POSTFACE

Georg Lukács as the philosopher of Leninism

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Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) is one of the few authentic events in the history of Marxism. Today, we cannot but experience the book as the strange remainder of a bygone era – it is difficult even to imagine properly the traumatic impact its appearance had on generations of Marxists, including the later Lukács himself who, in his Thermidorian phase, i.e. from the early 1930s onwards, desperately tried to distance himself from it, to confine it to a document of merely historical interest, and conceded to its reprint only in 1967, accompanied by a new, long, self-critical introduction. Until this 'official' reprint, the book led a kind of underground spectral existence of an 'undead' entity, circulating in pirated editions among the German students in the 1960s, available in some rare translations (like the legendary French one from 1959). In my own country, the now defunct Yugoslavia, reference to *History and Class Consciousness* served as the ritualistic *signe de reconnaissance* of the entire critical Marxist circle around the journal *Praxis* – its attack on Engels's notion of the 'dialectics of nature' was crucial for the critical rejection of the 'reflection' theory of knowledge as the central tenet of 'dialectical materialism'. This impact was far from confined to Marxist circles: even Heidegger was obviously affected by *History and Class Consciousness*, since there are a couple of unmistakable hints at it in *Being and Time* – for instance, in the very last paragraph, Heidegger, in an obvious reaction to Lukács's critique of 'reification', asks the question: '[. . .] we know for a long time that there is the danger

of "reifying consciousness". But what does reification [Verdinglichung] mean? Where does it originate from? [. . .] Is the "difference" between "consciousness" and "thing" at all sufficient for a fundamental deployment of the ontological problematic?'[1]

I

So how did *History and Class Consciousness* attain this cult status of a quasi-mythical forbidden book, comparable, perhaps, only to the no less traumatic impact of *Pour Marx*, written by Louis Althusser, Lukács's later great anti-Hegelian antipode?[2] The answer that first comes to one's mind is, of course, that we are dealing with the founding text of the entire tradition of Western Hegelian Marxism, with a book that combines an engaged revolutionary stance with topics that were later developed by the different strands of so-called critical theory up to today's cultural studies (the notion of 'commodity fetishism' as the structural feature of the entire social life, of 'reification' and 'instrumental reason', and so on). However, on a closer look, things appear in a slightly different light: there is a radical break between *History and Class Consciousness* – more precisely, between Lukács's writings from *c.* 1915 to *c.* 1930, inclusive of his *Lenin* from 1924, a series of his other short texts from this period not included in *History and Class Consciousness* and published in the 1960s under the title *Tactics and Ethics*, as well as the manuscript of the present volume, *Chvostismus und Dialektik*, Lukács's answer to his Comintern critics – and the later tradition of Western Marxism. The paradox (for our Western 'post-political' perspective) of *History and Class Consciousness* is that we have a philosophically extremely sophisticated book, a book that can compete with the highest achievements of the non-Marxist thought of its period, and yet a book that is thoroughly engaged in the ongoing political struggle, a reflection on the author's own radically Leninist political experience (among other things, Lukács was a minister of cultural affairs in the short-lived Hungarian Communist government of Bela Kun in 1919).[3] The paradox is thus that, with regard to the 'standard' Frankfurt School Western Marxism, *History and Class Consciousness* is at the same time much more

openly politically engaged *and* philosophically much more speculative-Hegelian in character (see the notion of proletariat as the subject–object of history, a notion towards which members of the Frankfurt School always retained an uneasy distance) – if there ever was a philosopher of Leninism, of the Leninist party, it is the early Marxist Lukács who went to the very limit in this direction, up to defending the 'undemocratic' features of the first year of the Soviet power against Rosa Luxemburg's famous criticism, accusing her of 'fetishising' formal democracy, instead of treating it as one of the possible strategies to be endorsed or rejected with regard to the demands of a concrete revolutionary situation.[4] And what one should avoid today is precisely obliterating this aspect, reducing thereby Lukács to a gentrified and depoliticised cultural critic, warning about 'reification' and 'instrumental reason', motifs long ago appropriated even by the conservative critics of 'consumer society'.

So, precisely as the originating text of Western Marxism, *History and Class Consciousness* occupies the position of an exception, confirming yet again Schelling's notion that 'the beginning is the negation of that which begins with it'.[5] In what is this exceptional state grounded? In the mid-1920s, what Alain Badiou calls the 'Event of 1917' began to exhaust its potential, and the process took a Thermidorian turn. This term is to be conceived of not only in the usual Trotskyist way (betrayal of the revolution by a new bureaucratic class), but also in the strict sense elaborated by Badiou:[6] as the cessation of the Event, as the betrayal not of a certain social group and/or their interests, but of the fidelity to the (revolutionary) Event itself. In the Thermidorian perception, the Event and its consequences became unreadable, 'irrational', dismissed as a bad dream of the collective plunge into madness – 'we were all caught in a strange destructive vortex . . .'.

What then happened with the saturation of the 'revolutionary sequence of 1917' (Badiou) is that a direct theoretico-political engagement like that of Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* became impossible. The socialist movement definitively split into social-democratic parliamentary reformism and the new Stalinist orthodoxy, while Western Marxism, which abstained from openly endorsing any of these two poles, abandoned the stance of direct political engagement and turned into a part of the established academic machine whose

tradition runs from the early Frankfurt School up to today's cultural studies – therein resides the key difference that separates it from Lukács of the 1920s. On the other hand, Soviet philosophy gradually assumed the form of 'dialectical materialism' as the legitimising ideology of the 'really existing socialism' – one of the signs of the gradual rise of the Thermidorian Soviet orthodoxy in philosophy is precisely the series of vicious attacks on Lukács and his theoretical colleague Karl Korsch, whose *Marxism and Philosophy* is a kind of companion piece to *History and Class Consciousness*, even to the extent of being published in the same year (1923). The watershed for this development was the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in 1924, the first congress after Lenin's death, and simultaneously the first after it became clear that the era of revolutionary agitation in Europe was over and that socialism would have to survive in Russia on its own.[7] In his famous intervention at this Congress, Zinoviev afforded himself a rabble-rousing anti-intellectualist attack on the 'ultra-leftist' deviations of Lukács, Korsch and other 'professors', as he contemptuously referred to them, supporting Lukács's Hungarian Party companion László Rudas in the latter's critical rejection of Lukács's 'revisionism'. Afterwards, the main criticism of Lukács and Korsch originated in Abram Deborin and his philosophical school, at that time predominant in the Soviet Union (although later purged as 'idealist Hegelian'), who were the first systematically to develop the notion of Marxist philosophy as a universal dialectical method, elaborating general laws which can then be applied either to natural or to social phenomena – Marxist dialectics was thus deprived of its directly engaged, practical-revolutionary attitude, and turned into a general epistemological theory dealing with the universal laws of scientific knowledge.

As was noted already by Korsch in the aftermath of these debates, their crucial feature was that critiques from the Comintern and those from the 'revisionist' social-democratic circles, officially sworn enemies, basically repeated the *same* counter-arguments, being disturbed by the same theses in Lukács and Korsch, denouncing their 'subjectivism' (the practical-engaged character of Marxist theory, and so on). Such a position was no longer admissible at a time when Marxism was changing into a state ideology whose ultimate *raison d'être* was to provide the

after-the-fact legitimation for the pragmatic political party decisions in ahistorical ('universal') laws of dialectics. Symptomatic here was the sudden rehabilitation of the notion that dialectical materialism was the 'world-view [Weltanschauung] of the working class': for Lukács and Korsch, as well as for Marx, a 'world-view' by definition designates the 'contemplative' stance of ideology with which Marxist revolutionary engaged theory has to break.

