Jean-Marie Vincent

ABSTRACT LABOUR

A Critique

Translated by Jim Cohen

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Jean-Marie Vincent
Professor of Political Science,
University of Paris-VIII

Translated by
Jim Cohen

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Preface by Stanley Aronowitz

In many respects, the 1960s constituted a great divide among the left intellectuals. On one side, many have portrayed the events of the last half of that decade in somber terms, as a warning that an entire younger generation had, from the perspective of socialist orthodoxy, lost its affiliation to the traditions of the workers' movements. For others, '60s radicalism proved the futility of utopian ideas and more generally posed a threat to the achievements of the Enlightenment. But for a third tendency, especially many who were part of the heady days of the Paris (and the Prague) Spring, 1968, what Ernst Bloch called the 'concrete utopia' seemed at hand.[1] Even when the promise of a new morning had been betrayed by Communist bureaucrats or, in Prague, Soviet tanks, 1968 transformed the meaning of the object as well as the processes of revolutionary change.

In reply to the perennial cry of the labor movement for social justice, a new educated 'socialized' worker[2] (or, in more orthodox formulations, a new middle class) estranged from technocratic, authoritarian society, called for 'all power to the imagination' and, more soberly, for self-management of all significant social institutions. The last two years of the '60s were marked by breakthroughs in thought as well as action which sent tremors through the corridors of power in the East as much as the West. Suddenly politics was no longer concerned with making room for the marginal and the excluded within the framework of the prevailing orders but of creating new social arrangements, the shape of which remained undetermined by the past precisely because the revolution had refused to play by the old rules of protest and confrontation. Rather it groped for new collective forms for the future that would be prefigured in the present – neither trade unions seeking redress without altering the nature of power, nor the old Bolshevik revolution which replaced one dictatorship with another, or the rule by one class by the rule by another.

The generation of 1968 sought liberation from work rather than celebrating its redemptive features, were interested in fashioning utopias rather than 'realistic' alternatives, and disdained power rather than contesting it. In Simmel's terms it privileged 'life' over 'forms' and therefore tended to relentless critique of practically everything that preceded it.[3] Marxism, still the *echt* revolutionary

doctrine throughout most of the immediate post-war period, did not escape the withering barbs of a movement that was inspired more by millenarian and anarchist impulses than by socialism. For if the future was to be made in the present, but not according to a predestined script, its forms could not be predetermined. Any doctrine that fixed definite forms of social relationships *in advance* constituted nothing less than a shackle on social agents.

'1968' was an overdetermined signifier that called into question all hierarchical authority even when new forms were yet unborn. The interregnum was unsettling because the communards were accustomed to following a set of rules which they, themselves, were in the process of overturning. By their side at the Paris barricades the independent communist left never tired of reminding their anarchic comrades that, without institutional forms such as a party, the movement would be defeated. Needless to say, many of the younger student revolutionaries became quickly disillusioned after the first victories against the established powers were overwhelmed by the combined forces of the state and the official left. Having failed to transform life without the benefits or burdens of institutions of revolutionary power, a fraction of these intellectuals discovered the previously discredited liberal doctrine.[4] However, others drew different conclusions from the events.

The second major tendency, closely identified with academic discourse, fashioned a radical post-marxism which, however, remained hostile to liberal politics. The leading French figures of this movement – Derrida, Lyotard, and above all Deleuze and Foucault – retained the *geist* of best traditions of marxism (the search for social and political agents, the insistence upon the specificity of historical forms, their refusal to accommodate to the existing order despite attacks from the official left and so forth). But their key categories were no longer derived from the marxist tradition, not even Marx himself, but from Nietzsche and Heidegger, both of whom had been excoriated by marxist critics (notably Georg Lukács) as representatives of irrationalist tendencies that fed fascist and other rightist ideologies.[5]

'Post-structuralist' theory does depart from the quest for certainty that marks scientificity. It challenges all of the givens of realist epistemology, and both analytic and dialectical logic as the sure foundations of apodictic, universally valid knowledge. Derrida rejects logocentricity and Foucault insists that all knowledge is local, all intellectuals specific. Lyotard calls this deconstruction of the antinomies

of western philosophy part of the post-modern condition, the other side of which is that the aesthetic distinction between high and low culture is sundered.[6]

The small industry that has arisen in Anglo–American countries in the wake of the dissemination of this rich body of work has, given its academic location, ignored if not remained ignorant of all but the specifically intellectual context that produced this outpouring. Neither the hegemony of the post-war Communist Party of France among intellectuals nor the dominance of its particular version of marxism (which, if possible, was a slightly more dogmatic version of Soviet marxism) rates more than a footnote in most of the many accounts of this 'revolution' in social and cultural thought. But the breakup of the PCF's intellectual and moral leadership on the left in the 1960s resulted in the demise of French marxism in proportion to the demise of its most articulate gatekeeper.

Jean–Marie Vincent is among the very few independent intellectuals of this generation to retain a strong affiliation to Marx, if not the tradition he unwittingly inspired, without ignoring the powerful contributions among the radical poststructuralist and postmodern writers who spurn Marx and his accolytes. Drawing from the marxist iconoclasts – particularly Ernst Bloch and the Frankfurt school – themselves inspired by Nietzsche, he nevertheless has forged a unique voice. Although aware of the importance of historical scepticism learned from Nietzsche, he possesses a strong sense of a living past not unlike that of Walter Benjamin for whom the past lives in the present insofar as its tasks remain unfulfilled.[7] From Bloch he draws the powerful strains of a secular spirituality; with the Frankfurt school, the critique of science and technology as ideology from which marxist 'science' is by no means exempt and its understanding of the centrality of culture in the constitution of political constraints and possibilities.

From Marx above all, Vincent grasps the towering idea that production, values, labor and the whole apparatus of bourgeois domination which is hinged to these categories, must be surpassed rather than preserved in the process of social transformation. That is, although standing on Marx's shoulders while fighting his orthodox interpreters, Vincent is also moving beyond Marx in some crucial respects. For example, the dialectical contradiction between the forces and relations of production, Marx's core category of social transformation, will not, in Vincent's reading, lead to a resolution in which labor remains at the center of the new social

world, but is displaced to a necessary, but clearly subordinate aspect of life.

During the last years of the 1970s when it had already become crystal clear – even to the diehards – that the major political movements of the 1960s had in most respects definitively ended (or at least entered a period of prolonged eclipse), my colleague, the critic Peter Clecak, remarked in a private conversation that perhaps the '60s influence would prove most enduring on our culture. Twenty years after the end of that era, this judgement appears eminently sound. For even as the political weight of the various lefts – old and new – have been severely reduced, conservatives have discovered in the cultural shifts of that time, both a ready political target and a seemingly intractable opponent. In the United States and the United Kingdom rightist governments wage unrelenting and often unsuccessful wars on the crucial cultural gains: abortion rights and other aspects of sexual freedom, particularly gay and lesbian rights; the demand for racial justice, both in its economic aspects and the growing demand by blacks and ethnic minorities for autonomous cultural identity, particularly in schools.

In the West, workers movements, once the undisputed center of the opposition, have, with a few exceptions, suffered slow decline. In the countries of advanced capitalism, the once powerful labor, socialist and communist movements still provide one of the crucial arenas for contesting capitalist hegemony, but, except for Germany and Sweden, the parties and the labor movements have lost much of their will even where their institutions are still formidable, as in the United States and United Kingdom.

One of the crucial markers of postmodernism is its refusals: of universal values, fixed intellectual foundations upon which transhistorical systems of thought (and feeling) are constructed and aesthetic standards against which to measure the new. It is upon these refusals that new modes of thought and feeling and varieties of new political forms are arising. While critical of some of the claims of postmodernism, especially the version that eschews anything that smacks even remotely of historical understanding, Vincent is among the thinkers of the postmodern. Not that this characterization would suit him or self-proclaimed postmodernists to whom he might appear much too appreciative of the achievements of modernism, especially Marx's social theory. Rather, his marxism depends on a reading of historical materialism that sees it, not as a finished doctrine, but

as an unfinished project whose subject is an indeterminate human agency.

For Vincent it is precisely the question of how humans can change their world that is rendered most problematic in Marx's later work. Having constructed capitalism as a system in which productive forces (science and technology congealed in dead human labor) seem to dominate living labour, that is, appear to overwhelm the working class as a historical agent by its domination over nature, the Marx of the three volumes of *Capital* seems to claim that capitalism will fall of its own inner contradictions or it will not fall at all. From these remonstrations arose the binaries of twentieth-century marxism: automatic marxism according to which socialism as the determinate negation of capitalism was the inevitable consequence of these internal, but largely extra-human contradictions; and voluntarism, the 'marxist' doctrine that argued that once the basic fissures of capital accumulation are given, politics is everything.

Vincent argues that Marx's apparently relentless description of the domination of the worker by these reified forces of production was above all critical. Far from holding to the views of his followers, *Capital* should be read as the view of the system *from within*, that is, from the epistemological space of capital itself. From this partial view followed the tendency of the marxist tradition, in Vincent's words 'to engage itself heavily in the social forms of the same historically situated world that it intends to supersede or destroy'. Thus, ensconced in the bourgeois world, orthodox marxism and indeed the workers' movement are attached to Victorian conceptions, particularly 'the very idea of liberation of society through labor'. The labor movement has constructed a veritable 'cult of labor' that has manifested itself in Communist countries and parties into a 'theology', the most recent version of which is the 'scientific and technological' revolution which social democrats as much as communists believe is the key to progress.

In one of his most powerful and provocative readings, Vincent explicates a Marx who problematizes labor, science and technology rather than celebrating them. It is true that Marx envisioned socialism to be the key to the full development of *human* productive forces, namely the forms of concrete labor as opposed to capital's drive to render labor abstract so that it can be exchanged and transformed into capital. However, Vincent insists that the end of capitalist social relations, while not abolishing material production, would signify its subordination 'to other imperatives and orientations'.

Nor can science and technology be separated from the social conditions that produced them and ensure their growth. In short, in contrast to Calvinist theology according to which work is a key to salvation, and knowledge the road to truth, Vincent joins a small but growing tendency in social theory to argue that science and technology, far from being regarded as either neutral instruments of social labour, or optimistically, as crucial elements of human liberation, turn out to 'belong to a social context' in which their links to the hierarchical organization of the prevailing order are hidden, especially from themselves.

Vincent's Marx is engaged in a labor of 'deconstruction' of these illusions. Just as in his earlier critique of religion Marx, following Feuerbach, showed that religious illusions were real abstractions from the concrete human experiences of estrangement, his later theological investigations 'decompose the everyday world of theology of action and valorization in order to open it to new possibilities'.

Of course, Vincent's reading of Marx as faithful to the principle of historical specificity, refuses the transhistorical interpretations of leading theorists of the second and third internationals. According to this interpretation, historical materialism is constituted as a repertoire of immutable laws of social development that apply equally to different historical periods. Vincent carefully separates Marx from some of his most prominent legatees, a task made difficult by the ponderous reality of the institutionalization of marxism. Marx becomes a precursor of contemporary social theory and philosophy, rather than a figure wholly identified with the key universal claims of modern thought. To be sure, Vincent scrupulously shows the differences; his work does not willfully bend representation for the purposes of salvaging a bankrupt doctrine. Instead, what he gives us is a way out of the antinomies of post-marxist ideology and, most importantly, he rescues what is living in Marx for a new paradigm that remains to be developed.

This is what separates Vincent from the post-structuralist judgement that Marx must be viewed now as a historical thinker, whose value has been surpassed by the passing of modernity. Recall Foucault's inaugural lecture where he inquires, somewhat ironically, what we have lost by distancing ourselves from Hegel (and Marx). Vincent provides an answer: we have lost the categories by which to render a trenchant critique of everyday life under late capitalism. For if Marx's major categories – production, value, commodity form, abstract and concrete labor and so on – are taken not descriptively

but critically, we have the basis of inverting the ascribed meanings theorists and scholars have given to them. According to Vincent, we can construct a social theory by *negating* these categories rather than annointing them with the status of ontological truth. In Vincent's reading Marx provides a model for the critique of knowledge and by making the model explicit, can contribute to the social theory of the future.

Nietzsche offered, among other things, a scepticism about history, a narrative of its discontinuities and indeterminism without which 'openness to possibilities' in any situation is improbable. Vincent recognizes that Heidegger can be accused of leading a retreat from the social world toward a private realm of sceptical, if not to say nihilistic ruminations. While acknowledging the partial justice in this attack, Vincent takes this move away from social theory as a necessary strategy in the wake of its deterioration into a series of closed systems. Vincent argues that the social sphere remains 'ambiguously' present in Heidegger's thought.

Vincent's most provocative contribution in this book is his effort to read Marx from Heideggerian lenses and Heidegger in the light of historical materialism. He sees the link between the two in their common attempt to destroy ontology, not 'in order to find more solid foundations of certainty' but to 'make new relations and horizons possible'. One of the presuppositions of this opening is to show the limits, indeed the straitjacket of logical closure. Heidegger's straightforward attack on logocentrism is well known, but Marx's contribution is less well understood or, to be more precise, is typically misinterpreted to mean the opposite. Where Vincent demonstrates that the famous fetishism section of the first volume of *Capital* should be read as an attack against all retrospective historical determinisms many of his followers use this work to demonstrate the reverse.

Even more fundamental is Vincent's deft explication of the parallels between the two alleged antagonists on the question of representation. Recall the 'materialist' appropriation of Marx where, according to Lenin, for example, marxism is a science like any other, whose propositions correspond to an external reality to which it refers.[8] In a brilliant synthesis of contemporary critiques of representation, Vincent convincingly demonstrates that Marx shares with this line of thought a view of a representation as an active process: in Heidegger's perspective, a manifestation of subjectivism, where objects are appropriated and subjected to human will rather than merely reflected in thought without significant alteration. Following

Sohn-Rethel[9] Vincent shows the different path traversed by Marx in his critique of representation. 'Representations' follow capital's logic. That is, capital presents itself as forms of appearance, as a theatre of commodities possessing different characteristics, but also as abstractions subject to exchange relations. Thus, where capital is the subject and object of representation, both of its sides are displayed in different forms.

Vincent's defense of Heidegger does not end with these 'marxian' ruminations. On the contrary, Heidegger, preeminently among contemporary philosophers, has positioned himself outside the social world in order to escape ensnarement by it. Vincent cites Heidegger's relation to the social in his critiques: of history, of technology, of art and politics. But these are undertaken not from the standpoint of action, but from the perspective of the critique of action-as-forgetting as what Heidegger calls ontic activity, that is, activity that relieves the angst of the world as the ineluctable context for being. More specifically, the sixth chapter of Heidegger's major work *Being and Time* is the fundamental critique of everyday life from which Lefebvre, De Certeau, and Axelos, among others, developed their own Marx–Heidegger syntheses.

Vincent's effort in this direction departs from these writers insofar as he makes one of the first serious efforts to articulate the later work of Marx with the whole range of Heidegger's thought and, in this work, rewrites both of them. His rewriting gives us a new conception of praxis not as the active side of a theological process, in which the future is prefigured in *history* and human agents are understood as its instrument, but as an indeterminate relation between action and doing in which structuration is understood as the outcome of the process as much as its condition. While Heidegger adopts a wait-and-see attitude toward politics, Marx refuses this contemplative position.

But although Vincent adopts Marx's standpoint in this regard, he fully absorbs the Heideggerian critique of politics as 'the permanent languor of the social' in the contemporary world. For when political action has become ensnared in the bureaucratic and technical limits within which it is ordinarily practiced in capitalist and state socialist societies, it is a caricature of 'praxis'. So, while Vincent adopts the standpoint of praxis, we cannot fail to remain sceptical of it, a position that draws him, albeit critically, to Adorno who, notwithstanding his own sharp polemic against Heidegger and Husserl, could not avoid their respective influences.[10] For Husserl and Heidegger

stand as the preeminent critics in the twentieth century of the self congratulation of Western scientific culture. And this really realigns intellectual ideology in our time. Clearly, neither the Frankfurt school nor Vincent himself is entirely prepared to abandon Reason as a benchmark against which to spot a new barbarism masked as democratic liberalism. Yet, they do step over the line in enough ways to mark a Great Divide.

The last half of the book carries the theoretical reflection to a wide range of practical issues ranging from labor and politics to art. Like the first two essays – on Lukacs and Ernst Bloch – they represent Vincent's coming to terms with his own marxist tradition in the light of Heidegger. These chapters provide a lively discussion of some contemporary themes in social and political theory.

In the first place, Vincent joins the debate concerning the centrality of labor, not only within marxism but in the labor movement as well. To the famous concept of the fetishism of commodities he adds the fetishism of labor. While Vincent agrees with Marx-critics such as Habermas, Axelos and Baudrillard that to posit labor's generic centrality to human existence is a form of economism, he strongly defends Marx against this accusation. This chapter is perhaps the leading example of a practical consequence of taking the position that Marx intends not only the abolition of the wage system, but the surpassing of labor as the veritable heart of signification and with it the concatenation of production and exchange with value, a cathexis that has thwarted the development of other possibilities for human existence since the industrial revolution.

Vincent extends this argument to some leading tendencies in the labor movement for which the defense of labor as ontological need carries the status of a defining ideology. One cannot avoid Hegel's critique of the sceptical attitude in the master–slave dialectic of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Lacking the master's recognition, the servant revels in his/her identity as worker. Being a worker becomes the farthest horizon of life. In one mode the worker proclaims the dignity of labor as a political program as much as a cultural identification. In the second, the worker draws inward to the stoic attitude, and withdraws from the combat, seeking only her or his own counsel.

Both of these modes acknowledge the permanence of the established order; the sceptic seeks recognition as a worker and all of the perquisites attendant to this accommodation. This is the program

of social justice that, as Poulantzas has effectively argued, alters relations of power but does not transform them. Vincent's critique of the labor movement and the parties to which it is affiliated is a critique of reformism, even its most radical exemplars. In this sense, in the wake of massive shifts by former marxist intellectuals of his generation to prevailing ideologies of 'socialist' politics in which the horizon of politics is the defense of civil society married to liberal democratic institutions, an eminently anti-utopian vision, Vincent embraces Bloch's doctrine of politics as the struggle for the not-yet as a rebellion against existing political as well as social forms. Vincent examines empirical politics and discovers its languor, its imprisonment within the bureaucratically rational structures of state apparatuses.

His refusal to adjust political theory to really existing politics signifies Vincent's enduring debt to the Frankfurt school whose judgements stand, in the light of the waning of revolutionary energy in Western countries, in brilliant contrast to the orthodoxies of both revolutionary marxism and social reformism. What to Vincent is a just acknowledgement of the power of German critical theory to penetrate the secrets of the late capitalist world is only tacitly remembered by the poststructuralists, whose debt to that tradition is no less crucial. One need only peruse Baudrillard's later inversion of Critical Theory's extensions of Lukács' critique of the commodity fetish or his earlier fecund work on consumer society, the political economy of the sign or even the anti-politics of his recent essays to see the degree to which this tradition, mediated by his mentor Henri Lefebvre, enframes his work.

The German referent is apparent throughout the text as well as the footnotes in this book. It marks Vincent as a thinker who straddles the divide between modernism and postmodernism. Yet, unlike Habermas, who holds that modernism's possibilities are not exhausted and, therefore, is palpably shaken by the temerities of postmodern ruptures from the kingdom of Reason, Vincent is eager to explore the not-yet. All except in art where he stands ambiguously between Adorno's brutal dismissal of popular culture as merely grist for the culture industry, and the postmodern refusal of categorical aesthetic value.

Although Vincent joins Adorno in deploring the transformation of art into a commodity in the culture industry, he refuses the leap to the proposition that high art is reserved for intellectuals. He holds out the hope that the labor movement, which traditionally has

instrumentalized all cultural activity in the service of political mobilization, can become a source for popular cultural renewal. Vincent tacitly adopts Trotsky's program, which held out the neces- sity of overcoming labor's economism by making the treasures of bourgeois high art the property of collective labor.

Needless to say, such a program is, in keeping with the singular character of Vincent's thought, controversial in an era when traditional labor culture, much less a new art education, is in near total eclipse in the wake of the universalization of the products of the culture industry. However, like other aspects of this book, they mark the appearance in the English language of one of the truly intelligent, pan-paradigmatic and provocative political philosophers of our era.

Notes

1. Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*. Unfortunately there is no published English-language edition of this major work. But the first part has been translated in Ernst Bloch, *Essays on the Philosophy of Music*, translated by Peter Palmer, with an introduction by David Drew (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
2. The term is employed by Antonio Negri to signify the displacement of the mass worker of the Fordist era by the multivalenced worker who, for the first time since the artisan mode of production, reunites head and hand, design and execution. See Antonio Negri, *Politics of Subversion* (Polity Press, 1989).
3. 'The Conflict in Modern Culture', in Georg Simmel, *Individuality and Social Forms*, Donald Levine (ed.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).
4. The phenomenon of the nouveaux philosophes is perhaps the most celebrated instance of former revolutionary intellectuals turned liberals, an intellectual movement of the late 1970s associated with the personalities of André Glucksmann, Philippe Sollers and Bernard-Henri Levy among others. But the liberalization of significant fractions of the generation of 1968 was a much wider event that penetrated nearly all Western countries.
5. For a notorious example, see Georg Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason* (London: Merlin Press, 1978).
6. See especially Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated with an introduction by Gayatri Spivak; Michel Foucault, *Power/ Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1981); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (New York: Viking, 1977); and Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Post Modern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

7. Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations* (New York; Schocken Books, 1977).
8. V. I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* (New York: International Publishers, 1947).
9. See Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor* (London: Macmillan, 1978).
10. Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (Evanston: North-western University Press, 1979).

Author's Preface to the English Edition

Since this book was published in France towards the end of 1987, the crisis of 'real socialism' has profoundly upset the political and social balance in a large part of the planet. Western capitalism has triumphed in appearance, but it is confronted with a major challenge: how to integrate the societies of Eastern Europe, now totally destabilised, into a new world order whose contours are not yet well established. This destabilisation is all the more worrisome for Western capitalism because a large part of what is called the Third World is also completely out of balance. The collapse of 'real socialism' is not the end of history as some have claimed too hastily, but rather the beginning of a new history – one which will no longer be marked by the Manicheanism of the Cold War, the struggle of Good against Evil. The débâcle of 'real socialism' will bring with it, in time, the end of the 'free world', that is, the end of a system of political and ideological self-defence by conservative forces. It will then be easier to see the world in a different way, to rediscover hidden or repressed questions, and to invent new ones which help to understand the world and society better.

But in order to move in this direction, thought must of course avoid the temptation of making *tabula rasa* of the past, rendering impossible any live and innovative relation to tradition. Brutal corrections and judgements without appeal indeed make it impossible to grasp the present and the path towards the future. Thought which seeks to be critical should take distance from immediate reality and must therefore labour upon tradition to make it say what it has not yet been able to say – to make it dialogue with the problems of the present. This obviously implies a refusal of both commemorative deference to tradition and arrogant disdain for what has preceded us and shaped our present in countless ways. Now, we cannot help observing that rigid behaviours which refuse to look towards tradition or to question the unarticulated dimension between us and it, constitute the dominant trend in the world of culture today. Weak thought is chasing away strong thought because it seems much easier to let oneself flow with the current.

The debate which has taken place in France since 1987 over Heidegger illustrates this regrettable situation. Victor Farias' book *Heidegger et le nazisme*, which showed that Heidegger's engagement in favour of Nazism was stronger than the philosopher himself had admitted, was welcomed with jubilation by some and consternation by others. The former sought to discredit once and for all one of the most important philosophers of our time; the latter tried, on the contrary, to shelter him from criticism with complicated but fragile intellectual constructions. With a few rare exceptions, one being Jacques Derrida in his book *De l'esprit* (1988), the participants in this dispute did not succeed in posing the most essential questions, in particular those concerning the relationship between Heidegger's philosophy and the culture and society of his time. All observers of good faith know that there is a world of difference between Nazi ideological elaborations on the one hand – the philosophical theses defended by the likes of Rosenberg, Bäumler and Krieck for example – and the philosophical theorisations of Martin Heidegger on the other. But that does not dispense us from asking about their points of convergence, their common blindness about the society in which they all lived. Like many intellectuals of his time, Heidegger had a contradictory attitude towards the problems of modernity: he hated the prosaic character of capitalist society, its individualism, and its mercantile spirit. Yet he believed a revival of communitarian spirit could be brought about by playing on the subjugation of the masses by an élitist cult of heroes, using all the modern techniques of mobilisation. It was thus through a militarisation of capitalism that he sought solutions, failing to realise that the institution of a permanent state of war in society cannot favour the slightest spiritual revival. The publication in 1989 of Heidegger's 'Beiträge zur Philosophie', written in 1936, shows that he began to realise the dangers of a total mobilisation on the eve of the Second World War. Characteristically, however, he still appears convinced in this text of the validity of élitism in the face of what he saw as an inevitable decline that must be prepared for in order to make possible a new beginning (the arrival of a new era in the history of being).

Heidegger thus shared certain conceptions with the Nazis and other reactionary currents – the opposition to democracy and the exaltation of the national community, for example – but on many other questions he thought differently. In particular, his critique of modernity, already present in *Being and Time* as the critique of

modern ways of thinking and theories of knowledge (see his text on Kant and the problem of metaphysics), grew little by little into a critique of subjectivism in social practices and social relations and a critique of technology. It is clear that in these developments of his thought, Heidegger moved further and further away from the activist reactionary mythologies. It is true that even before he encountered Nazism, the constituent elements of his thought maintained complex, sometimes conflictive, and even unstable relations with each other. Heidegger was simultaneously or successively a Catholic scholastic thinker, a heretical disciple of Husserl, a man of dialogue with Protestant theology, a philosopher of man's poetic relation to the world and a demolisher of traditional ontology. Prior to his turn to quietism after the Second World War, there was enough of a discrepancy between his thought and the dominant currents to produce fruitful questionings which bore new problematics. In the 1930s and 1940s, Heidegger was an anxious and tormented thinker. (See the account of Georg Picht in *Erinnerung an Martin Heidegger*, Pfullingen, 1977, p. 203). His attempts to achieve a new level of thought beyond metaphysics – a renewal of thought – put him in a different position from those who, like him, experienced the forward march of modernity as an uprooting process and abandoned themselves to fundamentalist reactionary impulses. Heidegger was all at once the rural dweller of Messkirch, the hermit of Todtnauberg, and the philosopher ready to undertake any audacious initiative to overturn the commonly agreed-upon views about consciousness and its modes of labour in the world. Heidegger in fact lived according to several different modes of time: a nostalgic mode of the past, an anxious mode of the present, and the expectant mode of an undefinable future.

These imbalances certainly sharpened his philosophical eye, allowing him to see beyond immediate reality and to perceive the confinement of thought in automatic social mechanisms and the forms of organisation which determined their functioning. When Heidegger asserted that science does not think, he was obviously not claiming that scientific discoveries and problematics are without cognitive scope; he was worried mostly about the absence of reflection by science on its own suppositions and its own paths forward (towards what unknown dimension?), problems that could only turn science into a machine for processing and conditioning thought and social practices. These interrogations, to say the least, remain pertinent today: for example, what sort of labour and what sorts of social

effects are produced by organised intelligence and its artificial extensions? It is quite remarkable that these considerations have played practically no role in the discussions about 'the case of Heidegger'. Police-style investigations and counter-investigations have prevailed over real debate. In a grotesque manner, the mass media have retained only one theme: 'Is it still possible to read Heidegger?' So much, then, for Heidegger's questionings and anxieties: all is well in the best of all worlds. Those who doubt this are guilty and need not be listened to.

Since the open crisis of 'real socialism' Marx has been treated, even more than Heidegger, as a candidate for execution, at least in France. For many people, Marx is at the origin of a monstrous error, Marxism, which discredits him forever after. And of course those who continue to use his work can only be incorrigible fanatics, irresponsible illusion-mongers or else potential totalitarians. Marx can now be attacked by any means at all, without reading him seriously and without worrying about what he really said. Marx is nothing more than a dead dog who must continually be killed. This is a hysterical attitude which speaks volumes about many intellectuals' refusal to think. It is often forgotten that in Marx's thought there is a theorisation, or the germ of one, about modernity, that is, an attempt to apprehend the contradictory sociability produced by capitalism. Following the example of Hegel, that great theoretician of bourgeois society, Marx is convinced that the rise of a sociality conditioned by individuality is an irreversible fact. Of course, he denounces the dissociation among individuals produced by the logic of valorisation, but one practically never sees him, in his mature works, advocate a new organicism (the dependency of the individual on the community). He is well aware that the subject of market exchanges and juridical relations is not yet really an individual because interindividual exchanges are restricted and made permanently dissymmetrical by rigid social arrangements (automatic social mechanisms and the institutions that serve them). But he also knows that this not-yet-individual is not a cipher either, for he or she erodes the traditional forms of sociality and does not let the fragmented and dissymmetrical sociality of capitalism go unchecked; (s)he tends to become a multifaceted individual, autonomous in the connections (s)he establishes with the world and with other people. The overabundance and pluralism of interindividual and social exchanges exist only in appearance because individuality and sociality are largely empty and the ground underneath them

is constantly disappearing. Marx allows, at least implicitly, that social transformation cannot be reduced to the passage from one mode of production to another and that it has something to do with removing the obstacles blocking the development of the qualitative dimension of intersubjective symbolic exchange, exchanges between individuals and between groups, and the constitution of dynamic networks of interaction.

Social transformation must therefore be seen as the construction of a deliberate, reconstituted, flexible sociality as well as the construction of an individuality unburdened of rigid identities and roles that prevent personal fulfilment. In spite of Marx's brilliant intuitions and the recurring expression of libertarian themes in the thought of many Marxists, this is not the perspective which has won out in the radical sectors of the workers' movement. What the latter have seen fit to retain is that the sociality born with the bourgeois era was essentially the law of the jungle and destructive anarchy, and that bourgeois individualism is completely negative in its consequences. It is thus not so surprising that in the peripheral countries of Western capitalism, the tendency of traditional socialities to dissolve has not been understood in all its complexity and its positive characteristics. Many revolutionaries have seen in this situation only the portent of a corrupting capitalist sociality, mixed with elements of decadence from the older order. From that position, there is only a short step to counterposing a bad reality to an ideal, abstractly conceived sociality – and that step was taken, for example, during the October Revolution in Russia and during the period of war communism. Socialising virtues were attributed to state coercion and industrial discipline (Taylorism) when in fact their effect was to check social and individual spontaneity and pose considerable obstacles to social exchanges. Under Stalinism the destructive potential of this bureaucratically administered sociality was dramatically revealed by the massacres perpetrated during the forced collectivisation and the Moscow trials. But even in the absence of such massive terror, in the period now referred to by the Soviets as the 'stagnation', one could observe the deleterious effects of state-managed sociality upon social bonds and individual identities: restriction of social and interindividual relations, their lifeless character, the prostration of people before institutions, competition for the favours of those in power, political and cultural conformism, and so forth. The negative effects on Soviet society, as revealed by the events from 1986 to the present, have been terrible.

It is interesting to note in this regard that a man who took the work of Marx very seriously and grasped the scope of certain Marxian analyses of modernity – Max Weber – had accurate premonitions, as early as 1917–18, of the oppressive and desocialising character of state-managed sociality. Unlike many, he did not predict the collapse of the Bolshevik dictatorship, nor did he consider it impossible that it could function economically. He did see it as an extreme manifestation of the tendency towards the étatisation of the social, present in all the capitalist societies as a result of the advancing bureaucratisation of institutions and major associations (political parties and trade unions). For Weber, the Bolshevik dictatorship was a dictatorship of soldiers and lower-ranking officers in revolt, led by intellectuals; it did not rest on a solidly structured working class and less still, of course, on an organised peasantry. It drew its strength from the disarray and collapse of its adversaries in a situation in which the old propertied classes and the rising bourgeoisie showed themselves incapable of proposing viable solutions for the other groups in society. In this context, the dictatorship, in order to fill the social and political vacuum it had itself created, could only produce, and reproduce on an expanded scale, bureaucratic state forms, in the absence of diverse counterweights such as associations, autonomous professional organisations, and economic enterprises free of the tutelage of the state. The only possible outcome, if the Bolshevik dictatorship was in fact to survive, was the progressive disappearance of the mediations between individuality and sociality, leaving face to face a hypostatised command-sociality and an encircled, restricted individuality.

This damning judgement of the Bolshevik revolution did not imply, however, that Weber was an a-critical sycophant of the capitalist order of his time. He was quite aware that the mediations between the individual and the social – markets, administrations and enterprises, for example – were problematical and could very well turn against the individual. Means which imposed themselves on ends and instruments of exchange which dictated their law to social exchanges were so many dangers for the socialisation of the individual and the individualisation of the social, that is, their mutual interpenetration in interactions and communication, in language games and symbolic exchanges. Weber asked in fact whether capitalism, which had been so favourable to the rise of individualism (under particular and extremely complex social circumstances), would then proceed to impoverish it and even subjugate it to uncontrolled

social exchanges. He wanted a polarity to be maintained between individuality and sociality, that is, the possibility for individuals to take their distance from the social in which they are immersed, in order to plunge back in with new interrogations. There should not be complete continuity between subjectively produced meanings and significant objective structures, but rather, precisely, permanent elements of discontinuity that prevent the individual and the social from becoming rigid. Weber did not really analyse the automatic social mechanisms and arrangements which ossified the mediations between the individual and the social, but his pressing interrogations about the individual's danger of falling into servitude and the danger of social relations becoming barren and inhabited only by schemas and phantom-actions, go well beyond those of Marx. Weber should be an integral part of any reflection about the emancipation of sociality and the development of the individual.

We now know that the 'great doctrines' or the theodicies disguised as philosophies of history are bankrupt and that the human and social sciences are ridding themselves little by little of the great schemas of explanation. This should be applauded and the narrow spirit of systems or schools of thought should be quietly repudiated. But at the same time it must be gradually and painfully rediscovered that thought needs interrogations – that the displacement of horizons and points of view is indispensable to thought, for it must live in a constant state of tension. The book you are about to read, in spite of all its imperfections, seeks to move in this direction. In a certain sense, it was a solitary venture, but it benefited greatly from discussions I have had with friends who share my anxieties and my hopes: Johann Pall Arnason, Sami Naîr and Denis Berger. Hélène Deville played an important part in preparing the manuscript and Jim Cohen performed the translation with great care. My thanks to all of them.

J.-M. V.
February 1990

Translator's Note

The French edition of Jean-Marie Vincent's book included a subtitle: *'le faire et l'agir'* (roughly: 'doing and acting'). These two terms refer to an important theme developed throughout the book, but they admit of no obvious equivalent in English: 'doing' and 'acting' hardly begin to convey the meaning. Now, the Greek terms *'poiesis'* and *'praxis'*, which Jean-Marie Vincent also uses, cover a similar distinction to that between *le faire* and *l'agir*. However, the Greek terms themselves require some explanation because of the variety of different meanings which have been attributed to them in philosophical literature. Without attempting to trace the history of these shifts in definition, I would simply indicate, following Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez in his book *The Philosophy of Praxis*, that *poiesis* is 'action which generates an object external to the subject of his act – literally the act of production or manufacture. In this case the artisan's work is poetic rather than practical'. (This sense of the word, he notes, represents a considerable change from the ancient Greek usage.) As for *'praxis'*, Sánchez Vázquez defines it with reference to Marx's definition in the first thesis on Feuerbach: 'human activity as objective activity', that is, 'revolutionary, critical-practical activity'. Such activity is thus 'oriented toward the transformation of an object (nature or society) as an objective created through active and conscious subjectivity by humans and thus both objective and subjective at once'.

However, Vincent would not follow Sánchez Vázquez's idea that the exemplary form of praxis is human labour. As the reader will discover, Vincent criticises the persistent tendency within the Marxist tradition to fetishise labour and hold it up as the model of human practice. Vincent's praxis is conscious, transformative activity which succeeds, precisely, in surmounting the repetitiousness and the unreflective character of labour.

One other term requires explanation: starting in chapter 3, Vincent, following Marx, refers to the 'sensible-suprasensible world', that is, the world of social relations which are perceived as objective forms but which also have a fetishised, reified character. 'Sensible' should be understood here as 'perceptible by the senses', even though it also commonly refers to that which 'makes sense'. I have preferred it to

'sensuous' and 'sensual' which are also frequently used to convey this notion.

My thanks to Jean-Marie Vincent for his patient explanations of the more difficult passages and to Belinda Dutton of Macmillan for her encouragement.

J.C.

Introduction

In the following pages I have sought to trace as closely as possible the major problems of our time. But I do not define them according to the dominant currents of thought at the present moment, since these are frequently steeped in reactive – not to say reactionary – passion with respect to the recent past; or else they are fraught with disabused resignation to the accomplished facts of the present and the aberrant paths taken by contemporary societies. The abandonment of critical thought tries to wave an attractive banner by 'rediscovering' the individual and the subject, without much original effort, and by substituting them for the fallen divinities of transparent History and transparent Society. But this approach, which presents itself as a return to the past, the recognition of past errors, and the retrieval of the solid ground of human rights, is singularly insensitive to the recurrent crisis of individuality. True, the era is not dominated by the nihilism of the will-to-power (according to Nietzsche's favourite formula), but it does not take much scratching below the surface to reveal that solipsistic individualism has taken its own succession in the form of the narcissistic individual in an era of emptiness – the individual who has abandoned all vital commitments of any significance for himself and others.[1] One could, of course, stress the positive aspect of this demobilisation or progressive disappearance of performance-orientated people who are at permanent war with themselves and others. But it must be understood that the individual freed from grand abstractions is most often guided by what Peter Sloterdijk calls cynical reason[2], that is, an acute consciousness of one's own interests and an instrumentalist conception of social relations. In other words, the disarmament is only partial and relative; competitive confrontation perpetuates itself in new forms, engendering the same old effects of atomisation and separation of individuals. What we are served up under the apparently aseptic label of 'competition', as a solution to all our ills, has little to do with the emulation or affirmation of differences in a climate of reciprocity; it is purely a situation of generalised struggle regulated by automatic social mechanisms (in particular the valorisation of capital). The rehabilitation of the market, that is, universalised exchange, serves to rationalise (in the sense of 'justify') the oligopolistic competition

among capitals and an allocation of resources favouring the strongest at both the national and international levels. From the more or less pertinent critique of a hypostatised view of the state and the bureaucratic-collective model, there occurs a slide towards the apology of an antediluvian free-market doctrine in its various guises, formulated in such a way as to play aptly on the loss of credibility of the doctrines of the workers' movement.

