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Confronting Reification

*Revitalizing Georg Lukács's Thought
in Late Capitalism*

Edited by

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BRILL

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The assumption that technical experts possess all the knowledge necessary to operate such institutions comes up periodically against resistances that force revisions in procedures, technical disciplines, and designs. We are increasingly aware that such cases have had a significant impact on medicine and technology in recent years.

Lukács argues that workers are situated in a social position from which they can understand the impact of the economic system on their own lives far better than can the capitalists who think in economic terms. Something comparable goes on today as individuals confront the limitations and harms of the technical systems in which they live. Knowledge from below of those limitations and harms can inform technical work and technical disciplines and improve the fit between the form and content of social life. This is a dialectic of lay and expert, which is already engaged under capitalism although it is still almost always treated as exceptional. It must become normal to open up communication across this gap but that implies a redistribution of the existing power relations and their economic foundations. This is why socialism is still an important democratic concept.

Let me conclude. Lukács's concept of reification gives us a powerful way of thinking about social struggle. His concepts of reification and dereification enable us to understand the different modes of action involved in living under and resisting institutions and technologies. We are constantly between the swords of Masamune and Muramasa and we need to be clear on the difference between them. But learning to wield Masamune's sword is difficult. We are a long way from such mastery.

CHAPTER 2

Categorical Forms as Intelligibility of Social Objects: Reification and Objectivity in Lukács

Christian Lotz

1 Introduction: Categorical Forms

Although it is well known that Lukács's emergence as an important philosopher for the European Marxist tradition was only possible because of his neo-Kantian background, with notable exceptions, not many scholars have paid much attention to this background of Lukács's thought.¹ The myth that Lukács made a sudden radical turn away from cultural philosophy towards Marx and Hegel in 1918 was taken for granted, although even in the central essay on reification, the influence of Weber and Simmel is apparent. Though Lukács seems to make a turn towards Hegel in his speculations on the "subject-object" in history, the Fichtean undertones of the claim that the proletariat unites both knowledge and being of history are overwhelming. Moreover, these Fichtean tendencies point back to Lukács's interests in ethics. In addition, many scholars focus exclusively on the reification essay alone, without connecting the essay to the other essays collected in *History and Class Consciousness*, and to the other writings from the previous period of Lukács's thought. In particular, as

¹ Exceptions are Andrew Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History* (New York: Routledge, 2004), Chapter 3; Andrew Feenberg, *The Philosophy Of Praxis: Marx, Lukács And The Frankfurt School* (London: Verso, 2014), Chapter 4; Konstantinos Kouvelakos, *Ästhetizistische Kulturkritik und ethische Utopie. Georg Lukács's neukantianisches Frühwerk* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns, Erster Band* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1988), pp. 474–488. Habermas clearly acknowledges Lukács's debt to Neo-Kantianism and, as a rare exception, he focuses on the concept of *gegenständlichkeitsform*; however, he criticizes Lukács for remaining tied to the concept of instrumental rationality, an epistemological position and a theory of society that is structured by the subject-object schema. Instead, Habermas works out a new concept of communicative rationality. Though I cannot deal with Habermas's critique of Lukács in this paper, I agree with Thompson that "from a Lukácsian perspective, Habermas's move towards communicative rationality is insufficient for such a task because it does nothing to deal with the problem of constitution." (Michael J. Thompson, "Ontology and Totality: Reconstructing Lukács' Concept of Critical Theory," in Michael J. Thompson, ed., *Georg Lukács Reconsidered*, (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 237).

I will indicate in this essay, Lukács's understanding of categories, as introduced in the important essay *What is Orthodox Marxism?*, provides a fruitful perspective for a proper philosophical understanding of the concept of reification, especially since it can provide us, beyond Lukács, with a transcendental and phenomenological conception of social reality. Lukács himself never gave up his early concept of categories. Even in one of his last interviews he points to the central importance of his concept of categories as a concept central for understanding being. I will come back to this point.

Before we go into more details of Lukács's conception of social objects and social reality, we would do well to recall that the intellectual situation in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century was characterized mainly by schools that came out of Kantianism, but tried to move away from his epistemology, such as neo-Kantianism, life philosophy, hermeneutics, and phenomenology. The emerging non-dogmatic Marxism (initiated by Korsch and Lukács) and Frankfurt School critical theory (such as Horkheimer) tried to develop theories though which epistemological and ontological questions can be grounded in social philosophy. All of these attempts to move away from Kant, however, were characterized by a deep suspicion and skepticism about the metaphysical underpinnings of Hegel's thought as it is presented in the *Science of Logic*, as well as about his system, as it is presented in the *Encyclopedia* (which Hegel, leaving aside the early *Phenomenology of Spirit*, later in his life took to be the true introduction to his philosophy). This skepticism regarding absolute idealism and a metaphysics of thought and being, however, drove all of these schools back to struggling with and further developing Kantianism, the philosophical starting point of which presented itself as the only true alternative to Hegel's absolute metaphysics. Accordingly, the intellectual mindset was somewhere located between Kant and Hegel, insofar as most philosophers denied both the subjectivist position of Kant as well as the objectivist position of Hegel. What was needed, then, was a theory that could function as a mediator between a subjectivist conception of knowledge and reality that was localized in human reason alone (as in Kant) and an objectivist conception of knowledge and reality that was localized in some kind of absolute being (as in Hegel).²

2 Andrew Feenberg offers a clarification: "Lukács calls this mode of perception/structure a 'form of objectivity' to get away from any subjectivist notion of mere illusion. Capitalism has a reified form of objectivity which is perceived and acted upon in a reified disposition, closing the circle of social construction" (Andrew Feenberg, "Reification and its Critics," in Thompson, *Georg Lukács Reconsidered*, p. 107).

