“PREFACE (1922)”

Introducing new agendas I

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Discussing the 1922 Preface entails a discussion of the project – not necessarily the outcome – of the collected edition of heterogeneous articles, mostly reworked for publication, that is *History and Class Consciousness* (*HCC*). To a German reading public, Georg Lukács was mainly known as the author of *Die Seele und die Formen* (*The Soul and the Forms*; 1911 in German) and *Die Theorie des Romans* (*The Theory of the Novel*; 1916 in a journal, 1920 in book form) when he presented his first Marxist book one hundred years ago, imbued with the intention of elucidating the “dialectical method” (Lukács 1971 [1923]: xliii) as a cohesive bond for the “*practical* essence of Marxism”[1] (ibid.: xlii). In the book, he aimed at an “*Aufhebung* [sublation]” of concepts which, if they were conceived in a “one-sided, abstract” manner, would have to become “false”; a new unity of subject and object required, instead, bringing concepts “to their true meaning less

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1 Unless otherwise stated, emphasis always in the original.

by a definition than by the methodical function they receive as sublated moments within the totality" (ibid.: xlvi, trans. amended).

1. *HCC* as a product of reorientations and a program for discussion

HCC does not seem to be a seamless product of the biographical period starting in December 1918, when Lukács joined the Hungarian Communist Party which had just been founded a few weeks before. Rather, the work appears to be the result of his attempts of self-clarification, encompassing important reorientations after the suppression of the Hungarian Council Republic in August 1919 and against the backdrop of events relevant to revolutionary history, such as the Kapp Putsch of 1920 and the so-called March Action of 1921 in the Weimar Republic. In autumn 1919, Lukács had fled into exile in Vienna where, apart from a few travels, he remained until the end of 1929. *HCC* consists of selected articles dated between March 1919 and September 1922, some of which had been thoroughly revised for republication, while two of them were written specifically for this book. The articles are not arranged chronologically but build on each other thematically, featuring, in this respect, a degree of coherence, a "certain topical cohesion" (ibid.: xli, trans. amended). Yet, principally, *HCC* is ultimately an unfinished, programmatic project (cf. Jameson 2009 [1988]: esp. 222, emphasising continuities between *HCC* and later works) and "the true

aim of this work" according to the 1922 preface was "to stimulate *discussion* and, as it were, to put the issue [of dialectics in G. W. F. Hegel and Karl Marx] back on the agenda from the point of view of method" (Lukács 1971 [1923]: xlvi, trans. amended). On the one hand, this condition allows for new questions to be productively linked to the collection of articles. On the other, it should be kept in mind that in the first article of the book, "What is Orthodox Marxism?", the author warned against wanting to construe available theories as a "'sacred' book" (ibid.: 1) that would have a definitive answer ready to every new question posed to it.

Referring to Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, and Lenin, but also to Hegel, in the second article, "The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg", Lukács advocated the method of, as he put it, "historical [*problemgeschichtliche*] analysis" of a given topic (ibid.: 33). In contrast to "bourgeois science", characterised by a harsh methodological "distinction drawn between theory and history" and by "the disappearance of the problem of totality in the interests of greater specialisation" (ibid.: 35), whereby in the methodology of said science "the history of a problem becomes mere theoretical and literary ballast" (ibid.), the aim, Lukács argued in the first article, is to situate a given problem in its specific historical totality via the reconstruction of its problem-history, to which one's own contribution factually and topically belongs: "The intelligibility of objects [*Gegenstand*] of investigation develops in proportion as we grasp their function in the *concrete* totality to which they belong" (ibid.: 13, trans. amended).

