MARX AND MODERNITY

Agnes Heller

Karl Marx died one hundred years ago and, throughout the duration of this year, all over the world, his work is being remembered and celebrated. For us, this is significant in two ways. Firstly, it means that the work of a man who died one hundred years ago continues to exert an enormous influence even today. Secondly, it means that the man indeed died one hundred years ago. Marx was born only three years after the battle of Waterloo and only twenty-nine years after the storming of the Bastille. He remains therefore, incomparably closer to the turbulences of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars than he does to our own age. In this sense, it is hardly surprising to discover that Marx's work cannot account unfailingly for problems and developments in our own present society. Yet what is surprising, is that a man who lived in that remote past actually discovered certain basic features of modernity, historical propensities, which, by and large only came to fruition well after his time, together with a categorical framework through which we can still elucidate certain problems specific to our own time.

When we read Marx today, we can adopt one of two interpretative approaches. On the one hand, we can analyze the questions he raised and the answers he provided without further problematization. This yields a philological interpretation which, if performed with practical intent, can lead either to a total acceptance or total rejection of Marx's *oeuvre*. Where, on the other hand, we regard his questions and answers as problems, a different, hermeneutical reading is required. Here, the text is read thoroughly and at the same time it is consciously mediated to the problems of our own experiential horizons. The yield here is neither total acceptance nor total rejection but the acceptance of those problems and solutions which can be rationally mediated to our present. Drawing on this second interpretative method, I wish to discuss here Marx's relation to modernity.

The problem of modernity is the focal issue, the problem *par excellence* of contemporary social theory. There is now a basic consensus that around the time of the Great French Revolution a new type of society was born, which differed considerably from all previous (or even contemporary non-Western) societies much more than particular Western countries differed from one another. Social theories disagree sharply in their interpretation of modernity and, as a consequence, they disagree about its overarching indicator. However, there are certain constituents of modernity which are generally accepted in every important contemporary social theory, even if with varying emphases. These are the following: modern society is dynamic and future-oriented;

economic expansion and industrialization comprise its main features. It is also rationalized and functionalist in character. Science, rather than religion, becomes the basis for the accumulation of knowledge. Traditional customs and habits are dismantled and traditional virtues are lost. Certain values or norms have become increasingly univeralized. Canons of creation and interpretation disappear and, finally, the concepts of "right" and "true" become pluralized. In what follows, I will argue that *all* these patterns of modernity were either discovered or reinterpreted by Marx.

Niklas Luhmann, in his anti-Marxist rather than Marxist book on the sociology of knowledge (*Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik*), provides us with a theory through which we can understand the modern character of Marx's undertaking. Luhmann characterizes the 17th and 18th centuries as a period of transition from pre-modern (stratified) societies to modern (functionalist) societies. In this period, he argues, no social theory proper could emerge; this is why anthropology occupied the semantic stage of that period. Once functionalist society gained momentum, social theory could be substituted for philosophical anthropology. From this period onwards culture was transformed into the symbolic use of functions. This is the kernel of Luhmann's argument. Let us, however, analyze exactly what it means. Firstly, the substitution of the understanding of society, for anthropology is *the* modern venture *par excellence*. Secondly, it is a cultural venture and thus symbolic. But this symbolism cannot be read from the viewpoint of a particular social stratum, only from that of a particular social function. The first statement seems to be very much in accord with a well-known and highly orthodox Marxist thesis according to which Marx transformed socialist theory from a utopia into science. But in fact it means something else, namely, that Marx, together with certain other social theorists, substituted a modern theory for a pre-modern (transitory) one. Science, as it is understood in the modern age, was substituted for science as it had been understood in the pre-modern or transitory age. The second statement, according to which a particular social theory in modernity is not expressive of a particular social stratum (it is not the self-expression or the product of this particular stratum), but rather belongs to a social function, contradicts the orthodox Marxist interpretation as well as Marx's self-interpretation. The second statement suggests that Marx's theory cannot be conceived of as expressive of the position of the proletariat, the proletariat being a social stratum or class, but instead as one belonging or appertaining to a social function. But which social function? This question has been raised several times during the last decades, and has yielded three typical answers. In terms of the first, Marx's social theory has to be imputed to the function of "industrialization"; in terms of the second, it has to be imputed to the function of "emancipation"; and finally, Marx's theory can be regarded as the symbolic expression of the function performed by the intellectuals. However, given that the very inquiry into which function the

