

The Essential Standpoint of Man: An Autopsy, in Three Parts

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Gib uns einen Fußtritt, o Fremdling, das wird
Vielleicht uns zerstreuen ein wenig.

I

In an era when work at the top-end of the value chain is usually performed by manipulating *concepts*, the “meritocratic” demand once voiced by Thomas Carlyle, that “[t]he tools” be given “to him that can handle them,” may now seem quaintly literal-minded.¹ Nonetheless: the inducement of popular belief in the “career open to talents” continues to be the principle desideratum of establishment reform discourse. The ideology is now referred to as social mobility. The nomination is of course typically (though in this case also quite scintillatingly) idiotic, because the vocabulary of movement it promotes is in fact not about social but *individual* mobility; but also because its conception of individual movement demands that “the social” (by which is meant capital and its class system) remains perduringly stable, a perfect trough for the turbid ebb and flow of human misery at which capital and its hordes of administrators are eternally found feasting. Social mobility is therefore an intrinsically *ironic* concept: as British Prime Minister David Cameron said in 1841, “[i]t is simply impossible for man to get beyond the true horizon of his being”; and the ignorant Afghan children who constituted Cameron’s audience (and who are employed in the first epigraph to this essay) must have *broken into joyous song* in the knowledge of it.

Like capital, the individual who is socially mobile must be free to move, and, again like capital, *the specific place* to which the individual is free to move ought to depend on where his owner decides to put him. It might seem an act of astonishing unreasonableness to begin an essay by reminding my reader of this “discourse,” which is so crude and disgusting, even ever so briefly, when suffering and profit are spreading across the world in a nauseous mutual quickening under the sign and aegis of “crisis”; but I want to hold it in view because Marxist thinking once possessed

an alternative vocabulary of movement, and because, for various reasons, I want to see that vocabulary again flourishing, as sharp a weapon as any quality of life index, and held in different hands. In the first section of the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels wrote that,

[j]ust as [...] at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now [when the class struggle nears the decisive hour] a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over [*übergang*] to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.²

This is very obviously not a description of social mobility: it is a description of class mobility. But then what is a *class* movement? A section of the nobility meets a portion of bourgeoisie. *But which portion?* The gluteus maximus of the nobility meets the bourgeoisie? The left lung of the bourgeoisie slides into the proletariat? Marx and Engels seem to suggest an answer. The portion of the bourgeoisie which goes over to the proletariat *in particular* is that portion which has “raised itself to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement of the whole.” The compound *übergang* or “goes over” is a listless construction, or it is listless within the imploding architectonics of the *Manifesto*, where verbs are routinely toggled to apocalypse, so that society is “splitting up,” the middle classes are “dumped” or “sink” into the proletariat, and the proletariat “dragged” about and into the rancid saloon bar which comrade Habermas knew as the “public sphere,” in a spectacle of push and shove not to be matched until the World Wrestling Federation usurped the Fourth International.³ What kind of movements are these? Why is it that the most listless of them, the most dawdlingly indolent, has received the most attentive and prolonged critical scrutiny? Why is it, in other words, that the bourgeoisie’s experience of merely *übergang* to the proletariat is so much more canvassed than its experience of being dumped into it?

The answer, I think, is that the first statement has served as the scriptural guarantor of another formulation of exceptional importance to twentieth-century Marxism, namely Lukács’s insistence in his *History and Class Consciousness* that the “essence of the method of historical materialism is inseparable from the ‘practical and critical’ activity of the proletariat” and that, just as the proletariat’s practical and its critical activity “are aspects of the same process of social evolution,” so too “the knowledge of reality provided by the dialectical method is [...] inseparable from the class standpoint of the proletariat.”⁴ Lukács supports this account of the dialectic, which serves as work preparatory to his long essay on reification, by quoting, not from the passage of the *Communist Manifesto* discussed above, but from another which appears in the *Manifesto*’s next section and which must be derived from it. In Section II of the text Marx and Engels write that the “Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties” because “[i]n the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.” Several correspondences are therefore asserted. The “standpoint” of the proletariat is the essence of Marxism *and* of the Marxist dialectic; this standpoint because of its objective function offers insight into the totality; and, in consequence of this (and here we get Lukács’s exceptional subliminal gloss on Marx and Engels’ statement), *the only way for the bourgeoisie to know the totality is to adopt the standpoint of the proletariat—to go over to it.*⁵

As the *Manifesto*’s formulations on the historical movement of the whole have been squeezed inexorably into the whalebone corset of early nineteenth century epistemology, its other suggestions about what a class movement might look like have been systematically ignored. As all Kantians ought to be capable of ascertaining, Marx and Engels’s image of a bourgeoisie and a proletariat at two poles or in two blocks requires *conceptually* that the constituents of other

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classes go over to these two blocks to join them. In the spirit of Kant's table of categories, this might happen for any of the following reasons:

- (i) parts of e.g. the nobility read the briefing paper and realise that there's a better buck to be gained by going over the bourgeoisie (cf. *Citizen Lafayette* etc); or
- (ii) the middle-strata of society are precipitated, sink, are swept or thrown into the proletariat, which does not preclude
- (iii) that very small parts of the middle-strata of society (the middle-strata's stirrup bone) upraise themselves to the bourgeoisie (evaporate into it).

This exhausts the movements of classes within the *present* modality, but Marx and Engels are not finished, because they then introduce a class of class movements motivated by appraisals of future changes, so that

- (iv) the middle-strata of society who have not yet been "precipitated" into the proletariat nevertheless recognise that they are threatened by this eventuality, and, in view of this judgment, side themselves with their "future" interests, which does not preclude
- (v) a different class of future-oriented class movements, in which a portion of the middle classes activate in their future judgments an optimism-bias, so that the future *itself* becomes efficacious as a determination of class movements, for the reason that since on this model the "future" is taken to modulate interests in the direction of the dominant class, the middle classes are bound to side themselves with their (subjectively) future-determined future interests and therefore with the bourgeoisie.

But aside from temporal appraisal of class-interest, a part of the *bourgeoisie* might also pass over to the proletariat by

- (v) a *self-reflexive* class dissolution (*Auflösungsprozess*), the vectors of which are not absolutely defined but which may not demand of the portion of the bourgeoisie that it is first of all immiserated; and to this can be added
- (vi) *epistemically motivated* class movements, where "a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole", pass over to the proletariat. It is not clear exactly why this is so (is it in the *interests* of the portion of bourgeois ideologists who comprehend theoretically the historical movement of the whole *to pass over to the proletariat*; or is it because of what Professor Habermas has called the *weak* force of the better argument?).

But before we dwell too despicably on these details, we can add, what Engels and Marx could not have anticipated, because neither of them had the pleasure of being trapped in the data-chutes of late 2011,

- (vii) business and community engagement is the strategic management of partnerships with the wider community to share knowledge and expertise for mutual benefit; and
- (viii) start a volunteer group; and
- (ix) outlier class-sector transfer, where that portion of the bourgeoisie which has raised itself to the knowledge that markets are determined by randomly scaled events decides to hedge on a black swan, ushering in immediate revolution.