Such a comprehensive situating of the problems of *HCC* is of course impossible to achieve in the present paper. Instead, I will try to address, tentatively, some questions regarding the book's status on the basis of two selected aspects. Namely, Lukács's use of the concepts of 'totality' and 'absolute spirit', taking into account his theoretical development preceding *HCC*.[2] To this end, I will point out relevant aspects of the prehistory of *HCC*, first rather biographical ones before 1919, followed by an examination of Lukács's publications from 1919 to 1922, the years when the articles to be included in *HCC* were written. Here the focus will lie on some of the differences between the

2 On 'totality' in the early Lukács, apart from Jay (1984), among others see also Heise (1987), Lee (1990), and Behrens (2015). Roy Pascal (1970), starting from the late study on *The Specificity of the Aesthetic*, examines in particular changes in the use of the term after *HCC*, especially in Lukács's later aesthetic works (also cf. in Pascal 1974: 63–100, 108 et sq., the "considerably revised" version (ibid.: 3) titled "Georg Lukács: The Concept of Totality"; on 'absolute spirit' cf. esp. ibid.: 72–74 and Pascal 1970: 151–153). Wolfgang Heise (1987: esp. 194 et sq.) seems more sceptically distanced than Pascal and omits the period between 1916 and 1923 from his discussion. Unfortunately, this period is not scrutinised in most studies. Martin Jay (1984) does examine "Bolshevism as a Moral Problem" (1918), *Tactics and Ethics* (1919), including the earlier version of "What is Orthodox Marxism?", and "The Old Culture and the New Culture" (1919). Indicating an interrelation of the concepts of spirit and totality, Jay points out the difference between an asserted emphasis in the Sunday Circle before 1919 on the "role of intellectuals" who were able "to know the whole" (ibid.: 99) on the one hand, and Lukács's rejection of a leadership role of intellectuals in *Tactics and Ethics* on the other – this role was then rather assigned to "the proletariat" as bringer of "salvation" in the name of the spirit which supposedly had become conscious in Marx's work (cf. ibid.: 99 n.86). Furthermore, in "The Old Culture and the New Culture", a lecture Lukács gave at the newly founded Marx-Engels Workers' University on 11 June 1919, Jay saw evidences of the programmatic notion of an "organic whole" (Lukács cited in ibid.: 101). – Comparing *The Soul and the Forms*, *The Theory of the Novel*, and *HCC*, Jay comes to the conclusion that the concept evolved from a normative notion of wholeness as lacking ontological differentiations, being unhistorical, balanced, and organic, and as a feature of artworks and forms in general, to a real historical totality that could only be practically constructed from the abstract to the concrete (cf. ibid.: 87–111).

original versions of three articles and their re-workings in order to make tangible a reorientation inherent in the book publication and (at least covertly) addressed in its preface.

2. The war's impact: Lukács before the Hungarian revolutions of 1918–19

Lukács's repugnance with regard to the (feudal-)bourgeois societies in which he lived until 1918 in the Austro-Hungarian 'Imperial and Royal' Monarchy and the German Empire was initially articulated in (proto-)existentialist, life-philosophical, and aestheticist terms. With the outbreak of the First World War, his despair, but also his criticism, became more acute. During this time, he established contact in Budapest with 'Radical Leftists'[3] such as Ervin Szabó, a theorist of the left wing of Hungarian social democracy, translator of Marx, and vice-president of the Sociological Society. Lukács also stood in direct exchange with the socialist politician Oszkár Jászi and the subsequent Hungarian Prime Minister and then President Mihály Károly, who would later be called the 'Red Count'. In May 1914, Lukács had married the former social revolutionary Yelena Grabenko from Kherson who, when in Budapest in 1918, lived in the House of

3 Cf. Hermann 1978: 109. In his (albeit inconsistent) study on the concept of totality in Lukács between 1906 and 1915, Kishik Lee (1990: 122) writes of Lukács's "early involvement in various politically committed groups and circles" as showing him never actually being "apolitical", not least because of his "vehement rejection of the bourgeoisie". Jay (1984: 99), on the other hand, characterised the Sunday Circle as a group that "combined elements of extreme left-wing and extreme right-wing critiques of bourgeois society and culture".

the Soviets (cf. Lukács 1983 [1969]: 47). Since 1910 he already maintained a friendship with the writer and former member of the German Social Democratic Party Paul Ernst. Now a conservative dramatist, in the 1890s Ernst had played a role on the side of the inner-party opposition of the so-called 'Jungen' (or 'Berlin Opposition') in the discussions about Marxism and had been a correspondence partner of Friedrich Engels. Presented here rather anecdotally, these circumstances nevertheless suggest that political involvement did not simply fall into Lukács's lap in 1918, in the manner of a 'virgin birth'.