It should therefore surprise no one that the rediscovery of the subject and its liberty is often accompanied by a profound ignorance of the situation actually experienced by a great many individuals. Great efforts are taken not to notice that the project of returning to 'free enterprise' (mistakenly identified with individual initiative), occurs to the detriment of many people who are relegated to the bottom of the social ladder and who are constantly denied the rights which are theoretically accorded them. Great efforts one are made as well to forget that social interactions at the economic and political levels are dominated by mechanisms which usually reduce subjects – who are assumed to be social actors – to a state of powerlessness and passivity, or else to a state of agitation which proves sterile in view of the problems they face. The powers that manifest themselves in society cannot be defined simply as a capacity to act, or temporary power over men in the aim of realising common projects; they grow out of fully specific mechanisms and arrays in which the power to realise goals is unilaterally oriented towards the production of exchange-values and becomes the precondition of powers over others – powers which are both permanent and unequally shared out. The logic of both social and political exchanges respects imperatives which are external to them, and, more precisely, foreign to everything novel and unexpected that symbolic and material exchanges can potentially bear. Power (*le pouvoir*) presents itself essentially as might (*puissance*) and is inevitably perceived as a substance or force which pushes its way ahead without considering what individuals think or want. The political (*le politique*) as a set of autonomised forms which serve the production and circulation of power, smothers or at least puts a damper on politics (*la politique*) conceived as free expression and imaginative deliberation over the social. The political continually calls into question the most fundamental right, that of full participation in political activity and its creative possibilities. It is thus mistaken to remain content with discourse about the guarantee of rights without becoming directly concerned with the conditions by which these rights can be made effective. A certain

tradition in Marxism is no doubt wrong to disdain formal rights and freedoms, but this does not mean that a few Marxists have not been right to scrutinise their actual realisation and their effectiveness in social relations.[3]

Indeed, an oversimplified problematic of human rights prevents us from understanding the roots of tendencies towards barbarity in the contemporary era; these tendencies are characterised by an uncontrolled slide of the political towards the negation of all politics. Behind the over-politicisation of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes there in fact lay a systematic repression of politics of a kind which produces and reproduces itself. The public sphere was emptied of any true form of deliberation or open confrontation, filling itself up with ideocratic pseudo-discourse and with political activity in the form of injunction and administration. Beyond the totalitarian façade, there no doubt lies an underground political life and contained movements of revolt, but this precarious survival of politics is far too limited to prevent the atrophy of the social and its submission to the processes of domination. Political power affirms itself as a medium which transmits apparently objective requirements, in particular those of the reproduction of the state and the economy (reference could be made here either to capital accumulation or to the administrative planning of labour performances as in Eastern Europe). It can thus present itself as a power of management which transposes to the level of human leadership the techniques and technologies for treating material resources and labour products. People dispossessed of politics thereby become the human material of power – material that those in power (*pouvoir*) can sacrifice to its own logic of power (*puissance*), its frenetic activity of total mobilisation and eradication of resistance. The holders of power thereby institute machine-like modes of political organisation which manifest the most blatant indifference to life and death, and incite their human subjects, in bureaucratic fashion, to perpetrate the worst abuses. In this regard, the paroxysm of totalitarian power appears to reflect a combination of three factors: the external sociality of individuals, the subordination of the power-to-accomplish to the power over other men, and the development of technology as control over things, thanks to the control over people and their labour. That is why it must be recognised that the era of catastrophes is by no means behind us, and especially, that the Western countries are wrong to perceive themselves as safe havens, permanently sheltered from the storms which rock other areas of the world. The crisis of

the welfare state favours the gradual rise of anti-democratic currents, in particular neo-conservative currents which seek to diminish little by little the field of political possibilities in the name of present constraints and future uncertainties. The anti-hedonistic tone which predominates in neo-conservative discourse is not a mere disabused reference to the old values of the Protestant ethic, but rather a kind of adaptation, without clear future perspectives, to economic and political developments. The neo-conservatives know perfectly well that labour has lost much of its centrality in the economically developed countries, but they also understand that it can be played upon as a factor of conformity and subjected to the requirements of the social system, as a distinguishing element between those who are content with the rewards available within the current framework and those who are not satisfied with the status quo. In opposition to the abstract utopia of planning which dominated the contemporary world for a long period, they brandish the counter-utopia of acceptance and affirmation of the unexpected, with the present appearing as a field in which no accumulation of experience is possible and which thus reflects a recapitulation of the past and anxiety regarding the future. In response to the deep crisis produced by the failures of the political, they seek recourse all the more in politics conceived as the management and administration of whatever may happen.

This is naturally no way to face the most urgent and dangerous threats to contemporary humanity, in particular the arms race and the permanent state of war which afflicts a large portion of the planet. The neo-conservative orientations postulate a necessary reconciliation with states as they exist, in their unstable hierarchical mode. In the face of the irrational consequences of the instrumental rationality of valorisation, they place their confidence in an overall rationality which is weakened in its ambitions and claims – a rationality which consists of gaining the best possible advantage from situations which are essentially accepted as given. The world is no longer perfectible and must be taken as it is; all that can be sought is to limit the negative consequences for humanity. The elevation of reason and its powers to the status of myth has given way to a sort of self-mutilation of rationality, stripped of its reflexive capacities (the power to turn back towards itself) and transformed into a mere auxiliary resource in the face of constraint and necessity. Reason may well multiply the powers of humanity over the environment and natural processes, but it cannot be a guide for mastering these powers and grasping their meaning. Nor can it claim to reveal the meaning of social processes

and effectively take charge or their evolution, even when it achieves a clear understanding of what is happening in the social world. In order to fight irrationality (in particular, the unrealistic projections of people regarding their own society), there is no alternative for reason except to recognise its own impotence and to modulate the different forms of activity in conformity with that recognition. To reason does not mean to issue laws; at best it means to regulate syntactic and semantic exchanges at the surface in order to reduce, in some modest measure, the contingency of events.

In response to this tendency to reduce so drastically the field of the legitimate uses of reason,[4] it may seem tempting to associate the neo-conservative critique of reason with the themes and theses referred to as post-modernist, which, of course, are deeply influenced by the Nietzschean critique of reason. To make this association is not without risk, however, because neo-conservatism does not seek to replace the reign of reason with anything – it is content with a residual form of reason – whereas the post-modernist currents, in their majority, attempt to eliminate all traces of the imperialism of reason and to replace it with 'reigns without a sovereign' – for example, by the multitude of narrations spoken of by Jean-Francois Lyotard or by the epistemological anarchism espoused by Paul Feyerabend. In the first case, we are dealing with a type of thought penetrated by the idea of order, which, in reaction to supposed tendencies towards social entropy, proceeds from a discourse on the necessity of rationality to a discourse about the rationality of necessity. In the second case, we are confronted with a thought about disorder and social polysemy which rejects everything resembling a pre-established meaning or a unified discourse about humanity and the world.[5] Rationality in this context means only the rationalisation of a particularism, the universalisation of that which is not universalisable – a universalisation obtained by playing on the ambiguities of language games. As a result, rationality has no validity or pertinence for resolving human problems, and it is by attacking such claims that one can find – or retrieve – the multiplicity of meanings as well as the atomised diversity of subjects.

The comparison does not turn to the advantage of neo-conservative reason; it merely emphasises its pathetic character in view of the challenges faced by contemporary society. Postmodernism's sarcasm brings out cruelly the lack of ambition and the petty fears of this thought about order which cowers from any possible challenge.

It is helpful in understanding that the desperate search for order in a world in continual upheaval is a quest without significance other than its illusory reproduction of what exists. The thinkers of postmodernity thus hold up to the neo-conservatives a mirror in which they may see everything that has escaped their weak vision. The merit of the postmodernists in this regard cannot be denied, and one understands why they have been more and more frequently denounced. It is nonetheless difficult to remain satisfied with their negative position on reason, which they confuse, essentially, with subjective reason which dominates in its claim but is dominated in its realisations.

Rationality is not only the cognitive, instrumental and strategic rationality of individual consciousness, closed in upon itself, and which measures itself against others and against the world; it is also, and especially, communicative reason which manifests itself in and through both interaction and the networks of language. As Jürgen Habermas has been insisting for several years, we should be aware that subjective (or more precisely, subjectivised) rationality is a type of rationality which has cut itself off from its social preconditions (language games) and from the dialogical origins of its own developments.[6] It is not the totality of reason, but it presents itself as such and thereby closes itself into inextricable aporia (particularly as a result of the incapacity of reason, thus reduced, to think through the problems of intersubjectivity and the relations of exchange with the world). In other words, it can be superseded because it is a one-sided configuration of rationality in contemporary society. To return to Habermas' theme, rationality's functioning is based on systematic and recurrent deformations of communication which isolate groups and individuals from each other. If one does not wish to fall into the most pronounced idealism, one must seek the origin of these deformations in the organisation of social exchanges rather than in reason itself. This is what Habermas brilliantly tries to do in his most recent works by indicating as the source of these deformations an orientation, predominant in social practices, towards the production of technical-material arrangements which aim for domination of the environment and its utilisation for particularistic ends (maximisation of private consumption, accumulation of wealth at certain poles of society, and so on). Social practices bearing a normative significance, that is, having to do with establishing or transforming norms, find themselves smothered, or at least hampered in their development, although they

are decisive for the deployment of human sociality. Borrowing from Marx's vocabulary, Habermas even believes it possible to assert that practices tend to coagulate around 'real abstractions', that is, media of exchange (money and power, for example) which, autonomised and transformed into regulating mechanisms, impose their functioning logics on people. A veritable decoupling occurs between the 'social life-world' (that of communication, norms and expressivity) and the systemic patterns and social mechanisms of material reproduction. More precisely, the system-world has escaped any real control by the social life-world, and as a result the latter is increasingly penetrated by the former and its automatised mechanisms.

Starting from these premises, Habermas is able to criticise quite effectively both reactionary nostalgia and neo-conservative pseudo-modernity. He is also able to reject the illusions of the postmodernists regarding the significance of 'pluralism' in the contemporary world – a pluralism which is in fact more implicit and hesitant than explicit and triumphant. He shows with great pertinence that the farewell to subjective reason (the *ratio* of domination) and subjectivism trumpeted by the exalters of postmodernity is more apparent than real. It is true that there is no legislating or legitimating reason in postmodern theories to oppose social exchanges and the variations in intensity which characterise them; but the separations, fragmentations and fractures which occur all across the social fabric are too easily mistaken for creative discontinuities, or even manifestations of liberty. The subjectivism which had been chased out of the door returns through a window in the form of multiple and omnipresent agent-substances which, under different labels, transcend the phenomenal world. Thus there can be no real surmounting of the contradictions of modernity, according to Habermas, unless a radical break is made with the philosophies of consciousness, praxis and subjectivity, which would have to be replaced with a theory of communicative action. Progress along that path requires that there no longer be primacy, in thought, of consciousness and the activity (*faire*) of the subject; on the contrary, a concomitant emergence of the social and the individual through communication and language must become a top priority. It is in the interaction of communication that the structure of subjectivity and intersubjectivity are forged, as well as the relations which form and organise human activities. The obvious result is that the social cannot be explained through the predeterminations of production and reproduction of life

or by power and its numerous modulations; effort should always be made to grasp the social as being fundamentally linked to activities of interpretation of interaction and action.

This Habermasian theme demonstrates its great force when it is confronted with reductive explanations of the individual or the social. But one can nonetheless wonder whether, as a consequence of successive theoretical 'slippages', Habermas has not come to accord too much privilege to the normative moment in activities of communication and interpretation. Indeed, what he calls communicative competence is placed under the sign of the regulating norm of discourse, that is, an ideal exchange (*idéal-idéel*) characterised by reciprocity and exempt from deceit, error, ulterior motive or violence. Habermas admits, of course, that this ideal of communicational transparence is never fully realised, but he sees it as permanently at work in the protagonists of communication, as an aim or a presupposition, even when, for one reason or another, they do not take inspiration from it concretely. Empirical communication is thus measured by the standard of regulative transparency, that is, according to its greater or lesser distance from that standard. The incommunicable (or the finitude of communication) thus has no place in communication or interaction; it is not a presence of the world in language, or precomprehension of that which proposes itself to be spoken; it appears essentially as a limit or pathology and disturbance. Sociality itself ends up being absorbed by the tyranny of the regulating norm and is apprehended above all as establishment and interpretation of norms for interactions and the relations they imply. It cannot be dialogue with the world or constitution of a horizon for networks and sequences of action; thus it does not appear as an immersion of communication in relations that it will never fully be able to envelop. The logic of the social thus becomes a logic of the normative (from particularism to universality) and of the obstacles which prevent it from deploying itself fully. One can thus easily understand how Habermas can conceive of today's problems according to a simple dichotomy between the social life-world and the systemic world of instrumentality and technology. On one side there is normativity and expressivity, and on the other, mechanisms and automatic effects that no one can control.

That is why, from Habermas' point of view, the main problem of the day is that of the colonisation of the life-world by systemic forms of organisation which proliferate and overflow their bounds. But he cannot put forward this perspective without relegating class

and power conflicts to a lower order of significance. In so doing, he refuses to see the interlocking relationship between normativity and power in technological mechanisms and systemic processes. The production and interpretation of norms are moulded by the constraints of the extraction of value from labour (a recent example being the implications for Western European social legislation of the drive to make labour more 'flexible'). It is undeniable, of course, that norms are experienced and interpreted differently by different social groups and in different situations, but it must be seen as well that these norms cannot stray too far from the social particularisms produced by the different logics of valorisation (valorisation of capital, of wage labour, of land, and so on). Similarly, power in such a framework cannot function essentially as a medium of social exchanges or as a means of mobilising material and human resources; it is used and allocated in such a way as to favour relations of valorisation. This means that it already begins to crystallise asymmetrically in social relations (asymmetry of the labour contract; subordination of workers to machine systems and management techniques) and that at the political level, it reproduces asymmetries of the same order. In fact, there is a subordination of the social life-world to the system-character of value (or 'real abstractions') because the social life-world intervenes in and nourishes the mechanisms of its own subordination. This means, more precisely, that the social life-world runs up not only against external obstacles but also against its own unilateral orientations, which manifest themselves as communicative acts or exchanges of information in the perspective of valorisation (self-evaluation conditioned by the valorisation of others and of objects), and as rigid norms which protect and sanction the exchanges of values, to the detriment of other kinds of exchanges. Activities of communication and interpretation are no doubt conditioned by crystallised technical-practical mechanisms, but at the same time these mechanisms, although perceived as nature-like phenomena, can only reproduce themselves because of certain activities; these activities are apparently repetitive but in reality they undergo changes according to constant sets of rules. Within a single horizon (structures of precomprehension and apprehension of the world) there is, consequently, a constant play of reciprocal determination between the subjectivism of values and the objective mechanisms of valorisation.

In this sense, systemic social mechanisms and 'real abstractions' cannot be reduced to pure crystallisation of instrumental–cognitive

activities; they refer back, instead, to complex material – non-material combinations in which basic structurations of human activity in its relation to the world may be found – in particular, relations of power and of rigid communication networks in their modalities of reproduction.[7] In this sector of social life, nothing, in fact, can happen without fairly significant movements in the relations of power between groups and in the flows of symbolic exchange around the circularities of reproduction. This means that class struggle is constantly born and reborn in automatic social mechanisms, both carrying them and repelling their dynamic. The social life-world is thus not simply confronted with the cancerous proliferation of systemic processes; it is also directly implicated in the regulated redeployments and transformations of these same processes. The codes to which it conforms in social exchanges and communication (the difference facets of valorisation) subject it to constraints from which it cannot free itself by mere movements of negation or denial. It is therefore somewhat dubious to apprehend the world of norms and communication as a world of liberty and pluralism in a context of universality – a world whose logic of development is perturbed by primarily external forces. The social life-world must in reality obey both internal and external constraints as well as a dual dynamic which gives exteriorisations and objectivations of action primacy over exchanges and communication.

That is why it does not suffice, today, to abandon oneself to dispersion and to cultivate the most apparent differences if one is seeking to attain a true pluralism of exchanges. The mere juxtaposition of monologics has no subversive implications whatsoever, nor can it produce ruptures within technical–practical organisations' mechanisms; it is, on the contrary, one of the conditions for the proper functioning of systemic processes and for their relative independence with respect to human projects and behaviours. The only route towards authentic plurality is the one which allows for the turning back of action and communicative activity upon themselves in order that they may discover the dialogical dimension of relationships with others and with the world of objectivity. Self-affirmation cannot be reached by throwing oneself upon exteriority; it is necessary, on the contrary, to open oneself to dialogue with the different forms of interiority and exteriority in their fractures and fragmentations in order to discover new paths among them and new kinds of relationships with them. As Heidegger keenly observed in *Wozu Dichter*, internalisation must cease to be a sort of incarceration of

oneself and of other-ness, in order that externalisation itself may cease to be an illusory apprehension of the world and an all-too-real 'capture' of people.

It is evident that pluralism, as a multifaceted and polymorphic development of actions and communication, is an objective which remains be attained; clearly, it is not compatible with an individualism timidly and narcissistically turned inward towards itself and blind to the sources of its own action. Nor can it reconcile itself to a society and a culture which are too integrated – regardless of whether this integration is due to totalitarian forms of social organisation or to individuals' mechanisms of adaptation and adjustment to external social constraints. Any idea of perfectly harmonious relations among individuals, groups and societies should be renounced. And if one allows that it is time to do away with the abstraction or the hypostasy called society, one must avoid speaking too readily of a social continuum, characterised by largely invariable space-time co-ordinates, that is, constituting a perfectly marked-out field of study. Society is nothing other than a constellation of groups, networks of interaction and norms in movement; it appears unified only because of the dominance of technical–practical mechanisms of valorisation (or of bureaucratic planning) and state apparatuses. What must be sought for, consequently, is a variable and differential sociality which results from abundant communications and sequences of activity in perpetual renewal, allowing individuals truly to accumulate experiences, broaden their horizons and constantly transform themselves. On these points, the thinkers of postmodernity appear quite fertile – provided, of course, that they do not forget that none of this can become possible as long as sociality and individuality revolve around labour and its valorisation – the breeding ground of technical–practical mechanisms.

The perspective we have begun to sketch out leads us very far from current practices, but it belongs to the horizon of many who aspire to activities freed from their rigidity and repetitiveness.[8] It is with this conviction that the following essays were written, between 1979 and 1985. They do not claim to treat in a systematic way themes which, in any event, hardly lend themselves to systematisation and call instead for exploratory probes. They do, however, attempt to state with the greatest rigour possible that the future need not resemble the present, and that there are still many paths to be discovered.

1 Lukács: Individuality and the Teleology of Works

'Obligation kills life'

Lukács

The young Lukács, whom we are beginning to know better thanks to the work of the Budapest School,[1] is without a doubt one of the great thinkers of modernity – the modernity of a bourgeois society which has stopped believing in itself as a privileged sphere of individual liberation and begun to question its own foundations. In his pre-Marxist writings, the idea that individuality has become problematic recurs like a leitmotiv, above and beyond the variety of subjects treated and the displacements of theoretical perspectives. For Lukács, the individual is called radically into question because he can no longer recognise himself in his objectivations; there has ceased to be any true correspondence between soul and action. There is indeed no continuity of being – continuity, that is, between the subject and what constitutes its domain of externalisation and intervention; the subject is a mere fragment thrown into a broken world, in which objectivity (the character of objects) is chaotic and objects are heterogeneous with respect to each other and other people. Individuals hover at the edge of the abyss because they cannot find meaning in the world surrounding them, constantly hitting up against contingency in the very place where they seek necessity. On the one hand, they experience a hostile, reified, and therefore inaccessible objectivity; on the other hand they cannot objectivate themselves satisfactorily in their works. They are not true subjects because they cannot organise truly significant exchanges with the world around them or move around in a world of objects congruent to them, that is, representing a true meeting point between subjectivity and objectivity. Strictly speaking, there can be no significant interaction between subjects walled-up in their own problems and their inability to communicate on the one hand, and an object-world speaking an incoherent language on

the other. As many commentators have already noted, the young Lukács appears in many ways as a philosopher of existence *avant la lettre*. But it must be remembered that for Lukács questionings about the individual are never totally separate from those about society. There is an insurmountable tension or struggle between form and life, form and matter – struggle for a culture which could be a significant totality wherein individuals could flourish within a community. Thus, questions about the objectivations of the individual, forms and life, are extended into questions about the hostility of the culture of bourgeois society and the possibility of its being superseded by a veritable form of community. The Lukács who spoke about modern drama or aesthetics was deeply affected by anti-capitalist currents of thought, either socialist ot romantic in origin. Early on, he became interested in Marx's works as the possible source of a sharp critique of the monadic individualism of bourgeois society and the demand for new relationships between the individual and society. He paid close attention as well to philosophers critical of bourgeois culture such as Georg Simmel (whose *Philosophy of Money* is a key reference). Lukács was no doubt rather sceptical about the capacity of the organised workers' movement and he remained aloof from its activities, but he can by no means be considered a complacent bourgeois aesthete, closed into the narrow domain of art for art's sake. On the contrary, his thought hovered ceaselessly around the problem of the relations between artistic forms and experienced reality (*Erlebniswirklichkeit*), and more precisely the contradictions which characterise these relations. Forms are in constant conflict with experienced reality; the world of art never truly partakes of the materiality of life, which means that the soul (or human spirit) cannot live authentically. Forms of existence and artistic forms constantly oppose each other and in spite of all efforts to make them correspond, they confront each other in their heterogeneity and irreducibility even as they appear thoroughly tied up with each other.

It would be difficult to attain a greater rigour than Lukács in the exploration of this antagonism between soul and life, forms and experience, supra-temporal validity and current reality.[2] In fact, in his fluctuations between a historical problematic and a transhistorical one – which by no means reflects an eclectic approach – he showed the difficulty of thinking this question through in the same terms that it is raised. In *Soul and Form* as well as in the writings of the Heidelberg period, he does not at all seek to hide the crisis

of values or the disappearance of meaning in a world of sin and guilt; rather, he radicalises all these themes to avoid the trap of false reconciliations and facile syntheses. Art and life, soul and life meet only episodically, without ever really coinciding or associating; the artistic microcosm cannot synthetise anything but fragments of an irremediably torn and broken individual and social reality. In other words, artistic totality is never any more than partial and, as such, merely formal, leaving the essential portion of life and matter – its nourishing soul – to escape. Even in its greatest and most undisputed successes, art is always outside life, in a margin which lies outside the mainstream of daily life and cannot become the basis of a straightforward and universally received communication. In his *Heidelberg Aesthetics*, Lukács points out, in this respect, that there is no common standard of measurement between *forma formans* and *forma formata*, that is, between creation and reception, or again, between production of works of art and their reproduction in the minds of the consumers who apprehend them. The task of artistic creation is to reunify the infinite dispersion of life, but even in its greatest successes it is confronted with unredeemable failure; it can transfigure life but cannot transform it because it never really comes into contact with it. Art and life are antinomies, heterogeneous spheres that nothing can bring together, even when they seem to nourish one another.

Paradoxically, this radical analysis stops halfway down the path to completion because it fails to submit its initial problematic – the opposition of art and life – to a radical critique in turn; this is the case because it does not pay sufficient attention to the problem of individuals and individuation, and thus to the situation of creation in a world of monadic individuals. Lukács sees the individual as deeply problematical in his actions and affirmations. He notes that the individual is in decline but he does not seek to question his foundations as an individual, his mode of insertion into subjectivity and sociality. The young Lukács' blind spot, in short, was the failure to ask whether the notion of individuality itself – characterised as it is by a state of social isolation and a constant quest for realisation and self-realisation – needs to be deeply questioned and perhaps revised.

None of the foregoing should be taken to imply that Lukács was guilty of individualism, a tendency he resisted even when ceding to élitism. The problem is rather that his thought remained enclosed within a very traditional dialectic of subject and object, individual

and society. Lukács understood very early that the relations established between individuals are just as much effects of de-socialisation as of socialisation; however, the individual facing the world in autonomous fashion remained his essential referent. Fraternity and participation are not seen as effects to be sought in certain social relations, but as values which individuals must put into practice (one aim, among others, being to change their social relations). For him, individuals are strongly constituted and structured totalities who suffer essentially from the gap separating their internal make-up from their works, their subjectivity from their objectivity (especially the derived objectivity created out of human practice). The problems of society are in this sense problems of action, that is, problems of the social consequences of mingled individual praxis-initiatives, or again 'non-meaning' which may arise from the pursuit of subjective meanings.

The pre-Marxist Lukács was already stating clearly that what is at stake is not the psychology of individuals, the difficulties of internal life, or the tribulations of consciousness, but rather the engraving of meaning into the world. One should thus not be surprised to see him condemn all forms of subjectivism and refuse to share in the miseries of unhappy consciousness, oblivious to the problems of activity (*le faire*) and practice (*la pratique*). In his earliest writings, he is even persuaded that the advance of subjectivism in individuals in bourgeois society is a manifestation of decadence, a symptom of imbalance in the relations between the subjective and the objective, rooted in the involution of the social world, the predominance of means over ends and products over practices, in a general context of chaotic relationships. Thus the individual he seeks to defend is not the one who falls prey to all the tempests of subjectivism, lost and torn among a multitude of contradictory temptations but the one who, in spite of all these difficulties, is able to master the dialectic of externalisation and internalisation and thus to seek significant works or totalities in the world. The references to Goethe, both in *Soul and Form* and *The Theory of the Novel*, are quite significant in this regard. For Lukács, Goethe is exemplary in his refusal to accommodate himself either to the anarchy of instinct, to the a-social sociality of bourgeois society in its beginnings or to the pure, contemplative interiority of the Romantics. In spite of obstacles and failures, Goethean heroes do not shy away from action in the world, nor from attempts to change relations between individuals and groups and to transform institutions. They never abandon their quest for

balance between interiority and action, motivated by the conviction that the two dimensions can be made to reinforce each other. As Lukács wrote in *Soul and Form*, Goethe's cult of the self is just the opposite of a Romantic renunciation of action or a disillusioned refusal to try to bring order to life and the world. Individuality at the outset of the capitalist era, not yet saturated with the effects of the division of labour or penetrated by market-determined values, took on the aspect of a norm – a standard of reference for judging the immediate, contemporary world. Even in works written after *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács returned insistently to the theme of this earlier individuality which had partially escaped the destructive tendencies of capitalism.

It would thus be no exaggeration to say that the Lukácsian perception of the crisis of individuality bore a retrospective stamp; in particular, there was a nostalgia for bygone days, in largely transfigured form – the 'ancient community', for example, in which people could be identified by their actions. The spiritual wanderings of individuals in developed capitalist society are set in opposition against an 'Ought' or an ethic of works, stronger than any moral perspective. The individual cannot become himself, either in his own eyes or in others', except by his own 'doing' (*son faire*), a 'doing' which transcends the immediacy of a lived reality, the chaos of relations between individual consciousnesses, prisoners of their own solipsism. To be sure, the pre-Marxian Lukács was tempted to move on other paths, among them an ethic of love and charity, but he returned consistently to the problem of works. His move from Dostoyevsky to Hegel during the First World War followed a rigorous logic; with few adjustments, Alexander Kojève's remarks on Hegel's evolution can be applied as well to Lukács:

> In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Love and Desire have become Desire for Recognition and Struggle to the death for its satisfaction, with all that follows, that is, History leading up to the rise of the satisfied Citizen and the Sage. Mutual Recognition in Love has become social and political Recognition through Action. And the 'phenomenal' Dialectic is thus described no longer as a loving Dialectic, but as a historical one, in which objective realization (*Verwirklichung*) of Recognition in the sexual act and the child is replaced by objective realization in struggle, in labor, and in historical progress culminating in the Sage.

Obviously, Lukács' dialectic of history does not culminate in the figure of the Sage. By 1918, the culminating figure had become that of the revolutionary, the man of action, capable of assuming his faults (in the ethical sense of the term) because he takes part in a labour of transformation of society far removed from the master–slave struggle.[3] However, it emerges upon further examination that this historical dialectic which aspires to supersede the antinomies of soul and life, life and art, living and doing (*le faire*), remains in singularly close correspondence to what one could call the classical conception of action and labour, because it is borne by the individual who realises himself by projecting himself into the objective world. It could, of course, he argued that in *History and Class Consciousness* and in later writings, Lukács refers to the class struggle and to a collective actor which is the proletariat, but upon closer examination, it will be recognised that the proletariat of *History and Class Consciousness* – the class which is supposed to become the identical subject-object of History – is constructed according to a model of individual consciousness. As a class alienated in the world of objects, and thus dispossessed from it, the proletariat must find itself again by taking control of the world of objects, just as consciousness must be retrieved after alienating itself.

Later on, Lukács was to distance himself from this conception, so deeply imbued with Hegelianism; but he did not change his view on action and labour in any significant way, as may be seen in his *Young Hegel*. For Lukács, the teleology of labour, that is, the advancing logic of environment-transforming human activity – a logic which presents itself as the deepest manifestation of the self-production of society and humanity – is a key to the real understanding of Marxism and the dialectical conception of the world. Humanity forges itself in and through labour, that is, through a form of activity which can be defined by the following sequence: intention, representation, elaboration, application of the means of labour to the object of labour, and finally, the product of labour. Human beings make themselves but can also un-make themselves, when the relations between different stages in the sequence change place or deteriorate. More explicitly, in the capitalist framework, labour is alienated because in its usual form of exploited wage-labour, it cannot be a satisfying expression or objectivation for the individual subjects who are its bearers. On the contrary, it turns against its subjects by depriving them of any possibility of controlling or mastering the instruments of products of labour. Labour is not – or is no longer

– creation, but degradation, absorption of the most vital individual energies by the ogre of objectivity which feeds itself tirelessly on human subjectivities, without ever reaching its limits. The objects and means of labour escape the control of their producers or users, thereby causing the producers to become instruments of their own reproduction as subordinate elements of social production.

Capitalist society, in other words, is characterised by an inverted teleology which puts means in place of ends, results of action in place of premises, confined in a goal-orientated relation in which the goal seems to express its own will. In Lukács's mind, the emancipation of labour requires a return to this original form of praxis, to borrow the language of his posthumous work on the ontology of social being.[4] Labour must move beyond its current condition of human self-destruction and become a state of permanent self-creation, a consciously assumed relation to the technical and natural environments via an overturning of the inverted relation between means and ends. The direct producers must reclaim the means of production and take responsibility for their own needs by devoting themselves to the production of use-values.

From the standpoint of a certain 'classical' Marxism, there is apparently nothing to be criticised in this conception, which places the accent on labour as individual accomplishment (and there are plenty of direct quotations from Marx and Engels which could be summoned as evidence on this point). However, it can and should be asked whether the labour of which Lukacs speaks time and again does not hypostatise an anthropological premise, namely, that people are necessarily in a dynamic relationship with their environment, even while attributing to this supposition a historically situated, transitory content. Labour-as-accomplishment, a notion he takes over from Hegel and the young Marx, is in fact a mixture between the work of the artisan and that of the engineer; it is a totalisation of individual consciousness. This type of labour is no doubt bound by social conditions of emergence and execution, but as an expression or expenditure of energy it is essentially an individually-based reality. It is clearly *not* crippling wage-labour, cut into discrete parcels; but neither does it transcend the limits of an instrumental relation to the world (a relation corresponding to projects of control over external and internal nature).

In a manner of speaking, Lukács remained captivated by the second part of Goethe's *Faust* or by Hegel's *Phenomenology*, which is to say that for him labour is an activity of transformation–assimilation

of the world, an activity whose basic goal is to enhance the means and powers available to people. This labour is the only path to life and to becoming human because it is also participation in the social whole, participation in the accumulation of material and spiritual goods which causes humanity to progress. Labour as self-realisation is thus an 'ought', a value which transcends individual, egotistical reactions in its form or expression; it must take on supra-individual contents since these must be compatible with the common interest. As Adorno would say, the dialectic of the singular, the particular and the general is not fulfilled here: the singular cannot be integrated into the general or the universal by reason of its particularity; it must, on the contrary, make its particularity conform to an abstract universal in the form of an 'ought'. The individual is socialised not only by values external to him/her; (s)he responds to a logic of valorisation which is, to be sure, no longer that of market values, but does not exclude inequality *vis-à-vis* social values, and thus may involve competition to partake of these, hence the relapse into particularism. An isolated individual is always confronted with a hypostasy of the collective and the social.

In spite of his very penetrating analyses in *History and Class Consciousness* and later in the *Young Hegel*, it must be recognised that Lukács neglected certain essential aspects of the Marxian critique of political economy, in particular those pertaining to abstract labour. Such labour is not, contrary to what many think, a social average but rather, to use Marx's terms, a real abstraction; abstract labour is the result of a series of social operations which transform the concrete labour of individuals into interchangeable activities or individually expended parts of an abstract social labour distributed among the different branches of production according to the laws of the market and the realisation of surplus value. If we recall the sequence of activities of production, we notice that under capitalism, all the terms are deeply modified with respect to the anthropological premise and the relatively simple teleological activity of the artisan or the engineer in the early days of capitalism. Now, however, there is not only a separation between activities hitherto unified within the work of one man, but also a change in the very nature of the activity. The conception and the elaboration of production have considerably changed through the systematic application of science, which is in turn more and more collectively produced, while the labour process is less and less a confrontation between people and tools and becomes a complex of shifting combinations between people and automatised

material flows, that is, a production process based on abstract labour even while tending to absorb ever-diminishing quantities of such labour. As Marx noted in *Capital*, capitalist production appears more and more as the work of an immense social automaton which imposes its dynamic upon individuals, and submits them, moreover, to the laws of a veritable machine-like principle at the societal level. In such a framework, the quest for a 'recomposition of labour' along the lines of a teleology of individual, non-alienating objectivation, offers little more than a retrospective interest. The activity of each individual in particular is practically no longer measurable in terms of product, and is observably less and less applied to concrete objects of labour. Individuals are no doubt more isolated than ever in the midst ot this rising tide of socialisation, but the implications of this tendency for traditional forms of labour to disappear are not strictly negative – at least potentially. In the most highly developed capitalist countries, the historically rising trend of productivity has placed the reduction of time devoted to production – related activities – and hence the extension of leisure time – on the agenda. At the same time, the growing separation between workers and the means of production, in addition to the obsolescence of old professions and skills, widens the distance between furnishers of abstract labour and their production. Individuals identify less and less easily with what has become no more than a phantom of individualised activity.

One should avoid jumping to the conclusion that these evolutions spell a definitive crisis of capitalist work relations; but they do suggest that there can be no superseding of capitalism without reducing the social importance accorded to production. Following a remark made by Marx in the *Grundrisse*, production must become a subordinate moment in the totality of polymorphous, multi-faceted social activities open to individuals. The placing right-side-up of a world whose head is pointed down, or the reversal of the inversion, is a metaphor which should not be taken literally (even if the notion of an inverted world is not metaphorical for Marx). Such a reversal implies a necessary recasting of relations between human beings and their environment, first of all through the reclaimed control over human productive forces, and then via the reduction of the relative weight of production in the exchanges of matter (*Stoffwechsel*) between humans and nature. The problem is not simply to liberate production, but also for humanity to liberate itself *from* production by ceasing to treat it as the centre of gravity of all social activities and individual action. The model or paradigm

of objectivity that we construct and master for the satisfaction of subjectivity must make way for other models of action which no longer fall under the sign of a constraining, one-sided rationality of the adaptation of means to ends and submission to values (Max Weber's *Zweckrational* and *Wertrational*). Society no longer needs to be a totality based on teleological relations and a morality of teleology (that is, on exchanges among people flowing from given objectives, given means and given values to be attained). In other words, sociality (*la socialité*) must become able to detach itself from a narrowly technical outlook which has locked it into overly standardised exchanges and communications, oriented predominantly towards the externalisation and affirmation of individuals who are separated from each other and set against each other by the social bond itself.

That is why the Lukácsian analysis identifying the crisis of individuality with a crisis of objectivation of labour is so reductive. It tends to ignore the complex correlations which locate and define the mobile relations of subjectivity and objectivity; it also neglects the historically conditioned character of individuation as it has taken form since the outset of bourgeois society. It should therefore not astound us that this analysis tends to apprehend the crisis of individuality according to a one-sided view of decadence which disconnects the problematical individual of today from the multi-dimensional crisis of social relations.

It is significant that Lukács, in his mature works, conceived the crisis of the individual negatively, that is, as a dissolution of the personality, not as a positive crisis of the unity of the subject constituted around the will and demiurgic activity. He remained tied to the idea of an individual conscious of what he is and does, present unto himself because he is able to create meaning through his action and possession of the world. Lukács is aware that the subject is torn apart and subjected to contradictory demands – on the one hand, the requirements of valorisation–evaluation of activities in the social sphere, and on the other, those having to do with communication without domination or constraint – effective life freed from conventional morality; but none of this reflects, for Lukács, the objective ambivalence of relations among individuals, the ambiguity of situations in which they are placed, or the malaise, the imbalances and inadequate correspondences between individuals and their roles; it attests rather to an 'anarchy of sentiments' (*Gefühlsanarchie*), that is, loss of conscious control over what they should be undertaking

and accomplishing. Because humanity, at the imperialist stage of capitalist society, cannot find itself in works worthy of the name, it is exposed to the temptations of a disorientated individualism. When people do not take part in the class struggle on the side of the proletariat, they lose themselves in impulses and in the pursuit of their most immediate interests, without concern for the social implications of their actions, that is, the potential correspondences between what they do and the current orientations of society as a whole.

The internal life of the individual, deprived of guide posts among the different modulations of objectivation, turns in on itself in crazed fashion; as Lukács repeats after G. K. Chesterton, internal life becomes the most obscure mode of illumination, that is, a way of ignoring what is really occurring in the surrounding world. The obvious consequence of this view is that internal life must turn away from its demons and sally outwards to meet the world, favourably stimulated by the prospects of a social transformation which transcends it; such a perspective would be defined as a reharmonisation of particular teleologies with the societal teleology. Nothing within the Lukácsian perspective allows us to advance the analysis of what this crisis of individual and his internal life signifies, by asking, for example, about the appearance of empty spaces in the overflowing content of consciousness. We are forced to remain content with the notion of what Georges Bataille critically termed 'positive intelligence', that is, the discursiveness which unifies the heterogeneous and reconciles the irreconcilable in the name of a *telos* which merely projects an outdated past onto a normatively connotated future. According to Lukács, individual consciousness must always pull together its *disjecta membra* in an effort which can know no interruption as long as capitalist domination lasts. But by choosing this path, consciousness can never succeed in recognising the full range of 'internal experience' (Bataille's term once again) which refuses to be captivated by projects and possibilities – those which appear to take shape in relationships with others and in the areas traced by these relationships. The internal life which thus no longer allows knowledge to do its work – the self-enclosed knowledge of teleology – opens up to a 'non-knowledge', or significant absence of knowledge – that of emptiness or bareness, or the senselessness of meanings which seek to fill consciousness. Lukács was no doubt somewhat justified in his strenuous criticism of the 'pessimistic' internal life which shields itself with power in order to enjoy its

own moods within the complacent sphere of egotistical isolation; but here again the internal life in question is characterised by an overflow which retreats from the experience of inner schism, from the disjunction of the individual from social relations, and from the fallacious character of totalisations put forward in the sphere of practice. Internal experience must, on the contrary, be negative and critical; it must comprehend that the individual and his consciousness in contemporary society are in a state of mere survival, their autonomy forever threatened; they are destined to be nothing more than copies, reproductions cast in identical moulds. In reaching this understanding, internal experience can thus accept the end of the unified, unitary individual organised around its own isolation and valorisation in universal competition. This negative experience does not, of course, allow one to perceive the contours of a new mode of individuation or to outline the characteristics of a socialised individual (the one described by Marx in the *Grundrisse*, who enjoys a wide range of freely contracted associations), but it is fundamentally important insofar as it prevents individuals from coinciding with 'themselves' and, more precisely, with their social trajectory. The individual is defined neither totally by what he does, nor totally by what he must or must not be according to situations and circumstances. He may spend his entire life as a docile bearer of social relations but he never identifies completely with these relations, which are external to him.

Lukács, who did all he could to ignore this presence of the negative, or wished to conceive of it only as a deviation from a norm, denied himself the possibility of a straightforward examination of the problem, so important to him, of everyday life (*Alltagswirklichkeit*) which in his mature works replaces the concept of *Erlebniswirklichkeit*. If, for the mature Lukács, everyday life is no longer a disorderly, destructuring encounter of solipsisms, it is also not, or is no longer, a stage on which the deep movements of society are played out; it is rather a surface on which only appearances are perceptible. He is naturally too opposed to idealism to transform inter-individual relations and everyday intersubjectivity into simple illusion or a screen hiding social relations. He prefers to see in them a second-degree or derived reality – derived from the many mediations of basic social relations, that is social relations of production.

It emerges, however, upon closer examination, that this derived reality – in discontinuous relation or even disjoined from the real framework of society – is a reflection which no longer reflects

much of anything, other than the separation of individuals from their own relationships. There is a break in continuity of sorts between the sphere of the social and that of the individual – a passage or leap between heterogeneous spheres. Lukács does not, of course, exclude the possibility that individual consciousness might accede to the comprehension of the major trends in history, but this cannot be done, in his judgement, starting from the difficulties and contradictions of everyday life experience, the reality which causes individuals to live in a state of malaise. Unhappy consciousness must surpass itself and move towards a consciousness of social contradictions – a consciousness which certainly does not deny the malaise experienced by individuals, but which can only interpret it as symptom which does not speak of itself and must therefore be made to speak. Problematic individuality must be apprehended in its apparently most irreducible spontaneity as moved by forces it has not yet succeeded in controlling; it must therefore seek to pose its own problems outside the sphere of its own life experience, in the sphere of transindividual totalisations and practices, that is, in the universality of discourse and action.