symbolic action called Marx's theory should be imputed is highly unorthodox from the viewpoint of Marx's (or the usual Marxist's) self-understanding, one can only provide an answer after having taken into account the problems of modernity precisely as they had been raised by Marx himself. I therefore now turn to this problem. I will analyze those constituent features of modernity, enumerated above, and will then show the *way* in which these features were first highlighted by Marx.

Thesis 1: Modern society is dynamic and future-oriented; expansion and industrialization comprise its main features.

For Marx, modernity was born with industrial capitalism. Marx often referred to finance and commercial capital as antediluvian forms of capital. The choice of adjective is telling: it stands for pre-modern. Pre-modern forms of capital dwell in the niches, in the interstices of traditional ways of life. However, industrial capital destroys tradition and revolutionizes ways of life.

In some of Marx's own summaries of his philosophy of history one gains the impression that capitalism is only one of several "modes of production" preceded by three (or four) others. However, in the majority of his writings Marx emphasized that industrial capitalism is not simply one mode of production amongst many, but rather that it is substantially different from all others preceding it. This point is very distinctly made in the *Grundrisse* where Marx frequently juxtaposed modern to all previous societies. All such juxtapositions include the contrast between "static" and "dynamic". In all pre-capitalist formations socio-economic reproduction was self-limited. By contrast, industrial capitalism expands without limits; illimitableness is built into its very structure. This is also why the pre-modern individual was limited and why only the modern individual can develop all his/her potentialities. In other words, the dynamic, as opposed to the static, is alone indicative of the character of modern society and the modern individual. It goes without saying that Marx not only described the central dynamism of modernity but also eulogized it. The birth of modernity is acclaimed throughout his works as the most progressive step taken in human history.

However, it would be a misconception to believe that Marx identified modernity with industrial capitalism. It is indeed industrial capitalism which triggers modernity and thereby performs its "historic mission", as Marx put it. But, as he also saw, the *dynamis* of capitalism was self-defeating for capitalism itself, as the boundless development of the forces of production (industrialization) would place limits on the accumulation of capital. Therefore, even though triggered by capitalism, industrialization is boundless and cannot be limited by capitalism. It is at this point that the Marxian analysis switches from reconstruction to prediction. In his view, capitalism is but a

prelude to modernity proper: communism. Marx has often been criticized, to my mind justly, for drawing this particular conclusion. It is a commonplace amongst attentive readers of Marx that this conclusion was arrived at long before Marx even embarked on the analysis of industrial capitalism, *alias* modernity. The idea that the society of associated producers, that is, cummunism, would be a necessary outcome of the dynamic development of capitalism, was the basic tenet of Marx's whole philosophy, but this idea was in no sense drawn from his analysis of modernity. Neither the thesis that social production collides with individual appropriation, nor his other thesis concerning the tendency of the rate of profit to fall provide sufficient grounds for the conclusion that communist society is inevitable. Indeed, all that the Marxian reconstruction can legitimately suggest are the following. First, the particular form of modernity or industrial capitalism which existed in the 19th century, must undergo a substantial transformation. Second, the marriage between the boundless development of industrialization and capitalist economic organization cannot be permanent. Third, industrialization will place developmental constraints on capitalism itself. In the second half of the 20th century these conclusions do not sound either utopian or excessively radical. There is no need even to be a Marxist in order to accept such conclusions.

Even if it is true that communism or the society of associated producers does not follow with any logical necessity from Marx's theory as the future *sui generis* of modernity, this conclusion nonetheless remains the all-encompassing basis of Marx's work as a whole. For Marx, there were very good reasons to acclaim unconditionally the achievements of modernity, for he firmly believed that capitalism was but a prelude to the accomplishment of the project of modernity as such. Boundless development took the form of exploitation and domination and became the source of human suffering. Boundless development could only be acclaimed unconditionally when it took place under the social condition of freedom, positive and negative alike. Whatever our opinion of the Marxian utopia of the society of associated producers may be, the idea of conceiving of modernity together with freedom, positive and negative alike, still remains central to an existing and influential Leftist-radical project. Irrespective of whether we set ourselves the goal of "autonomous society" or "socialist society" or "the ideal community of communication" or "self-governed society", all such projects express and formulate an objective similar to, if not identical with, Marx's idea.