All of these are ways of moving into a class, though they may not be ways of moving into its *standpoint*. Accordingly we can further subdivide certain categories as e.g. (ii) into (iia) and

(iib), where on

(iia) the middle strata of society are precipitated into the proletariat but do not adopt its standpoint, with consequences for (iib) which I do not, perhaps, need to spell out.

And thus we arrive at last with our antipodes: our two blocks. As E.P. Thompson once nicely said (quoting Marx), all this is “shit”: thick, homogenised, and difficult to move through.⁶ Where is *real human life* among all these impudently teeming bullet points? Schleiermacher wrote of self-consciousness’s limitless movement, of the mind which is perfectly volatile, perfectly able to surge past all the Chinese Walls which class or region might set up in its way, and perfectly able also to compass the universal, because never even momentarily distressed in the grace of the motion which defines it.⁷ Schleiermacher’s limitless movement of self-consciousness is shut into the grid above; but that grid is exactly the model on which the majority of social scientific accounts of class are now based.

What follows will attempt as far as is possible to eschew the tendentious game in redefinition in which, for example, the inflation of a critical category (“the proletariat”) diminishes its use for the definition of social antagonism, and so depletes the force of that category with every new extension in the field of its application.⁸ Its aim is instead to describe the acerbities of artworks which are not critical by virtue of a correct description of social reality; nor even by their identification of contradictions in a false description; nor even in fact by their “criticism” of it; but instead by volatilising their means of identification. In order to explain what I mean by that, I’ll first attempt to describe the fate of the category of “standpoint”: and the next two sections will run through the history of translation and discussion of Marx and Engels’s comments on that idea. I will focus on the theoretical glaciation which licensed Adorno’s (dubious) categorical judgment in *Negative Dialectics* that dialectics is not a standpoint.⁹ Adorno’s critique has, I think, dissemblingly truncated the discussion of standpoints; briefly, this is because the critique is based on the presupposition that a standpoint is only of interest if it attains to the totality (i.e., if it has the qualities of my point (vi)—what I called the epistemically motivated class movement), with the quite inevitable result that the rejection of “the” category of the standpoint is conducted on the slender basis of the untenability of just one construction of it. “Standpoints” in this construction are not “things” which a person can occupy wrongly, be dragged into or hurled out of; they are not sites into which people can be unwillingly chaperoned. They are merely perspectives or “class view-points”: eyeglasses for the socially impaired. At the essay’s conclusion I will argue that the withering of standpoints into a shorthand for partiality, the tendentious self-limitation of the *engagé* intellectual imposing his sumptuary laws on cognition in the name of a “programme” or a “cause,” has diminished the literary and critical compass of the negative; and that it has done so because the limited construction of standpoints has discouraged attention to what it means to *move into them* or to *fail* or to *refuse* to do so, as well as to desire their abstraction or insufficiency. The historical “fact” that a class standpoint cannot be rightly adopted and is itself not “right” is used as an instrument to deny the latent repudiation in the effort not to undergo the movement into it, as if all error (all wrong) were as indifferently substitutable as the commodities which currently condition it. By reducing every variety of effort towards a class movement to the merest puff piece to a backwards “commitment,” critical theory enlarges the field of heteronomy in the name of a hypostatised autonomy; and yet every “critical” enlargement of heteronomy serves merely to revalue heteronomy under capital by condemning to categorical equivalence with its cruellest manifestations the activity which aims to destroy them. The enlargement of the “field” of heteronomy in the name of autonomy reverses into the blissful *de facto* revaluation of the worst forms of heteronomy under capital, which are upgraded to the status of commitment by means of commitment’s ethical devaluation. The mannequin

known to twentieth century letters as the committed intellectual is the ideal personification of the wage labourer (the *engagé* intellectual and the wage labourer are Siamese Twins in the foster care of the World Spirit): but the disavowal of “commitment” in the name of “autonomy” is the act which creates the *engagé* intellectual and which nullifies the social meaning of repudiation.

II

The word *Standpunkt* travels out of corybantic late eighteenth-century German debates on philosophical idealism, stumbles slantwise into secularised lexicon of left Hegelian humanism, is incinerated in Marx and Engels’s critical oven, interred, forgotten, disinterred, revived, unjustly incarcerated in the prison wagon of Lukács’s intellectual apparatus, carried on a long journey from existentialism to the concrete nowhere of an insipid *proletkult*, interred, forgotten, disinterred, this time left unrevived, and then denounced for its tendentious Stalinism. The next section is a brief oration on the death (*la petite mort*) of a category.

First, a word on the English: *standpoint* may by now seem deeply idiomatic. This is deceptive: though it was in regular use in German philosophical debate from the late eighteenth century, “standpoint” doesn’t go over to English until the early 1850s. Helen McFarlane’s 1850 translation of the *Kommunistisches Manifest* (the first rendering of any of Marx’s ‘output’ in the mother tongue of the great Dr. Andrew Ure) translates Marx and Engels’s *Standpunkt* as “class view-point”; and McFarlane thus loses the opportunity to pip to the post the OED’s first prize in lexical precedence, awarded (wrongly) to George Eliot for her 1856 translation of Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity*, a book whose “essential standpoint of man” had once attracted Marx, but with which by 1848 he was famously disenamoured.¹⁰ (Historical materialism is confirmed in *translation* history if nowhere else.)

In consequence of McFarlane’s aversion to neologism, standpoints do not become a part of Anglophone Marxism until the 1870s, after the publication of Samuel Moore’s (Engels supervised) translation of the *Manifesto*. This is telling. Engels had good reason to ensure the correct translation, because he and Marx had commented on the usage of *Standpunkt* before, in tones of concentrated lampoon if not yet of satire. Their first criticism of the “standpoint” as it disported in the jargon of critical criticism occurs in the course of Marx’s long reading of Eugène Sue’s *Les Mystères de Paris* (and of what Marx darkly refers to as the Young Hegelian Herr Szeliga’s “gamut of eulogy” for it) in *The Holy Family*. That book’s cavalcade of headbutts against “Herr Bauer and Co.” are among Marx’s most wounding, and the short section on “The Revealed Mystery of the ‘Standpoint’” argues that the word “standpoint” is for Bauer nothing more than Hegel’s “determinateness of self-consciousness” whipped out of its cassock and fitted out in something more “profane,” in a kind of daytime TV makeover show for sweating and glowering German philosopher kings.¹¹ The net result is that Bauer is lamely susceptible to all the invidious remarks about dialectical headstand acrobatics which Marx had aimed at Hegel’s philosophy in his ‘Paris’ manuscripts (written just a few months before he and Engels fell to poisoning *die Heilige Familie*). And so Marx scarifies as follows:

Finally, it goes without saying that whereas Hegel’s *Phenomenologie*, in spite of its speculative original sin, gives in many instances the elements of a true description of human relations, Herr Bruno and Co., on the other hand, provide only an empty caricature, a caricature which is satisfied with deriving any determinateness out of a product of the spirit or even out of real relations and movements, changing this determinateness into a determinateness of thought, into a *category*, and making out that this category is the *standpoint* of the product, of the relations and the movement, in order then to be able to look down on this determinateness triumphantly with old-man’s

wisdom from the standpoint of abstraction, of the general category and of general self-consciousness.¹²

