

# Dialectic of the Concrete Totality<sup>1</sup>

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1 KOSÍK, Karel. **Dialectic of the Concrete Totality**. In: *Telos Fall*, 1968, vol. 1968, no. 2, p. 21-37. Transcribed by V. S. Conttren, November 2021.

## I. The World of Pseudo-Concreteness and its Destruction

The dialectic deals with the «thing in itself». But the «thing in itself» is not immediately given to man. In order to come to comprehend it, it is necessary not only to exert a certain effort, but also to make a detour. Because of this, dialectical thought distinguishes between the representation and the concept of the thing. By this it does not simply mean to distinguish two forms or two degrees of *knowledge* of reality, but first and foremost two qualities of human praxis. The primordial and immediate attitude of man with respect to reality is not that of an abstract knowing subject, of a thinking head that speculatively considers reality. Rather, it is that of a being that acts objectively and practically. It is the attitude of a historical individual who performs his practical activity in relation to nature and other men, and pursues the realization of its own ends and of its own interests within a determinate set of social relations. As such, reality does not present itself to man first as an object to be intuited, analysed, and theoretically comprehended—whose opposite and complementary pole is precisely the abstract knowing subject existing outside of the world and separate from it—but as the field in which he performs his practico-sensible activity and upon which that immediate intuition of reality will rise. In the practical-utilitarian relationship with things—where reality reveals itself as the world of means, ends, tools, exigencies, and efforts to satisfy them—the individual creates for himself, in «concrete contexts», his own representation of things and elaborates a whole correlative system of notions which catch and fix phenomenal aspects of reality.

But «real existence» and the phenomenal forms of reality—which are immediately reproduced in the heads of those who perform a determinate historical praxis as a set of representations, or as categories of «common sense» (which only as a result of a «barbaric habit» are considered concepts)—are diverse and they often contradict the *law* of the phenomenon, the *structure* of the thing, i.e., its *essential* internal nucleus and the corresponding concept. Men use money and they carry out most complicated transactions with it without knowing, nor being held responsible for knowing, what money is. Therefore, immediate utilitarian praxis and the common sense that corresponds to it place men in conditions of orienting themselves in the world, of familiarizing themselves with things handling them. But they do not give men the *comprehension* of things and reality. Because of this, Marx can write that those who effectively determine social conditions feel at ease, as fish in the water, in the world of phenomenal forms estranged from their internal connection and absolutely incomprehensible in such isolation. They see nothing mysterious in what is intrinsically contradictory, and their judgment is not the least disturbed by the inversion of the rational with the irrational. The praxis involved here is onesided and historically determinate. It is the fragmented praxis of the individuals based on the division of labour, the division of society into classes, and the resulting stratification of social positions. This praxis renders possible the formation of the determinate material environment of the historical individual, and of the spiritual atmosphere in which the superficial appearance of reality comes to be fixed as the world of pretended intimacy, confidence and familiarity within which man operates «naturally» and with which he deals in everyday life.

The set of phenomena that crowd the daily environment and the

common atmosphere of human life, which penetrate the consciousness of individual agents with their regularity, immediacy, and evidence, thus assuming an independent and natural aspect, constitutes the world of *pseudo-concreteness*. This world is composed of:

—the world of transactions and manipulation, i.e., of man's fetishized praxis (which does not coincide with the critical revolutionary praxis of humanity);

—the world of common representations, which are projections of external phenomena into man's consciousness, the product of fetishized praxis, or ideological forms of its movement;

—the world of fixed objects that give the impression of being natural conditions and are not immediately recognizable as the result of man's social activity.

The world of pseudo-concreteness is a *chiaroscuro* of truth and fraud. Its proper element is ambivalence. The phenomenon indicates but simultaneously conceals the essence. The essence manifests itself in the phenomenon, but only in a partial and inadequate way, or only for certain sides and aspects. The phenomenon points at something other than itself, and lives only in virtue of its contrary. Essence is not immediately given: it is mediated by the phenomenon, and, as such, manifests itself as something other than itself. The essence manifests itself in the phenomenon. Its manifestation in the phenomenon reveals its movement and demonstrates that essence is not inert and passive. But the phenomenon reveals the essence in precisely the same way. In fact, the manifestation of the essence is the activity of the phenomenon.

The phenomenal world has its own structure, its own order, its own

legality, that can be unveiled and described. But the structure of this phenomenal world does not yet catch the relationship between the phenomenal world and the essence. If the essence did not manifest itself in the phenomenal world at all, the world of reality would distinguish itself in a radical and essential way from the world of the phenomenon. In such case, the world of reality would be for man «the other world» (Platonism, Christianity), and his only tangible world would be that of phenomena. But the phenomenal world is not something independent and absolute: the phenomena become phenomenal world in relation to the essence. The phenomenon is not radically distinct from the essence and the essence is not a reality belonging to an order different from that of the phenomenon. If things were really so, then the phenomenon could not be connected, by means of an intimate relationship, to the essence; it could not manifest, and, at the same time, hide it, and this relationship would be reciprocally external and indifferent. To catch the phenomenon of a determinate thing means to investigate and describe how the same thing manifests itself in that phenomenon, and how, at the same time, it is hidden by it. The comprehension of the phenomenon constitutes the *reaching* of the essence. Without the phenomenon, without the manifestation and the revelation, the essence would be unreachable. In the world of pseudo—concreteness, the phenomenal aspect of the thing, in which the thing manifests and hides itself, comes to be considered as its own essence, and the difference between phenomenon and essence *disappears*. Is the difference that separates phenomenon and essence therefore equivalent to the difference between real and unreal, or between two different orders of reality? Is the essence more real than the phenomenon? Reality is the unity of the phenomenon and of the essence. Because of this, the essence can be as unreal as the phenomenon, and vice-versa // they are isolated

and considered unique or «authentic» reality.

