic saltus” (“Here [is your] Rhodes, here [is your] jump”), whereas the “salta” with which Marx ends his version is the singular imperative of the Latin verb *saltare*, which can mean “to dance” or “to jump.” Had Marx translated his Latin for us, then, it would have read: “Here [is your] Rhodes, jump/dance here!” That he instead gives “the rose” (*die Rose*) for “Rhodus” is an indication that he is citing — or rather, nearly citing — Hegel’s near-citation of Erasmus in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*. At first glance, Hegel appears to be faithfully quoting the line from Aesop in the original Greek and in Erasmus’ Latin — “Hic Rhodus, hic saltus” — although notably without offering a German translation.⁶ We begin to get a sense that more is afoot a few sentences later when he observes: “With a little alteration, the saying just quoted would read: ‘Here is the rose, here dance.’”⁷ In contrast to Marx, Hegel gives us some indication of why he presents the citation in the first place, declaring that the task of philosophy is “to comprehend *what is*,” and adding: “It is just as foolish to imagine that any philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as that an individual can overleap his own time or leap over Rhodes.”⁸ This comment about leaping over the island has prompted some scholars to suggest that Hegel may not have been terribly familiar with the fable from which he took the line or at least did not fully understand it. Complicating matters further, the Greek “original” Hegel provides is actually a hybrid of the two existing Greek versions of Aesop’s fable, the one translated by Erasmus and a second, in which the relevant line reads: “Look — Rhodes, and leap off from (it)!” In other words, in creating his own Greek version of Aesop and then “complementing” it with Erasmus’s translation of one of the actual versions of Aesop, Hegel juxtaposes two lines from two foreign languages as if the one were a translation of the other when in fact it is not. We are thus back to the conjunction of juncture and disjuncture that we encountered in “The Revolution is dead! — Long live the Revolution!” Hegel’s alignment of the two sentences/languages serves only to highlight how little their co-appearance may reveal about either one of them or about any supposed relationship between them.

By the time we get to Hegel’s rewriting of the Latin line in German as “Here is the rose, here dance,” it is virtually impossible to determine what is motivating his individual “emendations.” He may be relying on etymology, that is, he may think, as

some scholars of the period did, that the name Rhodes came from the Greek word for rose, *rhodon*, or he may simply be fashioning a pun based on the first syllable of Rhodus.⁹ In either case, the rose may be a symbol of Rosicrucianism and therefore perhaps a figure for reason. Hegel's proposed shift from *saltus* (the noun "jump") to *salta* as "Dance!" raises similar questions.¹⁰ Suffice it to say that no two accounts of this passage in the *Philosophy of Right* or of Marx's quasi-citation of it agree on what is word play, what is systematic scholarly intervention, and what is an outright mistake.¹¹

In Hegel and Marx's texts, Aesop's line — if it is still "his" line — never has the privilege of being taken seriously. Having called on the revolutionaries of the nineteenth century to go beyond the traditional play of living and dead languages, Marx punctuates his account of the radical mobilization of the proletariat by nearly quoting Hegel's near quotation, or misquotation, an exercise in misprision that spans three languages, living and dead. Although Hegel and Marx are both ostensibly trying to craft a discourse of the here and now, their use of these citations confounds the relationship between the putative proximity and contemporaneity of their German and the putative there and then of the Latin and Greek. If Hegel "quotes" Aesop, or some fabular hybrid version of Aesop, in order to emphasize the importance of philosophy not trying to overleap its own time, Marx's mobilization of Aesop, Erasmus, and Hegel reveals Hegel's citational practice to be a challenge to the possibility of ever knowing if one's own language is of the past, present, or future.

Hic Rhodus, hic saltus/salta is a slogan for proletarian revolutionaries. In proclaiming it, one follows Aesop's athlete and makes a daring leap, springing forth from one language without necessarily being able to return to it or land safely in a new one, much less coordinate one's old language with a new one. Moreover, having jumped one cannot be sure that what one was jumping from was in fact one's own language in the first place. In this respect, *hic Rhodus, hic saltus/salta* is what Marx in various texts terms a *salto mortale*.¹² Such an instance of linguistic praxis becomes truly revolutionary by freeing itself of any claim to be "of" a particular language, old or new. Its power stems from the fact that it never becomes a model for any other linguistic act, even another slogan. In flight from its own status as paradigmatic or exemplary, Marx's formulation leaps, in pure speculation, exposing itself to possible ignominy or oblivion without any promise of a reward. As we will see, it is this capacity of a slogan to operate outside a bourgeois discourse of investment and return or equivalence and exchange that will intrigue Marx's inheritors.

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Bread, peace and land! Dare to think, dare to act! ¡No pasarán! ¡Pasaremos! Each of these rallying cries has a unique history and could be studied in its own right as a distinctive socio-political gesture. It is less certain whether the rich tradition of Marxist slogans is complemented by a comparably rich theoretical discourse about them. One place

in which the subject does come to the fore is in Lukács's reading of Rosa Luxemburg in *History and Class Consciousness*. The significance of this 1923 book for twentieth- and twenty-first-century cultural criticism cannot be overstated. Lukács's claim that proletarian consciousness can be a radically transformative force continues to serve as a benchmark for any model of material praxis. To observe that Lukács's detractors are as legion as his defenders is simply to acknowledge that anyone who has followed him in the Marxist tradition has had to take a position on his account of how reification structures all social dynamics.¹³

One of the distinctive things about *History and Class Consciousness* is that it offers multiple interpretive forays into various subjects, ostensibly allowing the reader to see changes in Lukács's thinking over a relatively short period of time. Prominent in this regard is the contrast between the first chapter on Luxemburg, an almost entirely laudatory discussion written in 1921, and a second chapter on her work, written a year later, in which Lukács, evidently following Lenin's lead, appears to part ways with her on several critical issues. Although Luxemburg only occasionally mentions slogans explicitly, they make an appearance in one of the best-known passages from *The Mass Strike*, where she is describing the same decisive mobilization of revolutionary forces that concerned Marx in the passage from *The Eighteenth Brumaire* we just considered. As Lukács characterizes it, this is the point at which the masses will "spontaneously and instinctively press forward with all their energies towards the party and towards their own class consciousness."¹⁴ Here, writes Luxemburg, the most important task of the group that is assuming a provisional leadership role will be "to give the slogan [*Parole*] — the direction — to the struggle; to establish the *tactics* of the political struggle such that in every phase and at every moment the entire sum of the available power of the proletariat... will find expression in the fighting posture of the party."¹⁵

While Luxemburg's reference to "the slogan" ("die Parole") is so fleeting that the English translation renders it as "to give the cue for," Lukács makes the term central to his explanation of how the unity of theory and practice will effect a transformation of "the economic necessity of the struggle for liberation" into "freedom."¹⁶ In his account of Luxemburg's argument: "Knowledge becomes action, theory becomes slogan [*Parole*], the masses act in accordance with the slogans and join the ranks of the organized vanguard more consciously, more steadfastly and in greater numbers."¹⁷ Far from simply offering direction as a preparatory step toward the establishment of the tactics of the struggle, "the correct slogans," Lukács argues, "give rise organically to the premises and possibilities of even the technical organization of the fighting proletariat."¹⁸ Throughout *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács never gives up on this idea. Much later in the book, he identifies the Russian Revolution of 1917 as an empirical example of

a crucial moment [when] the slogans of peace, self-determination, and the radical solution to the agrarian problem welded together an army

that could be deployed for revolution while completely disorganizing the whole power apparatus of counter-revolution and rendering it impotent.¹⁹

Nonetheless, having declared the slogan to be central to the revolutionary interplay of spontaneity and organization, Lukács immediately betrays some ambivalence about what he has termed its “organic” authority. The party, he maintains, is the “historical embodiment and the active incarnation of class consciousness,... the incarnation of the ethics of the fighting proletariat,” *but* “its politics may not always accord with the empirical reality of the moment; at such time its slogans may be ignored.”²⁰ Although Lukács stresses that such discord will only be temporary, the qualification clearly compromises the status of the slogan as a decisive feature of proletarian struggle. No longer simply shaping reality, slogans must now partly be measured by their fidelity to a world they do not determine. As their meaning is no longer self-evident, they have to be treated as texts to be read and interpreted. In his second chapter on Luxemburg, Lukács will follow Lenin in charging that she overestimates “the organic character of the course of history” and “the spontaneous, element forces of the Revolution.”²¹ In this first consideration of her work, however, he has already reproached himself for making the same mistake.

To be sure, Lukács is nothing if not inconsistent on this point. Later in the book, he pushes back against those who would doubt the self-evidence of slogans, as he himself has done. He insists that “the fear that the party might sacrifice its communist character because of too close a familiarity with the seemingly ‘reformist’ slogans of the day” bespeaks “insufficient trust in correct theory,” adding that “when [slogans] are seen from a true revolutionary point of view,” the “final goal” of proletarian struggle is “present dialectically in every slogan from the day.”²² On this account, the rallying cries in circulation cannot be essentially off message, and they cannot help but drive the forces of the proletarian struggle: “every slogan leads to deeds in which the individual members risk their whole physical and moral existence.”²³

Lukács’s discussion of Luxemburg touches on some of the key concerns of a short pamphlet that Lenin wrote in July 1917 entitled “On Slogans.” Here Lenin sharply distinguishes between two types of political discourse: idle talk or “phrase-mongering,” for example, casual boasting about one’s revolutionary ambitions (if not also about one’s talents as a long jumper), and slogans, which encapsulate the “totality of specific features of a definite political situation.”²⁴ According to Lenin, a slogan creates the conditions of possibility for the very forces that give it its meaning, which primarily means a mobilized proletariat.²⁵ Despite his well-known efforts to distinguish himself from Luxemburg’s positions on spontaneity and party organization, it would appear that he accords slogans as formative a role in revolutionary praxis as she does.