As early as 1914, Lukács wrote of a "coming socialism" (Lukács 2018 [1914]: 501).[4] In his review of writings by Hans Staudinger which, as Lukács noted, examined, among other things, the "cultural structural difference of the workers' world from the one of the bourgeoisie" (ibid.: 502), he paid particular attention to a study on "the psychology of the worker" (ibid.) written by Staudinger jointly with Fritz Seidel (cf. Staudinger and Seidel 1913). In the reviewer's eyes, this research question was "very interesting and promising according to its possibilities", but he deemed the (indeed fragmentary) study unsatisfying due to an inconsistent method used by Staudinger and Seidel, insofar as it was based on rather anecdotal-empirical evidence for a present state of affairs among workers with regard to their intellectual capacities for a normatively conceived 'culture' (Lukács 2018 [1914]: 502 et sq.). The concept of 'cultural objectivation' (*Kulturobjektivation*) was introduced by Lukács in support of his plea for a 'sociology of culture' as opposed to a

4 All translations from German source texts are my own, K. B.

'philosophy of history' in which the "overall development of humanity is attempted to be traced back to one principle (or several)" (ibid.: 498 et sq.). At the same time, he advocated against a mere "empirical-historical immanence" of science (ibid.: 499).

Lukács by no means saw himself as a Marxist at this time, even though in his critical work he occasionally showed interest in "what Marx calls the problem of ideology" and articulated his Hegel-inspired interest in the historicity of categories (Lukács 2018 [1915]: 516). His review on Benedetto Croce written in 1915 addresses the latter's engagement with Hegel and Marx. In Lukács's eyes, Croce's "founding of historical science from the concept of Hegelian spirit" was problematic as it tended to abolish "the sharp distinction between objective and absolute spirit" in order to "arrive at a unified concept of spirit immanent in history" (ibid.: 510). Yet, as Lukács argued, this entailed the danger of a positivist relativism towards historical 'values' as well as that of a "panlogistic-dogmatic metaphysics" of historical progress, a merely affirmative attitude towards actual development (ibid.: 511; cf. 513 et sq. where Lukács referenced Croce's rejection of an "absolute totality" of the respective object's scope). Lukács endorsed an "abstinence from value judgements" in historical science (ibid.: 511) and at the same time showed interest in "the problem of the historicity of the in itself timeless, absolute spirit" (ibid.). In his view, it was only in sociology that the "values actually valid within a particular cultural sphere [could] be truly grasped" and typologised (ibid.: 514). With regard to the question of "how it is possible that art, religion, and philosophy [understood as instances of 'absolute spirit'; K.

B.] have a history at all" (ibid.: 511), Lukács referred, by way of examples, to a connection between changes in taste in art or new questions in historiography with "sociologically conditioned interests" – e.g. of classes, as Lukács exemplified quoting Karl Kautsky's "Forerunners of Modern Socialism" (1895) via Ernst Troeltsch (1912: 18 n.10) – "concerning certain complexes of interrelations" (Lukács 2018 [1915]: 515). It was thus possible for Lukács to write in 1915: "The fact that historical materialism, the most important sociological method to date, has almost always become a metaphysics of the philosophy of history must not make us forget the epoch-making value of the method on which it is based, only as yet not clearly carved out" (ibid.: 515 et sq.) To him, the "way to the solution of the problem" lay precisely in "what Marx calls the problem of ideology" (ibid.: 516). Yet, and somewhat contradictorily to his own premises, Lukács limited this methodology to refer to 'objective spirit'; "for the value systems of absolute spirit", on the other hand, the problem would have to be "formulated quite differently" (ibid.), which he did not elaborate any further in this review article. As a consequence, in 1915, Lukács ultimately juxtaposed everything that is to be understood "as a product of social conditions" with something he then still called "the Absolute" (ibid.).[5]

Lukács had published these reviews in Max Weber's *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* during the time of the *Werturteilsstreit*, the 'value-judgement controversy'. In context of his failed habilitation efforts under Weber's tutelage at

5 Quoting from *HCC* (Lukács 1971 [1923]: 374), Fredric Jameson (2009 [1988]: 209) holds that this notion of an 'Absolute' did not persist in Lukács's later work.

the University of Heidelberg, also for anti-Semitic and anti-foreigner reasons,[6] the 32-year-old Hungarian intellectual left Heidelberg in November 1917 for Budapest where he participated again in the meetings of the Sunday Circle he had co-founded in 1915. (Some of its members, such as Béla Balázs, Béla Fogarasi, or László Radványi would later, like himself, become communists.) At the same time, Lukács took part in the Sociological Society (which did not prevent him from returning to Heidelberg during 1918).