Therefore, the phenomenon is nothing other than that which—unlike the hidden essence—first and most often manifests itself immediately. But why does the «thing in itself», the structure of the thing, fail to manifest itself immediately and directly? Why is an effort and a deviation necessary in order to comprehend it? Why does the «thing in itself» hide in immediate perception? What kind of occlusion is it? Such an occlusion cannot be absolute. Even if man only *investigated* the structure of the thing and aimed at studying «the thing in itself», if it is at all possible for him to discover the hidden essence or the structure of reality before beginning any investigation, he must necessarily already be aware of the fact that there is something that can be defined as the structure of the thing (the «thing in itself»), and that there is a hidden truth of the thing distinct from the phenomena that immediately manifest themselves. Man makes a detour and engages every effort in the discovery of truth only because, somehow, he presupposes the existence of truth, and because he has a sure consciousness of the existence of the «thing in itself». But why is the structure of the thing not directly and immediately within the reach of man? Why, in order to catch it, is a detour necessary? And towards what does such a detour aim? If what is caught in immediate perception is the phenomenon of the thing, and not the «thing in itself», does this depend on the fact that the structure of the thing belongs to an order of reality different from that of the phenomenon, and, as such, constitutes another reality which is found behind the phenomena?

Since the essence—unlike the phenomena—does not manifest itself directly, and since the hidden foundation of things must be discovered by means of a particular activity, science and philosophy must exist. If the

phenomenal appearance and the essence of things were to coincide directly, science and philosophy would be unnecessary.<sup>2</sup>

The direct effort to discover the structure of the thing and the «thing in itself» has and will always constitute the task of philosophy. The various *fundamental* philosophical tendencies are only modifications of this fundamental problem area and its solutions in the single evolutive stages of humanity. Philosophy is an *indispensable activity of humanity*, since the essence of the thing, the structure of reality, the «thing in itself», the being of the thing, is not directly and immediately felt. In this sense philosophy can be characterized as a systematic and critical effort that aims at catching the «thing in itself», the hidden structure of things, at discovering the mode of being of what exists.

The concept of the thing is the comprehension of the thing, and to comprehend the thing means to know the structure. The most peculiar characteristic of knowledge consists in disassembling the internal. The dialectic does not come to thought from outside or *post festum*; it does not even constitute one of its qualities. Knowledge is the dialectic itself in one of its forms. Knowledge is the taking apart of the internal. In a dialectical conception, the «concept» and the «abstraction» have the meaning of a method that takes apart the internal in order to spiritually reproduce the structure of the thing, i.e., to comprehend the thing.<sup>3</sup>

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2 «...If men could immediately catch connections, who would need science?» Letter from Marx to Engels of June 27, 1867. «All of science would be superfluous if the phenomenal form coincided directly with the essence.» Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, sect. VII, ch. XLVIII. «For phenomenal forms... unlike the essential relationship... obtains exactly what obtains for all of the other phenomenal forms and for the foundation hidden behind them. Phenomenal forms are immediately reproduced by themselves, as standard forms of thought, but their occluded foundation must be discovered by science alone.» Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, sect. VI, ch. XVII.

3 Some philosophers (e.g., Granger, «L'Ancienne et le Nouvelle Economique», in *Esprit*,

Knowledge comes about as the separation of the phenomenon from, the essence, of what is secondary from the essential, since only through such a separation it is possible to show their internal coherence, and therefore the specific character of the thing. In such a process what is secondary is not left aside, is not distinguished as unreal or less real, but reveals its phenomenal or secondary character through the demonstration of its truth in the essence of the thing. This taking apart of the internal, which is the constitutive element of philosophical knowledge—*in fact, without the taking apart there is no knowledge*—shows a structure analogous to that of human functioning: action is also based on the taking apart of the internal.

The very fact that thought moves naturally in a direction which is opposed to the nature of reality, that it isolates and «kills», and that the tendency to abstract is found in this natural movement does not constitute a peculiarity of thought, but it follows from its practical function. Every acting is «one-sided»,<sup>4</sup> since it aims at a determinate goal and, as such, isolates some moments of reality as essential for that action, and, for the moment, it leaves others aside. Through this spontaneous acting, which points out the important determinate moments for the attachment of a certain purpose, thought divides the unique reality, enters into and evaluates it.

The spontaneous impulse of «praxis» and thought to isolate phenomena, to divide reality into what is essential and what is secondary,

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1956, p. 5515) attribute the «method of abstraction» and of the «concept» only to Hegel. Actually, it constitutes the only path open to philosophy for reaching the structure of the thing, i.e., the *comprehension* of the thing.