Evert Van der Zweerde has developed in detail the ideological functioning of the Soviet philosophy of dialectical materialism as the 'scientific world-view of the working class':[8] although it was a self-proclaimed ideology, the catch is that it was not the ideology it claimed to be – it did not motivate, but rather legitimated political acts; it was not to be believed in, but ritualistically enacted; the point of its claim to be 'scientific ideology' and thus the 'correct reflection' of social circumstances was to preclude the possibility that there could still be in Soviet society a 'normal' ideology which 'reflected' social reality in a 'wrong' way; and so on. We thus totally miss the point if we treat the infamous 'diamat' as a genuine philosophical system: it was an instrument of power legitimation to be enacted ritualistically, and, as such, to be located in the context of the thick cobweb of power relations. Emblematic here are the different fates of I. Ilyenkov and P. Losev, two prototypes of Russian philosophy under socialism. Losev was the author of the last book published in the USSR (in 1929) that openly rejected Marxism (discarding dialectical materialism as 'obvious nonsense'); however, after a short prison term, he was allowed to pursue his academic career and, during the Second World War, even started lecturing again – the 'formula' of his survival was that he withdrew into the history of philosophy (aesthetics) as a specialist scientific discipline, focusing on ancient Greek and Roman authors. Under the guise of reporting on and interpreting past thinkers, especially Plotin and other neo-Platonists, he was thus able to smuggle in his own spiritualist mystical theses while, in the introductions to his books, paying lip service to the official ideology by a quote or two from Khrushchev or Brezhnev. In this way, Losev survived all the vicissitudes of socialism and lived to see the end of communism, hailed as the grand old man of the authentic Russian spiritual heritage! In contrast to Losev, the problem with Ilyenkov, a superb

dialectician and expert on Hegel, was that he was the eerie figure of a sincere Marxist–Leninist; for that reason (i.e. because he wrote in a personally engaging way, endeavouring to elaborate Marxism as a serious philosophy, not merely as a legitimising set of ritualistic formulae), he was gradually excommunicated and finally driven to suicide – was there ever a better lesson on how an ideology effectively functions?[9]

In a gesture of a personal Thermidor, Lukács himself, in the early 1930s, withdrew and turned to the more specialised areas of Marxist aesthetics and literary theory, justifying his public support of the Stalinist politics in the terms of the Hegelian critique of the Beautiful Soul: the Soviet Union, including all its unexpected hardships, was the outcome of the October Revolution, so, instead of condemning it from the comfortable position of the Beautiful Soul keeping its hands clean, one should bravely 'recognise the heart in the cross of the present' (Hegel's formula of the post-revolutionary reconciliation) – Adorno was fully justified in sarcastically designating this Lukács as someone who misread the clatter of his chains for the triumphant march forward of World Spirit, and, consequently, endorsed the 'extorted reconciliation' between the individual and society in the East European Communist countries.[10]

II

This fate of Lukács none the less confronts us with the difficult problem of the emergence of Stalinism: it is too easy to contrast the authentic revolutionary *élan* of the 'Event 1917' with its later Stalinist Thermidor – the true problem is 'how did we get from there to here?' As Alain Badiou has emphasised, the great task today is to think the necessity of the passage from Leninism to Stalinism without denying the tremendous emancipatory potential of the Event of October, i.e. without falling into the old liberal babble of the 'totalitarian' potential of radical emancipatory politics, on account of which every revolution has to end up in a repression worse than that of the old overthrown social order. The challenge to be faced here is the following one: while conceding that the rise of Stalinism is the inherent result of the Leninist revolutionary logic (not the result of some particular external corruptive influence, like the

'Russian backwardness' or the 'Asiatic' ideological stance of its masses), one should none the less stick to a concrete analysis of the logic of the political process and, at any price, avoid the recourse to some immediate quasi-anthropological or philosophical general notion like 'instrumental reason'. The moment we endorse this gesture, Stalinism loses its specificity, its specific political dynamic, and turns into just another example of this general notion (the gesture exemplified by Heidegger's famous remark, from his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, that, from the epochal historical view, Russian communism and Americanism are 'metaphysically the same').

Within Western Marxism, it was, of course, Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, as well as Horkheimer's later numerous essays on the 'critique of instrumental reason', that accomplished this fateful shift from concrete socio-political analysis to philosophico-anthropological generalisation, the shift by means of which the reifying 'instrumental reason' is no longer grounded in concrete capitalist social relations, but itself almost imperceptibly becomes their quasi-transcendental 'principle' or 'foundation'. Strictly correlative to this shift is the almost total absence of theoretical confrontation with Stalinism in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, in clear contrast to its permanent obsession with Fascist anti-Semitism. The very exceptions to this rule are tell-tale: Franz Neumann's *Behemoth*, a study of national socialism which, in the typical fashionable style of the late 1930s and 1940s, suggests that the three great world systems – emerging New Deal capitalism, Fascism and Stalinism – tend towards the same bureaucratic, globally organised, 'administered' society; Herbert Marcuse's *Soviet Marxism*, his least passionate and arguably worst book, a strangely neutral analysis of the Soviet ideology with no clear commitments; and, finally, attempts by some Habermasians who, reflecting upon the emerging dissident phenomena, endeavoured to elaborate the notion of civil society as the site of resistance to the Communist regime – interesting politically, but far from offering a satisfactory global theory of the specificity of the Stalinist 'totalitarianism'.[11] The standard excuse – that the Frankfurt School classical authors did not want to oppose Communism too openly, since, by doing this, they would play into the hands of their domestic pro-capitalist cold-war warriors – is obviously insufficient: the

point is not that this fear of being put in the service of official anti-communism proves how they were secretly pro-communist, but rather the opposite, for if they had been really cornered as to where they stood in the Cold War, they would have chosen Western liberal democracy (as Horkheimer explicitly did in some of his late writings). It was *this* ultimate solidarity with the Western system when it was really threatened that they were somehow ashamed to acknowledge publicly, in clear symmetry to the stance of the 'critical democratic socialist opposition' in the German Democratic Republic whose members criticised Party rule, but, the moment the situation became really serious and the socialist system was seriously threatened, they (Brecht *à propos* of the East Berlin workers' demonstrations in 1953, Christa Wolf *à propos* of the Prague Spring in 1968) publicly supported the system. 'Stalinism' (really existing socialism) was thus, for the Frankfurt School, a traumatic topic with regard to which it *had* to remain silent – this silence was the only way for them to retain their inconsistent position of its underlying solidarity with the Western liberal democracy without losing the official mask of its 'radical' leftist critique. Openly acknowledging this solidarity would have deprived the Frankfurt School theorists of their 'radical' aura, changing them into another version of the cold war anti-communist left liberals, while showing too much sympathy for 'really existing socialism' would have forced them to betray their unacknowledged basic commitment.

It is difficult not to be surprised by the unconvincing, 'flat' character of the standard anti-communist accounts of Stalinism with their references to the 'totalitarian' character of radical emancipatory politics, and so on – today, more than ever, one should insist that only a Marxist, dialectical-materialist, account can effectively explain the rise of Stalinism. While, of course, this task is far beyond the scope of the present essay, one is tempted to risk a brief preliminary remark. Every Marxist recalls Lenin's claim, from his *Philosophical Notebooks*, that no one who has not read and studied in detail Hegel's entire *Science of Logic* can really understand Marx's *Capital* – along the same lines, one is tempted to claim that no one who has not read and studied in detail the chapters on judgement and syllogism from Hegel's *Logic* can grasp the emergence of Stalinism. That is to say, the logic of this emergence can perhaps best be grasped as the succession of the three forms of syllogistic mediation

which vaguely fit the triad of Marxism–Leninism–Stalinism. The three mediated terms (Universal, Particular and Singular) are History (the global historical movement), the Proletariat (the particular class with a privileged relationship to the Universal) and the Communist Party (the singular agent). In the first, classical Marxist, form of their mediation, the Party mediates between History and Proletariat: its action enables the 'empirical' working class to become aware of its historical mission inscribed into its very social position and to act accordingly, i.e. to become a revolutionary subject. The accent is here on the 'spontaneous' revolutionary stance of the proletariat: the Party only acts in a maieutic role, rendering possible the purely formal conversion of the proletariat from the Class-In-Itself to the Class-For-Itself.

