

# “PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION (1967)”

Introducing new agendas II

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It is well known that the first reprint of *History and Class Consciousness (HCC)* was about forty years in the making, as Georg Lukács had for a long time rejected a new edition of the book. After an unauthorised French translation was released in 1960, and several German-language ‘pirated’ editions were already in circulation, he arranged for the collection of articles to be republished as a part of the West German edition of his *Werke* (Collected Works) begun in 1962. The new, extensive preface, dated March 1967, was to become, according to his intent, “an integral part of its new editions and of all translations” from then on (Lukács 1976 [1970]: back cover page). In 1930, while working at the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow, Lukács read early writings by Karl Marx, especially the ‘Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844’ that were published for the first time only in 1932. Through this process, and by re-

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examining the young G. W. F. Hegel’s trajectory, Lukács reframed his position on the issues of alienation, externalisation, objectification, reification, and fetishisation. What is noteworthy regarding the new preface is not only the author’s self-criticism of previous stances and the points he upheld,<sup>1</sup> but also his overt assessment and commentary on earlier self-criticisms.

Initially, it might be useful to recapitulate the history of Lukács’s self-criticisms regarding *HCC*. Subsequently, I will seek to outline some of the programmatic repositionings associated with the new editions during Lukács’s final work phase after 1956.

## 1. Criticisms and self-criticisms

Until 1926, Lukács still publicly referred to his own collection of articles affirmatively. He did so in his extensive review of

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1 According to Martin Jay (1984: 104), Lukács “never repudiated” his stance on Marxist method as being well-founded even if every result hitherto reached would prove to be mistaken. Among the arguments Lukács adhered to, Jay (*ibid.*: 85) emphasises, quoting from the late Preface, as being especially important for *HCC* “to have reinstated the category of totality in the central position it had occupied throughout Marx’s work” (Lukács 1971 [1967]: xx). This, though, as Lukács deplored, should not have been played off against attention to social-economic analysis (*cf. ibid.*). Lukács also retained a criticism of Friedrich Engels’s statement regarding praxis and the thing-in-itself as “theoretically incomplete” (*ibid.*: xix). According to Lukács’s autobiographical notes, written shortly before his death, being excluded from Hungarian party politics between 1929 and 1935 had a “positive side” for him, giving him the opportunity to “re-think *History and Class Consciousness*. The result: what was important about it, was not its anti-materialism but its completion of historicism in Marx and with that, ultimately, the universality of Marxism as a philosophy” (Lukács 1983 [1969–71]: 163, trans. amended).

an edition of Ferdinand Lassalle's letters in 1925 and in his article on Moses Hess, which was also published as an independent print in 1926.<sup>2</sup> I will return to both shortly. But it is worth mentioning that also his 1925 review of Nikolai Bukharin, who was then a member of the Politburo of the Bolshevik party and from 1926 chairman of the Communist International, does not appear to be particularly faint-hearted, but rather quite sharp, when Lukács accuses Bukharin of turning Marxism into a 'science' – i.e., one akin to the natural sciences that would not historically mediate their own results.<sup>3</sup>

The criticism of *HCC* on the part of the Communist International began in Summer 1924, after Lenin's death on 21 January had led to several attempts at biographical, theoretical, and political interpretation (among the first of which was the one by Lukács), as well as to disputes over Lenin's theoretical and political legacy and its rightful representatives. Notably, Lukács's *Lenin* study was anonymously criticised in *Arbeiterliteratur* even before *HCC*.

The journal *Arbeiterliteratur* existed for only one year. In 1924, 12 issues (some of them double issues) and one special issue were published. The anonymous review of Lukács's *Lenin* study was authored by August Thalheimer, who had been a member of the leadership of the German Communist Party's Central Committee until April 1924. The outlawing of the party

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<sup>2</sup> See Lukács 1926.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lukács 1975 [1925a]: esp. 136. Lukács levelled the same charge of turning Marxism into an (a-historical, positivist) 'science' against Abram Deborin and László Rudas in the then unpublished, fragmentary polemic in attempt of a self-defence of *HCC*, "Tailism and the Dialectic" (cf. Lukács 2000: esp. 49, 137).