In Spring 1918, answering to a lecture by Fogarasi in the Sociological Society, Lukács opined, according to the minutes, "that with a certain world vision [*Weltbild*[7]], norms of action of different directions and with a certain norm of action, different world visions can be linked without inner contradiction" (Lukács 1985 [1918]: 248). In the course of its historical development, a given ethic could "correlate with the most diverse epistemologies and metaphysics" (ibid.: 249), without, for instance, affecting the political implications of this ethic. An 'ethical idealism' (grounded in Immanuel Kant and J. G. Fichte) would have as its "aim and content" – in relation to politics – an "ideal", namely: "the autonomous, […] free will seeking only the good as the sole possible, definite aim" (ibid.: 253). The validity of such an ideal of a will, it appears, could thus seem to be placed beyond history and be brought into relation with 'absolute spirit'. In actual politics, though, Lukács argued that in accor-

6 Cf. Alfred von Domaszewski's letter to Lukács, 7 December, 1918 in Lukács 1986: 289; cf. also Baehrens 2016: 220 n.8.

7 This term had also been used by Staudinger and Seidel, cf., e.g., their sub-chapter "Das Weltbild des Arbeiters" (Staudinger and Seidel 1913: 143–156).

dance with 'ethical idealism', the purpose was "to create institutions that correspond as best as possible to the ethical ideal and to eliminate such institutions that stand in the way of its realisation" (ibid.: 250). Regarding certain instances of 'objective spirit', Lukács gave his judgement that "from the standpoint of ethical idealism, no institution (from property to nation and state) can have any value in itself, but only insofar as it conduces to the development", i.e., the approximation of institutions to forms that would serve "exclusively the ethical higher development of the human being" (ibid.: 251). In this respect, 'ethical idealism' was supposed to be compatible with 'progressive' politics understood in this ethical-humanist sense.

It seems plausible that Lukács began to sympathise with socialism years before he joined the newly formed Hungarian Communist Party – still quite suddenly and unexpectedly to his acquaintances[8] – at the end of 1918 and eventually considered himself a Marxist. Differentiating between 'objective' and 'absolute spirit', he endorsed a transformation of the instances and institutions of the former in the sense of a 'will' as a political ideal, which in turn did not initially appear to be further historicised, but apparently was to be justified in the sense of the latter.

In December 1918, in the aftermath of the republican, antimonarchist Aster Revolution, in which bourgeois parties and

8 Jay (1984: 98 n.77) has emphasised, referring to Jameson, "that the notion of a semi-religious conversion experience mystifies the essential continuities in Lukács's position" and that "focusing on the continuities and discontinuities between Lukács's uses of totality" renders possible to capture "the nuances of his development."

social democrats came to government in Hungary, Lukács joined the one existing party furthest to the left, less than one month after it had been founded. Shortly before this, a re-articulation of political ideals can already be observed when, in the essay "Bolshevism as a Moral Problem", the proletariat is ascribed the "*will* to a democratic world order" (Lukács 1977 [1918]: 420, trans. amended). The Hungarian Revolution, which unfolded in October 1918 initially in a republican form, had been, according to Peter Ludz, "celebrated more strongly" (Ludz 1967: XXVIII) by Lukács than the Russian October Revolution a year prior. In the war between imperialist powers he had rejected both a victory of the Central Empires and the prospect of Hungary joining the Allied Entente Powers, seeking, instead, an 'ethical community' within his home country as a third way (cf. Hermann 1978: 116). With the beginning of the Hungarian Council Republic in March 1919, when the social democratic and the communist parties merged, he then became Deputy and later acting People's Commissioner for Education. The ethical legitimation for his political stance would continue to develop in dialectical interrelation with the latter.