However, as always in Hegel, the 'truth' of this mediation is that, in the course of its movement, its starting point, the presupposed identity, is falsified. In the first form, this presupposed identity is that between Proletariat and History, that is the notion that the revolutionary mission of universal liberation is inscribed in the very objective social condition of the proletariat as the 'universal class', as the class whose true particular interests overlap with the universal interests of humanity – the third term, the Party, is merely the operator of the actualisation of this universal potential of the particular. What becomes palpable in the course of this mediation is that the proletariat can 'spontaneously' achieve only trade-unionist reformist awareness, so we come to the (supposedly) Leninist conclusion: the constitution of the revolutionary subject is possible only when (those who will become) party intellectuals gain insight into the inner logic of the historical process and accordingly 'educate' the Proletariat. In this second form, the Proletariat is thus diminished to the role of the mediator between History (global historical process) and the scientific knowledge about it embodied in the Party: after gaining insight into the logic of historical process, the Party 'educates' workers into being the willing instrument of the realisation of the historical goal. The presupposed identity in this second form is that between Universal and Singular, between History and the Party, that is the notion that the Party as the 'collective intellectual' possesses effective knowledge of the historical process. This presupposition is best rendered by the overlapping of the 'subjective' and the 'objective' aspect: the notion of History

as an objective process determined by necessary laws is strictly correlative to the notion of party intellectuals as the Subject whose privileged knowledge of, and insight into, this process allows it to intervene and direct it. And, as one might expect, it is this presupposition that is falsified in the course of the second mediation, bringing us to the third, 'Stalinist', form of mediation, the 'truth' of the entire movement, in which the Universal (History itself) mediates between the Proletariat and the Party: to put it in somewhat simplistic terms, the Party merely uses the reference to History – that is, its doctrine, 'dialectical and historical materialism', embodying its privileged access to the 'inexorable necessity of the historical progress' – in order to legitimate its actual domination over and exploitation of the working class, that is, to provide the opportunistic pragmatic Party decisions with a kind of 'ontological cover'.[12]

To put it in the terms of the speculative coincidence of the opposites, or of the 'infinite judgement' in which the highest coincides with the lowest, the fact that Soviet workers were awakened early in the morning by the music from loudspeakers playing the first chords of the *Internationale* whose words are 'Arise, you prisoners of work!' is granted a deeper ironic meaning: the ultimate 'truth' of the pathetic original meaning of these words ('Resist, break the chains that constrain you and reach for freedom!') turns out to be its literal meaning, the call to the tired workers 'Get up, slaves, and start working for us, the Party *nomenklatura*!'

III

So, back to the triple syllogistic mediation of History, the Proletariat and the Party: if each form of mediation is the 'truth' of the preceding one (the Party that instrumentalises the working class as the means to realise its goal founded in the insight into the logic of the historical progress is the 'truth' of the notion that the Party merely enables the Proletariat to become aware of its historical mission, that it only enables it to discover its 'true interest'; the Party ruthlessly exploiting working classes is the 'truth' of the notion that the Party just realises through them its profound

insight into the logic of History), does this mean that this movement is inexorable, that we are dealing with an iron logic on account of which, the moment we endorse the starting point – the premise that the Proletariat is, as to its social position, potentially the 'universal class' – we are caught, with a diabolic compulsion, in a process at the end of which there is the Gulag? If this were the case, *History and Class Consciousness*, in spite of (or, rather, on account of) its intellectual brilliance, would be the founding text of Stalinism, and the standard postmodernist dismissal of this book as the ultimate manifestation of Hegelian essentialism, as well as Althusser's identification of Hegelianism as the secret philosophical core of Stalinism – the teleological necessity of the progress of the entire History towards the proletarian revolution as its great turning point, in which Proletariat as the historical Subject–Object, the 'universal class' enlightened by the Party about the mission inscribed into its very objective social position, accomplishes the self-transparent Act of liberation – would be fully justified. The violent reaction of the partisans of 'dialectical materialism' against *History and Class Consciousness* would again be an example of Lucien Goldmann's rule of how the ruling ideology necessarily has to disavow its true fundamental premises: in this perspective, the Lukácsian megalomaniac Hegelian notion of the Leninist Party as the historical Spirit embodied, as the 'collective intellectual' of the Proletariat qua absolute Subject–Object of History, would be the hidden 'truth' of the apparently more modest 'objectivist' Stalinist account of revolutionary activity as grounded in a global ontological process dominated by universal dialectical laws. And, of course, it would be easy to play against this Hegelian notion of Subject–Object the basic deconstructionist premise that the subject emerges precisely in/as the *gap* in the Substance (objective Order of Things), that there is subjectivity only in so far as there is a 'crack in the edifice of Being', only in so far as the universe is in a way 'derailed', 'out of joint', in short, that not only the full actualisation of the subject always fails, but that what Lukács would have dismissed as the 'defective' mode of subjectivity, as the thwarted subject, is effectively the subject itself.

The Stalinist 'objectivist' account would thus be the 'truth' of *History and Class Consciousness* also for strictly inherent philosophical reasons: since the subject is failed by definition, its full actualisation as the

Subject Object of History necessarily entails its self-cancellation, its self-objectivisation as the instrument of History. And, furthermore, it would be easy to assert, against this Hegelo-Stalinist deadlock, the Laclauian postmodern assertion of radical contingency as the very terrain of (political) subjectivity: political universals are 'empty', the link between them and the particular content that hegemonises them is what is at stake in the ideological struggle which is thoroughly contingent, in other words, no political subject has its universal mission written in its 'objective' social condition.

Is, however, this effectively the case with *History and Class Consciousness*? Can Lukács be dismissed as the advocate of such a pseudo-Hegelian assertion of Proletariat as the absolute Subject–Object of History? Let us return to the concrete political background of *History and Class Consciousness*, in which Lukács still speaks as a fully engaged revolutionary. To put it in somewhat rough and simplified terms, the choice, for the revolutionary forces in the Russia of 1917, in the difficult situation in which the bourgeoisie was not able to bring to fruition the democratic revolution, was the following one.

On the one hand, the Menshevik stance was that of obedience to the logic of the 'objective stages of development': first the democratic revolution, then the proletarian revolution. In the whirlpool of 1917, instead of capitalising on the gradual disintegration of state apparatuses and building on the widespread popular discontent and resistance against the provisional government, all radical parties should resist the temptation to push the movement too far and rather join forces with democratic bourgeois elements in order first to achieve the democratic revolution, waiting patiently for the 'mature' revolutionary situation. From this point, a socialist take-over in 1917, when the situation was not yet 'ripe', would trigger a regression to primitive terror . . . (Although this fear of the catastrophic terrorist consequences of a 'premature' uprising may seem to augur the shadow of Stalinism, the ideology of Stalinism effectively marks a *return* to this 'objectivist' logic of the necessary stages of development.)[13]

On the other hand, the Leninist stance was to take a leap, throwing oneself into the paradox of the situation, seizing the opportunity and *intervening*, even if the situation was 'premature', with a wager that this

very 'premature' intervention would radically change the 'objective' relationship of forces itself, within which the initial situation appeared as 'premature', that is, that it would undermine the very standards with reference to which the situation was judged as 'premature'.

Here, one must be careful not to miss the point: it is not that, in contrast to Mensheviks and sceptics among the Bolsheviks themselves, Lenin thought that the complex situation of 1917, that is the growing dissatisfaction of the broad masses with the irresolute politics of the provisional government, offered a unique chance of 'jumping over' one phase (the democratic bourgeois revolution), of 'condensing' the two necessary consecutive stages (democratic bourgeois revolution and proletarian revolution) into one. Such a notion still accepts the fundamental underlying objectivist 'reified' logic of the 'necessary stages of development'; it merely allows for the different rhythm of its course in different concrete circumstances (in other words, that in some countries, the second stage can immediately follow the first one). In contrast to this, Lenin's point is much stronger: ultimately, there is no objective logic of the 'necessary stages of development', since 'complications' arising from the intricate texture of concrete situations and/or from the unanticipated results of 'subjective' interventions always derail the straight course of things. As Lenin was keen on observing, the fact of colonialism and of the super-exploited masses in Asia, Africa and Latin America radically affects and 'displaces' the 'straight' class struggle in the developed capitalist countries – to speak about 'class struggle' without taking into account colonialism is an empty abstraction which, translated into practical politics, can result only in condoning the 'civilising' role of colonialism and thus, by subordinating the anti-colonialist struggle of the Asian masses to the 'true' class struggle in developed Western states, de facto accepts that the bourgeoisie defines the terms of the class struggle.[14] One is tempted to resort here to Lacanian terms: what is at stake in this alternative is the (in)existence of the 'big Other': the Mensheviks relied on the all-embracing foundation of the positive logic of historical development, while Bolsheviks (Lenin, at least) were aware that 'the big Other doesn't exist' – a political intervention proper does not occur within the coordinates of some underlying global matrix, since what it achieves is precisely the 'reshuffling' of this very global matrix.