The individual who is the plaything of bourgeois social relations can find salvation only in the negation of the sphere of individual 'immediacy'. The Lukácsian dialectic of the individual and the social remains prisoner, in this regard, both to the social and its hypostasis of a certain conception of political practice, and to the reduction of everyday individual activity to its psychological components (which clearly explains why it cannot reach the end of the long chain of mediations). Implicitly, it must admit that the exteriority of the social bond with respect to subjects of capitalist society cannot be analysed as the consequence of a specific mode of socialisation of individuals; it tends rather to conceive individual life experience as scoria of sorts, detached from the social and forgetful of its own origins. Lukács' distrust of internal life and experience thus prevents him from seeing that the emptiness and the lapses experienced by individuals refer back – beyond the individual – to the configurations of intersubjectivity and the forms of interaction which are its bearers. The individual marked by absence and by the Other (as spoken of in psychoanalysis), cannot be understood as an isolated self, even if it lives in isolation, for it is intersubjectivity trapped in ossified forms that constitute it as a subject. Even when individuals believe they are engaged altogether independently in relations and exchanges with others, they are in fact subject to social modes of organisation and

evaluation of inter-individual relations. Market relations and laws of value-determination penetrate not only into people's consumption habits but into most of their socialisation processes as well.

Learning to evaluate oneself and project one's own value in a discontinuous and inegalitarian social context; learning to manipulate imposed social means as well as forms of interaction; mastering certain kinds of discourses about the world via the acquisition of languages and codes – all these are practical aspects of being born into society; but in a negative sense, these processes of simultaneous accession to expression, social life and individuation also eliminate or mutilate the very thing they institute. Individuals are simply unable to symbolise all their interactions and find ways of giving form to all the exchanges they engage in – with themselves, others and their environment, with internal and external nature. It follows that the socialisation that takes place according to the terms of value-projection and valorisation is a veritable progress towards *desocialisation*; and that individuation which loses itself in the stages of a very hypothetical realisation is a kind of submission to the social as abstract universal. That is why the current crisis of individuality – the breakup of its unity, its loss of bearings in social practices, its difficulties in pursuing socially licit or legitimate endeavours – should not be interpreted in terms of decadence, but rather as a crisis of relations between individual subjects and social relations (of which individuals make up the 'primary resource'), that is, relations of society and its presence within individuals. This means, in particular, that social reproduction must surmount more and more obstacles because the system of social relations manages only with great difficulty to produce the personalities it requires. The crisis of society and that of individuals thus feed each other, in a reciprocal process, via constantly renewed imbalances. In this respect, the 'normal state' of society is anything but ordered, even if it seeks to be a normalising force; for each individual, daily life is multiple and contradictory, divided between spaces and temporalities which are often opposed and always diverse: the space and time of abstract labour and production, the space and time of consumption and recovery, the space and time of affectivity, and so on. Above and beyond the deafening effects produced by fetishised and repetitive forms of interaction linked to the movements of valorisation, all these scenes of daily life strike false or dissonant notes within the social relations of production. Consequently, it is quite mistaken to think, as Lukács did, that the perspective of superseding bourgeois society can be

affirmed only by transcending the sphere of *Alltagswirklichkeit*, or by hoisting individuals above themselves and their concrete attributes. The perspective of social transformation must, on the contrary, navigate through a fragmented everyday reality, just as it must deal with individuals who can claim nothing more than a shadow of existence and individuality.

It should come as no surprise, then, that in Lukács' view, the struggle for a new blossoming of individuality in a liberated society takes on the aspect of a restorative enterprise – an attempt to rekindle Hegel in our own era; this attempt is embodied in an insistent and recurrent nostalgia for the unity of the subject – a unity founded on the teleology of individuals and their strivings to position themselves socially. Lukács' avoidance of the 'decentring' of subjects, that is, their displacement with respect to self-consciousness, is nowhere more apparent than in the domain of art and literature, even if it is precisely in this area that the young Lukács' modernity was best expressed. Indeed, in his later, 'mature' stage, Lukács condemned practically all modern art on the grounds that it no longer obeyed an aesthetic of works and no longer sought to project itself as knowledge and mastery of the world.[5] The Lukács who wrote *Problems of Realism* extended his conception of decadence to include modern art; in its destructive tendencies (explosion of forms and genres, upheavals in style, and so on) and in its renunciation of the portrayal of broad historical tendencies as reflected through typical characters, Lukács finds only a surrender to the disintegration of individuality. He thereby refuses to understand that it is precisely in its negativity that modern art shows its subversive potential and finds the means to proceed from the known towards the unknown – in short, to break the circularity of reproduction and become an immanent antithesis of society (Adorno). Of course, art is never assured of survival; it is spared neither by the tentacles of market relations nor by the dangers of fetishism and aesthetic sublimation, nor by the temptations of élitist complacency. Nonetheless, its profound complicity with the individual who refuses to 'be himself' and places no confidence in the guidelines transmitted to him, allows it to escape the trap of conciliation with the real, and thus to pursue the combat between the soul and its forms, between forms and life, a struggle which Lukács prematurely declared to be resolved.

There are obviously no certain revolutionary effects to be sought in these displacements within everyday life and the inter-subjective dimension, but it is certain that they are necessary to the workers'

movement and to collective action in general, in order to escape the fascination with labour and teleology and to break once and for all with the notion that the struggle for a different society must be a form of worldly asceticism – an attitude which, if pursued too logically, can lead to power-paranoia.

2 Ernst Bloch: Concrete Utopia and the Ontological Trap

Society has more and more trouble coinciding with itself. In other words, people find it harder and harder to identify with relations and practices that stick to their skin, as it were, but which seem external and imposed from an outside dimension which they cannot locate. A large portion of contemporary thought bears witness to this situation by becoming a thought of 'retreat', that is, disengagement from social practices and representations. For example, Heidegger's philosophy, after having been tempted by the project of a fundamental ontology aiming to elucidate the structures of daily life, turned towards a critical re-examination of all Western thought, conceived as an expression of the will to power and domination and thus as forgetfulness of its original relation to being (*l'être*). The 'beyond' of the inauthentic present is a sort of 'below', or retrospective outlook which re-establishes the virtues of receptivity and astonishment along with the spirit of meditation. This fascination with retreat, and this repudiation of immediate engagement, are by no means the monopoly of thinkers all too hastily labelled as reactionary, for the same themes may be seen at work in the best-known theoreticians of the Frankfurt school, such as Theodor W.-Adorno. For Adorno, all social exchanges and practices, marked as they are by reification and the spirit of domination, are caught in a pattern of social structuration which closes minds and levels off differences. Society, which assumes the consistency of a second nature, abandons itself to dizzy repetition and reproduction of the Same and identification of the heterogeneous with phenomena already familiar and already codified. Society hunts down the non-identical – everything that might recall or suggest forms of inter-human relations, or humanity's relations to its environment, that are not reducible to a relation of appropriation or forced assimilation.

Practices which seek recognition as revolutionary succumb in their

turn to this omnipresent reification; they shake it up, only to be integrated into it later on. Outside of art, itself threatened with death, there is no determined negation of the existing order, no practice which leads to recognition of the non-identical and to the renunciation of violence against people and nature.

It is quite evident that the different varieties of official Marxism have been scarcely able to answer the questions raised by radical philosophies of retreat or the critique of closure in contemporary society. For official Marxists, criticism of what exists all too often resembles an apology for current forms of practice, technology and social activity. The institutionalised Marxisms criticise bourgeois individualism but most of the time they do not seek to apprehend the complexity of relations between individual and society and, more precisely, the problematical character of relations between a hypostatised General or Universal – society – and a Particular enclosed in its monadic isolation – the individual. From this type of Marxist viewpoint, the reconciliation of individual and society, the flowering of individuality and sociality, is to be accomplished directly through socio-economic upheaval and the moral transformation of individuals (in fact, the internalisation of new social norms). The realisation of socialism can thus appear as a renewal of the values of the ascending bourgeoisie: heroism, asceticism, the cult of hard work and self-realisation in bourgeois forms of social exchange and activity. Sartre saw this clearly in his *Questions de méthode*, but unfortunately he proposed a very debatable solution to the problem, which was to provide, as a complement to orthodox Stalinist Marxism, an existentialist philosophy of practice (and its subjective foundations). Ernst Bloch's *Experimentum mundi* demonstrates, however, that it is possible to question Marxism from within regarding its solidarity with the old world that it proposes to fight.[1] Bloch does not begin with an already-constituted human being who need only be inserted into better conditions within an already-habitable world; he begins, on the contrary, with an unfinished being in a world of interruptions and discontinuities, a being without self-possession and who can only express an 'I-mean-to-say' without any qualification or predication. Humans' non-coincidence with themselves, with society and its practices, does not signify a forgetting-of-being or a totalitarian closure (that is, a submission of individuals to an abstract universal), but rather the frustrated 'loss of being', the troubled state of longing-for-more which is not yet satisfied. Humans are not what they are, nor altogether what they do; what differentiates them from

other beings is precisely their ability to project beyond the immediate and what holds them prisoner. To demonstrate this, Bloch points to everything which goes beyond the given in daily life, such as the works of human spirit: mythologies, religions, works of art and the like – most often involving an implicit transgression of what is explicitly said. Daydreams, like the 'pre-appearance' dimension in works of art, point to what has not yet come into existence but is maturing beneath the sleepy, stagnant surface and thus continually transforming the conditions of action by upsetting accomplished facts and apparently well-established situations.

That is why, for Ernst Bloch, there can be no ideological closure, no confinement within the illusory satisfactions of a presence unto oneself. There is always something which exceeds ideology and the circularity of the already-seen and -known, and which allows us to go towards the unknown by bursting through the barrier of an overly-circumscribed 'now' dimension. The world can thus be conceived from the standpoint of objective possibilities, that is, latent tendencies inscribed into all contexts in which an incurable reality seems to be triumphing. In other words, what is now occurring is only a part of objective reality; it represents only one of the many possible actualisations open at a given moment within the processes and movements which constitute the real. Temporality, in order to be truly understood, must be placed under the sign and the primacy of the future, in order that beyond the stubbornly limited perception of chronological succession, we may understand, as Bloch says, that the dynamic of 'becoming' (*le devenir*) is 'prior' to the past. In this sense, the path beyond the inauthentic present is not via anamnesis or rediscovery of what had been lost, but rather though concrete utopia which fuels itself on tendencies at work in reality. Utopia, as Bloch conceives it, is both close to and far removed from the Hegelian determined negation: close, in the sense that is not an abstract negation, a purely moral refusal of what presents itself as the only possible reality; but removed, because it is not a quietist and basically predetermined resolution of contradictions that manifest themselves in the present. Concrete utopia is not pure transcendence; it manifests itself through the intermediary of a dialectic of near and distant objectives which feed reciprocally into each other, with a constant effect of mutual correction. Concrete utopia, in this sense, has nothing to do with technocratic planning, which turns the future into an expanded reproduction of sameness (through the principle of quantitative growth), nor should it be

confused with an abstract utopia which builds perfect future societies by placing brackets around not only the difficulties to be surmounted but also around what is likely to develop. Provoking fundamental change in society does not mean imposing abstract norms from above, but rather favouring new relations and new forms of human activity in a climate of liberation of human productive forces. Bloch is not afraid to affirm that concrete utopia grows out of the objective imagination, that is, an imaginary dimension of society (*l'imaginaire social*) which draws its strength from its critique of the narrowness or one-dimensionality of crystallised reality.

It should thus come as no surprise that Bloch refuses to conceive of intellectual rigour in the framework of a circular totalisation or a closed system which claims to bring the world of beings (*étants*) under its submission. The system of thought, as he says, is an itinerary, a constellation of transformational perspectives which identifies and espouses the positive, anticipatory tensions in reality. It is a system open *par excellence* to its own movement and to the surmounting of boundaries that thought imposes on its own development when it seeks to contemplate and master a reified present. It follows that the categories of thought which support its architectural structure can only be process-oriented, in tension with and directed towards the 'not-yet-come-to-pass', unlike the concepts of traditional theories of knowledge. Bloch lays particularly heavy emphasis on the category of the 'front', which designates the temporal situation facing us, where questions are decided, and the *novum*, which aims to comprehend that which is not yet conscious and has not yet realised its objective possibility. True knowledge should thus not be perceived as an illusory correspondence with a frozen objectivity; rather, it is a restless expedition towards what is near but not yet apprehended. It involves systematic exploration of what has not yet been questioned; it opens itself to creative experimentation not caught in the protocols of experience; it accepts astonishment and the shake-up of laboriously established certainties. Conceptualisation and reality move towards each other, for concepts are questioned and challenged in the process of surveying and working along the horizon, and the reality which explodes obsolete categories itself exercises pressure for the elaboration of a different conceptualisation. Philosophy as Bloch understands is must be a way of ordering and organising the world by drawing support from ontologically certain truths, that is, references to the permanence of being. His thought is quite explicitly centred on the ontology of the 'not-yet-come-into-being', so that it

may be altogether clear that there is no immutable foundation of thought and practice. This ontology of the not-yet-come-to-pass – the fault or crevice in the most solid of foundations – can only be a constantly renewed incitement to transform practices and their one-sided relations with processes of fermentation in society. Ontological reflection on the insufficiencies of social being and of its relation with nature must shed stark light on the uncertainty of content upon which even the surest social relations rest. Consequently, the upsetting and dynamisation of practices must prevent ontological reflection from drifting into a static form of thought about tranquillity or well-tempered change.

Such is the spirit in which Bloch proposes to study society and to restore its *multiversum*-character, the multidimensionality which may have been hidden from view by ideological platitude. Society, for Bloch, is a crossroads of spatial and temporal discontinuities; the interlocking and overlapping strands woven into the social fabric call for a multi-lateral theorisation which establishes connections among all things neglected by abstractly universal discourses on the social. It is crucial to realise that concrete social formations do not live within single temporalities; there is no necessary synchrony between the different components, no necessary coincidence in time among the orders of succession of socially significant episodes. The different social layers, in their divergence or opposition, do not share a common relation to the collective memory or the social imaginary, that is, the different ways of conceiving the past, present and future of society. This is true not because their social life experiences are heterogeneous, but because the relations between groups or classes and the dominant social relations of production are unsystematic and do not take shape under the same conditions everywhere. If certain layers close to the bourgeoisie are undeniably satisfied with the capitalist present, others live necessarily in the nostalgia of a precapitalist past, while the workers in large-scale industry aspire, for their part, to a different future. These temporal discrepancies induce permanent ideological imbalances which make periods of stability particularly uncertain and fragile. Behind the normalised facade of the social- and state-order lies a society in perpetual effervescence, perhaps even prone to major ideological drifts and displacements which betray the impossibility of a conciliation between contradictory modes of rootedness in space and time or between social practices with different or opposed foundations. It is true that individuals and collective entities shaped within capitalist society are characterised

by their rigidity – on the one hand, that of monadic isolation, on the other hand that of the mechanisms which force individuals to submit to the group; but this separation of the singular from the general and this imprisonment of the dialectic of the singular, the particular and the universal within reified relations of power and the market, are not sheltered from the potential outbursts of the utopian spirit. Neither individuals nor groups are at ease in solipsistic individualism or totalitarian collective mentalities; they constantly aspire to another state of being: to a 'myself' which no longer needs constantly to seek protection from others; to an 'us' which is not founded on regressive mechanisms of identification, that is, reliance on chiefs and negation of self. Individuality is thus in search of a different sociality, one which allows for both intense participation and an aloofness conscious of its conditions and implications (via a reinvention of the condition of solitude). Sociality, which is not exhausted in the exteriority and the constraints of an abstract social bond, tends to create new forms of association. One must thus avoid falling into a reductive view of class struggle which retains only immediate and observable oppositions of material interests or – the opposite side of the same coin – abstractly conceived historical interests. The analysis of class conflict must, on the contrary, take into account the multitude of determinants of the individual and the social, well beyond economic and political factors in their usual, narrow sense.

However, Bloch's enrichment of the notion of class struggle must not be mistaken for a mere cultural complement to the traditional notion. For Bloch, class struggle is above all a profound labour of the not-yet-conscious upon frozen consciousness – the labour of newly developing social forms upon fetishised ones. Struggles over exploitation and oppression are not simply warlike confrontations, articulations of strategies and tactics; they are just as much struggles for new mediations between subject and object; progressive reorganisation of relations between consciousness, practices and technical-social environments; distanciation with respect to blinding immediacy which may impede the formation of new types of relations between humanity and the world. Struggles thus involve the attaining of class consciousness, as Lukács expressed the problem in *History and Class Consciousness*, through the surmounting of commodity fetishism and fetishism of the state. But contrary to what Lukács thought, class consciousness in formation is not an attributed consciousness, measurable according to some pre-established conception. It cannot be defined *a priori*, nor be presented as an

a priori comprehension of the historical task to be accomplished. It is a process of tearing oneself away from everyday routine; discovery during the struggle, of unsuspected possibilities; and at a deeper level, a 're-creating' or re-opening of history, proceeding not from a sudden illumination, but rather from a practical-critical re-elaboration of the whole set of representations of the world and society. Class struggle should thus be conceived as struggle against pre-history, against the primacy of a closed past, including struggle for the renewal of unexplored or untapped potentialities hidden or buried in the past. In this sense there can be no linear pattern of social progress, nor can an unsuccessful present be superseded, without attempting possibilities which had failed to gain validation in the past. The front of progress thus transcends the customary limits of temporality and establishes itself, as Bloch observes, in an elastic temporality which cuts across different epochs. Nothing has been definitely settled because no cards, for the moment, have been dealt away. The *novum* which appears on future horizons may yet save what has apparently been buried deep in ancient times, for the *novum* can always enrich itself – beyond the concretely utopian surges in the immediate present – with all the virtualities which, having been formally left behind in chronological time, still seek to be made actual. The histories and traditions of different social layers may be heterogeneous, and their mutual communication may seem impossible, but these are not really insurmountable obstacles, because the unification of the human world under the aegis of capitalism forces oppressed and exploited groups to make their efforts, and the means they employ, converge towards common objectives.

Ernst Bloch would certainly not have subscribed entirely to the views of Walter Benjamin regarding the Revolution as redemption from all the suffering of the past, but he would not have reflected the idea of a space–time transversality which continues with no permanent interruption to transpose the essential elements of subversive experience from one era to another. Class struggles, like authentic revolutionary practice, reveal themselves to be polyphonic, that is, bearers of 'music' composed in different places, under very different circumstances. They occur and are experienced on very different registers, in non-simultaneity, or in an a-synchronic synchrony, which causes considerations of originally different orders to coexist and combine their impact. To challenge the domination of the bourgeoisie and to bring together oppressed groups around the central

rallying point represented by the working class is not, fundamentally, to add up the sum of material interests (even if that, too, must be done); it is rather to combine aims towards the 'altogether-different' – aims different in origin but common in their non-submission to the self-satisfied present. Alliances forged in political struggle cannot be solid – or cannot stay that way for very long – unless they allow for the fusion of different horizons and temporal structures, thereby exploding the customary notion of contemporaneity.

That is why revolutionary thought has no right to neglect what comes from other places and times and what therefore, obviously, cannot bear the stamp of today's date or originate from the very spot where one is standing. The primacy of the future requires on the contrary that the extra-ideological surplus, the not-yet-conscious, the flattened-out and un-thought dimension (*l'impensé*) of traditions (to use Heidegger's term) be taken into consideration anew and reinterpreted, in order to break down the resistances of a certain past: the past of immobility and the reproduction of the Same. The world of the objective spirit, of intellectual forms and interpretations of society and the universe, is situated behind a facade of serenity; in an apparent climate of gradual maturation of knowledge and culture, the world is in fact full of malaise and confrontation, contrary tendencies of attraction towards the new and backsliding towards the old. This world is to be displaced, torn from its hinges with the aid of a hermeneutics of advancing forward and cutting through tradition. In Bloch's perspective, the progress of human spirit does not occur through progressive or natural selection of the best theories and cultural forms, and less still through successive accumulation, but rather through struggles whose objectives are often obscure, upon which light must be shed to better understand the future; at the same time, these struggles must be expressed according to new codes and conventions to replace the original ones.

In this regard, one should not neglect the influence of religious struggles and confrontations, given their important role in certain phases of history; it would be sterile to adopt a scornful attitude towards such conflicts originating from a narrow and vulgar atheism. Religion is not just the projection into an unreachable 'beyond' of people's unsatisfied desires and their resulting submission to a hidden god (*deus absconditus*) who supposedly responds to this dissatisfaction; it is, just as much, a quest to discover the unfinished, hidden dimensions of people and humanity as a whole (*homo absconditus, humanum absconditum*). This is particularly true when religion

presents itself as a search for the Kingdom of God on Earth, as a messianic quest which cannot be content with the reign of the transcendent Father and cannot reconcile itself to the existing state of things. In other words, one must be attentive, in considering religions, to everything which questions the inaccessibility of the divine and moves towards its humanisation – and in particular to every break from apologetic, static myths about divinity and every turn towards eschatological myths bearing the imprint of human problems. There has almost always been a religion from below which opposes the religion of priests and theocracy, administered from above; the view from below seeks, through mysticism and heretical forms of religious beliefs, to loosen the hold of theology and ecclesiastic structures. Through these struggles, religion becomes an authentic atheism, a secularisation and transformation of anxieties and protests addressed to the divine in the form of subversive practices. This secularisation is neither an adaptation/reinterpretation of religions aiming to cope with the disenchantment and desacralisation of the modern world dominated by capitalism, nor the abstract and blind negation of religion in the name of the struggle against theocracy, but a revelation of the religious–eschatological dimension unto itself, stimulated by the dialogue of tradition with revolution. As Bloch noted in his *Atheism in Christianity*, one must read the Bible with the *Communist Manifesto* in mind, just as one must take into account, when reading Marx, the most urgent questions posed in traditional religious texts.

Without such a vital relationship with the subversive eschatological and sacred dimensions, profane atheism is condemned to die away, or even to turn into a particularly self-satisfied and obtuse form of conservative religion, that of dogmatic atheism. Bloch meant nothing else when he wrote: 'Only an atheist can be a good Christian, only a Christian can be a good atheist'. This formula may be read as an appeal for contemporary Marxism to re-examine its own suppositions, because Marxism, not unlike the established religions, has seen itself as an unsurpassed horizon and thereby tended to become a transcendence which is incapable of transcending the existent. The heresy which was Marxist theory changed into a theory of orthodoxy, an identification with the adversary in the name of effective struggle against that adversary. Against this Marxism of theoretical complacency and immobility, Bloch stresses the importance of restoring to Marxism the mission of theorising mobility and anticipation, anxiety and hope. Marxism is definitely

not a form of prophecy, a surge of irrationalism in a paralysed society; but neither is it a totalising explanation of the world or a *Weltanschauung* bearing deep and timeless truths. Marxism should not be a positive theorisation of society and the world, but a critical and self-critical theory, always ready to displace its object, and revise its own bearings with respect to the object, in order to achieve a new practice of theory. To work within the horizon of the future and to contribute to change in the world, Marxist theory must constantly transform itself; it must repudiate any contemplative relation to the world. There is not only a back-and-forth movement between theory and practice and a reciprocal relation between objectives and the means of their attainment; there is also, in the dynamic relations of theory and practice upon each other, a permanent questioning about the limits of harmony and balance. Anticipatory theory destroys the certainties of blind practice; those practices irreducible to pre-established orientations and institutionalised teleologies attack the ramparts of theoretical edifices. Marxism as unity of theory and practice does not proceed from the pragmatics of adaptation and adjustment, but from permutations and continual fluctuations which displace the orders of primacy; there is a primacy of the theoretical when anticipatory thought liberates energies imprisoned in reified and routine practice, but priority belongs to practice when it shamelessly and recklessly disrupts the elegant regimentation of theoretical presumption. Theory and practice coexist in a relation of permanent tension, not to say confrontation, punctuated only rarely by intervals of armistice. In particular, revolutionary theory must fight the form *par excellence* of theoretical illusion: the kind which believes itself capable of directing practice from above, by decree, and thereby controlling the world. Logical representation never completely imprisons a-logical intensity and, as Bloch never tired of repeating, starting in his *Spirit of Utopia*, Marxism cannot be reduced to a 'critique of pure reason', that is, a purely cognitive theory which would suffice to establish the necessity of socialism. More precisely, the 'critique of pure reason' – or in the present case, the 'critique of political economy' – cannot be understood in its full critical rigour unless it is set against the background of a different ethic: an ethic without private property, made possible by the faults and absences of capitalist society. The new ethic in embryo does not, of course, provide the conceptual apparatus of the critique of political economy, but it does bring into the economic field the elements of

rupture by destroying the illusion of economics as a 'natural' activity and opening the way for other epistemological orientations. The categories of the critique of economy do not seek to embrace socio-economic reality, as those of classical political economy claim to do; rather, they expose it and demonstrate its specificity and historicity, while taking their distance from it. In short, it should be kept in mind that Marxist theory is multi-faceted, in correspondence with the conflictual unity of diverse, often irreconcilable moments: the moment of the 'un-thought' and of unformulated questions; the moment of projection into the future; the moment of scientific criticism; and the moment of being on the lookout, detective-style, for unexpected clues or secondary elements which might shed light on the essential.

Marxism, obviously, has no fixed centre, no hard core of crystallised truth; it is crossed over by 'cold currents' (critical and scientific rigour) and 'warm currents' (the search for a better world) which blend together without pre-established rules, in accordance with the movements and shocks in society. It finds its unifying principle in the well-founded, well-argued hope for a classless society – the hope principle (*docta spes*) as Bloch called it – but this does not refer to any certain truth or historical determinism. The necessity of a classless society does not claim foundation in a pre-established meaning, as we have already seen, but in the objective possibility of socialism. In particular, this means that the *docta spes* cannot find support only in impulses towards the altogether-different and in discontent with what is missing or has not yet come to pass; it must show itself capable of providing solidity to the utopian function, without falling into fatalism, or a reading of social contradictions based on faith. As Bloch was perfectly aware, Marxism as understood in this manner should be able to apprehend, in the objective movements of society, that which contradicts society, transcends it and expresses the impossibility of reducing human practices and relations to the social forms they temporarily assume. It is thus poles apart from a purely moral refusal of present reality, because it must also stimulate the birth of subversive, transforming practices out of the encounter and fusion between objective contradictions and innumerable revolts. The hope principle must become the convergence point of the diverse moments of Marxist critique of the existent, in order to bring to the different wills-to-act the moment of qualification and predication. To do this, it must obviously be able to specify the types of opposition to the existing order, that is, to discover their sources, their integration

into space and time, and their dynamics. The horizon of the future must itself enter into a movement of determination and appearance of new, positively identifiable possibilities. In a more negative formulation, the problem consists of bringing to light everything which puts a damper on the free play of social forms, that is, their determination by non-petrified, non-automatised individual and social activity. The idea is to understand why capitalist society, in spite of its seeming non-directiveness and the permissiveness that some people attribute to it, does not tolerate – and may even openly proscribe – the introduction of a predicate and qualifying terms into activities and acts of communication from within these activities themselves and the questions they may raise.

At this point Ernst Bloch does not fail to refer to Marx's analyses of value which valorises itself, as a substitute for meaning and as a straitjacket for different forms of activity; but he does not apply the full radical force of this analysis, and this creates a blind spot in his theorisation. In particular, he takes very scarce advantage of Marx's developments regarding capitalist society as an inverted or upside-down world in which capital, in the deployment and metamorphosis of its forms, presents itself as the real subject of social processes and as the motor of sociality. Social forms (as forms of human relations) do not appear in their dependency *vis-à-vis* the subjects (individuals and social groups) which bear them, but rather in their autonomy and their primacy with respect to these subjects, insofar as these forms manifest themselves and are practiced as if they were natural and thus obligatory. The introduction of the predicate and of qualifying terms into activities which arise from automatised practices of valorisation, results in a (pseudo-)subject with respect to (concrete) subjects, which are reduced in turn to the condition of predicates of their predicates. The relation between productive social activity and social production is reversed, and locked into that position; the product dominates and imposes its laws on producers. This means that materialised crystallisations of human activity, the forms of exchange between people and their environment and with nature take on their own consistency with respect to the volitions and projects of participants in social life. That is what Marx presents in his mature works as an inversion of the relations between human–productive forces and materially crystallised productive forces (or dead labour), the latter subjugating the former. But Marx's exposition is critical as well: it stresses the incompleteness of the process of capturing human exchange represented by the onward march of capital. The exposition

describes and reconstructs the dialecticity of capital, its movements of differentiation and return to itself (expanded reproduction); at the same time it constructs circles of circles, showing that the apparently self-sustaining processes of capital can never free themselves from the substantive premises or their contents, and indeed trip up on these at every turn. The stubborn materiality of human activities and exchanges cannot be assimilated by any ideal materialism or speculative idealism of capitalist dynamics; this material character, on the contrary, resists and sets up limits which can only be exceeded in complex and recurrent crises. The possibility of a reversal of the inversion is consequently built into the precarious equilibrium of the reproduction of capitalist social forms; concrete utopia is thus in complicity with the tendency for a permutation of relations to occur between social forms and their producers, in this case with a determined negation – the 'return to a standing position' which is neither a return to origins nor a move backwards, but indeed an opening to different modalities of production of social forms, and hence of subjects.

The horizon of the future is no longer determined or qualified simply by projections towards a 'being otherwise' (*être-autre*) which grow out of what is missing in the present; it is filled and penetrated with perspectives of the flying-apart of the closed systems of social practices and forms as well as by the resulting possibilities for reformulating and redistributing human activities. In this regard, the human figure which appears at the gate of the future is not just unfinished man or *homo absconditus*; it is also, as Marx wrote, the multi-faceted individual, rich in relations with others and with the world, and consciously playing upon these relations. Sociality and individuality, without ceasing to be terrains of exploration and discovery, manifest themselves, in this regard, in their potentially complementary relationship, poles removed from their mutually hostile position in today's world. The reversal of the inversion does not, of course, bring automatic solutions in its wake to everything that torments humanity, but it does offer hope for the deliverance of material and symbolic exchanges from the constraints and automatisms of reification. It is the quality of proximity, or latency, that allows us to define with rigour the terms of this dialogue between tradition and revolution which inhabits Ernst Bloch. A future both determined (in what it rejects) and open (in what it authorises) can be set concretely in motion in the present; this future can taunt the present about all its routine and ossified aspects and push it out of its static temporality and logic of closure. Tradition

need no longer be understood as a world of frozen sedimentations, characterised by strict rules of transmission (and disintegration), to be either accepted as a weight on the present or violently rejected. On the contrary, it can be questioned in a non-arbitrary way according to what the potential reversal of the inversion reveals about past forms of exploitation and oppression. More precisely, the reversal opens up the possibility for deconstructing the entire fetishistic edifice of the world of objective spirit, and in particular for disarticulating the whole forced logic which turns spatially and temporally heterogeneous elements into homogeneous and subordinate factors in the theoretical–cultural reproduction of capital. The 'third world' (to use Karl Popper's term in *Objective Knowledge*) is no longer the autonomous and continuous circulation of cultural productions which produce the symbolic relations of men; it is no longer the objectivity and the symbolic links which can be continually held up against the subjectivities which bear them, but indeed the world as it is reappropriated by people who liberate the energy to undertake manifold cultural projects for enlivening practice – or again, the place where new links between intellectual forms and social forms are established. The dialogue between past and future via the questioning of the present (or its false immediacy) raises the question, precisely, of the possibilities of displacement or reversal of the relations between the activities of thought (*la pensée*) and the 'already-thought' (*le pensé*); it challenges anything that might oppose the conscious development of social forms. It is not simply a question of producing new genealogies which destroy the 'being-there' of reified categories and their apparent resistance to discussion; nor it is simply a matter of abolishing retrospective teleologisms; the problem is to make possible, through the reciprocal questioning and qualification of past and future, new determinations of social existence. Not just any questions springing from the past or from anticipation of the future are helpful practically and collectively in elaborating new social categories and forms; the relevant ones are those which take into account capitalist universalism, its universalisation and synthesising of forms of exploitation and oppression, and the resultant contradictory unification of time and space in the world. One could add that it is via this passage through the reified world that the hypotheses and models of transformation forged in confrontation between spatial–temporal discontinuities, can develop into real, tested hypotheses, that is, inserted into the very experience of the world, as Bloch might say.

This attempt to articulate the dialectics of concrete utopia and its determined negation is not, of course, incompatible with a major dimension of Blochean thought which features a settling of accounts with a certain Marxist positivism. But it should not be forgotten that Bloch's theorisation does not stop at a historically-situated theory of the production of social forms, but widens into a world-dialectic based on a very particular sort of materialism, that of unfinished or unrefined matter – *ens imperfectissumum* – tending towards its own realisation. Objective possibility, so decisive in Bloch's conceptualisation of the social, finds its origin here in the dynamics of matter, in its 'movement' of the production of forms, or if one prefers, in its entelechy (*activité entéléchique*). Consequently, the experience of the world is defined as the 'becoming-a-subject' of nature and matter. The social subject to be born, and the process by which this birth occurs, can be interpreted only as the extreme outcome, the furthest point, of a movement which involves all nature. The 'what-impulsion' in search of its 'this-ness' refers not only to mutilated subjects anxious to find a way into society which removes them from atrophied relations with themselves, others and the world; it refers as well to the imperfection of the world, the failings of its modes of appearance (*Erscheinen*) or of 'making its appearance'. Here we see clearly what Bloch is able to criticise in deterministic and positivistic conceptions of nature: the reduction of matter to a set of fixed and quantitative relations, a dead 'in-itself' (*un 'en-soi' mort*) which is no doubt resistant, but only very weakly so, to humanity. Against this, he argues the impossibility of a determinism pushed to its outer limits; in other words, object-ness or matter are not insignificant substrata for subjective activities (any more than they are mere correlatives of consciousness). In nature as in society, there are subjects at work, seeking to overcome their 'not-yet'-ness. Thus the reconciliation of man with nature must be conceived not as an absorption of natural objectivity by human subjectivity but as the function – the reciprocal fecundation – of subjectivities in development.

Bloch, it is true, did not go so far as to say that this realisation of the world is certain to succeed; he admitted that self-consuming passion – the impulsion which does not find its 'this' – may lead to nothingness and total vanity. However, the circumscribing of the world within this alternative between the tendencies towards success and towards catastrophe (temporary interruptions being, of course, secondary) poses a definitive problem because it surreptitiously

restores a finalism or teleology that Bloch thought he could avoid. Indeed, if one wanted to go any further than to observe a relative indeterminacy of nature, one would be obliged to impose on nature a meaning – a 'sense' or a 'non-sense' – which is one way of attributing it a destiny. True, Bloch affirms that 'the beginning is at the end', that is, the natural world is in suspension, but he is forced to add that it is agitated by 'utopian tides' which are the natural complement to 'concrete utopias' found in society. He thereby places the theme of 'the humanisation of nature and the naturalisation of humanity', taken from the young Marx, under the sign of anthropomorphism. The objective-real hermeneutic which claims to reveal what the allegories or codes of the natural world have to tell us, are modelled in reality after the hermeneutic which decodes the utopian pre-appearance in society. It places itself in a context in which the goals of man and nature – identical in tendency – correspond to the identity between being and thought, as the theologian Alfred Jäger has pointed out quite well. There is a 'co-productiveness' of nature, that is, participation of nature in human history, because there is no deep affinity between coded material processes and difficult-to-decode – or not-yet-decoded – social processes.

In any event, Bloch finds himself, thanks to this idea of the identity-to-come (the unattained goal), in the framework of a dialectic of the finite and the infinite, or of unfulfilledness and plenitude which tends to put the infinity of Reason (the open manifestation of utopia) at the beginning and at the end of human and natural processes. The ontology of the not-yet, rather than functioning as a warning signal against the ontological temptation, has closed in on itself and reveals itself to be an ontology of utopian Reason which can eventually explain and classify everything in nature and society, to the detriment of the non-identical and the non-conceptual. From this point of view, it is no exaggeration to state that Bloch's thought is constantly mired in deep contradictions, torn between its will to affirm the rights of a-logical intensities and its tendency to submit the non-logical to teleologies of a conceptual order. We may note in particular that the qualitative natural teleology that he applies to extra-human realities prevents him from analyzing, in their full complexity, the dynamics of relations between social forms and forms of human relationships with nature. The 'materialist' solution borrowed from a certain Aristotelian tradition (from Aristotle to Vico) masks, so to speak, the materiality of relations between humanity and nature. It covers up what one could also call the

material and supra-sensible character of exchange relations between humans and nature, if it is kept in mind that there is no direct apprehension of nature by people, but rather an entanglement of human forms of comprehension and the initial grasping of the object with the modes of integration and blending of natural processes into social forms. Indeed, there is a social production of nature, and more precisely of natural forms, both parallel to the reproduction of social forms and within the reproduction of these forms. This means, in particular, that there is no clear-cut division between society and nature, or between humanity and matter, but rather an elaboration and permanent revolution of the natural starting from the materials left by previous generations and from the questions raised by new social practices.

The history of nature can thus not be separated from the production of natural forms as forms of grasping and making contact with the natural. The temporalities and spatial modulations of the natural element or of materiality are clearly not reducible to temporal and spatial manifestations of society, but in order truly to perceive this association – variable in its degree of distance and discordance, nearness and harmony – and in order to receive and accept materiality in its non-sociality, one must further understand that the mode of production of social forms and natural forms can yield the latter as forms of separation between humanity and materiality, that is, as forms which negate the differences or the non-conformity of the natural-material dimension. In this context, objectivation (the encounter of the social and the natural) appears and develops as a subjective projection of the social – a unilateral annexation of material processes which leaves aside many determinations of practices. This double process of objectivation and the obscuring of other possibilities has no doubt reached its culmination in capitalist society, which transforms the material-natural into a sphere of valorisation and exploitation. The knowledge accumulated in the vast domain of nature grows considerably, but the relationships with the natural become more and more utilitarian (searching for natural resources and for places and means for the recovery of labour-power); these relations, in other words, make any comprehension of the human-natural metabolism as a relationship-in-process increasingly difficult, with implications for many form-producing activities. The natural-material dimension gains autonomy, takes on the consistency of indifferent matter, passively receptive or passively resistant in the face of technical human operations of valorisation;

and just as passively, matter is instilled into the play of material productive forces which submits people to its yoke.

Without claiming to exhaust the question, we may consequently ask whether, in its future-oriented outlook, Bloch's thought is attentive enough to the finite character of humanity, temporality and history, and whether it does not seek to jump with excessive ease over certain barriers which cannot in reality be crossed at all. Does it not cede to the temptation, in its dialectic of Nature as subject, to claim possession of the absolute, in the image of a divine-human subject? Does it not remain prisoner of the projections of subjective consciousness, that is, forever falling short of recognising the inventive character of communicative relations among people and the qualitative leaps these relations are actually able to make, in their finite condition to be sure, as opposed to the pseudo-infinity of the solipsistic confrontation between subject and object?

3 Heidegger with Marx: Politics in the Element of Finitude

I

One cannot understand Heidegger and his supposed fixation on archaic themes – his obsession with the origins of thought – unless one places him in the more general context of retreat from the customary modes of thought. Heidegger and a series of other philosophers no longer want to adhere to the norms of a theoretical rationality which refuses to pose radical questions about itself. The activity of 'thinking well' in order to 'act well', according to the customary logic and organisation of the internal and external world, is precisely what they refuse to engage in with blind satisfaction. There is no innocent relation of thought to the world, no mastery of objectivity which can avoid engaging in questions which go well beyond the problematic of knowledge about the 'obvious' aspects of subjectivity and objectivity – thought and reality – and the commonly admitted boundaries between the thinkable and the unthinkable, the real and the unreal. The notion of humanity itself is, in this respect, problematical because the dialectic of theory and practice, externalisation and internalisation, itself becomes suspect in what constitutes its basic core, the affirmation of the subject through its works and its actions.