Thesis 2: Modern society is rationalized.

As is well known, it was Max Weber who first coined the concept "rationalization" and distinguished it from rationality. However Marx had already analyzed, prior to him, the same phenomenon. This is why Lukács succeeded

so easily in synthesizing the Marxian and the Weberian conceptions in *History and Class Consciousness*. Let me begin with a rough summary of the Weberian conception. The notion of rationalization applies to institutions. An institution operates according to a set of rules which guarantee *efficiency* where efficiency is not relative to values. If the rules are kept, the minimum-maximum criterion is met (minimal input – maximum output). By contrast, the notion of rationality applies to human actions. If an action is rational, it can either be purposive rational or value rational. In other words, we set a goal, select the means and realize the goal, or we observe a particular value (a norm) in all our actions. Now the fact is that Marx had analyzed modernity in exactly the same terms, even though in a restricted manner as he did not discuss politics, only economy. The latter is one of the gravest shortcomings of Marx's theory of modernity. I will return later to this paradoxical fact that Marx, who is associated in the minds of hundreds of millions with a distinct type of politics, never developed a political theory of his own. For the moment, however, let us proceed with the problem of rationalization. According to Marx, it was the work process which had become rationalized in modernity. In the first volume of *Capital*, he dedicated a whole chapter to the description of how rationalization had become one of the forces of production in industrial capitalism. In the course of the analysis of the division of labour within the factory, he referred, as Weber did after him, to an intrinsic set of rules which guarantee efficiency where efficiency is not relative to values. Interestingly, Marx shared with Weber similar ambivalences concerning the process of rationalization. On the one hand, he appreciated efficiency which was no longer relative or subordinate to values. This new kind of efficiency signalled that traditional constraints on production had been left behind. He even praised Ricardo's predilection for "production for production's sake" and, moreover, he played with the idea of rationalizing society as a whole simultaneously with the elimination of the market. On the other hand, Marx was uneasy about rationalization to the same extent as Weber also would be. Should the worker be put in a position where he can only apply pre-set rules, then the work process would no longer be a goal-rational process, since the worker could not set his own goal and select his own means to realize it. Thus purposive rationality is alienated in rationalization. So also is value rationality. Even if Marx emphasized that production for production's sake was progressive when compared to productive processes still under the constraint of traditional values, ultimately he could not accept that production should not be relative to any value. In the *Grundrisse* he emphasized more than once that it is the development of all the individual worker's capacities themselves which should shape the productive process. However, should the individual worker's developmental needs shape the production process, the process itself could not be entirely rationalized as it would then become relative to at least one value outside the process itself. This ambivalence cuts across all Marx's works, even if the third volume of *Capital* is more

in favour of rationalization than the *Grundrisse*, which retains a hostility to it. Yet in general one can state that he left the question, at least as far as the future is concerned, wide open. If the associated producers subject industrial or, even, economic development to their collective will, one could not foretell the extent to which they might keep production rationalized, or whether or not this might be possible at all.

This characteristic ambiguity in the assessment of rationalization is indicative of a highly modern attitude. Excepting pure romantics who reject rationalizations of all kinds and full-fledged liberals who are not concerned with the costs of rationalization, almost all modern theorists demonstrated exactly the same ambiguity as did Marx when confronted with the problem. It is certainly true that the question of rationalization is addressed to a far wider spectrum of institutions and forms of social interaction in contemporary discourse than it was by Marx. However, it is not my intention here to show a Marx who provided answers to all our problems today, only one who had already recognized and located a fundamental problem we have been trying to solve ever since.

Thesis 3: Modern society is functionalist.