This, then, is the reason that Lukács had such admiration for Lenin: his Lenin was the one who, *à propos* of the split in Russian social democracy between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, when the two factions fought about a precise formulation of who could be a party member as defined in the party programme, wrote: 'Sometimes, the fate of the entire working class movement for long years to come can be decided by a word or two in the party programme.' Or the Lenin who, when he saw the chance for the revolutionary take-over in late 1917, said: 'History will never forgive us if we miss this opportunity!' At a more general level, the history of capitalism is a long history of how the predominant ideologico-political framework was able to accommodate – and to soften the subversive edge of – the movements and demands that seemed to threaten its very survival. For example, for a long time, sexual libertarians thought that monogamic sexual repression was necessary for the survival of capitalism – now we know that capitalism can not only tolerate, but even actively incite and exploit forms of 'perverse' sexuality, not to mention promiscuous indulgence in sexual pleasures. However, the conclusion to be drawn from it is *not* that capitalism has the endless ability to integrate and thus cut off the subversive edge of all particular demands – the question of timing, of 'seizing the moment', is crucial here. A certain particular demand possesses, at a specific moment, a global detonating power; it functions as a metaphoric stand-in for the global revolution: if we unconditionally insist on it, the system will explode; if, however, we wait too long, the metaphoric short-circuit between this particular demand and the global overthrow is dissolved, and the system can, with sneering hypocritical satisfaction, make the reply 'You wanted this? Here, have it!', without anything truly radical happening. The art of what Lukács called *Augenblick* – the moment when, briefly, there is an opening for an *act* to intervene in a situation – is the art of seizing the right moment, of aggravating the conflict *before* the system can accommodate itself to our demand. So we have here a Lukács who is much more 'Gramscian' and conjuncturalist/contingentian than is usually assumed – the Lukácsian *Augenblick* is unexpectedly close to what, today, Alain Badiou endeavours to formulate as the Event: an intervention that cannot be accounted for in the terms of its pre-existing 'objective conditions'. The crux of Lukács's argumentation is to

reject the reduction of the act to its 'historical circumstances': there are no neutral 'objective conditions', or, in Hegelese, all presuppositions are already minimally posited.

Exemplary here is, at the very beginning of the present book, Lukács's analysis of the 'objectivist' enumeration of the causes of the failure of the Hungarian revolutionary council-dictatorship in 1919: the treason of the officers in the army, the external blockade that caused hunger . . . Although these are undoubtedly facts that played a crucial role in the revolutionary defeat, it is none the less methodologically wrong to evoke them as raw facts, without taking into account the way they were 'mediated' by the specific constellation of the 'subjective' political forces. Take the blockade: why was it that, in contrast to even stronger blockade of the Russian Soviet state, the latter did not succumb to the imperialist and counter-revolutionary onslaught? Because, in Russia, the Bolshevik Party made the masses aware of how this blockade is the result of foreign and domestic counter-revolutionary forces, while, in Hungary, the Party was ideologically not strong enough, so the working masses succumbed to the anti-Communist propaganda which claimed that the blockade was the result of the 'anti-democratic' nature of the regime – the logic of 'let's return to "democracy" and foreign aid will start to flow in . . .'. Treason of the officers? Yes, but why did the same treason not lead to the same catastrophic consequences in Soviet Russia? And, when traitors were discovered, why was it not possible to replace them with reliable cadres? Because the Communist Party was not strong and active enough, while the Russian Bolshevik Party mobilised properly the soldiers who were ready to fight to the end to defend the revolution. Of course, one can claim that the weakness of the Communist Party is again an 'objective' component of the social situation; however, behind this 'fact', there are again other subjective decisions and acts, so that we never reach the zero level of a purely 'objective' state of things – the ultimate point is not objectivity, but social 'totality' as the process of the global 'mediation' between the subjective and the objective aspects. In other words, the Act cannot ever be reduced to an outcome of objective conditions.

To take an example from a different domain, the way an ideology involves 'positing its presuppositions' is also easily discernible in the

standard (pseudo)-explanation of the growing acceptance of the Nazi ideology in the Germany of the 1920s by the fact that the Nazis were deftly manipulating ordinary middle-class people's fears and anxieties generated by the economic crisis and fast social changes. The problem with this explanation is that it overlooks the self-referential circularity at work here: yes, the Nazis certainly did deftly manipulate fears and anxieties – however, far from being simple pre-ideological facts, these fears and anxieties were already the product of a certain ideological perspective. In other words, the Nazi ideology itself (co)generated 'anxieties and fears' against which it then proposed itself as a solution.

IV

We can now return again to our triple 'syllogism' and determine in what, precisely, resides its mistake: in the very opposition between its first two forms. Lukács, of course, is opposed to the 'spontaneist' ideology of advocating autonomous grass-roots self-organisation of the working masses against the externally imposed 'dictatorship' of the Party bureaucrats, as well as to the pseudo-Leninist (actually Kautsky's) notion that the 'empirical' working class can, on its own, reach only trade-unionist reformist level, and that the only way for it to become the revolutionary subject is that independent intellectuals gain a neutral 'scientific' insight into the 'objective' necessity of the passage from capitalism to socialism, and then import this knowledge into the empirical working class, 'educating' them about the mission inscribed into their very objective social position. It is here that we encounter the opprobrious dialectical 'identity of the opposites' at its purest: the problem with these oppositions is not that the two poles are too crudely opposed and that the truth is somewhere in between, in their 'dialectical mediation' (class consciousness emerges from the 'interaction' between spontaneous self-awareness of the working class and the educational activity of the Party); the problem is rather that the very notion that the working class has the inner potential to reach adequate revolutionary class consciousness (and, consequently, that the Party merely plays a modest, self-erasing, maieutic role of enabling the empirical workers to actualise this potential)

legitimises the Party's exertion of dictatorial pressure over the 'empirical', actually existing workers and their confused, opportunistic self-awareness, in the name of (the Party's correct insight into) what their true inner potentials and/or their 'true long-term interests' in fact are. In short, Lukács is here simply applying to the false opposition between 'spontaneism' and external party domination the Hegelian speculative identification of the 'inner potential' of an individual with the external pressure exerted on him by his educators: to say that an individual possesses 'inner potential' to be a great musician is strictly equivalent to the fact that this potential has to be already present in the educator who, through external pressure, will compel the individual to actualise it.

So the paradox is that the more we insist on how revolutionary stance directly translates the true 'inner nature' of the working class, the more are we compelled to exert external pressure on the 'empirical' working class to actualise this inner possibility. In other words, the 'truth' of this immediate identity of the opposites, of the first two forms, is, as we have seen, the third form, the Stalinist mediation – why? Because this immediate identity precludes any place for the *act* proper: if class consciousness arises 'spontaneously', as the actualisation of inner potential inscribed into the very objective situation of the working class, then there is no real act at all, just the purely formal conversion from in-itself to for-itself, the gesture of bringing to light what was always-already there; if the proper revolutionary class consciousness is to be 'imported' via the Party, then we have, on the one hand, 'neutral' intellectuals who gain the 'objective' insight into historical necessity (without engaged *intervention* into it), and then what is ultimately their instrumental-manipulative use of the working class as the tool to actualise the necessity already written in the situation – again, no place for an *act* proper.