on 23 November, 1923 (following the Hamburg Uprising) had resulted in a restructuring of the party leadership. In the double issue No. 7/8 of *Arbeiterliteratur*, this short review was printed under the evocative title “A Superfluous Book” ([Thalheimer] 1924), immediately following a positive review of Deborin’s study *Lenin, the Militant Materialist*, which likewise had been published that year.<sup>4</sup> Lukács, according to the critic, worshipped the “idea of totality [...] like a fetish” (ibid.: 427) and also aspired to “emerge as the representative dialectician” (ibid.: 428).<sup>5</sup> Thalheimer deemed this endeavour, imputed to Lukács, doomed to failure, since the book “bears very poor witness to his much-vaunted (though only by himself and his appendix) dialectical thinking” (ibid.: 427 et sq.). Reference was made to “his disciples [Jünger]” who supposedly had recently presented in the journal *Internationale* “the more intensive cultivation of this kind of ‘materialist dialectics’ as a programme, so to speak, of an ideological reform work”, adding “a *political background*<sup>6</sup>” to the matter (ibid.: 428). In addition to the charge of factionalism, the short review addressed two slightly more substantive points. Firstly, “Lukács and his friends” were accused of calling for a turn “back to Hegel” without taking into account Marx’s proletarian-revolutionary ‘sublation’ of Hegelian dialectics (ibid.), while Thalheimer himself described Hegel as the “philosopher of

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4 The renowned and influential philosopher Deborin was not a member of the Bolshevik party at the time, which he would join in 1928. His pamphlet consisted mainly of an approving commentary on Lenin’s *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, briefly mentioning HCC critically in passing, pointedly picking up on its alleged denial of dialectics in nature (cf. Deborin 1924a: 26).

5 All translations from non-English language source texts are my own, K. B.

6 Unless otherwise stated, emphasis always in the original.

the Prussian Junker state” (ibid.: 429). Secondly, the question of the activities of revolutionaries during wartime was raised through the use of decontextualised citations. According to Thalheimer, Lukács categorically ruled out that “workers can fight workers in the service of the bourgeoisie”, since in this case “the International in practice ceases to exist” (Lukács cited in ibid.: 427). In contrast, Lenin’s position – reproduced here without context – was presented by Thalheimer as follows: “Communists must take part in every war, even the most reactionary” (Lenin cited in ibid.: 428).<sup>7</sup>

It was not until the following issue No. 9 of *Arbeiterliteratur* that the first part of László Rudas’s critique of HCC appeared in German.<sup>8</sup> Deborin’s condemnatory article followed in issue No. 10.<sup>9</sup> At the 5th World Congress of the Communist International on 19 June, 1924, Grigory Zinoviev had already publicly criticised Lukács and Karl Korsch (after Rudas had written a letter to the Presidium of the Communist International

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7 In January 1918, three factions had formed in the Bolshevik leadership over what would become the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty. While Lenin sided with ending the war even if it meant territorial losses, Trotsky favoured a (deceleration) scenario in which the war could be ended without signing a peace treaty right away, hoping that soldiers on all sides would refuse to continue fighting for the bourgeoisie; the third position held that the conditions imposed by the German and Austrian military governments had to be rejected and that the imperialist war should immediately be transformed from a nationalist into an internationalist struggle, turning it into a revolutionary war. This stance was, among others, advocated by Bukharin, and also adopted by the then prisoner of war Béla Kun (cf. Borsányi 1993: 54). This group gathered around the journal *Kommunist*, which appeared in Petrograd in March and in Moscow from April to June 1918.

8 See Rudas 1924c; a Russian version had appeared in issue No. 8 of the bulletin of the Communist Academy, *Vestnik Kommunisticheskoy Akademii* (Rudas 1924b).

9 See Deborin 1924c; this article had appeared in the Russian original in the June/July issue of *Pod Znamenem Marksizma* (*Under the Banner of Marxism*).

on 12 June, 1924). Ivan Luppol’s annotation of Deborin’s Lukács critique (in the Russian original in pamphlet form), titled “The Society of Militant Materialists”, appeared in *Pravda* on 27 May, 1924 – more than a year after *HCC* had been published. By this time, Lukács’s study on Lenin had already been completed; its preface is dated “February 1924” (Lukács 2009 [1924]: 7). Its readers in Moscow did not see this book as a theoretical rapprochement or sign of submission. Instead, they understood its author as a political rival. It therefore seems unlikely that he would have written it in response to criticism from the Communist International (as Peter Ludz presumed in 1961 when he introduced the very first collection of articles by Lukács to appear in West Germany; cf. Ludz 1961: 15). Rather, with the *Lenin* study, Lukács drew envious attention in the competitive struggle developing in Moscow over the proper interpretation and the political legacy of the recently deceased party chairman and head of government, whereupon the collection of articles by the man perceived as a competitor also entered the focus of the dispute.<sup>10</sup>