3. Ruptures and continuities: the spirit of contradiction(s) in *HCC*

In the booklet *Tactics and Ethics* (1919), most of which was written before the beginning of the Hungarian Council Republic, Lukács already emphasised the determining role of "concrete

totality" (Lukács 1975 [1919a]: 24): the significance of its components was to be inferred from their functional position within the whole (cf. ibid., esp. 14–24). While in the 1919 version of "What is Orthodox Marxism?" Lukács assumed "that the development of society is determined exclusively by forces present within that society" and explicitly included "Spirit", namely art, religion, and philosophy (ibid.: 16), here, referring to "the theory of the Hegelian concrete concept" (ibid.: 22),[9] a certain overemphasis on an "unconditional hegemony of the totality" could still occur (ibid.: 24). Lukács supposed that "the whole takes precedence over the parts" without stressing the mediating instance of the particular between the singular and the universal. Drawing on the (pseudo-)quotation 'so much the worse for the facts' attributed to Fichte (cf. ibid.: 27), which is not reiterated in *HCC*, this Hegelian-inspired conceptual realism paradoxically led Lukács to a rather Fichtean notion of revolutionary subjectivity when he elaborated on his hypothesis of a "sudden change" (*dialektischer Umschlag*) caused by historically conceived "concepts" as "*living realities*" (ibid.: 20): "*Decisions* […] *precede the facts*" (ibid.: 26). Lukács could proclaim this based on the Hegelian acknowledgement that concepts constitute an integral part of historical development, combining it with a quite Fichtean political interpretation. Already before the beginning of the Council Republic, he had written of the "final goal: *the classless society and the liberation from every form of economic dependence*"; the proletariat's class consciousness would emerge, in

9 Quite comprehensibly, he explained this view as follows: "concepts cease being rigid schemata, which, once defined, never again change their meaning, nor are they isolated thought-structures" (ibid.: 20).

this regard, as decisive factor of the "*homogeneous development of society*" (ibid.: 17), becoming self-conscious in Marxism, as if incarnating "the self-discovery of the Spirit seeking itself in the course of history" (ibid.: 18). Writing after the establishment of the Council Republic, with regard to "the unified will of the unified proletariat", Lukács presented the party – towards the end of a successful "social revolution" (ibid.: 29) – as "the executive organ of the will that is developing in the new society from new sources of strength [*neuen Kräften*]" (ibid.: 36).

In *HCC*, on the other hand, Lukács insisted much more strongly on the historicity and inner contradictoriness of this totality as a dialectical historical process (cf. Lukács 1971 [1923]: 1–26, esp. 8–12). His use of the term 'totality' had changed, in the words of Roger Behrens (2015: 196), from a "still abstract conception" grounded on works of art – Lukács had advocated for a "true totality" in *The Soul and the Forms* (Lukács 2010 [1911]: 170, trans. amended) – to the notion of a "created totality" in *The Theory of the Novel* (Lukács 1971 [1916]: 37), to that of a historically unfinished, processual, and inherently contradictory totality in *HCC* and beyond.[10] Among other aspects, this shift seems to be functionally connected to the changing use of the Hegelian vocabulary of 'absolute spirit', as rendered particularly clear by the discrepancies between the two different versions of the article "Historical Materialism's Change of Function". While in 1919 Lukács had introduced Hegel's terminological distinction between 'objective' and 'absolute spirit'

10 Cf. also Jameson 2009 [1988]: esp. 205, 211, 213, as well as Baehrens and Voigt 2019: 196–198.

with affirmative commentary in order to develop it critically (cf. Lukács 1975 [1919b]: 115 et sq.), in the considerably more extensive version printed in *HCC* the designation 'absolute spirit' is explicitly mentioned only once and immediately qualified restrictively in a new footnote: there was to be "no application whatsoever of the (otherwise very problematic) doctrine of the spirit" (Lukács 1971 [1923]: 254 n.10, trans. amended). In accordance with this distancing, in the remainder of the article in *HCC*, Lukács exclusively used the term 'objective spirit' – and, for that matter, only in quotation marks.[11]