The concept of class is central to Marx's theory. For this reason, one might assume that he was still operating with a stratification model and not with a functionalist one. However, it has often been pointed out that Marx offers several interpretations of the concept class, all incompatible with one another. It is equally well-known that the third voume of *Capital* concludes with an unfinished chapter on classes. Beyond any doubt, Marx could not conclusively solve the problem and the *magnum opus* was left unfinished. The political message of the text and the analysis of modernity were thus never merged theoretically. In what follows I wish to reconstruct the functionalist interpretation of modern classes in Marx and show why he could not develop this conception in full.

Marx emphasized several times that modern, socio-economic classes differ substantially from all previous social-classes, and he described this difference in many ways. Modern society is a "pure" society, whereas previous societies were still bound to nature (*naturwüchsig*), so that modern classes are pure social classes whereas previous social classes were still organized on "natural" ties. The class members' relation to previous classes was a relation of "necessity", whereas the class-members' relations to modern classes is accidental. During the early development of capitalism (in other words, of modernity), even the members of estates related to their respective estates in an "accidental way". This means therefore that even estates were being transformed into modern classes. The implication of the above distinction is unambiguous.

Whereas in pre-modern societies it was stratification that defined the function of all members born into a given social stratum (estate), in modern, capitalist society it is rather the function performed in society that constitutes the classes. To be born a serf meant performing functions specific to that estate. By contrast, it is in the performance of the function of "industrial labour" that one becomes a member of the working class, so that, when one is no longer performing that function, one can no longer be said to be a member of that particular class. An enriched serf would remain a serf except in specific conditions under which he could buy his freedom. An enriched worker who opens a shop however, is no longer a worker because he performs a different function. In his analysis of modern society Marx had a tendency to operate with the categories of labour and capital, instead of those of workers and capitalists, thus emphasizing the *function* performed in the reproduction of capitalist society. I would suggest that in this matter Marx was more radically modern than Weber, for the latter also operated with the concept of "prestige", the distribution of honour, that is to say, with a non-functionalist theory. True enough, Weber's distinction matches the results of empirical observation far more than Marx's abstraction does: modern, Western, societies are not *totally* functionalist. But Marx was more radical in grasping the main tendency of modernity.

It is easy to understand why Marx could not follow his own functionalist theory of class through to its final conclusions. The two functions, labour and capital, indeed explain the conflicts between the two social classes constituted by those functions. However, they only explain the conflicts constituted by those very functions. If we conceive labour to be a social function, and the proletariat to be a social class constituted by this function, the conflict of labour and capital can only be conceived along trade-union lines. It goes without saying that not even trade-union movements are merely expressions of the function "labour": but they at least organize this class from the position which the function "labour" occupies in the reproduction of modern society. This conclusion would have followed logically from the purely functionalist concept of modern classes; it would also have been a true conclusion. In the last one hundred years, pre-modern social strata have progressively disappeared as Marx predicted. Yet simultaneously the functions performed in modern society have also become increasingly differentiated. It was precisely this differentiation that led to the expansion of the trade-union movements. However, the "historical mission of the proletariat" which is for Marx identical with the proletariat becoming the bearer of a socialist revolution, liberating itself and with it, and in one act, the whole of humankind, cannot be attributed to the function "labour", and nor can it be derived from it. Being clearly aware of this, Marx did not appeal to the function of labour, but to the revolutionary consciousness of the "proletarian" class as a class-for-itself. But how can this class-for-itself be constituted, if it does not issue from the

function labour itself? Marx offered several complementary explanations one of which deserves particular attention. In terms of this version, the proletariat, being outside political and civil society, composing the huge crowd of pariahs of modernity, can emancipate itself politically only via human emancipation, in other words via the accomplishment of a socialist revolution. However, since Marx's times an important development has taken place. With the establishment of democracy through universal suffrage (which Marx regarded as a mere facade covering the temporary equilibrium of hostile classes), political action has tendentially become disconnected from the particular function people perform in society. The complementary argument which seemed to be so evident in the age of Marx, has lost its relevance. Working class movements and parties, several of them inspired by Marx's theory itself, kept fighting for the establishment of political democracy, and succeeded, at least to a very large extent, in their attempts at political emancipation. This historical development which was accomplished in the West, and only here, after the Second World War, yields two different results. Firstly, Marx was right in so far as he discovered that modern stratification is based on functions and not vice versa, but he was wrong when he predicted that the proletariat would be the bearer of a socialist revolution. Secondly, Marx was wrong when he analyzed modernity only in functionalist terms, as is anyone else who now embarks on the same operation. Democracy, as a political institution, is beyond functions since it expresses functions only in so far as capitalism or industrialization place constraints on it.