Given this overall picture, I propose that we should read Lukács through such a lens. For what he tries to develop is a social philosophy that moves towards a new understanding of social being in which epistemological and ontological questions come together and are synthesized. This synthesis of anti-subjectivism and anti-objectivism in Lukács is mediated through two aspects, namely, on the one hand, through a strong "methodological" take on Marx's concept of categories as Marx outlined it in the introduction to the *Grundrisse* (and to which Lukács always refers when it comes to reflections about fundamental social questions) and, on the other hand, through a transformation of Lask's concept of categories as Lask developed it in his work *The Logic of Philosophy*. One commentator nicely summarizes Lask's position as being somewhere between Kant and Hegel:

Lask[...] opposes Kant's 'purely logical' deduction of the categories, because they are after all 'not logical through and through ... but arise from allogical material' and so find their order in a material logic; 'we can determine their place only by way of a detour across this matter, persistently looking at it and regarding its stufflike nature' (II, 62f). Also, contrary to Hegel's panlogism, the individual forms are not intertwined by reciprocal logical relations. They stand before us in a reciprocal heterogeneity and irreducible multiplicity. The pure forms in which we stand at most give us the inner light by which to regard their matter, since it is also being reflected from the impenetrable surface of matter's brute facticity. In our encounter with this interface of facticity, we can only accept its allogical order of being and resign ourselves to the limits of reason.³

In what follows I will outline a few signposts for such a (Laskian) reading of Lukács between Kant and Hegel that help us understand the concept of reification as the central concept for a theory of social reality and social objects as objects that can be neither reduced to subjective nor to objective dimensions alone and which push us towards an understanding of history that is neither historicist nor essentialist. It is important to note, however, that despite the

3 Theodore Kisiel, "Why Students of Heidegger will have to read Emil Lask," *Man and World* 28 (1995), p. 210. For a superb reading and interpretation of the relation between Lask and Heidegger that opened up the entire intellectual field as well as my own reading of Lukács, see Steven Galt Crowell, *Husserl, Heidegger, and the Space of Meaning. Paths toward Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), and Steven Galt Crowell, "Emil Lask: Altheology as Ontology," *Kant Studien* 87 (1996), pp. 69–88.

rejection of Kant's subjectivism, this understanding is transcendental.⁴ This transcendental viewpoint can be defined in the following way: what a social object *is*, is determined by what makes it possible as this or that kind of object; i.e., as its social form or its "being." This social form, however, is neither directly derived from some inner structure of reason; instead, it is itself something that we can only find "at" or "on" the objects and in their relation to us, which, in turn, transforms the classical Kantian question of the "condition of the possibility of 'x'" into a phenomenological and genetic question, insofar as categories are the condition of the possibility of experiencing (social) objects, but they no longer can be generated and "applied" to reality through human reason alone. Instead, they are *historical*. Put differently, the form of objects is found

4 I would like to focus on this methodological conception of history, since Lukács's concept of history remains problematic in the light of contemporary (post-colonial) critiques of progress and history as a unified "super concept" in the sense of "human history" (Erich Hahn, *Lukács und der orthodoxe Marxismus. Eine Studie zu 'Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein'* (Berlin: Aurora Verlag, 2017), p. 121). Lukács clearly has no awareness of his own Euro-Centrism and rarely asks whether he is justified in speaking of one history or "the" history. As Kavoulakos rightly points out, though, the initial motive of Lukács's turn to Marxism is not a somewhat metaphysically distorted concept of history; rather, it is the "experience of the crisis of modern culture and society" (Konstantinos Kavoulakos, "Back to History? Reinterpreting Lukács's Early Work in the Light of the Antinomies of Contemporary Critical Theory," in Thompson, *Georg Lukács Reconsidered*, p. 159); for this, also see Hahn, "Lukács und der orthodoxe Marxismus," p. 98, 104, 118. Kavoulakos argues that Lukács's concept of history is based on "the adoption of a radically presentist perspective" (Kavoulakos, "Back to History," p. 160). We might add that this "presentist perspective" is unfortunately lacking in contemporary critical theory, such as Honneth and even Habermas. For example, the ecological devastation, the looming total control of individual behavior by state power and bio-industries, the global dynamics of capital, the establishment of new walls, the return of the nuclear threat, the re-emergence of European nationalisms, and the emergence of a totally irresponsible managerial class that runs the world together with the most irrational leaders ranging from Berlusconi, Le Pen, to Trump, never comes up in their work. As a consequence, on some level, this perspective remains a-historical and society is no longer seen as changeable. Against this, Kavoulakos argues the following: "In reality, the philosophical problem that Lukács sought to address concerns the way in which we could conceive of a nonmechanistic emergence of a qualitatively new form of consciousness and a corresponding social practice as the concrete embodiment of effective human freedom. On his view, this prospect requires an irreducible manifestation of the authentic objective structure" (ibid., p. 162). As Kavoulakos further points out against Habermas's charge that Lukács's falls back onto a metaphysical conception of history, Lukács did not hold that the change will be an immediate rupture; instead, Lukács is aware that change is "a long process of rupturing a repeated ossification of social reality" (ibid., p. 82). In addition, for an elegant reconstruction of the critiques of Lukács's concept of reification by Adorno, Habermas, and Honneth, see Konstantinos Kavoulakos, "Lukács's Theory of Reification and the Transition of Critical Theory," in Michael J. Thompson, *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), especially pp. 80–83.

and needs to be traced back to what Marx calls in the chapter on primitive accumulation its "origin."⁵

The key term that Lukács uses for all of this is *Gegenständlichkeitsform*, which is a concept by means of which both the unity of objects as well as the form of the unity of objects is addressed.⁶ The social sphere, now understood via the *Gegenständlichkeitsform* or the "form of objecthood," unites both epistemological and ontological aspects of social reality. Reification is precisely the name for the reflexive category of (capitalist) objecthood as being applied equally to social subject and social reality. As Kouvelakos has it, "the *Gegenständlichkeit*, as the primordial relation between form and material, is the foundation for understanding its correlated subjective position";⁷ i.e., the position of the knower is correlative to her position in the social reality. It is important to note that Lukács affirms this point in his *Chvostismus and Dialectic* (1926). He underlines there that the abstract concept of history is overcome by materialist dialectic because it "reveals the concrete, real, historical genesis of the historical structure";⁸ i.e., Lukács does not speak of a historical genesis of certain empirical phenomena; instead, he is concerned with the structural and categorical aspect of social reality. Put differently, the essence of history is to be found in the history of categorical forms. Consequently, a social change in the "real material also changes the entire structure [*Struktur der Zusammenhänge*],"⁹ since the categorical structure or the social form of the social reality under capitalist conditions defines both how objects *are* and how they *are known*.

5 For this, see my interpretation in Christian Lotz, *The Capitalist Schema: Time, Money, and the Culture of Abstraction* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), pp. 96–103.

6 As Andrew Feenberg has remarked, Lukács's relation to Kantianism is obscured by the problematic translation of one of his key words, not only in *History and Class Consciousness*, but also in his later writings (Andrew Feenberg, "Rethinking Reification" in Timothy Hall and Timothy Bewes, eds., *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence: Aesthetics, Politics, Literature* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 118). Most crucially, the following terms are problematic: "Gegenstand" is often translated as object (what gets lost is that "Gegenstand" means that something stands positioned towards against us); "Gegenständlichkeit" is translated with "objectivity" and "Gegenständlichkeitsform" with "forms of objectivity" (instead, I translate it with "forms of objecthood"); finally, the term "Wechselwirkung" has been translated with "interdetermination" or "reciprocal determination" (I translate it with "mutual determination"). For more on this term see my own attempt in Christian Lotz, "Gegenständlichkeit: From Marx to Lukács and Back Again," in Arnold Darrell and Andreas Michels, eds., *Theory and Practice: Critical Theory and the Thought of Andrew Feenberg* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 71–89.