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10 Indeed there had already been an anonymous letter to Bukharin on 6 July, 1923, requesting a review of *HCC* for the *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz*, invoking the danger of a factionalism of the “friends” around Lukács and appealing to Lenin’s authority to mark Lukács as a “bad dialectician” ([Anonymous 1923]). No reaction came from Moscow before the Summer of 1924, making it highly improbable that the *Lenin* study would have been written solely in response to such a letter. The early review of *HCC* in the *Rote Fahne* of 27 May, 1923, written by Hermann Duncker, a friend of Bukharin’s and since 1923 responsible for the department for education and instruction in the Central Committee of the German Communist Party, was very critically dismissive, but did not articulate an accusation of factionalism and would have hardly led to any further consequences. Duncker criticised the way the book, which in his eyes was formulated in an incomprehensible and intellectualistic manner, was directed at its readership as well as its emphasis on revolutionary subjectivity. In doing so, Duncker himself seemed to partly overestimate “economic determinism” in Marx-

As late as 1925, in his review of Gustav Mayer's edition of Lassalle's letters, and in his 1926 article on Moses Hess, both published in Carl Grünberg's *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung* – which had become the theoretical journal of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research –, Lukács still made references to *HCC*: “For the Marxist conception of class consciousness” (Lukács 1975 [1925b]: 167 n.22), on the correlation between Immanuel Kant's problem of the thing-in-itself and that of historical becoming (Lukács 1975 [1926]: 190 n.20), and on dissolving the “fetish character” by “revealing the historical categories of mediation” in the Critique of Political Economy (ibid.: 218 et sq.), Lukács explicitly recommended his own book.<sup>11</sup>

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ism (Duncker 1974 [1923]: 348). At the same time, he pointed to “problems raised by L[ukács]” that deserved “serious working through” (ibid.: 347). Within the German party, the public discussion that Lukács had meant to stimulate with *HCC* did not ensue, not even after an extract from “Legality and Illegality” was reprinted in *Rote Fahne* on 12 August, 1923, when the political climate in Weimar Germany was heating up (on this, cf. Lauschke 2023: 406).

11 Within the scope of the present paper, unfortunately many important aspects of the development between 1926 and 1933 cannot be dealt with. In 1929, criticism within the Hungarian party (involving the Communist International's Executive Committee and Dmitriy Manuilski) of Lukács's position as formulated in the ‘Blum Theses’ led to his not being re-elected onto the Central Committee at the Second Party Congress held in Moscow in early 1930. Having been expelled from Vienna in December 1929, Lukács remained in Moscow and worked at the Marx-Engels Institute, which was eventually closed in February 1931. In March of the same year, many of its staff were dismissed, including Lukács, who was described on this occasion as “not a Marxist according to his philosophical views” and characterised by Pavel Yudin as an “idealist” (cited in Vollgraf, Sperl and Hecker 2001: 25, 88). When in Berlin, after his public discussions with Willi Bredel and Ernst Ottwalt in 1931/32, Lukács's manner of communication was officially estimated as “far too harsh”, “destructive criticism” by Sergei Tretyakov, who was one of the soviet participants in the extended German Joint Commission of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers in December 1932. Also Paul Dietrich, a representative of the German party's leadership, criticised that the group around Bertolt Brecht, Bredel, Ottwalt, and others had been “insufficiently consulted to

It was not until 1933 that Lukács’s first public self-criticism of *HCC* appeared, when the intellectual who fit dangerously well into the stereotype of a ‘Jewish Bolshevik’ escaped from Nazi Germany and returned to Soviet exile. The special issue on Marx (fifty years after his death) of the journal *Internationale Literatur* from March/April 1933 contains Engels’s speech at Marx’s grave, a poem, the article “Heine and Marx” by Franz P. Schiller, Lukács’s “Sickingendebatte” article, Mikhail Lifshits’s “Karl Marx and the Aesthetic”, and Karl Schmückle’s article on the newly discovered and published early writings of Marx and Engels. This is followed by a section entitled “Writers on Marx” (p. 177–189), to which, alongside Klaus Mann, Stefan Zweig, Paul Eluard, and others, also Lukács contributed a short self-report (p. 185–187), which was later reprinted and became better known under the title “My Way to Marx” (his residency was indicated in the journal as “Berlin”; Lukács 1933: 185). Evidently, this is the author’s first public self-critical statement about *HCC*. According to Lukács in 1933, the collection of articles clearly indicated his own “transition” from an “ultra-left subjectivism” and “activism” to an “*attachment to the revolutionary workers*’

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collaborate” by the group around Lukács, Johannes R. Becher, and Andor Gábor. Hugo Huppert judged Lukács’s public criticism of Ottwalt to have been “not concrete, not helpful, but abstract and in part dismissive”; Hans Günther also conceded that Lukács had not sufficiently emphasised “what we have in common, what unites us” (cited in Barck 1983: 102 et sq.). In 1932, Ottwalt and Brecht were elected into the German organisation’s Fraction leadership. It remains a matter of speculation, albeit being a successful and persistent narrative since the times of the Cold War (when Lukács was still alive), whether or not he was sent to Berlin in 1931 with an official literary and cultural policy mandate. What we do know for certain is that Lukács’s activities resulted in the official party line in Moscow being adapted – at least on paper – to the outcomes of the discussions in Berlin (see, e.g., Gallas 1971: 59 et sq. and also Fowkes 2017: 233).