4 Marx, Hegel and Goethe find themselves on the level of this practical «onesidedness» against the fictitious universality of the romantics.



is always accompanied by a similarly spontaneous, but—for the naive consciousness—a great deal less evident, and very often immature *perception of the whole*, in which and from which, certain aspects come to be isolated. The obscurely intuited horizon of an «indeterminate reality», *as the whole*, constitutes the unavoidable background of every action and thought—although it remains unconscious for the naive consciousness.

Phenomena and phenomenal forms of things spontaneously reproduce themselves as reality (reality itself) in common thought not because they are the most superficial and the closest to sensorial awareness, but rather, because the phenomenal aspect of the thing is naturally produced by daily praxis. The utilitarian daily praxis creates «common thought»—in which both the familiarity and the superficial aspect of things are caught as the technique of how to deal with things—as the form of its movement and existence. Common thought is the ideological form of everyday human activity. Yet the world that is presented to man in fetishised praxis, in transacting and manipulating, is not the real world, although it has the «consistence» and the «validity» of the real world. It is «the world of appearance» (Marx). The representation of the thing that passes for the «thing itself», and that creates ideological appearances, does not constitute a natural quality of the thing and of reality, rather, it is the projection of determinate historical conditions that have been *petrified* into the consciousness of the subject.

The distinction between representation and concept, between the world of appearance and the world of reality, between the utilitarian daily praxis of men and the revolutionary praxis of humanity, or, to put it in other words, «the splitting of the unique», is what allows thought to catch the «thing in itself». The dialectic is critical thought that wants to

comprehend the «thing in itself» and that systematically asks how it is possible to come to the comprehension of reality. It is, therefore, the opposite of doctrinaire systematization and of the romanticization of common representations. The thought that wants to know reality adequately, i.e., that is not satisfied with the abstract schemes of that reality, nor of its mere and similarly abstract representations, must destroy the apparent independence of the world of immediate everyday contacts. The thought that destroys pseudo-concreteness in order to reach concreteness is, at the same time, a process during which, under the world of appearances, the real world reveals itself. The law of the phenomenon is—revealed behind the exterior appearance of the phenomenon, the real internal movement behind the visible movement, the essence behind the phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> What confers the character of pseudo-concreteness to these phenomena is not their very existence. It is the independence with which this existence manifests itself. The destruction of pseudo—concreteness that dialectical thought must accomplish does not deny the existence or the objectivity of those phenomena. It destroys, however their pretended independence by demonstrating their mediacy, and against it carries the proof of the derivation of their pretended independence.

The dialectic does not consider the fixed products, the configurations

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5 Marx's *Capital* is methodologically grounded upon the distinction between false consciousness and real comprehension of the thing. Thus the main categories of the conceptual comprehension of the investigated reality are the pairs:

world of appearance—world of reality

external appearance of the phenomena—law of the phenomena

positive existence—internal, essential and occluded nucleus

visible movement—real internal movement

representation—concept

false consciousness—real consciousness

doctrinaire systematization of representations («ideology»)—theory and science.

and the objects, and the whole of the reified material world as something original, and independent. Similarly, it does not consider the world of representations and common sense to be so. It does not accept them in their immediate aspect. Instead, it submits them to an analysis in which the reified forms of the objective and ideal world are dissolved. Thus they lose their fixity, their natural character and pretended originality in order to show themselves as derived and mediated phenomena, as sedimentations and products of the social praxis of humanity.<sup>6</sup>

Acritically reflective thought<sup>7</sup> poses immediately, i.e., without a dialectical analysis, the fixed representations in a causal relationship with

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6 «Le marxisme est un effort pour lire derrière la pseudo-immédiateté du monde économique réifié les relations interhumaines qui l'ont édifié et se sont dissimulées derrière leur oeuvre.» A. de Walhens, «L'Idée Phénoménologique d'Intentionnalité», in Husserl et la Pensée Moderne, (La Haye, 1959) pp. 127-128. This definition of a non-Marxist author constitutes a typical testimony for the philosophical problem area of the 20th century for which the destruction of pseudo-concreteness and of the most diverse forms of alienation has become one of the essential questions. The individual philosophers distinguish themselves for the way in which they resolve it, but the common problem is already given for positivism (Carnap's and Neurath's struggle against real and supposed metaphysics) as well as for phenomenology and existentialism. It is interesting that the authentic sense of the husserlian phenomenological method and the whole connection of its rational nucleus with the philosophical problem area of the 20th century has been discovered only by a philosopher with a marxist orientation whose work constitutes the first serious attempt at a confrontation between phenomenology and the materialist philosophy. The author explicitly outlines the paradoxical and rich character of the phenomenological destruction of pseudo-concreteness «...Le monde de l'apparence avait accaparé, dans le langage ordinaire, tout le sens de la notion de la r... Puisque les apparences s'y sont imposées à titre de monde réel leur élimination se présentait comme une mise entre parenthèse de ce monde... et la réalité authentique à laquelle on revenait prenait paradoxalement la forme d'irréalité d'une conscience pure.» Tran-Duc-Thao, *Phénoménologie et Matérialisme Dialectique*, (Paris, 1951), pp. 223-224.