Given Lukács’s concern that slogans may be misaligned with their situation — out of step, that is, with the situation that they themselves create — Lenin may seem

overconfident when he claims that one can systematically distinguish true rallying cries from phrase-mongering, just as Lukács himself may sound overconfident in averring that it is always possible to see slogans “from a true revolutionary point of view” and thereby find the kernel of proletarian struggle in each and every one. Precisely what, however, is a “true revolutionary point of view”? While Lukács says little about this, an intriguing footnote in *History and Class Consciousness* may prove illuminating. At this juncture, Lukács is stressing that the commodity character “conceals above all the immediate — qualitative and material — character of things as things,” citing Marx’s statement in *The German Ideology* that “private property alienates not only the individuality of men, but also of things.”²⁶ In a footnote, Lukács comments: “This refers above all to capitalist private property. Marx goes on to make a number of very fine observations about the effects of reification upon language. A philological study from the standpoint of historical materialism could profitably begin here.”²⁷

The observations in *The German Ideology* to which he refers are part of a critique of the philosopher Max Stirner, a discussion whose length and vituperative tone suggest that Marx considers Stirner an adversary to be reckoned with. In the sections that interest Lukács, Marx is attacking his foe for his constant recourse to what Marx calls “synonymy.” This is Stirner’s tendency to ground relationships between different concepts or epistemic registers in connections between verbal elements. In this context, finding connections means a range of different things, including highlighting etymological links between words, identifying the multiple meanings of a single word, or taking the similarities between the sounds of words as evidence of a more fundamental rapport between them. As one might anticipate from an author most famous for a book known in English as *The Ego and His Own* (*Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, literally *The Singular One and His Property*), one of Stirner’s major affronts in Marx’s eyes is that he sees the communist ambition to abolish private property as nonsensical since it will prove impossible to dispel the abstract sense of something belonging to someone. Stirner argues that to truly do away with *Eigentum* (“property,” “possession”), it would be necessary to abandon the very notion of anything — a thought, an ailment — being *eigen* (“one’s own”). The concept of a trait or attribute (that is, a “property,” in German *Eigenschaft*) might have to be banished as well, at which point identity of any kind would effectively cease to exist. In the same vein, Stirner argues that it is impossible to do away with the notion of *mein* (“my”), because people will always have *Meinungen* (“opinions”), *ihre eigenen Meinungen* (“their own opinions”). In a cheeky moment, Marx responds that by Stirner’s reasoning, doing away with *Wechsel* (“bills of exchange”) would mean doing away with change (*Wechsel*) as such.

Marx does not think that the relationships between words and ideas that Stirner claims to elucidate are simply a product of coincidence, or of an overly active imagination. Such connections are easy to make, because in the language of the

bourgeois, whether German, French, or English, “the relations of buying and selling have been made the basis of all others.”²⁸ This is what Lukács refers to as the reification of language, and in Marx’s eyes, it renders Stirner’s demonstrations trivial. To the extent that the same terms are used to describe commercial relations, the features of individuals, and the relationships between individuals, a bourgeois thinker like Stirner has little trouble recasting any critique of social dynamics as an attack on selfhood.

Stirner treats everything actual (*wirklich*) as an abstract concept, and he reduces conceptual dynamics to resemblances between words. In response, Marx does not seek to reassert rigid distinctions between the abstract and the actual or between the language of thought and “the language of everyday life.”²⁹ The goal of the revolutionary is rather to fashion a poetry of the future in which such dichotomies could never emerge. This would be a language free of the reification endemic to the discourses of Marx’s day, as well as of Lukács’s day, and presumably our own. With *hic Rhodus, hic salta*, we saw a slogan striving to escape the clutches of phraseology. In Marx’s critique of Stirner, we get a glimpse of a language in flight from the bourgeois paradigms of equivalence and exchange, a language of radical anti-synonymy in which resemblances between words, connections of words based on their common etymons, and the polysemia of individual terms have no authority. At its limit, this is a discourse in which meaning is no longer organized by relations of similitude, patterns of repetition, or figures of substitution in which one element can stand in for or take the place of another. In contrast to Hegel’s Greek or Marx’s Latin, this poetry of the future’s very status as a language will not be predicated on its capacity to translate other tongues or to be translated by them.

In an oft-cited formulation that is arguably a slogan in its own right, Marx declares: “A radical revolution can only be a revolution of radical needs, for which the conditions and breeding ground appear to be lacking.”³⁰ The poetry of the future will have to be a revolution in our ideas about what slogans are, what they need to be, and why we feel a need to distinguish them from everything else. From the perspective of our customary conceptions of representation and performance, this will be a language of empty phrases. From Lukács’s “true revolutionary point of view,” it will be a language of *salti mortali*, a proletarian praxis of relentless self-criticism.

Notes

1. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Eighteenth Brumaire*, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11 (New York: International Publishers, 1975) 106 (translation modified).
2. Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire* 105.
3. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Class Struggles in France*, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10 (New York: International Publishers, 1975) 70.
4. *Eighteenth Brumaire* 107.
5. This same Latin quotation appears at the end of Chapter 5 of the first volume of *Capital*, where it is also cited without any comment, as if its significance were self-evident.
6. G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge UP, 1991) 21 (italics original).
7. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* 22 (italics original).
8. *Philosophy of Right* 21-22 (italics original).
9. For a review of nineteenth-century speculations about the etymology of this place name, see F. G. Tomlins, *A Universal History of the Nations of Antiquity: Comprising a Complete History of the Jews, From the Creation to the Present Time: Likewise an Account of Ancient Syria, Grecian Islands, Persian Empire, Armenia, Numidia, Ethiopia, Arabia, Scythia, the Celtes, &c. &c. &c.: to Which Are Prefixed the Various Theories of Creation, According to the Most Esteemed Ancient And Modern Writers* (Halifax: W. Milner, 1844) 625.
10. See *Philosophy of Right*, 391n26. Some of Hegel's immediate predecessors also quoted the Erasmus line as "hic Rhodus, hic salta," possibly because they wanted a more directive version of the formulation, possibly because they were working with the other version of Aesop's text. In these cases, it is not always clear whether *salta* was intended to be read as "Jump!" or "Dance!"
11. Many scholars, perhaps most notably Isaiah Berlin, have weighed in on these passages and inveighed against the "errors" of others' explications of the inter-linguistic complexities. For help in reflecting on these issues, I am grateful for the assistance of my colleagues Walter Englert and Nigel Nicholson.
12. In an early text on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, Marx observes that Germany lags behind other European nations in political emancipation because in Germany theory runs ahead of material exigency. Accordingly, he suggests that Germany must, through a *salto mortale*, surmount the fact that it does not yet experience the same barriers as other European nations, that is, Germany must leap over the absence of what needs to be there to be leaped over. Years later, this *salto mortale* will reappear in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and *Capital* to describe the "leap" of value from the body of the commodity to gold, the first step of C-M-C circulation.
13. Lukács's harshest critics, including Louis Althusser and Theodor W. Adorno, owe the most to him. One can debate to what degree the arguments of *History and Class Consciousness* depend on the thought of Max Weber or Georg Simmel, whether the analysis is excessively or insufficiently Hegelian, or if the philosophical dogmatism that will become more prominent in Lukács's later work is already on display. Whatever we decide his ultimate position on the theory of revolution to be, however, it is not utopian. Lukács claims that the dynamic praxis that is proletarian consciousness constantly reshapes both itself and its object, perpetually calling into question the very models that ground its own claim to relate to itself as a form of consciousness. As a consequence, Lukács is the first to allow that the proletariat may transform society for better, or it may adapt itself to the most decadent forms of bourgeois culture —

the point is truly undecidable.

14. György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT P, 1972) 42.
15. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Essential Rosa Luxemburg: Reform or Revolution & The Mass Strike*, ed. Helen Scott (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008) 149 (translation modified, italics original).
16. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* 42.
17. *History and Class Consciousness* 42 (translation modified).
18. *ibid.*
19. *History and Class Consciousness* 311.
20. *History and Class Consciousness* 42.
21. *History and Class Consciousness* 277, 279.
22. *History and Class Consciousness* 328.
23. *History and Class Consciousness* 336.
24. V. I. Lenin, "On Slogans," *Revolution at the Gates: Selected Writings of Lenin from 1917*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2002) 66, 67.
25. Lenin, "On Slogans" 62. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that for Lenin, slogans create a vanguard, the proletarian class, as an "assemblage of enunciation," and they do so before it is possible for the proletarian class to exist as a body. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987) 83.
26. *History and Class Consciousness* 92.
27. *History and Class Consciousness* 209n16.
28. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology, Collected Works*, Vol. 5 (New York: International Publishers, 1975) 231. See also Marx, *German Ideology* 278.
29. *German Ideology* 26. In a footnote in "The White Mythology," Jacques Derrida hints that Marx is overly reliant on the possibility of sustaining a clear distinction between the conceptual and the material (Jacques Derrida, "The White Mythology," *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982] 216–17n13). In a similar vein, Derrida wonders how Marx can repeatedly charge Stirner with lapsing into Hegelian slogans (*Phrasen*) while apparently taking it for granted that he himself does not, irrespective of how often he has recourse to Hegelian staples such as *Geist*, *Wirklichkeit*, or *Begriff*. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994) esp. 133–135.
30. *German Ideology* 183 (translation modified).

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Value: The Representation of Labour in Capital

Diane Elson, editor

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Value in the Expanded Field

Joshua Clover

The most suggestive passage in the republication of *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capital* appears in the front matter, directly on the copyright page: "This edition published by Verso 2015. First published by CSE Books 1979." The dates speak volumes. Psalm 43 says that "As the hart pants after the water brooks, so pants my soul after thee, O God." Marx revises this in *Capital* to "As the hart pants after fresh water, so pants his soul after money, the only wealth." In a crisis, as a friend said to me in 2009, people pant after what is to be found in Marx. And particularly after the fate of value.