7 Kouvelakos, *Ästhetizistische Kulturkritik und ethische Utopie*, p. 65 (my translation).

8 Georg Lukács, "Chvostismus und Dialektik (1925/26)," *Jahrbuch der Internationalen Georg-Lukács-Gesellschaft* (1998/1999), p. 133.

9 Ibid.

Accordingly, the problem of how to overcome capitalism *must* be a problem of both knowledge and reality.

This middle path between historicism and naturalism or between constructivism and essentialism is based on what Lukács calls a "methodological" understanding of Marx, insofar as Marx provides us with exactly such an outlook. For, on the one hand, the categorial system of commodity form, money, capital, interest, etc. is not something that can, as a form, change every day, but, on the other hand, it can only be understood if we interpret these categories as historical categories whose content can be traced back to an emerging historical field (origin). Consequently, Marx thinks of the structural form of capitalist social reality as laying both beyond historicist relativism and essentialist naturalism. The methodological position, then, implies a position by means of which we are able to argue that despite the categorial form of social reality it is nevertheless historical because the social form is tied to the *real* and historical being of social objects. Consequently, revolutionizing social reality must mean to revolutionize the categorial form of this reality. Accordingly, for Lukács history is not a process in which a multiverse of social mediations are, to use a Sartrean term, totalized; instead, he has an overall transcendental idea of totality, insofar as the totality is not constituted by the relational network of social objects or social actions.¹⁰ Rather, social totality is constituted by the relational network of the *categories* united under one form.¹¹ As we know, this form is

¹⁰ Menninghaus has charged Lukács with a wrongheaded universalization of the concept of reification. As he argues, Lukács concept of reification refers to the contents and not to its form; Lukács confuses the forms of objectivity with the objects themselves (Winfried Menninghaus, "Kant, Hegel und Marx in Lukács's Theorie der verdinglichung. Destruktion eines neomarxistischen 'Klassikers,'" in Norbert W. Bolz and Wolfgang Hübener, eds., *Spiegel und Gleichnis. Festschrift für Jacob Taubes* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1983), p. 321). I do not think that Menninghaus' charge is convincing, since a neo-Kantian reading of the concept of *Gegenständlichkeit*form, as I argue in this paper, shows that with this concept of reification, Lukács refers to the *unity* of form and matter.

¹¹ Though the influence of Simmel and Weber is visible everywhere in *History and Class Consciousness*, the decisive difference between Lukács and them (including contemporary critical theory) is that Lukács assumes that all social systems and social "spheres" follow the same underlying rationality or social form (which is reification). For this, see Mariana Teixeira and Arthur Bueno, "Spectres of reification: Weber and Simmel on History and Class Consciousness," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 17, 2 (2017), pp. 101–115. Additionally, Rüdiger Dannemann argues that reification is the negative expression of a totality that did not exist before capitalism. In this sense, totality is itself a result of the historical process. This thesis deserves more discussion, since, at least to some extent, it clashes with my interpretation of totality as a *categorial* concept and as a concept for the closure of categorial systems; for this, see Rüdiger Dannemann, *Georg Lukács. Eine Einführung* (Wiesbaden: Junfermann Verlag, 2005), p. 61.

referred to as "reification" and it seems to me that many commentators overlook this quasi-Kantian dimension in Lukács's thought and therefore tend to misconstrue the original motives and problems in critical theory to which, I submit, we need to return if we want to overcome the contemporary deadlock in critical theory of the Frankfurt School tradition.¹²

2 History as History of Structural Forms

In order to clarify the transcendental horizon of Lukács's understanding of social reality and its possible change, in what follows, I reconstruct and clarify the problem of method and categories in Lukács in some detail. Despite its length, I need to quote the following passage in its entirety since it is a crucial passage for Lukács's re-reading of Marx on the basis of his neo-Kantian background. It should be noted that the quote is taken from one of his last interviews, which demonstrates that his theory of the categorial aspect of social reality is central for his entire oeuvre.

Marx established – and in my estimation, this is the most important part of Marx's theory – that historicity is the fundamental category of social being, and as such of all being [*Sein*]. In the Paris Manuscripts, Marx says that there is only one science, the science of history, and he even adds, 'a non-objective essence is not an essence' [*ist ein Unwesen*]. This is to say, something [*Sache*] without categorial attributes cannot exist. Existence means, therefore, that something exists as a determinate form of objecthood [*Gegenständlichkeit von bestimmter Form*]; i.e., the determinate form of objecthood makes up the category to which the essence in question belongs. It is this that distinguishes my ontology clearly from earlier philosophies. Traditional philosophy conceived of a system of categories

¹² For a critique of the "formalist" reductions in contemporary critical theory, see Kavoulakos, "Lukács's Theory of Reification and the Transition of Critical Theory," p. 82; for an application of the concept of reification to contemporary issues, see Rüdiger Dannemann, "Das unabgeschlossene Projekt der Verdinglichungskritik. Verdinglichung als Leitbegriff der Gegenwartsdiagnose," in Hanno Plass, ed., *Klasse, Geschichte, Bewusstsein. Was bleibt von Georg Lukács's Theorie* (Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2015), pp. 140–145; For a different position and different idea of critical theory as (re-)centered around concepts of political economy, see Werner Bonefeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2014), as well as my comments on Bonefeld in Christian Lotz, "Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason," *Radical Philosophy Review*, 18/2, 2015, 337–342.

which included the categories of history along with others. In the Marxist system of categories each thing is furnished from the outset with a specific quality, with a specific thinghood and with a categorical being. A non-objectified essence is not an essence [*Urwesen*]. And in what exists [*in-nerhalb dieses Etwas*] is the history of the changing categories. Accordingly, the categories are components of objective reality. Nothing can exist which is not in some sense category. In this respect there is an extraordinarily sharp difference between Marxism and earlier world-views. In Marxism the categorical being of a thing constitutes its being, whereas in the old philosophies categorical being was the fundamental category within which the categories of reality were constituted. It is not the case that history unfolds within the system of categories; rather, history is the changing system of categories. The categories are therefore forms of beings [*Seinsformen*]. To the extent that they also become ideas, they become mirror forms of reality; however, primarily they are forms of being. In this way completely different groups of categories with their various contents come into being.¹³