This notion of the act also enables us to deal with the feature that seems to justify fully the critical dismissal of Lukács as a determinist 'Hegelian' Marxist: his ill-famed distinction between empirical, factual, class consciousness (a phenomenon of collective psychology to be established via positive sociological research) and the 'attributed/ascribed/imputed (*zugerechnete*)' class consciousness (the consciousness that it is

'objectively possible' for a certain class to achieve if it fully mobilises its subjective resources). As Lukács emphasises, this opposition is not simply the opposition between truth and falsity: in contrast to all other classes, it is 'objectively possible' for the proletariat to achieve self-consciousness which allows it the correct insight into the true logic of the historical totality – it depends on the mobilisation of its subjective potential through the Party to what extent the factual working class will reach the level of this 'ascribed' class consciousness. In contrast to the proletariat, the 'imputed' consciousness of all other classes, although it also reaches beyond their factual consciousness, is not yet the true insight into the historical totality, but remains an ideological distortion (Lukács refers here to Marx's well-known analysis of the French Revolution of 1848 in which the cause of Napoleon III's '18th Brumaire' was that the radical bourgeoisie did not even fully actualise its own progressive political potential). The reproach imposes itself here almost automatically: does not Lukács himself implicitly regress to the Kantian opposition between the ideal formal possibility and the empirical factual state of things which always lags behind this ideal? And is not implicit in this lag the justification of the domination of the Party over the working class: the Party is ultimately precisely the mediator between the 'imputed' and the factual consciousness – it knows the potential ideal consciousness and endeavours to 'educate' the empirical working class to reach this level? If this were to be all that Lukács means by 'subjective mediation', by act and decision, then, of course, we would still remain within the confines of the 'reified' reliance on the 'objective stages of development': there is the prescribed ideal-typical limit of what is 'objectively possible', the limit of the 'ascribed' consciousness determined by the objective social position of a class, and all the manoeuvring space that is left to historical agents is the gap between this 'objectively possible' maximum and the extent to which they effectively approach this maximum.

There, is, however, another possibility open: to read the gap between factual and 'imputed' class consciousness not as the standard opposition between the ideal type and its factual blurred actualisation, but as the inner self-fissure (or 'out-of-jointness') of the historical subject. To be more precise, when one speaks of the proletariat as the 'universal class',

one should bear in mind the strictly dialectical notion of universality which becomes actual, 'for itself', only in the guise of its opposite, in an agent who is out-of-place in any particular position within the existing global order and thus entertains towards it a negative relationship – let me quote here Ernesto Laclau's apposite formulation (thoroughly Hegelian notwithstanding Laclau's declared anti-Hegelianism):

> the universal is part of my identity in so far as I am penetrated by a constitutive lack – that is, in so far as my differential identity has failed in its process of constitution. The universal emerges out of the particular not as some principle underlying and explaining it, but as an incomplete horizon suturing a dislocated particular identity.[15]

In this precise sense, 'the universal is the symbol of a missing fullness':[16] I can relate to the Universal as such only in so far as my particular identity is thwarted, 'dislocated', only in so far as some impediment prevents me from 'becoming what I already am' (with regard to my particular social position). The claim that the proletariat is the 'universal class' is thus ultimately equivalent to the claim that, within the existing global order, the proletariat is the class that is radically dislocated (or, as Badiou would have put it, occupying the point of 'symptomal torsion') with regard to the social body: while other classes can still maintain the illusion that 'Society exists', and that they have their specific place within the global social body, the very existence of the proletariat repudiates the claim that 'Society exists'. In other words, the overlapping of the Universal and the Particular in the proletariat does *not* stand for their immediate identity (in the sense that the particular interests of the proletariat are at the same time the universal interests of humanity, so that the proletarian liberation will be equivalent to the liberation of the entire humanity): the universal revolutionary potential is rather 'inscribed into the very being of the proletariat' as its inherent radical split. This split, again, is not the immediate split between the particular interests/positions of the proletariat and its universal historical mission – the 'universal mission' of the proletariat arises from the way the proletariat's very particular existence is 'barred', hindered, from the way proletariat is a priori ('in its very notion', to put it in Hegelese) not

able to realise its very *particular* social identity. The split is thus the split between the particular positive identity and the barrier, inherent blockage, that prevents the proletarians from actualising this very particular positive identity (their 'place in society') – only if we conceive of the split in this way, is there a space for the act proper, not only for the actions that follow universal 'principles' or 'rules' given in advance and thus providing the 'ontological cover' for our activity.

Therein resides the ultimate difference between, on the one hand, the authentic Leninist Party, and, on the other hand, the Kautskyist–Stalinist Party as embodying the non-engaged 'objective knowledge' which is to be imparted to the uneducated working class: the Kautskyist Stalinist Party addresses the proletariat from a position of 'objective' knowledge intended to supplement the proletarian subjective (self)-experience of suffering and exploitation, i.e. the split here is the split between the proletarian 'spontaneous' subjective self-experience and the objective knowledge about one's social situation, while, in an authentic Leninist Party, the split is thoroughly subjective, that is, the Party addresses the proletariat from a radically subjective, engaged position of the lack that prevents the proletarians from achieving their 'proper place' in the social edifice.[17] And, furthermore, it is this crucial difference that also explains why the Stalinist sublime body of the Leader (with mausoleums and all the accompanying theatrics) is unthinkable within the strict Leninist horizon: the Leader can be elevated into a figure of Sublime Beauty only when the 'people' whom he represents is no longer the thoroughly dislocated proletariat, but the positively existing substantial entity, the 'working masses'.

To those whose reaction here is that what we are describing now is a hair-splitting philosophical distinction of no use to engaged fighters, let us recall a similar experience with Kant's practical philosophy: is it not that Kant's apparently 'difficult' propositions on the pure form of law as the only legitimate motif of an ethical act, and so on, suddenly become clear if we directly relate them to our immediate ethical experience? And the same goes for the above-mentioned distinction: the gap that separates reliance on the 'objective logic' from the risk of an authentic act is 'intuitively' known to anyone engaged in a struggle.

V

A further possible misunderstanding has to be clarified here: Lukács's position is not, as it may appear to a superficial reader, that the whole of history hitherto was dominated by 'reified' objective necessity, and that it is only with the late capitalist crisis, and the concomitant strengthening of the revolutionary proletarian stance, that the 'objective possibility' arises for the all-encompassing chain of necessity to be broken. All human history is characterised by the dialectical tension and interdependence between necessity and contingency; what one should be careful about is to distinguish different historical shapes of this interdependence. In pre-modern society, it was, of course, not only possible – it effectively happened all the time – that totally meaningless contingencies (the madness or some other psychological peculiarity of the monarch) could lead to global catastrophic consequences (like the utter destruction of rich and highly civilised Arab cities by the Mongols); however, psychological idiosyncrasies could have such consequences only within certain well-defined power relations and relations of production in which so much authority is effectively invested in the leader. In modern capitalist society, contingency reigns in the guise of the 'unpredictable' interplay of market forces which can 'for no apparent reason at all' instantly ruin individuals who worked hard all their life: as Marx and Engels already put it, the Market is the modern reincarnation of the ancient capricious Fate, in other words, this 'contingency' is the form of appearance of its dialectical obverse, of the impenetrable blind necessity of the capitalist system. Finally, in the revolutionary process, the space is open, not for a metaphysical foundational 'act', but for a contingent, strictly 'conjunctural', intervention that can break the very chain of Necessity dominating all history hitherto.