But even if Marx's vision of the great proletarian revolution has lost its relevance, the perspective designed by him has not. His argument here runs as follows. Modern classes are constituted by functions. The division of socio-economic functions is identical with the social division of labour. As long as individuals perform one and the same function throughout their whole lives, class society is reproduced. The directive functions constitute the dominating or ruling class (or classes), the executive functions (first of all, the function of manual labour) constitute the dominated class (or classes). Further, Marx suggested that the directive function is performed by those who own the means of production, and the mere executive function by those who own nothing but their labour power. Here he described accurately the *modus operandi* of capitalist societies. However, the model has far broader connotations. If we glance at the East-European (or Soviet-type) societies, we immediately realize that they are the ones that carry the functionalist type of stratification to the extreme. In them, the position of those dominating and of those being dominated is totally defined by the function performed in the social division of labour. But the function of commanding is not relative to the legal ownership of the means of production, rather to the position occupied in that institution called "the party". In constrast to Western societies with democratic constitutions, where transfunctional action is

institutionalized, there is absolutely no possibility for transfunctional actions in Soviet-type societies. One can easily see from this that it is not for motives of incorrigible naivety or romantic dreaming that Marx challenged not only private ownership but the social division of labour as well. He worked out several projects for the abolition of the social division of labour, and theoretically it is rather irrelevant that hardly any of them seem nowadays to be at all viable (particularly the ones which advocate a constant switching from manual to mental labour and vice versa, from one kind of manual labour to another, from one kind of mental labour to another and vice versa). If we accept the thesis that democracy is the only transfunctional institution of modernity, the conclusion that a class society, constituted by functions, could be overcome via the radicalization of democracy seems to be legitimate. Somewhere Marx himself made the critical remark that democracy stops at the factory gate. And what if it did not? Self-management of society would not eliminate the social division of labour altogether, but it could eliminate domination as a special function. This solution certainly occurred to Marx when he spoke of the "self-management" of society. What did not occur to him was the idea that the radicalization of democracy could be conceived of as a process within the established framework of an already existing democracy.

Thesis 4: Science, rather than religion, becomes the basis for the accumulation of knowledge.

It is a well-known fact that Marx was clearly aware of the gaining momentum of the sciences. He described the natural sciences as "general intellect", where "general" stood for "exclusive". He referred to natural sciences as the most powerful "forces of production", even if he believed that capital obtains science for free. While it is easy to criticize him for the second statement, which has proved to be false, one cannot help but admire the boldness of the former statement for in Marx's time the natural sciences were still a long way indeed from being powerful "forces of production".

One of Marx's core statements concerning the status of social theory, including his own, was that it had to be a science, and here his model was that of natural sciences. Repeated usage of the categories of "laws" and "necessity" in his social theory, attests to this firm conviction. It is equally well-known that Marx sent a copy of *Capital* to Darwin with a dedication to the scientist he venerated more than anyone. At this point, it is not Marx's so-called (and actual) scientific mistakes but his complete identification with science as the exclusive world-view of modernity that calls for criticism. It never occurred to Marx that science would become a world-view of domination. He shared the positivist view that only religion, political and moral ideas serve the purpose of domination, not science. It is hardly surprising therefore to find that

science is never enumerated by him among the elements of the superstructure, and this is not because he saw it as part of the so-called "base" but, rather because he was convinced of the "domination-indifference" of purely objective and true knowledge. Marx acclaimed as an unquestionable asset that which was later called by Max Weber "the intellectualization of worldviews". Yet Weber, who opted for science much as Marx did, was fully aware of his having made this choice. Marx, however, was not. For him, science stood, without rivals, for knowledge as such.

Thesis 5: Traditional customs are dismantled and traditional virtues lost. Certain values or norms become increasingly universalized.