The following three points are important: Lukács argues [1] that the existing reality is constituted socially and, as such, historically, [2] that existing reality has a categorical structure (its form of objecthood or *Gegenständlichkeit*), [3] that the categorical structure determines both existing reality and history. Accordingly, the essence of the historical has to be localized in the categorical form of social objects and not, as one might think, on the level of the objects. Put in Heideggerian language, the categorical form belongs to the being of beings.¹⁴ The problem of reading this highly suggestive passage is partly a problem of how to translate Lukács's terms. For example, the translator of the English translation translates "Kategorie" with "concept" and not with "category." Furthermore, he translates "Sein" one time with "beings," and another time

¹³ Georg Lukács, *Autobiographische Texte und Gespräche*, Werke, Band 18 (Münster: Aisthesis Verlag, 2009) p. 196; in English: Georg Lukács, *Record of a Life* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 142; translation altered; one of the very few commentators who points to this passage is Werner Jung, "Zur Ontologie des Alltags. Die späte Philosophie von Georg Lukács," in Werner Jung, ed., *Objektive Möglichkeit: Beiträge zu Georg Lukács's Zur Ontologie des gesellschaftlichen Seins. Frank Benseler zum 65. Geburtstag* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag 1995), p. 260.

¹⁴ For this, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p. 6: "Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its Being as it is; in Reality; in presence-at-hand; in subsistence; in validity; in Dasein; in the 'there is.'"

with "existence," which is confusing, given that Lukács uses the term coherently (though in line with Hartmann and not with Heidegger). Categories are determinations of reality as reality; accordingly, they are not comparable to concepts in general. What Lukács wants to say is that something cannot exist as this or that without its categorical determination, and the historicity of beings is to be sought in their categorical constitution. In fact, true history for Lukács is the history of categorical determinations since the categories make beings accessible. Lukács, then, connects Marx's claim in his early work that something only exists in an objectified manner [*gegenständlich*] with what he says later in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, namely, that categories are forms of existence [*Daseinsformen*]. For Lukács, something that exists in an objectified manner is accessible to us only because of its objective status; i.e., something that stands opposed and in relation to us. This means that an object exists historically and socially only insofar as it is constituted categorially.

All of this becomes clearer when we connect Lukács's claim about the categorical structure of social reality to his critique of Hegel in *History and Class Consciousness*:

Hegel's enormous intellectual achievement consisted in making theory and history dialectically relative to each other, conceiving them in terms of a process of dialectical interpenetration. But even this attempt finally failed. Hegel was never able to advance to a real unity of theory and practice; instead he merely either saturated the logical arrangement of the categories with a wealth of historical material or rationalized history into a succession of sublimated and abstracted forms, alterations of structure, epochs, etc., which he raised to categories. Marx was the first to see through this false dilemma: he did not deduce the order of sequence of the categories from either their logical arrangement or from their historical succession, but he recognized that 'their order of sequence [*Reihenfolge*] is rather determined by the relation which they bear to one another in modern bourgeois society.' [...] The critique of political economy no longer stands as 'one' science alongside the others, nor is it merely ranked above the others as a 'basic science'; but rather it comprises the entire world-history of the 'forms of existence' [*Daseinsformen*] (the categories) of human society.¹⁵

¹⁵ Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, Frühschriften 11, Werke, Band 11 (Münster: Aisthesis Verlag, 2013), p. 684; for this, also see *ibid.*, p. 342; English: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/Lukács/works/1926/theses-hess.htm> (last accessed February 26, 2018).

What Lukács points out here is that the relation between categorial structure and reality should be seen as the crucial hinge for understanding historical progress and change. Whereas Hegel, at least in Lukács's understanding, remains tied to a metaphysical juxtaposition of logical form and social reality, Lukács argues that the "logical" form of social reality must be found *in* it as a historically-specific type of social reality that is constituted by its categorial relations. To be "methodological," then, means that we reconstruct the categorial form in their order of sequence. This order of sequence is dialectical because, as Lukács underlines, the "higher" categories are needed for grasping the "lower categories." For example, although money existed before capitalism, what money is under capitalist social conditions can only be revealed through it being determined and formed by capital. Accordingly, capitalist social reality only exists *as* this reality because in it all social reality is constituted by a categorial form in which money is a lower expression of capital (even when it *seems* to function exclusively as money in market exchanges). Furthermore, we are only able to understand simple everyday objects, such as tables, as *social* objects (i.e., not as objects of the natural sciences or as aesthetic objects) because their categorial determination make them "meaningful" for us, which, in this case, would be an explicit or implicit relation to wealth accumulation and growth.¹⁶ To give another example, in relation to machines, Lukács argues that the "actual form of objecthood [*wirkliche Gegenständlichkeit*]"¹⁷ should not be seen in an ahistorical essential core; instead, with its inclusion in the capitalist organization, it receives what Lukács calls its "structural form" [*Strukturform*],¹⁸ which, in turn, determines the uniqueness of a historical epoch as well as machines as actually existing objects.¹⁹ Machines can therefore only be understood *as* social objects by means of their structural form. Put differently, only if we ask what makes machines *capitalist* machines, do we understand their historical structure.

There must be clarity about the fact that the so-called simple categories are not trans-historical elements of the system, but are just as much products of historical development as the concrete totalities to which they belong, and that, therefore, simple categories are correctly grasped

16 In Laskian terms: "It is only because I live in the validating element that I know about the existing element" (quoted in Kiesel, "Why Students of Heidegger will have to read Emil Lask," p. 206).

17 Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, p. 335.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 336. Note that the term Lask uses in his theory of judgement is "Strukturkomplikationen."

19 *Ibid.*

from higher, more complicated, more concrete ones. That is to say it is only the comprehension of the concrete whole, to which the simple categories belong, that makes possible knowledge of the simple ones and not the other way round, even if – as has already been outlined – its position must often take a reversed path.²⁰

Consequently, by "totality" Lukács refers exclusively to the categorial determination of social reality, and not, as one might think, to the totality of the entire historical process or the totality of all social mediations. *Comprehending* a totality requires a reconstruction of the categorial relations as determinations of social reality. "Concrete analysis," as Lukács puts it, "means: relation to the society as a whole."²¹

Accordingly, the status of the categories changes from being applied to a historical process (as in Hegel) to being the essence of the historical itself, insofar as the categories themselves *are* constitutive for the historical dimension of reality.²² Categories are the *forms* in which and through which societies exist as this or that society. For example, the movement from feudalism to capitalism can no longer be (simply) explained by causal connections of historical events; in addition, what has to change is the categorial unity of the society, which then leads to a new social configuration of reality and, finally, to a new framework under which social objects *are* social objects and are knowable *as* these objects. In categories, we can recognize, as Lukács says, "what is *specific and new*, grasped in thoughts".²³

And the nature of history is precisely that every definition degenerates into an illusion: history is the history of the unceasing overthrow of the forms of objecthood [*Gegenständlichkeitsformen*] that shape the existence [*Dasein*] of man. It is therefore not possible to reach an understanding of particular forms by studying their successive appearances in an empirical and historical manner. This is not because they transcend history, though this is and must be the bourgeois view with its addiction to thinking about isolated 'facts' in isolated mental categories. The truth is rather that these particular forms are not immediately connected with

20 Lukács, "Chvostimus und Dialektik" p. 136.

21 Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, p. 223; for this also see Dannemann, *Georg Lukács. Eine Einführung*, p. 61.