7 Hegel gives a definition of reflexive thought as follows: «Reflection is the. activity that consists in noticing the oppositions and in passing from one to the other, but without outlining their connection and the unity that con-penetrates them.» Hegel, *Philosophie der Religion*, vol. I, p. 126 (in *Werke*, vol. XI). Cf. Also Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 10.

similarly fixed conditions, and seeks to pass such a form of «barbaric thought» for a «materialistic» analysis of ideas. From the moment that men became conscious of their time (i.e., they live it, evaluate it, criticize it, and understand it) within the categories of «coal-man's faith» and of «petty bourgeois scepticism», the doctrinaire supposes that a «scientific» analysis of those ideas has been carried out as soon as an economic, social or class equivalent for them has been found. But what is obtained through such a «materialization» is only a double mystification: the overturning of the world of appearance (of fixed ideas) has its roots in overturned materiality (reified). The materialistic theory must *undertake* the analysis with the following question: why have men become aware of their time precisely in these categories? And, which time presents itself to men through these categories? By posing such a question the materialist prepares the basis from which to proceed to the destruction of pseudo—concreteness, *both* of ideas *and* conditions. Only *after* this can there be a rational explanation of the intimate connection between time and thought.

But the destruction of pseudo-concreteness as critical-dialectical method, thanks to which thought dissolves the fetishised creations of the ideal and reified world, in order to reach their reality, is, however, only the other side of the dialectic as a revolutionary method for the transformation of reality. *Until the world can be «critically» explained, it is necessary that the very explanation pose itself within the terrain of revolutionary praxis.* We will see later that reality can be changed in a revolutionary way only because and to the extent that we are ourselves the producers of reality, and to the extent that we know reality to be our product. The difference between natural and human-social reality consists in the fact that man can not change and transform nature, while he can change human-social reality in

a *revolutionary* way. This, however, is so only because man is himself the producer of the latter reality.

The real world, hidden and yet at the same time manifesting itself through pseudo-concreteness, is not the world of real in opposition to unreal conditions, or the world of transcendence in opposition to subjective illusions, rather, it is the world of human praxis. It is the comprehension of human-social reality as a *unity* of production and product, of subject and object, of genesis and structure. Therefore, the real world is not a world of «real» fixed objects which, under their fetishised aspect, lead a transcendental existence understood as a naturalistic variant of platonic ideas. It is, instead, a world in which things, meanings and relationships are considered as *products* of socialized man. Furthermore, man himself turns out to be the real subject of the social world. The world of reality is not a secularized variation of paradise, of an already realized and a-temporal state. It is a process through which humanity and the individual *realize* their own truth, and thus bring about the humanization of man. Unlike the world of pseudo-concreteness, the world of reality is the world of the *realization* of truth, it is the world in which truth is not given or predetermined, it is not already there and copied in an immutable form in human consciousness, rather, it is the world in which reality *becomes*. It is because of this that human history can be a process and the history of truth. The destruction of pseudo-concreteness means that truth is neither unreachable, nor can it be obtained once and for all. It means that it is made, i.e., it is developed and realized.

Thus, the destruction of pseudo-concreteness comes about as: (1) the revolutionary critique of humanity's praxis, which coincides with man's human becoming, with the process of the «humanization of man» (A.

Kolman), whose key-steps are constituted by social revolutions; (2) dialectical thought, which dissolves the fetishised world of appearance in order to arrive at reality and at the «thing in itself»; (3) the realization of truth and the creation of human reality in an ontogenetic process, since for each human individual, the world of truth is simultaneously a personal spiritual creation as a socio-historical individual. Each individual must—*personally and without the possibility of someone else substituting him*—give himself an education and live his life.

Therefore we cannot consider the destruction of pseudo-concreteness as a tearing away of a screen and the discovery of reality that was hiding behind it, all set and ready, existing in a world independently of human activity. Pseudo-concreteness is precisely the autonomous existence of man's products, and the reproduction of man at the level of utilitarian praxis. The destruction of pseudo-concreteness is a process that creates reality and its concreteness.

Unlike idealistic trends which at times have absolutized the subject, (dealing with the problem of how to look at reality so that it would be concrete or beautiful), and at times the object, (thus supposing that reality is real in proportion to the degree that the subject is removed from it), for the materialistic destruction of pseudo-concreteness the liberation of the «subject» (i.e., the concrete *vision* of reality contraposed to «fetishized intuition») coincides with the liberation of the «object» (creation of the human environment as a human accomplishment of conditions of transparent rationality), since the social reality of man is created as the dialectical union of subject and object.

The pass-word *ad fons*, which periodically sounds as a reaction *against* pseudo-concreteness in its various manifestations in the same way as the

methodological rule of positivistic analysis: «to free oneself from prejudices», finds its foundation and its justification in the materialistic destruction of pseudo-concreteness. The very return «to the sources», however, presents two completely distinct aspects. Under the first it presents itself as a critique of learned and humanistically educated sources, qua analysis of the archives and of the ancient sources, from which reality has to be deduced. Under the more profound and more meaningful aspect—which to the eyes of learned erudition appears as barbarous (as it is testified by the reaction against Shakespeare and Rousseau)—the password *ad fons* means *critique of civilization and of culture*, it means an attempt—romantic or revolutionary—of discovering behind the products and the creations, the activity and the productive doing, of finding «the authentic reality» of concrete man behind the reified reality of the dominating culture, of unveiling the authentic historical subject under the stratification of fixed conventions.