The discovery that capitalism (or modernity) dismantled traditional values and norms was made long before Marx. He merely reformulated an already widespread idea, albeit with a strongly renewed emphasis. However, in contrast to Rousseau, or even to Montesquieu, Marx glorified this tendency unconditionally and uncritically. As a libertarian theorist, he regarded binding customs and norms only as limits to liberty. Norms as extra-individual authorities, place constraints on human choice and action. Capitalism performed an unambiguously emancipatory function by liberating us from the coercive power of these norms. While in his personal ethics, Marx was frighteningly Victorian, in his theoretical attitude to norms and prescriptions, as a sympathetic reader of de Sade, he was libertarian and very close to being libertine. But the contradiction between his personal ethics and his theory does not concern us here.

Marx held firmly to the view that industrial capitalism would perform the function of universalization in several different respects. Capitalism, he argued, would unify the whole globe: within a very short period of time, every country would be capitalist. This is why he lent (qualified) theoretical support to colonization. Capitalism would overturn all traditional ways and walks of life, and thus clear the path everywhere for the second stage of modernity, communism. This was, we now know, a false prediction. The Marxian view that the expansion of the market would be of sufficient basis for the emergence of modernity was a misconceived idea. It is arguable whether or not the base-superstructure model was responsible for this failure. I am rather inclined to believe that the model was invented by Marx precisely as a theoretical device to underpin his prediction and not the other way round. However, whichever of these two conceptions may have had precedence, both together indicate that Marx was not prepared to take into account non-economic factors as equally responsible for the emergence of modernity, a point so strongly emphasized later by Max Weber.

The theoretical tension berween the philosophy of history and the theory of modernity is even more blatant in the Marxian discussion of ideology. Marx

operated with two versions of the materialist conception of history, a weak and a strong one. I disregard here the weak version of the theory which has been widely accepted since, and will refer only to the strong version. Marx's thesis is that to the same extent as one cannot judge a person on the basis of what he believes, or professes that he does, but only on the ground of what he in fact does, societies and social classes as well cannot be judged on the ground of what they believe, or profess that they do, only on the ground of what they really do. However cogent it may sound, the thesis is neither plausible nor true in this general formulation. If a person believes that he does something and in fact he does something else, his belief (self-understanding) is shaped by, and is in accordance with, the historical consciousness of his age. If, however, a whole society or a social class "believes" that it does something (has this collective self-understanding), while its members do something else, the belief, the material of this collective self-understanding has to be present in the historical consciousness of the epoch which is not identical with the consciousness of the particular institution, stratum or class. This historical consciousness other than the intersubjective consciousness of any particular community, must stand higher than any particularistic consciousness, and thus it must be universal. But it is only with modernity that the consciousness of universality emerges at all. In no pre-modern society can we distinguish between "thinking that we are doing this and this" and "in fact doing this and this", on an integrational or class level. A procedure like this is only relevant in modernity. Ever since a few norms and values have been universalized, societal actors of groups and classes can act with the consciousness of universality while pursuing particularistic ends. When Marx applied the concept of ideology to modern society, he certainly broke entirely new ground. It is absolutely true that in modern times universalized values and norms can legitimize particularistic group actions. This is an exceptionally valuable contribution to the theory of modernity, one which has since been taken up and elaborated on by the sociology of knowledge. However, Marx's theory of ideology has two basic flaws. First, as has already been mentioned, he tried to apply a pattern of modernity to the mythical entity called History with a capital H. Secondly, Marx is not sufficiently lucid on one major point. He never clarified precisely what he meant when he held that classes or strata may not recognize that they are "in fact doing this and this", rather than what they think they are doing. Let us look more carefully at this claim. When he formulates his theory in general terms, Marx identifies that mysterious "doing this and this" with production alone. But when he referred to particular historical periods the emphasis often shifts. For instance, when the bourgeoisie was ascending to class power he argued, it had recourse to universal values even if these were shielding a new form of political domination. Here "doing this and this" (in contrast to "thinking that they are doing this and this") has nothing whatsoever to do with production, rather it emanates from political action. The confusion is due to the attempt to

combine coherently a strong version of the materialist conception of history (a philosophy of history) with a theory of modernity, a combination replete with tensions and several unresolved contradictions.