22 Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* p. 306. Lukács argues that being should not be understood as an abstract formal concept; instead, in addition to the formal and empty level, we need to take into account "additional levels [*Stufen*] of actuality" (*ibid.*, p. 306).

23 Lukács, "Chvostimus und Dialektik," p. 136; emphasis mine.

each other either by their simultaneity or by their consecutiveness. What connects them is their place and function in the totality and by rejecting the idea of a 'purely historical' explanation the notion of history as a universal discipline is brought nearer. When the problem of connecting isolated phenomena has become a problem of categories, by the same dialectical process every problem of categories becomes transformed into a historical problem. Though it should be stressed: it is transformed into a problem of universal history which now appears more clearly than in our introductory polemical remarks-simultaneously as a problem of method and a problem of our knowledge of the present.²⁴

Although the consequences of this way of thinking are enormously problematic, it should be clear why Lukács's further thinking about the proletarian revolution is directly linked to his concept of *Gegenständlichkeitsform* and, as its central expression, to reification. Since Lukács does not operate with a concept of rupture and "event" à la Heidegger or Badiou, he needs to locate the rupture on both the productive capacities of the agents and knowers of social reality. The capacity to change the course of history lays in changing the categorical form of reality and not this or that aspect of reality. Not only is it the case that "history becomes the history of the forms of objecthood from which man's environment and inner world are constructed and which he strives to master in thought, action and art, etc."²⁵ but it is also the case, we might add, that man needs to destroy the existing forms of objecthood if new thoughts, actions, and art are to be discovered. Seen from the point of practical theory, the proletariat is "the transformation of the form of objecthood of the objects of action."²⁶ Accordingly, everything changes because everything changes its form, and since form and matter cannot be separated, knowledge and reality can also not be separated insofar as the reality is known *through* its categorical structure. In addition to Fichte, the influence of Lask on Lukács should not be underestimated, as for Lask knowing [*Erkennen*] means that one lives through *and* grasps the categorical form within which the material is given.²⁷

24 Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, p. 372; English: Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, tr. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge/MA: MIT Press, 2000), p. 186.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 375; *ibid.*, p. 188.

26 Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, p. 359.

27 Emil Lask, *Die Logik der Philosophie und die Kategorienlehre. Eine Studie über den Herrschaftsbereich der logischen Form* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1993), p. 82.

3 Categories in Lask and Heidegger

At this point, we already know that Lukács's concepts of categories and social form are opposed to Kant's and Hegel's concept of categories, insofar as he is searching for a middle ground between a subjectivist theory of categories as something belonging to human reason alone and an objectivist theory of categories as something belonging to an absolute reality. The reality of society is, then, sought by Lukács (and other early critical theorists), as the region of reality that can function as the constitutive level for all other regions, such as mind and nature, without turning society into a replacement region for Hegel's logic.²⁸ This move brings Lukács closer to a phenomenological approach to reality since neither questions about "absolute reality" are addressed nor is a dialectics of nature developed. Marxism, at least seen from this angle, cannot be developed into a new super theory for everything. Be that as it may, it should be clear by now that Lukács's approach to the problem of categories is distinctively anti-Hegelian since the categorical relations are the precondition for a historically specific form of social reality, and they are not understood in some metaphysical fashion as determining absolute thought as absolute being, which, in turn, brings him back to Kant. However, Lukács's position is anti-Kantian, too, insofar as categories are no longer "implanted" in mind or reason on the side of the subject; instead, from the beginning the identity, they determine type, and kind of object that the subject *can* encounter; i.e., they are part of what can be experienced. Accordingly, in a sense they function, similar to Heidegger's phenomenology of assertion and judgement in *Being and Time*, "before" judgements, insofar as they make subjective references to them possible. The objectivity of objects is prior to reason, which is now understood as a rather passive element of receiving these forms. Logic, or in the case of Lukács, with the help of Marx's critique of political economy, social logic is rethought as the condition for objects to be "discovered" by subjects. In this way, transcendental philosophy is transformed into a social and ontological philosophy in which the togetherness of categorical form and reality make up what Lask calls "sense" [*Sinn*]; i.e., the framework of meaningfulness under

28 For the sake of this paper, I am unable to go into any details of Lukács's later ontology; however, Lukács's position towards nature is, with the exception of issues related to his concept of the proletariat, most problematic. For this topic, see the classical study by Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (London: Verso, 2014); and, more recently, John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark, "Marxism and the Dialectics of Ecology," *Monthly Review*, 68/5 (2016). Foster and Clark demand a return to the idea of a dialectics of nature.

which assertions about and the experience of objects as social objects are possible. Sense is both structural form and social reality. The consequence of the indivisibility between structural form; i.e., forms of objecthood, and social objects, is that subjects do not "make" or constitute these forms. They are pre-cognitive and, to use a phenomenological expression, need to be *read off* from reality. This point is very important because Lukács's position, despite all talk about dialectics and logic, pushes him away from contemporary Hegelian approaches to Marx and his critique of political economy.²⁹ This is also the reason for the Weberian and Simmelian elements in his (early) thought, inasmuch as these thinkers are equally skeptical about reconstructing social reality in logical terms. Instead, *interpretation* is the key term. To be sure, the categories must emerge in history, within an "original" field, but the decisive insight of Lukács is that this emergence of a new shape of historical development is in truth the emergence of a specific structural form, instead of it being simply the emergence of new things, institutions, ideas, or actions. For example, the emergence of the steam engine was certainly important for the development of modern industrial capitalism; however, the decisive event in history that led to a new preconfiguration of the social reality as a new *reality* is the emergence of the structural form under which steam engines are possible and become meaningful things to their operators and inventors. In a rather complex manner, this goes back to the instrumentalization of nature, a functionalist metaphysics, the exploitation of the earth and labor power, and a socially abstract accumulation of wealth. As we know, the term that unites all of this, at least for Lukács, is reification.