This brief overview of the republication is meant as well to introduce a series of reviews and essays from what we might call "the perspective of value" (on this occasion, reviews by Sarah Brouillette of Dave Beech's *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics* and by Juliana Spahr of Jason Moore's *Capitalism In the Web of Life*).¹ Edited and with an anchoring chapter by Diane Elson, *Value* is a sophisticated FAQ addressing the "value debates." These are the charged and contentious arguments, both within and contra Marxism, surrounding the theory of value set forth at complex and sometimes contradictory length over the course of Marx's writings on political economy. Value grounds both Marx's critique of all existing political economy, and his own propositions about capital's laws of motion. It is without a doubt the most elusive of his categories, dismissed by conventional economists as metaphysics, and worried ceaselessly even by the theory's adherents. Moreover, there are any number of subtle Marxist thinkers who have found it possible to generate useful results without much reference to value. One might think of Robert Brenner's price-based explanations of the genesis of contemporary "global turbulence," or Giovanni Arrighi's world-system based history of capitalist

hegemonies, founded on any number of Marxian categories while holding to a theory of declining profit derived largely from Adam Smith. And yet value remains the *differentia specifica* for Marxist critiques of political economy, and it is this fact which haunts much of the collection as a series of stated and unstated questions. Why do we need a theory of value? What is it for, theoretically and politically? And can it weather the powerful critiques levied against it?

The book divides, after a fashion, into two parts: five shorter essays by Jairus Banaji, Geoffrey Kay, Chris Arthur, Athar Hussain, and Makato Itoh (with Nobuharu Yokokawa), and a sustained essay by Elson herself, “The Value Theory of Labor.” Some of the contended terrain herein seems less with us in the present — for example the question of Marx’s Hegelianness. That this matter is rarely debated today is not to suggest it is no longer relevant. Indeed, it is useful at a minimum for underscoring the extent to which thinking value demands a dimension of thought which is not just abstract but conceptually distinct from what Elson will later call “arithmomorphic” thinking, the mode typical of modern economics — a point to which we will return.

The main concern of the opening essays is to rebut more and less directly the well-known criticism of Marx’s value theory by Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, still hauled forth to this day by those wishing to do away with what they will always call the “labor theory of value” — a term accepted by many Marxists, who should really quit it. Böhm-Bawerk’s attack is subtle and serious, exploiting the so-called “transformation problem.” In its simplest form, this involves the argument that the value derived in Volume I of *Capital* — that is, determined according to given amounts of socially necessary abstract labor time — could not be made to match up with prices of production developed in Volume III. Their total magnitudes are different, and commodities cannot be found to exchange according to their values. The treble effect of this claim seems devastating. Immediately, it renders value inadequate for explaining price, calling into question its usefulness as an economic category. Following from that, it undermines the claim that profit’s source is in exploitation of labor, as it then becomes possible to make the argument that profit is the play of prices rather than some secret and unverifiable extraction, thus dispensing with labor theories of value. Further, the abstract argument holding that it is embodied labor which is the common element found in all commodities that renders them exchangeable also fails. All of this contra-Marxology effects to bolster the account found in marginal utility theory, with its need only of price to explain price, and the need or desire of different people for differing uses to explain profit.

The terrain of this debate has itself been transformed in the intervening period via further theorizations. Best-known among them the temporal single-system interpretation (TSSI) most associated with Andrew Kliman and Alan Freeman, endeavoring in main to demonstrate that Marx’s system is internally consistent. The addresses to the technical problem of values and prices hinge on the fact that the values borne by production goods, being themselves subject to shifting determinations which

relate various labors, will have changed by the time they enter into consumption goods and then are sold for market prices.

The responses from the seventies are less defenses of Marx's theoretical rectitude than dismantlings of Böhm-Bawerk et al. Their breadth and depth would be impossible to summarize herein. One theme that emerges variously, sharing with TSSI the importance of value's fluidity according to developments in production, regards the ways the transformation problem presumes a model of what economy is in the first place — here again the arithmomorphic is a useful concept — which simply brackets its social and historical aspects. Arthur notes several errors in Böhm-Bawerk, from a mistaken presumption of symmetries in exchange on which his discovery of incommensuration depends, to a more broadly mistaken idea of value as “an abstract essence inhering in a product in a pseudo-natural fashion” (80). This indicates a failure to grasp the movement of value as a social relation, one which not only rests on mutual presuppositions but whose determinations change as these relations develop — the dialectical view which distinguishes Marx's account from substantialist models belonging to Smith and Ricardo. Geoffrey Kay offers the most thoroughgoing riposte, showing how Böhm-Bawerk “defined the question too narrowly” in various ways (58). Most particularly, he ignores Marx's own account of how the value embodied in a commodity was modified in its magnitude by the relative composition of capital (the ratio of value expended in means of production against labor power) in the given sector, a set of disequilibria that allow for the reallocation of investment which eventually equalizes profit rates across sectors. Itoh offers a related response with his familiar clarity, to the effect that at advanced levels of production, prices function to organize social allocation, and that individual prices might vary widely from the value they purportedly express. Social factors within the market set the possible range of prices, not the “technical average condition of production” (105). Itoh deduces what he calls “market value” and “market price of production”; the former is set by competition in each sector, and the commensuration of value and price comes only after these have all been summed.

These responses largely take Böhm-Bawerk on his own terms, albeit limning their inadequacy. Elson's bravura contribution blows up the debate. Noting the tendency of value arguments to devolve toward the two linked poles of price formation and proof of exploitation, she steps back to ask, “What is Marx's theory of value a theory of” (115)? The scope of the essay is too capacious and far-ranging to be reduced to a single point. One argument does take precedence, however:

the *object* of Marx's theory of value was labour. It is not a matter of seeking an explanation of why prices are what they are and finding it in labour. But rather seeking an understanding of why labour takes the forms it does, and what the political consequences are. (123)

Some fifty pages later, she concludes, “[t]he major concern of Volume I is to establish how it is that labour comes to count ‘simply as a value creating substance’, how this entails the subsumption of labour as a form of capital” (171).

I might put the matter slightly differently, only toward summarizing the implications of Elson’s title both theoretical and strategic. The “Value Theory of Labour” (drawn uncited from, as best I know, Raya Dunayevskaya) suggests we ought leave the LTV to the Scottish Enlightenment, leave behind the model of labor as the force that forms value, whether passing concretely and immediately into the commodity or as an abstracted average. Rather, *value forms labor*, as distinguished from work. Both condition each other and arise in tandem, no doubt. But the focus of Marx’s historical analysis is not value as such. Marx’s theory proposes to explain the social form — let us call it the value relation — within which it is possible for labor to become not simply the useful transformation of nature but the source of accumulation as well as profit, conditioned by a law which expresses itself mercilessly throughout the social whole, allocating labor and means of production, compelling the development of productivity and the expulsion of living labor from the production process, increasing immiseration, and eventually hollowing out its own basis.

“These forms,” Marx writes of the value relation early in the exposition of Volume I,

therefore imply the possibility of crises, though no more than the possibility. For the development of this possibility into a reality a whole series of conditions is required, which do not yet exist from the standpoint of the simple circulation of commodities. (cited in Elson 170)

It is precisely the series of conditions which are then set forth, culminating in Chapter 25’s exposition of capital’s limits against which adequate value production becomes impossible. And it is this dimension, of capital’s expansivity across both space and time, that we see a dramatic but underthought contradiction, which Elson clarifies. The theory of value features equilibrium prices (fluctuating around value, modified by sectoral compositions of capital). But these in their development form the very basis for systemic disequilibrium, in that the space between value and price — their very non-identity — allows for catastrophic imbalances to develop between production and circulation.

And so we have returned to crisis, where we began. The psalmic syllogism might now be provisionally completed: in crisis, people thirst after Marx’s theory of value *because it is a theory of crisis*. This is one way to distinguish its nature from marginal utility theory. The latter is actually quite good at explaining prices at any given moment; if we wanted little but static pictures of the market in series, it would suffice. What it cannot do is show us the movie: offer a logical and historical basis for discerning a moving trajectory for capitalist accumulation, for the real movement of historical process located in the political-economic whole.

In the period since the crisis around 1973 and its aftermath, of which this volume is an expression and inquiry, there have been arguably three pressing developments in the thinking of value and the value-form in the west. All of them in their ways concern crisis. They are these: the broader dissemination of the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* (which features Michael Heinrich's flawed rejection of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, a crucial aspect which cannot be taken up herein); questions of "immaterial labor" and more broadly an expanding debate concerning how to understand value-productive labor in an age where more and more of the extant profit seems to come from labor traditionally thought of as non-productive; and the race to synthesize theories of economic and ecological crisis.

Of these, Elson might be thought most closely alongside the first. The *NML* roots itself in a monetarist model (some would say circulationist) which holds, to misserve it through brevity, that value has no social existence until it is realized in exchange. This comports with another vital aspect of Elson's account, an eloquent theorizing of the volatile unity of circulation and production. Stressing that wage struggles are themselves conducted at the level of price, she notes that there is thus a politically disabling fissure at the level of appearance which separates those struggles from the scene of exploitation. Circulation and production appear autonomous, while "the theory of value enables us to analyse capitalist exploitation in a way that overcomes the fragmentation of experience of that exploitation" (171).