Marx not only analyzed the universalization of certain values and norms in modernity. More than this, he took a resolute stand for a conclusive and all-encompassing universalization against all particularities. Freedom and humankind were his supreme values, and in this respect he did not differ from his close predecessors. But he was more radical than others in his quest to eliminate all particularities from societal life. The proletariat would have the mission to liberate humankind as a whole; the words "liberate" and "humankind as a whole" were granted equal emphasis by Marx. Without criticizing universalism as such, we must note that a single-minded contempt of this kind for all particularities was seriously flawed theoretically and politically. Even the most democratic, that is, radically democratic politics operates in a field of particularistic interests and goals, even though it acts from the vantage point of certain universalistic values and norms. With one resolute gesture of contempt therefore, Marx swept away all particularities: the interests of the peasants, of middle classes, those of nations and colonies. This absolute universalism made Marx particularly insensitive to political questions in general, and to the project of a democratic politics in particular. Democratic politics is one of the basic components of modernity, and when Marx failed to cope with this problem, his pioneering theory of modernity was drastically limited. One could only speculate as to why a man of genius, who discovered and analyzed so many basic features of modernity was not to the slightest degree superior to any of his socialist contemporaries whenever he embarked on discussing political problems. When it came to politics, his genius invariably failed him. The bombastic style of his political writings, the vagueness of his political ideas, the open bias of his judgement, the mythologization of his favourite heroes shift Marx back to a period and its guises, the epoch of the French Revolution and Bonapartism, precisely that period the ideological costumes of which Marx had so vigorously sought to debunk.

Thesis 6: The erosion of the canons of creation and interpretation.

At this point again, Marx's relation to modernity becomes highly ambivalent. Marx had always believed that without canons great works of art could not be created. The generalization of commodity production, this basic characteristic of industrial capitalism, destroyed all canons together with other kinds of norms (for instance, the ethical). This is why capitalism is hostile to art, as Marx's famous and generalizing dictum had explicitly claimed. Here there is a double degredation: the art work becomes a commodity in capitalism, and its use value has to be mediated by its exchange value. Hence, the production and reception of works of art are disconnected from one another; further, it

is profit, or producing profit for someone else, that motivates artistic creation, but profit is merely quantitative and has no canonic (normative) power. Yet we know that the modern individual, who is superior to the pre-modern, "limited" individual was born only with capitalism. It follows from this that capitalism is not entirely hostile to art, as it opens the gate for increasing individualization in creation. It has been observed by many commentators that whenever Marx wrote of future communist society (the society of associated producers), he attributes, in the main, artistic creativity to the denizens of the future world. From his sporadic remarks one gains the impression that in the future society people would be occupied mainly with writing poems, painting, composing music, and so on and so forth. This emphasis on artistic creation is far more than the private whim of a creative intellectual. One of Marx's basic philosophical messages was the coming end of alienation. As a result of de-alienation, every individual would be identical with the human species, the fully developed individuality and the generic essence would coincide. This coincidence of opposites implies the solution to the antimony of artistic creation in modernity: the artistic canon provided by the human essence would reside in every individual creator.

Being familiar with Marx's fairly positivist predilection for science, one might presume that the hermeneutical concept of interpretation never entered his mind. In fact, it did. In his famous dictum that the anatomy of man is the clue to the anatomy of ape, he displayed certain affinities to hermeneutics. Marx quite frequently took up the idea that contemporary history constitutes the historical past from the viewpoint of modernity. In this way, the past is mediated to the concerns of the present. He even went so far as to reflect upon his own philosophy of history as a hermeneutical enterprise.

Thesis 7: The concepts of "right" and "true" are pluralized.