In order to make Lukács's concept of categories as "structural form" even clearer, we should briefly look at two other authors who were struggling with the same problem as Lukács (albeit not in relation to social reality), namely, Lask in his *Die Logik der Philosophie und die Kategorienlehre* (1910) and Heidegger in his early text *Die Kategorien- und Bedeutungslehre des Don Scotus* (1916).³⁰

29 For this, see Chris Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and his Relation to Hegel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); Tony Smith, *The Logic of Marx's Capital. Replies to Hegelian Criticisms* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990); and Helmut Reichelt, *Zur logischen Struktur des Kapitalbegriffs bei Karl Marx* (Freiburg: Ca Ira, 2001).

30 The influence of Lask on Lukács has been debated before. Whereas Lukács himself in his late self-reflections as well as in his Lask obituary, denies that he was *deeply* influenced by Lask, others, such as Rickert and Szilasi, argue differently (for this, see Elisabeth Weisser-Lohmann, *Georg Lukács's Heideggerian Kunstphilosophie* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1992), p. 86). Be this as it may, it is undeniable that the reflections on the role of categories and the shift from epistemology to ontology plays a crucially equal role for neo-Kantianism, phenomen-

4 Lask

One of the most important moves regarding the problem of categories in Lask's work, insofar as it is relevant for Lukács, is his claim that "the objecthood of the objects is category [*Die Gegenständlichkeit an den Gegenständlichen Kategorien*]." ³¹ which Lukács transforms from a theory of being into a narrower theory of social being in *History and Class Consciousness*. Lask's newly established logic is based on the claim that "contents stand *in* the form", ³² i.e., "the form of objecthood of the objects is category, is identical with the categorial form of the realm of truth." ³³ Lask makes a distinction between objects [*Gegenständliches*], form of objecthood [*Gegenstandsform*], and object sense [*gegenständlicher Sinn*], whereby the intertwining of form and material, as the realm of truth, is called *sense*. ³⁴ Additionally, as Lask underlines, this concept of sense differs from sense as "sense of," given that it is pre-predicative and objective *before* a judgment *about* it. The realm of the object is the realm of truth. It is what makes it possible for judgments to be judgments about something as judgments of something. *Sinn* is both form and material; whereas the categorial form determines the form of objecthood, the objects are identical with their theoretical sense. ³⁵ As a consequence, the two separate realms of truth (about an object) and the object *as* object are no longer separated. Lask gives Kant's theory of categories an ontological reading, which foreshadows the readings of Heidegger (and Adorno) years later. ³⁶

As to Lukács, reification becomes the determinate form that determines the way in which an object is accessible to us as an object as *being* an object. We do not simply encounter things in our world; neither do we encounter simply social things in our world; rather, we encounter things in our world of a *specific* historic quality, which, at least in our case, is that which makes objects *capitalist* objects.

As one commentator has it, "the object [*Gegenstand*] already shows up before judgement-based knowledge in an 'openness' [*Offenheit*]; i.e., it stands in

31 Lask, *Die Logik der Philosophie und die Kategorienlehre*, p. 33.

32 Ibid., p. 33.

33 Ibid., p. 33.

34 Ibid., p. 34.

35 Ibid., p. 40.

36 For this, see my comparison of Adorno's and Heidegger's reading of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in Christian Lotz, "Warentausch und Technik als Schematisierung von Gegenständlichkeit bei Adorno und Heidegger," in Christian Lotz, et al., eds., *Verdinglichung. Technik- und Sozialphilosophie nach Heidegger und der kritischen Theorie* (München: Fink

relation to be possibly known by the subject.³⁷ In other words, Lask transcends the Kantian position by introducing a realist interpretation of the transcendental realm as the pre-predicative openness of being that is related to the knowing subject, and, in addition, it is *presupposed* for any kind of active epistemological engagement of the subject. The categorial form, we might say, opens things up to us so that we can encounter them as meaningful for us. Their objecthood is the way in which they stand opposed to us. Lask is the decisive author for this new way of looking at objects, insofar as he argues in *The Logic of Philosophy* that "the object [*Gegenstand*] is always already *object for*; i.e., is always already material in definite meanings. For the knowing subject, the material is always already part of and stands in the meaning bestowing *logos*: the object is always already 'immanent to the logos.'³⁸ As a consequence of Lask's synthesis of neo-Kantianism and phenomenology, we no longer need to assume that the subject "creates" or "makes" the object in front of it. Reason is conceived in Lask rather as a passive openness and relation towards something that makes the reception on the side of the objects possible.³⁹ In Lukács's reading of Marx' concept of categories this passivity is turned into a historical and genetic concept. Sense makes objects transcending and "real" entities, before the subject judges or reflects about these entities, thereby allowing them to be encountered with new categories that belong to the reflexive realm. Accordingly, according to Lask, theoretical reflection is secondary and establishes a new level of categorial forms.⁴⁰ With this position, Lask prepares Heidegger's analysis in *Being and Time*, which states that the epistemological attitude establishes its own relation to the non-reflexive primary everyday life of *Dasein*. Reflection isolates elements and abstracts from the original unity of what we are living through. As a consequence, judgement (in Lask) and assertion (in Heidegger) are taken to be secondary and are taken to be derived modes of what is already accessible and transparent on a deeper level. In Heidegger's terms, assertions and judgments are not the primary way of disclosing the world; on the contrary, judgments can either "cover up" or "uncover" our

37 For this, see the excellent article by Konrad Hobe, "Zwischen Rickert und Heidegger. Versuch über eine Perspektive des Denkens von Emil Lask," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 78 (1971), p. 364.

38 Ibid.

39 In his Duns Scotus book, Heidegger already uses "to heed to something" [*Hineinhören*]; for this, see Martin Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften* (Frankfurt/M.: Klostermann, 1972), p. 343.

40 For this, see Kouvélakos, *Ästhetizistische Kulturkritik und ethische Utopie*, pp. 71–72.

being-in-the-world, which is primarily characterized by concern. Logic and truth are now understood as something that belongs to the immanence of the objects, which can only be grasped and articulated through devotion, specifically, "as devotion [*Hingabe*] of the subject to the categorially encompassed material."⁴¹ It comes of no surprise, then, that Lukács points to the receptive concept of the subject in his obituary of Lask. "This subject," as Lukács remarks, "is purely receptive [*hinnehmend*], its cognition is never the activity of predications, but, instead, the simple [*schlichte*] receiving of the object [*Gegenstand*]" (363). In fact, Lukács himself uses the notion of devotion. For example, what is needed in philosophy, according to Lukács, is a "devotion"⁴² towards the objects of thought, which are now conceived of by Lukács via a "new concept of the 'given'"⁴³ coupled by an acceptance of the facticity of the starting point⁴⁴ for every social analysis.