## **II. Rational and Spiritual Reproduction of Reality**

Since things do not directly show themselves to man as they are, and man does not have the faculty of directly seeing things in their essence, in order to know things in their structure, humanity takes a detour. Precisely because such a detour is the *only* path open to man for attaining truth, humanity periodically tries to save the effort of such a deviation and wants to *directly* observe the essence of things (mysticism is precisely man's impatience to know the truth). At the same time there is the danger of getting lost or of remaining stranded while making such a detour.

Obviousness does not coincide with the perspicuity and clarity of the

thing itself; it is rather the lack of clarity of the representation of the thing. What is natural manifests itself as something unnatural. Man must exert some effort and come out of the «natural state» in order to become truly man and know reality as such (man elaborates himself by evolving into man). According to the great thinkers of all times and inclinations—in Plato's myth of the cave, in the Baconian image of the idols, in Spinoza, Hegel, Heidegger and Marx—knowledge is correctly characterized as the overcoming of naturalness, as the highest activity or effort. The dialectic of the activity and passivity in human knowledge manifests itself first of all in the fact that man, in order to know things in themselves, must first of all transform them in things for himself. In order to know things as they are independently of himself, he must first submit them to his own praxis. In order to observe how they are when they are not in contact with him, he must first come into contact with them. Knowledge is not contemplation. The contemplation of the world bases itself upon the results of human praxis. Man knows reality only to the extent that he *creates human reality* and behaves primarily as a practical being.

In order to approach the thing and its structure, and thus find a way to get to it, we must first seek to detach ourselves from it. It is well known how *difficult* it is to scientifically elaborate contemporary events. The analysis of past events, on the other hand, is relatively easier since reality has already provided to evolve a certain elimination and «critique». Science must *artificially* and experimentally reproduce this natural path of history. What is this experiment based on? Upon the fact that science reaches a convenient and motivated distance, a perspective from which things and events show themselves in an adequate way free of falsifications. (Schiller has stressed the importance of this intellectual experiment that adds to the



real historical detachment in relation to drama).

It is not possible to immediately comprehend the structure of the thing or the thing itself through contemplation or through mere reflection; rather, comprehension occurs only through a determinate *activity*. The penetration of the «thing in itself» and the answer to the question regarding what is the «thing in itself», are not possible without the analysis of the activity through which the thing is understood. At the same time, this analysis must also include the problem of the creation of the activity that brings about the attainment of the «thing in itself». These activities are various ways or aspects of the human *appropriation* of the world. The problems treated by phenomenology under the heading of «intentionality toward something», «signifying intention toward something», or the various «modes of perception», have been articulated by Marx upon materialist presuppositions as various aspects of the human *appropriation* of the world: practical-spiritual, theoretical, artistic, religious, and also mathematical, physical, etc. It is not possible to appropriate and thus comprehend mathematics and the reality that mathematics introduces to us, through an intentionality not corresponding to mathematical reality, e.g., through religious experience or artistic perception. Man lives in more than one world, but each world has a different key, and man cannot pass from one world to the other without that key, i.e., without changing intentionality and the corresponding modes of appropriation of reality. For philosophy and modern science, which is permanently enriched by the concept of praxis, *knowledge* represents one of the modes of *appropriation* of the world by man. On the other hand, the two constitutive elements of every human mode of appropriation of the world are the subjective and the objective *senses*. What intention, what vision, what sense must man

develop? How must he dispose and «regulate himself» in order to understand and discover the objective *sense* of the thing? The process of catching and discovering the sense of the thing is at the same time the creation of the corresponding *sense*, thanks to which the sense of the thing can be comprehended by man. The *objective sense* of the thing can therefore be understood if man creates a *corresponding sense*. These very senses through which man discovers reality and its sense are socio-historical products.<sup>8</sup>

Each degree of human knowledge, sensible or rational, and each mode of appropriation of reality, is an activity based upon the objective praxis of humanity and, *as such*, connected with all others in various ways and in greater or lesser degree. Man always sees *more* than what he immediately perceives. I don't perceive the thing that I see in front of me as a cluster of geometric forms, of physical qualities of the material with which it is made, of mere quantitative relationships. Rather, I become aware of things first of all as human environment and as a harmony of not clearly perceived forms, colours, surfaces and so on. In the same way, I don't perceive the noise that I hear as sound waves of a certain frequency. Rather, I perceive it as the roar of an air plane that is either departing or approaching. And from the roar I can distinguish if it is a helicopter, a jet, a warplane, or a cargo-plane, etc. Thus all of my knowledge and my culture, all of my experiences, both live and hidden in my memory, and manifesting themselves in determinate situations, my thoughts and my reflections, participate in some way in my hearing and in my seeing, even if this does not explicitly appear to be so in the concrete acts of perceiving and of experiencing as a predicative aspect. In the practical-spiritual appropriation

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8 Cf. Marx, *Philosophical and Economic Manuscripts of 1844*, «Private Property and Capital\*». In M.E.G.E., Erste Abt., vol. III, (Berlin, 1932) pp. 118-119.

of the world, from which and on the basis of which all of the other modes of appropriation, theoretical, artistic, etc. originally derive, reality is conceived as an *indivisible whole of entities and meanings*. It is implicitly included in a unity of judgments, observations and evaluations. Departing from this full and inexhaustible world of reality, it is only through abstraction, thematisation and projecting that determinate zones, aspects, and spheres can be isolated—spheres that naive naturalism and positivism consider as the only authentic, as the only reality, while they suppress *what is left over* as mere subjectivity. The physicalist image of positivism has impoverished the human world. In its absolute exclusivism it has deformed reality. It has reduced the real world to *only one* dimension and under only one aspect, to the dimension of extension and of quantitative relationships. Furthermore, the human world has been divided. Only the world of physicalism, the world of real idealized values, of extension, of quantity, of measure, of geometrical forms, has been declared to be real while the everyday world of man has been condemned as fiction.