*movement arising from many years of practice*”, so that “the comprehensive and unified character of materialist dialectics had become *concretely* clear” to him. The “real study of Marxism” was “*only now*” beginning properly, and could “never come to rest”, since, as Lukács wrote quoting Lenin against Stalinist dogmatism, “every law” was “narrow, incomplete, approximate” in view of the abundance of phenomena (ibid.: 187).<sup>12</sup> Apparently all too submissively, he suggested that *HCC* was revealing of his ongoing “transition”, considering he had not yet overcome Hegel’s idealism with regard to “nature dialectics, reflection theory, etc.” (ibid.). Possibly taking up Duncker’s criticism, he stressed that Marxist “method and results” were to be appropriated (ibid.). Although the rather passing criticism of *HCC* at this point could be read as a signal from a man preparing for exile in Stalinist Moscow after Adolf Hitler’s rise to power, it did not present itself as particularly obsequious, especially since it could easily be overlooked and no respective contemporary reactions to it are known. Rather, during the early 1930s, Lukács continued to be identified by many in Moscow and elsewhere with the positions articulated in *HCC*.<sup>13</sup>

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12 It is also worth noting that in 1933 Lukács publicly wrote about his readings during the First World War: “I read – with strong and lasting effect – Rosa Luxemburg’s pre-war writings” (ibid.: 186). Lukács thus expressed his debt to Luxemburg after Stalin’s letter to the magazine *Proletarskaya Revolutsiya* published under the title “Some Questions Concerning the History of Bolshevism” in November 1931 had officially delegitimised Luxemburg’s theories, referring to her supposedly “semi-Menshevik scheme of permanent revolution” as to be incompatible with Leninism (Stalin 1954 [1931]: 93).

13 This was the case, crucially, in the so-called ‘Philosophical Debate’ in the Soviet Union. Prior to and after Deborin tried to promote himself in 1930 by referring to his own previous criticism of “Comrade Lukács” and “his widely known book” (cited in Sziklai 1992: 77), various participants repeatedly mentioned Lukács’s name in order to

This could help explain why, in the August 1933 introduction to his study *Wie ist die faschistische Philosophie in Deutschland entstanden?* (*How did Fascist Philosophy Emerge in Germany?*), Lukács offered a somewhat more detailed distancing from his earlier positions. It was the first time since the publication of *HCC* that he returned to questions of the history of philosophy at book length, but the typescript remained unpublished during Lukács’s lifetime and thus this self-criticism would not reach its intended readers at that time. Here, possibly referring to Duncker’s criticism of 1923, Lukács started from the assumption that a theory (even a published one, for that matter) that does not reach broad circles of society exhibits a “lack of connection with praxis” (Lukács 1989 [1933]: 36) and is therefore also intrinsically problematic. It had obviously become necessary to come to terms with and reflect on his own theory. He

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set themselves apart from him (cf. also *ibid.*: 74 et sq.). Eventually, in the Resolution of the Party Cell at the Institute of Red Professors from December 1930, in which the positions of the group around Deborin were convicted as an ‘idealism in a Menshevik manner’, it was counted as a supposed camouflage of this group that it had opposed “Idealist Hegelians, spearheaded by Lukács” (cited in *ibid.*: 78). Also Béla Fogarasi, once a member of the Sunday Circle in Budapest who had been criticised in 1924 alongside Lukács (cf. Deborin 1924c: 618 and Luppol 1977 [1924]: 63), still identified him with *HCC* in 1931 when he attacked both Deborin and Lukács in *Pod Znamenem Marksizma*: “The Russian Machist and Lukács (History and Class Consciousness), as is well known, term Engels dogmatic. And Lenin, too” (cited in Sziklai 1992: 274 n.30). By then, the Marx-Engels Institute had already been shut down, and Lukács relocated to Berlin. Another example is the so-called ‘Sociology of Knowledge Dispute’ in German and Western contexts during the late 1920s and in the 1930s; whenever Lukács’s name was mentioned, it was consistently associated with *HCC*, from Karl Mannheim’s “Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon” (1928) and his *Ideology and Utopia* (1929) to Hannah Arendt’s “Philosophy and Sociology” (1930) and up to Hans Speier’s “The Social Determination of Ideas” (1938) (cf. Meja and Stehr 1999: 371, 386, 431, 506, Meja and Stehr 1982a: 235, 252, 255, 262, 274, 279-282, 292, 297 et sq., esp. 357, 412, and Meja and Stehr 1982b: 444, 449, 515, 552, 557, 563, 570 et sq., 574, 577, 583, 796, 875).