This might on first reading not sound all that bad. Bruno & Co. do much what contemporary sociologists would be proud to do. That is, they carefully assemble their theoretical data, feed it down the assembly line of the *objektiver Geist*, and collect from the evacuation funnel a *category* which defines the abstract status of their inputs. Only at the next step in Bruno & Co.'s industrial process do things become *altogether less perspicuous*. Thus: What is "general self-consciousness" and what does it do to the "determinateness" which it looks down on? The argument here is more oblique, but I don't think it is Marx's criticism that the causal procedure in Bauer is worked out in reverse or upside down; nor is it even that this procedure is in a given instance inaccurate. Marx's attack on Bauer is in other words less "logical" than it is "moral," though of course Marx would reject the convenient bracketing of the first term from second. *The Holy Family* criticises Bauer's "method" because that method freezes what must be mobile, so that "[b]oth [Bauer and Sue's Rudolphe] turn *real human beings* into *abstract standpoints*." This is what defines Bauer's bourgeois coldness—all standpoints are reduced to the standpoint of T.S. Eliot's Gerontion, the old man congratulating himself on his sagacity as he climbs gamely into his cryogenic freezer.

Marx rejects all this; but does he also want to revive the *limitless movement* sung so sweetly by Schleiermacher? Can what has been glaciated be made again to *move under our eyes*, as later Benjamin would write of what he called the dialectical image? Marx's repudiation of standpoints was not a rejection of the category of the standpoint as such, because he continued to use that category in his own writing. What he rejects is the procrustean bed into which the category is jostled by Bruno Bauer; and yet subsequent discussion of the movement of standpoints (and also of what this point negatively implies, which is the experience of *real human beings* who are *stuck* in their abstract standpoints and who cannot—as I have said above—accomplish their volitional alienation) has been frozen and vitiated by the later discussion of this category, whose ultimate fate has been to be reduced to a hieroglyph for "vulgar" Soviet Marxism and (therefore, inevitably) to be subjected to emblematic rejection.¹³ To put that somewhat differently, the "sublation" of the category has been staged by means of the simplest act of *Gleichschaltung*, that is, by identifying the meaning of "standpoint" with instances of its misuse. If we return to Lukács's pronouncement, that "the knowledge of reality provided by the dialectical method is likewise inseparable from the class standpoint of the proletariat," we may very well be in the presence of what Marx, not exactly prostrating himself on what were not exactly his knees, called "a mystical Subject-Object"; but this usage is not identical to Bukharin's *Standpoint of Dialectical Materialism* of 1931, and nor is it quite (it isn't roughly) co-incident with Marx's discussion of standpoints and their dissolution process in the *Communist Manifesto*. Criticism of these positions, however, has tended not to bother with these niceties, or, often enough, and more egregiously, it has directly exploited terminological similarities to disencumber itself of the task of even addressing one account (say Lukács's) on its own terms.

In the English language debate, the best known critic of standpoints—and therefore the worst offender in their tendentious dismissal—is Adorno, and though Adorno's criticism of Lukács's 'standpoint' does not explicitly enter the lists against Lukács's character, or pronounce him a mere puppet of a regime, it does do so *implicitly* and by means of omission. In the second part of *Negative Dialectics*, in the section titled "Dialectics Not A Standpoint," Adorno offers a partial and partially negative definition of dialectics: "[d]ialectics", Adorno writes, "is the consistent and thorough consciousness of non-identity. It does not begin by occupying a standpoint. Thought is driven to dialectics by its own inevitable insufficiency, the guilt it bears for what it thinks."¹⁴ Dialectics is consistent and thorough. Standpoints are inconsistent and lackadaisical. By not

deigning to name Lukács as his target, Adorno sweeps him into unpleasant proximity with all those other votaries of orthodoxy who (he implies in the book's preface) congregate on the far side of the Berlin Wall. Naturally this includes Bukharin and his textbooks for the party rank-and-file. At the same time Adorno shifts the focus of the discussion away from disputes local to twentieth-century European Marxism and towards the more heavenly peaks of German Idealism, a move which is made still more blatantly in the introduction to the first German edition of "Aspects of Hegel's Philosophy," where he writes:

All appreciations are subject to the judgment passed in Hegel's preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* on those who are above something only because they are not in it. They fail from the start to capture the seriousness and compulsoriness of Hegel's philosophy by practicing on him with what he called contemptuously (and with all justice) standpoint philosophy.¹⁵

This raises the problem of standpoints into a full-blown contest of philosophical scholarship; Adorno heavily implies that Lukács's Hegelian turn is in fact not a turn to Hegel but a wrong turn, and whether this wrong turn is into Fichte Canyon or Jacobi Gorge doesn't much matter, because English language exegesis (it is difficult to think of it as much more than this), surveying the wreckage, has usually been content to pass over the debate without further discussion. No one wants their dialectic to be like *Jacobi's*.¹⁶ But Adorno's attack on—what must be Lukács's, because it cannot be Bukharin's, because Bukharin had nothing so coherent—*Standpunktphilosophie*, which distorts and tendentiously cramps dialectical thinking until it will fit into a Stakhanov costume, is, in fact, bogus. It is bogus because Hegel, press-ganged into Adorno's defence in an unseemly game of I'm more *große Logik* than you—never used the phrase *Standpunktphilosophie*, and though he does often declare that the "standpoint" of subjective idealism is a castigatable departure from the true task of philosophy, which is of course to know the true movement of the whole, this is hardly what analytic philosophers like to call a "devastating" criticism of Lukács, who in his writing did so much to distance himself from subjective idealism, and who affected Adorno's own approach so deeply, and who Adorno doesn't care even to name.¹⁷

But I am not interested here in Adorno's own account of the dialectic; nor do I wish to resuscitate Lukács, whose own reading of the proletariat as the identical subject/object of history doesn't need to be rehearsed when it has already been endlessly refuted, and whose own account of "throwing" is not an engagement with Marx's *hinaufgeworfen* but is instead an ontological transposition from Heidegger's infinitely necrotic recursive ponderings on *Dasein* and its existential status. Both Adorno and Lukács are wrong about standpoints: Lukács because he demands that standpoints be treated with exactitude, as a matter of philosophical urgency, and assumes that the alternative is just Bukharin and loosely ineffectual pasquinades against a cartoon bourgeoisie; and Adorno because he accepts Lukács's point and then refers it tediously back to Hegel. The recourse to the German Idealist concept of the *Standpunkt*, which disintermediates the *Kommunistisches Manifest*, allows the doors of perception to slam shut on the question of what it might mean to go over from one standpoint to another. The main problem in all these critiques is that standpoints cannot be true. This is now the dominant position in all critical recapitulations of the concept "standpoint" and its fate:

There is, however, a logical problem with Lukács's notion of some 'true' class consciousness. For if the working class is the potential bearer of such consciousness, from what viewpoint is this judgment made? It cannot be made from the viewpoint of the (ideal) proletariat itself, since this simply begs the questions; but if only that

viewpoint is true, then it cannot be made from some standpoint external to it either. As Bhiku Parekh points out, to claim that only the proletarian perspective allows one to grasp the truth of society as a whole already assumes that one knows what that truth is. It would seem that truth is either wholly internal to the consciousness of the working class, in which case it cannot be assessed *as* truth and the claim becomes simply dogmatic; or one is caught in the impossible paradox of judging the truth from outside the truth itself, in which case the claim that this form of consciousness is true simply undercuts itself.¹⁸

I could say that this is a conventional reduction of the problem of the social experience of class location to a problem of epistemology, here played out in Wittgensteinian terms as the internal aporetics of any attempt to construct a private language, so that the proletariat with its 'true' class consciousness becomes like the armchair philosopher playing idle signifying games with his favoured *qualia*. Lukács would of course answer to this that the criticism is not just untrue but is *exceptionally* and even *paradigmatically* false, and that this is so because it is the paradigm function of bourgeois thought to reduce the problem of revolutionary knowledge—that is, the practical self-knowledge of the working class—to a titillating show of epistemic “problems”—an atavistic striptease in individual cognition, basic aporetics and peephole metaphysics. And yet even in this most crisply desiccated account of the limitations of the Lukácsian *Standpunkt des Proletariats*, the spatiality and fantasy of sentiment is still present, because in the very tolerable “impossible paradox” with which Eagleton’s paragraph concludes we are caught “*outside the truth itself*,” at once desirous to pass over into its interior encampments and snared in the traps of our own verification criteria and truth conditions.

The class pathology of standpoints is still not very far away. Eagleton’s—or Parekh’s—argument is quintessentially class-based, because it rests on the conscription of individualist epistemology to confute a theory which is premised on the denial of exactly that theory (because it relies on carousel refutation); but also because by stationing us outside the truth “itself” the paragraph half-instantiates the bourgeois desire to literalise the act of going over in the performance of some “real” (i.e., individual) act of movement, towards the forlornly shining figure of exemplary truth or beauty, who I must turn to in order to fulfil the ethical vocation of my class but who can never (if I am honest) receive me, because what held us apart was never *my own* lack of companionableness.

Marx and Engels criticised the *bourgeois* universalist concept of the standpoint because the concept was abstract. It might seem that a criticism of the later development of the discourse of proletarian standpoints—if it were conducted in fidelity to Marx’s thinking—would ground itself in the rejection of the “abstraction” of this discourse from the refractions of real social development, or, in other words, for its diversion of otherwise sober senses towards the more enticing standpoint of the hismat crystal ball, now more fully the speculative asset of financial services consultants. The argument is true. But, as someone must once have said, true arguments can be badly interpreted. Marx and Engels criticised the bourgeois universalist concept of the standpoint not just because it was abstract but because it was “an empty caricature.” Their own caricature of a bourgeoisie professing its utter disbelief as it is pressed, dragged, hurled and precipitated into the proletariat—this has by now been fully exantlated. What remains is “a portion” of the bourgeoisie, sailing serenely across class lines, with its blueprint tucked jauntily under its arm. The image of a happy intimacy which this “movement” in theory has inadvertently promulgated is in fact the mystification of an intense withdrawal. What it means to “go over to the proletariat” in theory, and also what it means to be unable to do it, and also what it means to be unable to do it by volition, is now perfectly scotomized. We don’t speak about it. But if an anatomy of class impulses is to be more than an autopsy of the bourgeoisie (the bourgeoisie,

home alone), the individual who conducts it must surely leap or step or fall beyond the border of her own class experience, past the inhibitory signage of official ethics and into the class experience of someone else; she must assume this mannequin, the class other's desire for a standpoint, abstractly defined in the radiance of its disuse; her violation of the sanctity of this person must be consummate and inelegant; and it must be this because the proscription of the violation of the sanctity of the other's desire is *in truth* nothing but the desire of the bourgeois intellectual to secure her own class projections from scrutiny, that is to say, her own class projections *including* their wildest and most violent imputations, whose gratifying distortions are not remedied but blur all the more gruesomely when they are made the phantasmagoric property of the person (bourgeois) who continues in private to entertain them;—and all this is eventually to the credit of those who have an interest in believing that they are not and could never be the *enemy* of those from whose continued immiseration they benefit. The evacuation of the caricature of class movement *has* circumscribed the negative, because it has reduced the number and the variety of scenes in which social rejection might flare into menacing life. But then the exercise of comfortable restraint; the refusal to go over to the class other in clever anticipatory concern for what might be the consequences; tarrying and shilly shallying in guarded defence of our own essential beneficence; aversion to repudiation—all these are forms of negativity too, are they not, self-caricatures thick and teeming with their own form of hostility? The final presentation will address any questions you may have.

III

I've tried in the last two sections to think about some of the issues incident to the sclerosis of a vocabulary. In part this is because of the endless exegetical reduction of what might be meant by Marx and Engels when they adduce in the *Kommunistisches Manifest* their list of verbs to describe one class "going over" to another—but also, and to my mind more importantly, the sclerosis is due to the perpetual attrition of the negative, ensured in the effort conceptually to establish it, so that the "opposite" of going over to the proletariat—and the word "opposite" already indicates the analyticity characteristic of this trend—is just (is as simple as) *not* going over to it. Not going over to the proletariat—whatever that means—is never on this account a brutal shock, sustained in the experience of repudiation; it is never an effort at reconciliation which cannot be achieved, because social (class) contradictions cannot be individually alienated on the winds of whim or need; and it is never the *avoidance* of repudiation: in short, it is never *going over wrong*, but instead it is just (it is nothing but) the mere opposite of what Marx and Engels mean when they say that a portion of the bourgeoisie go over to the proletariat. And thus the modern historical experience of class, of the reproduction under capital of types of people who are defined by their relation to it, and of their movements towards and apart from one another, in love and aversion and in the most slack and languid indifference, is reduced to insipidity, and becomes at last a single and flavourless dispute about the epistemological status of the proletarian "standpoint," possessing as its corollary a meta-epistemological debate about the capacity of the individual bourgeois critic to assign to it its truth.