Dave Beech's *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics* is a significant intervention into the second of these debates. That post-Fordist reorganizations have seemed to subordinate more and more of what were once extra-economic activities to capital's dictates is inarguable. Has this then created new sources of surplus value in activities once presumed accumulation-neutral? So goes the argument with its origins in the idea of the "social factory" associated with Mario Tronti and Raniero Panzieri, opening onto suggestions that immaterial labor — affective, financial, feminized, informatic, biopolitical — might now be value-productive and might in turn provide a new condition of possibility for anticapitalist interventions. One evident counterargument is the empirical fact of crisis itself; had these types of work assumed the duties of accumulation, we would be hard-pressed to explain why there has been no real recovery from the global downturn generally dated to around 1973, but instead a series of bubbles and busts, each of which discloses that there has been no restoration of accumulation but rather a temporary swelling of nominal wealth and fictitious capital thrown off by sectors that turn out to be anything but productive.

Within this debate, spurred most directly by *Empire*, the status of cultural production has become both significant in itself as the cultural sector has expanded, and paradigmatic for the question of productive labor as a whole. Beech provides a patient working-through of this question. He draws forth the ways that the artist (his focus is the fine arts) is disciplined by capital. At the same time, Beech resists

the narrative of relentlessly expanding commodification, deriving the ways in which the unique artwork should not be understood as a commodity, and thus its production cannot be grasped as capitalist production nor as value-productive. In Sarah Brouillette's measured reading, this gets at some crucial truths, in particular a resolute rejection of the contemporary habit wherein art is said to have undergone "real subsumption." In Marx this is a rigorous concept indicating the technical restructuring of the production process toward greater efficiency and a higher ratio of production means against wage labor; contemporary usages have preferred a more casual sense of being encircled by the market, a usage which obscures more than it reveals. For Brouillette, however, Beech's argument, for all its rigor, does not take the opportunity to address cultural making more generally, in its insistence on a relatively pristine separation of the economic from its other. "Beech describes artworks as in important ways 'non-economic,'" she writes, "but what if we were to argue rather that artworks are not 'non-economic' so much as defined fundamentally by their unusual relation to the economic sphere?"² From this, she shows how further arguments might be staged.

The third debate is also about a larger unity, not exactly beyond circulation and production but expanding the circuit of capital's self-reproduction to include that object we have been happy to call "ecology." This centers the philosophical aspect of Jason Moore's *Capitalism In the Web of Life*. Arguing against what he deems a Cartesian split of the nature/culture sort which takes the environmental dimension (including resources) as something other than capitalism, an outside from which capitalism draws, he suggests that they form a single system, the web which gives the book its title. It is not altogether clear whether this is a philosophical problem and needs to be dealt with as a question of bad thought. That said, Moore's insistence on recognizing ecological transformation as immanent to capital and vice versa is salutary. It bears particularly on crisis in ways that resonate with both the value-theorizations of Marxist feminism and the comic model of crisis favored by Austrian economics. The great value-theoretical intervention of Leopoldina Fortunati and others was to show not that reproductive labor in the home produced a *new* magnitude of value, but rather that the value of conventionally productive labor (and thus some share of surplus value) must be understood to arise in part from unpaid reproductive labor. Housework is effectively a transfer of embodied value from, for example, housewife to male proletarian; she valorizes him no less than the assembly line worker valorizes a Ford. Bearing that value, he in turn transfers it through his labor into the commodity to be sold at market. Moore suggests much the same for "ecological" factors with his model of the Four Cheaps, which include cheap energy, food, and resources in addition to the cheap labor power on which *Capital* focuses. In his view, these — not because they exist but because they are unwaged donations to capital's reproduction, entirely internalized to the expanded circuit of capital which is the "web of life" — might be understood as providing a portion of the value that seems to come from traditional

valorization. And without them, as without free and abjected reproductive labor, accumulation is impossible.

This is not to say, however, that ecological failure leads necessarily to crisis. He suggests persuasively that it can instead be a kind of creative destruction providing for a new round of accumulation. Juliana Spahr captures the scalar leaps of Moore's argument, at once comprehensive and vertiginous in the best tradition of world-systems analysis, which show how "it was a sort of environmental crisis, the sinking peat bogs, that freed up three-quarters of Holland's labor force to work outside of agriculture and led to the rise of the Dutch Republic."³ A possible contradiction obtains, then: will the vanishing of some fraction of the Four Cheaps (should it come to pass, per Moore's assertion) threaten capital's expanded reproduction with total crisis, or will it offer further creative destruction launching another cycle of accumulation? Spahr concludes with doubts about the account's adequacy in proposing either a clear trajectory or a political orientation.

Perhaps that is only right. As spirited as the value debates have been, few now would argue against the idea that we find ourselves in a period without clear direction. Capital has not recovered from the crisis of 2008. Neither has it abolished itself. Perhaps we never recovered from 1973, and the Long Crisis continues, characterized by the miserable persistence of the value relation as much as value's double refusal either to get back to work, or give it up and head out into the long night. Hurry up please it's time.

Notes

1. Sarah Brouillette, "On Art and 'Real Subsumption,'" *Mediations* 29.2 (Spring 2016) 169-176, and Juliana Spahr, "Beyond Red and Green," *Mediations* 29.2 (Spring 2016) 177-180.
2. Brouillette, "On Art" 170.
3. Spahr, "Beyond Red and Green" 177.

Sarah Brouillette. "On Art and 'Real Subsumption,'" *Mediations* 29.2 (Spring 2016) 169-176.
www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/on-art-and-real-subsumption

*Art and Value:
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Neoclassical and Marxist Economics*
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On Art and "Real Subsumption"

Sarah Brouillette

Narration of the relentless commodification of culture and the growing power of cultural markets so extensive they absorb and kill off any sort of autonomous aesthetic activity has become commonplace. Responses to this story range on a spectrum: one can be bemused, blasé, or outraged about what it portends; or one can claim, as Dave Beech does in *Art and Value*, an integrally non-economic quality of the artwork's making that, regardless of its formal or thematic concerns, excludes it from total identity with the commodity.

Beech maintains that art's unusual relation to capitalism has been obscured by the focus of Western Marxism since the 1920s on the idea of art's increasing commodification, absorption into the culture industry, or even real subsumption by capital, wherein art's modicum of autonomy from capital is cancelled by the reduction of every intention to the maximization of advantage and sales, and by the turning of any critical purpose into nothing but a marketable spectacle. For Beech this tradition, while of course not without merit, has unfortunately served to distract from the fundamentally economic question of whether art's production conforms to the capitalist mode. Theorists have exhaustively charted the influence of capitalist social relations on art's themes and forms. They have considered artists' reactions to their works being turned into reproducible commodities, marketed, stored as relatively safe investments, et cetera. They have studied the extent of the determination of the cultural superstructure by the material base of capitalist social relations. At times

they have risked identifying the operations of “the market” with capitalism as such. What our understanding of art’s relation to capitalism requires, then, is basic insight into the uniqueness of the ways in which works of art are actually made.

For Beech, it is only in studying artistic production that we perforce discover whether “art embodies the social relations in which the capitalist subjugates production through the ownership of the means of production and the payment of wages to purchase labor power” (9). What arises from his attention to this question is the argument that art is, in fact, economically exceptional within the capitalist mode of production. This is true because the worker does not accept a wage in compensation for her role in the production of a commodity, but rather sells the product itself (to a gallery or a collector for instance); it is true because the artist does not act as a capitalist engaging in the exploitation of labor to accumulate surplus; and it is true because external limitations on replication or iteration in production make the artwork irreproducible, setting it apart even from “petty production.”

There are, Beech writes, “non-economic” constraints placed on art’s production which mean that artworks cannot be replicated as most commodities are. Artworks are “inseparable from how and when they are produced”; even if an artist makes two apparently identical pieces, they retain some separateness from one another by virtue of their sequence in time (359). In essence, for Beech, because artists work on making unique objects which cannot be reproduced in their original form, the price of those works is not indexed to the average socially necessary labor time constitutive of value under capitalism. A coffee table book featuring paintings by Vincent Van Gogh is a capitalist commodity to which such measures are relevant; an original painting by Van Gogh is not, no matter how its price rises with the sale of postcards and books and tea towels and refrigerator magnets.

You may be thinking quite rightly that this argument applies only to a very small roster of those things that people can take or have taken to be art. Beech does not suggest that anything to which his analysis is technically inapplicable — Roberto Bolaño’s 2666, say, or Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Il fiore delle Mille e una notte* — must never be considered art or art-like. Beech has no desire to define art per se. It is just that the focus of his treatment is the kind of art that is economically exceptional in a very particular way. His insights can be applied rigorously only to works of irreproducible fine art. This delimitation of emphasis is essential to his task as he defines it.

What I want to detail here, though, is how a more dialectical emphasis would amplify the importance of his insights without undermining the focus on economically exceptional production that is his core contribution. Beech describes artworks as in important ways “non-economic,” but what if we were to argue rather that artworks are not “non-economic” so much as defined fundamentally by their unusual relation to the economic sphere? Instead of anchoring analysis only in the conditions of production exclusive to unique fine art, we could also claim that, well beyond such works, much of what aesthetic production is — from what we can for simplicity’s

sake call its content or message, to claims for its ontological distinction from other kinds of expression — emerges in some way from the shifting but ultimately stably unusual position of many aesthetic practices vis-à-vis the capitalist dominant.

In Daniel Spaulding’s terms, the category of art itself entails the distinction between things which, like a Van Gogh painting, “escape the law of value,” and things which, however aesthetically pleasing or considered, like a framed print picked up at Ikea, obey instead the laws of capitalist rationalization.¹ Artists (and not just visual artists, but poets and musicians and TV writers) often understand their work as motivated by things other than or opposed to the desire for acclaim or financial reward. There are artistic movements motivated by a will to explore the threat of becoming just like other commodities. Artists are permitted unusual license in articulating their dispositions against capitalism. These phenomena can all be said to follow from, relate to, and/or mediate the fact that there are artists — accompanied by inducements to identification with artists — who are by definition simply not regular productive laborers who sell their capacity to work for a wage, and nor are they capitalists employing productive laborers. There is a whole world of aesthetic practice and experience that stems from and relates closely to the *ideals of irreducibility* that are only materialized in the relatively unique cases Beech considers.