This movement of rational thought retreating from itself cannot, of course, be dissociated from what is happening in society. It is the disengagement of certain bourgeois strata (especially intellectuals) from social practices which leads to the different forms of disenchantment first theorised by Max Weber. The search for meaning in the social world, starting with its themes, its instruments and its points of application for action (or praxis) becomes problematical. The meaning one thinks one is producing through the confrontation of ends and means, individual and social considerations, in fact cuts a path towards non-meaning, towards a society which escapes from whatever meanings its members try to assign to it. Individual and society, subject and object, theory and practice entertain relations

which have as much to do with incoherence as with coherence, as much with inconsistency as with consistency; in other words, one can only find meaning, coherence and consistency in extra-human social mechanisms (although these are set within interindividual relations and within human relations to the environment).

It should nonetheless be noted that the thinkers associated with this movement of retreat (Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Musil, and so on) do not, for the most part, take into account the social backdrop. What interests them more fundamentally are the errors in the orientation of thought (or theory, or knowledge) which may in their view be responsible for the 'failed' relationship of humans with the world. Their way of posing the problem is quite limited and one-sided, but it can nonetheless be very fruitful because of its refusal to bow to theoretical compromise, its urge to go beyond the different varieties of post-Kantian criticism which only refine the traditional instruments of knowledge without digging at their weaknesses. Heidegger's phenomenological destruction, which is basically a critical deconstruction of the history of Western thought, thus allows us to ask about thought prior to thought, that is, the structures of pre-comprehension which determine and orient knowledge. It also opens the way for a phenomenology of daily life, which attacks the world of fixed, frozen meanings – substantial beings (*étants*), cut off from their deep connections with *Dasein* (or human presence and its being-in-the-world). The world of the physical, or the *res extensa* of Descartes, but also the daily world of the 'they' (*Das Man*) subjected to the Other and to reification, may thus be stripped of their false substantiality and placed in relation with what underlies them, below the level of appearance. The dialectic of subject and object, in this context, loses all its founding or originating character, because it appears as a derivation of structures of the being-in-the-world ('thrown-ness', virtuality, the anxiety of being-ahead-of-oneself, discourse), and not as a simple manifestation of a conscience which floats above the world and knows it.[1] The problem of temporality itself takes on a very particular aspect: it can no longer be reduced to the problem of linear, cumulative time, in the simple continuity of an abstract infinity, lacking in precise contours; it is revealed – beyond customary views on the successiveness of the before, the during and the after – as a problem of making the temporal modes (*Ekstasen*), past, present and future, relate and interpenetrate under the sign of the future and the incessant modifications it occasions for the

'what was' (*Gewesenheit*) and the 'what is' at present. Chronological time, as an image of static eternity to which inauthentic life adapts according to the public space of the 'they' – a derivation in fact from more originary structures – only masks the temporality of a being-for-death, which is possible only through death and finiteness; that is, it discovers in death and finiteness its own possibility and its authenticity. On the contrary, any challenge of linear succession, that is, of the 'now' as a moment of eternity, brings out by contrast, the consequence of the *Dasein* and its existence, its imprisonment in a world of the present-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) dominated by relations among substances; by abrupt disjunctions between subject and object, thought and matter, and especially, by a subjectivism which leaps into an infinite quest for control over the world of beings, which are reduced to beings drawn into interminable chains of reciprocal conditioning.

This Heideggerian conception of authenticity and finite temporality in being-for-death has been the subject of much mockery; many have attributed to it an unhealthy attraction to morbidity and nothingness, but these notions are utterly groundless. Such over-hasty criticisms have hampered comprehension of some of the strongest points of contemporary thought's retreat into itself, in particular the taking of distance from the social meanings inscribed in the objects and relations of daily life; the attempt to release thought from its fascination with an objectivity present only for subjectivities; the retreat from the over-fullness and the agitation of a world of will-affirmation and action; the refusal to pursue meaning in activity (*le faire*) and creativity as a frantic search for self-realisation. One should not underestimate the revolutionary implications of revealing the will to power or the 'will-to-will' as a one-sided relation to the word and as a relation of domination which escapes all control, feeds on its own automatisms, and can thus only present itself as an eternal return of the Same, that is, infinite circularity and repetition. The world, indeed, appears or presents itself to the will-to-will only as a set of values to be created or seized hold of in order to allow subjects to have the illusion of control. Truth appears thus to reside only in the conformity of the object-world to the ego-logical aims of human beings; it is not, or is no longer, an openness to what is not immediately given, an illumination of what is obscure or covered-up to the unattentive or merely evaluative behaviour. This type of truth ignores the secret history of being – that which is to be found beyond the vision of

self-consciousness, beyond totalising self-presence, and which alone can state that contemporary humanity does not coincide with itself or with its own relations, that it is at once beneath and beyond its own mode of registering or inscribing itself in the world of the given moment. Set against this sort of truth which can be summed up as – or reduced to – a correspondence obtained in a climate of force and violence, between the spirit and the thing, or as an orientation in an unknown direction, the questioning with no precise goal of Heideggerian thought appears as the will to preserve the possibility of apprehending what is refused by an exclusive fixation on everything that is given or that presents itself as transparent to consciousness. Phenomenological elucidation of daily experience (*Alltäglichkeit*) is not to be dismissed as a simplistic and demagogic means of valorising the rights of subjectivity; it reverses or subverts the point of view of the over-full in order to make manifest the vacuity, the lack-of-being (*Mangel*) which characterises being-in-the-world of contemporary humanity.

Of course, we cannot accept the existential analytical procedure of *Being and Time* as a basic formulation or a preparatory step towards a fundamental ontology with transhistorical validity. In spite of all the ambiguities and impasses into which it has led, Heidegger's thought itself does not propose to lead us in this direction because it presents itself as a movement beyond onto-theology and metaphysics, that is, a challenge to the opposition-complementarity between the spatial and temporal world of the *res extensa* and the world of *res cogitans* or intelligibility – in other words, an opposition-complementarity between second-order substances and fundamental ones. Heidegger's notion of the forgetting-of-being rests on deeply ambivalent analyses, but its manner of turning its attention deliberately away from the energy-investments of individuals in the current forms of social interaction (libidinal investments, cognitive ones, and so forth), reflects a more and more critical relation between individual and society, individuation and socialisation, subjectivity and objectivity. The movement of retreat from the public sphere and disengagement from social practices may of course lead to a reactionary solipsism, but it is also possible, drawing support from the analyses of being-with-others (*Mitsein*), to make of these forms of retreat the initial moments of a critical re-examination of sociality and the hypostases of the collective and the individual. Such a critique of the everyday condition of intersubjective relations, relations proper to the being-in-the-world of the *Dasein*, is by no means a secondary

aspect of the questioning of capitalist society (and contemporary societies more generally), but rather the necessary condition for an effective critique of the social relations of production taken in their totality and in their separation–derivation from the structures of everyday life (from the most diverse interindividual exchanges to the relations with the present-at-hand. Capitalist sociality is not only the connection–opposition of social categories with divergent interests and the abstract affirmation of social principles (property, capital, and so on) above the heads of those who make them vital; it is also composed of a myriad of capillary networks which link individuals to one another and to objects, according to very particular modalities, and, significantly, in a state of forgetfulness of the many-sidedness of these connections and relations. The sleep-walking character of everyday life, the flight at every instant from consciousness of the condition of immersion and dispersion in the world of values – these, too, are elements of capitalist reproduction, which is also necessary for the renewal of the will-to-will and its repetitive universe.

Marxism, in its predominant form, has refused up to now to recognise these critical potentials in existential analysis and its extensions in the work of the 'mature' Heidegger. To explain this refusal, it is all too easy to implicate the dogmatic tendencies of Stalinist origin, but one should not be too quick to absolve the Marxist tradition in general, because it has a major blind-spot, that is, its tendency to engage itself heavily in the social forms of the same historically situated world that it intends to supersede or destroy. Even as Marxism calls for replacement of capitalist social relations, it shares many values with the world it opposes. As inspirer of the workers' movement, it defends – or believes it is defending, against the bourgeoisie – the exemplary value of labour, that is, the decisive contribution of labour to the maintenance or the reinforcement of social bonds. On one side, it portrays a bourgeoisie with its taste for money and enrichment, pillage and exploitation; on the other, the proletariat and other oppressed layers who carry forward the essential activity of creating the wealth of society and reacting in class solidarity to events and to the unknown. This ingenuous dichotomy in the presentation of the class struggle clearly neglects the fact that the bourgeoisie itself is no stranger to the values brandished against it, and that at certain historical phases of its existence, it has paid extravagant tributes to the work ethic and to the ideal of the common good which is thought to result from individual effort. It might even be argued that the bourgeoisie surrenders to the pleasures

of parasitism and sloth, prodigality and neglect of the future, only once it has exploited its own internal resources of energy and will. That is why the moralistic critiques of the bourgeoisie issuing from the workers' movement, the latter's attachment to what have been called 'Victorian' conceptions, and the very idea of the liberation of society through labour, cannot be taken as manifestations of the moral superiority of the workers over the bourgeoisie, but merely as a reflected image of the world criticised upon the very people who protest against it.

In a remarkable study, the Italian Communist historian Ernesto Ragioneri has shown how, at the turn of the century, the German social-democracy had succumbed, without realising it, to a veritable cult of labour.[2] Since then, this tendency has only grown more serious, with the development of what could be called, without exaggeration, a theology of work and labour in the Communist countries and parties. Wage labour, and with it everything favouring the quantitative growth of goods and production in general is considered implicitly if not explicitly, as the basis on which society as a whole can be reorganised. We are thus placed before the paradox of an emancipatory movement which claims to suppress capital even while preserving what it draws its nourishment and strength from: labour as it has developed since the industrial revolution. Naturally, one cannot forget that the Marxist tradition, as opposed to the Lasallean or Fabian versions of socialism, demands the suppression of wage-labour and exploitation, and therefore that work is not totally unproblematic. However, this has not prevented Marxism from portraying the transformation of wage-labour in altogether idyllic hues. The liberated activity of the future appears as a form of labour no longer subjected to undue constraints and no longer applied to objects in the aim of producing surplus-value. Its goal would no longer be an accumulation of commodities and wealth, but the maximal production of use-values for the satisfaction of human needs. The perspective outlined is no longer that of valorisation in the capitalist sense of the term but it does continue to express the themes of the extraction of value from scarce resources and the primacy of production and consumption over other social activities. The idea, dear to Marx, of a socialist society which would develop productive forces superior to those of capitalist society, is interpreted here in the very narrow sense of qualitative progress of *material* productive forces – whereas Marx's writings allude quite specifically to *human* productive forces and the potential for qualitative progress

that their development holds. The restructuring of the social world, conceived essentially as a new organisation of productive forces rather than as re-deployment and transformation of these forces, strongly resembles a reappropriation of present society by those who are today dispossessed, but without any major upsetting of the foundations of this society. It is in this sense that the majority of the workers' movement is caught, despite itself, in a tendency to espouse the very life-forms of the world it means to condemn. Neither intersubjective relations, nor the relations of individuals to the forms of interaction and social relations, nor the forms of collective and individual action, not the customary conceptions of self-realisation by self-production – none of these themes is examined in a critical light or considered to pose a problem. The characteristic relations of capitalist society are not understood and analyzed in their full, chain-like system of constraints and their inexorable logic at every level of society. The impulse has been, rather, to distinguish the overarching forms of organisation, seen as irrational and in need of transformation, from the world of everyday life and individual experience, which remains largely untouched by critique. At the very moment when the urgent question of retreat and disengagement begins to be posed, the Marxist tradition, and with it a decisive portion of the organised workers' movement, continues to wave its old banners and remain locked in a game of attraction and repulsion, imitation and competition, with the dominant class.

Should we then conclude that the question is settled and admit, with the Frankfurt School, that Marx and Marxism are secretly branded with the positivism they claimed to reject? Can we say – in more Heideggerian terms – that Marxism is incapable of understanding the essence of technology and can discern nothing more in it than an instrumental relation to the environment? In other words, is Marxism unable to question anything that presents itself as an unproblematic relation of means to ends? Such a judgement would indeed be in tune with current intellectual trends, but it would also neglect some of the strongest and most original developments in Marx's thought, particularly during his period of maturity. In his *Letter on Humanism* Heidegger accuses Marx and Marxism of understanding humanity only as self-production, and of seeking in man a kind of demiurge or spirit which takes hold of the world of beings. This reproach is justified only if one limits oneself to Marx's Hegelian-inspired conception of the *Manuscripts of 1844* and other works of the youthful period. The concept of praxis, which in the

Theses on Feuerbach becomes a key to the comprehension of society, moves well beyond the problematic of self-production of humanity through its control over the surrounding world. In the works that pivot on the conceptual complex set out in the *Critique of Political Economy*, the activity of production, although indispensable to all social life, loses its explanatory privilege and becomes a problem in itself, requiring elucidation in turn.

Labour as we know it today is not a trans-historical reality or the manifestation of a natural tendency for humans to engage in activity; it cannot be apprehended with the aid of a few simple notions such as instrument of labour, object of labour and product of labour, as related to the person performing the labour. As bare, unadorned labour, generalised throughout society, it manifests itself as an abstract labour which arrogantly ignores its supporting foundations in concrete labour (bearing concrete characteristics and objectives) and individuals. It should thus be apprehended as the culmination of a whole series of social operations which equalise their labours so that they can become the means of valorisation of capital via the production and creation of commodities. Labour, says Marx, takes on the form of value; it is not as a primary teleological activity that it receives social sanction. The labours of different individuals as components of total social labour have as their essential objective the expanded reproduction of capital – a goal external to individual goals or wills; it utilises, to this effect, means possessed as capital which transcend or surpass individual skills and abilities. The labour process as socialised by capitalism is less an active combination of multiple factors than a process of separation – separation among workers first of all, and then between workers and the means of production and between workers and their product. This type of labour, which favours the perpetuation of self-valorising value (capital), unites individuals in social production only to divide and atomise them, effectively reducing them to character-masks or functional furnishers of support to developments they can in no way control, even if they believe themselves to be controlling the circumstances before them and the material at their disposal.

It is therefore quite evident that technology (or more generally, the division of labour in factories and other enterprises) cannot be apprehended as a socially neutral set of procedures (simple correlations between concrete ends and the concrete means for achieving them). The capitalist use of machines described by Marx in *Capital* goes well beyond an adaptation of means to ends (production of exchange

values and use values) in the framework of large industry; it is in fact an intricate combination of material production procedures with the sensible-suprasensible process of valorisation of labour products. Capitalist technology is not just the optimal adjustment of means to ends, that is, the pursuit of lesser costs starting from known parameters; it is also, and especially, the setting-up of socially conditioned relations between agents and conditions of social production. The technological relation today has little to do with what is presented as, that is, a constant readjustment of the modes of utilising human and material resources; it is, at bottom, a social relation to the objective world involving the subordination of a decisive portion of society. From Marx's viewpoint, the essence of technology overflows the bounds of technology itself, as Heidegger himself would have said; however, this overflow does not indicate a pure deviation of thought and action, or an historical occurrence to be imputed to the metaphysics of the Western world and the development of the will to power, but indeed a loss of control of society over the instrumental relations with its environment. There is not only an invasion of the realm of ends by that of means and an absorption of ends into a logic of production for production's sake, for the means themselves lose their capacity to remain pure instruments in the service of directly expressed needs; the means adopted are those dictated by the criteria of valorisation, or values which transmit value into the very moments of their utilisation by labour power. The introduction of technological innovations does not flow functionally from criteria of efficiency measured in terms of lessened hardship in carrying out labour or maximal satisfaction for the greatest number of people; it is a function, rather, of the accumulation of capital, its profitability, and the reproduction of the social relations of production; wage-earners need to be reproduced as subaltern and compartmentalised workers, just as capitalists need to have their dominant position reproduced. As Marx showed clearly in *Capital*, machine production serves not only to reduce costs but also to subject workers more completely to capitalist command by despoiling them of intellectual productive powers and the social force they could develop through co-operation. In machine production the capital-labour relation crystallises, just as if it had 'flowed' into objects transformed into means of production – as if it were only the domination of the means over the agents of production, of material productive forces over human ones. It is thus via technology that the inversion of the objective and the subjective, as Marx described it, occurs, and the 'technological veil'

(Adorno) spreads itself over society, causing people to take the surface appearance of instrumental relations for the real relations of substance (while attributing to the latter the powerlessness of people in social life). Isolated and dominating subjectivity succumbs, or rather, seems to succumb, under the weight of what it has created, whereas in fact it is only struggling in the complicated channels of relations which escape its control and proliferate according to a circular, but expanded, pattern of reproduction.

It would therefore be incorrect to interpret the dialectic of productive forces and relations of production, as it is set out in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, according to a logic of technological determinism; that is a misconception. Technology, beneath its material envelope, is a relation of relations, a complex of processes, each apparently autonomous in its instrumental objectivity; but all are linked in the basic pattern of their movements to the dynamic of capital and labour. In this regard, the relations of production do not conflict with technology, or with what the theoreticians of 'state monopoly capitalism' call the scientific and technological revolution, because technology is one of the essential manifestations of these relations; the conflict occurs in fact between the relations of production and enchained human productive forces; what the relations of production do run up against are the different alternative uses of material productive forces they attempt to promote. Capital, in its forced march towards accumulation, tends to develop without limits, that is, without taking account of the limits working people attempt to impose on it or the relations workers are forced to establish with their environment in functional response to the continuous pace of production. It is thus inevitable that capital, in order to cope with the crises it engenders, is led, as capital, to deny the obstacles by using technology to break through human and material resistance, in the aim of pushing back the boundaries of what can be transformed into value. Technology and technical skills are therefore not just means employed to raise the productivity of labour; they are also systematically developed means to do violence to the concrete materiality of relations and exchanges between people and nature. The sensible-suprasensible materiality of capital, that is, the dead and abstract materiality of exchanges between commodities and values, presents all the outward features of life by seizing hold of its living, corporeal forces, and subjecting them to machine systems which are also, at the same time, a social machinery set up outside the flow of exchanges among people. That

is why revolts or radical challenges to the relations of production can be carried out only by human productive forces constantly pushed forward and transformed by technological revolutions, not by creations of technology, however technically refined they might be. If human productive forces are confined by capitalist relations of production, it is precisely because they have been reduced to appendices of material means of production and prevented from conquering a field of action outside the bounds of value-production. As Marx noted, the one-sided character of capitalist development comes into contradiction with the broadening of vital horizons and social connections to which it leads individuals and social groups. In production for its own sake, the direct producers cannot fail to develop preoccupations which are at the least irreducible – if not diametrically opposed – to the orientations imposed on them in the aim of engendering the automatic reactions of value valorising itself. In other words, the producers' capacities for action and intervention cannot fail to overflow the very notion of production and extend themselves, at least potentially, into exchanges and activities whose aim is not the maximal proliferation of objects and services subject to valorisation. In Marx's view, subservient productive forces do not strive merely for a better correspondence with relations of production, in an infinitely recurring game of correspondence and non-correspondence; they are, quite to the contrary, stimulated towards the transformation of social relations of production into new and different social relations, and towards their own disappearance and transfiguration beyond the status of productive forces (as bearers of abstract labour). This obviously does not mean that material production is destined to disappear; it does imply, however, that it can and should be subordinated to other imperatives and orientations than those of valorisation, in either its outward or its derived forms (accumulation of goods and services functionally determined by social evaluations which escape the control of individuals and the groups they compose).

In the context of a critique as sharp as this one of technology and the development of productive forces, there is not and cannot be a cult of science. The mature Marx is perfectly aware of what links the sciences to technical processes in the framework of capital accumulation. It is thanks only to the systematic application of scientific discovery that technology becomes an apparently irresistible force which provokes change in both the relations and the forces of production by upsetting all the customary routine and inertia

in social practices. But it is also thanks to the growing demand for technological development that science takes such an important place in social life and becomes the model of theoretical activity. Nothing can be opposed to it because seemingly nothing can resist it, except perhaps by taking refuge in the domain of the irrational, the suprasensible or the supernatural. The scientific assumes the whole weight of the economic (in all senses of the term) and of all courses of action which cannot be avoided, under penalty of much difficulty and needless expense. But it is precisely this weight of given reality, that is, of what presents itself as immediately positive, that Marx refuses to recognise.

Scientific developments for Marx are inseparable from the ends inherent in the relations of production, the social demands these engender, and especially, the social division of labour which turns these relations into instruments of valorisation and reproduction of social relations. The sciences, be they experimental or purely theoretical (mathematics, for example), cannot be isolated from the relations of knowledge that people have established with their environment and among themselves. The sciences belong to a social context in which the asymmetries and hierarchical differences among social positions are carefully hidden and in which certain very important questions are therefore not treated and cannot be even formulated. The sciences move forward in the ignorance of their own conditions of production and the rules according to which their discourses are constituted, because they [the sciences] see themselves as being grounded only in theories and practices of knowledge and because they define their objects restrictively. This is what Marx demonstrates very well in his discussions of political economy, when he subjects all its premises to rigorous critical examination. Classical political economy, which presents itself as the elucidation of the laws of production and consumption in general, beyond all historical variations, is in fact trapped in a one-sided outlook which causes it to take as natural what is in fact historically determined. In its search for the explanation of relations of value between commodities or products, it believes it has found a solution in the labour theory of value, in particular as formulated by Ricardo, for this theory is supposed to explain with equal success the distribution of labour among the different branches of production and the proportions of exchange.

However, this theory fails to take notice of its own tendency to naturalise the notion of labour and absolutise the form labour

has taken in bourgeois society. The value-form of the products of labour, which poses problems in its own right, is thus taken as a trans-historical form, rational *par excellence*, of regulation and distribution of production. Because he does not allow himself to become enclosed in the contours of the object of political economy, and because he is able to situate a problematic of knowledge within a much broader social problematic, Marx can raise the question of the value-form itself and all its derivations. To speak of the value of labour, he remarks in volume III of *Capital*, is like speaking of a yellow logarithm; in other words, to measure things according to labour, or labour according to things and time, is an impossible enterprise unless one takes for granted those recurrent social practices (so common as to appear trivial) which reduce the heterogeneous to the homogeneous, diversity to equivalents, and exchanges among human beings to exchanges of value, engraved, as it were, in products measured according to value-standards. The critique of political economy to which Marx devoted himself for decades was in this sense no mere attempt to recast political economy by defining its object and its field of investigation more rigorously; nor was it a moral condemnation of the cynicism of the great economists who described human suffering while considering it to be inevitable. Marx's critique of political economy is a subversion not only of the theoretical foundations of political economy but also of the reality of which the latter is a reflection; to borrow a theme dear to Marx, it seeks to reverse the inversion, or place back on its feet a world whose head is pointed down, by dissolving categories, that is, scraping away the real abstractions which govern social life externally (*en extériorité*), above and beyond individual acts of volition and group reactions. The critique of political economy thus transcends the limits of a theoretical, scientific discipline or an experimental science, both because it refuses to be a mere elaboration and ordering of concepts and because it does not stop at the positive surface appearance of the given. It is simultaneously a deconstruction of concepts and a destruction of objective illusions upon which the most firmly established social practices are based; that is what allows it to undertake an examination in depth of the roles assigned to theory and practice. There can no longer be theory in the traditional sense of the term because the essential task of reflection is not to establish the order of the world in categories, but to show that the categories upon which thought customarily relies must be upset and questioned in their claim to grasp, not to say imprison, the real.

The goal of the critique of political economy is thus not to construct a new corpus of irrefutable statements about the nature of economic activity; it seeks rather to elucidate the problematical character of economic reality itself, its autonomisation with respect both to other modes of activity and to bearer-subjects (*sujets-supports*). Nor can practice continue to exist in the traditional sense of the term, because there can be no question of putting into practice a positive theory and finding applications for it; the task is rather to decompose the everyday world of teleology of action and valorisation in order to open it to new possibilities. The correlations between an ordering theory and a practice of execution give way, at least in tendency, to multiple and reversible links between reflexive activities which take their distance from given conditions, and to interventions which shake up routine practices. Critical theory does not simply take its place in the social division of labour and take part in the separation between means and ends, between elaboration and realisation of human activities, between those who engage in theory and those who execute practical tasks; it strives rather to involve itself in an enterprise in which connections are multiplied, relations established with what is apparently far-removed and cut-off in practice. At the same time, critical theory relaxes or breaks off the established ties among things, meanings and social relation – everything which, in the current framework, favours the recurrent flow of the social into things, that is, the substitution of relations among things for social relations, in collective representations and everyday practices.

The conceptualisation of capitalism in Marx's work thus has nothing to do with a scientistic outlook, that is, the notion that the world can be possessed and controlled thanks to the unstoppable progress of scientific formalisation. Marx does not at all seek to circumscribe the real with a fine network of laws in an effort to dominate it and subject it to the aims of men and the automatic mechanisms of valorisation. On the contrary, he investigates the foundations of the mode of labour which characterises thought within capitalist relations and the real status of the theory of knowledge and the diverse forms of logic. He certainly does not object to the ascetic attitude towards scientific work or the purifying operations which seek to reduce considerably, if not to eliminate, the element of confusion in theoretical elaborations; but he does refrain sceptically from the notion that such processes of knowledge take place in a permanent and direct relationship between subjective consciousness and the objective world. Knowledge is not a 'reflection

of the real' or a quest for correspondence between the object and the intellect; in the framework of contemporary society, it is a social relation of production, an ordering relation between people and their environment – a relation which brings into play multiple and complex social mechanisms (language, modes of perception, the organisation of those who produce the knowledge, and so forth).

From this perspective, the theoretical (in its un-critical guise) cannot escape from the limits assigned to it by the broad framework of production relations. In particular, scientific discourse considerably limits its field of investigation, by abstaining from raising questions about its own conditions of production, that is, its means of production (material and human), its methods and the objects of knowledge it is called upon to produce. By absolutising its own procedures and conferring upon them an extra-social and extra-temporal validity, it presents itself as a universal discourse and treats all regions of the real according to the same canon. Marx's theoretical discourse seeks, on the contrary, to be a discourse of specificity (of determined abstraction and multiple determinations). Some of its methods at first appear quite surprising. The Hegelian logic of identity, in spite of its mystical aspects, is applied to the metamorphoses of commodity values, because the relations of permutation and substitution between the different moments of the value-form (the diverse forms of commodities, money and capital) can be successfully apprehended through a dialectic of concept, substance and subject. And yet this dialectic is never taken to be a self-sufficient one; its apparent circularity is constantly perturbed by the differential logics of material flows and exchanges between people and their natural surroundings. Self-valorising value (capital) can never be totally abstracted from what nourishes its vital forces (people engaging in exchange and labour in determined material conditions), because it is indeed no more than a functioning 'from without' of social relations, and because the dynamic proper to it is basically one which it must borrow from outside itself. The object of the critique of political economy is in fact not unified but divided within itself, that is, cut into contradictory fields of investigation which call for radically different or even opposed methodologies. If the notion of 'law' in *Capital* is such an enigma, that is because it refers to heterogeneous levels of analysis – value and materiality – that political economy is incapable of distinguishing from one another; it invokes several different types of causality which cannot be grasped according to any prematurely unified

logic. Methodologically, Marx's *Capital* is polyphonic and escapes reductive or 'flattened' conceptual constructions such as may result from a scientific activity which is blind to the procedures by which it constitutes its object.[3] Marx rejects customary scientific constructions in favour of a much more complex architectonics which does not seek to close theoretical discourse in upon itself but on the contrary leaves it open to new directions and problematics. In spite of the pressure of events and circumstances, Marx always resisted the temptation to conceive the critique of political economy as an accomplished work or an unsurpassable horizon of thought. For him it was a means of short-circuiting automatic reflexes in the development of science, in particular those concerning the study of society by bringing to light, against such reflexes, the irreducible character of what they claim to be able to reduce and all the forces at work below the misleadingly smooth surface of ritualised social relations. It was anything but a call for rest and self-satisfaction of thought.

II

These preliminary reflections show that a dialogue between the thought of Marx and that of Heidegger should be possible, in spite of everything which apparently divides them. More precisely, the points where they diverge should not prevent them from confronting each other and allowing mutual influence to come into play, in order to reach new results and allow each side of the dialogue to say what neither could ordinarily say in isolation. The first moment of the confrontation should clearly take as its theme Western metaphysics, its history, and the perspective of its supersession. This moment is quite central in Heidegger because it is closely linked to the problem of the historicity of Being (*l'être*) as distinguished from being (*l'étant*). In a less obvious way it is an important theme in the relation established by the mature Marx between his critique of political economy on the one hand and Hegel and German classic philosophy on the other. As we know, Marx proposed in *Capital* to stand the Hegelian dialectic back on its feet, that is, to place his enterprise of reversal of political economy under the sign of a critical reprise and transposition of Hegelian philosophy, in particular the *Logic*. This project originated in Marx's awareness of being faced with a system which was not only trying to apprehend its era in thought but to synthesise and reconstruct all of Western philosophy. What confers such breadth on the project, however, is that Hegel

himself, as Michael Theunissen has shown,[4] has posed the problem of superseding metaphysics. *The Science of Logic* is not a treatise which proposes to substitute dialectics for formal logic; it is first of all a critique, in the form of a speculative discourse, of ontology and the theories of knowledge. The goal of the dialectical movement is not so much to disqualify the overly rigid categories of logic as to establish new relationships between concept and reality by putting an end to the relations of indifference between subject and object, subject and otherness, which give way so easily to the domination of one over the other, that is, to relations of subsumption. The dialectic is thus a challenge to thought which isolates and separates in the belief that it can reach fundamental conclusions while staying on the immediate level of the given. The dialectic seeks to destabilise Being which manifests itself in appearance; at the same time it supersedes the transcendental illusions in subjective consciousness by confronting the latter with the world of objectivity. It is thus a displacement of thought from its frozen forms towards new horizons. In particular it seeks a new conception of the truth – a truth which is no longer an adequate correspondence of spirit to the thing, but rather a correspondence of objectivity to spirit, that is, a rapprochement of objectivity to the substance-subject which is reached by crossing the barriers between objectivation and consciousness closed in upon itself. Dialectical movement as movement of thought measuring itself with Being and with itself is thus a march towards the unity between relations to oneself (*autorelationnalité*) and relations to otherness. In this sense, there is no reason to let oneself become enclosed in the false opposition between idealism and realism, spirit and matter, theory and practice, the intelligible and the sensible, as these are found in the metaphysical tradition. On the contrary, the limits of the theories of knowledge must be violated in order to approach a theorisation of forms or determinations of thought as forms of dynamic relations to the world, involving diverse figures and moments which generate each other out of what is missing or deficient in each. That is why *The Science of Logic*, particularly in its sections which treat Being and Essence, is both exposition (*Darstellung*) and critique of the categories of logic (conceived in Kantian terms) with the aim of finding in the concept the reconciliation of thought and Being, the universal and the singular, via action which turns back towards itself. However, this victory over indifference and domination turns out to be an illusion because it is an absorption of the finite (of Being) into the infinite dimension of

discourse and speculative formulation. The critique of ontology turns into onto-theology, to borrow Heidegger's terms.

The Hegelian dialectic thus remains a critique of metaphysics within the limits of metaphysics itself. Like all of classical German philosophy after Kant, it remains haunted by the idea of unity and the attempt to realise unity in a world fraught with rupture and opposition.[5] The unity of humanity with itself and with the world indeed appears quite problematical in bourgeois-commercial society. The development of the division of labour separates people from each other while subjecting them to processes of compartmentalisation of their activities. The state, which autonomises itself with respect to society in its activity of management and administration, operates like a machine and scarcely takes human reactions into account. Commercial activity multiplies the exchanges of commodities and communicational activities between people but at the same time turns people into the mere cogwheels of activities which escape their control. The dissolution of feudalism and the progressive consolidation of capitalism thus cannot be evaluated in simple terms. The birth process of the new society takes place under painful conditions, amidst any number of negative phenomena.

Thus philosophy cannot content itself with the project of thinking out the epoch; it needs as well to find a dimension beyond the ruptured present. Hölderlin, Schelling and Hegel in their youth attempted to uncover the conditions which would make possible a return to the ancient democratic city-state, in which the public and the private, the political and the social, are not experienced in separation or mutual exclusion. In their minds, the idea was to recreate the possibility of a true human community, expressed in a very strong ethical and religious life. In 'The Most Ancient Fragment of the German System of Idealism' (1796), Hegel searches for solutions which involve the suppression of the state, the development of a popular art comparable to that of the ancient Greeks, and the establishment of a religion which bears a mythology of Reason which would favour the reconciliation of humanity with the world.[6] The evolution of the French Revolution and European society brings Hegel to understand how abstractly utopian such an orientation is. Once he begins to appropriate classical political economy and move ahead in his reflections on politics, he is no longer inclined to seek for ways beyond social separation in a return to the past. He now attempts to conceive the unity of subject and object, and the unification of humanity and the world, as they might

grow out of tendencies in the present – out of the forces at work in early bourgeois society. In particular, he discovers that the separations and ruptures are accompanied by the tumultuous development of individuality and subjectivity, going far beyond what ancient society had ever known. The Greek city-state had been able to take shape as a political and religious community with relative ease because individuals were so scarcely developed subjectively and inclined to make so few demands in their common dealings and institutions. The modern era is altogether different in that the search for community cannot take place without also taking into account the problems of particularity and universality, the singular and the general, that is, the problems and contradictions which affect any attempt to bring about a full correspondence between these poles. The unity of humanity and the world cannot assert itself immediately; it must first pass through the meanders of subjectivism (abstract affirmation of self) and objectivism (the loss of self in otherness), and the dissociation of individuals and their submission to an abstract repressive order. Individual consciousness must experience its non-correspondence with reality and discover itself little by little to be part of a process which takes place beyond itself: that of the Spirit which differentiates in order to return to itself. The advancement of the community thus manifests itself as a journey towards the ethical community of the representative state (the objective Spirit), first stage of the absolute Spirit, thanks to the materialisation of Reason in history through Christ and revealed religion.

The presence of Christ in history (particularly as it is portrayed in the Reform) guarantees the unity of humanity and the world, theory and practice, Being and being, in the form of the unity of the concept and reality, religion and rationality. But this posited unity exposes itself, in the formulations it adopts – the correspondence of the subject and the predicate in the copula, as the unity of thought and Being under the aegis of thought. It is a forward flight of consciousness, a search without precise references, which results only in the sublimation of the institutions of bourgeois society. As M. Theunissen has written, onto-theology becomes a theology of domination: the spirit as absolute Spirit engulfing all is shaped from the model of self-consciousness (*Selbsbewusstsein*) which, in its self-reflection, behaves with itself as with another, the better to grasp itself in the terms of a dialectic of mastery and possession.[7]

Hegelian theory thus reveals itself unfaithful to one of its most

interesting themes, that of identity and difference – the impossibility of either their complete dissociation from one another or the definitive elimination of either of the two terms. The unity of identity and difference, at the level of absolute spirit, no longer presents itself as historicity and temporality, or as constant passage from one into the other, but as the covering-over of difference by identity in the context of negation of the dialogical dimensions of human consciousness and activity. The unity of one's relation to oneself and to the other as condition for overcoming the break or split is surreptitiously replaced by the idea of mastery of self and knowledge knowing itself. The difference between Being and being is thus apprehended in a Platonic perspective, as relation between the infinite and the finite – the intemporal and the ephemeral – not as a differential relation in which neither the terms nor the relation between them is stable and invariable. As Marx understood clearly, the Hegelian critique of the forms of objectivation and objectivity, indifference and domination in one's relation to others and to the world turns into a disappointing game of reconciliation because it has no basis in a proper understanding of the social origins of isolation and separation of consciousnesses from each other or of the hiddenness of the dialogical relations of people with each other and with the world. Hegel's recourse to an eschatology of the Christian *logos* is replaced by a specific social dialectic of the bourgeois era.

At this point, we are seemingly quite far removed from the Heideggerian critique of metaphysics, with its reference to origins and its theme of the forgetting-of-Being; and yet, if one remembers that the existential framework for the analysis of Being is a critique of self-consciousness as presence to oneself and of the resulting forms of objectivity, then the points of convergence between the author of *Capital* and the author of *Being and Time* become clearer. Although they begin from two altogether different positions, they converge in a common enterprise of destruction of ontology which goes well beyond the Hegelian critique of classical metaphysics, since it seeks to escape from the traditional problematics of foundations. The critique of the world in which people live does not aim to deconstruct certain illusory figures of consciousness in order to find a more solid foundation of certainty for the activity of consciousness arranging or developing the world. The aim is much more radical than that: it is to question all the historical forms of relation to the world that also constitute a separated consciousness, and thereby to make new relations and new horizons possible, beyond

those already conceived and codified. The passages on commodity fetishism in Book I of *Capital* do not simply cast light on the metamorphosis of social relations into relations among things; if one pays closer attention, Marx attempts as well to elucidate the channelling of thought towards things (a certain mode of functioning of the symbolic), and the resulting paths of flight of bourgeois-Christian thought, in order to expose the traps of solipsism and the conditions for a communicational liberation of action and conscious activity.[8] Marx subtly attempts to depict social relations which would allow for the flowering of intersubjectivity in a context of supersession of the relation of indifference-domination with otherness and with the world. The setting of the Hegelian dialectic on its feet appears, in this respect, as an extension, in the logic of the concept, of the critical labour partially accomplished at the level of objective logic (of Being and Essence). The idea is no longer to abolish the distance between reality and the concept, or to reintegrate the otherness of the other into Spirit; it is rather to return explicitly to conceptualisation all its relational dimensions (that is, openness to others and to the world). At this level, Marx prefigures the Heideggerian critique of logical closure and the cognitive mechanisms which prevent thinking about relations with the world or about the activity of thought itself. In his own – often indirect – manner, he challenges an entire conception of rationality and calls, by way of consequence, for the re-working of an entire theoretical tradition. Clearly one does not find in Marx all the vigour that Heidegger deployed in tracing back to bygone ages the ontic imprisonment of thought; it must be recognised nonetheless that Marx forged a weapon against all retrospective historical determinism (retro-projection of the present onto the past) by showing how the historical-genetic antecedents of bourgeois society are integrated and 're-dimensioned' in the organised framework of capitalism. The history of the forgetting-of-Being, as Heidegger termed it, is not linear; it is, quite the contrary, baffling and disconcerting, full of faults, and that is precisely what allows us to question it without getting caught in the systematic re-elaboration which capitalist society exercises on it in order to deviate it.