It is not worth attempting to state here what it would mean to know the full historical experience of "class"; it is a "problem" too large even to define; it is not a problem; and neither in this article or in my life can I hold in view at once the distinctions between "real" classes, between class constituents and their own disseminated abstract standpoints, and between the hurricane of fantasised standpoints which a class society generates *in situ*. I turn this idea over in my head and it seems obscure to me: isn't "standpoints" itself a shorthand for the most finely differentiated experience of abstract class-definitions, whose schemes swerve towards and away from the baseline of real human life? Is human experience when measured against these abstractions not itself caught in a cycle of attraction and revulsion? What's the point? Does that question terminate our

inquiry? But the argument here against the exegetical reduction of *überging* and its “opposite” is not a demand for a resurgent *variety* but an attempt to know in the most useful detail what it means to speak of a broader process of class *dissolution*. Are there historical developments in the bourgeois experience of not going over to the proletariat (or “the proletariat,” since these may be different entities)? Can these too be dragged into the light of our speech and spat back out; or, therefore, can we distend and attack a mere opposite until it becomes visible again as a latent impulse of repudiation; or as the latent desire to avoid painful subjection to it—as the desire not to be rejected? Is it possible that in the development of bourgeois culture (in the dissolution of bourgeois culture) we have gone wrong? Do latent repudiations fester now with more or less malignity than they did? Is this *the real historical movement of a class*, towards its dissolution? In this my final section I want to exit the theory cloister, and perhaps to unwind somewhat, into some more desultory reflections on bourgeois culture, the main suggestion of which is that the idea of *going over* has become more stubbornly vexatious for bourgeois thinkers, more darkly cross-hatched by the possibility of repudiation. The objects of discussion, in only roughly chronological order, are models of going over *wrong*.

In 1823, in his wildly pathological autobiographical novella *Liber Amoris*, William Hazlitt wrote:

THAT S. L. MIGHT HAVE BEEN MINE, AND NOW NEVER CAN—these are the two sole propositions that for ever stare me in the face, and look ghastly in at my poor brain. I am in some sense proud that I can feel this dreadful passion—it gives me a kind of rank in the kingdom of love—but I could have wished it had been for an object that at least could have understood its value and pitied its excess. You say her not coming to the door when you went is a proof—yes, that her complement is at present full! That is the reason she doesn’t want me there, lest I should discover the new affair—wretch that I am!¹⁹

Hazlitt lives in the knowledge that he is cut off permanently from the thing which must reciprocate his desire if life is to be worth living. Let’s cut to the chase. When the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, does it wish for an object that at least can understand its value and pity its excess? What kind of impropriety is it, this instatement at the centre of the question of class standpoints of the bourgeois vocabulary of sentiment? Adam Smith wrote in 1759 that “if we do not entirely enter into, and go along with, the joy of another, we have no sort of regard or fellow-feeling for it. The man who skips and dances about with that intemperate and senseless joy which we cannot accompany him in, is the object of our contempt and indignation.”²⁰ For Smith, anything we cannot pass over into (which we cannot “enter into”) cannot but be met with our contempt and indignation. Men who like to “skip” are contemptible. More generally (in a more philosophical mood), the person who displays his feelings with too much vehemence will repel those to whom he is present, because the basic structure of moral personhood, basic enough to be erected on the first page of *The Theory of the Moral Sentiments*, determines that I cannot feel what I observe another to feel with the same intense vivacity as if I experienced it myself. And since I who observe am also observed, and since I know this, Smith’s argument about the limitations of my own capacity of sympathetic imagination becomes in turn a principle of self-regulation. The highest moral disposition (Smith is not much interested in “imperatives”) entails that I acknowledge in the slightest cadences of my own behaviour the objective limits to the sympathy of other people; and when I act in this manner *other people may enter my feelings*. But Lord Hazlitt of the Kingdom of Love is a fucking idiot.

Smith’s moral theory corresponds to the ethics of a commercial bourgeoisie, and its image of regulated sociality moralises the practical etiquette of contract partners above all. Lurking behind

the series of examples on which its account of moral behaviour relies, behind its descriptions of men who skip in public and who are disgusting, and men who meet and who come to an understanding through the performance of a mutual regulation of personal impulse, behind its image of completed reciprocity in the entry we make into one another's feelings—somewhere in its conceptual underskirts—is the triumph of the contract. The confident bourgeoisie which lives and *moves* in the warm but not brilliant light of its own reciprocity creates—it is well known—other kinds of movement also: “Far, far away,” wrote Oliver Goldsmith, in famed paternalistic dismay, “thy children leave the land.”²¹ Contradictions must be “inhabited,” and inhabiting this one is easy. Members of the bourgeoisie can still penetrate one another. But the problem of “going over” is different in Hazlitt, because Hazlitt is stuck. THAT S. L. MIGHT HAVE BEEN MINE, AND NOW NEVER CAN. Is this a familiar kind of plaint? Do we recognise its mixture of mode and tense? Another statement by a bourgeois writer, more familiar from the current trade in academic monographs, states that “Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realise it was missed.”²² THAT COMMUNISM MIGHT HAVE BEEN MINE, AND NOW NEVER CAN. But what happens when “one” tries to realise it anyway? More specifically, what happens for bourgeois writers when their fraught grammar of comforting impossibility is disregarded? It is worth knowing again the failure of this so charmingly impossible desire, to know its accession into grotesque obsession, to know the way it might recompose “me” not as an angel or a beautiful raindrop but as an object hateful beyond measure, because this is the slurred expression of the internal dissolution of the bourgeoisie, its own damage aglint through the rips in the grey synthetic fabric which covers over the plastics from which its cubicles are built up. Class fantasies are not to be swept away, when they are the most naked image of a process of dissolution.

The liberal poet and essayist Leigh Hunt often adopted a typically ironical stance towards the excesses of fantasies of transcendence, wrenched free of the life that might sustain them. These were stupid, contemplative fantasies, window-gazing fantasies, *Wunscherfüllung* and nothing else, which is why eventually Hunt enjoyed literalising the standpoint which was their origin. His essay “Windows” begins,

The other day a butterfly came into our room and began beating himself against the upper panes of a half-open window, thinking to get back.²³

Hunt begins not with the standpoint of the bourgeoisie but of the window. The butterfly is so in love with what it believes itself to see that it cannot recognise what separates it from its object. “Oh faith!” sighs Hunt, “your butterfly must learn experience, as well as your Buonaparte.”²⁴ The essayist, staring indolently through the window of his study, whose height is neither sufficiently high to be poetic (aristocratic) nor sufficiently low to be prosaic (plebeian), and making it clear to us also that this is *his* window, reflects to himself in leisurely and untaxed sentences on the charming similitude between an insect and Napoleon Buonaparte.

But we had a higher simile for him than that. “Truly,” thought we, “little friend thou art like some of the great German transcendentalists, who, in thinking to reach at heaven by an impossible way (such at least it seemeth at present), run the hazard of cracking their brains, and spoiling their little wings for ever; whereas, if thou and they would but stoop a little lower, and begin with earth first, there, before thee, lieth open heaven as well as earth; and thou mayst mount high as thou wilt, after they own happy fashion, thinking less and enjoying all things.”²⁵

As the most inferior of all major (that is, of all the bourgeois) English Romantic poets, as well as the one who lived to see the greatest stretch of the nineteenth century, Hunt was well placed to write (he must have had an especial interest in writing) light satire on the transcendental exaltation of objects of absolute desire. Windows which allow for no human egress are the perfect metonym for the *vita contemplativa* in whose cells the desire for transcendence is cramped, because contemplation is the window's most basic use, or, rather, if we are to treat windows as commodities with use values which are variable according to their material design and class distribution, we ought to say that contemplation is the most basic use value of the window *for the bourgeoisie*. It is a tired truism in cultural studies that windows invest commodities with value by offering them protection, as an infant is invested with value when it is in the protection of its parent. It is a further truism that windows provide the transparent perimeter for private property, when it is important in the development of a commodity society that we are able to *see* more than we are in fact able to have. Those who discharge managerial functions within capitalist society have a responsibility to adjust expectations up or down in line with the needs of "business," and, from what Bukharin would have called the *Standpunkt* of expectation management, rioting, which smashes through windows, is evidence of a failure in the management of social entitlement. But Hunt tells us that inevitable hypertrophy in bourgeois expectations is less damaging than this, because, like the insect, the *dissatisfied* bourgeois is incapable of destroying anything except itself (the satisfied bourgeois is much more dangerous). Is Hunt wrong? In this sketch, Immanuel Kant beats himself to death against a sheet of glass. Is Kant wrong?