In the world of physicalism—that modern positivism considers the only reality—man can exist only as a determinate abstract activity, i.e., as a physicist, statistician, mathematician, linguist, but never with all of his virtues, never as a full man. As a thematised way of knowing physical reality, the physical world is only one of the possible images of the world which express determinate essential properties and aspects of objective reality. Besides the physical world there are yet other worlds which are also *legitimate*, e.g., the artistic world, the biological world, and so on, which means that reality is not *exhausted* by the physical image of the world. Positivistic physicalism is responsible for the equivocation of having considered a certain *image* of reality as *reality* itself, and a determinate way

of appropriating reality as the only authentic one. In doing so, first of all it denies the inexhaustibility of the objective world and its irreducibility to science—which is one of the fundamental theses of materialism—and, secondly, it impoverishes the human world, since it reduces the wealth of human subjectivity, which is *historically* realized in the objective praxis of humanity, to a unique way of appropriating reality.

Every determinate thing upon which man concentrates his sight, his attention, his action or his evaluation, emerges from a determinate whole from which it is surrounded—a whole that is perceived by man as an indetermined background, or as an obscurely intuited imaginary connection. How does man perceive single objects? Does he perceive them as if they were unique and absolutely isolated? He *always* perceives them within the horizon of a determinate *whole* usually not expressed and explicitly perceived. Every perceived object, observed or elaborated by man, is part of a whole. And precisely this not-explicitly perceived whole is the light that shines on and reveals the single observed object in its singularity and in its meaning. Human consciousness is, therefore, to be considered both in its theoretical-predicative aspect, in the form of explicit, motivated, rational and theoretical knowledge, as well in its pre-predicative aspect intuited in the whole. Consciousness is constituted by the unity of two forms which reciprocally penetrate and influence each other, since in their unity they are based upon objective praxis and upon the practical—piritual appropriation of the world. The rejection and devaluation of the first lead to irrationalism and the most diverse kinds of «vegetative thought». The rejection and the devaluation of the second lead to rationalism, positivism and scientism, which, in their onesidedness, necessitate irrationalism as a necessary complement.

Why, then, does theoretical thought become «half universal», through which passes *anew*—or can pass—all that has already been lived in experience, intuited in intuition, represented in representations, fulfilled in action, felt in sensibility? Why does reality, that man appropriates first and foremost in the practical-spiritual activity, and at its root in art, in religion, etc., need be *once again* possessed theoretically? A certain «privilege» that the theoretical sphere enjoys in relation to all others is demonstrated by the fact that a theory can be elaborated about everything, and that everything can be submitted to an explicit analytic examination: besides art there is also a theory of art, besides sport there is also a theory of sport, besides the praxis there is also a theory of the praxis. But what kind of privilege is it? Is the truth of art in the theory of art and the truth of the praxis in the theory of the praxis? All the caricatures of the theory and of the formalistic-bureaucratic conception of the theory are based upon these presuppositions. The theory is neither the truth nor the efficacy of this or that non-theoretical way of appropriation of reality, but it represents its *explicitly reproduced comprehension*, which, in turn, exercises its influence upon the intensity, truthfulness and similar qualities of the way of corresponding appropriations.

The materialist theory of knowledge as spiritual reproduction of reality catches the *ambiguous* character of consciousness which escapes both positivism and idealism. Human consciousness is «reflection» and at the same time «projection», direction and construction, observation and planning. It is reflective and anticipative, while at the same time receptive and active. To let the «thing in itself» speak, without adding anything, leaving things as they are, requires an activity of a particular kind.

The theory of knowledge as a spiritual reproduction of reality

instantiates the active character of knowledge in *all* of its levels. Even the most elementary sensible knowledge never derives from a passive perception, but from a perceptive activity. Yet, as it follows from the fundamental idea of all of our work, every theory of knowledge is based—implicitly or explicitly—upon a determinate theory of reality, and presupposes a determinate conception of reality. The materialist theory of knowledge as intellectual reproduction of reality derives from a conception different from that which gives rise to the method of reduction. Reduction presupposes a rigid substance, immutable and non-derived. elements in terms of which, in the ultimate analysis, the truth and mutability of the phenomena are explained. The phenomenon is explained if it is reduced to its essence, to the general law, to the abstract principle. The untenability of reductionism is expressed by two famous phrases: Franz Kafka is a petty bourgeois intellectual, but not every petty bourgeois intellectual is Franz Kafka. The method of reductionism reduces the individuals under the abstract universal and creates two poles between which there is no mediation: the abstract individual is on one side, and the abstract universal on the other.