Following two very different paths, Marx the critique of political economy and Heidegger the destruction of ontology, both thinkers reach the point of challenging the reifying effect of the mode of functioning of thought. It is therefore not so surprising to find in both thinkers' works a critical theorisation of representation (*Vorstellung*) and its role in the organisation of relations with things and with the

world. Heidegger shows that representation is a manifestation of subjectivism which tends to impart to beings a status of objectivity and positivity destined to make of them things which exist for the will-to-will, both reassuring in their ontic inertia and utilisable at will. Representation thus appears as a means of conquering and bringing order to beings, with the goal of closing them into totalising systems. Representation presents itself, to be sure, as an act of approaching the object and assimilating its characteristics, but behind this apparent modesty it proceeds to classify and evaluate, referring to the values of the will (or will-to-power). Representation should not be grasped as a pure activity of knowledge; it has practical aspects which link it to people's *poietic* activity and their nihilistic quest to exploit the world. The labour of representation is thus incorporated into an enterprise of mystification of the truth as revelation, as 'clearing' of Being or as 'event' (*Ereignis*). It encloses space and time by reducing them to homogeneous successions and series in which human activities and their corresponding beings deploy themselves. The Marxian conception of representation begins from significantly different premises because it explores from the outset the social synthesis (as Alfred Sohn-Rethel uses this term[9]) underlying the activity of representation. The intentionality of individual consciousness and its representatives are apprehended essentially as the manifestation of commodity relations, that is, as relations which unify individuals through the intermediary of their opposition or separation in the exchange of values. The social synthesis thereby severs conscious activity from its communicational sources and induces it to locate itself as an isolated subjective act among reified exchanges. As Marx observes, things (commodities) appear to engage in social relations above the heads of the subjects of exchange, because sociality is external to its bearers. Subjectivism and objectivism condition each other reciprocally in an infinite series of representations thrown out of alignment with their conditions of production. These subjective representations are thus largely powerless to grasp the arrangements of social relationships into which they have been introduced. They are obliged, in Marx's view, to accept schemas of orientation which are veritable stage productions, frozen into characteristic and recurrent forms of social relations among people and among things: *Vorstellung* gives way to a theatre-show of enchanted beings – Monsieur Capital, Madame la Terre and the like – the *Darstellung* of the saga of capital accumulation. In Sohn-Rethel's terms, it is the abstraction of exchange which carries or bears socialisation. The

regular patterns of interaction and communication conform less to socially controlled norms than to automatic mechanisms necessary for the exchange of values – which means in reality that norms adapt not to the multifaceted character of symbolic exchanges, but to the one-sidedness of value-relations. Activity does not display its polymorphic character and its dialogical qualities (in relations with the world and with otherness); it displays itself as polarisation around labour or instrumental activity which assimilates value as a goal-orientation and a *modus operandi*. Society, dominated in this manner, is conditioned by the action and combination of real abstractions – objective intellectual forms which present themselves as the dynamic and 'natural' co-ordinates of individual actions. The abstract thought of individual consciousness (*Denkabstraktion*) which relies on representation (*Vorstellung*) separates and reifies because it has no choice but to submit, in this context, to real abstractions, taking them for the actual field of conceptualisation.

After having thus reconstituted the views of Heidegger and Marx on representation, it may seem tempting to conclude that Marx's conception is the superior one and to define the limitations of Heidegger's view as the lack of a problematic of society. One would be wise to avoid too much haste in this matter, however; rather than an outright absence of the social, it would be fairer to speak of its ambiguous presence. When he begins his major reversal (*Kehre*), Heidegger is quite conscious that *Dasein*, in its relationship with beings and with the masking and unmasking of Being, cannot by any means be interpreted through a methodological individualism.[10] Human consciousness cannot be grasped as reflexivity or self-reflection which, taking itself as an object, provides its own means of taking possession of the objective world in the act of constituting it. That is why the Heideggerian hermeneutic presents itself essentially as labour within and upon language – language taken as the sedimentation of relations with the hiddenness-openness of Being, above and beyond all illusions of presence-to-oneself.[11] It is language which speaks via people rather than people who, by uniting, constitute language. More precisely, Being, through the mediation of language, both manifests itself to people and remains hidden from them in enunciations which they can never appropriate fully, that is, never capture in unequivocal meaning. Language, although it bears the stamp of the ontic character of metaphysics, in fact becomes the vector of a symbolic activity which overflows subject-object confrontations and substantialist thought. Even the

most apparently frozen form of symbolic communication, deposited in things and engraved into consciousness, can always be brought back to the imaginary, and particularly language-invention, which constitutes its ground or source of nourishment.[12] In other words, it can be deconstructed in its full 'thickness' (*consistance*) and reality and restored to its dramatic social dimension and its relations with the world that it seeks to circumscribe. In this sense, Heidegger incites us to explore further the Marxian themes of commodity fetishism and social fantasmagoria by combining an analytical approach to the imposition of meaning by capital with an archaeology of the distortion of meanings in language. Real abstractions – crystallised and solidified social representations – can thus be understood in their latent multi-dimensionality and set back in motion in a temporality which is no longer linear (involving complex simultaneities instead of simple relations of succession and expanded reproduction of the Same). The fascination exercised by 'social things' (sensible-suprasensible, as Marx would say) may thereby be thought of as stemming from a variety of engagements, constantly re-elaborated in an effort to align them with each other.

The significance of Heidegger's reflection in this area is too frequently masked by the ambiguity which characterises his conception of history. It may even seem that the history of forgetting-of-Being or destiny (*Geschick*) are inaccessible to the exchanges between the social imaginary and the relationships of Being (in its difference from beings) – inaccessible, that is, to what Marx attempted to grasp as the metabolism between humanity and nature. The risk here is to consider that only Being makes history and thus to turn Being into a new absolute or substantive entity which regulates the evolution of humanity. The critique of traditional ontology may even spill over, if one does not pay attention, into an ontologism – the self-satisfied ontologism that Adorno denounces in *Negative Dialectics*. It is true that an excess of this sort would betray the explicit intentions of Heidegger himself; one need only observe how careful he was not to let himself be carried into a general thematic of Being by conceptually displacing Being towards the *Ereignis*, that is, the emergence of the appropriating event. But this does not prevent ambiguity from arising constantly out of a conception of language which all but excludes its propositional and communicational, imaginative and normative aspects, that is, the aspects which link it most directly to social activities. Language is indeed apprehended in its supra-individual characteristics, but these

are not brought into relation with their dialogical components, nor in any explicit way with socialised relations with the world; this does leave the door open to certain ambivalent notions and temptation to ontologistic excess.

Nonetheless, we repeat, it would be wrong to speak of a 'forgetting-of-society' in Heidegger's thought; it would be more accurate to speak of an overly allusive and fleeting presence of society. This presence makes itself felt via a reflection on the relations of power and domination which surface in language and become manifest in practice. That is why Heidegger's thought, even when it enriches and brings new perspective to Marxian critical approaches, must be corrected and counterbalanced with the latter, in a relation of reciprocal dynamisation and transformation. This becomes especially important when one takes up one of the most interesting topics of Heideggerian reflection: the question of technology – a decisive one, of course, for the adequate understanding of many contemporary developments.

Heidegger quite radically proposes that technology be considered as something other than pure instrumentality or a systematisation of means in the aim of dominating natural processes in order to make them serve human objectives. Technology is basically a way of situating oneself in the world in order to take possession of it under the most favourable conditions. It is the materialisation of a world-view which seeks to take possession of all beings, organise them into a system and close them into rigidly frozen identities. Pushed to its furthest extent, technology can become a formalisation and application of knowledge from all the fields that can be explored by human subjectivity, in a context where even the most slightly troubling questions regarding the relation of Being to beings are evaded. As Heidegger shows quite well, a technology which develops such a one-sided and blinding relation to the world is in fact not at humanity's disposal. It can help to clarify certain aspects or manifestations of the Being of beings by excluding from view anything which might reverse it and introduce new relationships. It is thus a way of capturing people by what they think they control – a master-scheme that dictates its law to all instruments that society may develop to establish its identity and express itself (from science to aesthetics); it perpetuates the illusion of an infinite path to progress. Technology, which presents itself as the greatest success of the anthropomorphisation of the world, in fact becomes a permanent source of uncertainty, strangeness and even danger. The exploitation of the world turns into a total mobilisation of individuals;

thought renounces its investigation of what has not yet been thought or does not conform to existing models.

The age of technology is thus characterised by the progressive narrowing of vital horizons and a declining relation to tradition; it is par excellence the age of nihilism. There is not only a reversal in the relation between ends and means, between subjects who see themselves as full and present to each other and the world of teleology; there is also an erosion or destruction of the ontological or ethical foundations traditionally attached to action. The age of technology becomes an age of decisionism; diverse fields of action, more and more fragmented and specialised even while claiming adherence to a principle of rationality, all apparently depend on subjective decisions. But in spite of this apparent triumph of subjectivistic judgement, a hyper-technical destiny takes shape in the form of a closed and repetitive history, in contradiction with a historicity truly borne by subjects. The technological support systems of human activity turn into more and more rigid constraints to action and end up narrowly delimiting the fields in which action may occur. The moment of decision which seems to impart meaning to what is accomplished in fact has no other significance than to perpetuate technology and cause it to flourish.

III

Heidegger takes care, of course, not to banish technology altogether. He does not harbour any nostalgia for the return to artisanal activity or to nature, as is frequently supposed, but he does ask what might conceivably lie beyond technology. He does not underestimate the sharp dangers which threaten the planet, nor does it escape him that technology is seeping little by little into all the pores of society and everyday life. But it is precisely the extreme character of the threat which seems in his view to hold out the possibility of a transformation, as if the unbearable character of humanity's current relation to the world, as expressed by technology, could produce the desire for change. Technology cannot be the last word because people may succeed in conceiving the forgetting-of-Being and a different way of inhabiting the world.[13] To go beyond the logic of scientific thought and to retrieve the pathways of thought as mediation and as attentiveness to the clearing of Being is consequently to prepare for superseding technology without falling into the traps of unreflected activism or immediately 'positive' solutions. In response to the

danger, Heidegger adopts a troubled wait-and-see attitude which corresponds quite well with his repugnance for any consideration of the social dialectic and its impact on people's relationships to their world. In other words, technology is never examined as a social relation even though Heidegger himself admits that it is at the heart of the problems of contemporary society. Its status as a 'power of destiny' thus remains quite unclear. It is clearly not a power of a demonic sort, but it cannot be known whether technology, in its massive omnipresence, originates from a deviation of thought (and the attitudes towards the world that this deviation induces), from a crystallisation of social practices, or from a combination of these two kinds of phenomena.

The constantly illusive character of Heideggerian reflection can only result in uncertain theory, which in turn can only reinforce, in practice, a wait-and-see attitude or even a prohibition from taking action. That is why, at this stage, we must return to certain Marxian themes, in particular that of technology as a social relation with the world. Marx clearly did not attain the radicality of a Heidegger in challenging technology, but he did understand many of the social mechanisms at work in technological development. In particular he understood quite well that machine systems constitute the material support of the reification of human relations to the environment and of production relations among people; that is, they make possible the establishment of social relations which remain external to the people who make up the actual fabric of these relations. Social relations function by and within machine systems whose rhythms of flow are regulated by the production and exchange of values. They thereby assume the form of systemic patterns or arrangements which dominate interindividual and intersubjective relations. In this framework, social practices cannot, of course, deploy themselves freely; they are orientated, directed and channelled by the dynamic imparted by the machine systems. Social practices may even become absorbed by technological practices, that is, by the action of machine systems with respect to one another, in correspondence with the requirements of valorisation. In this sense, technology cannot be explained simply as the growth and cancerous proliferation of an original technical principle (*techné*), but rather as the specific – capitalist – use of instrumentality, which is in turn a function of a specific mode of organisation or relations among humans and between humanity and the world. Instrumental reason – the kind which centres on the use of things – is made to serve rational designs or intentions which, beyond

the things themselves, seek to turn the world into the artificial extension of evaluative representations. The world becomes a technical milieu by subordinating the natural milieu, which becomes a mere domain of pre-treated and pre-worked material for real abstractions. Reason (or thought) gives way to automatic mechanisms of formalisation and rationalisation which dictate what reason must do, even if it believes itself capable of mastering the problems posed. That is why technological evolution pushes to extremes the rupture, noticeable at the beginning of the bourgeois era, between people's rationalised, formalised and autonomised externalisations on the one hand, and their internal life on the other. Objectivations such as the state and the economy are no longer alone in standing up against individuals as independent powers; the networks of interaction and social practices, and especially the operations and productions of reason itself, do so as well. The individual, as *subjectum* or substratum of the technical-natural world, enters into crisis because he is constantly confronted with the evanescence of his own autonomy. As soon as he moves into the domain of action, he experiences the slightness of weight of his intentionality and will and, of course, his dependence upon circumstances and mechanisms which escape his control.

It thus appears that the problem posed by technology is not so much to put it at a distance and turn towards a more meditative form of thought, as to liberate instrumentality and sociality with respect to one another by loosening the grip of valorisation processes. Indeed, if instrumentality is no longer subordinated to the artifacts of value, it can become an opening towards the world, an experimentation in the shaping of social relations. Similarly, overcoming the solipsism of the relations of evaluation and competitiveness proper to the different fields of capitalist competition may open the way to new relations with objectivity by placing them under the sign of dialogue. Exchanges among people, and in particular symbolic exchanges in their dialogical and imaginary dimensions, could become manifestations of dynamic and questioning relations with the world. People and things could become available for changes in social arrangements and for experiments in 'interface' (*confrontations multilatérales*). In this context, *Dasein* could experience its temporality differently if it were stripped of its alienated notion of indefinite progress and no longer subjected to linear, quantified successions. The 'clearing' of Being (or appropriating event) need no longer be grasped as an unprepared-for occurrence or as an undeserved reward for contemplative passivity. In its very unpredictability, it appears linked to

processes of change in the perception and treatment of beings – processes which overturn fixed world-views and upset the production of representations (and abstract signs as substitutes for meaning). It appears linked as well to a destabilisation of ossified forms of sociality (both external to individuals and given as the extension of their internal dialogue) which make possible a dialogical redeployment of that sociality. Others, and the world, become integral parts of what people are in their 'being-there', rather than appearing in the state of abstract creations and phantoms with isolated consciousness. The openness/hiddenness of Being should not, in this sense, be conceived as a sort of illumination attributable to the fullness of an undeniable and total presence; it is a revelation of new constellations of Being and beings, but it is also a hiddenness in that new enigmas arise at each stage. As we may observe, the idea is not simply to place machines in the service of people or to develop new ('soft' or 'non-oppressive') technologies in order to be sure of reaching the path to sociality and liberation from instrumentality. To supersede technology, in the implicit logic of Marx's writings, in fact requires new practices of materiality and new relations between culture and nature, going beyond the themes of social reorganisation.[14] The Marxian thematic of the new society can therefore not be reduced to a passage from one mode of production, or dominant form of production, to another. It implies a displacement of the centre of gravity of social activity from production towards unproductive activities in the strict sense of the term. Material and non-material production of values can no longer be the model of other activities; on the contrary, production should be informed by and checked continually against, other social activities in the process of renewal.

It would be no exaggeration to state that in this respect, Marx's perspective stands in anticipated opposition to the Weberian diagnosis of the 'disenchantment of the world'; he would oppose the idea that such a tendency is irreversible. Marx was, of course, not the kind of thinker who wished to return to the gods or great religious myths of the past in order to make the world more inhabitable. He knew quite well that the decentring of culture with respect to nature is the very condition of more distantiated and mediatised relations among people and between people and the world. He also realised that these mediatised relations are indispensable for the development of polymorphic action and symbolic exchanges. He was further aware, however, that the articulation of the technical milieu on the natural environment imposes a rigid organisation of space and time on

life experience. The growth of accessible mediations to action is accompanied by a rapid extension of autonomised mechanisms for the selection of action, which impoverishes human selectivity considerably. Rationalisation according to real abstractions results in a limiting of the field of possibilities even if it presents itself as a promise to broaden this field. But the result is not precisely the 'iron cage' that Weber spoke of in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in the context of an entropic temporality, that is, a future more and more determined by the complex artificiality of the immediate past and the present in flight; rather, the negative experience of technified culture stimulates people to stake out another culture, a different organisation of experience.

Anyone confronted by the progressive restriction of projects and programmes, or the prospect of finality freezing into rigid networks of interdependence may be tempted at one moment or another by the fragmentary, the discontinuous, the assymetrical or the non-assimilable. People may indeed find unexpected opportunities for setting up new relationships – partial syntheses which upset technical practices and mechanisms while opening the space for new ways of perceiving and living in the world. Autonomised mediations in the form of real abstractions cannot, of course, be turned against themselves, that is, become mediations of experience with a stimulating effect on experience, unless a radical transformation of collective action has occurred. But if certain spaces inassimilable by automatic mechanisms were to develop in society, that would already suffice to encourage relationships with the world to undergo a modest gradual re-enlightenment. The world would no longer be made up solely of individuals and groups oriented by systemic patterns of organisation; innovation, attentiveness and relative concord could establish themselves among people and their multiple environments. The world would remain without a God – creator or supreme architect – but it would not be prevented from experiencing feelings of marvel towards the unexpected and the ephemeral, nor would it be sheltered from the resurgence of hidden or buried images, at the crossroads of past, present and future. The world would thus become more available for the rediscovery of the sacred amidst profane activities, poetry in everyday life. Culture could open up to new fields of experimentation, once it were no longer forced to submit itself to the dream of dominating nature; it could become a questioning and constant astonishment *vis-à-vis* all new possibilities. The Marx who reflected on the significance of Greek art in the contemporary era

is not so far removed, after all, from the Heidegger who interpreted Hölderlin in his search for the meaning of the sacred, even if Marx ceded too frequently to a linear and pre-planned conception of the future. Marx did not attempt to define the contours of a perfectly rational society, but rather to determine the conditions under which a novel society – novel in the variety of its horizons – might appear. In this regard, he was not so far from a polymorphic conception of action; the transforming practice (*umwälzende Praxis*) to which he alludes cannot be confused with teleologies of the taking of power unless all the dimensions – by no means secondary in his thought – of challenge to the activism of valorisation, are removed.

The Marxian conception of practice is not a quest for new theologies or founding theodicies; its goal is to establish, in a straightforward manner, new relations between *praxis* and *poiesis*, or (by rough equivalent) 'acting' (*l'agir*) and 'doing' (*le faire*). In this regard it is close to Heidegger's condemnation of the submission of action to imperative organising principles, systems of totalisation and frozen cosmogonies. For both thinkers, action is to be conceived not as a realisation or incarnation of meta-social principles but as a way of living within the world in its diversity. However, Marx goes further in one respect: he does not display the same repugnance as Heidegger to the idea of giving frank treatment to teleological forms of action and instrumental rationality. The passages in *Capital* on factory despotism and co-operation tend to show that the capitalist division of labour favours a teleology of subsumption and command in production in which means and actions are organised from above. The combination of functions and operations and their degree of correspondence to given objectives are determined by a logic of verticality which tends to enclose all relations. Teleology thus presents itself as a refusal or manipulation of horizontally interdependent relations and a refusal of interaction between ends and means (or among means themselves). Co-operation, that is, communication among people in their activity with objects (*le faire*), is relegated to a position of secondary importance, that is, placed in the service of tightly regulated programmes. In spite of its complexity, it is mere execution of tasks and placement of individuals; this prohibits co-operation from serving as a framework for permanent dialogue about the performance of tasks and prevents individuals from using co-operation as a means of reinventing networks of symbolic and material exchange and thereby reconstituting themselves. If, on the other hand, priorities between verticality and horizontality are

reversed – and that is what Marxian critique seeks to encourage – teleology can become experimentation, opening outwards to new dimensions and allowing them to blossom. There should be no further need to fear a tyranny of the adaptation of means to ends or vice versa, because projects would not necessarily arise from a mechanistic arrangement of wills, and means would not be separated brutally from their environment. Nor should there be any fear of a permanent incompatibility between collective and individual action, since the new teleological flexibility allows precisely for more autonomy from individual practice or appropriation–experimentation of the world. Strategic actions, those which base themselves on interindividual actions contributing to goals which lie beyond the direct control of the actors, could also, to a great degree, shed their character of subsumption-practices; they could become integrated into ongoing exchanges regarding aims and means, paths to follow and the manner of introducing them into the social context.

It can now be better understood why Marx, in contrast to Heidegger,[15] rejects all forms of scepticism and 'wait-and-see' attitudes in politics, proposing instead to transform the world by transforming politics. In contemporary capitalist society, politics appears in multiple forms: it can be an art of rational direction, systematic pursuit of objectives, exchanges and equalisation of interests among groups and individuals. It appears as a kind of capacity for control of society over itself – a society capable of self-reflection which finds its culmination and crowning achievement in the rational state, conscious of the problems and tasks to be confronted. Politics at the lofty heights of the state may thus be presented as a condensation or concentration of human powers in a multitude of mechanisms which channel their activities. Politics as so conceived is a power game, an ordering of people, their practices and their environment, that is, the apogee of a demiurgic relation to the world. At the same time, politics manifests itself as its own negation, that is, as growing impotence in the pursuit and exercise of power. More precisely, the mechanical arrangements it creates end up absorbing and deforming the stimuli from which it believes it derives its nourishment and provoke strategic and tactical confrontations. Instead of really leading, politics is led along by all the processes it is supposed to incorporate and adjust to one another. Far from transcending the automatic mechanisms of the economy, it merely compensates for their failures and ends up adopting their logic and their dynamics. The reason for all these limitations is that politics is not the culmination of a sociality

fully accepted and undertaken in its discontinuities and faults; it is rather the sanction of an unco-ordinated sociality coupled with a desocialising form of individuality. The proliferation of the political in its institutional–bureaucratic and institutional–representative guises does not prove that political rationality has triumphed; rather, it expresses a permanent languor of the social, beneath the appearance of uncontrollable exuberance (of processes and mechanisms).

Marx, consequently, could not have sung the praises of the state and reason-of-state to the point of creating a new mythology of reason. Nor could he have been a partisan of the revenge of the social – a social without vigour (other than that of objective forms and real abstractions) and without the autonomous capacity to renew itself. Neither the absorption of society by the political-state sphere, nor its opposite, the absorption of the political-state sphere by the social, can legitimately present themselves as solutions to the technification-'thingification' of the social and the political. The mature Marx, who challenged both anarchism and Lasallean state-socialism, understood this quite well and attempted to discover the ways and means of a simultaneous and interdependent reconstruction of the social and the political. Politics as transforming – or revolutionary – practice cannot be reduced to the destruction of power mechanisms. It is essentially a rearticulation of the social and the political with a view to reactivating symbolic and material exchanges among people by submitting these exchanges to the control of all who take part in them. Politics must thus present itself as a progressive reappropriation of the means of action as well as political and social forms, by the participants of society. It does not require sacrificing the present for a hypothetical and infinite future; it does involve the transformation of social temporality, in particular by taking full responsibility for human undertakings in their finite character. Marx no doubt failed to draw the precise contours of this new political theory and frequently let himself be tempted by enigmatic or ambiguous metaphors (the withering away of the state, dictatorship of the proletariat, transitional phase, and so on). Nonetheless, to his credit, he has brought us to understand clearly that the reference to democracy does not suffice to resolve all the problems of the political, but at the same time, the suspicious and doubting attitude of a Heidegger towards democracy may lead us terribly astray, particularly in the contemporary era. Politics and democracy must be reinvented constantly and the moment is not opportune for withdrawal or retreat.

4 The Fetish of Labour and its Dominion: The Critique of Economy as Critique of the Value-Form

I

The problems of labour are at the heart of Marx's opus, from his youth to his maturity. That is why it may seem tempting to make of this theme the unifying principle in a diverse and voluminous body of thought. Of course, there are many differences between the analyses of alienated labour in the *1844 Manuscripts* and those of exploitation of labour in *Capital*, but one might ask whether these do not boil down to a single set of questions about the centrality of labour in contemporary society – or labour's significance or lack of it. From this perspective, Marx appears much more dependent than he himself imagined on the classical political economy of his time, which reflected the ever more crucial role of production within the broad range of social activity of the bourgeois era. Marx, in this framework, is perceived as having remained a prisoner, throughout all his works, of Hegelian conceptions in which labour is interpreted as the externalisation of the subject, of consciousness, in a context in which the latter constantly threatens to become alienation and loss of control over action. Marx's theorisation is thus seen as marked by 'economism', that is, a primacy of the relations of production over other social relations and by a simplified model of action which favours the transforming action of the material world, to the detriment of communications and the various forms of human interaction. From his youth to his mature period, labour, conceived as the expression of the force of the generic being of man, is seen as Marx's founding principle of social organisation – in its negative as well as its positive manifestations in history. We are apparently faced with a monism of labour which relegates all other dimensions of social life – the imaginary, the normativity of action, the plurality of language-games, and so on – to a place

of secondary importance, making it impossible to take these into account.[1]

These accusations, which can be found in various forms in the writing of a series of very different thinkers (Heidegger, Habermas, K. Axelos, J. Baudrillard, *et al.*) are in one way upheld by the undeniable continuity of theme and terminology in the writings of Marx. The vocabulary of alienation in his youthful writings may be found, with some changes, in his later work, particularly in the *Grundrisse*. It is also noteworthy that Marx uses dialectical themes and Hegelian references even in some of his last writings, which hardly suggests a break with the anthropology of labour outlined in the *1844 Manuscripts*, under Hegel's direct influence. It is thus the alienation of labour – or loss of control over it – as the leading theme, which explains the whole theoretical edifice of *Capital* as well as the developments on commodity fetishism and the double guise of reified social forces according to the logic of the commodity form and abstract labour. In spite of his wish to carry out a critique of the existing order by grasping the situation at its root, Marx, in this view, merely ceded to the illusion of a transparent society in which people manage their relations with each other and the world harmoniously and altogether consciously. In Kostas Axelos' terms, Marx is the thinker of technology *par excellence*.[2] 'Technology holds the key to the world', writes Axelos, 'and it is by technological development that man produces himself as man, nature becoming history and history thus transforming itself into universal world-history'. In other words, according to this view, Marx remains a thinker of domination over the world as an extension of the will-to-power of subjects, in spite of his rejection of exploitation of man by man. The unity of theory and practice as the end of the rift between humanity and the world and of the antagonism among men themselves is thus reached by the human species' return to itself.

And yet we may legitimately ask whether these interpretations, which make of labour a sort of mode (*ek-stase*) of the subject, do justice to Marx's work in its most advanced developments, which are the result of successive corrections and displacements of his problematic. The young Marx is, to be sure, deeply imbued with a model of labour corresponding to the work of the artisan and the scientifically educated engineer; but he gradually abandons this model in favour of a much more complex conception of human activities. The youthful texts, *The German Ideology* included, are deeply engaged in a dialectic of subject and object, conscience and materiality, subjectivity and

otherness, which tried to break with Hegel without really succeeding. In these writings, Marx attempts to demonstrate that objectivation is not indissolubly linked to alienation, which is, on the contrary, only a transitory figure in relation to objectivity. He thus conceives a social dialectic based on the transformations of the relations among people at work, their instruments and their products.

People form themselves by losing their collective forces and then reclaiming them in enriched form in the course of struggle. They 'lose themselves' socially when they lose their control over their labour and product; they achieve success when they turn labour into self-realisation (of the individual as well as the species). It is in *The German Ideology* that this dialectic achieves its most complete form by claiming the status of a trans-historical dialectic of productive forces and relations of production. In this work, written at the same time as the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx takes care to break with any vestige of idealism, and particularly with essentialist conceptions based on a static view of human nature. But his references to the modes or forms of exchange (*Verkehrsformen*) as historically situated modes do not prevent him from referring positively or negatively to labour as 'manifestation of self', above and beyond its particular configurations. The history of humanity is grasped, in this framework, as a unitary history, calling in its very diversity on a single set of criteria of explanation and principles of organisation. The 'anti-speculative' and 'realistic' Marx of *The German Ideology* takes as given a spatial-temporal continuity of the social which could serve and has served to justify a monistic view of history. This phase of elaboration of new concepts cannot be reduced, however, to a subtle metaphysics of the realisation or manifestation of self. In his effort to portray the different facets of labour as faithfully as possible, Marx was obliged to move into political economy, an object of study which had earlier escaped him even as he thought he had grasped it. For Marx, the critique of political economy was to be not only the critique of its theory or of specific theoretical currents, but also, simultaneously, the critique of social relations and the theorisations which inadvertently allow these to escape.

Indeed, Marx is constantly drawn further ahead than he had earlier thought necessary. The final settling of accounts with political economy is perpetually postponed; the boundaries of theory are constantly being pushed back, causing the 'natural' referents and apparently solid foundations of theory to vanish. The notions of labour, production, economy, and so on, rather than gaining in

purity, become more and more complex, reflecting the situation of the contemporary era. This leads to a theoretical break when Marx perceives that his underlying anthropological premises no longer hold. In space and time, labour, production and economy adopt more and more incommensurable configurations and organise themselves into socially heterogeneous spheres. The division of labour, as separation between groups and individuals and as differentiation of tasks in production, cannot serve as a universal key for interpreting society and history; it must in turn be explained in its various modalities and discontinuities. That is what Marx begins to see in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, where he takes aim at the nostalgic vision of artisanal labour which had led Proudhon to seek in industry the conditions of 'self-realisation' in terms largely inherited from the past. Marx perceives clearly that the form of labour in capitalist society is a social reality superior to individual forms, involving complex relations of production which go beyond the four-way combination of direct producer, instruments, objects and products of labour. Labour becomes socialised through universal processes of valorisation, in the sphere of both production and circulation. In this framework the 'objectivation' of the worker in or through his product appears as only a secondary – and indeed a deeply problematic – manifestation of social relations of capital and labour. Strictly speaking, objectivation does not call for analysis in terms of alienation (loss of control over the product and the instruments of labour) because it cannot be isolated from socially interdependent, often indissociable operations. Social relations are in turn tightly bound up with complex material organisational patterns; one cannot apprehend them in simple opposition to the product of labour (possession or non-possession, control or non-control). Against Proudhon, Marx therefore argues that the machine cannot be considered the means of a new synthesis of compartmentalised labour because it is basically an economic category and a social relation, not a simple object or instrument of production. Wage labour appears as a complex set of relations whose real objectivity is found in multiple networks of relations at the levels of circulation, production, distribution and consumption. In this regard, it is significant that Marx, in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, sees himself as very close to Ricardo and his concept of absolute value, while distancing himself from Adam Smith and his all too subjective conceptions of labour ('labour commanded', 'labour embodied'), that is, too linked to the activity of individuals.

This rapprochement is not a full identity of views; Ricardo is basically preoccupied with the problem of an invariable standard of value whereas Marx seeks to determine what value truly is, namely, what gives the products of human activity the character of commodities having a set value in exchange. Marx does not seek an a-temporal answer to this question by giving value a definition that transcends historical eras; on the contrary, he seeks to specify the form of productive activity attributable to capitalist society and which leaves an indelible mark on exchange transactions that occur in that type of society. He is not seeking, in other words, to define the 'natural-ness' of economic activities behind the procedures of particular social organisations existing in space and time; rather, his goal is to discern what makes capitalist society distinctive from the point of view of value and labour. The historical dimension of capitalism is not presented as a stage of evolution in a trajectory predetermined from the origins; it presents itself as the opposition of systems of differences between different social formations. Thus it cannot be reduced to its development or to its genesis; it is made up, rather, of links among concrete determinations which distinguish themselves from other concrete determinations. As Marx demonstrates clearly in his 1857 *Introduction*, history and logic are not radically heterogeneous; they are, rather, tightly linked, the logical being localisable through space-time co-ordinates and the historical dimension being characterised by its determinations and predications above and beyond its positions in chronologies or temporal successions. In this sense, the present can no longer be understood as a mere result of the past or as a deviation with respect to an origin, nor can it be considered the mediatisation of an originally immediate relation. In his singular battle with political economy, Marx thus discovers that origins must be apprehended as a complex set of problems rather than as the promise of an immediate relation which guarantees the transparence of activities in the future. When he turns towards the theme of the value of labour as it is found in Ricardo's works, he is not seeking a miracle solution to the social enigma, but merely an opening towards a new field of investigation requiring further exploration in depth. The critical task is no longer to show that a set of social relations and activities has broken from what is and should be the positive form of life in society with its 'naturally' communitarian manifestations; it is to examine a given situation in its context – with its faults and contradictions, its misperceptions and its difficulties in expressing itself. To criticise

is not to compare a real state of affairs with a desirable one; it is to break insofar as possible with *a priori* assumptions and views which impinge from the outside on an object of study, in order to bring out the unformulated or neglected problems.

This new critical enterprise, which operates in the immanence of the object of study and refuses to transcend the immediately given except through a labour of mediatisation and deconstruction starting from the 'simple' or the 'natural', clearly raises many problems. It must designate firm bases from which to approach its material of study and develop criteria for establishing order in this material. It must also define the status of the knowledge it seeks to produce. It can therefore not evade an epistemological reflection on its own labour; Marx's hesitations on this subject attest to the arduous character of an unprecedented intellectual adventure. At first he appears to yield to economistic and scientistic temptations which, in the logical extension of certain theses of *The German Ideology*, orient him towards a positive social science which he sees as superior to classical political economy by its very scientificity. Critical science presents itself as a science of the modes of production and their succession, which authorises the formulation of a number of general laws (see the *Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*). Even as he continues to examine the 'positivity' of the economy, however, Marx is exploring other paths. In particular, he questions the status of the objectivity of economic relations, that is, their 'natural-ness', not to conclude that they are somehow artificial, but in order to understand what confers upon them, in most people's judgement, such natural and timeless characteristics. He is thus led to conceive socio-economic reality as organised into several levels and several dynamics; it is plural and contradictory in its manifestations, which often negate each other. It is therefore necessary to grasp the 'objectivity' of capitalist society and economy with different instruments from those of Adam Smith or Ricardo, by replacing heavy, static, general abstractions with more flexible instruments, capable of producing complex configurations of multiple determination and of dissolving hypostases (that is, general economic assumptions transformed into operative categories). This is what explains Marx's renewed interest for Hegelian logic in 1858. The categories of *The Science of Logic* allow him to follow closely the movements which disturb the capitalist economy and to understand it less as a relation than as a process of valorisation. Capital – value which valorises itself – can thus be analyzed in the metamorphoses which negate it, only

to restore it to itself, by allowing it the possibility of assimilating that which at the outset appeared foreign to it (notably use value and living labour). Like Hegel's Spirit, capital, as the completed form of value, can assert itself, after a series of transformations, as auto-relation, the substance-subject of social processes.

Naturally, this use of Hegelian logic is not a mere borrowing – it is a transposition which assigns itself goals altogether different from those of its original model. Contrary to Hegel, Marx does not interpret the finite as nothingness, that is, he does not deny the materiality of social relations, no more than he proposes to accord to capital the status of substance-subject. What he seeks to apprehend, beyond these dialectical movements of value, is the apparent self-sufficiency of capital as an appearance possessing some degree of substance (or reality), but only up to a certain point. The auto-relative character of capital (*autorelationnalité*) is to be understood as existing within the limits of what produces it and claims it to be self-sufficient. For this reason, logic in its original Hegelian conception cannot be totally adequate to the object to which Marx assigns it. It must consequently be corrected by displacing its theoretical premises towards other horizons, from which the dialectical conceptualisation will appear in its insufficiency, that is, the largely illusory character. This is what Marx aims explicitly to do when he speaks of setting Hegelian logic back on its feet and reducing it to its rational core. However, he cannot proceed in this enterprise without taking precautions, nor can he move on a purely formal plane; he must prove that there exists a circumscribed domain in which dialectical contradiction can be legitimately considered 'at home'. In an initial stage – in the *Grundrisse*, essentially – he believes he can reveal the origins of 'economic dialecticity' in the capitalist negation of the social premises of human activities and in the necessary revenge of 'sociality' against the relations of production. The as-yet little developed 'sociality' of the earliest human societies finds itself considerably enriched by the new connections and relations after having passed through the painful process of bourgeois privatisation.[3] This thesis, which discreetly substitutes society for the Hegelian Spirit, is abandoned, however, in the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Apparently, Marx realises that by doing this he is being unfaithful to his essential methodological principle: not transforming general assumptions or preconditions into hypostases, that is, universal matrices of explanation. That is why he tries, from this point on in his work, to locate the sphere of 'dialecticity' in

areas where human activities are autonomised with respect to their bearers and to other spheres of activity (where dialecticity does not prevail). Dialectical metamorphoses of value and its forms (commodities, money, capital, and the like) derive less from a dynamic of social deviation (society's infidelity to its origins) than to automatic social reflexes (*automatismes sociaux*) linked to specific arrangements (*agencements*) of human activities and relations. Dialectical movements are movements of real abstractions which regulate and displace exchanges and practices above the heads of social actors. It is with respect to the imperatives of valorisation that people orient their efforts; these imperatives function as frameworks for their interaction, indicators for the behaviour and objective obstacles to their own arbitrary will. In other words, in the 'dialectical' sector of social life, it is not norms, but processes and relations crystallised into planned material arrangements and automatic procedures, that impose themselves on individuals. Social exchanges are no longer acts performed principally by actors consciously engaging in exchanges; they are rather a setting into relation of social forms intended to coincide with the expanded reproduction of the value *par excellence*: capital. That is why value as a sensible-suprasensible reality, which assimilates human activities the better to negate them in their concreteness and materiality, manifests itself as a kind of embodiment of the Hegelian substance-subject.

II

For Marx, the problem is one of an inverted world, the head (that is, people in action) where the feet should be, in which social relations, separated from their living bearers, take place among things – or a particular variety of things, namely, commodities. The dead seize the living and the suprasensible dominates the sensible; the dialectic is the result of an inversion which stands all society on its head. However, Marx does not claim this inversion to be a perversion requiring analysis in simple terms of degradation or loss of content; he tries to show that it runs contrary to certain other processes, such as the metabolism between humanity and nature, human communications and symbolic exchanges, and so forth, from which the dialectic of the value-form can never totally be separated or freed. A basic and irreducible duality characterises capitalist society, but it would be an error to interpret this as the break-up of an original unity and the result of a continuous history,

homogeneous in its essential components. The duality is rather to be interpreted as a latent and recurrent incompatibility between (1) the ideality of value and capital (the constant surmounting of limits, the ideal negation of material obstacles) and (2) the rationality (the finite determination) of concrete interactions among people and exchanges with the world. Capitalist society can thus be understood as a place of constant imbalance and disorder. The path to follow in order to supersede it is not given once and for all, since this depends on displacements which occur between the sensible-suprasensible world and the sensible world. Great importance should thus be attached to the articulation between these two dimensions – the forms within which they connect and disconnect. Marx never takes these up in a systematic way, but he is nonetheless fairly explicit both in the *1861–63 Manuscripts* and in *Capital*, especially when he takes up the problems of circulation and the phenomenal surface of society. He notes in Chapter 2 of the first volume of *Capital* ('Exchange') that in order for commodities to enter into relation with each other, the wills of their owners or controlling agents must inhabit them as things and encounter each other, leading to joint voluntary actions. Movements of value take place through the subjective exchanges of will by the representatives of commodities; the 'objectivity' of the world of commodities takes as a given condition the subjectivism of traders who care only about their own activity. In other words, an extreme form of supra-human objectivity, taking on the appearance of value as substance-subject, finds its conditions of possibility in the monadic subjectivities of wills which have no favoured points at which to apply themselves but which simply 'will themselves' in order to valorise themselves with respect to other wills. The devalorisation of the sensible and of social materiality at the level of the universality of commodity exchange corresponds, at the individual level, to that particular form of asceticism which causes people to deny systematically the sensible-material character of their relations in order to orient themselves in the world of value. Without undue exaggeration it can be said that the insertion of the individual into the abstraction of value is analogous to the odyssey of consciousness as Hegel described it in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: successive movements leading from the stage of sense-certainty to that of perception and then understanding, leading up to a point of total reversal, when the suprasensible world of laws and the ordering of multiplicity give way to a second suprasensible world in which consciousness knows itself in its 'other-being' (*être-autre*) and is equal to itself in this other-being.[4]

The inverted world of 'dialecticity' is thus inseparable from the specific processes of socialisation which cause the individual to live on a double register: that of valorisation under competitive conditions, and that of communication, multiple exchange and openness to the world, which is smothered by the first. The individual who must valorise himself or make himself appreciated in social relations thus uses his concrete forms of rootedness, his networks of human contacts, and all the qualities at his command as means of enhancing his value in a generalised quest for abstract wealth and socially recognised signs of success in the competition for valorisation. The advance of his consciousness (its self-discovery) is linked in this context to the constantly recurring negation of a part of himself and his environment in order to transform the world into a stage where he acts out his valorisation. And it is because he plays this role of seeking valorisation for its own sake that he becomes the 'representative of commodities' spoken of by Marx. He takes part in the world of commodities by experiencing it as the substratum from which he realises himself, or more precisely, sees himself as attaining self-realisation. This reflex of representative thought is at the same time a boiling-down of action to its pure form, a repudiation of its potential or latent polymorphous character; action becomes the instrument of valorisation. Labour-action envisions its mission as a submission to conditions revealed by the senses and technical control of processes; it sees in this the basis of its own elevation beyond material constraints. But it is precisely at this moment that everything undergoes a new reversal; the subjectivisation of the world by labour – the representation which projects itself beyond the sensible into the sensible-suprasensible – reveals itself to be the condition of the objectification of social relations and the autonomisation of value. Labour which, in its private conditions of performance and in its solipsistic representations, constantly denies its own sociality, displaces the latter towards the forms of value. It gives them the motor force with which to animate sensible suprasensible objects – commodities, money, capital. As Marx wrote, labour represents itself as capital, as incorporating itself in its own products by giving them the stamp which allows them to circulate and be exchanged. But it thus escapes from itself and becomes, through these very processes, abstract labour indifferent to its content and to concrete expenditures of energy and intelligence. Labour represented as value (or value-in-representation) thereby becomes the condition by which the transformation of labour power

into commodities becomes possible. After labour has represented itself in value form, value in turn represents itself as labour, as concrete human effort. Value-in-process is a series of permutations between representatives, things represented and the act of their representation. That is why the theory of value cannot be a labour theory of value, as Marx rightly attempts to make clear in *Capital*, but a theory of the value-form of social actors and social relations. Labour as representation of human activity directed towards value shapes the most essential social operations – the orientation of social production, allocation of the human and material resources of society, and especially, regulation of the relations between performers of abstract labour and supervisors of the labour-process, delegated to occupy these functions by dead labour. By depositing itself in sensible suprasensible things, labour is not simply acting out its role; it is also crystallising social and intersubjective relations in a one-sided way by arranging them according to 'objective' intellectual forms (*objektive Gedankformen*), that is, by reifying and fetishising them.