Hunt's fantasy can be traced back somewhat further, to 1800:

But in the darkness of the night, then most
this Dwelling charms me; covered by the gloom
Then, heedless of good manners, I stop short
And (who could help it?) feed by stealth my sight
With prospect of the company within,
Laid open through the blazing window. There
I see the eldest daughter at her wheel,
Spinning amain, as if to overtake
She knows not what, or teaching in her turn
Some little Novice of the sisterhood
That skill in this or other Household work
Which from her Father's honored hands, herself,
While She was yet a Little-one, had learned.
Mild Man! He is not gay, but they are gay,
And the whole House is filled with gaiety.²⁶

For Wordsworth in 1800 the home of the working poor is more "charming" at night, and in this usage the word is already demonstrating its age, pausing on its journey from incantation to the verbal expression of kitsch indifference. In fairness to the poet, he was unlikely to have known in the spring of 1800 that his language was destined to be cheerfully engrossed by estate agents and merchants whose own need for aesthetic vocabulary is defined principally by the requirement for terms of moderate and unaccountable approval.

But is it here, outside of the "whole" house, where Feuerbach's essential standpoint of man reaches its true (though not its chronological) endpoint? The perimeter of the house, with its window blazing as if it were on fire and not merely lit by one, or, at a stretch, just about suggestive of Milton—the fiend Moloch retraining as a salesman of glazed windows—appears in

the poem with the purpose of establishing the highest truth of Feuerbach's universalism at the material representative of its limit. What I mean by that is that the poet cannot cross over the border of this property which formally (legally) resembles his own, just as its occupants cannot pass into his, and the mutuality of this exclusion is both the shared experience of these class representatives but also what separates them insuperably and forever. This is the dialectic of bourgeois universalism. The limitless freedom of movement reverses into voyeurism, and while the relapse of Wordsworth's blank verse into broken single-line statements is not the most interesting feature of this passage, it is the voiced expression of the hesitation which occurs in speech at the threshold of propriety. I say it is the *expression*: not its mimesis but the thing itself. "Private property," someone once wrote, "does not know how to change crude need into human need. Its *idealism is fantasy, caprice and whim*." It could be said that it is the task of writers to give voice to the idealism of private property, but this would be nothing besides prescriptive reduplication, for writers have been elaborately concerned with the idealism of private property for some centuries. Before it was grandly usurped by the cathode-ray tube and its applications in consumer technics, Leigh Hunt knew that the idealism of the kind of private property *which contains windows*, i.e., *houses*, was nothing more than caprice. And in 1800, Wordsworth, "heedless" of the manners which he should observe, unable, as the Old English root implies, to *possess* them, anticipates Hunt's position. He anticipates it when he takes a vantage from which he can watch without detection the daughters of his working class neighbour. The essential standpoint of man shrivels into a lyric to the *whole house* sung by the bourgeois whose accepts his exclusion from it as the penance which exculpates him for his wealth.

Wordsworth's vantage offers a vision onto the eighteenth century putting-out system. What does he see? A woman is working "amain," quickly but also aggressively. The raw materials on which she works are likely owned by merchant-capitalists. She works on them *violently*, "as if" she were attempting to "overtake" something. The poet claims "She knows not what" this is. Wordsworth, watching a valorisation process through the window, now proceeds to another infringement, this time not only on the sanctity of the home (commodity) but on the sanctity of the thoughts of its inhabitants. Why does he claim to know that the elder daughter is acting "as if" she were trying to overtake something indistinct or incomprehensible? What recognisable social experience is meant to be implied here, in the invocation of an attempt to go faster than something which cannot be specified? Wordsworth's imprecision is endemic. It spreads outwards and through the description of the girl's sister who is "Some" little novice in something ("that skill in this or other").

Wordsworth knows what his object knows not what, and he knows it by writing in a desperate attempt to communicate with absolute and unwavering passion the song of the entire unity of all Men formed in brotherhood, in a language bold enough to supersede and preserve the greatest republican blank verse and with an imaginative spirit large enough to find even in the cage of the early English proletariat the kind of commitment which can harmonise with his own artifice of commitment to Grasmere, this blended unity of earth and sky, in a song whose intensity will be the true realisation of a desire for community, and which can make Elihu Burritt, citizen of the world, weep the kind of *beautiful raindrops* which Samuel Moore must have had in mind when he translated into English the *Manifest der Partei Kommunist*. But what Wordsworth's object the elder daughter does not know (what she knows not what) is that Wordsworth is hiding in her garden, and the passage terminates with this truth, which leaves the relevant social contradictions not at all "sharpened," the glass of the window not smashed into fragments but as intact as ever. This isn't satire but the effort to act out the individual alienation of social contradiction as the dissolution of the class whose own composition makes it incapable of acting against social contradiction *in any other way*.

Is this just an *embarras de richesses* for the roving *Ideologiekritik*? Is the standpoint of Man so reducible to scopophilia; or, to put that in other terms, is it really tenable, that the earnest and passionate attempt to communicate the brotherhood of man would transmit itself into the advance confirmation of a Lacan-derived film theory? But what is happening in this language? Is this imprecision a failure of courage motivated by the desire *not to go over too far*, not to issue the pulverising evidence of a failure of identification which is incapable of being disavowed; not to make myself repulsive by my too glib willingness to assert that I understand exactly what is happening in the mind or the heart of the person observed, who is not of my class, whose experience I don't share? Does the bourgeois poet want to evade his own definition as an enemy? Does speech falter in that grasp of that wish? Earlier I argued that the resistance to abstraction as such, that is, to the dismissal of standpoints on the grounds of their abstraction, is motivated by a bourgeois ethics of privacy whose solicitude for the rights of the "Other" at last fulsomely guarantees the rights of the bourgeois to maintain the fantasies which legitimate his class privileges. Wordsworth's lines are the exposure of that historical dynamic in language; they are the effort made in it to go over as far as possible towards the proletariat without being repugned. The dynamic is historical because this kind of tender negotiation with repudiation as a social fact—as the truth both of the attempt individually to go over and *also* not to do so—is the "result" of a radiantly intense period of internally antagonistic cross-class insurrection, a dream in blood which sweeps across the world and shines through bourgeois ink spilt on bourgeois paper. Adam Smith in 1759 could not have written these lines; what stopped him from going over was something else entirely. But the fact that, after Wordsworth, Romantic authors who wish to know the *truth* and to combine with the stars in the cosmos do not choose to go over to the proletariat but portend for themselves instead an image of heaven, ought to be treated as an implicit repudiation of an abstract standpoint which was at the end of the eighteenth century beginning to become *an option* (which is not to say that any bourgeois could uncomplicatedly assume it). Is this what changed: the choice of class identity (of abstract standpoint) pressed against the manifold reality of long-term social constitution and impulse? In bourgeois society all bourgeois desire for transcendence is an expression of the dissolution of the bourgeoisie, either in an expression of joy or, later, in the most significant and unremarked sense, as an expression of repudiation. What I mean is that bourgeois *transcendence* becomes in its historical development the occulted instantiation of a refusal of that other class identity which might (and on Lukács's account *must*) accelerate into its final catastrophe not only the dissolution of the bourgeoisie as a class but even the whole structure of class domination in which bourgeois *society* finds its fertilising basis.