In 1919, Lukács had still harshly contrasted the "purely scientific method" of historical materialism with the latter as a "means of struggle" (Lukács 1975 [1919b]: 110; cf. also 118) and had accordingly drawn a dividing line between "purely social formations" of the 'objective spirit' on the one hand and "science, art, religion" on the other (ibid.: 115). He also attested to Marx having rightly "felt a certain difference in level" of the two phenomenal modes of 'spirit' since the social determinacy of each supposedly proceeded with different complexity. Even Hegel, according to Lukács in 1919, had merely outlined this "important difference in principle" programmatically, but had not consistently developed it (ibid.: 116). "Marx takes over this unclarity unchanged from Hegel", Lukács wrote (ibid.). The reason he gave for this was that in capitalism 'absolute spirit' (such as religion) had been 'reduced' to the level of 'objective spirit'

11 Cf. ibid.: 234, 238. In the English translation, both terms appear a further time and without quotation marks in a passage (ibid.: 234) where they are not mentioned in the German original.

(such as the institution of the church) which, in turn, supposedly showed itself to be quite directly socio-economically determined. For both pre-capitalist and post-capitalist times, the Lukács of 1919 envisioned a kind of society in which 'absolute spirit' fulfilled a decisive function. Although "the absolute spirit cannot yet rule over society in the dictatorship of the proletariat" (ibid.: 122), and in this 'transitional period' only 'objective spirit' would rule – albeit no longer as a function of the economy but as one of 'absolute spirit' – Lukács's (messianic) perspective was that "economic life" would become "the simple function of the idea" (ibid.: 121 et sq.).

With regard to class as a historical agent, whose psychological-empirical and 'imputed' (or 'attributed') class consciousness Lukács did not yet distinguish in this passage, he assumed a necessary "awakening of the proletariat" (ibid.: 118), whereas, for example, individual scientific errors could only be corrected later, after a successful revolution.

In the rewritten form of the article in *HCC*, Lukács wanted the Hegelian terminology to be understood "only in order to differentiate clearly between [...] spheres", with which no psychology or metaphysics was supposed to be connected in Hegel either; instead, 'spirit' was a matter of the "unity of consciousness and its object", which was close, Lukács explained, referring to *The Poverty of Philosophy* and *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, to Marx's way of addressing "categories" (Lukács 1971 [1923]: 254 n.10). Also new, compared to the 1919 version of the article, is the strong reference to the preoccupation with the 'external' and 'internal' nature of human

beings as a criterion, even if Lukács immediately added that the "distinction" between 'objective' and 'absolute spirit' "should not be understood mechanically" (ibid.: 234). Now he explicitly conceded that the "connections [*Zusammenhänge*]" in those spheres that Hegel had assigned to the 'absolute spirit' are always given in a "socially conditioned form" and at the same time insisted that they "develop according to their own inner laws and they preserve a much greater independence of their basis in the life of the society from which they (necessarily) spring" (ibid.).

Judging by the ambition, a certain historicisation of the concept of 'absolute spirit' had taken place. It had become an integral part of the totality, not something beyond it. This totality, encompassing not only what had been subsumed under the notions of 'subjective' and 'objective spirit' but also the spheres of religion, art, and, crucially, philosophy and science, had now become truly integral, historical, and thus contradictory within itself.

After the Hungarian Council Republic had been suppressed, a necessary, more protracted ideological work was now indicated as well when Lukács wrote more mediately of the necessity of "awakening *the class consciousness of* the proletariat" (ibid.: 239; my emphasis, K. B.). The "will of the proletariat which has become conscious" was now only defined negatively: as "to abolish itself – and at the same time to abolish the enslaving hold of reified relations over the human being, the hold of the economy over society" (ibid.: 251 et sq., trans. amended). Nevertheless, Lukács adhered to the concept of "conscious action" in

which "the conscious meaning of every moment" is seen as being "*one* step ahead of the process" (ibid.: 250).