If we abstract from all these mirror-games between representations and social operations, to speak of the value of labour makes as much sense – as Marx wrote – as to speak of a yellow logarithm. In other words, the representation or exposition of the 'dialecticity' of the economy cannot exist without a critical dimension coextensive with the elucidation of the movements of auto-valorising value. The exposition (*Darstellung*) cannot simply follow the movement of deducing the forms of value as in the *Science of Logic*; it must also, simultaneously, demonstrate that the 'reality' of chainlike dialectical connections is of a second order, both as phenomenal appearance which refers back to an essence (negation of the immediate), and, especially, as a deployment of categories which cannot abstract from its sensible material premises. Simple circulation, for example, refers back to the circulation of capital, which refers back, in turn, to the production process, in which concrete work activities, having become vectors for general abstract labour, produce surplus value, the fundamental negation of equivalence relations. An adequate mode of exposition for this object – the critique of political economy – must in fact apprehend the overall process of capitalist production, that is, it must capture simultaneously its dialectical unity of circulation and production and the real contradictions or incompatibilities of which it cannot rid itself.

This double requirement is particularly apparent in Volume 3 of *Capital*, when Marx takes up the problem of crises and the

falling rate of profit. He takes particular care to show that the accumulation of capital constantly reproduces oppositions between the theoretically unlimited process of valorisation and the boundaries (or determinations) imposed on the material or technical processes of production and exchange. It is therefore illogical to seek in Marx's mature works a demonstration of the inevitable, preordained fall of capitalism. The conceptualisation he uses, although solid in its aims and formulations, is broad and hence subject to different interpretations in its range of applications. The categories of the critique of political economy reflect the contours of objective intellectual forms; they describe the dynamic relationships of these forms as quasi-natural historical processes; however, through a permanent reflexive movement they also point to the one-sidedness and partiality of what they put forward in the first instance. The counterpoint of the 'dialecticity' of capital is to be found in the elucidation of everything problematical about its effectuation, everything that might pose a challenge to it. The future of society is not to be found in systems of laws according to the classic deterministic scheme, but in the confrontation of dynamic movements; these may reconcile with one another but cannot be confused with one another. It would thus be wrong to hem theory in by assigning it to a definitively bounded subject; it should always be prepared, on the contrary, to return to the project of apprehending the transfers and movements of capitalist dialecticity as well as the resistance of technical-material or sense-material relations, against the background of expanded social reproduction (in the double sense of intensive and extensive expansion). Theory must not take for granted an invariable essence of capitalism; it must follow the latter's variations, by patiently deconstructing its spontaneous social categorisations and systems of representation which may be found in social practices and the institutions which circumscribe them. Therefore, the critique of political economy cannot, as theory, claim the classic status of a supra-historical science – practical-critical and critical-practical – of social relations.[5] It is a setting into motion of the frozen sphere of social forms of representation and their crystallisation in the most varied practices. It thus challenges the surface objectivity of capitalist society, the sort which makes economy appear to be a substratum upon which everything is constructed, opposing it to a second-order objectivity, a dynamic and plural one, made up of continuities and discontinuities. The critique of political economy does not aim so much to speak of the object called society, but

rather of the articulations between relations or practices, and the structuration processes of social groups and their environments. Its aim is less to classify phenomena and institute order than to smash the obstacles to knowledge present in the seemingly most rigorous approaches. Potentially, then, the critique of political economy is a critique of economic theories and the critique of theoretical reflection and its procedures for accounting for the social. It does not claim to represent social objects as they are immediately encountered, but to study their constitution, their forms of representation, and the processes of metabolism among humans, technology and nature which determine their form of existence (which should allow it to show to what extent the agitated and feverish activity of capitalist society is accomplished at the price of a domesticated social imaginary). Basically, it refuses to be a thought based on the given or on positivity; it is open instead to all the challenges to given reality which society abounds in, in spite of the apparent reproduction of the Same.

This antipositivism, so frequently found in the mature Marx, does not, however, exclude relapses into certain commonplace notions of his time. The model of critique coexists in Marx with that of traditional explicative science; theoretical circumspection often yields to revolutionary impatience and the conception of complex social transformation may turn into prophecy about the incipient collapse of capitalism. These unresolved tensions that can be found in even the most novel and original texts (from *Capital* to the *Theories of Surplus Value*) make tangibly clear the danger of canonising the Marxian opus. This is particularly true for one of the strong moments of Marx's theory: the theory of value. In several polemics against economists of his time, notably Ricardo, Marx lays stress on everything that separates him from Ricardo's labour theory of value, but we are forced to note that he draws very close to this 'naturalist' theory of value when he tries to understand certain phenomena and certain developments in the capitalist economy. To explain prices of production in relation to the rate of profit and the balancing-out of the latter among the different capitals, quantitative measures of value (labour time crystallised in products) become a privileged instrument, even to the extent of relegating to secondary significance the idea of value as representation and form. Socially necessary labour time is no longer a complex social relation among people, activities and means of production – a relation reflected, inverted and frozen in recurring social representations – but instead

a nature-like standard of measure (seemingly just as concrete as labour itself). Measures of value are thus no longer secondary, that is, determined by something other than themselves; they become primary and determinate. From these theoretical slips, Marx wanders into the impasse known as the problem of the 'transformation of values into production prices'. He gives it a non-solution (by abstracting from the necessary transformation of the values of capitals into production prices) and believes that by starting with these premises he can balance the total mass of surplus value with that of profit. In this manner, it becomes impossible to understand that production prices do not derive from quantified measures of value, but from conditions of production (effectiveness of production techniques) and from contrary or opposing variations of profits and wages. Thus he can no longer trace measures of value (homogenisation and quantification of abstract labour) to their true origin in the polarity of class relations and the physical productivity of labour. Measures of value are not seen in their real status of dependent variables (beyond socially necessary labour time and the abstract equalisation of the multiple labours at the level of production and of exchange), a crystallised balance of forces between classes and the technical-cognitive relations to the means of production embedded in these class relations. Measures of value are substantified, so to speak, and their relational nature forgotten as if they were the quantitative expression of a 'natural' substance, namely, labour time.[6]

Once he has taken this path, Marx finds himself involuntarily but unavoidably carried towards a rather 'naturalistic' conception of the economic contradictions of capitalism. Without ever disappearing completely, the problems of compatibility, or lack of it, between the sensible and dialectical levels of social relations are gradually relegated to a place of secondary importance, while the oppositions and contradictions at the level of accumulation are favoured. The movement of valorisation thus tends more and more to be analyzed as producing itself, in linear fashion, within its own limits; economic contradictions engender each other according to a dynamic which accentuates the difficulties of capitalism. A good example of this orientation, never rendered fully explicit, is Marx's law about the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (and its underlying assumption, the rising organic composition of capital). In formulating such a law, Marx was evidently attempting to approach the overall movement, or logic of accumulation, of capital, while avoiding overly mechanistic or deterministic predictions. However, when he began to concentrate

to narrowly on the economic level and the variations in unit-measures of value, it escaped him that tendencies for the rate of profit to fall are not only counterbalanced or temporarily neutralised by counter-tendencies; they may also be completely invalidated by a changing balance of forces between valorisation and sense-material. As many Marxist economists now recognise, there is no long term in which a law of the downward evolution of the profit rate manifests itself and therefore one cannot turn to such a law as a basic explanation for economic crises; more complex, pluralist theorisations must be sought.[7]

It must be admitted that Marx, in spite of his wish to contribute to a political economy of direct service to the working class, never clearly formulated the project of reversing the inversion, that is, entrusting to political economy the aim of reconstructing the overall pattern of material and sensible movements underlying the valorisation process, by exposing the mechanisms of social representation which function as mechanisms of sense-rigidification and deformation of meanings by substitution for one another (certain movements or relations becoming manifestations of what they are not and cannot be). In short, in Marx's formulations, the critique of political economy does not yet appear as a decoding of interlocked material and non-material flows – a decoding which might lead to a radical challenge to the most fundamental (cognitive, ethical and practical, sensible and libidinal) arrays of relations among people and between humanity and the world. The critique of political economy, beyond its immediate areas of application, must, however, be critical of the frozen forms of intersubjectivity (communication derailed by valorisation) which, by making individuals into Robinson-subjects, renders them incapable of thinking out their relations to others, to action and to materiality, in terms other than those of will and domination. The critique of political economy can thrive only as a destruction of the ontology that underlies the world of (spiritual and material) values and will, not out of a vague predilection for the retrospective contemplation of hierarchical orders that preceded the polytheism of values, but in the aim of conceiving in radically different ways the forms of relation between people and nature, or even establishing new relations between action and the social imaginary. By following this direction, the critique of political economy should show, among other things, that technology (including scientific constructions) is not at humanity's disposal, but instead fully subjected to the logic of abstract labour as social relation to be reproduced

and as social relation to objectivity and subjectivity. Technology, indeed, is not pure instrumentality (adequate correspondence of ends to means); it carries with it representations and conceptions of the world which predetermine our ways of approaching and learning about material processes and exchanges. It is not in itself domination or oppression; it transmits in its most detached 'objectivity' (with the perspective of respecting extra-human processes in order to channel them better) strong doses of one-sided subjectivity which negate or hide a portion of human relationships to the world. Contrary, then, to what Marx seems to suggest in *Capital*, one cannot reduce the questions raised by technology to those inherent in the capitalist use of machines. Technology poses, more fundamentally, the problem of the nature and form of productive forces, as incorporation of human and material productive forces. In this respect, Marx's works open some interesting avenues, in particular the idea of liberated human productive forces – liberated, that is, from the constraints of capital-valorisation – but Marx does not push this question far enough. One may ask, for example, whether the difficulties encountered in mastering technological processes and reconstructing the symbiosis between people and machines on new foundations, have not been underestimated or reduced too narrowly to considerations about material production or production in general. The liberation of human productive forces, which certainly involves liberation with respect to the domination of abstract labour, also includes an extra-productive dimension which it would be dangerous to ignore. Only by extracting itself from a reductive subject-object dialecticity can the social imaginary engender new ways of 'practicing society' and the world, while using machine systems and systemic forms of organisation ('automatic' social mechanisms) as a true extension of human actions.

The imprecise, hesitant or uncertain aspects of the Marxian critique of political economy have, of course, overshadowed the audacity of its conception and the novelty of many of its insights. After Marx's death, the discipline of critical economy became, for the most part, a variant of political economy itself, whose main concern was to formulate the laws of evolution of capitalism. This has manifested itself first by an a-critical acceptance of a 'naturalist' theory of value which owes more to Ricardo than to Marx. Marxists, it is true, have taken their distance from Ricardian socialists who call for the right to the full product of labour and regard exploitation as an attack on the physical and moral integrity of the worker. But if we look a bit closer,

Marx's disciples do not move very far from the Ricardian perspective when they take labour as a kind of primary, supra-historical element of social organisation. They do not consider abstract labour as a substance-subject produced by social relations and representations, but as a substance common to all products of human productive activity, regardless of differences among societies. Socialism, as collective control over labour processes and as democratically-decided disposal of surplus labour, is thus the revelation of labour to itself and of society to itself. Socialist society puts labour in its real place, and the withering away of the law of value takes place in the form of the gradual disappearance of market mechanisms (the market of means of production and of labour power) and the progress of planned direct allocation of social labour among the different branches of production. That is why the capitalist economy can be criticised as an economy based on the irrational use of labour (waste, unemployment, and so on) and social anarchy at the economic level.

Several types of economic contradictions – insufficient solvent demand with respect to production, disproportionate accumulations of capital among the different branches of the economy, decline of the rate of profit, over-accumulation – all bear witness to the fact that capitalism suffers from certain incurable dysfunctions. Naturally, views differ as to the possible outcomes: collapse of the system under the weight of its own contradictions, growing mass consciousness of the negative effects of maintained capitalist relations, progressive transformation of the socio-economic mechanisms for coping with recurring difficulties, and so on. This does not prevent the great majority of Marxists from believing that the end of capitalism is foreordained in its most basic characteristics as an economic system, even if the events are not programmed in detail. The critical theory of capitalism is therefore not required to go beyond a theory of the decadence of capitalist relations of production. This means that it does not need to elucidate capitalism's conditions of development and expanded reproduction, nor, less still, to pay attention to the gradual changes which may occur in social relations in the areas of action open to individuals, and more generally on the horizon of social practices. To criticise capitalism, in this perspective, does not involve any incessant displacement of theoretical frameworks, nor any search for what is hidden beneath appearances or in the cracks and fault lines along the orderly surface of social relations; it only involves recording what is happening before one's eyes and,

from there, seeking reasons for an abstractly different future. It is quite significant that the critique of political economy has become, in the hands of most Marxists, an altogether positivist theory of the economy, its necessary laws of motion, its cycles and its evolution along predetermined path – in other words, a discipline quite analogous to its adversary, 'bourgeois' political economy. For in both versions, one finds the same attachment to a narrow model of social science and a corollary methodology. Naturally, the basic premises and references tend to differ greatly, given 'bourgeois' economists' commitment to 'subjective' theories of value, and this explains why many Marxists believe, in all good faith, that they are accomplishing a critical mission by putting forward their 'objective' conception of value as an antidote to the subjectivism of the marginalists. But this should not hide the fact that the two adversaries are opposed on only one point: the supposedly 'natural' substrata of value – labour vs. utility – that is, on the criteria for judging activities which confront each other in the spheres of circulation and production: the work of supervision or surveillance on the one hand, wage-labour and tasks of execution on the other. In one case, the reference to the rationalist psychology of marginal utility and the optimal combination of factors of production reflects and justifies capitalist roles (accumulation, innovation, and so on); in the other case, the primordial role of dependent labour in the production of wealth expresses in theory the self-evaluation of wage-workers in their resistance to exploitation.

It is indeed a question of two social 'subjectivities' looking for the 'objective' foundation of their practices; the two points of view diverge to be sure, but this does not prevent the economists of both sides from joining each other in fetishising the economy – the economy in which they coexist, even while engaging in harsh confrontations. One may be tempted, it is true, to contest this analysis by calling to mind the resolute historicism of the Marxists, practically all of whom stress the historical incompleteness and imperfection of capitalism as a mode of production. But are we not dealing here with a naturalised historicism – or a historicised naturalism – which claims to elucidate a social dynamic with reference to a few basic and easily recognisable matrices? Of course, it would be unjust to reduce the thought of Marxists to a narrow naturalism – its best developments and intuitions escape this reproach – but it must be admitted that the forays beyond the Ricardian labour theory of value are few and far between, and have never been seriously pursued. Thus the critique of political economy is not yet really a discipline; so far it exists

only in potential, not yet as an articulate and systematic discourse.

If Marx's initial indications are taken as a starting point, the broad lines of inquiry of political economy and its means of grasping the two levels of social reality - the dialectical and the non-dialectical – have yet to be defined clearly. It must grasp the movements of the economy in their double nature, that is, with attention to the series of successive splits which occur, both at the level of relations and that of practioces. More significantly, the interaction of these two worlds must be understood, that is, their ways of influencing and conditioning each other, in a process which is apparently endless, although dominated by the dialectic of objective social forms.

It is particularly important to move beyond the simplistic opposition between the 'bewitched' world of value and commodities on the one hand and the 'authentic' world of material and sensible metabolisms on the other. Each penetrates the other, representing and asserting itself through the other. In this sense, real abstractions function in such a way as to assure passage from one level of reality to the other, even before becoming barriers to an overall perception of processes. The flows of production and exchange, as material-sensible combination of transformations and transfers, find meaning and direction in the codes and signs which impart coherence to the market relations between equivalent values. In the same way, dialectical relations between forms of value are fuelled by the material displacements and changes set in movement by people, although they reveal themselves to be in opposition to people's interests. Constant permutations and substitutions transfigure the social scene with optical illusions, *quid pro quos* and telescoped images and the like, in which reality is always disguised and appears in double. Use value is a necessary condition of exchange value, but it cannot be produced without the movement of exchange values. Concrete labour carries abstract labour within itself, but it is the social distribution of the latter among the different branches of production and circulation which determines the concrete characteristics of concrete labour. These relations of inseparability do not, however, exhaust themselves in mutual interaction. The codes and signs of self-valorising value cannot express all the meanings attached to the material and non-material flows of social practices, and the latter fit only imperfectly into the models of social forms. Real abstractions, as points of contact or communication between these homogeneous/heterogeneous worlds, cannot convert the sensible-

material into the sensible-suprasensible or vice versa. There always persists, both on the dialectical and the non-dialectical side, a certain measure of excess which resists assimilation – a surplus value of meaning of the material-sensible as well as values which cannot valorise themselves in the sphere of the suprasensible. The result is a nearly uninterrupted series of pressures and counter-pressures exerted from one world to the other. The forces of attraction appear to provoke, in their very movement, vigorous forces of repulsion in a general climate of unstable reproduction. The processes of integration of the different levels of the real into each other are accompanied by tendencies of rejection and dis-integration which strike most social phenomena with the seal of ambiguity and inner tension. This is particularly true of the class struggle, which constitutes for workers both resistance to the valorisation of capital and struggle for the valorisation of labour-power against the various forms of devalorisation. Class struggle can either put a damper on capital accumulation or stimulate it remarkably. It is thus likely to carry within it diametrically opposite meanings, or at least non-superimposable ones, with definite repercussions in any case on the functioning of social relations. For individual and collective actors, the significance of practices, relations and social institutions is never definitively given; out of real abstractions arise secondary abstractions which aim – at the price of rapid exhaustion – to establish unity within fluctuating diversity and harmony in conflict. In the systemic constructions organised around real abstractions, unequivocal and permanent meanings can never be assured: society makes and un-makes itself in discontinuous sequences. There are certain isolated spaces in society in which value has only a limited weight (family relations, for example), and it is not rare for certain forms of sociability (friendship, camaraderie, sexuality) to partially escape the requirements of reproduction. It is thus indispensable that the primacy of the dialectical world be materially and ideally reaffirmed by institutions at the societal level, at a level removed from the effervescence and the incongruities of the confrontations between the suprasensible and the sensible. The state in particular must develop complex mechanisms for compensating the polymorphic deficiencies of valorisation, even if this entails contradicting its immediate logic (via the correction of market mechanisms, public interventions into the economy, social protection, and so on). As the so-called regulation school of political economy has shown very well,[8] the capital-labour relationship can never be static; it requires

perpetuation through successive reorganisations of the wage relation (the mode of integration of workers into production, distribution and consumption). Legal regulation itself cannot be limited to the regulation of exchange relations; it must gradually flow into the area of social conflict and take part in the relative pacification of such conflict. The sphere of social naturalness (value) is thus complemented by a sphere of general interest whose purpose is to stitch the two worlds back together through the rational conciliation of the 'natural constraints' of value (the laws of the economy) and human needs. This general interest presents itself – and is represented in its forms of appearance – as a balancing force between the dialectical extra-human and the human, thus as the force which recovers or patches together meanings which are in the process of drifting apart.

It is, of course, impossible not to notice that the functioning of state institutions is characterised by ambivalence with respect to both economic laws (valorisation) and social laws of competition (or the differential evaluation of individuals and groups). The state does not simply 'derive' from capitalist market relations; it must, on the contrary, negate these relations in part in order to preserve them, and far from putting an end to the heterogeneity of the two worlds, it reproduces this heterogeneity on its own scale in the form of recurrent dysfunctions and internal contradictions. In order to maintain at least a minimal possibility for action, state institutions must present a façade of unity and even declare themselves to be a supra-social entity with a clear consciousness of its objectives and tasks; but their actual day-to-day life is fraught with hesitations and precarious compromise, orientations quickly abandoned and practices which bog down. The more state apparatuses and the rules they put into practice extend themselves outwards and penetrate into social relations, the more the state's activities expose themselves to irreconcilable tendencies and cross-currents. The state can never stop defining itself, since it is faced with demands from both the dialectical and non-dialectical spheres. Its developments is largely a forward-flight – a succession of attempts to escape from the perverse effects of its own actions and decisions (for example, unforeseen negative influence on the dynamics of valorisation). The state which assists, subsidises and protects is also the state which upsets or brakes many activities. Neither its role nor the limits of its field of intervention are ever clearly definable. After the great expansion of the Welfare State, many social groups are

now crying out for 'less state' and more free space for regulation via the money supply or the market place, without actually being able to say how such a policy choice can be put into practice. At the level of appearance, there is a contradictory dynamic between 'more state' and 'less state'; this dynamic seems to control politics and the economy without any predictable logic to the motion. In reality, however, the forward march of state regulation is never stopped by de-nationalisation or de-regulation campaigns, pursued like crusades against a proliferating state bureaucracy. More precisely, there are subtle displacements and modifications in the aims of state interventions – for example, more aid or less to the private sector; more state-capitalist activity or less, according to the problems posed by the economic and social dynamics. But at bottom, there is no significant long-term movement backward from the 'mixed economy', which combines a multiform public intervention with private initiatives taking place less and less on an individual basis. As both Max Weber and Joseph Schumpeter saw very clearly, a statist trend and the decline of the individual enterprising spirit dominate the evolution of contemporary society, relegating small and middle-sized enterprise to a quickly receding past.

This does not signify, however, a discreet transition from capitalism to another social system; the dialectical world is not reabsorbed into the non-dialectical world. The state sphere undergoes in its turn the influence of valorisation and competition; it transposes them into its domain as rules of behaviour for its own interventions. Both internally and externally, the state must find its own way to valorise itself, taking care to cut costs and maximise its utility in stimulating the overall dynamic of valorisation. It must therefore take a much more direct part in what it is supposed to be regulating and monitoring from above. The national state today is incorporated more than ever before into international competition and cannot exercise full control over the erratic movements of capital, either at the circulation level (monetary instability) or the production level (the dynamics of investment). It is engaged in a constant race with other states to keep up with the requirements and the consequences of capital accumulation.

Socialisation as state control is thus a process in which the state becomes engaged against its convictions, as it were; it is a type of socialisation which betrays its own claims to be suppressing particularisms in favour of rational, general interests or equalisation of opportunity for particular interests. Indeed, political forms

themselves – institutions, modes of circulation and distribution of powers, forms of political exchange and representation – must conform more or less directly to the logic of valorisation. As complements or extensions of the real abstractions of the economy, they function according to interpretive schemas and language codes which ban from this field of activity and interest anything which, in normal times, deviates from relations of appreciation-depreciation and valorisation-devalorisation among individuals and groups. Politics obviously does not feed only on material interests expressed in rational terms; its stakes are frequently symbolic, materialising in rituals and orchestrated scenes. But this does not contradict the fact that it is essentially an exaltation of values – promotion of sensible-suprasensible values of the economy, cult of possession of the apparatuses of power (prestige, honour, reputation and the like). In the sphere of politics there is no clear, linear progression from great and apparently irrational mass movements to bureaucratic management, nor from belief in the virtues of charismatic leaders to belief in the virtues of political technology. Participation in politics is not an entry into multi-dimensional confrontation open to social change; it is a participation in games of representation in which processes of substitution of persons and positions are accompanied by transposition and transfiguration of lived experience, unsatisfied aspirations and unavowed frustrations. Contrary to what Talcott Parsons thought, the political system is not engaged in realising society's goals, that is, mobilising its human and material resources in order that society may reaffirm its deepest cultural values. Rather, it is a system which aims to reduce the reflexivity (the possibility of taking distance from the given situation) in social relations and in complex relations between humanity and its environment. Its purpose is not to favour the tendencies towards transformation in the other sub-systems of society, but to limit their possibilities of variation, adaptation and restructuration. The state, often analyzed as a crystallisation of social consciousness, or as the incarnation of rationality, reveals itself paradoxically as a set of conscious forces working unconsciously to perpetuate the absence of control and responsibility by people over a great part of their relations and interactions. The political sphere, in capitalist society, far from overflowing with consciousness, presents most often a vacuum or gap, an absence or failure of certain dimensions of what people accomplish or try to accomplish. Politics, in most of its manifestations – strategic and tactical orientations, activities of management

of existing relations and activities in preparation of the future – is thus a deficit or deficiency of the political. In order for politics to maintain its effectiveness, that is, its ability to control the inegalitarian distribution and circulation of powers required for the relations of valorisation, it must inevitably have recourse to different forms of myth – the myth of the unity and continuity of the state, the myth of the superiority of the Reason of State over common sense, myths of great statesmen, and the myth of public opinion (in order to discourage awareness of the latter's reactional and inarticulate character). Thus politics recognises by itself that it has abandoned the creation of new social possibilities and subordinated itself to constraints that it fails to question or even chooses not to see. It can only be an expanded reproduction of the Same, or partial innovation, even while presenting itself as a broadening of contingency starting from necessity. Politics, as capitalist society knows it, is made up of promises which cannot be kept; as social reflexivity it negates itself just when it claims to assert itself. Consequently, it cannot be a labour of society upon itself, nor a systematic search for new modes of social organisation and new relations with the world. In its fetishised forms, it takes part in the forward flight of value valorising itself.

III

The future, as a result, presents itself as a particularly difficult temporal dimension to apprehend. It is a mandatory element in the capitalist horizon because accumulation (investment, innovation, and so on) relies on future results flowing from its efforts in the present. But the probable future of the expanded reproduction of capital as expanded social reproduction of social relations is also a risky future, exposed to various unforeseeable disorders and imbalances. It is repetition or redundancy of the current forms of production and circulation of capital, but at the same time a threat to the continuity of processes in motion. It is a chronological succession of phases, from the production to the reproduction of capital; a return to the interdeterminate periods of opposition between the dialectical and the non-dialectical; but it is also an interruption or break in linear temporal continuities. The future as it appears in forecasts and quantitative extrapolations is intermittently obliged to confront the future seen in terms of questionings and uncertainty.

This becomes evident when one tries to envision with any seriousness the future of labour as a function of the successes scored by capital accumulation. Nothing appears able to challenge capital's thirst for living labour, but the most evident result of efforts to extend wage labour is to diminish the relative importance in production of living labour with respect to the dead kind. Each worker expends more and more accumulated labour (in terms of both value and technology). Without stretching the point, this means that very well-sustained growth rates are required if employment itself is to continue growing and if the domination of abstract labour is to maintain its hold on bodies and minds. However, growth requires ever-higher rates of technological innovation, which only reproduces or intensifies the problem. Technical progress does, of course, inaugurate new forms of exchange in human activity (and capital accumulation); by lowering the cost of commodities it facilitates the expansion of production, but it cannot alone guarantee that job creations will be more numerous than job suppressions. At the current time, it is increasingly probable that the rate at which equipment reaches obsolescence will pass the growth rate. It is true that the massive suppression of jobs in the directly productive sectors can be at least partially compensated by the creation of jobs in the indirectly productive sectors; but this can only last for a limited time, since new methods of raising the productivity of labour are becoming a necessity in this sector as well, in order to bring down costs. For the next few decades at least, permanent unemployment will be the fate of a growing portion of society. The result is an altogether paradoxical situation in which the social logic of abstract labour and capital accumulation is apparently borne by a diminishing portion of society in spite of its tendency to become universal. Capitalism thrives on the saving of time, not in order to allow society to dispose more freely of a growing mass of available time, but to expand the mass of dead labour possessed as capital. Capitalism does not exclude, but on the contrary implies, a greater and greater waste of human resources; it provokes the marginalisation of a great portion of society from from dominant social processes.

There should be nothing surprising, therefore, about the growth and development of certain forms of disengagement and loss of interest by workers in their activity of subordination. From the perspective of all those who are condemned to a precarious work status, or unemployment, abstract labour can no longer appear as the organising centre of individual life or the privileged means of

integration into social life. It is true that its relative absence does not signify its disappearance from the horizon; it remains present in the very form of its lack or absence and its negative impact on those who are not engaged in its mechanisms. But its presence, which is more or less far-off and threatening, cannot have any value as a regulator; that is, it cannot stand alone as a means of orienting people towards social trajectories in full conformity with the imperatives of capital and accumulation. At first glance, the situation is different for those who work permanently and are engaged in hierarchical systems of qualification; many such people accept the rather uncertain prospects of promotion in the course of their working lives. However, the differences are far less than what appears to be the case. First of all, permanent workers undergo strong pressure to become 'flexible' in terms of geographical situation, skill level, work conditions, and job duration. The processes of identification with one's work have become much more complex than during the long period of prosperity following the Second World War. To this must be added the crisis of professional training systems: there is no longer any evident, transparent relation between the efforts required to become trained and the available jobs on the labour market. Work as a socially determined individual life plan is no longer something that can be rationally directed or managed. Management has understood this and responded by attempting to 'personalise' the careers of workers in their companies, in order to re-establish a plausible relation between the work accomplished and one's position in the organisation. However, these attempts have struck up against the difficulty of measuring individual contributions to large modern production units dominated by the imperatives of technology and collective labour organisation. Also, it should be observed that while capital still appropriates productive intellectual powers and collective labour powers, it can no longer do so as easily as in the era of Taylorism. In order to appropriate science for its own profit, it must both autonomise scientific production and rely on more and more numerous strata of wage-earning intellectuals, and this does not occur without the penetration of class struggles into this area. Capital must rely especially, and more and more, on public-sector initiatives (state and para-state organisations) in order to promote and stimulate the production of applied knowledge, without any clearly foreseeable results. There have been waves of privatisation and reprivatisation in this sector as in others, but these have been powerless to hold back the processes now working themselves out. To master science and

technology, capital must disseminate them, socialise them in its own way, and well beyond what is strictly and immediately necessary. To be sure, they remain dependent on the dynamics of valorisation in their development in the definition of their objectives; but they are borne all the same by people – human productive forces – who cannot be analytically reduced to those dynamics. The project of trying to make everything pass through the needle's eye of abstract labour can never be thoroughly accomplished, once and for all.

Capitalism's ability to meet this fundamental challenge – the generalisation and systematisation of socialising processes – should not be underestimated. Collective relations are not usually organised so as to favour intense communicative relationships; most often they are circumscribed by bureaucratic rules and regulations. In other words, when change occurs within the framework of valorisation, the customary relations of competition are not replaced with democratic confrontation but with further hierarchisation and competition, which tends to fragment the relations and practices of the majority of people. In this context, collective enterprises are bound by major constraints; by contrast, the initiatives of individuals or primary groups appear in a positive and transfigured light. However, there is an obverse side to this spread of anti-statist sentiment: the rampant legitimation crisis of a broad range of institutions within large contemporary states. The themes of 'less state' and individual 'creativity' cannot suffice to cope with the problems of bureaucratic proliferation and the situations of subordination into which the immense majority of citizens are placed, as objects of administration and assistance programmes. In most cases, collective resistance is the most effective weapon for making arbitrary bureaucratic rule give way. Thus, in spite of the ideologies of 'new individualism', one observes, in a great many sectors of the working world, an aspiration towards an authentic democratic legitimacy which would change the conditions in which institutions function. For many people, the dilemma between oppressive bureaucracy and individualism (conceived as a liberating force) reveals itself to be a false one, for it does not correspond to their practical experience of the antinomies of the contemporary world.

It is not surprising, then, that capitalism's defence mechanisms against gradual socialisation are forced to go well beyond the institutional domain and occupy that of the production of objects (objects as environment and as extension of the world of subjectivity). Subjects who cannot freely develop their relations to

others and to the world (since these are bound by relations of valorisation) are confronted with a world crawling with objects in a perpetual process of renewal. This activity does not reflect a preoccupation with utility in the narrow sense (that is, observable material and biological satisfaction of needs); it reflects interests or needs which are more or less phantasmagoric. Individuals become 'subjects' for objects – 'subjects' in search of satisfaction through objects which give them the impression of extending their relational capacities through a constant permutation and substitution among ephemeral means of excitation. The object is there to give subjects, largely enclosed in routine and reactive practices, the impression of expanding as individual egos in a context of autorelationality, that is, relations to objects with a view to assimilating them. The subject loses itself in more or less accessible objects in the hope of finding itself and finding its place, free of the obstacles posed by the social relations of production. Behind the appearance of a transparent relationship to itself and a symbolic appropriation of the world there occurs a process of refraction of social and natural realities through coded objects. This de-realisation (or loss of reality) of social relations, accompanied by a sur-realisation of the social significations of seduction and illusion, clearly attains its apogee in the domain of production and circulation of objects of culture. The mass media which disseminate these, present them as new and different ways of speaking and experiencing the world, but they remain immersed in the world and continue to take part in the very real vicissitudes of valorisation. Thus there occurs no total break from the sphere of practice, but rather a constant swinging back and forth between a nearsighted realism and a quickly domesticated imaginary world. It is not audacity, but a hidden conservatism, that governs this social invention of culture-objects; this conservatism seeks to locate in the environment and in fantasy-products the universe of values which valorises solipsistic subjects. There is no incentive to experimentation nor any initiative to search for what is hidden under the surface of dominant social relations and practices and what therefore cannot be identified with valorisation (that which is not identical to valorising representations). That is why, when all is said and done, the hybrid world of mass culture cannot fully obscure the movements which give rise to new and original experiences of the world and a different quality of relationship with individuals, the environment and daily life. The dance performed by objects cannot cause the renewed bonds between people and their environment, both below and

beyond the dialectical networks of value, to be erased or forgotten. The feverish pursuit of objects cannot succeed in locking human subjects into the world of value.

5 Transforming the World or Transforming Action: Reflections on Art, Labour and Politics

I

Marxism first began to be placed on trial a long time ago, but the trial seems to have moved into a new historical phase. The weight of the accusations has grown, both in the East and in the West. The pleas against the defendant are gaining in insistence – and incisiveness. Clearly, a great ideological battle is being waged over the heritage of Marx. Some think that the practical and theoretical eradication of Marxism is the major stake of the late twentieth century; others, who side with Marxism, do so in bad faith or bad conscience, with uncertainty, or, as is more often the case, in confusion. The arguments which can be wielded against it are indeed countless. In its 'Marxist-Leninist' guise, it has turned into a justification of oppressive and retrograde regimes, incapable of adopting a path of auto-reform and emancipation of the mass majority. As a dominant ideology in the workers' movement, it appears to be defenceless against the latest developments of capitalism (in particular economic crises). Even the smaller critical currents of Marxism give the impression of being paralysed and out of commission. In the intellectual debates of these past decades, it cannot be said that Marxism has made a good showing, by reason of its fluctuation between eclecticism and dogmatism. New problematics and major discoveries have not frequently been generated from within Marxism. The Marxists indeed have dragged behind; most have been unable to renew their thought without recourse to the work of others.

Can it therefore be concluded that the battle is in fact being waged over a non-entity camouflaged by empty formulas? Not at all. The paradox is that Marxism, apparently moribund, occupies an unrivalled position in the contemporary spectrum of thought. Indeed, our era cannot be conceptualised without reference to the work of Marx and the Marxists or to the instruments they have forged to

understand history and society and to account for the conflicts which have constantly arisen. Clearly, even anti-Marxist thought is suffused with Marxism, if only to fight against it. The struggle over Marxism is thus being waged over a heritage – a broadly disseminated tradition – in order to determine to what extent it can be maintained in the present and the future. More, precisely, the question is whether what survives will be limited to a few cognitive instruments (for example, the importance of the forms of production and reproduction of life in any society) or whether it will remain a weapon for the emancipation of exploited and oppressed people. It cannot be denied that the predominant response today is the former one. In the wake of the theories of totalitarianism, many tend to locate the negative and perverse aspects of Marxism in its theorisation about future society and the 'new man'. According to this view, Marxism as a theory of revolution is a means of forcing the pace of historical events. It is thus seen as having changed secretly from a critique of existing social relations into the justifying ideology of a totalitarian and destructive utopia. It is therefore essential to purge the Marxist legacy of all allusions to a necessarily socialist outcome in history: the dialectics of revolution must go. However – need it be said? – this apparently compelling theme is unacceptable, for its real aim is to cast suspicion, above and beyond canonised Marxism, on anything which may contribute to the deep transformation of social relations.

This does not merely imply the need for an updating or renewal of Marxism. The Marxist tradition, in its different forms, must answer as well for its most basic failures, and in particular its inability to become a theory and practice of emancipation during the crises of the twentieth century. The strong mass support that certain Marxist ideas have obtained among wage workers, peasants and intellectuals should not obscure the limited character of this success. Marxist orthodoxy has not seen fit to take into account the ferments of dissatisfaction which have manifested themselves in everyday social relations. The passage from revolt to revolution is analyzed less as a broadening and deepening of a critical and well-informed refusal of degrading social or inter-individual relations than as the passage from a state of uncertainty to a state in which the 'direction' and the 'laws' of history are recognised. In other words, class struggle is not taken to mean alternative paths of development of social and intersubjective relations via processes of modification of practices, but rather a series of transformations and readjustments

of strategic (power-related) forms of organisation and modifications of social forms (property relations, structures of leadership in economic and political processes). The 'orthodox' Marxisms do, of course, postulate a great upheaval in class consciousness, but this change is presented as a more or less total break with the real lives and aspirations of workers – something resembling a sudden access to the truth, transcending individual limits and prescribing necessary actions against the dominant class. Thus conceived, class consciousness appears as a leap towards enlightenment by a collective subject, hypostasised with respect to its constituent elements which have up to now been mired in ignorance and largely blinded to its own interests. Whatever class consciousness may indeed be in this perspective, it does *not* involve thinking about processes whereby workers can progressively put an end to the spirit of competition and rivalry among themselves forging links of solidarity by building collective entities made up of social individualities strengthened by their connections with others and by their capacity for practical development.