As the identity of the bourgeoisie continues to fray and subside under the pressure of the social system it rules, the occulted and negative refusal of a proletarian class standpoint becomes increasingly contorted and grotesque: transcendence warps into the kind of rancid pathorrhea that would have made a gentle ascetic like Adam Smith sick to his stomach, as for example Wyndham Lewis saw so lucidly when he polemicized in *Blast* against Dickens and his "sentimental ghoul-like gloating over the death of Little Nell," or, more generally, against the desperate pleasure drawn from the extermination of what we profess to need and whose "intrinsic value" we profess in rhapsodies to admire. Lewis's own work throughout the first decades of the twentieth century was in part a guerrilla war in aesthetics against what he called with typical understatement the "BLACK BOURGEOIS ASPIRATION" to meliorate its own dissolution with images of transcendence, i.e., with occulted repudiations of a proletarian standpoint.²⁷ Lewis did not want repudiation to be occulted in an act of artistic self-transcendence: he wanted repudiation to be *screamed*. The bold precision of outline in his paintings is a surgical attempt to stanch the bleed into weak transcendence and the merely tacit

repudiation of the dissolution of one's own class; which is to say that where bourgeois transcendence is both the rejection of bourgeois immanence and the occulted repudiation of what Marx and Engels called going over to another class standpoint (the proletariat's), Lewis believed—and his attitude also was bourgeois, though in a different way—that he need only ululate with enough vigour his absolute and unconditional self-affirmation. His visual aesthetic is Stirner's *Ego und sein Eigenkeit* in brushstrokes. (Among conservative modernists, Lewis's work is significant for its recognition of bourgeois transcendence as a *weak effort in the repudiation of the proletarian standpoint*, and it departs in this respect from any more blandly generalised rebuttal of “modern” or even “bourgeois” decadence, fat on the fatuities of its herd mentality.)

It is the essential problem of ideology critique not that it diminishes itself to epistemology but that it is usually conducted *as if* it were occurring between just two people who are capable of communicating, in the touching colloquy of those who are equal only because equally stupid: Beckett's Mercier and Camier masturbating one another at an inn, Laurel and Hardy wrestling on the carpet in front of the blazing hearth, the refined gentleman author beaming his niceties via the felicitous intermediary of the publishing industry and into the lair of the reader's skull, this room of one's own, inalienable unless it gets smashed in.

Lewis's nice conceptual disquisition on BLACK BOURGEOIS ASPIRATION might discriminate for us several “kinds” of class repudiation, and some of these may yet even be affirmations in drag, and for this surely we must doff our hats to the Aristotle of BLOCK CAPITALS. But what Lewis does not tell us, and what moreover the whole discourse of ideology critique—with its habitual derogation of mere *Standpunktphilosophie*, its quaint baskets of historical data, its effervescent Truth to combat the wild hangovers of epistemic distortion—what that discourse can *never* tell us, even as it drifts unabated across the al fresco annexes of our long-franchised coffee shops, is the *impossibility* of affirmation defined (as I have defined it above) as the individual alienation of social contradiction by the “limitless movement” across the cordons which separate class from class. How do we know social possibility and the class fantasies which police it? We might begin, I suggest, by living out those fantasies with the most thickly malevolent cupidity, as, in the highest passion for unity, the poet Wordsworth did in a poem which he was never able to publish in the form in which I have quoted it, because its final movement towards universal brotherhood carried him backwards into a conciliation with exclusion achieved by sexual neurosis. The “possibility” for the individual alienation of social contradiction is abolished only in the vision of the effort to realise it, and what I've called the dissolution of a class can be nothing besides the asphyxiation of its possibilities—it can (can it?), to some extent, be an inside job.

Thy advocate is thy adverse party. We must do exactly what we are told. We can be absolutely in love with one another, like the beautiful men in the foreground of Goya's “Yard with Lunatics,” our bodies as pale as the certitude of our identity; and the effort to construct that unity can be the newest metaphysical oration, the truth content of the capital which we live to represent, circulating above us, broiling thinly like heaven's last and only possible representative. But, can it be so, that beneath this graphic heaven which seems forever to plunge and recover, as dramatic as Lazarus's decline and resurrection and decline and resurrection as seen from the standpoint of redemption on loop as farce, that I might look through this pane of glass and see you, and that I might attempt to pass over only to beat myself instead against the pane of glass indefatigably until death, while you, who don't exist, watch on, and as we, *the whole cast now*, including guest appearances from all our diminishing cries at *fragmentation* and *isolation*, continue to dissolve, leaving behind at last just the tepid watercolour which shows everyone who has ever lived,

holding hands, radiantly beautiful and overflowing with compassion, congregated in the most local intimacy, going nowhere, more and still more hatefully wrong.

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Notes

¹ *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, ed. Henry Duff Trail (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 37.

² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 229.

³ The references to throwing are lost in the most prominent translation of the Manifesto. Samuel Moore tells us that “entire sections of the ruling class are, by the advance of industry, precipitated into the proletariat, or are at least threatened in their conditions of existence.” *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 252. This is very Victorian. Moore’s moth-eaten “precipitated” is meant to translate *hinabgeworfen*; but “precipitated” splices into the DNA of the *Manifest der Partei Kommunist* a smidgen too much Lord Tennyson. “What a plague of rain; Of rain at Reggio, rain at Parma; At Lodi, rain, Piacenza, rain. At the standpoint of the proletariat, rain.” In the original German, gentlemen do not drizzle. In Marx and Engels’s text a portion of the ruling class is unceremoniously *thrown down* into the proletariat, more like a portion of a drunk being turfed out of a bar than a beautiful raindrop; and where the ruling class is not thrown down it is at last threatened with the prospect of it. And amid this process of dissolution—and this is where the claim which means so much to Lukács finds its first expression—a further portion, the part which has raised itself to the comprehension of the total historical movement, also goes over to the proletariat.

⁴ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin, 1973), 20-21.