declared that he had not stood “in solidarity” with *HCC* for a long time, which was why he had not authorised a new edition (the work, he wrote, had been out of print for about five years). He criticised his own “failure to escape from bourgeois idealism” while at the same time “subjectively believing to be particularly radical” (ibid.: 37), as precisely this proved dangerous in anti-fascist struggle in 1933 (cf. ibid.: 38). Yet, his assessment at the time that “no one” should “think that they can get closer to Marxism with the help of this book” (ibid.: 38) apparently misjudged the actual effect of *HCC* on many of its readers.<sup>14</sup>

Roughly a year after his arrival in Moscow, on 21 June, 1934, Lukács obviously still found it necessary to distance himself from *HCC* as if he had not yet done so before this audience, when he gave a short lecture at the scientific conference of the Philosophical Institute at the Communist Academy (of which Deborin had been director until 1931, followed by Vladimir Adoratsky), entitled “The Significance of ‘Materialism and Empirio-criticism’ for the Bolshevisation of the Communist Parties”. The lecture was published exclusively in Russian translation at the time. An original version remains unknown to this day.<sup>15</sup> Here, I can only deal with the position on *HCC* Lukács’s lecture con-

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14 Cf. for instance, literary critic and critical theorist Hans Mayer (1970: 126) who reports having been advised to read the book and subsequently doing so within a Marxist students group in Cologne in 1928. In his 1967 Preface, Lukács acknowledged *HCC*’s “profound impact in youthful intellectual circles” (Lukács 1971 [1967]: xxii).

15 It is unsurprising that Lukács chose this topic. Lenin’s book-length polemic, to which Deborin had emphatically appealed in his criticism of Lukács (cf. Deborin 1924c: 624), was first published in German translation in 1927, with a preface by Deborin and commentary notes by Rudas (and, as we know today, possibly with some assistance from Karl Popper; cf. Stadler 2015: 258). The translator was Lukács’s ex-wife from the time of the First World War, Yelena Grabenko (cf. Lenin 1927: VII).

tains; it should be emphasised, though, that Lukács derived from Lenin’s book “the fundamental, decisive problem for the partisanship of philosophy in the present, the basic problem in the struggle of Bolshevism against fascism on the ideological front” (Lukács 1977 [1934]: 255). At this historical moment, Lukács did not merely see the general opposition of ‘bourgeois’ and ‘proletarian’ standpoints as decisive, despite the overarching reference to imperialism. His criticism of attempts to present Marxism as lacking specificity in relation to different philosophies (cf. *ibid.*: 257) simultaneously indicates Lukács’s upholding of one of the core theses of *HCC*, namely the assertion of Marxism’s philosophical relevance.

In his self-criticism, Lukács emphasised that he had joined the Hungarian Communist Party in 1918 “with a worldview largely determined by syndicalism and idealism” (*ibid.*: 260). He went so far as to characterise his earlier ethical-political position as ‘materialist’ on the surface but combined with an ‘idealist’ epistemological(-ontological) justification, indicating his own criticism of romantic anti-capitalism (leftist ethics, rightist epistemology). His derivation of ontological theses from epistemological arguments had supposedly resulted in a phenomenological ontology that could appear superficially as ‘materialism’ (and reflect on itself as such), while remaining idealistically determined in its foundations.<sup>16</sup> Apart from that, at the Commu-

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16 In the chapter on “Empirio-criticism and Historical Materialism”, Lenin had written that Ludwig Feuerbach (as well as, to a lesser extent, Georg Büchner, Carl Vogt, Jacob Moleschott, and Eugen Dühring) “was a ‘materialist below and an idealist above” (Lenin 1927: 336). Thus, Marx and Engels developed their theory starting from criticising Feuerbach ‘above’ and “paid most attention [...] not to the materialist epistemology

nist Academy in 1934, Lukács confined himself to naming supposedly flawed views contained in the book without providing any further reasoning as to their flawed nature – although in his concluding, rather uncritical paragraph, the reference to the necessity to win “‘allies’ outside one’s own movement” was nevertheless not omitted (ibid.: 261).

## 2. A new edition and a new positioning on *HCC* – and on reification

In 1960, the French edition of *HCC* was published without Lukács’s authorisation.<sup>17</sup> The West German political scientist

but to the materialist conception of history” (ibid.). In the case of the Machist-oriented Russian social democrats, by contrast, the dominant bourgeois philosophy of the time was centred on epistemology and thus “was directing its attention chiefly to a defence or restoration of idealism below and not of idealism above” (ibid.). This is why also the Machists focused on epistemology, and not on “philosophy of history” (ibid.); they mostly learned “Marx’s economic and historical theory” “by rote”, without clearly apprehending “philosophical materialism” (ibid.: 337): according to Lenin, these “Russian Büchners and Dührings turned inside out [*umgestülpt*] [...] want to be materialists above [i.e., regarding the conception of history; K. B.], but are unable to rid themselves of muddled idealism below [i.e., regarding the epistemological foundations; K. B.]” (ibid.). In a comparable way, Lukács was to characterise various forms of a romantic-anti-capitalist critique in terms of ‘left-wing ethics’, i.e. a more or less superficial historical-philosophical attitude, and ‘right-wing epistemology’, i.e. non-materialist philosophical foundations.