In this light, also, we see that the fact of art’s association with uniqueness and irreproducibility — a fact that Beech’s work continues and deepens — is one that emerged historically in relation to capitalism’s dominant tendencies. So while aspects of art may indeed be “non-economic,” it is just as true that the emergence of the category of art, and the privileged place held for aesthetic autonomy within that category, cannot be separated from the emergence of capitalism, in that it only becomes possible to conceive of art as an autonomous and “self-consistent” set of practices vis-à-vis what Spaulding describes as “a different logic,” namely, the logic of capitalist value production.² Far from representing a pure non-capitalist other, the production of art exists in an uneasy and conflicted relationship with the capitalist value form, and that unease will remain in force so long as capitalism itself does.³ I suggest then, building on Spaulding’s take, that whereas Beech emphasizes fine art as non-economic, we might broaden that inquiry to conceive aesthetic activity of various kinds as trapped in a definitively problematic relation to the production of capitalist value.

This broadening would I think only strengthen Beech’s welcome insistence that art can never be “really subsumed” by capital, where “real subsumption” signals the technological rationalization of every process involved in the production of commodities with the aim of maximizing profits by decreasing socially necessary labor time, the very measure that artistic production evades. Nicholas Brown has recently written that:

What differentiates Adorno's culture industry from the self-representation of our contemporary moment is that the art-commodity now has no other. Fredric Jameson... simply says, matter-of-factly, that "What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally." From this everything follows.⁴

We need to pause over the political-economic particulars of this "integration." Brown claims that the pressure for a work to be extensively distributed has fundamentally restructured the production process itself, such that the culture available to us is culture made in the light of the reality of its inevitable incorporation. In contrast, Beech's point is that an artist's willingness to suit consumers is not relevant to the question of whether his or her art has been subsumed. The creation of saleable singular art objects differs fundamentally from the production of commodities via labor that is formally or really subsumed to varying degrees and whose ultimate purpose is the accumulation of surplus value.

Beech writes importantly that "as we posit subsumption in general rather than the subsumption of labor by capital then, it appears to me, the mechanism by which capitalism takes hold of society is lost" (17). In other words, Beech's argument rests on a particular understanding not just of the making of art but of the foundational machinations of capitalism. What do we know about what capitalism is because we know art is not strictly speaking a capitalist commodity? Beech's image of capitalist relations is profoundly not one of a generalized "social factory" wherein once extra-economic social activities have become themselves a new wellspring of value. It is not one in which everything is subsumed by capital rendering our social relations and aesthetic habits its manifestations and engines. For Beech the realities of art's production, so tightly connected to its fashioning as self-legislating and autonomous, make it a model of this ongoing non-instrumental behavior, which is more common than we often imagine. No development in commercial markets for art has fundamentally challenged this situation.

Here I cannot help but note there is a great deal of support for Beech's approach in Marx's oeuvre, though the support I have in mind suggests once more a broadening that is consonant rather than coincident with his particular focus on the making of discrete works of visual art. At times Marx argued that capitalist production "is hostile to certain branches of spiritual production, for example, art and poetry," and he positioned the unproductive nature of the making of art against bourgeois economists' tendency to overemphasize and overvalue productivity and to assume that everything is ultimately useful to the economy and to the production of wealth.⁵ He wrote that these economists "are so dominated by their fixed bourgeois ideas that they would think they were insulting Aristotle or Julius Caesar if they called them 'unproductive laborers'."⁶ He famously claimed that John Milton, who was paid £5 for *Paradise Lost*, was an unproductive laborer, while "the writer who turns out stuff for

his publisher in factory style” is, in contrast, a productive one. He elaborates that, like a silkworm producing silk, “Milton produced *Paradise Lost* for the same reason,” that is, “as an activity of his nature.”⁷

When Marx describes Milton as engaged in “an activity of his nature,” he does not mean that the art work articulates the pristine, original, self-grounding individual interiority imagined by bourgeois aesthetic theory. Consider his remark that Raphael, for example, “was conditioned by the technical advances made in art before his time, by the organization of society, by the division of labor in the locality in which he lived, and — finally — by the division of labor in all the countries with which that locality stood in communication.”⁸ The artist’s “nature” is thus an expression of his existence as a *zoon politicon*, meaning a creature “which can individuate itself only in society.”⁹ The human consciousness which art exhibits is always everywhere conditioned by material relations. It is thoroughly embedded and social, even in its apparent indivisibility and uniqueness, which are, as we have seen, determined by a particular history of social and aesthetic forms. It is simply that the material relations that define art’s production differ in important ways from those that tie the laborer to the capitalist so characteristically. This difference, and not any special qualities of the artist, is what makes art practice a foil to the alienating abstractions of labor for a wage.

Art and culture are in this light precisely not the singular achievements of given expressive individual consciousnesses who see themselves in certain lights, but rather the products of practices that are materially, concretely, importantly distinct from capitalist norms. In other words, art is not a realm of free-floating ideas but a form of praxis thoroughly shaped by the artist’s relatively unusual material existence and by the social relations that define her experience. The making of art and engagement with art are distinct but never wholly autonomous, never free from social determination, and so never cut off ideologically and ideationally from capitalism. These practices are in turn some of the many means, all only *potentially and contextually* effective, by which people can become conscious of the nature of their social existence and “fight it out” — that is, engage the defining struggle to realize or manifest something other than capitalism.¹⁰

When Marx describes capitalism as inimical to art, he does not mean merely that the production of art cannot be organized in accordance with the law of value. It matters also that labor under capitalism is understood as a threat to whatever artistic features our work might exhibit. He writes that the “economic relation” between capitalist and worker develops in proportionate relation to labor itself losing “*its character of art*.”¹¹ What he means here specifically is that the ends of labor, or the nature of the task and product to which the labor is applied, becomes an irrelevance. In S.S. Praver’s argument, Marx considered the loss within the wage-commodity nexus of work’s artistic character — its concrete specificity, its lack of generalizability — as definitive of modern wage labor. He in turn saw artistic creation “as the type of

labor to which all others aspire; the type of labor in which the individual can realize and develop his potentialities.”¹² The making abstract of labor, its transformation of workers into nothing but a calculable force of production, is of course constitutive of capitalism, and the process is taken to its extreme when the worker is replaced by a machine — a replacement Marx describes as confronting the worker “in a brutal fashion obvious to his senses” as capital assimilates labor into itself.¹³ This assimilation cannot happen in the production of art, as we have seen, because the work of art cannot be precisely reproduced by waged labor.

The productive labor defining capitalism depends upon the worker’s insecurity and desperation. She is dependent on wages for survival, and at work uses techniques and tools that appear entirely alien to her so as to produce commodities to which she similarly bears no obvious relation. It is easy to see why the making of art — performed with tools one has invested in oneself, toward creating a product apparently embodying one’s own ends — throws into such sharp relief the productive labor which rarely entails the “play of [one’s] own mental and physical power.”¹⁴ Art is one thing — not the only thing — that occasions a superior relation to one’s effort and to the products of one’s effort. This point has been hugely influential for subsequent Marxist approaches to art and aesthetics, though they have perhaps focused too exclusively on high-artistic manifestations of this superior relation. For Lukács, in György Markus’s terms, the best art was “the living example of the possibility of a non-reified relation to reality”; and for Adorno, similarly, genuine works of art were “plenipotentaries of things that are no longer distorted by exchange, profit, and the false needs of a degraded humanity.”¹⁵

In *Art and Value*, Beech by no means rejects this tradition. Indeed he joins it, but in a very particular way, by adding to it a substantial account of the unique nature of the artist’s process. “Art’s exceptionalism is not an economic argument for art’s autonomy,” Beech writes, but — and this is an important but — “autonomy appears to have a material basis in the economics of artistic production” (27, 274). In other words claims to autonomy from capital have a basis in material realities — realities not exclusive to artists, and which according to Beech precede art’s unique formal concerns and artists’ self-fashioning. Contrast Brown’s claim that a “plausible claim to autonomy” is “the precondition for any [anti-market] politics at all,” and that to make this claim we need to “return to immanent critique, to the notion of self-legislating form; in other words, to the conception of literature formulated by the German Romantics at the turn of the 19th century.”¹⁶ Contrarily, Beech’s understanding of the nature of capitalist value production makes art one of many clarifying foils to its dominance. He is not interested in art’s self-understanding or philosophy, except as those follow from certain truths of art’s making. Brown’s more idealist and perhaps aestheticist position is that if we credit certain tendencies in art’s self-imagining we will be able to hold art *in particular* up as a bulwark against a capitalist dominance that is getting thicker and worse as it subsumes into itself everything that was once

non-economic.

In Beech’s account, subsumption is not a category relevant to art’s making, and the nature of art’s production is still usefully, generatively posed against the capitalist dominant. In the broader terms I recommend above — not fine art but aesthetic practices, not non-economic status but the reality of being trapped in negative relation to capitalist value — aesthetic praxis, or intentional sensuous expression in art works and art-like objects, can still be understood as one form of the kind of activity that is not afforded to people forced to depend on wages to reproduce themselves and their social worlds. What is more, the implication of Marx’s observation about labor losing all of its artistic character, and about art remaining distinct from the law of value, is that the making of art is an activity that should be available to all people rather than just to that special singular Milton. Indeed, Marx writes explicitly that this making is something denied them, given that “concentration of artistic talent in single, unique individuals and... suppression of such talent among the masses is a consequence of the division of labor.”¹⁷ Beech echoes this insight in the conclusion to his study, writing that “Nothing can really revolutionize art except a complete transformation of the preconditions for participation in art, particularly the emancipation of the culturally excluded” (369).