A comparison of the two versions of the article "Class Consciousness" likewise makes the efforts of historical integration visible. After the Kapp Putsch in Weimar Germany had been ended by general strikes which, however, would not lead to any further-reaching consequences in the direction of socialism, in April 1920 Lukács already described the "correct insight into the nature of society" as "perhaps […] the decisive weapon in general" (Lukács 1975 [1920]: 212), thus relating 'pure science' and 'means of struggle' to one another. In a critical situation of decision, he wrote, "only the conscious will of the proletariat can protect humanity from catastrophe" (ibid.: 213). Yet, so far the "consciousness of the proletariat" (understood here in rather psychological-empirical terms) had "for the time being still succumbed to reification" (ibid.: 216). Although Lukács attributed an important role to more general "questions of culture", he still implied that their significance could only really be clarified after a revolution (ibid.: 218). In contrast, he showed confidence in a low-threshold organisation against reification and its consequences: "The very existence of the workers' council" was "a sign that the class consciousness of the proletariat is in the process of overcoming the bourgeois character of its ruling strata" (ibid.: 217). The workers' council as a "form" was seen as "the political-economic overcoming of capitalist reification" (ibid.).

In *HCC*, almost three years later, Lukács emphasised that even after a theoretical insight into reification, the objectivity of

a lawlike necessity independent of the will of existing human beings could, in fact, remain (cf. Lukács 1971 [1923]: 49).[12] Now he explicitly argued against "Kantians" who conceive of history "as an in itself meaningless material basis for the realisation of timeless, suprahistorical, ethical principles" (ibid., trans. amended). In contrast, any actually given "'false consciousness'"

12 In the meantime, Lukács had occupied himself with Sigmund Freud's theory, as his review published on 21 May, 1922 attests. This review (a rare case of Lukács using the phrase "late capitalism"; Lukács 1983 [1922]: 35) can be taken as indicating Lukács's interest in mass- and social-psychological issues and his lines of questioning at the time. Despite sharp criticism of the individual psychological perspective on 'the masses' in the "otherwise meritorious researcher" Freud (ibid.: 36), Lukács emphasised at the outset: "Freudian psychology signifies a certain advance compared to common psychology", which is why a treatise evaluating his "psychological system" would be quite desirable (ibid.: 33). Lukács approved of the objective of "exploring the social reasons for [a human being's] separateness from the whole" as well as the "connected problems" of inter-subjective social relations (ibid.). Nevertheless, Freud's psychology would be unable to achieve this since it "rules out the influence of economic, social and historical conditions *in its method*" (ibid.: 34). Here, Lukács drew a connection between class position and 'unconscious' behaviour: "the more its problems touch on topical questions", the less "any bourgeois discipline" is able to "perceive the social, class-governed character of its mistakes"; "of course", he added with a somewhat tongue-in-cheek twist, the "attempts to draw a veil over this state of affairs […] are in many cases unconscious" (ibid.: 36). – Additionally, after the German March Action in 1921, Lukács had begun to focus more strongly not only on the question of consequences of reification in the consciousness of the proletariat in general, but also more specifically in the consciousness of communists within the leadership of the party: in the March Action, as he publicly criticised in June 1921, "the very vanguard itself was not organizationally equal to the task" (Lukács 1975 [1921b]: 108). To overcome "the ideological remnants of capitalist reification in the thinking and feeling of the communists themselves" (ibid.: 116), he deemed necessary a specific kind of democratisation within the party "*to create* […] *the intellectual and organizational conditions for* […] *discipline in the building of the party*" (ibid.: 111). In his view, as he expressed already in March 1921, the party was "obliged to take the initiative by actively intervening and engaging *the entire proletariat* directly in their own immediate interests […] and in constant interaction between the masses and the party" (Lukács 1975 [1921a]: 101), a task that demanded "organizational" consequences (ibid.: 104). Paul Le Blanc (2013: 55 et sq.) interprets the outcome of the Third Congress of the Comintern (June–July 1921), in which Lukács took part and agreed with its aims, as follows: "The Congress advanced

was supposed to be investigated "concretely", as a moment of "historical totality" (ibid.: 50). Using terms such as "inconsciousness" (ibid.: 52, trans. amended) (*Unbewusstheit*) and "repressed" (ibid.: 59) (*verdrängt*), which had not yet appeared in the earlier version, Lukács now addressed contradictions between interests, actual behaviour, and the *manner* of being conscious among ruling and revolutionary classes, among the bourgeoisie realising its immediate interests in capitalism and among the proletariat whose interest did not consist in the "*immediate realisation of the class's social being*, but […] [in] *its self-sublation*" (ibid.: 71, trans. amended). Therefore, both victories and defeats were conceived as "a means of education" for the proletariat (ibid.: 74). The metaphor of the "object-lesson of history" (ibid.: 76, trans. amended), which was being used here as well (cf. Lukács 1975 [1920]: 216), this time was qualified to the effect that "in its forms of appearance" the "overall movement" necessarily exhibited "no immediate unity" (Lukács 1971 [1923]: 74, trans. amended). The workers' council was now depicted by Lukács as "the organ of struggle of the entire proletariat, growing into an