Exemplary is here Lukács's critique of the liberal sceptical attitude towards the October Revolution, which considers it as an important, but risky 'political experiment': the position of 'let's wait and patiently observe its final outcome . . .'. As Lukács is fully justified to retort, such an attitude transposes the experimental/observational stance of natural sciences on to human history: it is the exemplary case of observing a process from a safe distance, exempting oneself from it, not of the

engaged stance of someone who – as always-already caught, embedded, in a situation – intervenes in it. Of course, Lukács's key point is here that we are not dealing with a simple opposition between the stance of impassive observation and the stance of practical intervention ('enough of words and empty theories, let's finally do something!'): Lukács advocates the dialectical unity/mediation of theory and practice, in which even the utmost contemplative stance is eminently 'practical' (in the sense of being embedded in the totality of social (re)production and thus expressing a certain 'practical' stance of how to survive in this totality), and, on the other hand, even the most 'practical' stance implies a certain 'theoretical' framework; it materialises a set of implicit ideological propositions. For example, the resigned 'melancholic' stance of searching for the meaning of life in withdrawn contemplative wisdom is clearly embedded in the historical totality of a society in decay, in which the public space no longer offers an outlet for creative self-affirmation; or, the stance of external observer who treats social life as an object in which one 'intervenes' in an instrumental-manipulative way and 'makes experiments', is the very stance required for the participation in a market society. On the other hand, the utmost individualistic stance of radical hedonism 'practises' the notion of man as a hedonistic being, that is, as Hegel would have put it, a person is never directly a hedonist, rather he relates himself to himself as one. In classical Marxist terms, not only is social consciousness a constitutive part of social being (of the actual process of social (re)production), but this 'being' itself (the actual process of social (re)production) can run its course only if mediated/sustained by the adequate form of 'consciousness': say, if, in a capitalist society, individuals are, in their daily practical lives, not prey to 'commodity fetishism', the very 'real' process of capitalist (re)production is perturbed. Here enters the crucial Hegelian notion of (self)-consciousness, which designates the gaining of self-awareness as an inherently *practical act*, to be opposed to the contemplative notion of a scientific 'correct insight': self-consciousness is an insight that directly 'changes its object', affects its actual social status – when the proletariat becomes aware of its revolutionary potential, this very 'insight' transforms it into an *actual* revolutionary subject.

In so far as (self)-consciousness designates the way things appear to

the subject, this identity of thought and being in the practical act of self-consciousness can also be formulated as the dialectical identity of Essence and its Appearance. Lukács relies here on Hegel's analysis of the 'essentiality' of appearance: appearance is never a 'mere' appearance, it belongs to the essence itself. This means that consciousness (ideological appearance) is also an 'objective' social fact with an effectivity of its own: as we already pointed out, bourgeois 'fetishistic' consciousness is not simply an 'illusion' masking actual social processes, but a mode of organisation of the very social *being*, crucial to the actual process of social (re)production.[18]

Lukács here can be said to participate in the great 'paradigm shift' at work also in quantum physics, and whose main feature is not the dissolution of 'objective reality', its reduction to a 'subjective construction', but, on the contrary, the unheard-of assertion of the 'objective' status of the appearance itself. It is not sufficient to oppose the way things 'objectively are' to the way they 'merely appear to us': the way they appear (to the observer) affects their very 'objective being'. This is what is so path-breaking in quantum physics: the notion that the limited horizon of the observer (or of the mechanism that registers what goes on) determines what effectively goes on. We cannot say that self-awareness (or colour or material density or . . .) designate merely the way we experience reality, while 'objectively' there are only subatomic particles and their fluctuations: these 'appearances' have to be taken into account if we are to explain what 'effectively is going on'. In a homologous way, the crux of Lukács's notion of class consciousness is that the way the working class 'appears to itself' determines its 'objective' being.[19]

It is of crucial importance not to misread Lukács's theses as another version of the standard hermeneutic opposition between *Erklären* (the explanatory procedure of the natural sciences) and *Verstehen* (the form of comprehension at work in the human sciences): when Lukács opposes the act of self-consciousness of a historical subject to the 'correct insight' of natural sciences, his point is not to establish an epistemological distinction between two different methodological procedures, but, precisely, to break up the very standpoint of formal 'methodology' and to assert that *knowledge itself is part of social reality*. All knowledge, of nature and of society, is a social process, mediated by society, an 'actual' part of social

structure, and, on account of this self-referential inclusion of knowledge into its own object, a revolutionary theory is ultimately (also) its own meta-theory. Although Lukács was adamantly opposed to psychoanalysis, the parallel with Freud is here striking: in the same way, psychoanalysis also interprets the resistance against itself as the result of the very unconscious processes that are its topic, Marxism interprets the resistance against its insights as the 'result of the class struggle in theory', as accounted for by its very object – in both cases, theory is caught in a self-referential loop; it is, in a way, the theory about the resistance to itself.

However, a further, even more fateful, misunderstanding would be to read this thesis on the social mediation of every form of knowledge as the standard historicist assertion of how each form of knowledge is a social phenomenon, 'a child of its age', dependent upon and expressing the social conditions of its emergence. Lukács's point is precisely to undermine this false alternative of historicist relativism (there is no neutral knowledge of 'objective reality', since all knowledge is biased, embedded in a specific 'social context') and of the distinction between the socio-historical conditions and the inherent truth-value of a body of knowledge (even if a certain theory emerged within a specific social context, this context provides only external conditions, which in no way diminish or undermine the 'objective truth' of its propositions – for example, although, as everyone knows, Darwin elaborated his evolutionary theory under the stimulus of Malthus's economics, Darwinism is still acknowledged as true, while Malthus is deservedly half-forgotten). As he puts it in *History and Class Consciousness*, the problem of historicism is that it is not 'historicist' enough: it still presupposes an empty external observer's point *for* which and *from* which all that happens is historically relativised. Lukács overcomes this historicist relativisation by bringing it to its conclusion, that is by way of including in the historical process the observing subject itself, thus undermining the very exempted measure with regard to which everything is relativised: the attainment of self-consciousness of a revolutionary subject is *not* an insight into how its own stance is relativised, conditioned by specific historical circumstances, but a practical act of *intervening* into these 'circumstances'.[20] Marxist theory describes society from the

engaged standpoint of its revolutionary change and thereby transforms its object (the working class) into a revolutionary subject – the neutral description of society is formally 'false', since it involves the acceptance of the existing order. Far from 'relativising' the truth of an insight, the awareness of its own embeddedness in a concrete constellation – and thereby of its engaged, partial, character – is a positive condition of its truth.

And therein resides the great achievement of the present manuscript: in *Chvostismus und Dialektik*, Lukács sets the record straight with regard to the possible misreadings of his basic position as articulated in *History and Class Consciousness*, not only against its obvious target, the emerging pseudo-Leninist Soviet orthodoxy that was later sanctified in the guise of the Stalinist 'Marxism–Leninism', but – for us today even more importantly – against the already mentioned predominant Western reception of *History and Class Consciousness* focused on the fashionable motif of 'reification'. When, in *Chvostismus*, Lukács elaborates in detail the passing critical remarks on Engels's notion of the 'dialectics of nature' from *History and Class Consciousness*, he makes it clear that his critique of the 'dialectics of nature' is embedded in his more fundamental critique of the notion of the revolutionary process as determined by the 'objective' laws and stages of historical development. The point of Lukács's polemics against the 'dialectics of nature' is thus not the Kantian abstract-epistemological one (the notion of 'dialectics of nature' misrecognises the 'subjective mediation' of what appears as natural reality, i.e. the subjective constitution of – what we perceive as 'reality'), but ultimately a *political* one: the 'dialectics of nature' is problematic because it legitimises the stance towards the revolutionary process as obeying 'objective laws', leaving no space for the radical contingency of *Augenblick*, for the *act* as a practical intervention irreducible to its 'objective conditions'.

And today, in the era of the worldwide triumph of democracy when (with some notable exceptions like Alain Badiou) no leftist dares to question the premises of democratic politics, it is more crucial than ever to bear in mind Lukács's reminder, in his polemics against Rosa Luxemburg's critique of Lenin, as to how the authentic revolutionary stance of endorsing the radical contingency of the *Augenblick* should also

not endorse the standard opposition between 'democracy' and 'dictatorship' or 'terror'. The first step to make, if we are to leave behind the opposition between liberal-democratic universalism and ethnic/religious fundamentalism on which even today's mass media focus, is to acknowledge the existence of what one is tempted to call 'democratic fundamentalism': the ontologicisation of democracy into a depoliticised universal framework which is not itself to be (re)negotiated as the result of politico-ideological hegemonic struggles. Lukács is well aware that the qualification of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as the 'democratic rule of the wide working classes, directed only against the narrow circle of ex-ruling classes' is a simplistic sleight of hand: the Bolsheviks, of course, often *did* break the democratic 'rules of the game', we *did* experience the Bolshevik 'Red Terror'.