It will be useful to attend to this crucial ambiguity or indeed dialectical character of the term “revolution” in Beech and in Marx more broadly. The more common claim remains one-sided, finding in art the ceaseless revolutions in production indexed to creeping commodification, real subsumption, market incorporation, or any number of cognate phenomena stemming from the ostensible rise in its importance to the economy as a whole. For the reasons I have outlined, Beech rejects such claims, underscoring art’s frozen character within capital, still awaiting the revolution *against* production which might set it again in motion. The claims nonetheless remain; what Beech does not do is significantly historicize them. I don’t have the space here to do so, either (or the completed research, frankly). I will just risk speculating that subsumption claims may be usefully understood as connected symptomatically to the broader consensus around art’s increasing economic protagonism — a consensus which reflects culture-based efforts to respond to the decline in real accumulation since the early 1970s. Beech does not discuss this decline, perhaps because in the last parts of his book he wants to argue that the fact that art is a foundationally non-economic good grounds state support for it. Recognizing a thoroughgoing crisis in profitability would make austerity seem like something of a permanent state and perhaps turn claims for extending arts funding into wishful thinking. Whatever the case, arts funding is unlikely to inch us much closer to the ultimate goal Beech’s work ably clarifies: transforming general social conditions such that the opportunity to do work that is not productive of value for capitalism would be a general rather than unique condition.¹⁸

Notes

1. Daniel Spaulding, "A Clarification on Art and Value," *Mute* (28 May 2015). <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/art-value-and-freedom-fetish-o>
2. Spaulding, "A Clarification."
3. See "A Clarification," and also Daniel Spaulding, "Value-form and Avant-Garde," *Mute* (27 Mar 2014). <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/value-form-and-avant-garde>
4. Nicholas Brown, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Real Subsumption under Capital," *non-site* (13 March 2012). <http://nonsite.org/editorial/the-work-of-art-in-the-age-of-its-real-subsumption-under-capital>
5. Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968) Ch. 04. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/cho4.htm>
6. *ibid.*
7. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1976) 1044.
8. Qtd. in S. S. Prawer, *Karl Marx and World Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976) 114
9. Karl Marx, "'Introduction' to the *Grundrisse*," *Later Political Writings*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 129.
10. Karl Marx, Preface, *Critique of Political Economy* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1976) xx.
11. Prawer, *World Literature* 291.
12. *ibid.*
13. *World Literature* 324.
14. Marx, qtd. in *World Literature* 313.
15. György Markus, "Walter Benjamin or: The Commodity as Phantasmagoria," *New German Critique* 83 (Spring-Summer 2001) 5, and Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) 310.
16. Brown, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Real Subsumption."
17. Qtd. in *World Literature* 113.
18. My thanks to Joshua Clover for helping me to write this piece and think through my conclusions.

Juliana Spahr. "Beyond Red and Green," *Mediations* 29.2 (Spring 2016) 177-180.
www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/beyond-red-and-green

Capitalism in the Web of Life

Jason W. Moore

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Beyond Red and Green

Juliana Spahr

One of the more glorious moments in Jason W. Moore's *Capitalism in the Web of Life* is what he calls a "modest catalogue of early capitalism's transformations of land and labor, from the 1450s to the eve of the industrial revolution" (182). It is 27 points. It begins with the observation that it was a sort of environmental crisis, the sinking peat bogs, that freed up three-quarters of Holland's labor force to work outside of agriculture and led to the rise of the Dutch Republic. It lingers on the relationship between sugar and slavery, hopping from Madiera to São Tomé to Gulf of Guinea to Angola to the Congo. Moves back to the Dutch peat and its depletion and relates these to the clove trade as it next moves on to the relation between deforestation and shipbuilding and then the relation between shipbuilding and maritime protein and the relation of both these things to the search for furs and ends with the "Columbian exchange," that world-altering moment when diseases, animals, and crops moved between the Old and the New World (187). This is a very literal explanation of some parts of the "web of life" that define capitalism. How, as Moore argues in this book, "world-economies do not interact with world-ecologies; world-economies *are* world-ecologies" (197).

As evidence of how much this book is needed, an anecdote: I once attended a reading group on Capitalism and Crisis, and the person presenting on the environment and what role it might play in the much longed-for decline of capitalism said that there were Reds and there were Greens and she was always going to be a Red. As Moore mentions in an interview with Kamil Ahsan, he began his work to counter this standoff between the Reds and the Greens, or what he calls a "Green Arithmetic" (but really, Greens hardly deserve all the shame here): "When we've had an economic

or social crisis or any other kind of crisis, they all go into one box. Then we have an ecological crises — water or energy or the climate — that go into another box.”¹ As Moore realizes, Reds and Greens have a long history of pretending that they can ignore each other. And this willful avoidance has created a lot of misunderstandings. For years, the primary misunderstanding, one held by both Greens and Reds, was that Marx has little to nothing to say about the environment and its relationship to capitalism and that Marxism could talk about the law of value without noticing that value was somewhat determined by environmental factors, or what Moore calls “extra-human natures” (4). John Foster Bellamy in *Marx’s Ecology* provided a crucial correction to the first observation. Moore’s work relentlessly addresses the second.

Moore’s theoretical contribution, and it is major, is his insistence that value is determined by, and capitalism is dependent upon, what he calls the “Four Cheaps” (17). One of these is labor-power (which is where Marxist theory has tended to dwell). The others are food, energy, and raw materials. He argues that in order for accumulation to happen at least one of these Four Cheaps has to be cheap (and ideally more than one). His examples are wide-ranging and historical. He presents as an example the exceptional moment in which the Dutch Republic rose as a result of having “Cheap grain (from Poland), Cheap energy (from domestic peat), and Cheap timber (from Norway and the Baltic)” (92). He points to how the development of the assembly line relied on cheap steel, rubber, and oil. And he notices the centrality of agricultural revolutions to the making of capitalist centers. And this leads him to point again and again to how often environmental destruction leads to a new and amplified round of capitalist accumulation, as in the end of Dutch peat and the rising costs of wood let the British economy rise because they had cheap coal.

Moore is at his best in this book when he not only ranges across centuries but also ranges across numerous fields of thought, most notably laboring to overcome the divide between Marxist value theory and ecology noted above. *Capitalism in the Web of Life* has four sections — “From Dualism to Dialectics: History as if Nature Matters”; “Historical Capitalism, Historical Nature”; “Historical Nature and the Origins of Capital”; “The Rise and Demise of Cheap Nature” — and a conclusion. Inside these four sections are ten chapters. It is hard to summarize them. *Capitalism in the Web of Life* is dense and somewhat messy and non-developmental in its argumentation. The “modest catalogue” that I find so glorious, for instance, is buried in the middle of a vocabulary argument about how the term *anthropocene* should be replaced with *capitalocene*. Moore’s arguments for *capitalocene* are for sure correct: the term *anthropocene* risks focusing our attention on the human and how humans produce environmental consequences. And he argues in a sort of “not all humans” way that instead we should focus on the producer/product relation that constitutes capitalism. And then if we do this, we would shift from locating 1784 and the steam engine as a problem largely of particular technologies and instead recognize that the problem is the rise of capitalism as social relation “with its audacious strategies of global

conquest, endless commodification, and relentless rationalization” after 1450 (172). This would allow us to escape a whole series of errors that haunt some aspects of Green Thought. Among them the idea that if we just shut down the steam engines and coal plants (or their contemporary equivalents) while leaving intact the inequalities and their “gendered and racialized cosmologies” upon which capitalism depends all will be well (172).

As I said, Moore is right in his description of the problem. And I get his focus here: “how one periodizes history fundamentally shapes the interpretation of events, and one’s choice of significant relations” (173). But to be honest, I am never convinced that arguing vocabulary with academics is worth it. Those devoted to the term *anthropocene* are probably not going to put it down anytime soon (too many careers have already been made from it). Or another way to put it, if the power of this book is how it sweeps a bunch of fields together in order to point out something crucial about capitalism, the limitation of this book is that at moments it is overly attentive to specific debates and vocabulary fights. Too much of this book is a defense of the various idiosyncratic terms that Moore wants to use to describe pre-existing ideas. And sometimes it feels as if he is even renaming his own terms, so while “web of life” is in the title, there is also a long defense and justification for the term “*oikeios*,” which best I can figure out is the same thing as “web of life,” a replacement for a Cartesian mode of thinking that at other moments he calls “Nature/Society dualism” and “a way of naming the creative, historical, and dialectical relation between, and also always within, human and extra-human natures.” Moore in his defense argues that “we must ‘name the system’” (4). But at moments I found the renaming and rhetorical style unnecessarily obfuscatory.

Moore ends *Capitalism in the Web of Life* with this observation: “The class struggle of the twenty-first century will turn, in no small measure, upon how one answers the questions: What is food? What is nature? What is valuable?” (287). And this observation is the one that matters; the rest is for tenure committees. It comes in the last chapter where Moore traces the impact of Cheap Food on the twentieth century’s capitalism. His goal here, he explains, is not to tell the history of food pricing but to describe our current predicament. As he has pointed out again and again in the nine prior chapters, historically each new capitalist regime has been made possible by a new model of agriculture. And he notices something similar in the twentieth century: how the 1970s saw the cheapest food in world history as a result of the Green Revolution (oh, if there was ever a term I could rename, it would be that one). And as the price of food has a direct impact on the value of labor-power, this allowed the rate of exploitation to rise. This last chapter describes a series of limitations — inefficient energy needs, toxic agricultural practices, super weeds, climate change — that suggest the end of Cheap Food.

I am with Moore that the end of Cheap Food is going to limit capitalism’s ability to meet its relentless need to expand. However, reading *Capitalism in the Web of Life* has, rather than completing that argument, made the question even more open for me.