17 In the 1950s, select articles from the collection had already been republished in French translation: in Spring 1957, the journal *arguments* brought out a French version of “What is Orthodox Marxism?”. Lukács, who after the suppression of the 1956 Hungarian uprising had been detained in Romania until 11 April, 1957 (cf. Jung 1989: 21) – two days before he turned 72 years old – responded in November 1957. In a letter written two years earlier, in November 1955, referring to the appraisal of *HCC* in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Les Aventures de la Dialectique* (1955), he had already criticised that “Merleau-Ponty wants to use the weaknesses of my dated book as positive characteristics of a ‘true’ dialectics” (Lukács 1956: 195). A passage from his second letter,

Iring Fetscher then printed extracts from *HCC* in German in the first volume of his edition of documents on the history of Marxism in 1962. Apart from a short passage from the 1922 preface, these were mainly sections taken from the ‘Reification Chapter’, accompanied by some from “Class Consciousness” and “Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organisation”. In the two subsequent volumes published in 1964 and 1965, passages from the *Lenin* study (1924) and from “Tribune or Bureaucrat?” (1940) were additionally included. Meanwhile, in 1963, Lukács agreed to the reprinting of the two articles “What is Orthodox

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written in 1957 and transmitted by Émile Bottigelli, was part of the December issue of *arguments*, together with a translation of “The Marxism of Rosa Luxemburg”. In the letter, Lukács stated that he had “publicly declared repeatedly for two decades” (i.e., since the mid-1930s) to deem *HCC* “as outdated and wrong in several respects”. One flaw he now mentioned was that *HCC* “repeated in its presentation of externalisation [*Entäusserung*] the Hegelian error of identifying externalisation with objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*] in general” (Lukács to Bottigelli, 18 November, 1957). Despite the author’s objections, in 1958 a French version of the article on reification was printed in *arguments*, of “Critical Observations on Rosa Luxemburg’s ‘Critique of the Russian Revolution’” in *Socialisme ou barbarie*, and of “Historical Materialism’s Change of Function” and “Legality and Illegality” in *La nouvelle réforme*. In this way, a discussion among French leftist intellectuals about (parts of) Lukács’s early book was sparked in the wake of his participation in the Hungarian uprising of 1956, his arrest in Romania, and the non-approval of his request for acceptance into the new party formed after the uprising’s suppression. On the early French reception of *HCC*, also cf. Bouffard and Feron 2021. On the early British reception of Lukács, cf. Peitsch 2018: especially 27 et sq. regarding the parallel debates of the early 1960s, when George Lichtheim recycled Theodor W. Adorno’s verdict from 1958 of ‘an intellectual disaster’. (In Summer 1957, an English translation of “What is Orthodox Marxism?” had appeared in the US Workers’ Party journal *The New International*.) At the same time, Lukács was being discussed as a ‘revisionist’ in Hungary, the Soviet Union, and the GDR (cf. Koch 1960). It was not until August 1967 that his 1957 application to be accepted as a member of the new Hungarian party was granted retroactively, after Lukács had sent his application letter again, adding that circumstances had changed recently (cf. Urbán 1985: 184), which might also indicate his renewed orientation towards democratisation and the role of workers’ councils as the “indispensable second pillar of socialist democracy” (Dannemann 2023: 37).

Marxism?” and “Historical Materialism’s Change of Function” from *HCC* (the latter, possibly, added to the publication plan by Lukács himself) in Peter Ludz’s edition of *Schriften zur Ideologie und Politik*, which did not appear until 1967, although Lukács had been expecting its publication as early as 1964 (cf. Lukács’s letter to Ludz, 18 April, 1964). Fetscher’s earlier reprint was introduced by remarks taken from a letter Lukács had directed to the editor on 6 September, 1962, which already addressed some of the criticisms of the later 1967 preface to *HCC*. In the letter, the book was once again described as a product of a period of “transition” – this time “from Hegel to Marx” (cited in Fetscher 1962: 221).<sup>18</sup> Lukács emphasised that “the decisive problem of the book, the problem of reification,” had been treated inconsistently “in that in the main line of the explanations, as in Hegel, reification (externalisation, alienation) was identified with objecthood” (ibid.), which, according to Lukács, “turns a social-historical problem into an ontological one” and “transforms the social category into an anthropological one” – the result being a “historical fatalism” towards the phenomenon of reification (ibid.).<sup>19</sup> For a clarification of this terminological dif-

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<sup>18</sup> See also the letter from November 1955 (Lukács 1956: 158).