Spinozism and physicalism are two of the most popular kinds of reductive methods that translate the wealth of reality into something fundamental and elementary. All of the wealth of the world precipitates in the abyss of an immutable substance. In Spinoza this method represents the other side of moral asceticism, which demonstrates that all the wealth in reality is not truly wealth at all, and that everything concrete and individual is illusory. Within a determinate tradition of thought, Marxism is understood as Spinozism made dynamic. The immutable substance of Spinoza is made dynamic. But under this aspect, Marxism would be a

metaphysics. Marxism has not made the immutable substance dynamic, rather, it has defined as «substance» the very dynamism of the object, its dialectic. Thus even to know the substance does not mean to reduce the «phenomena» to the substance made dynamic, i.e., to something that hides behind phenomena, and that does not depend on them. Rather, it means to know the laws of the movement of the thing itself. «Substance » is the *very movement of the thing, or the thing in movement*. The movement of the thing creates the individual phases, forms, and aspects that cannot be understood by reducing them to substance. Rather, they are understandable as explanation of the «thing in itself». It is not possible to materialistically interpret religion by rediscovering the earthy nucleus of religious conceptions and by reducing them to the materialistic level. Rather, religion is to be understood as overturned and mystified activity of man as an objective subject. The «substance» of man is objective activity (praxis), and not dynamic substance present in man. Reductionism is the method of the «nothing but». All of the wealth of the world is nothing but either immutable substance, or substance that has been made dynamic. This is also the reason why reductionism cannot rationally explain a new evolution of a qualitative nature. All that is new can be reduced to conditions and hypotheses. The new is «nothing but» the old.<sup>9</sup>

If all of man's social wealth can be reduced to the phrase that the essence of man is the creation of tools, and if all of social, reality is ultimately determined by economics *understood in the sense of economic factors*, the question that unavoidably arises is why must this factor be

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9 The *Wiener Kreis* has performed a positive task in the destruction of pseudo-concreteness. With its assertion that matter is not something that is found behind phenomena, behind the transcendence of phenomena, rather, that matter is objects and material processes, it has liquidated surviving metaphysical conceptions. Cf. Otto Neurath, *Empirische Soziologie*, (Wien, 1931), pp. 59-61.

camouflaged and realized in essentially different ways such as, for instance, imagination and poetry.<sup>10</sup>

How is it possible to understand the new? By reducing it to the old, i.e., to conditions and hypotheses. Within this conception, the new presents itself as something exterior that comes subsequent to material reality. Matter is in motion, but it does not have the quality of negativity.<sup>11</sup> Only one conception of matter in terms of which matter itself contains negativity, i.e., the power to produce new qualities and higher evolutionary levels, allows the possibility of materialistically explaining the new as a quality of the material world. If matter is understood as negativity, the reductive scientific explanation ceases to be valid. I.e, the reduction of the new to postulates, of concrete phenomena to abstract foundations, is no longer valid and the knowing process becomes the *explanation of the phenomena*. Reality comes to be interpreted not by means of reduction to something different from itself, rather, by explaining it in terms of reality itself, through the development and the illustration of its phases, of the moments of its movement.<sup>12</sup>

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10 This problem has been dealt with elsewhere.

11 Polemics against dialectical materialism stubbornly attribute to modern materialism a mechanistic and metaphysical conception of matter borrowed from theories of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Why is it that *only* spirit and not matter possess the quality of negativity? Even Sartre's thesis that materialism cannot be the philosophy of the revolution (Cfr. Sartre, *Materialisme et Revolution*, Paris, 1959) follows from the metaphysical conception of matter, as even Merleau-Ponty *indirectly* recognizes: «On s'est quelque fois demandé avec raison comment un matérialisme pouvait être dialectique (Sartre: *Materialisme et Revolution*) comment la matière, si Ton prend le mot à la rigueur, pouvait contenir le principe de productivité et de nouveauté qui s'appelle une dialectique» (*Temps Moderns*, vol. I, p. 521). All of the discussions that refer to the recognition or to the rejection of a «dialectic of nature» converge upon this problem.

12 The term «entwickeln» is a translation from the Latin «explicatio» and means «unfolding», clear picturing of a “mysterious totality” which first presents itself as obscure and intricate.» Hoffmeister, *Goethe und der Deutsche Idealismus*, (Leipzig, 1932)



The point of departure of the examination must be formally identical to the result. This point of departure is to be maintained in the identity through the entire process of thought since it constitutes the only guarantee that thought does not get lost in its path. But the sense of the performed analysis is in the fact that its spiral movement leads to a result that was not known at the beginning and which, as such, given the formal identity of point of departure and point of arrival, at the conclusion of its movement, thought reaches something different—in terms of its content—from what it was initially started with. From the vital, chaotic, immediate representation of the whole, thought arrives at concepts, at the abstract conceptual determinations through which formation a return to the point of departure is obtained. But this return is no longer to the living although non-understood whole of immediate perception. Rather, it is a return to the concept of the whole richly articulated and better understood. The path from the «chaotic representation of the whole» to the «rich totality of the multiplicity of determinations and relationships», coincides with the comprehension of reality. The whole is not immediately knowable to man, even if it is given to him in a sensible form, i.e., in representations, opinions, and experience. Thus the whole is immediately accessible to man, but it is an obscure and chaotic whole. For man to know and to comprehend this whole, to render it clear and to explain it, it is necessary to make a detour. The concrete becomes comprehensible through the mediation of the abstract, the whole through the mediation of the part. Precisely because of the fact that the path of truth is a detour—*der Weg der Wahrheit ist Umweg*—man can become lost and remain stranded.