Democracy as the form of state politics is inherently 'Popperian': the ultimate criterion of democracy is that the regime is 'falsifiable', that is, that a clearly defined public procedure (the popular vote) can establish that the regime is no longer legitimate and must be replaced by another political force. The point is not that this procedure is 'just', but rather that all parties concerned agree in advance and unambiguously upon it irrespective of its 'justice'. In their standard procedure of ideological blackmail, defenders of state democracy claim that the moment we abandon this feature, we enter the 'totalitarian' sphere in which the regime is 'non-falsifiable', that is, it forever avoids the situation of unequivocal 'falsification': whatever happens, even if thousands demonstrate against the regime, the regime continues to maintain that it is legitimate, that it stands for the true interests of the people and that the 'true' people support it . . . Here, we should *reject* this blackmail (as Lukács does *à propos* of Rosa Luxemburg): there are no 'democratic (procedural) rules' one is a priori prohibited to violate. Revolutionary politics is not a matter of 'opinions', but of the truth on behalf of which one often *is* compelled to disregard the 'opinion of the majority' and to impose the revolutionary will against it. In the difficult times of the foreign intervention and civil war after the October Revolution, Trotsky openly admitted that the Bolshevik government was ready sometimes to act against the factual opinion of the majority – not on behalf of a privileged 'insight into objective truth', but on behalf of the very 'subjective'

tension between the fidelity to the Revolutionary Event and the opportunistic retreat from it, the tension that is inherent to the revolutionary process itself. (Significantly, although Stalinism was factually a much more violent dictatorship, it would never openly acknowledge acting against the opinion of the majority – it always clung to the fetish of the People whose true Will the Leadership expresses.) The political legacy of Lukács is thus the assertion of the unconditional, 'ruthless' revolutionary will, ready to 'go to the end', effectively to seize power and undermine the existing totality; its wager is that the alternative between authentic rebellion and its later 'ossification' in a new order is not exhaustive, in other words, that revolutionary effervescence should take the risk of translating its outburst into a New Order. Lenin was right: after the revolution, the anarchic disruptions of the disciplinary constraints of production should be replaced by an even stronger discipline. Such an assertion is thoroughly opposed to the 'postmodern' celebration of the good 'revolt' as opposed to bad 'revolution', or, in more fashionable terms, of the effervescence of the multitude of marginal 'sites of resistance' against any actual attempt to attack the totality itself (see the mass media's depoliticising appropriation of the May 1968 events as an 'outburst of spontaneous youthful creativity against the bureaucratised mass society').[21]

As Alain Badiou repeatedly emphasises, an Event is fragile and rare – so instead of merely focusing on 'how did the October Revolution turn into a Stalinist Thermidor?', we should perhaps turn the question around: is it the Thermidorian forswearing of the Event, the passive following of the course of things, that appears as 'natural' to the human animal? The big question is rather the opposite one: how is it possible that, from time to time, the impossible miracle of an Event does take place at all and leaves traces in the patient work of those who remain faithful to it? So the point is not to 'develop further' Lukács in accordance with the 'demands of new times' (the great motto of all opportunist revisionism, up to New Labour), but to *repeat* the Event in new conditions. Are we still able to imagine ourselves a historical moment when terms like 'revisionist traitor' were not yet parts of the Stalinist mantra, but expressed an authentic engaged insight?

In other words, the question to be asked today *à propos* of the unique Event of the early Marxist Lukács is not: 'How does his work stand in relation to today's constellation? Is it still alive?', but, to paraphrase Adorno's well-known reversal of Croce's patronising historicist question about 'what is dead and what is alive in Hegel's dialectic' (the title of his main work):[22] how do *we today* stand in relation to – in the eyes of – Lukács? Are we still able to commit the *act* proper, described by Lukács? Which social agent is, on account of its radical dislocation, *today* able to accomplish it?

Notes

1. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1963), p. 437.

2. Let me evoke here again my personal experience: roughly, one could say that, in the last two decades of the Communist regime, two philosophical orientations dominated intellectual life in Slovenia: Heideggerianism among the opposition and Frankfurt-school Marxism among the 'official' Party circles. So one would have expected the main theoretical fight to have taken place between these two orientations, with the third block – us, Lacanians and Althusserians – in the role of innocent bystanders. Yet, as soon as polemics broke out, both major orientations ferociously attacked the same particular third author, Althusser. In the 1970s, Althusser actually functioned as a kind of symptomatic point, a name *à propos* of which all the 'official' adversaries, Heideggerians and Frankfurt-Marxists in Slovenia, Praxis-philosophers and central-committee ideologues in Zagreb and Belgrade, suddenly started to speak the same language, pronouncing the same accusations. From the very beginning, the starting point of the Slovene Lacanians was this observation of how the name 'Althusser' triggered an enigmatic uneasiness in all camps. One is even tempted to suggest that the unfortunate event in Althusser's private life (his strangling of his wife) played the role of a welcome pretext, of a 'little piece of reality' enabling his theoretical adversaries to repress the real trauma represented by his theory ('How can a theory of somebody who strangled his wife be taken seriously?'). This resistance to Althusser, whose very excessive, almost 'irrational', character was deeply symptomatic, certified how it was precisely the Althusserian theory – defamed as proto-Stalinist – that served as a kind of 'spontaneous' theoretical tool for effectively undermining the Communist 'totalitarian' regimes: his theory of the Ideological State Apparatuses assigned the crucial role in the reproduction of an ideology to 'external' rituals and practices with regard to which 'inner' beliefs and convictions are strictly secondary. And is it necessary to call attention to the central place of such rituals in 'really existing socialism'? What counted in it was external obedience, not 'inner conviction' – obedience coincided

with the semblance of obedience, which is why the only way to be truly 'subversive' was to act 'naïvely', to make the system 'eat its own words', i.e. to undermine the appearance of its ideological consistency.

Paradoxically, from the perspective of each of these two Marxists, Althusser and Lukács, the other appears as the quintessential Stalinist: for Althusser and post-Althusserians, Lukács's notion of the Communist Party as the quasi-Hegelian Subject legitimises Stalinism; for the followers of Lukács, Althusser's structuralist 'theoretical anti-humanism', his rejection of the entire problematic of alienation and reification, plays into the hands of the Stalinist disregard for human freedom. While this is not the place to engage in detail in this confrontation, suffice it to emphasise how each of the two Marxists does articulate a crucial problematic excluded from the opponent's horizon: in Althusser, it is the notion of Ideological State Apparatuses as the material existence of ideology, and in Lukács, the notion of the historical act. And, of course, there is no easy way to accomplish a 'synthesis' between these two mutually exclusive approaches – perhaps the way to proceed would be via the reference to Antonio Gramsci, the other great founding figure of Western Marxism.

3. *History and Class Consciousness* thus marks a radical break also from the early pre-Marxist Lukács himself, whose main work, *A Theory of the Novel*, belongs to the Weberian tradition of socio-cultural criticism – no wonder that, in this book, he signed his name Georg von Lukács!