a perspective of careful party-building and serious efforts to advance class consciousness through organic connection with the actual struggles of the working class – engaging in trade union work, reform struggles, and united fronts" (cf. also Lauschke 2023: 261–265). Yet, it is noteworthy that Lukács spoke of an historical "object-lesson" (Lukács 1975 [1921b]: 111) for the proletariat in a situation he regarded as an "*acute stage of the proletarian revolution*" (Lukács 1975 [1921a]: 97; cf. Schlesinger 2016 [1969]: 195). – The impression of a necessity to democratise the party itself may also have been fostered by the military suppression of the Kronstadt Rebellion in March 1921 for which Grigory Zinoviev had been responsible as Chairman of the Petrograd Defence Committee (cf. Behrendt 2023: 464). Moreover, from as early as 1920, counter-revolutionary movements and 'white terror' in Hungary and Italy, but also in Germany, were astutely observed by Lukács and integrated into his theoretical, political, and strategic analysis.

organ of state" (ibid.: 80, trans. amended).[13] The fact of the establishment of the workers' council, according to Lukács, steered available resources in the direction of an "ideological overcoming of capitalism" (ibid., trans. amended). Its "existence [*Dasein*]" (ibid., trans. amended) was devised to be "constantly developing" (ibid.), which Lukács also understood as a 'struggle with oneself'. At the same time, he referred to the Communist Party as the "organised form" of the "correct view of the overall economic situation" and thus of the "correct class consciousness of the proletariat" (ibid.: 75). A programmatic division of labour between workers' councils and the party was thus at least implied.

Lukács re-formulated his ambition of consistent historical integration as follows: "Hegel's half-heartedness lies in the fact that he only allows the absolute spirit to actually make history in appearance" (ibid.: 77, trans. amended). By contrast, what mattered was to see "the true bearer of historical movement in history itself, in the way the proletariat organises itself as a class and, hence, in the class consciousness of the proletariat" (ibid.: 78).[14]

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13 On 30 December, 1922, the Soviet Union was founded, thus officially marking the end of the civil war.

14 As workers' councils on their own, in his view, gave no guarantee that class consciousness would be continuously developed, Lukács demanded for the party, indispensable for this purpose, more internal democracy. Later, more general ideological influences in society as a whole, including especially literature and art, also philosophical theories and traditions and their (popularising) lines of reception and histories of impact, were to be increasingly taken into account by Lukács (even after *HCC*) as conditions for the conclusions drawn by individuals and collectives from the 'object-lesson of history'. Seen this way, decisions, themselves not without preceding conditions, would indeed precede the facts.

If the 'will' of the working class in developing capitalism is not to be imagined as something fixated, returning to its own original harmony through history like 'absolute spirit', if it is not timeless, but historical, there is work to be done to elicit this will. Under the premise of a truly historical totality with no 'absolute spirit' beyond it and given that workers' councils cannot guarantee by the fact of their mere existence that the nightmare of all dead generations has already been overcome, everything seems to depend on whether or not Lukács will sufficiently be able, in *HCC,* to conceive a mediation of class consciousness and the will of the proletariat in a convincingly democratic manner. Certainly, for Lukács, the indispensable inner-party ideological labour necessarily included "criticisms" (ibid.: 336) directed to the party by its members who simultaneously were supposed to bring "the whole of their personality" (ibid.: 335) into this organisation in order to prevent "rigidity", "fossilisation", and "ossification" (in the German original always *Erstarrung*), both theirs and the party's (ibid.: 333, 335, 336).

Lukács dated his Preface, perhaps ironically, "Christmas 1922" (ibid.: xlvii). According to Christian tradition, this is the celebration of God becoming human through the Holy Spirit and a virgin woman born without original sin. According to Jewish tradition, so far the Messiah has not come. Lukács equally expected the most important changes to lay still in the future.

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