The method of ascension from the abstract to the concrete is the

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pp. 120-121. This is the sense in which it is used by both Goethe and Marx.

method of *thought*. In other words, this means that it is a movement which takes place in concepts, within the element of abstraction. The ascension from the abstract to the concrete is not the passage from a level (sensible) to another level (rational), rather, it is a movement *in* thought and *of* thought. In order for thought to progress from the abstract to the concrete, it must move in its own element, i.e., in the abstract level, which is the negation of immediacy, of evidence, and of sensible concreteness. The ascension from the abstract to the concrete is a movement for which every beginning is abstract and whose dialectic consists in the overcoming of such abstractness. Therefore, the progress from abstraction to concreteness is generally a movement from the part to the whole and from the whole to the part, from the phenomenon to the essence and from the essence to the phenomenon, from the totality to the contradiction and from the contradiction to the totality, from the object to the subject and from the subject to the object. The process from the abstract to the concrete as the materialistic method of knowledge of reality is the dialectic of the concrete totality in which reality is ideally reproduced in *all of its levels and dimensions*. The process of thought is not limited to transforming the chaotic whole of the representations into the transparent whole of concepts. During the process the whole itself is at the same time designated and understood.

As it is well known, Marx distinguished the method of investigation from the method of exposition. Notwithstanding this, the method of investigation is still treated superficially as something known, and the method of exposition is still considered in terms of the form of presentation, i.e., it is not seen that it is through the method of explanation that the phenomenon becomes transparent, rational and comprehensible.

The method of investigation involves three steps:

(1) minute appropriation of the subject-matter, full possession of the material, including all the historically available details;

(2) analysis of the single forms of development of the material itself;

(3) investigation of the internal coherence, i.e., determination of the unity of the various forms of development.<sup>13</sup>

Without the full possession of such a method of *investigation* any dialectic is empty speculation.

What science takes as its point of departure for the exposition is already the result of an investigation and of a critical-scientific appropriation of matter. The beginning of the exposition is already a *mediated* beginning which embryonically contains the structure of the whole work. Yet, what can, or better, must constitute the *beginning of the exposition*, i.e., of the scientific development (exegesis) of the problem area, is not yet known at the *beginning of the investigation*. The beginning of the exposition and the beginning of the investigation are two different things. The beginning of the investigation is casual and arbitrary, while the beginning of the exposition is necessary.

Marx's *Capital* begins—and this is nowadays commonplace—with the analysis of commodities. But the fact that such a beginning of the *interpretation*, the commodity, is a cell of capitalist society, that it is the abstract beginning whose development reproduces the internal structure of capitalist society, is itself the result of an investigation, the result of the scientific appropriation of matter. This is often ignored. For capitalist society, the commodity is *absolute reality*, since it is the unity of all the

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13 Cf. Marx, *Capital*, «Postscript» to the second edition.

determinations, the embryo of all the contradictions. In this sense, it can be characterized in Hegelian terms, as the unity of being and non-being, of distinction and similarity, of identity and non-identity. All further determinations are richer definitions or concretizations of this «absolute» of capitalist society. The dialectic of the interpretation or of the exegesis cannot eclipse the central problem: how does science reach the *necessary beginning of the exposition*, i.e., of the explanation? In some interpretations of Marx's work, the lack of distinction and even the exchangeability of the beginning of the investigation and the beginning of the interpretation are at the bottom of trivial and ridiculous errors. In the investigation, the beginning is arbitrary, while the exposition is the *explanation of the thing* precisely because it presents it in its development and in its *internal and necessary* evolution. Here there must be a truly and authentic beginning, one from which the remaining determinations develop *necessarily*. Without a necessary beginning, the interpretation is never a development or an explanation. Rather, it turns out to be an eclectic combination or a continuous and undirected hopping around. And, in order to finish, the internal and necessary development of the *thing itself* is not realized. What is accomplished instead is the development of the reflection of the thing, of the mediation of the thing, which—in relation to the thing—is something exterior and arbitrary. The method of explanation is not an evolutionistic development. Rather, it is the unfolding, the manifestation and «complication» of the antitheses, it is the unfolding of the thing for the mediation of the antitheses.

The explanation is a method that presents the unfolding of the thing as the *necessary transformation* of the abstract into the concrete. Ignorance of the method of dialectical explanation (based on the conception of reality

as concrete totality) leads to the subsumption of the concrete under the abstract, to the skipping of intermediate terms, and to the construction of forced abstractions.

The materialist dialectic as a method of scientific explanation, of socio-human reality does not mean, as such, research of the earthy nucleus of spiritual configurations (as it is supposed by the Spinozian reductionistic materialism of Feuerbach), it does not mean the connecting of cultural phenomena to their economic equivalents (as Plekhanov thought following that same Spinozian tradition), nor the reduction of culture to economic factors. The dialectic *is not a method of reduction, but it is the method of the spiritual and intellectual reproduction of reality*; it is the method of the development and explanation of cultural phenomena, departing from practical-objective activity of historical man.