The practices which have grown out of Marxism's penetration into social conflicts have, for all these reasons, acquired a double aspect. On the one hand, they are a questioning of the authority of capitalists in the economic domain and thus a demand for the opening-up of democratic processes at all levels of society (as opposed to the political nihilism of the anarchists). These practices undoubtedly have destabilising effects on social reproduction by sharpening class conflicts and unmasking certain relations of exploitation and oppression. However, they conform to a conception of mass action which subordinates such actions to contests of strength, competition for power as it is currently constituted, and rivalry for the control of the apparatuses of the bourgeoisie. Struggle is not liberation in and of itself; it is struggle for the supposed preconditions of liberation: the taking of power, control of the means of domination, and so on. Collective action taken with anti-capitalist aims is unconsciously modelled after the action of the adversary, even when it perceives itself in a positive light, that is, as class violence and radical negation of the existing order. Efforts are taken to do better than the organisations of the dominant class without using truly different means; 'better' is taken in this case to mean 'more effective', that is, involving better use of existing means and resources. Thus the major political organisations of the labour movement – the mass social democratic parties or the communist parties 'of a new type' –

were actually in advance of major twentieth-century trends towards bureaucratic politics and ideological supervision within party ranks. The bourgeoisie and its organisations took the lead from these Marxist-inspired labour parties in producing their own indispensable tools of social and political control. In this sense, Marxism served as a pacesetter for the successive reforms of the dominant class, via a series of apparently innovative practices, thereby falling into what Ulrich Sonnemann has called the 'constraint of repetition',[1] that is, in the circularity of the dynamic reproduction of the social order. The strategic turns, the changes of 'line' and programme, have not prevented the socialist labour movement from functioning in Sisyphean style, vainly trying to push its rock to the mountain's summit. The alternating successes and failures, and even the 'labour of the negative' within the great successes (the degeneration of victorious revolutions) have yet to provoke an overhauling of the collective memory or a reappropriation of the elements of a concrete utopia (in the Blochean sense) which are present in the multitude of sedimentations of practice as ferments of dissatisfaction and anxiety.

Historical temporality is understood as continuity and succession, movement and accumulation of experience, that is, as a sequential form of temporality in which the origin of failure is attributed to two factors: strategic political error and the lateness of class consciousness in catching up to the objectively maturing situation (the socialisation of productive forces, for example). There is therefore no place in this conception for a temporality of renewal and rupture, to be inaugurated via the establishment of new relationships between the past, present and future, with the unrespected promises of the past joining with possibilities to be realised in the future, in such a way as to relieve the present of its one-dimensionality and its self-contained consciousness. Given these limitations, history cannot, in spite of references to revolutionary experience, become a field of simultaneity and discontinuity, communication among discrete realities in space and time, heterogeneous but able through their collisions to create new fields of practical activity. History, in this outlook, does not learn to change, as it were, or to be modelled into a different historicity; it remains a series of recurrent confrontations and catastrophes.

The conclusion we must draw is that Marxism still identifies too strongly, especially at the level of action, with the world it seeks to fight. The ideas of practice and praxis, which most of Marxism's

interpreters consider essential, pose problems in those very aspects which seem most evident and most tantalising. A body of thought far too neglected by the Marxists, that of Martin Heidegger, allows us to reach this understanding, in its radical critique of the will to power and the subjectivism of teleological action characteristic of contemporary societies. Heidegger shows clearly how action is conceived and posited as the realisation of representations and objectives advanced by individual consciousnesses in the illusions of self-presence and presence-to-the-world. Action, it is supposed, actualises values which spring from individuals and return to them through the utilisation and transformation of the world. In this sense, it is tightly linked to technology as extension of thought in the 'thing-ness' of means and as multiplication of human forces in movement towards the realisation of values. In this framework action comes in the form of demiurgic manifestation or unilateral display of power, which perceives its other relations to beings and to being as negligible quantities or obstacles to be swept away. Thus action, even in its collective form (the sum of individual wills to power), is a solipsism, a confrontation of powers which seek to annihilate each other in mutual ignorance. Social relations – the world and being as irreducible to thought – are absent from the scene of practices; they become mere correlatives of a thinking activity which cannot conceive of its own finite character. Thought which believes itself to be infinite and in control of action becomes a prisoner of technology and nihilism engendered by the anarchy of quests for valorisation of the self and its spheres of activity. Contrary to what many Marxists have believed, the basic problem is not to put an end to division between contemplative theory, satisfied with its position in the world, and blind practice, stripped of its self-reflective capacities; nor is it the separation between intellectual and manual labour, even though this separation is altogether negative, relegating *poiesis* to an inferior position and turning it into pure instrumental activity, incapable of opening itself to experience. The deeper question is that of the principle of unity of theory and practice (as *poiesis* and as *praxis*), that is, of what binds them into their closure – above and beyond their transitory permutations of priority and role which favour one or the other by turns – and deafens them to everything other than the realisation of projects and a feverish objectivism marked by obsession with subjective affirmations. Should it not be asked, each time the unity of theory and practice seems to be accomplished in a form such as the concordance between future projections and

political-social practices, whether thought is not being obscured in its capacity to listen for non-correspondence or discontinuity with respect to what we seek to programme? May we not be witnessing a negation of action as opening-up-to-the-unprecedented, as broadening or diversification of people's connections with the world and with others, as they push beyond their limits as theoretical and practical subjects? As Heidegger notes, making progress in knowledge does not mean moving from the unknown to the known, but from the known to the unknown – from satisfied thought to questioning. For this reason, it is not enough to change the world, as one would be tempted to think by reading the theses on Feuerbach; action itself must also be transformed, as must be as well the actors who are in a position to transform it.

This critical perspective must not be confused with references – frequent among Marxists – to the creation of a 'new man', for these are rooted in an appeal to a morally ascetic attitude of conformity to an ideal norm (forced projection onto a future, to be avoided). It should rather be understood as a questioning of the violence inherent in social and intersubjective relations – a questioning, that is, of the modalities of organising the power to accomplish things (to discover, to expose oneself to novelty, to transform, and so on) when these modalities cause the power over people and things to appear as permanent oppression, or even as negation and destruction. On this point, Heidegger is joined by one of his most determined adversaries, Theodor W.-Adorno,[2] who discerns in contemporary forms of thought and action all the distinguishing marks and stigmata of a refusal of the non-identical (to thought and to oneself) and of negation of nature by culture. Contemporary thought, which is submitted to the law of exchange of equivalents (of values) and to its resulting identity-determining constraints, tends more and more to become logical absolutism, imprisonment of the world and experience within conceptual formalisation.

This tendency is particularly evident in the imperialism of science, which claims to exercise rule over the essential dimensions of the human world, starting from reductive constructs of its objects of knowledge, and in this instance, from an organisation of the sphere of practices which neglects their presuppositions, or the social pre-comprehensions on which they depend. Scientific laws and the necessary relations to which they refer are in fact detached and removed from the situated contexts which give them their validity. Scientific enunciations may thus be perceived as belonging to a

scientific language with universal claims, which articulates, little by little, the domain of certain knowledge – or which, if not certain, is at least indisputable, by reason of its supra-subjectivity (that is, the intersubjectivity of scientific languages). In this framework, objectivity tends to become confused with method and with the rigorous application of the latter in all circumstances and all places; knowledge (*savoir*) presents itself as a positive accumulation of elements of knowledge (*connaissances*) made possible by scientific generalisation. In spite of the uncertainty of scientists, the successes of science are seen as important determining factors of a great many social practices and as mythical models of successful practice, that is, having met the test of effective results and tending to confirm control and possession of the world. Science, with its parade of innovations, thus introduces itself into complex procedures of negation of reality and suppression of all that is not efficient, in the name of a higher reality of the achievable. Marxism, insofar as it sees itself as 'scientific socialism', clearly takes part in this practical and theoretical restrictiveness, because it claims to found itself practically on the 'solid ground' of established relations or inevitable transitions from one set of social forms – or even entire social formations – to another. Marxism thus conforms in spirit to the reproduction and reinforcement of the dichotomy, so characteristic of the contemporary world, between apparent rationality at the praxeological level and irrationality at the private level, which affects the public level in times of crisis. The omnipresence of the teleology of action in social relations and the supremacy of practices of evaluation (reflecting the aim of achieving maximum value), make processes of collective and individual identity-affirmation more and more difficult. Sociality as well as individuality are in a perpetual state of imbalance in their reciprocal relations; the social is at some times an objective social which imposes itself on practices through various automatic mechanisms (the market, for example), and at other times an effect of mass gatherings or encounters around orientations which escape conscious collective control. As for the individual dimension, it fluctuates between affirmation of subjectivity in a social sphere which appears as its field of action, and submission of the subject to constraints which penetrate it entirely and escape its control, leaving it isolated and defenceless.

Society as culture, that is, as the world of creations of the human spirit and as the technical–teleological environment erected to conquer natural obstacles, can therefore be nothing other than 'a second

nature' endowed with a coercive force often superior to that of the first one. The interpenetration of social processes forms a negative totality, a superposing of generalised particularist constraints which weigh on all activities. Not only is there a subjugation of human productive forces by relations of production having the strength of external powers; there is also a dissociative socialisation of these human productive forces, that is, production of mutilated individuals as the basic material of social construction. As a result, the critique of capitalist social dynamics is not complete without what Adorno calls a critical history of the individual (or of individuation) – of individual development – and non-development – in social relations. Adorno no doubt needs to be criticised for relying on a regressive philosophy of history for his explanation of the dialectic of sociality and individuality; this dialectic becomes a dialectic of subjective reason and its return to myth after having apparently vanquished it. However, this should not obscure the importance of his critique of bourgeois individuality as a monadic individuality which, in the name of self-affirmation and self-preservation, is led to deny its own social ties and thus, in a succeeding phase, to submit to hypostatised collective realities. As Adorno wrote, the subject tends to become a copy even as it holds fast to what it believes to be its originality with respect to others; a-social individuality succumbs to social determinism by reason of its very isolation. Subjective consciousness, that fortress of internal life, cannot, by itself, stop the disruptive intervention of society as negative totality in the most intimate reaches of the individual, since it is to a great extent negation and oppression of nature in humanity – violence in the service of one-dimensional activities. The individual who realises himself in action, that is, who constitutes himself as value, excludes himself from a broad range of possible relations and identities realisable through dialogue with others in the world. He sees everything in terms of how we can strengthen his ability to promote himself in the processes of evaluative competition, to the detriment of all that surrounds him and constitutes his own diversity. Even when the practices of individuals seem to adjust to each other, one cannot truly claim that they 'reply' to each other by stimulating shock waves and echos in an incessant play of correspondence. As a result, collective action itself becomes a multiple soliloquy, a precarious coalition of wills which meet only to ignore each other; it identifies itself with collective projects of discrimination and exclusion. The weak egos of disoriented individuals unify only to seek illusory security and

to find ephemeral satisfaction for their obsessive fears. Thus, for Adorno, practices in their spontaneity are suspect, even when they explicitly espouse objectives of liberation. Most of the time, aims which see themselves as revolutionary only become feverish activism which moves according to customary modes of action; abandoning oneself to practices posited as transformational reveals itself as an affirmation of constraints on oneself and others – as a quest for auto-valorisation through identification with hypostatised and imperative collective tasks. In this context, representations of the future merely contribute to reproducing the present because they are no more than its abstract negation and its obsessional extension. All critical theory must therefore proscribe the projection into the future of images which result from poorly controlled dissatisfaction and frustration. The liberated future can only be sketched-in negatively and shown as what it cannot or must not be.

This prohibition of images (*Bilderverbot*) by no means implies for Adorno an excuse for abstention or inaction. Permanent quiescence is just an unacceptable for him as the fever of activism. Those who refuse the *fait accompli* and its repetition are by no means exempted from seeking new and different forms of action and practice, even if that is limited to practicing theory in a radically new way (in particular by ridding it of its affirmative traits). Most of all, however, it is the domain of art which must be explored in order to trace the contours of practices which escape from the usual identificational and assimilative violence; for art, in its best manifestations, produces forms which harmonise with the non-identical without denying it. Art may, of course, seek to become a harmonious totality, a production of organic works which sanction the human spirit's taking of possession of the world or the spirit's ability to measure itself by the standards of the world; it then becomes a form of cultural complicity with the existing order. But it can also become a questioning of the regimented order of life and society, a destruction of the meanings and values which impose themselves on human activities through the forcible penetration of the non-intentional and the open display of polysemy and the ambivalence present in all activities. This disruptive art does not need to conform to determined goals or sacrifice itself to the paranoia of the goal to be achieved; it is a liberation of the elements with respect to the whole, in association of what had been dissociated, a discovery of great gaps in even the most solid of surfaces, a rupture of excessive continuity, or a rapid, stunning projection of light.

Art of this kind can naturally thrive only in the aporia – aporia between the diversity of meanings to be teased out of the work of art and the expressive cohesiveness of its parts, which are linked together without necessarily being riveted; aporia between the return to what had been buried and forgotten and the production of ever-newer forms; aporia between discipline in the use of materials and the need to encourage the eruption of chaos in stagnant worlds. But it is precisely these aporetic relationships which make radically oppositional art fruitful, in spite of the threat of death hovering over it. The techniques it employs do not involve instrumentalisation in the service of meaning, but letting the subject speak for itself, and an opening-up to that which fetishised reality has rendered mute, so that new relations with nature and objectivity may develop. Artistic mimesis does not mean obeying rules of servile imitation which would only reproduce the relations of delighted domination over the world; it plays on the multitude of spheres of the real and the variety of relations they allow, in order to become multiple itself. Mimesis thus becomes a form of advancement of objective reason (with the accepted presence of nature and corporality) against subjective reason (corresponding to a vision of possession of the world and to individual realisations), that is, recognising the primacy of the non-instrumentalised objective dimension. That is why art, in spite of its unrealism (its opposition to the existing state of things) becomes a bearer, here and now, hence concretely, of new relationships with beings and things. It transforms a portion of the present by bringing to light moments of rejection of the individual and social *trop-plein* (overflow, or fullness-to-the-brim) which announce, without prefiguring, a different path for the world. Utopia is not only – as in Bloch's thought – a projection based on unsatisfied needs; it actually prepares the determined negation of the established order by deploying its critique of the unbearable in all areas in which the order is upheld. Artistic-aesthetic practice thus does not remain purely aesthetic; it spills over into what might be called the art of life or the way of inhabiting the vital human domain. Adorno's intuition of this appears when he links changes in contemporary art to the development of aesthetic productive forces, which are no doubt linked to the evolution of techniques and technologies, but which nonetheless have their own dynamic of discovery and experimentation with objectivity-in-movement. Implicitly, this means that exchanges with nature (and their repercussions on social practices) go beyond the narrow level of material production of wealth (commodities) and intervene in essential aspects of conduct

and ways of life. Aesthetic productive forces are naturally not subject to cumulative progression, but they do renew themselves through their capacity to favour unprecedented kinds of symbiosis between people and their life-environment and to give rise to new 'world-symbolisation games' which defy the weight of everyday life. Neither the precarious nature of these aesthetic productive forces nor their limited place in social relations and exchanges can be denied, but they nonetheless represent permanent elements of the upsetting of human productive forces as a whole, because they constitute an active rebellion against valorisation and its utilitarian character.

II

The flight towards aesthetics does not, however, furnish the key to social transformation because, in Adorno's terms, it only appears possible via ascetic intellectual activity, reserved by definition to a tiny minority in society. Indeed, only individuals who have adopted a critical stance regarding their own individuality, and who have decided to brave all the resulting crises, are able to practice art as the determined negation of the existing order. For the great mass of people, art presents itself in the degraded and degrading form of the culture industry, whose products aim precisely to sweep such problems away. The culture industry plays a great deal on dreams and the imaginary, but this only facilitates the confinement of individuals to images of the world as it appears in its immediately given aspect. The culture industry transfigures vital forms and appearances, not in order to change their modes of existence by emphasising what is irreconcilable with the petrified relations of bourgeois society, but indeed to smooth over the rough spots, the cracks and the senseless phenomena with which individuals are confronted. Indeed, the virtuosity that mass art has displayed in adjusting to changes in the moral conjuncture and in inventing new themes, allows it both to mirror and mould society with awe-inspiring effectiveness. Again and again, it furnishes daily life with countless fetishes which are in fact substitutes for the unexpected encounters and relations which the realm of commodities prohibits in its quest for novelty-in-repetition. Moreover, there is a growing interpenetration between mass art and the aesthetics one sees at work in the conditioning and valorisation of commodities (advertising, presentation, packaging, and so on); in each case, there

is a renunciation of the force of expression and the wealth of meanings that it can carry, to the benefit of serial production of ephemeral stimuli which can in no case serve as catalysts for the enrichment of individual or collective experience. The commodification of art (*la mercantilisation de l'art*), like the 'art of merchandising' (*l'art de la marchandise*), in their apparently inexorable progression, attest to the growing poverty of human relationships, their reduction to a realistic phantasmagoria made up of people-signs and object-signs, bearers of values and forms of delight that melt on the fingertips as soon as one tries to touch them.

It would thus seem that we should deal cautiously with the hopes raised by certain thinkers, notably Walter Benjamin, regarding the technical reproduction of works of art, including critical art. When a work becomes accessible to the great majority of people, it undergoes a process by which it becomes commonplace and the aesthetic enjoyment it produces levels off; it becomes a passively consumed product, the consumers being largely indifferent to the work's real characteristics. One consumes great art, great music or great painting, but one does not place oneself in a position to confront the hidden dimensions of a particular work and its way of speaking to the world. One must also be cautious about the hopes placed in art forms which refuse to identify with a-critical reproduction of the real and seek – like Brecht's work, for example – to be politically didactic. The weight of the pedagogical approach, in spite of all the efforts to compensate for it by stimulating processes of self-education in the spectator or listener, centres works not on the problematical experience and expression of people in the world, but on ideological struggle or the illustration of a particular conception of the world. Art understood in this way cannot be an art of taking action and living in a different way.

Such was the Adornian scepticism regarding the possibility of reunifying authentic art with the masses. But is this attitude the only possible one? Must we remain tied to the idea of the aporia of élitist art and a mass culture industry? If we cannot envision going beyond the current conditions of participation in artistic production and reception, we must naturally be content with the absence of solutions in Adorno. If, however, these conditions were to begin to change, a different perspective would be possible. One observation is crucial in this regard: the tradition of the workers' movement and of Marxism are deeply marked by a utilitarian conception of art and by altogether reductive views about aesthetic forms. Art is considered

neither as a way of life, nor as a mode of knowledge, but as a part of an ideological sphere of culture in which the values of the different classes confront each other as heterogeneous social contents. This confrontation is seen as reflecting more or less faithfully the political and economic struggle between classes. To this conception – already highly debatable – it must be added that the Victorian spirit and the cynicism so deeply anchored in the workers' movement since its inception place major obstacles in the path of a true perception of the aesthetic productive forces at work in art. The Victorian spirit not only degrades or denies the status of sexuality; it is also wary of the sensitivity and sensuality that characterise any ability to symbolise and comprehend the world (and other people). The Marxist brand of Puritanism suggests a spirit of sacrifice in the service of a secular religion, but in reality it is more like an attitude of repulsion towards the natural presuppositions of human activity and a fear of challenging patriarchal relationships and the sexual division of labour. Every time it is actually confronted with critical reactions to life practices, it hides behind its *Weltanschauung* or behind an alleged inopportuneness of so-called 'subjective' problems with respect to the real, current problems of the political class struggle. This Marxism of denial can only adopt an attitude of cynicism and indifference towards what happens every day among people and in their exchanges with the world. It sees nothing more in the social and objective worlds than an arena where blows are exchanged between actors unconscious of the real stakes of their action; materiality (that of people as well of that of nature) is nothing more than a raw material manipulated by abstract principles or figures (the class struggle, the Revolution, and so on).

Marxists who think in this manner accommodate themselves very easily to the heteronomy of culture, that is, everything which makes culture into a dependent, derivative or secondary plane of reality; they cannot envision its assuming any higher a status in the future and do not see it playing a role in the liberating of energies and imaginations. It becomes in their eyes a more or less faithful illustration of social relations and their transformations. Culture by definition is dominated: it is a product of social practices and their structuration. They therefore accept that the interpenetration of nature and culture itself take place under the sign of heteronomy, following a dynamic foreign to both terms – a dynamic of production and commodity exchange – which transmutes the sensory-sensible dimension of the objective world into the supra-sensible dimension of commodities while reducing the symbol-inventing powers of the

human mind to increasingly one-dimensional capacities for rational calculation of valorisation and combination of means. The opposition of these Marxists to exploitation and the reign of money thus does not reach the point of questioning what Max Weber called the disenchantment of the world, that is, the fetishistic reduction of the world to teleological, instrumental and valorising relations among people as well as between people and things. Taken to its limit, this could mean that the socialist transformation of society becomes nothing more than a readjusting of these disenchanted social relations – a 'more rational' means of organising them (by putting an end to the anarchy of capitalist competition) without posing either the problem of the autonomy of culture or that of the rediscovery of sensuality.[3] Socialism is the extension of the movement towards secularisation which dethrones the gods, dissipates myths, and weakens traditions, to the benefit of the dry prose of systems for evaluating and taking stock of social activities and the natural environment. It is therefore not accompanied by a movement of dialectical secularisation, as defined by Ernst Bloch, one which re-appropriates everything the mythological-religious dimension contains and condenses into unsatisfied aspirations, unexplicit intuitions about non-constraining relations with existence, the refusal of oppression and domination by theological or theocratic powers.[4] The live sensuality and subtle sensitivity that may be found in rituals, popular cultural practices and religious art forms are considered as strictly outmoded, superstitious and erroneous perceptions of the world while in fact they express often-audacious attempts to create and develop warm exchanges between people and the world which surrounds them and penetrates them to their depths. Collective creations which seek to lift themselves to the level of the gods are demoted, by this condescendingly critical attitude, to the status of museum pieces or ethnological artifacts which have little to communicate to a present immersed in immediate reality and its most apparent problems. Disenchantment and detachment from past or traditional modes of construction of vital, everyday reality are not only a refusal of the 'not-yet-accomplished' and the 'promising' transmitted to the 'now' of society and the individual; they are also an anticipated proscription of anything that might challenge fetishised materiality and objectivity (the part of the objective dimension which is significant for valorisation) and might therefore question the emblematic centrality of the monadic individual, with the corollary subjective anthropomorphisation of the march of events and relations with things.

In this spirit, the production of values by individuals who identify with them and lose themselves in them must at the same time be immunisation against the diverse and the heterogeneous; it must be an excommunication of the forms of mimesis which do not slavishly imitate the given but rather, in their very movement of drawing close to the sensuous world, move beyond it and rid it of its immobility. Indeed, this is the very condition for preventing the aesthetic productive forces from realising their potential to be forces for displacing the real – forces able to make the supposedly invariant elements composing the organised world strike up against one another and undergo metamorphosis. The broadening of the vital horizons of individuals (wealth of contacts, abundance of relations and possible combinations among people in time and space) must not be allowed to give rise to a real multiplication of experiences or a deepening of relations with the world.

Against this alignment with disenchanted structures, philosophers descended from Marxism such as Jürgen Habermas take their stand in favour of a liberation of exchanges among human beings. They oppose instrumental rationality, today omnipresent both in life-production and in the domain of knowledge, in the name of a communicative rationality, latent in social relations and practices.[5] It is within and through intersubjectivity or communication that the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) constitutes itself as a place where individuals and groups achieve their full capabilities and deploy their specific qualities. Communication, with its modes of validation (its logic), its rules and its speech and language practices, has primacy, if not always priority, over instrumental activity, which is solipsistic as a result of its limited horizon and its implications (its focusing on means and on the religion of success). Discursive communicative rationality, which involves reciprocal exchange, should by rights take the lead over cognitive-instrumental rationality, which dominates in fact. Because this reversal does not occur, it is necessary to discover everything, beyond the actual exchanges among people, which might cause routinised forms of communication and comprehension to become ossified. In the current world there is, of course, a predominance of exchange value over use-value, but this must be set within the broader context of the privatisation of activities and the multiplication of 'automatic' social processes designed to adjust these activities. Contemporary societies tend to present themselves as functional wholes, with open systems aiming at reducing the complexity of their relationships to the outer

environment, precisely because many such relationships and social exchanges become crystallised – above the heads, so to speak, of the people involved – into 'real abstractions' or coagulated organisational principles responding to complex mechanisms of self-regulation. Apparently, then, there is no need to worry about problems of social transformation – only about facilitating differentiations and systematic connections through the development of effective social technologies – or at least that is how the problem is seen by those who prefer not to see anything else. They fail, however, to realise that the reduction of communication to the exchange and stocking of information and the channelling of action within predetermined networks must run up sooner or later against the life-world structured by communication. This manifests itself notably in the difficulties of legitimation encountered by large bureaucratic institutions: they seek to impose systems-logics (logics of apparently self-regulating processes and procedures) without forfeiting mass support for the respect of formal democratic rules. They are thus unable either to take fully into account the functional imperatives of petrified social relations or to submit completely to democratic surges of communication, universal in their implications and issuing from the life-world. It should therefore not be surprising that in the largest contemporary states, confronted with the breakdowns of accumulation mechanisms over the past decade, recurrent crises of 'governability' have taken place; these crises involve failures in the instruments of policy, rapid mortality of orientations and strategies, and difficulties in establishing coherence in state actions and decisions. The 'media' of leadership and communication constituted by money and political power (as analysed by Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann) no longer assure the regularity of social exchanges, in particular the integration of intersubjective exchanges and interactions within groups into automatised and standardised social exchanges. It is true that a society of automatic effects and privatisation continually destroys social forms and norms inherited from pre-capitalist eras, thus displaying a robust imperialistic tendency. But these victories over certain once-inviolate domains of conviviality (the family, neighbourhood groups, collective leisure activities and so forth) are not one-sided, because they do favour a widespread blossoming of new forms of solidarity – precarious, to be sure, but less particularist than in the past, in response to technocratic-systematic requirements. Contrary to what neo-conservatives think, the contradictions of late capitalism are not primarily the result of an anomalous gap between

a hedonistic culture and a socio-economic system based on high performance; the major gap, rather, lies between, on the one hand, bureaucratic and individualist-solipsistic organisation of exchanges and material flows, and on the other hand, the tendency towards the universalisation and the rejection of constraints in the world of norms and symbolic exchanges.

III

If we follow this line of analysis, which seems attractive in many ways, we may be tempted to see the fetishisation–petrification of exchanges, that is, the ever-expanding circulation of goods and information substituting themselves for communicative activities strictly speaking, as the main source of 'disenchantment' of the world. We may indeed observe that instrumental rationality draws its apparently irresistible strength from exchange-relations in which people are compelled to increase the volume of what flows into their hands (accumulation of wealth through the mediation of value-exchanges which admit no limits). We may also observe that the dynamics of relations among goods and services, as well as among information-bearing signs, are extending their influence within social relations, leaving no more than a secondary, degraded area for the different forms of interaction.

Must we conclude, however, that the solution to these problems lies in the subordination of the world of instrumentality to that of communication thanks to new institutional networks and new social norms? [6] No, because the world of instrumentality must itself be challenged, which leads us to question the fetishisation of exchanges well beyond simple considerations of the exclusion of communication and rigidification of meanings. At this point, whatever Habermas may think of it, we must return to the Marxian problematic of value as a theory of the value-form of labour rather than as a labour theory of value. The great but often underestimated merit of Marx is to have sought an explanation, not for the quantitative measure of value, but for its nature, that is, its rootedness in social relations and relations with the environment. Marx does not present the abstraction of labour – the labour *sans phrase* of capitalist society – as a specific manifestation of a generic instrumental activity, but rather as a particular configuration of the metabolism between man and nature. Understood in this way,

labour is not simply an activity of transformation and reproduction of social life; it is also regrouping and co-ordination of multiple activities in a constellation of relations with the objective and social world. The expenditure of labour in production implies a whole complex interplay among perceptions, affective reactions, identification processes, affirmations and negations which make of it much more than a sheer physical and nervous ouput. Labour is all at once individual valorisation, participation in processes of social recognition and involvement in flows and distributions of resources. As abstract labour which escapes from its authors and manifests itself as a huge mass of material crystallisations weighing on all the general conditions of activity, it determines social exchanges both in their general orientations and their sectorial dynamics. Accumulated labour – or dead labour – reproduces itself on an expanded scale by absorbing or rejecting huge masses of abstract living labour, that is, human labour which is conditioned and normalised in its modes of formation and exercise. The actual, concrete activities of individuals, and their capacities for expression and externalisation in diverse situations, thus serve as accessories to the automatised social mechanisms of capital accumulation, in the sense of socially uncontrolled accumulation of wealth and power. In this framework, the individual expenditure of labour loses more and more of the artisanal characteristics that it could still claim at the beginning of the bourgeois era. It is less and less typically the transformation of a material or an object of labour by use of tools in the aim of producing a definite product, tending to become work performed on signals or signs, using more or less complex codes. As Marx had already noted in *Capital*, work presents itself less and less as a set of varied activities unified solely under the formal command of capital, and increasingly becomes one-dimensional activity, obeying machine-like movements of a material or informational nature. More and more, labour is evaluated according to its contribution to the steady functioning of apparently self-regulated systems of production and exchange, that is, according to its contribution to the reproduction of dead labour and its power over living labour. As concrete activity it is becoming nothing more than a residual reality, that of the adaptation of individuals to external constraints, in particular to strictly controlled conditions of activity, which does not prevent it from being an important investment of life-energy for those who exercise it. The centrality of labour as value which valorises itself by subjecting other values, prohibits us from confusing it with any other moment of

everyday life. It is rather the central point around which other activities aglomerate and derive substance (in varying degrees). Leisure, cognitive activity, affective relations and so on gain reality only by comparison with, or in opposition to, abstract labour and its totalising dynamic at the societal level; their role is to make possible - that is, bearable - the dominance that abstract labour exercises over social and intersubjective relations. In short, these cannot develop in and of themselves; they cannot find within themselves their own principles of deployment and modulation because they are necessarily incorporated into the regulating mechanisms of the generalised exchanges of labour.

Moreover, labour does not only play this role of mandatory reference point; it forces its way into the midst of other important activities. In particular, it is crucial in symbolic exchanges with the environment and with internal nature (sense perception); it gives shape to these by determining their orientation and, to a great extent, their most singular manifestations (the perception of domains habitable by humans and of objects of substantial importance to them). Far from being a pure instrumental activity (with means and ends in direct correlation), labour expresses the world in its own way, evaluates it even in its most hidden recesses and conditions it for humans – in short, it is inseparable from world-experience and life. That is why, as a mode of communication with the extra-human dimension with humans, labour cannot fail to have a strong impact on communicative activities as a whole. The abstraction of labour, as a privileged form of experience of people's relations to situations and to the multiplicity of beings, is in fact a way of pre-judging the meanings attached to vital relations. It settles in the most varied spheres of action and establishes continuities of meaning and durable conditions of perception among them. It manifests itself as well as a form of repression, that is, a denial of relations which fall either 'below' or 'beyond' the bounds of valorisation, that is, the construction of reality as a set of interdependent processes of evaluation and classification of objects and beings; such relations include affective reciprocity, free association (*gratuité*) and imagination in symbolic exchange and the like. This means that abstract labour does not produce only presence – objects bearing one-dimensional social meanings – but also absence through a kind of blindness. Exchanges of abstract labour, as relations among things, growing without finite limit, and exchanges of commodities as confrontations of isolated subjectivities (isolated insofar as they are differentiated through

valorisation): these processes efface other, essential social processes and make society an abstract arena for abstractly equivalent subjects. Consequently, communication suffers not only from being relegated to certain social mechanisms, from institutional constraints, or from the instrumentalisation of inter-individual relations in the production and circulation of goods; it runs up even more against the limits of meaning-production in symbiotic exchanges with nature and among humans. Meaning does not spring out of multi-lateral dialogues but rather out of criss-crossing monologues, against which communicative rationality, as a counterfactual ideal of free communication, is largely powerless. To surmount this monological reality, it cannot suffice to push instrumental rationality to its limits; this will not advance us significantly towards a resolution of the problem. It is only because the dynamic of means is itself pushed forward and directed by a logic of value-calculation that communication constantly yields the priority. In fact, there is no duel between communicative rationality and instrumental rationality, but rather a domination of both by the rationality of value, which mediates most communicative relations. Reason presents itself as exclusion and proscription (of a great part of people's symbolic capabilities), not because it is intrinsically inclined to do so, but because under the domination of value it becomes a rationality of subsumption, homogenising equivalency and hierarchy-forming measurement. Instrumental-cognitive rationality makes reductive distinctions among different practices and intellectual activities because it follows the direction imposed by valorisation and not because it carries within itself an irresistible tendency towards domination. Its universalism is that of value which seeks at the same time to relegate to the irrational (emotion, non-motivated decision) all the communicative foundations of human activity. The rationalisation which characterises the contemporary world is thus not the triumph of a Reason unfaithful to itself, but that of its particularity and its deformation in the form of the rationality of abstract labour.

Ernst Jünger demonstrates this very well in his *Der Arbeiter*,[7] which, in its very excess and *parti pris*, illuminates the totalising dynamic of the value-form of labour. The world after the First World War, which has left the era of bourgeois security behind, is analyzed as a world in formation, moving towards a new planetary culture: that of labour, planning and technology. In a context of massive change, work ceases to be a manifestation of individual self-realisation and becomes the union of man with the means of his activity – a total

world mobilisation.[8] Labour is an omnipresent reality because each person is concerned insofar as he or she works or controls the work of others; but in addition, work is – or becomes – an elemental reality, a will to power, by absorbing the vital energies of individuals while at the same time integrating them into supra-individual designs and collective enterprises. It is thus situated at the foundation of a new élitist order which leaves liberal capitalism well behind and imparts a new vigour to state organisation. As Jünger puts it, the 'labour-state' presents itself as a worker's democracy in that it no longer tries to base itself on bourgeois individualities and atomised masses, but on 'types', strongly integrated into hierarchically organised labour plans. The state thus reasserts the great authority and organic mobilising capacities which had escaped it in the era of bourgeois democracy. In the planned landscape of this new type of society, the state becomes a salient, decisive element whose importance grows incessantly, at a rhythm imposed by confrontations among nations, prior to the establishment of a new world order. The world, overtaken by power and by the passion for mobilisation of all present and future virtualities, can obviously find no adequate language in technology, which is a means of multiplying energy, amplifying it, and pushing back the resistance of inertia. Technology, in the world of labour, is thus more than just a logic of effective means and processes; it is an expression and a life-style, a model of behaviour and a deep-seated attitude. All aspects of social life are imbued with it, to such an extent that its voice is found even in art, in the form of constructions organically linked to the elemental surges of labour, as well as to the patterns of order labour imposes. Technology is consubstantial with a new form of liberty which affirms itself as an urgent need for labour as the exaltation of a life of striving towards goals which are at once closely circumscribed and unlimited in their ambition. Apart from retrograde daydreams, one finds no condemnation of technology as a force dispossessing human beings from themselves; one encounters only affirmation, through technology, of new powers over the world and society.

This ideal-type constructed by Ernst Jünger at a time of world economic crisis leading to a new, post-classic form of capitalism, was never realised in pure form. Significantly, however, several of its essential characteristics were to be found in political regimes as different from each other as Nazism and the New Deal in the 1930s. More remarkable still is that Jünger's constructions in many ways prefigured the socio-political system of the USSR under Stalin, with

which a portion of the labour movement continues to identify. The USSR of the Five-Year Plans and accelerated industrialisation was indeed a country in which labour and technology were worshipped along with order and hierarchy. The state, too, flourished anew, particularly in its guise of manager of work-relations (allocation of the means of production and labour power, fixing the proportions of accumulation with respect to consumption, determining the hierarchical scale of wages and salaries, and so forth). As the official doctrine asserted, the state could not progress towards its own withering-away (socialised management, self-administration) except via its own continual reinforcement and perfected functioning. Labour freed from the command of capital thus remained non-liberated labour; although it was no longer submitted to the expanded reproduction of capital, it was now subordinated to the expanded reproduction of power bureaucratically controlled by the party-state. Planning which claimed to assure the transparency of economic and social processes and to predetermine their dynamics, manifested itself as a huge social machine for producing and reproducing the powerlessness of workers, whose deposits, or expenditures, of labour-power were not socially recognised unless duly classified and utilised by the hierarchy of planners. No more than in the capitalist framework did the concrete activities of individuals and groups serve as referents for the mechanisms of social regulation; rather, they were treated as materials to be processed to feed the various apparatuses which dominated the society.

In the USSR, it is no longer the anonymous, impersonal powers of the market and competition among capitals which bring individual and collective practices into play; these are replaced by systems of command which are linked in turn to systems of competition for better life conditions, thereby placing a premium on conformism; these systems dissuade the members of society from following their own impulses. Growing links of interdependency are inevitably accompanied by the multiplication of rules and injunctions which must be respected in social practice. As Jünger alertly observed, the worker nearly comes to resemble the soldier; dominant ideology tends to perceive society as an 'army of labour'; military metaphors are indeed abundant in 'existing socialism'. The reign of the collective is no more than the abstract negation of individual forms of opposition and the voluntaristic path beyond the atomisation and massification of groups. True enough, the Stalinist system has by now lost much of the force of attraction that its own socio-economic effectiveness was

supposed to command; it is apparent that more and more currents in the labour movement tend to criticise it and reject it. However, this in no way diminishes the influence of the themes evoked by Jünger over the organisations of the labour movement, because these themes survive in the guise of the Welfare State. The idea of the 'labour-state', that is, a state based on promoting the interests of labour (seen as the logical outcome of the existing Welfare State) continues, in spite of the current crisis, to be at the centre of the programmatic thinking of those who identify themselves as socialists or communists. Social transformation is envisioned as an improved valorisation of labour, and of the wage-labour relation in general. The suppression or disappearance of wage-labour is no longer extant as a strategic orientation; only the adjustment and regulation of this relation (through various checks on market mechanisms) is maintained as a plausible orientation. Society is seen as able to reorganise itself around the needs and problems of the suppliers of abstract labour, in particular by allowing them to produce the elements of their labour-power under better conditions. In this aim, the state is called upon to become the veritable organiser of a labour democracy, via the extension and representation of the workers' parallel power at all levels of economic and social life, but also via the partial, gradual limitations of the prerogatives of capital in the areas of accumulation, employment, and organisation of work processes. Restrictions on the field open to exploitation (reduction of labour time, extension of the role of the role of trade-unions in labour relations, and so on) as well as the enhanced role of the state in certain functions of capital (creeping, bureaucratic-style socialisation) also figure into a dialectic whereby capital responds to the stimulus of organised labour, but in which capital also imposes on labour its imperative of expanded national and international reproduction through various political, financial and monetary mechanisms in constant readjustment.

It would be hasty indeed to predict a rapid downfall of labour (that is, of the production and utilisation of abstract labour) as a result of the rapid expansion of complex machine systems (computerisation, automation, robotisation). There is, to be sure, a constant movement in the sharing of productive tasks between workers and machines; wage workers are assigned more and more to sectors not directly connected with material production. There is also a constant movement of the skills and practical modalities of the expenditure of labour-power; we have reached a point where more and more workers operate with only signs or signals – information – in

technical surroundings of ever-greater complexity. There is even a very rapid growth of non-material production – services, applied knowledge, and the like – in proportion to industrial production. However, none of these developments upsets the essential situation: the subordination of living labour to the expanded reproduction of crystallised labour, or to state it differently, the socialisation of the concrete activities of individuals dominated by the imperatives of reproduction, in competitive conditions, of different capitals at unequal rates and stages of development. It matters little that the concrete, material notion of means of production and the concrete notion of labour are no longer what they were in Marx's time. Capital and labour continue to exist even if there is no physical matter directly involved. One is even tempted to say that the full development of social relations of capitalist production cannot occur until they have freed themselves from a narrow materiality of needs and ends, activities and means, inherited from pre-capitalist formations. It is true that labour, understood as an interlocking set of processes of transformation of material and situations, remains, in one way or another, material exchange (*Stoffwechsel*) with the environment and with nature; but one of its characteristics today is precisely that it relies more heavily on technical interventions and detours in the confrontation – or symbiosis – of humanity and nature. Labour, as relation between abstract and concrete labour, is constantly changing; it vanishes in the form by which it has been recognised at a given moment only to reappear in a broad variety of new forms. Competences and performances (to borrow the terminology of linguistics) grow and diversify; they combine into more and more interdependent relations, but also into conditions which reproduce at a higher level the subordination of people to technical systems; these conditions confirm the supremacy of capitalised means of production. Labour is always changing in character, but it remains locked into predetermined channels; Jünger's intuitions seem to retain their validity, even today.