According to Lask, the "*Gegenstand* is truth as being positioned *towards against us* [*entgegenstehende*]." ⁴⁵ Put differently, the "being there" of the objects belongs to the objecthood of the object and is a character of them; i.e., it is that which makes the object a *possible* object of judgement. Objects already stand in certain relations to us before we get cognitively or practically engaged with them. However, the categorial form is not a natural property of the object; rather, it is that which "gives" the object as object. As Weisser has it, "it means that the given object is not, as in Kant's conception, the product of a synthesis that the subject brings about. On the contrary, the object is encountered from the outside as a task for the cognizing subject."⁴⁶

We can easily see how Lukács transforms Lask's ideas into a Marxian position by arguing that the structural *social* form can only be found *in* social reality and that it is precisely this form that makes them historical objects, insofar as history is now understood as a structural form of a reality in which each element needs to be traced back to its origin. Reification is the expression for the way in which objects always already stand in relation to us and, correlatively, we to them, insofar as categorial form and content open up the social space in which we know these objects.

41 Lask, *Die Logik der Philosophie und die Kategorienlehre*, p. 80; see also 85; see also Kouvélakos, *Ästhetizistische Kulturkritik und ethische Utopie*, 65.

42 Georg Lukács, *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst*, Frühe Schriften zur Ästhetik I, Werke, Band 16 (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1974), p. 238.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., p. 239.

45 Lask, *Die Logik der Philosophie und die Kategorienlehre*, p. 30.

46 Weisser-Lohmann, Georg Lukács's *Heidelberger Kunstphilosophie*, p. 72.

5 Heidegger

Heidegger's interpretations of Kant's philosophy and his philosophy in *Being and Time* are heavily influenced by Lask and his early work on scholastic philosophy in which Heidegger delivers an astonishing reading of Duns Scotus via terms that he takes from Laskian neo-Kantianism and Husserlian phenomenology. Heidegger follows Lask by arguing that Kant's transcendental logic is primarily not an epistemology; instead, it is in truth an ontology and it is based on a logic of objecthood. In a central passage Heidegger writes:

A category is the most general determination of objects. Objects and objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*] have, as such, sense only for a subject. In this subject, objectivity [*Objektivität*] is built up through judgments. Consequently, if we want to conceive of categories in a decisive manner as determinations of objects, then we must establish their essential relations to the forms that build up objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*]. Thus it was no 'accident' but rather grounded in the innermost core of the problem of categories that this problem arose in both Aristotle and Kant in some sort of connection with predication, i.e., with judgment. This might mean that the categories would have to be reduced to mere functions of thinking, but the possibility of such a move does not make any sense at all for a philosophy that has acknowledged problems having to do with sense.⁴⁷

We can see that "sense" is offered by Heidegger as the key term for moving beyond both Aristotle and Kant, insofar as it brings us to a new concept of categories as something (at least primarily) independent from thought. Heidegger connects the concept of objecthood [*Gegenständlichkeit*] to the concept of form, which Heidegger defines as determinateness [*Bestimmtheit*] and specificity of an object [*Gegenstand*].⁴⁸ The form of an object makes up the objecthood of the object. One consequence of this is that the world of categories is more complex than Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel conceive of them; for from now on form and objects are indivisible and are always encountered as "meaningful" before they can be reduced to objects of logic and reason. For example, the categorical form makes it possible that I have something like one object in front of me, which means that the phenomenon of "being in front of me" is already

47 Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften*, p. 345; English: Martin Heidegger, *Supplements: From the Earliest Essays to Being and Time and Beyond* (New York: SUNY Press, 2002) p. 64.

48 For Heidegger's determination of the concept of form, see Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften*, pp. 164–166.

something that belongs to the object as object. The "being in front of me" makes it possible that I can address the object in predications, assertions or other reflective activities. Form is that through which something is revealed to me as something that I can grasp as this or that kind of object. Lúkács reads Marx' concept of categories through the same theoretical lens. Form determines the object's objectivity; i.e., how it is posited towards the subject. Form is, as Heidegger points out, the *respect* through and in which I grasp the object.⁴⁹

If we conceive of the categories as elements and means for interpreting the sense of what is experienceable – of what is an object [*Gegenständen*] in any sense – then what ensues as a basic requirement for a theory of categories is *characterizing and demarcating the different domains of objects into spheres that are categorially irreducible to one another*.⁵⁰

The problem of how to demarcate regions of the reality, which is already prominently featured in Husserl's attempt to transform ontological questions into phenomenological questions, is precisely the problem that Lúkács struggles with, insofar as Lúkács tries to introduce the concept of reification as a concept for demarcating capitalist social objects and capitalist social reality as a region of sense in which this reality is disclosed as a capitalist reality.⁵¹ As such, Lúkács underlines that Lask's position no longer allows us to deduce all realms of objects via one principle;⁵² the different "spheres"⁵³ have "their own laws" [*eigenes Gesetzlich*] and due to their immanent status, theoretical reason is left with "revealing" [*aufdecken*] their different qualities and making them transparent, as Lúkács puts it (astonishingly close to Heidegger). Another consequence of this position that is equally important for phenomenology and critical theory, is that different spheres of experience and reality neither can simply be reduced to or be subsumed by the logical sphere as such,⁵⁴ nor can they be

49 Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften*, p. 165.

50 Ibid., p. 342; Heidegger, *Supplements*, p. 63.

51 It is rather surprising that not even Goldman in his groundbreaking study on Lúkács and Heidegger seems to be aware of this connection.

52 Hartmut Rosshoff argues that this position has consequences for the concept of actuality, insofar as the actuality dissolves into a multiverse of separate and distinctive objects; for this, see Hartmut Rosshoff, *Emil Lask als Lehrer von Georg Lúkács. Zur Form ihres Gegenstands begriffs* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1975), p. 41.

53 Georg Lúkács, "Nachruf auf Emil Lask," *Kunststudien* XXII, January (1918), p. 357.

54 For this, also see Weisser-Lohmann, *Georg Lúkács's Heidegger-Kunstphilosophie*, p. 90, 191.

subsumed to an overarching metaphysically defined system as we find it, for example, in Hegel's *Encyclopedia* (1830). Instead, each sphere receives its own "positioning character" [*Setzungscharakter*] and, hence, its own *Gegenständlichkeit*. Reification is Lukács attempt to interpret and reveal the form of objecthood of one sphere, namely, the social sphere.⁵⁵ Spheres, because they are unities, are independent from each other, and have a "structure."⁵⁶ As Lukács puts it, the task is

to uncover the genuine structure of each sphere, to which the problematic object belongs, and to grasp it as something unified [*Einheitliches*] and self-contained [*Abgeschlossenheit*], so that each thing that becomes an object of knowledge [*Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*] can be returned to its original and implicit contained objecthood [*Wesenheit*].⁵⁷

It comes as no surprise, then, that Heidegger, at least in the *Duns Scotus* book, also refers to history and culture as the main stepping stones for developing a richer theory of categorial forms:

History and its teleological interpretation in philosophy of culture *must become a determining element for the meaning of the problem of categories* if we want to think differently about working out the *cosmos* of categories in order to go beyond an impoverished schematic table of categories.⁵⁸

Despite his lack of properly understanding phenomenology, Lukács would wholeheartedly agree with this position, although he would have added that this goal can only be achieved through a Marxist interpretation of categories.