Not in a bad way but in an “I have my eyes opened some more” way. I mean capitalism seems unsustainable at every turn and has for a long time. And yet every single one of my prior predictions that it was at its end have been dramatically wrong. Often the way that it seems to sustain itself, intensify even, against all common sense is blamed on Keynesian-style interventions. And it’s a big and frequently tedious debate about how much longer that can go on. I’ve long thought crisis theory underestimates what Moore might call the impact that extra-human resource depletion will eventually have on capitalism’s endless need to expand. But reading Moore’s long-ranging histories it becomes obvious how often extra-human resource depletion stimulates capitalism. Out with the Dutch peat, in with the English coal. One could argue that the impact of climate change is going to be a special stimulus package too. But as with the Keynesian-style interventions, it is unclear how much longer that can go on in the face of things like climate change.

Nonetheless, Moore is fairly confident that the end of Cheap Food means that the crisis cannot be deferred. That Cheap Food is big enough that when it fails, everything fails with it. Then he suggests “the end of Cheap Food may well be the end of modernity, and the start of something better” (290). Maybe yes. Maybe no. There is no reason for anyone to be sure about the something better part. What comes after capitalism is, of course, a big open question that gets relentlessly debated and these debates often split along utopic and dystopic lines. Many have theorized — even a number of devoted anti-capitalists — the possibility of a massive die-off. Moore is more utopic. He claims that food politics offer a glimpse of the future. When he gets there, in the last four pages of the last chapter, he quotes Rebecca Solnit’s “The Revolution Has Already Occurred” from *The Nation*. This is the article in which Solnit claims that community gardens are a sort of revolution. The article is muddy. She claims it is an anarchist sort of one and a direct democracy sort of one. But not just muddy, also so delusional in pursuit of the mollifying emotions of hope that it claims that a revolt could happen one first-world community garden at a time. It is almost shocking to see it quoted at such length at the end of Moore’s book because it felt as if he had been working against this sort of understanding from the beginning. Any understanding of a world-economy as a world-ecology would have to at least consider that as community gardens are part of the web of life, they too are at risk from toxic soil, super weeds, and climate change. Another way to put this: whatever sort of hope Moore wants to throw in at the end for some reason, the prior two hundred and some pages suggest something more complicated, and it is that something that is worth listening to with care.

Notes

1. Jason W. Moore and Kamil Ahsan, “Capitalism in the Web of Life: an Interview with Jason W. Moore,” *Viewpoint Magazine* (28 September, 2015). <https://viewpointmag.com/2015/09/28/capitalism-in-the-web-of-life-an-interview-with-jason-moore/>

Ross Wolfe. "The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*." *Mediations* 29.2 (Spring 2016) 181-188.

www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/our-friends

To Our Friends

The Invisible Committee

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The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*

Ross Wolfe

"From now on all friendship is political."¹

Seven years after its incendiary debut, *The Coming Insurrection*, the Invisible Committee has released another book. *To Our Friends*, the group's long-awaited sequel, attempts to take stock of the global wave of riots, uprisings, and insurgencies that arose during the interim. It is unlikely that this latest effort will have the same impact as its predecessor, which struck a nerve with readers after nearly a decade of fruitless antiwar campaigns. Whereas *The Coming Insurrection* struck a premonitory note, forecasting the shape of future struggles, *To Our Friends* is relatively measured and circumspect in tone. Despite this somewhat different tenor, however, many stylistic traits that feature in the former recur in the latter — and along with them, all of the strengths and weaknesses they entail.

One undeniable merit of *To Our Friends* is its directness, which it inherits from *The Coming Insurrection*. No footnotes appear throughout the text. Quotes from various sources pop up here and there, usually attributed, but scholarly citations are nowhere to be found. "We would have liked to be brief," the authors express in the coda, "to forgo genealogies, etymologies, quotations" (238). Though not able to avoid such digressions altogether, for the most part they are successful. All this lends *To Our Friends* a kind of fluent immediacy, even an urgency, which is largely absent in radical politics these past several decades. Very little background is required to get the basic gist of what they are saying. In a discourse smothered by exegesis and exhaustive/exhausting commentary, this book is like a breath of fresh air.

Nevertheless, *To Our Friends* simultaneously admits of a deeper reading. Besides overt references to theorists such as Antonio Negri, whose notions of “democracy” (55, 74) and “the commons” (207) are roundly criticized by the authors, allusions to other theoretical debates can also be detected. Most of these debates are, predictably, French. Usually there is a quick series of negative criteria, defining what a term is not, followed by a pithy summary which inverts them to define what it is. For instance, lines like the following implicitly nod toward everything from Foucault’s conceptual lineages to Deleuze’s philosophy of affect and “material flows,” from semiotic signifying chains to Bourdieu’s *habitus*:

There is no empty space, everything is inhabited; each one of us is the gathering and crossing point of quantities of affects, lineages, histories, and significations, material flows that exceed us. The world doesn’t environ us, but passes through us. What we inhabit inhabits us. What surrounds us constitutes us. (79)

Another line almost recalls Derrida’s deconstruction of the “metaphysics of presence”:

It’s not the world that is lost, it’s *we* who have lost the world and go on losing it. It’s not the world that is going to end soon, it is *we* who *are finished*, amputated, cut-off, *we* who refuse all vital contact with the real. The crisis is not economic, ecological, or political; *the crisis is above all that of presence*. (31)

Examples abound. Besides this repeated rhetorical technique, which *To Our Friends* employs a bit too often, explicit mention is sometimes made of theoreticians whose work clearly hangs over the Invisible Committee’s text. Gilles Deleuze — or “comrade Deleuze,” as they call him — is one of the figures approvingly invoked (230). His thought-figure of “lines of flight” is used to interpret surveillance practices in the cybernetic age (114). Michel Foucault exercises a great deal of influence over the text as well, especially in the second and fourth chapters regarding “governmentality” or “governance.”² Toward the end of the book, the authors appeal to Foucault’s authority in rejecting a dialectical interpretation of history or society (227). Indeed, they question the very existence of “society” in a previous subsection, speculating “[p]erhaps there is no longer a ‘society’ to destroy or persuade.” A Foucauldian genealogy ensues, tracing the shifting historical meaning of the word, from which the authors conclude society was merely a “fiction born at the end of the seventeenth century,” or just “[t]he projected shadow of successive modes of government” (171-77).

Dialectical methodology is not the only aspect of Marxism contested in *To Our Friends*. Marx’s attitude toward crisis, theses on democracy and the state, as well as his analysis of money and commodities all receive harsh treatment (21-22, 69, 82).

At best, his thought is considered to have once been true. Now that the world of nineteenth-century capitalism Marx knew has moved on, however, his critique of political economy is inapplicable or obsolete. In the third chapter of *To Our Friends*, the Invisible Committee addresses the labor theory of value, writing:

The Marxists can stick to their day jobs: the process of commodity valorization, from extraction to the pump, coincides with the process of circulation, which itself coincides with the process of production.... Saying the value of the commodity crystallizes the labor time of the worker was a political operation as fruitful as it was fallacious. (92)

But it is difficult to take such objections seriously, since Marx includes the cost of transport — and labor outlays in general — in the sphere of production, though it constitutes the physical circulation of commodities.³ Likewise, the notion that value production has been irrevocably altered by cybernetics or informatics is unfounded. Far from surpassing the horizon of dead and living labor, the dynamic of constant and variable value is still the basis of capital's organic composition; only the ratio has changed. When it comes to political economy, the Invisible Committee would've done better to acquaint themselves with recent German scholarship on Marx's value-critique, as Anselm Jappe and others active in the French scene have done.⁴

To Our Friends does manage to clarify the group's distance from Marxist politics, though, developing a distinction that had merely been latent in *The Coming Insurrection*: namely, between "revolution" and "insurrection." In *The Coming Insurrection*, revolution is discussed primarily in terms of potentiality, possibility, and prospect; its connection to insurrection remains undertheorized.⁵ Anyone familiar with the anarchist tradition will recognize the roots of this divide in Max Stirner's *The Ego and Its Own* (1846). "Revolution and insurrection must not be looked upon as synonymous. Whereas revolution aims at new arrangements, insurrection leads us to no longer let ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and sets no glittering hopes on 'institutions.'"⁶ It would be overhasty to assume that the Invisible Committee accepts Stirner's delineation of these terms unmodified or outright. Still, this provides a helpful heuristic for thinking about the group's own idiosyncratic usage. Frustratingly, however, the terminology in *To Our Friends* is far from consistent on this score. "Revolutions of the past promised a new life," the second chapter proclaims. "Contemporary insurrections deliver the keys to it" (44). Here insurrection seemingly opens the door to revolution. But earlier on in the text, a short circuit appears to run between them: "The insurrections have come, but not the revolution, [which] always seems to choke off at the riot stage, [or else] serves as a stepping stone for those who speak in its name but only think of liquidating it" (12-13).

Others have already noted the disconnect between the sense of vindication expressed at the book's outset and the sobering political realities of the present.⁷

Glancing back at the results of the Occupy movement, the Arab Spring, riots in London, and anti-austerity protests across Europe, one would be hard pressed to describe any of them as a success. Little wonder, then, that the strongest moments in *To Our Friends* come when the authors pause to reflect on defeat. “At this point it must be admitted that we revolutionaries have been defeated,” they write candidly at the beginning of the book. “Not because... we haven’t achieved revolution as an objective, but because... we’ve lost sight of revolution as a process” (13). Syntagma Square in Athens, site of major 2008 clashes with metropolitan police, is paradigmatic for the Invisible Committee, and it is here the authors brush up against the limits of insurrection as a model of struggle:

What the Greek case shows is that without a concrete idea of what victory would be, we can’t help but be defeated. Insurrectionary determination is not enough; our confusion is still too thick. Hopefully, studying our defeats will serve at least to dispel it somewhat. (135)

Demobilization in Greece after 2012 or so meant a return to the same rotten institutions, and to institutionalized defeat: Syriza’s eventual capitulation was guaranteed from the start. *To Our Friends* endeavors, inadequately at times, to digest the failures of the past seven years.