It would be illusory, however, to count on a stabilisation of the state or of labour democracy; the culture of labour is far from having crystallised into any definitive form. Inevitably, labour sets society in motion, particularly those members of society who are directly engaged in labour. Transformations of productive or para-productive processes bring about the redefinition of individual identities for the various categories of workers. Without adopting Alain Touraine's periodisation of the phases of industry and the theoretical consid-

erations he attaches to them, one may recognise along with him that craft-workers, unskilled factory labourers and multi-skilled workers in heavily automatised settings do not perceive themselves, their roles in society, and collective action in the same way. They do not adopt a common outlook with respect to labour or to the places and positions assigned to them in overall social relations. In other words they do not struggle in the same way against the negative self-images that social pressure causes them to adopt. Historically, a transition occurred from the worker's identification with his craft, borne by a weakly-structured workers' movement confronting the state, to a more problematic set of identifications with the working-class condition, compensated for and sublimated into a strong attachment to trade-union and political organisation, and more and more directly involved in matters of state intervention. Today we are clearly in a phase of transition in which old articles of faith regarding the status of work, the right to work and the role of the state as defender of the workers are being questioned. As a consequence of these questionings, there is widespread scepticism regarding the working life as a possible and desirable route to follow. The problems of the so-called dual society are at the centre of the discussion. Individual and collective identities are falling into crisis because labour no longer appears as a stable and tangible reality, but rather as a shifting and unpredictable force whose conditions may undergo remodelling without warning. Naturally, efforts are made to establish a clear opposition between this crisis of the old workers' world, mired in laborious continuity, and the contours of a new world of liberty and creation which is supposedly springing from a rediscovery of private initiative and individual inventiveness; but those who wish to believe in a new-found youth of capitalism are also very prompt to raise the problem of capitalism's cultural contradictions, by which they mean, primarily, a contradiction between hedonistic mentalities and the necessary constraints of economic life, as well as the difficulties of governing modern political societies. But it could just as well be argued that what instead predominates is the crisis of the Western workers' movement as agency of socialisation (partial reconciliation of individuals with themselves) and as promoter of actions oriented towards a passage beyond the present society. Whether we are speaking of its political or its trade-union form, the workers' movement, which has sought since its origins to carry the seeds of a different future, is painfully mired in an increasingly sombre present.

This crisis, whose end is not in sight, at least has the advantage

of bringing cruelly to light the heteronomy that has existed and continues to exist in the dynamic of the workers' movement; we refer in particular to the forces which have caused the movement to grow attached (even when it denies it) to the successive configurations of labour because these have provided it with unifying principles at least as much as has its reasoned opposition to capitalism. The workers' movement builds itself, to be sure, from the workers' resistance to exploitation, but also around labour as its own principal form of (individual or group) activity, which cannot always be looked upon negatively. Militant workers develop an image of an alternative or socialist future not only out of the exalting aspects of working experiences (solidarity) but also out of its mutilating dimensions (competitiveness, dispossession of productive intellectual powers). Industrial discipline, and the cooperation it makes possible, often serve as reference points for working-class organisations and, by extension, for the reorganisation of society. The anti-capitalist objective is no doubt perceptible in most of the representative images and projects engendered by the workers' movement. Concrete working situations and the schemas of organisation on which they depend are frequently criticised with great vigour and sometimes violently rejected, and yet capitalist development is not rejected in its overall logic, because it seems to assure the self-development of the working class itself, that is, its reproduction on an expanded scale (note capital's thirst for labour power, outside of crisis periods). In theory and in practice, its negative effects are challenged – growing social inequality, waste, the irrationality of investment choices – but there is no effort to detect its source, that is, the operations which produce abstract labour and its corollary, surplus labour in the form of surplus value. Nor are the struggles to promote the training and qualification of labour power without ambiguity, since they take place within the dynamic of the division of social labour, that is, the refraction and diffusion within the working class.

The political economy of the workers as active criticism of the political economy of capital, as Marx wished to see it, has not proven so easy to put into practice, once its initial foundations have been laid. It is, of course, undeniable that protest movements and struggles for certain demands have strongly affected the evolution of capitalism, but the conditioning forces exercised in return by capital have been much stronger because of their repercussions on the very structuring of the world of labour. The working class is continually modified and transformed, as much by technological innovations as

by shifts in power relations, in particular those which result from the instituting of procedures for settling social conflicts. Class struggles do not take place on uncharted or virgin ground, but in a field marked out by bureaucratic systems which regulate and channel the exchanges involving abstract labour in material production and in services. This is largely due to the fact that the defence of labour power as struggle over the conditions of its reproduction cannot occur without recourse to legal or state-backed guarantees located beyond the direct area of confrontation of social adversaries or partners. If social peace agreements and compromises are to be durable, they cannot stand alone; they must be linked to the general conditions of production and the conditions of dynamic equilibrium of the social system.

As the workers' movement has advanced along this path, it has subordinated itself to political or state-related levels of action; that is, it has subordinated the politics it can produce by itself to the politics that imposes itself in the societal context. That is why we must conclude that the critique-in-action of exploitation and oppression in labour does not exclude positive recognition, at least indirectly, of abstract labour in most of the working class' interventions. The existing order as order of labour is abstractly negated without any prefiguration of a determined negation of the fundamental characteristics of the social relations of production.

In settling accounts with itself, the workers' movement, now in crisis, can thus not yet dismiss the problem of labour, its main theme since the beginning. It must seize that problem from the roots and pursue it further than at any time in the past, not only because its fixation on the dynamics of industrial labour has led to more and more misjudgements, but also because the gap between work and the workers offers a new chance for a concrete critique of relations centred on abstract labour. The plasticity of technical systems in terms of their physical placement, the tasks they are able to accomplish and their relative autonomy with respect to human intervention – all these factors make much more flexible relations possible between automatised systems and those who serve them. The idiotic character of repetitive labour does not disappear, no more than does the negation of intelligence in any process of subordinated labour, but the diversity of possible occupations has given a new extension to the notion of interchangeability (of operators and of jobs), since individuals are no longer riveted as they used to be to the environment of work. Many of the ambiguous aspects of the

world of material production and service work – variable schedules, alternation of tasks, part-time work, precarious jobs and frequent job changes and the like – all belong to a general context of the de-centring of work, that is, the shrinking of its weight in everyday relations and practices. For many, not working no longer bears the stigma of a fundamental deficiency, that is, the hollow sense of an absence of meaning in life. Work is less and less frequently identified with self-realisation or the lack of it; it is no longer a measure of the most significant efforts of individuals to express what they feel or wish to be essential. It appears more and more as a mandatory checkpoint in a life essentially located elsewhere, and thus it loses its character of mere recovery time for labour-power.

As Marx demonstrated very well in the *Grundrisse*, individuals' horizons in capitalist society are displaced and in a certain way broadened in the relations of production. Inter-individual connections multiply; distances and temporal relations draw together and expand simultaneously while relations among people, technical systems and the social environment intensify and broaden. Many kinds of traditions begin to 'wither away', particularly those which had given order to the world and to life by regulating behaviour. The life-world crumbles, becomes dispersed into a kaleidoscopic variety of constantly renewed supplies of commodities and ephemeral, evanescent messages. The temptation of immediate consumption takes the place of the search for permanent values and life-practices bearing a stamp of coherence and continuity. There is apparently no more unity except in a generalised aesthetic of commodities (merchandise) which plays on fascination and infinite changes in appearance, that is, on the continual production of a second order of reality which relegates real social relations to a background role. The world which emerges presents itself as a constantly expanding one, rich with unknown possibilities and punctuated with frequent, delirious declarations about freedom and enjoyment; but this set of appearances gives way brutally and at irregular intervals to a world of crisis and rigidity in which the dominant discourse is one of constraint and necessity. There is no longer any evident relation, with reference to stable criteria, between participation in enjoyment and the efforts people are required to make in order to avoid social exclusion. In a world which has become schizoid, individuals no longer have fixed anchoring stations; the quest for performance and the attitude of passive submission appear to be equally uncertain in their results; the feeling of belonging to cultural groups or settings is in a state

of regression or atrophy. Neither the natural environment nor social reality are perceived according to fixed, unequivocal representations corresponding to practices oriented in any determinate way to mastery over action or events. The relation between individual and society becomes more and more tenuous because fields of action have become too unstable, and social life-paths too uncertain, for a growing number of individuals. Society is still there with its unavoidable constraints and its incalculable forces, but it no longer provides the compass-points which allow people to chart paths towards recognised or recognisable goals. Thus individuals lacking in solid defences lose the sense of presence-to-themselves and presence-in-the-world which could allow them to take part 'naturally' in social relations as they are played out.

The tendency of old forms of attachment and dependence to loosen and even to dissolve does not, as an isolated factor, favour the development of multifaceted individuals, as Marx hoped would happen. What it does lead to is the endangering of older crystallisations of social reality and labour – the ethics of effort and of mastery. It strips the layer of hyper-reality (one-sided, imperative social meanings) away from emblem-objects, 'places of refuge', fetishised commodities, which fill up human sociability while simultaneously voiding it. What Marx described as the sensible-supersensible world – that of the metamorphosis of value-forms (commodity, money, capital), becomes purer and more intellectualised as it reinforces its own characteristics of ubiquity and capacity for accelerated communication. To a certain extent it loses reality (*se déréalise*) by de-realising social relationships which justify themselves and seek in it a solid reference point. Value which valorises itself always holds a great power of fascination and suggestion over the mind. As a packaged bundle of objective intellectual forms (*objektive Gedankformen*), it faces no notable competition in the construction of social reality (competition from associative principles of social organisation, for example). But it can no longer generate deep vital commitments comparable to those of the era of classical capitalism, that is, by satisfactorily structuring a resistant libidinal economy with ramifications in all human relations. The destruction of labour – the foundation of valorisation – may thus be put on the agenda as a questioning of dominant social practices. More precisely, we can begin to examine labour (the opposition between abstract and concrete labour) as an obstacle, repeatedly set back into place, on the road to expanding and renovated practices – the horizon which

claims the right to dictate its perspective to all other horizons. As the surrealists had already well understood decades ago, new perceptions are on the agenda – perceptions which short-circuit old connections and old networks of exchange, dressed up in new clothing according to the aesthetic canons of merchandise, by assigning incongruous places to the unexpected, to the degraded, to disturbing patterns and so on. But it must be understood that this subversion of daily life must penetrate the world of labour in order to show that is the negation of action and its polymorphism – that it is non-action in the guise of energetic activity.

It is at this point that the Adornian theme of aesthetic productive forces comes to the fore with renewed critical strength. The idea is not only to illuminate the correspondence between productive and artistic practices, or the parallel movement between the growth of material-practical know-how and the diversification of artistic materials and forms; it is also to grasp how different movements of the retreat from productive structures or disengagement from repetitive and banal practices do more than simply deny what they refuse; what they most often express it not a retreat towards the primitive and the archaic, but the aspiration towards new uses of achieved levels of material competence and powers, as well as new conquests of the human spirit. Art as alternative practice finds nourishment in production, returning to it in order to become better detached from it and to move beyond it more effectively; not only to contest its goal-oriented dynamics and its organisation, but also to challenge old methods with new ones. In this sense, art is directly concerned with labour, and particularly abstract labour, for its task is to untie the strands of labour, so to speak, in order to find its way towards new forms of inhabiting the world and developing human action. Art may no doubt be lured into many dead-ends – among others, solipsistic creation, contemplation and enjoyment of realities apparently spared by commodity relations and production, and so on – but the rapid exhaustion of artistic forms (and especially formalisations) due to their banalisation and their integration into market-value-bound social exchanges – makes their choice of quietist paths particularly risky. Art cannot maintain its exploratory character and critical virtues unless it moves constantly onto the attack against coagulated work relations, regressive crystallisations of action which keep people locked into over-simplified operating patterns. Aesthetic practices cannot take effect unless they reply in a definite way to the processes and consequences of abstract

labour. Art which takes root in the art of living is a series of challenges born out of technology and the penetration of new instruments of valorisation into the world of everyday relations.

Art is first and foremost a means of setting back into motion the images and representations which surround us, particularly those which claim to constitute the foundations of a stable world – stable in its manner of proposing to individuals a way of experiencing space and time and receiving their projects and aspirations. It is thus a questioning of the mechanisms which reduce the growth of productive forces to a growth of control over objective and objectifying processes, while casting into oblivion people's capacity for play in (and with) the world. Art which does not fetishise itself is no longer essentially a quest for finished and supposedly self-sufficient works, nor a mere invention of forms; it is above all discovery of possibilities for action hidden within relations locked into labour. It becomes exaltation of human productive forces liberated from narrow applications to production and from restrictive use of technological extensions of the human body and mind. It multiplies into many perspectives and becomes a rejection of rigid processes of identity-imposition by adopting mimetic practices which are attentive to the unexpected. It does not allow itself to become enclosed in the dilemmas of the workaday world or those of activism vs. passivity, hedonism vs. performance, concentration vs. dispersed attention, the intentional vs. chance occurrence, realised product vs. waste product and so on. Art-as-subversion is no doubt present only in the margins of society – and of individuals – as a set of instruments whose use is not clearly understood and whose effects are feared. But it acts precisely as a recourse against that which renders the unbearable bearable; it does so by casting light on the exceptional surges towards dynamic imbalance which challenge the narrowness of the present, behind all forms of domesticated art and transfigurations of reality. It is both everywhere and nowhere since there is nowhere it cannot appear, no reserved area where it can seek shelter from the threats of the surrounding world. One may find it without looking consciously, but one must obviously aspire strongly to a different form of life in order to reach the paths which lead to it. It would thus not be mistaken to state that artistic practice supposes both *Einfühlung*, [9] which allows one to embrace beings and the world enthusiastically, and *Verfremdung*, or distanciation, which refuses accomplished facts and proscriptions against a different future. The practice of art develops strong links to the sensible world while

causing it to multiply in the sphere of the imaginary, so as to remove its one-dimensional character. To reserve it to 'avant-garde' groups mired in quarrels over priorities and critiques of invalid formalisms would be to restrict its possibilities considerably. One must realise that plural artistic practices are born in all layers of society; they are frequently tenuous and ephemeral but they constitute a latent reality which intermittently irrupts within the protected terrains of aestheticism and the cultural industry. In this sense there is no reason to let oneself become locked into the apparent antinomy between élitist culture and mass culture, for both – in order to survive and renew themselves – must seek nourishment in non-domesticated art production, even while de-naturing it. We do not mean to imply, of course, that there exists today a popular art comparable to that in precapitalistic formations (in particular, an oral tradition), but it is true that art is a discontinuous reality, always ready to reappear and express the broadening of individuals' vital horizons and social relations. Art becomes indispensable to any enterprise of transforming society – which also means that transformational political practices must favour artistic expression. But there can be no question of protecting art or seeing in it the illustration or the epic commentary on revolutionary politics. On the contrary, it is an anticipatory force, going beyond immediate relations; it must listen to these, in order to shake up political routine and cause energy to gather around something other than the most directly perceptible interests.

But make no mistake, this relationship between artistic practices and politics has nothing to do with an aestheticisation of political life, nor, in particular, is it the transfiguring and sublimation of political violence and its destructive might. The relationship involves, rather, putting politics into perspective and criticising it as the pure thought and practice of balance of forces, forgetful of its transformational and innovative dimension. In this perspective, politics, as the exchange of symbolic and material acts in the aim of balancing or stabilising social relations, is constantly refused in its tendency to conserve relations of asymmetry and dependence. It is to be grasped, on the contrary, as constant displacement of social limits and institutional crystallisations and as a means of permutating the positions occupied at a given moment by individuals and groups. More precisely, it is conceived as a conscious central core of change, of realisation of social constraints and increasing possibilities of autonomy and open action for the many. The central aim can no longer be to

eliminate the adversary from the battle and occupy supposedly impregnable fortresses; the idea is rather to transform people's relations and practices in order to make broad changes possible. Molecular changes in action, brought about by aesthetic anxiety and aesthetic subversion, through aspirations to a life-beyond-work, must seek their extension in political struggles, in particular in order to confer on these other objectives than domination and subordination. Politics is no longer, in its essence, the strategy or tactics of conquering positions of power; it becomes a struggle for better conditions of action, for fuller relations of communication allowing for a greater social inventiveness. Individuals and groups no longer subordinate themselves to objectives which supposedly go beyond them; they discover new possibilities for self-determination through confrontations with organised powers and structures of domination. Politics is no longer separate from activities which transcend routines; it no longer lets itself be confined to technical recipes and frozen, codified exchanges. Nor can it be confused with the abstract utopian affirmation of a 'different society', and less still with the immediate realisation of a world without constraint or violence; on the contrary, it tends to transform the exteriority of social relations with respect to group and individual political practice, which no longer takes the primacy and domination of abstract labour as a given and unchangeable condition and seeks to go against the grain of social reproduction. It can no longer identify with the customary stakes and priorities, that is, the reassuring language of those in power, the production of rituals and symbolisms aiming to integrate different social layers into the networks of the state.[10] It identifies in fact with the broadening of horizons, the diversification and intensification of social exchanges, and with shifts in the meanings attributed to social activities.

In this framework, political orientations can no longer be summed up in 'general lines' defended and promoted by organisations; they must be largely incorporated into the concerns of social groups and their efforts to develop links of solidarity within their ranks in spite of tendencies to treat such concerns privately. A truly innovative politics cannot atomise citizens by addressing them as isolated individuals resigned to considering society as fraught with danger; it must seek to bring together groups and individuals who organise themselves and thereby re-create the social fabric. Thus it has no need to present itself as a response to reactions of fear and anguish with regard to social change – the kind of response

which drapes itself in tradition. Politics, so conceived, does not flatter fundamentalism but rather exposes its inability to face up to problems of the future because of its sclerotic conceptions rooted in the past. Its solid foundation lies in the initiatives taken in the most diverse situations by those who are presumed not to know what to do. Strictly speaking, there is no gap between politics and everyday life because the two reinforce and complement each other – without, of course, becoming confused with one another. Politics draws its nourishment from aspirations to change everyday life and from perception of the falseness of solutions which retreat into customary, far too restrictive relations. The world of lived experiences opens itself to new fields of action thanks to the political confrontation of multiple experiences.

Conceived and practiced in such a manner, politics little by little sheds its heavily pedagogical aspect, and particularly its paternalistic references to enlightened guiding spirits who possess and put into practice the norms which lead to social transformation. It becomes the progressive elaboration of new norms and rules of life in society; it produces new ways of relating to the regulating modes and systemic arrangements which characterise certain areas of social life. It does not become society's consciousness of itself or a transparency of social relations, but it does broaden the field of conscious action upon the mechanisms of regulation, by denying all functionalist one-dimensionality. In its revolutionary guise, politics cannot be assimilated to the masses' more or less rapid accession to a historical consciousness of their supposed tasks. It is neither revelation nor illumination but rather displacement – both discontinuous and irreversible – of the gravitational axes of new networks of communications and possibilities to act. Class consciousness is not something which enters politics to subvert it; it is politics, on the contrary, which approaches class consciousness (consciousness of exploitation and oppression in relations of labour and of the state) and shows it how to transform life. There is no need to project a 'new man' outside of real time, existing against a background of abstract social morality; the real need is to grasp the emerging movements against the tyranny of abstract labour, in social relations as well as in intersubjectivity, in individuals' relations to their vital environment as well as to their action. Political struggle is less a question of convictions (convincing as many as possible to think a certain way) than a struggle against the de-socialising effects of market relations and competition among

performers of labour. It is not enough to call for higher wages, better working conditions and better life-surroundings; in order for these demands to be anti-capitalist they must also blend into movements which aim beyond wage-labour itself, towards the re-socialisation of exploited and oppressed people. Coalitions, groupings and other manifestations of direct democracy should aim not only to reinforce the side of the underprivileged, but also to transform action itself - transforming society through collective action.

These different forms of political mobilisation cannot, of course, have miraculous effects; they cannot quickly produce new relations between individuals and society or put an end to all the causes of disintegration of social bonds and interindividuality. And yet they are crucial insofar as they present social reconstruction as a concrete possibility within the horizon of the present. This is what is emerging via the themes placed on the agenda by what are now widely referred to as the 'new social movements' – essentially, feminism and the 'green' movements for alternative life-styles. The traditional notion of the 'workers' movement' is thus placed into question, since it is welded to the emblematic figure of the industrial labourer and his social promotion; it is also blind to the current crisis of work relations and to the analyses of new forms of work and new processes of inclusion in, or exclusion from, production. The workers' movement is severely weakened by its inability to take initiatives because paradoxically, it refuses (contrary to its own belief) to grasp the full current dimensions of the 'centrality' of abstract labour, and particularly the differentiation of its forms of appearance resulting from its penetration into new social layers. In many circumstances it is inclined to take wrongheaded positions in political debates because it ignores the aspirations inherent in new collective practices, liberated from authoritarianism and from one-sided fixations on the activity of the state. In many cases it refuses to understand that the crisis of political participation, far from being ephemeral, grows out of a deeper crisis of political mechanisms – in particular those which claim to represent the workers but in fact reduce their role to one of pressure or counter-pressure on instances of state power structured outside itself. In a context of declining efficacy of the Welfare State in all areas concerning social protection, a politics reduced to raising demands and agreeing to partial reforms granted from above inevitably loses its attractive power. Without exaggeration, it is becoming more and more difficult to renew this kind of politics by seeking new *raisons d'être* and future perspectives for it.

This does not mean, of course, that there is no room left for politics as manifestation of the will-to-power of some – and correlatively, the relative passivity of others – or again, as the sum of formally equal though substantively unequal interests. Authentic social change, however, is related to a type of politics which is radically different in its foundations. The rationality of subverting the old relations cannot be equated to the rationality of adjusting one bearer of the relations of abstract labour to another regardless of the individual's status as exploited worker or functionary of capital; quite the contrary, this new kind of politics turns on their transformation (*devenir-autre*) as individuals and as members of society. It can accommodate itself neither to custom nor to the weight of cultural tradition; neither to the organised use of force necessary for social reproduction, nor to the institutionalisation of basic social asymmetries. It involves a logic of movement, an abolition of social distances, a redeployment of political relations between centre and peripheries and between diffused social powers and individuals. It tends towards what one could call, after Gramsci, a new type of hegemony, characterised by new experiences and meanings in everyday life, linked in turn to new institutional equilibriums in a framework of generalised redistribution of powers. In this regard, the revolutions up to now in the twentieth century, beginning with the October Revolution, stand out as having been halted in mid-course; they are closer in fact to passive revolutions – mere rearrangements of hegemony – than to full-fledged revolutions.

There have undoubtedly been profound upheavals in terms of property forms and relations of production, and these have brought about the elimination of the bourgeoisie as ruling class, but the formerly dominated classes have not had the possibility or the opportunity in the course of these processes to radically transform their modes of action and living. Following periods of intense mobilisation which have shaken up old power relations and given rise to many initiatives from below, the customary activity of reorganisation of society from above has continued, both because the victorious revolutions up to now have had to take charge of resolving problems from the past (failed bourgeois revolutions) and because they have been led by vanguard organisations mainly preoccupied with the problem of central political power. Revolution in the narrow – political – sense, has taken the lead over revolution in the broad sense, that is, everything which tends spontaneously to shake upon existing social relations. Or to be more precise, revolution in the broad sense – the

entry of the mass majority onto the political stage – has been used as a lever for political revolution. Lenin, even more than Marx and Engels, saw this mass activity as a sort of natural catastrophe which, in a given place has opened up a limited period of time favourable to the political-military intervention of revolutionaries.[11] Our world is still an inverted one in which means – politics reduced to the use of relationships of force – take precedence over ends (social revolution) subject to progressive enrichment by human action. The party, incarnation of politics as force, has become supposedly the sole guarantor of social transformation, even though it has become mired in extremely centralised power arrangements. To move beyond passive revolution it is necessary to restore revolution in the broad sense to the leading position which befits it rather than perceiving it as a series of violent and more or less irrational eruptions which need to be transcended. It should be understood that beyond certain chance circumstances, the tremors which have shaken up the social order, apparently unpredictably, have in fact had a double origin: first of all, the questioning – often in an unstructured way – of what has been taken as normal practice, and secondly the elaboration of new social forms (communications, embryonic institutions, modes of action). These forms are both destruction of the old and construction of the new under determined conditions, that is, productive of meanings and orientations beginning with the effects of social relations and the lived experience of these. In other words, these phenomena of dissolution and reconstruction of the social fabric cannot be interpreted as mere unconscious behaviour which encounters in revolutionary politics (the seizing of power) its mode of access to consciousness. Politics as strategy and tactics cannot escape from the determinations of social reproduction except by placing itself in the service of upsurges of revolution (in the broad sense) which allow it to develop a better understanding of what is at stake.

It is thus apparent that contemporary Marxism, not yet having succeeded in thinking through the articulation between the social and the political, remains a prisoner of their fetishistic separation. The political, which serves as a regulator in the last instance of social conflicts, is understood in a reductive and traditional manner as the reflection of 'naturalised' contradictions (for example, Lenin's notion of politics as concentrated economics) at the level of the 'base' (movements of opinion), and as a type of military art at the 'summit' (hegemonic changes). This interpretation of the political is both amorphous, since it is a manifestation of what comes to it from

elsewhere, and extremely formalised as a set of games reserved for small, specialised élites. It is not understood in the broad sense as referring to relations of autonomy and dependency which appear from top to bottom in society, binding the social groups together in more or less stable relations. In this context, the primacy of the political, which many Marxists claim to uphold, appears in a very ambiguous light. On the one hand it is a belief in the ability of people to act decisively in the face of social and economic contradictions, but on the other it is a conviction that only active minorities (with the support of more or less consenting masses) can set this capacity into motion.

This conception combines democratic postulates with certain anti-democratic implications. It is thus not surprising that in the course of the twentieth century, Marxists have acted schizophrenically, broadening the field of politics and its participants while reserving a privileged role for a limited number of decision-makers. Here we confront what the Frankfurt School has called the 'hidden positivism' of Marxism, which is not really economism in the strict sense, but rather an inability to think through the question of *praxis* and *poiesis*. Marxism, to borrow a term from Henri Lefebvre, has preoccupied itself with 'becoming the world' (*devenir-monde*), that is, translating its critical conceptualisations into social practices, while forgetting to submit these conceptualisations in turn to criticism; it thereby sacrifices, in this weakly-founded actualisation, some of its sharpest instruments. As a result, the progress of 'thought-become-world' has inevitably been accompanied by symptoms of stagnation or even regression. Marxism has shaken up the bourgeois thought of its time and even stimulated the reflection of those repelled by its dogmatism; it deserves indirect credit for the blossoming of innovative currents in philosophy, economics and the social sciences. Marxism itself, however, has retained very little – other than flat transpositions – from other currents. In an apparent paradox (but only apparent), Marxism must 'unlearn' the reflex of 'becoming-the-world' and learn to question its own origins and successive sets of relations to beings and objects. Its current impotence could turn out to be merely the price to pay for its fruitfulness tomorrow. But this can only occur if it ceases to be fascinated by visions of omnipotence and the temptation to supply solutions to all society's problems. It must renounce its assertions about what the world is and should be, the better to pose questions which penetrate both beneath and beyond what it takes itself to be. It would no longer be a question of 'becoming-the-world' but of 'becoming-within-the-world' (*devenir-au-monde*).

Notes

Introduction

1. See Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, New York, 1979; also, Thomas Ziehe, *Pubertät und Narzissmus*, Frankfurt-Köln, 1975.
2. Peter Sloterdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft*, Frankfurt, 1983, two volumes.
3. On this subject, see Ernst Bloch's important work, *Naturrecht und menschliche Würde*, Frankfurt, 1961.
4. See the collective volume edited by Herbert Schnädelbach, *Rationalität*, Frankfurt, 1984.
5. See Albrecht Wellmer, *Zur Dialektik von Moderne und Postmoderne*, Frankfurt, 1985; the title essay has been translated as 'On the Dialectic of Modernism and Postmodernism', *Praxis International*, vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 337–62.
6. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. T. McCarthy, Boston, 1984 (vol. 1) and 1987 (vol. 2); *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, Frankfurt, 1985.
7. See Axel Honneth *Kritik der Macht*, Frankfurt, 1985. Useful ideas may also be found in Dominique Jannicaud, *La puissance du rationnel*, Paris, 1985.
8. Among the most recent publications on this subject let us mention the very interesting book by Costanzo Preve, *La filosofia imperfetta. Una proposta di reconstruzione del marxismo contemporaneo*, Milano, 1984. The author points out very well that it is necessary today to establish a critical outlook on Marx and especially the Marxist tradition, which is so deeply charged with metaphysics, naturalism and scientism. He also feels the necessity to undertake a serious examination of the works of Heidegger and Ernst Bloch; both are treated with great sympathy and competence. One must be more reserved about Preve's suggestion that the later Lukács' ontology of social being provides the key to certain important theoretical problems. Like Lukács, Preve proposes to approach the problems of action from the perspective of labour as a model of social praxis, that is, starting with teleological action, without realising that this is only a moment – an historically variable moment – in the constantly redefined unity of multiple determinations.

   One may also refer to Albrecht Wellmer, *Ethik und Dialog, Elemente des moralischen Urteils bei Kant und in der Diskursethik*, Frankfurt, 1986, for a well-argued critique of the elements of idealism present in Habermas's discursive ethic and pragmatics of language. He shows that in the works of both K.-O. Apel and Habermas, the community of ideal communication implies the anticipation of a transparent language as regulator of all intersubjective relations, which are thereby degraded in their finitude. Contrary to what Habermas seeks to do, one cannot reconstruct historical materialism starting

simply with the logics of evolution present in the procedures of establishing, broadening and interpreting social norms.

1 Lulács: Individuality and The Teleology of Works

1. Agnes Heller *et al., Die Seele und das Leben. Studien zum frühen Lukács*, Frankfurt, 1977.
2. Aside from *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock, Boston, 1974, one should examine *Philosophy of Art (1912–1914)* and the *Heidelberg Aesthetics*, neither of which exists in English translation.
3. See Lukács, *Political Writings, 1919–1929*, trans. Michael McColgan, ed. Rodney Livingston, London, 1972.
4. See the three volumes: *Ontologie-Hegel, Ontologie-Marx, Ontologie-Arbeit*, Neuwied-Darmstadt, 1972–73; in English, *The Ontology of Social Being*, trans. David Fernbach, London, 1978.
5. See Hans-Jürgen Schmitt (ed.), *Der Streit mit Georg Lukács*, Frankfurt, 1978.

2 Ernst Bloch: Concept Utopia and the Ontological Trap

1. Bloch's works are published in 17 volumes by Suhrkamp, Frankfurt. Important works on Bloch include Burghart Schmidt (editor), *Materialen zu Ernst Blochs Prinzip Hoffnung*, Frankfurt, 1978; Hans Heinz Holz, *Logos Spermatikos*, Darmstadt- Neuwied, 1975; Arno Münster, *Figures de l'utopie dans la pensée d'Ernst Bloch*, Paris, 1985.

3 Heidegger with Marx: Politics in the Element of Finitude

1. On all these points, one should naturally refer to *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, London and New York, 1962. Its implications have by no means been fully apprehended, particularly regarding a critical understanding of contemporary modes of existence.
2. See Ernesto Ragioneri, *Il marxismo e l'internazionale*, Rome, 1968, and in particular the study entitled 'Alle origini del marxismo della seconda Internazionale', pp. 47–162.
3. All references to *Capital* are in fact references to the works which Marx undertook between 1857 and his death. We are still quite far from being able fully to appreciate their diversity and originality; leaving aside the disputes about interpretation, there is still a basic labour of appropriation to be accomplished with regard to these thousands of pages.
4. See Michael Theunissen, *Sein und Schein, Die kritische Funktion der Hegelschen Logik*, Frankfurt am Main, 1980, as well as the discussion of these theses in H. F. Fulda, R. P. Horstmann, M. Theunissen, *Kritische Darstellung der Metaphysik, Eine Diskussion über Hegels*

Logik, Frankfurt am Main, 1980; also see M. Theunissen, 'Begriff und Realität. Hegels Aufhebung des metaphysischen Wahrheitsbegriffs' in Rolf-Peter Horstmann (co-ordinator) *Seminar: Dialektik in der Philosophie Hegels*, Frankfurt am Main, 1978, pp. 324–59.

5. On this subject see Panajotis Kondylis' book *Die Entstehung der Dialektik. Eine Analyse der geistigen Entwicklung von Hölderlin, Schelling und Hegel bis 1802*, Stuttgart, 1979. With respect to Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* and Lukács' *The Young Hegel*, Kondylis' volume has the advantage of showing the importance, in these thinkers' works, of metaphysical and religious heritages.
6. See the critical edition of *Mythologie der Vernunft, Hegels ältestes Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, published under the direction of Christoph Jamme and Helmut Schneider, Frankfurt am Main, 1984.
7. See Michael Theunissen, *Hegels Lehre vom absoluten Geist als theologisch-politiker Traktat*, Berlin, 1970.
8. In order to avoid all confusion, we must point out here that there is no question of replacing the subject by a community of communication and its *a priori*, as Karl-Otto Apel seeks to do in *Transformation der Philosophie*, two volumes (Frankfurt am Main, 1976), but rather of rediscovering the presence-absence of the other and the world-horizon in all manifestations of the individual. On this subject, see Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere, Studien zur Sozialontologie der Gegenwart*, 2nd edition, Berlin, 1981.
9. See the following works by Alfred Sohn-Rethel: *Waren-und Denkform*, Frankfurt am Main, 1978; *Geistige und körperliche Arbeit, Zur Theorie der gesellschaftlichen Synthese*, Frankfurt am Main, 1972; *Soziologische Theorie der Erkenntnis*, Frankfurt am Main, 1985.
10. See, in particular, his *Letter on Humanism* and his book on Nietzsche.
11. The critique of the illusion of presence-to-oneself and self-reflection is not, as one might think, a complete negation of all forms of individual consciousness, familiarity with oneself and spontaneity. It is essentially a questioning of the claim of consciousness to take itself as the true and original understanding of its own object and to found relations to others and to the world on the supposed transparency of the subject to itself and the mastery of self which supposedly results. The subject does not possess its own consciousness; it must put its consciousness to the test as an individual thrown into the world and who must seize himself and project himself into the confrontation with others. As Ernst Tugendhat has shown very well in *Selbstbewusstsein und Selbstbestimmung*, Frankfurt am Main, 1981, individual consciousness is not in the first instance intentionality, but rather 'propositional activity' linked to interaction and language; it can develop only dialogically, in the weave of language. It should not be concluded, however, that consciousness is a pure product of communication and the systems of difference which express themselves at the level of the signifier in language codes. Neither communication nor codes can produce meaning by themselves; for that they require the 'wild', extra-linguistic intervention of individuals who receive and

modify what has been transmitted to them to make socialised subjects of them. It is in this sense that Heidegger refers to language as the primordial poetry which reveals people to themselves as beings and relations to other beings. (See 'Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes' in *Holzwege*, 6th edition, Frankfurt am Main, 1980).

12. On this subject, see Hermann Mörchen, *Die Einbildungskraft bei Kant*, 2nd edition, Tübingen, 1970. If language speaks through people, we must take care not to transform language into a substitute for the subject, forgetting that people, too, make language speak by constantly inventing and reinventing symbolic forms in the course of their exchanges.
13. Gianni Vattimo expresses some interesting thoughts on this subject in *Le avventure della differenza, Che cosa significa pensare dopo Nietzsche e Heidegger*, Milan, 1980.
14. Reiner Schürmann's book, *Le principie d'anarchie, Heidegger et la question de l'agir*, Paris, 1982, suffers from not raising these essential issues.
15. See Heidegger, *Réponses et questions sur l'histoire et la politique*, Paris, 1977. It would be oversimplistic, and therefore false, to attribute Heidegger's suspicion of democracy to a fundamentally reactionary political position, in continuity with the stances he took in 1933–34. It would be fairer to say that Heidegger perceived democracy as nothing more than a method or formalisation, associated in his view with a technicist or technocratic politics. He did not choose to see democracy as the bursting forth of the unexpected and destruction of routine in social exchanges.

4 the Fetish of Labour and its Dominion: The Critique of Economy as Critique of the Value Form

1. This type of position is defended in Ernst Michael Lange's *Das Prinzip Arbeit, Drei Metakritische Kapitel über Grundbegriffen, Struktur und Darstellung der Kritik der politischen ökonomie von Karl Marx*, Frankfurt am Main, 1980; Jean-Luc Petit, *Du travail vivant au système des actions. Une discussion de Marx*, Paris, 1980. In a different approach which reconstructs more faithfully the complexity of Marx's positions, see J. A. Gianotti, *Origines de la dialectique du travail*, Paris, 1971.
2. Kostas Axelos, *Marx, penseur de la technique*, Paris, 1961.
3. This is the argument developed by Antonio Negri in *Marx au-delà de Marx*, Paris, 1979. Negri sees the *Grundrisse* as the keystone of Marx's entire opus.
4. The most illuminating commentary on these aspects of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is that of Heidegger in *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*, vol. 32 of the *Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt am Main, 1980.
5. In other words, a science conceived in the terms of Popper and critical rationalism – a science which seeks to keep its distance from practice without transcending the limits of the latter.
6. The literature on this subject is immense. Here we shall mention only

Ian Steedman, *Marx after Sraffa*, London, 1977; Gilles Dostaler, *Marx, la valeur et l'économie politique*, Paris, 1978; Pierangelo Geragnani, *Marx e gli economisti clasici*, Oxford, 1982.

7. See, for example, Christian Barrère, *Lire la crise*, Paris, 1983.
8. See Michael Aglietta, *Régulation et crises du capitalisme. L'expérience des Etats-Unis*, Paris, 1978.

5 Transforming the World or Transforming Action: Reflections on Art, Labour and Politics

1. See his book *Negative Anthropologie*, 2nd edition, Frankfurt am Main, 1981.
2. On this parallel between the two authors, two essential books by Hermann Mörchen may be consulted: *Macht und Herrschaft im Denken von Heidegger und Adorno*, Stuttgart, 1980; and *Adorno und Heidegger, Untersuchung einer philosophischen Kommunikationsverweigerung*, Stuttgart, 1981.
3. A very rich reflection on these problems may be found in Alfred Lorenzer's *Das Konzil der Buchhalter. Die Zerstörung der Sinnlichkeit. Eine Religionskritik*, Frankfurt am Main, 1981.
4. One can refer here to Bloch's *Atheism in Christianity*, trans. J. T. Swann, New York, 1972.
5. Within Habermas' growing opus, we are referring here in particular to *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. T. McCarthy, Boston, 1984 & 1987 (2 vols.); *Moralbewusstsein und kommunikatives Handeln*, Frankfurt am Main, 1983; *Vorstudien und Ergänzungen zur Theorie des kommunikatives Handelns*, Frankfurt am Main, 1984.
6. One discerns in Habermas a tendency to idealise communication or, more precisely, to postulate its necessary tendency towards transparency. This reflects a neglect of the individual unconscious and the consequent differentials in meaning which appear in dialogues and other language practices.
7. *Der Arbeiter, Herrschaft und Gestalt*, Hamburg, 1932.
8. See Heidegger's reflection based on Jünger in *Grundbegriffe*, vol. 1 of *Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt am Main, 1981.
9. One should not interpret *Einfühlung* in a narrowly psychological sense, but rather as a relation of sympathy and openness which allows beings to exist. This is not the same as the *Einfühlung* denounced by Heidegger in 'Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes', understood as a taking possession.
10. See Sami Nair's book *Machiavel et Marx*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1984, on this subject.
11. The theme of revolution or social transformation must lose its eschatological connotation, that is, its definition as a programmed future. On this subject the work of Lelio Basso is very stimulating, in particular *Theorie des politischen Konflikts*, Frankfurt am Main, 1969; see also the collective work co-ordinated by Claudio Pozzoli, *Rosa Luxemburg oder die Bestimmung des Sozialismus*, Frankfurt am Main, 1973.