In the discussion of this problem, Marx's philosophy of history and his theory of modernity are, once again on a collision course. On the one hand, Marx emphasized that ethics was, as it always had been, divided along class lines, that there was no general and homogeneous ethics, and he tried to account for this phenomenon by the application of the base-superstructure model. Yet the crux of the matter is that while in pre-modern societies ethics had actually been divided according to social stratification, in modern society this became less and less the case. On the other hand, in discovering the specificity of modernity, Marx unearthed the fact that the pluralization of ethics was to be attributed to the division of functions. He mentioned the division between private and public morals, and, amongst others, emphasized that "the commerce of morals" and "the morals of commerce" had become not only distinct entities but that they operated with two contradictory sets of norms that could not be observed simultaneously. This implies that if someone

operates within one institutional framework, the rules provided by this framework have a normative power; and since a person (any person) performs actions in different institutional frameworks, the person is confronted with divergent and sometimes contradictory norms of action. This is hardly different, if at all, from the description of the pluralization of ethics in modernity found later in the work of Max Weber. However, while Weber analyzed this question in some detail, Marx himself could do very little with his own epochal discovery. The recurring base-superstructure model demanded, and triggered, an already obsolete explanation of ethical diversity.

The same internal contradiction characterizes Marx's view concerning the pluralization of truth. On the one hand, he held that modern classes are constituted by the major functions performed in capitalist society. On the other hand, he stressed that the pluralization of truth, at least in social theory, could be accounted for by the class viewpoint of the particular theorist. Both Ricardo's and his own theory of capitalism are alike (if not equal) in their scientificity, but Ricardo's theory, he believed, was formulated from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie while his own that of the proletariat. Of course, Marx argued, as did all philosophers, that his theory was truer than that of his predecessors' (which is why they could not be equally scientific). However, since Marx had initially accepted the modern idea of the plurality of truth, he had to find a new argument to substantiate this claim. He did this by appealing to the principle of universalization. His theory is truer than that of Ricardo not simply because his is formulated from the viewpoint of the proletariat, but because the viewpoint of the proletariat is at the same time the viewpoint of humankind. Let us mention in passing that, of all the Marxists of the last hundred years, only Lukács understood the overall importance of the principle of universalization for the Marxist conception of truth.

If, however, modern classes are constituted by the main functions performed in modern society, one cannot claim to take the position of a class, but rather only the position of the main function which constitutes the particular class. This problem leads us back to our initial question: which social functions were expressed symbolically in the theory and philosophy of Karl Marx. The easiest answer to this question, so often repeated in the last two decades, runs as follows: Marx was an intellectual, and his social function as an intellectual was expressed symbolically in his theory. However, this is not only an easy answer, it happens to be a wrong one as well. There is a general tendency in modernity, realized in full only in the 20th century in terms of which the creation of meaningful world-views has become a separate function fulfilled by the stratum of intellectuals. Creating a meaningful world-view is, indeed, performing the function of an intellectual but the content and message of meaningful world-views can be the symbolic expression of any social functions performed. We can indeed argue that Marx established his meaningful world-

view as an intellectual but this assertion cannot be replaced by the further assertion that his theory expresses the function of intellectuals. The view that he expressed symbolically the function "labour" was hardly Marx's own self-delusion. This is precisely why work was conceived by him as the primary (all-encompassing) anthropological constituent of man; this is why alienation was conceived by him primarily as the alienation of work and this is why in his philosophy of history, he held fast to the primacy of the development of the forces of production. But when Marx expressed symbolically the function "labour", he was not simply adopting the position of industrialization. Departing from his objective of the "emancipation of labour", the function "labour" was expressed symbolically throughout his whole theory and philosophy. Thus, the question of whether Marx viewed the world from the perspective of industrialization or from that of emancipation can only be answered one way: from both, as the standpoint of labour implies both.

As mentioned, however, the function "labour" does not explain even labour movements. Hannah Arendt was right in her criticism of Marx, though she erred in the opposite direction. She argued that the founding father of Marxism completely forgot about another kind of human action, political action proper, as an end-in-itself. Political action never interested Marx in its own right, only as a means to achieve the emancipation of labour, as a gesture of *the* revolution. This is why one of the major constituents of modernity, political democracy, was not only generally forgotten, but also downgraded by him as an institution of no consequence and without future. In addition, this is why for Marx only the abolition of every form of commodity production and every type of social division of labour could be the guarantee of freedom. This is why he regarded colonization as a progressive historical step. And most importantly this is why the Marxian theory of modernity is not only incomplete, but also one-sided, despite all the deep insights it offers into the specific characteristic features of a world which was still to come and one very distant from Waterloo and the French Revolution.