Perhaps the most surprising of these reflections concerns a much more distant defeat, though. In the third chapter, riffing on a remark by the Italian Marxist Mario Tronti, the authors contend “[the proletariat in the twentieth century] was... defeated by failing to appropriate the substance of working-class power.” Rather than the common bonds of exploitation, “what distinguishes the worker in a positive sense is his embodied technical mastery of a particular world of production” (96). This is not merely a contention about the past, either. What the Invisible Committee has in mind here is part of a broader move away from the workerist emphasis on the wage-relationship, toward the autonomist emphasis on the “general intellect.” Unexpectedly, in contrast to its disparaging appraisal of tech overall, this particular portion of *To Our Friends* stresses the technical (as opposed to the political) dimension of practice. “A revolutionary perspective no longer focuses on the institutional reorganization of society... but on the technical configuration of worlds” (95). Specialists — or, better, technicians — will be required in order for a successful revolution to take place:

We need to look in every sector, in all the territories we inhabit, for those possessing strategic technical knowledge. Only on this basis will movements truly dare to “block everything.” Only on this basis will the passion for experimenting toward another life be liberated, a largely technical passion that is the obverse, as it were, of everyone’s state of technological dependence. This process of knowledge accumulation, of

establishing collusions in every domain, is a prerequisite for a serious and massive return of the revolutionary question. (96)

Blockades, which seek to disturb infrastructure and interrupt logistical flows, are for the Invisible Committee the principal means by which to “destitute” power or government (72, 75-79, 128, 135). So central is this notion to the architecture of the text that its authors feel compelled “to reconceive the idea of revolution as *pure destitution*” (74). Government today, they maintain, is no longer identified with charismatic figures of authority or the personal patrimony of kings, but is located in the interstices, in the endoskeletal framework of society: “*Power now resides in the infrastructures of this world*” (83). Destitution thus entails a kind of hollowing out or rotting from within. One begins to suspect after a while that *To Our Friends* is imprecise in this assessment, however, mistaking the impersonal domination of capital for the impersonal power of the state. Its takeaway from the antiglobalization experience of the 1990s and 2000s is “the critique of the global apparatus of government” (224). Revolution is then a simple outmaneuvering of state force: “As far as strategy is concerned, it’s a matter of getting two steps ahead of global governance” (18). Questions of politics, the role of the state in brokering a postcapitalist transition, are thus evaded without ever being properly posed. In this the Invisible Committee seems to concur with John Holloway’s assertion that one can “change the world without taking power.”

Still, it is to the authors’ credit that they do not embrace local struggles, isolated pockets of resistance, as a surefire method by which to counteract global patterns of accumulation. “We risk losing everything if we invoke the local against the global,” they warn. “The local is not the reassuring alternative to globalization, but its universal product. Local is just the underside of global, its residue, its secretion — not something capable of shattering it” (188). Even if the Invisible Committee errs in assigning priority to the state instead of capital, it errs in the right direction by insisting on the global scope of the problem: “Only a *global perspective* can capture its significance” (15). However, the category introduced to bridge the gap between global and local, “territory” (cribbed from the Deleuzean lexicon), is unconvincing. Initially, *To Our Friends* situates territorial planning within the context of economic restructuring since the 1970s: “Capital doesn’t frame itself any longer in national terms, but territory by territory” (180). Against this new tendency, the Invisible Committee recommends “secession,” accompanied by the rapid formation of “communes” in territories that secede:

Seceding is not carving a part of the territory out of the national whole; it is not isolating oneself, cutting off communications with the rest — that would be certain death. Seceding is not using the scraps of this world to assemble *counter-clusters* where alternative communities would bask in their imaginary autonomy vis-à-vis the metropolis.... Seceding means

inhabiting a territory, assuming our situated configuration of the world, our way of dwelling there, the form of life and the truths that sustain us, and *from there* entering into conflict or complicity. So it means linking up strategically with other zones of dissidence... regardless of borders. (184-85).

Romantic and reactionary ideologemes are readily discernible this passage. Unmistakably Heideggerian residues cling to the concepts of “dwelling” and “inhabiting” used by the authors here and elsewhere in the text, explicitly informing their conception of “the commune”: “The commune inhabits its territory — that is, it shapes it just as much as the territory offers it a dwelling place and shelter. It forms necessary ties there, it thrives on its memory, finds a meaning, a language, in the land” (202).⁸ Similarly, their counterposition of quantitative “space” (a geometric grid in which the metropolis expands) to qualitative “place” (an organic ground on which the commune grows) takes its cue from Heidegger’s anti-Cartesian ontology.⁹ One can likely trace the anti-humanist tirade in the opening chapter back to this theoretical origin as well.¹⁰ Not to mention the weirdly dated polemic against existentialism and Camus, which cannot help but strike readers as dancing over the grave of a long-dead philosophical foe (29-31).

As soon as it lays down roots in a particular “place,” the commune orients itself according to the friend/enemy binary conceptualized by Schmitt. “Every declared commune calls a new geography into existence around it,” *To Our Friends* concludes.

Where there had only been uniform territory, a plain where everything was interchangeable, in the grayness of generalized equivalence, it raises up a chain of mountains... with passes, peaks, incredible pathways between friendly things, and forbidding or precipitous terrain between enemy things. (229)

This dichotomy is unavoidable, the authors write, since “even our immune system depends on the distinction between friend and enemy” (139). It would perhaps be too literal to infer from such metaphors that the Invisible Committee “naturalizes conflict,” as some reviewers have, but it is easy to see how this reading is possible.¹¹

Beyond interrogating the book’s intellectual background, however, one has to ask: Does anything proposed in *To Our Friends* differ that much from the utopian socialism of the nineteenth century, albeit dressed up in slightly more militant garb? Numerous cases are culled from world history to illustrate the authors’ arguments, but two are especially revealing. Early on, they implore readers to study the revolts of native populations in the Americas so as to rid themselves of Western prejudices: “There is no humanity, only earthlings and their enemies, the Occidentals.... We would do well to learn about the uninterrupted uprisings by the indigenous peoples of Central

and South America" (34). An analogous romanticism attaches to the primitive folk-community [*Volksgemeinschaft*] still found among Oaxaca tribes, who in the course of their struggles "arrived at the notion of 'communality.' For these Indians, living communally is... what sums up their traditional basis and what they oppose to capitalism." On the following page, the authors summon up a still more distant past, the communes of eleventh-century France (198-99). Here one begins to understand the needless invective hurled at communicative instruments, technology, and all manner of mediation.

Conditioning the communist prospect throughout the book is the vain notion that premodern forms of communal life could somehow be revived as an emergency measure amidst generalized societal collapse. Autarky, the principle of economic self-sufficiency or independence, is once again placed on the agenda as a goal to be achieved. *To Our Friends* justifies the (re)turn to this outmoded ideal as a practical result of changed circumstances. "[I]t's the confrontation with our epoch that has required this theorization," write the authors. "The need to autonomize from infrastructures of power is not due to an ageless aspiration to autarky" (204). Rather, this necessity supposedly flows from the fact that it is too late to project a future that builds on present developments, on the accumulated infrastructure of past centuries. On the contrary, that ship already sailed a long time ago: "In reality, the end of civilization has been clinically established for well over a hundred years, and countersigned by events" (29). For the Invisible Committee, there is no way to avert the impending disaster. "So every attempt to block the global system, every movement, every revolt, every uprising should be seen as an attempt to delay the catastrophe and branch off in a less fatal direction" (94). Marxism, of course, teaches that the only way *out* of capitalism lies *through* it. But it is precisely Marxism that the Invisible Committee rejects.

Notes

1. Unknown, *Call*, trans. Lawrence Jarach (Pasadena: Anemone, 2004) 10.
2. For “governmentality” and “governance,” see *To Our Friends* 66-71, 76-79, 85-86. 103-13, 115, 126-29, 153-54, 161-64, 171-73.
3. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume 2, trans. David Fernbach (Penguin Books. New York, NY) 226-229.
4. Anselm Jappe, “Toward a History of the Critique of Value,” trans. Alastair Hemmens and Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro, *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 25:2 (2014): 25-37.
5. The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, trans. Robert Hurley (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009) 13, 15, 16, 90, 101, 107, 128.
6. Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, trans. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 279-80.
7. Jason Smith, “Since the End of the Movement of the Squares: The Return of the Invisible Committee,” *Brooklyn Rail* (June 3, 2015). <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2015/06/field-notes/since-the-end-of-the-movement-of-the-squares-the-return-of-the-invisible-committee>.
8. For more examples of Heideggerian influence, see 33, 62, 79, 89, 96, 112, 123, 133, 164, 184-185, 187-188, 199, 214, 219, 228.
9. “[W]e inherit from modernity a conception of space as an empty, uniform, and measurable expanse where objects, creatures, or landscapes occupy their place. But the sensible world doesn’t present itself to us in that way. Space is not neutral. Things and beings don’t occupy a geometric position, but affect and are affected by it. Places are irreducibly loaded with stories, impressions, and emotions. A commune engages the world from its own place. Neither an administrative entity nor a simple geometric unit of space, it expresses rather a certain degree of shared experience inscribed territorially” (201).
10. “When one asks the left of the left what the revolution would consist in, it is quick to answer: ‘placing the human at the center.’ What that left doesn’t realize is how tired of the human the world is, how tired of humanity we are — of that species that thought it was the jewel of creation, that believed it was entitled to ravage everything since everything belonged to it. ‘Placing the human at the center’ was the Western project. We know how that turned out. The time has come to jump ship, to betray the species” (34).
11. McKenzie Wark, “No-Futurism,” *Public Seminar* (June 22, 2015). <http://www.publicseminar.org/2015/06/no-futurism/>.

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