<sup>19</sup> This could be interpreted as a criticism of contemporary (mainly existentialist) readings of *HCC* rather than necessarily of the book itself. One prominent example of reception in the 1960s can be seen in *Negative Dialectics* (1966), where Adorno identified reification as a “form [*Gestalt*] of consciousness”, criticised the conception of *HCC* as “idealistic”, and, alluding to Lukács, distanced himself from someone who “looks upon thingness as radical evil” (Adorno 1973 [1966]: 190 et sq.). Andrew Feenberg has commented on this interpretation: “The impression is given that reification [...] is overcome by the dereification of consciousness rather than concrete social change” (Feenberg 2011: 173). In his new preface, Lukács wrote: “it is precisely those parts of the book that I regard as theoretically false that have been most influential” (Lukács 1971 [1967]: xxvii).

ferentiation, Lukács, who was preparing his volumes on *The Specificity of the Aesthetic* for publication in 1963 and would begin writing *Towards the Ontology of Social Being* (where he does use and discuss the term reification), referred to the last chapter of his book *The Young Hegel* along with Marx’s ‘Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844’ (cf. Fetscher 1962: 222). These manuscripts, which contain the young Marx’s critique of alienation, also establish a link between Hegel’s concept of externalisation (*Entäußerung*) and his understanding of labour, addressing its “dialectic of negativity”:

The importance of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and its final outcome – the dialectic of negativity as the moving and producing principle – lies in the fact that Hegel conceives the human being’s self-creation as a process, objectification [*Vergegenständlichung*] as dis-objectification [*Entgegenständlichung*], as externalisation [*Entäußerung*] and as sublation [*Aufhebung*] of this externalisation; that he thus grasps the nature of *labour* and conceives the objective human being [*den gegenständlichen Menschen*] – which is the true, because real human being – as the result of their *own labour* (Marx 2010 [1844]: 332 et sq., trans. amended).

In *The Young Hegel* (mostly written in 1938), in the chapter “‘*Entäußerung*’ (‘externalization’) as the central philosophical concept of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*” (Lukács 1975 [1948]: 537–568), which forms the book’s conclusion, Lukács distinguished “three stages in the Hegelian concept of ‘externalization’”: “It refers firstly to the complex subject-object relation inseparably bound up with all work and human activity of an economic or social kind” (ibid.: 539) – altogether producing



human history under circumstances that are found immediately, given, and transmitted from the past. “Secondly, [...] the specifically capitalist form [...], i.e. what Marx would later call ‘fetishism’” (ibid.: 540). Lukács argued that Hegel would often confuse the two ‘stages’ and “frequently overlooks the mediating role of things” (ibid.).<sup>20</sup> “Thirdly”, Lukács continued, “there is a broad philosophical generalisation of the concept ‘externalization’ which then comes to be synonymous with ‘thinghood’ or ‘objecthood’” (Lukács 1975 [1948]: 541, trans. amended). While the first and second ‘stages’ could be understood as a differentiation between non-alienated and alienated objectification (the third, in turn, as an inherently problematic, generalising conflation of both by Hegel), in Marx’s Paris Manuscripts of 1844, in engagement with Hegel, as Lukács noted, “alienation is sharply distinguished from objecthood itself, from objectification in the act of labour. The latter is a characteristic of work in general [...]; the former is a consequence of the social division of labour in capitalism” (ibid.: 549, trans. amended).<sup>21</sup> Yet, Lukács went on to point out two different dimensions of the consequences of

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20 In his notes to the third volume of *Capital*, referring to the “Trinity Formula” (capital–profit, land–ground–rent, and labour–wages), Marx had written that the “reification of social relations” was completed as a “coalescence of material determination” (Marx 1964 [1894]: 838). Emphasising the totality of the overall context and the *differentia specifica* of the capitalist mode of production, Marx would also use the term reification (*Verdinglichung*): “the reification of the social determinations of production and the subjectification [*Versubjektivierung*] of the material bases of production” were “implied already in the commodity, and still more so in the commodity as the product of capital” (ibid.: 887; cf. Hahn 2017: 15).