4. Of course, if one accepts to play alternative history games, one can safely surmise that, if Lenin were to have read *History and Class Consciousness*, he would have rejected its philosophical premises as 'subjectivist' and contrary to 'dialectical materialism' with its 'reflection' theory of knowledge (it is already significant how, in order to maintain his Leninist credentials, Lukács has virtually to ignore Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*). On the other hand, in Lenin's entire writings, there is only one mention of Lukács: in 1921, in a brief note for the journal *Kommunismus*, the organ of the Comintern for south-eastern Europe, Lenin intervenes in a debate between Lukács and Bela Kun, ferociously attacking Lukács's text as 'very leftist and very bad. In it, Marxism is present only at a purely verbal level' (see V.I. Lenin, *Complete Works* [Russian edition], vol. 41, pp. 135–7). However, this is no way undermines the claim that Lukács is the ultimate philosopher of Leninism: it was rather Lenin himself who was not fully aware of the philosophical stance he 'practised' in his revolutionary work, and who only gradually (through reading Hegel during the First World War) became aware of it. The other key question, of course, is: was this misrecognition of one's true philosophical stance necessary for one's political engagement? In other words, does the rule, established already by Lucien Goldmann, in his classic *The Hidden God*, *à propos* of Pascal and the Jansenists (who were also unacceptable for the ruling Catholic circles), of how the ruling ideology necessarily has to disavow its true fundamental premises, apply also to Leninism? If the answer is 'yes', if the Leninist misrecognition of its philosophical premises is structurally necessary, then Leninism is just another ideology and Lukács's account of it, even if true, is insufficient: it can penetrate to the true philosophical premises of Leninism, but what it cannot explain is the very gap between

truth and appearance, i.e. the necessary disavowal of the truth in the false (objectivist, ontological, 'dialectical materialist') Leninist self-consciousness – as Lukács himself knows very well (this is one of the great Hegelian theses of *History and Class Consciousness*), appearance is never merely appearance, but is, precisely as appearance, essential.

5. F.W.J. Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856–61), vol. VIII, p. 600.

6. See Chapter 9 of Alain Badiou, *Abrégé de métapolitique* (Paris: Seuil, 1998).

7. Incidentally, the lesson of these early years of the October Revolution is ultimately the same as that of today's post-Maoist China: contrary to the liberal ideologists, one has to assert that there is no necessary link between market and democracy. Democracy and market go together only with stable property relations: the moment they are perturbed, we get either dictatorship *à la* Pinochet's Chile or a revolutionary explosion. That is to say, the paradox to be emphasised is that, in the hard years of 'war communism' prior to the application of the New Economic Politics (NEP) which opened up the space again for market 'liberalisation', there was much more democracy in Soviet Russia than in the years of the NEP. The market liberalisation of the NEP goes hand-in-hand with the emergence of the strong party of *apparatchiks* gaining control over society: this party arose precisely as a reaction to the autonomy of the market civil society, out of the need to establish a strong power structure in order to control these newly unleashed forces.

8. See Evert van der Zweerde, *Soviet Historiography of Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997).

9. Paradigmatic here is the legendary story of Ilyenkov's failed participation at a world philosophy congress in the USA in the mid-1960s: Ilyenkov had already been given a visa and was set to take a plane, when his trip was cancelled because his written intervention, 'From the Leninist Point of View', which he had to present in advance to the Party ideologues, displeased them – not because of its (wholly acceptable) content, but simply because of its style, of the engaged way in which it was written; already the opening sentence ('It is my personal contention that . . .') struck a wrong chord.

10. See Theodor W. Adorno, 'Erpresste Versöhnung', in *Noten zur Literatur* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 278.

11. See, as a representative example, Andrew Arato and Jean L. Cohen, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

12. What makes Fidel Castro's famous statement 'Within the Revolution, everything. Outside it, nothing!' problematic and 'totalitarian' is the way its radicality covers up its total indeterminacy: what it leaves unsaid is who, and based on what criteria, will decide if a particular artistic work (the statement was formulated to provide the guideline for dealing with artistic freedom) effectively serves the revolution or undermines it. The way is thus open for the *nomenklatura* to enforce its arbitrary decisions. (There is, however, another possible reading which may redeem this slogan: revolution is not a process that follows predestined 'laws', so there are no a priori objective criteria that

would allow us to draw a line of separation between the revolution and its betrayal – fidelity to the revolution does not reside in simply following and applying a set of norms and goals given in advance, but in the continuous struggle to redefine again and again the line separation.)

13. Let us also not forget that, in the weeks before October Revolution, when the debate was raging between Bolsheviks, Stalin did take sides against Lenin's proposal for an immediate Bolshevik take-over, arguing, along Menshevik lines, that the situation was not yet 'ripe', and that, instead of such dangerous 'adventurism', one should endorse a broad coalition of all anti-Tsarist forces!

14. Again, one can discern here the unexpected closeness to the Althusserian notion of 'overdetermination': there is no ultimate rule that allows one to measure 'exceptions' against it – in real history, there are, in a way, nothing but exceptions.

15. Ernesto Laclau, 'Universalism, Particularism, and the Question of Identity', *October* 61, p. 89.

16. Ibid.

17. Perhaps, a reference to Kierkegaard might be of some help here: this difference is the one between the positive Being of the Universal (the 'mute universality' of a species defined by what all members of the species have in common) and what Kierkegaard called the 'Universal-in-becoming', the Universal as the power of negativity that undermines the fixity of every particular constellation. For a closer elaboration of this distinction, see Chapter 2 of Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (London: Verso, 1999).

18. In a more detailed approach, one would have to elaborate here this key Hegelian notion of the essentiality of appearance. Hegel's point is not the standard platitude that 'an essence has to appear', that it is only as deep as it is wide expressed–externalised, etc., but a much more precise one: essence is, in a way, its own appearance, it appears *as essence* in the domain of appearance, i.e. essence is *nothing but* the appearance of essence, the appearance that there is something behind which is the Essence.

19. Here also, it would be interesting to establish the connection between Lukács and Badiou, for whom 'appearance' is the domain of the consistency of positive 'hard reality', while the order of Being is inherently fragile, inconsistent, elusive, accessible only through mathematics which deals with pure multitudes (see Chapter 14 of Alain Badiou, *Court traité d'ontologie transitoire* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1998). Although Lukács and Badiou are far from deploying the same notion of appearance, what they do have in common is the way both turn around the standard metaphysical opposition between Appearance and Being, in which appearance is transitory, in contrast to the hard positivity of Being – with Lukács, 'appearance' stands for the 'reified' objective reality, while the true 'actuality' is that of the transitory movement of subjective mediation. The homology with quantum physics again imposes itself: in the latter, what we experience as 'reality' is also the order of consistent 'appearance' that emerges through the collapse of quantum fluctuation, while the order of Being is that of the transitory, substanceless quantum fluctuations.

20. The same criticism could also be made apropos of Richard Rorty's notion that there is no objective truth, just a multitude of (more or less effective) stories about ourselves that we narrate to ourselves: the problem with this notion is not that it is too relativistic, but that it is not 'relativistic' enough – in a typically liberal way, Rorty still presupposes a non-relative neutral universal framework of rules (respect for others' pain, etc.) that everyone should respect when indulging in their own idiosyncratic way of life, the framework that guarantees the tolerable co-existence of these ways of life.

21. See, as exemplary of this stance, Kristeva's statements: 'today the word "revolt" has become assimilated to Revolution, to political action. The events of the twentieth century, however, have shown us that political "revolts" – Revolutions – ultimately betrayed revolt, especially the psychic sense of the term. Why? Because revolt, as I understand it – psychic revolt, analytic revolt, artistic revolt – refers to a state of permanent questioning, of transformation, change, an endless probing of appearances. If we look at the history of political revolts, we see that the process of questioning has ceased . . . in the case of the Russian Revolution, a revolution that became increasingly dogmatic as it stopped questioning its own ideals until it ultimately degenerated into totalitarianism' (Julia Kristeva, 'The Necessity of Revolt', *Trans* 5, 1998, p. 125). One is tempted to add sarcastically to this last thesis: were not the great Stalinist or Khmer Rouge purges the most radical form of the political regime's 'permanent questioning'? More seriously, what is problematic with this position of depoliticising the revolt is that it precludes any actual radical political change: the existing political regime is never effectively undermined or overturned, just endlessly 'questioned' from different marginal 'sites of resistance', since every actual radical change is in advance dismissed as inevitably ending up in some form of 'totalitarian' regression. So what this celebration of the 'revolt' effectively amounts to is the old reactionary thesis of how, from time to time, the existing order has to rejuvenate itself with some fresh blood in order to remain viable, like the vulgar conservative wisdom that every good conservative was in his youth briefly a radical leftist . . .

22. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Drei Studien zu Hegel* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1963), p. 13.