⁵⁵ Kisiel clarifies: "each with its own governing regional category (especially validity versus reality) differing in meaning from other such region-constituting forms; if these different domains have their own logic, then there must be a logic which unifies and differentiates them, and this 'logic of logic' will in turn have its own categories." (Kisiel, "Why Students of Heidegger will have to read Emil Lask," p. 206). Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, p. 335. The claim that the Aristotelian categories are no longer universal, but can only be applied to a specific sphere and specific respect of reality is also argued by Heidegger in regard to Duns Scotus in his early work (for this, see Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften*, p. 205).

⁵⁶ Lukács, *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst*, p. 236.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften*, p. 350; Heidegger, *Supplements*, p. 67.

6 Conclusion: Reification as Intelligibility

As we indicated, philosophers such as Lask and Heidegger re-interpret the concept of truth as an ontological concept, in close connection with the concept of meaningfulness or sense. As Kavoulakos has it, "aletheiological questions are related to the discovery of 'sense structure and categorial form-content,' which is the central topic of a theoretical doctrine of sense."⁵⁹ Sense allows social agents to experience social objects in a meaningful way as historically specific objects. To give an example, a table is a table with certain natural properties that are put to use through the process of objectification and labor. 'The table is also a social object, insofar as it functions not only within different social worlds, such as family or school, but also in different use value contexts. However, a hand crafted middle age table or an industrially produced table in the 20th Century are not simply social objects because people in the middle ages or people in the 20th Century can use them for eating or learning; rather, they are historically specific objects because they are meaningful within a broader frame that, at least in our contemporary epoch, determines the table as a table used and produced within our capitalist social organization. The table is something and has a specific form of objecthood since it was produced under certain circumstances, is categorially formed though its monetary form, and contributes to the overall wealth production in our world – independent from whether we reflect on its categorial structure. This fact, that even a simple breakfast table is what it is by means of it being an expression of surplus value, is no longer visible for most consumers. Nevertheless, despite its intransparency, nothing can change the fact that, if we intend to understand the table as a social and historical object, we need to address its capitalist categorial forms that disclose the object as an object of our time period. During this process of theoretical clarification, with Lukács, we might come close to concluding that the categorial forms can be unified by the concept of reification.⁶⁰ What the table *in truth* is cannot be exhausted by its natural and a-historical social properties; the aletheiological "showing" of *capitalist* society occurs *through* its specific *Gegenständlichkeitsform*. This form of objecthood reveals that the table is

⁵⁹ Kouvelakos, *Ästhetizistische Kulturkritik und ethische Utopie*, p. 54.

⁶⁰ I have argued in Lotz, *The Capitalist Schema*, that reification is not satisfactory; instead, we need to argue that money is the central category; for a similar point and direct critique of Lukács see the excellent study by Frank Engster, *Das Geld als Mass, Mittel und Methode: Das Rechnen mit der Identität der Zeit* (Berlin: Nicolai Verlag, 2014).

only understandable as a table of our times if we understand it as already being constituted through *value*.

As a final point and in order to conclude this set of reflections, we should remind ourselves that with the publication of *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács's Laskian and phenomenological understanding of categories and categorical form receives a Marxian twist. For the concept of reification is not only developed in close connection with Lask, but also with what Marx says in the first chapter of *Capital*⁶¹ and the introduction to the *Grundrisse*. In two central passages Lukács writes the following:

The mutual determination [Wechselwirkung] we have in mind must be more than the interaction of otherwise unchanging objects. It must go further in its relation to the whole: for this relation determines the form of objecthood [*Gegenständlichkeitsform*] of every object of cognition. Every substantial change that is of concern to knowledge manifests itself as a change in relation to the whole and through this as a change in the form of objecthood [*Gegenständlichkeitsform*] itself. Marx has formulated this idea in countless places. I shall cite only one of the best-known passages: 'A negro is a negro. He only becomes a slave in certain circumstances. A cotton-spinning jenny is a machine for spinning cotton. Only in certain circumstances does it become capital. Torn from those circumstances it is no more capital than gold is money or sugar the price of sugar.' Thus the forms of objecthood of all social phenomena change constantly in the course of their ceaseless dialectical mutual determinations with each other. The intelligibility of objects develops in proportion as we grasp their function in the determined [*bestimmte*] totality to which they belong.⁶²

Thus the economic categories become dynamic and dialectical in a double sense. As 'pure' economic categories they are involved in constant mutual determination with each other, and that enables us to understand any given historical stage of the evolution of society.⁶³

Consequently, revealing the form of objecthood means that we analyze each thing under a totality of categorical relations, which means that we analyze the

object as one that belongs to a specific historical stage and a specific determination of its categorical unity.⁶⁴ Accordingly, this unity is finite and cannot be universalized – and this is precisely why the critique of political economy is *critical*: for it demonstrates the limits of the capitalist world. Something that is limited can change. Accordingly, only a theory that demonstrates that social objects in capitalism have a specific form of objecthood would allow us to imagine a new, even a revolutionarily new, categorical form for encountering objects; i.e., an altogether different frame of meaningfulness, which would also mean that we "know" the social reality in a different sense.

Therefore, the assumption of a radical social change, whether it is a realistic position or whether it is not, necessarily follows from Lukács's concept of reification as the expression of the unity of the structural form of capitalist social objects. Rejecting Lukács's concept of history as speculative nonsense is therefore not as easy as it sometimes seems.

64 Hartmut Rosshoff argues that Lukács's introduction of the concept of totality as the idea of a new historical configuration stems from Fichte; for this, see Rosshoff, *Emil Lask als Lehrer von Georg Lukács*, p. 32.

61 For this see my attempt to relate Lukács to Chapter One of Marx' *Capital* in Lotz, "Gegenständlichkeit. From Marx to Lukács and Back Again," especially pp. 81–86.

62 Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, p. 185; Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 13 (translation altered).

63 *Ibid.*, p. 187; *ibid.*, 15 (translation altered).