21 Lukács indicated the possibility of a relation between alienation and expropriation (of surplus labour) in his discussion of Hegel’s economic thinking during the latter’s Jena period: “Hegel never understood the crucial development in the classical theory of value, viz. the exploitation of the worker in industrial production” (ibid.: 335).

alienated objectification: “alienation has both subjective and objective effects in the whole sphere of human life. *Objectively*, the product of labour *appears* as an alien thing that dominates the human being; *subjectively*, the process of labour *is* a self-alienation” (ibid.: 550, trans. amended, my emphasis, K. B.; note the use of the words “appears” and “is” in connection with ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’, allowing for an interpretation in accordance with the distinction between fetishisation and reification).

### 3. Concluding remarks

In this paper, so far there has been a retracing of Hegel (and Marx) in Lukács, which also includes a criticism of the latter’s own supposed lack of differentiation still in *HCC*. But as yet there has been no explicit (or only rudimentary) mention of a distinction between reification as a social material process (an actual mediation of interpersonal relations through things) and fetishisation as a corresponding (or reversing) reaction of consciousness. Highlighting the distinction, Lukács brought together the terminologies of reification and fetishisation in 1945 when he wrote that Marx had proven that the categories of “economic being” in capitalism “inevitably appear in reified forms and with their reified form conceal their real essence, the relationships of human beings. This turning upside down of the fundamental categories of human existence is the necessary fetishisation of capitalist society” (Lukács 1961 [1945]: 221). Nev-

ertheless, in *The Young Hegel*, Lukács also pointed out another aspect of Marx's criticism of Hegel, beginning with the latter's equation of the human being with self-consciousness: "Since, according to Hegel, 'externalization' is ultimately the 'externalization' of consciousness, it ought to be superseded *exclusively* by consciousness, *within* consciousness" (Lukács 1975 [1948]: 557). In *The Holy Family*, Marx had criticised this, as quoted by Lukács, writing that the "mass" should by no means consider certain "products of its self-alienation as mere *ideal* phantasmagorias, mere *externalizations of self-consciousness*, and must not wish to abolish *material* alienation by a purely *inward spiritual* action" (cited in *ibid.*: 558, trans. amended; cf. Marx and Engels 1975 [1845]: 82).

In a first step, reification would have to be understood as the social praxis of mediating relations between people through material objects, namely commodities and money. Of course, this praxis is only possible because it is accompanied by the distorted vision that bestows those things with the qualities they are supposed to represent in order to mediate social relations. Overcoming reification necessarily would be associated with an end of this kind of social mediating praxis underlying it. It would not be overcome by an understanding of the distortion alone. Already in the 'Reification Chapter' in *HCC*, Lukács had initially distinguished between reification as a "form of objectivity" on the one hand and the allocated "subjective behaviour corresponding to it" on the other (Lukács 1971 [1923]: 84, trans. amended). A generalising reading, however, quickly made the

analytical distinction disappear from view and both aspects became virtually inextricably intertwined.

That Lukács underestimated the category of labour, which is already present in Hegel, as he had to realise, in his eyes had led him to that much-cited “attempt to out-Hegel Hegel” (Lukács 1971 [1967]: xiii). But here, too, a further criticism must be taken into account that has been made very clear by Lukács in his article from 1954 on the philosophical development of young Marx: because Hegel “conceives of labour as the self-generating process of human beings, of the human species”, but at the same time regards objecthood in general as alienation of the ‘spirit’ originally conceived as free of contradiction, as harmonious, “he must necessarily arrive at the mystification of a superhuman ‘carrier’ of world history, but at the same time also at the absurdity that this [i.e. “absolute spirit”] only apparently makes history” (Lukács 1967 [1954]: 583 et sq.).<sup>22</sup>

In the preface of 1967, Lukács saw it as a problem that in *HCC* ‘imputed’ or ‘attributed class consciousness’ was treated as “a purely intellectual result” (Lukács 1971 [1967]: xix), rather than arising from the analysis of a practical movement. Conversely, one of *HCC*’s main merits was, in his eyes, the methodological centrality of totality, though this should not have been played off against the “priority of economics” (ibid.: xx). He

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22 In *The Young Hegel*, Lukács provided nonetheless arguments in favour of not abandoning the concepts of relative autonomy and specific efficacy of the sphere called ‘absolute spirit’ in Hegel: classical antiquity, for example, could be used as a “yardstick” by critical intellectuals during the Enlightenment, precisely because this comparison made visible uneven aspects of historical development (Lukács 1975 [1948]: 511 et sq.; this also made conceivable a persistence of alienation in socialist states, cf. Heyl 1989: 313 et sq.).

characterised his own self-criticism of *HCC* in 1933/34 – just like the “earlier” (ibid.: xxxviii) one of the ‘Blum Theses’ – as “[t]actically [...] necessary” in order to be able to wage “all further partisan struggle” within the movement in Moscow (ibid.) but at the same time as sincere. Quite possibly, the remains of a Hegelian attitude in his theory offered Lukács a legitimation for his own often times conservative terminology.

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