⁵ A portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular [*namentlich*] that portion which has raised itself to the diamat platform, with its southfacing views onto the historical movement of the whole. The adverbial connection does not seem in Samuel Moore and Engels’s English to imply a relationship of logical necessity, though Lukács is perhaps poorly served by Moore (and Engels by Engels), since “in particular” is offered as a translation of *namentlich*, which could be taken at least to imply that going over to the proletariat is conditional on the theoretical comprehension of the whole, which is to say, is not merely an eventuality made more probable by it. But both Helen McFarlane in 1850 and Terrell Carver at the butt-end of history otherwise known as 1998 give “in particular.” Lukács’s own well known variation on Marx and Engels’s proposition does therefore surely strengthen it, because it eliminates even the lexical suggestion that it might be possible to go over to the proletariat by volition without comprehending “*der ganzen geschichtlichen Bewegung*”—the the whole historical movement. Lukács, in other words, does not argue that the standpoint of the proletariat is a particularly fine or comfortable place from which to observe the historical movement as a whole, in the way that the Saxony Tourist Board might suggest that a perch in the *Elbsandsteingebirge* is a particularly fine or comfortable place from which to observe a sea of fog; but he argues that it is the only standpoint from which the “knowledge of reality provided by the dialectical method” might be acquired. There is no other option. For McFarlane’s translation see *The Red Republican* no. 21 vol. 1, reprinted in *The Red Republican and The Friend of the People in two volumes, vol. 1, The Red Republican* (London: Merlin Press, 1966), 171; for Carver’s, *Marx: Later Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10. My thanks to Keston Sutherland for pointing me in the direction of the Merlin reprint of the Red Republican.

⁶ Thompson's revival of the *Geschichtenscheissenschlopf* occurs in his long ecstatic critical promenade through the cleometric groovers of Althusserian thinking, *The Poverty of Theory* (London: Merlin, 1995), 144-145.

⁷ Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, ed. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 64-65. This passage in Schleiermacher was brought to my attention by Neil Pattison's unpublished paper on the work of John Wilkinson, "Wilkinson's Law."

⁸ The most recent exponent of this item of soft-furnishing is Bernard Stiegler, *Towards a New Critique of Political Economy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009). I offer a slightly more extended analysis of the trend it represents in a review published in *Studies in Social and Political Thought*, volume 19, summer 2011.

⁹ *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), 4.

¹⁰ Searches for earlier occurrences throw up just two, the earliest of which falls in an advertisement for a republican newspaper to be published by a Mr. Elihu Burritt in 1855. Burritt's blurb, which was disseminated by several English newspapers, declares that his new periodical, the 'Citizen of the World', "will endeavour to merit its designation, by viewing from the elevated standpoint of human brotherhood all principles, policies, events, institutions, and enterprises, which affect the peace, prosperity [sic]." The advertisement obviously continues, but the editor of the miscellany section in the Hampshire Advertiser & Salisbury Guardian must have had better things to do, because Mr Burritt is cut off by an insouciant "&c. &c." [The Hampshire Advertiser, Sat, Jan 20, 1855] (Burritt, it appears, was famous for his mastery of languages, which would explain his small feat in English neologism.)

¹¹ Marx and Engels, *Collected Works Volume 4* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 201.

¹² *Ibid.*, 193.

¹³ It is true that the concept's passage from German Idealism to Marx terminated in its elective adoption by the theorists of Soviet Marxism. Thus Bukharin's pugilistic *Theory and Practice from the Standpoint of Dialectical Materialism* (1931) sets up against bourgeois scientificity a battery of standpoints, which include (apart from its titular standpoint, and *inter alia*), the "standpoint of 'I'", the "standpoint of social theory," the "standpoint of the causal regularity of social development", the "standpoint of actual relationships", the "standpoint of technique," the "standpoint of economics," the "standpoint of world history," and, most charmingly of all, the "standpoint of... basic orientation."

[<http://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1931/diamat/index.htm>]. Unlike Bukharin, Lukács was interested in the *exactitude* of standpoints. In 1925 he admonished Karl August Wittfogel's *The Science of Bourgeois Society*, which, despite its many "correct insights," failed to establish "clearly, convincingly and unambiguously" the relationship of the "standpoint" of bourgeois science to Marxism. *Political Writings 1919-1929*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: New Left Books, 1972), 144. Wittfogel joined the Frankfurt School of Social Research in 1928, where he remained for the next four years. It is relevant to what I will argue below that he would have been known to Adorno.

¹⁴ *Negative Dialectics*, 4.

¹⁵ Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1993), 1-2. I have revised Nicholsen's version, which gives "philosophy of viewpoints" for Adorno's *Standpunktphilosophie*, and which erratically translates the nominalised adjective *Verpflichtende*—meaning something like 'compulsoriness' or 'obligatoriness'—as "cogency." For the original German, see Adorno, *Drei Studien zu Hegel*, in *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 5*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 251.

¹⁶ Hegel often did use the word *Standpunkt* as a term of description in critical commentaries on Fichte, Jacobi, and (more rarely) on Kant, but I cannot find any passage in which the word is

used *contemptuously*. I'm grateful to Gordon Finlayson for guidance on this point (obviously I remain in full possession of my errors).

¹⁷ If it is replied that Adorno's thinking precludes the adoption of standpoints because a negative dialectic forecloses on this positivity (and we can guess the kinds of argument that might be adduced in support of this position), I would still deny the validity of the extrapolation — that the thinking which adopts 'standpoints' is untenable, retroceding to capital all intellectual autonomy—because the extrapolation assumes that a standpoint *must be true* in order to sustain the thinking which electively adopts it. In what follows I'll say more about why I dissent from this account of negation.

¹⁸ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), 93. I quote Eagleton because his version of the criticism is stated clearly, but in fact the criticism is everywhere in academic writing on Lukács, spreading like a virus from carrier to carrier. Here's another example: "However, [w]ho decides on the correctness or incorrectness of Marxist doctrine, i.e., on its conformity with proletarian interests? According to the Marxists: once again, this is a process where one of the participants declares himself to be the judge. As incoherent as these self-consecrations may be, they seem coherent to the Marxists who are dealing not with a real proletariat that exists only in an empirical way but with an idea of the proletariat that can, like any conceptual thing, be transformed as one likes." Assen Ignatow, 'Is There a 'Proletarian Standpoint'?' in *Lukács Today*, ed. Tom Rockmore (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1988), 164. As incoherent as this may be, the irony of "any conceptual thing" is not noticed by its author.

¹⁹ Hazlitt, *Liber Amoris and related writings*, ed. Gregory Dart (Manchester: Carcanet, 2008), 66-67.

²⁰ Smith, *The Theory of the Moral Sentiments* (London: Strahan, Cadell and Davies, 1797), 103-4.

²¹ *The Poems of Oliver Goldsmith* (Michigan: Scholarly Press, 1978), 129.

²² Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 3.

²³ Hunt, *The Seer, or, Common Places Refreshed, part One* (London: Edward Moxon, 1860), 12.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Wordsworth, *Home at Grasmere*, ed. Beth Darlington (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 74, ll.579-606.

²⁷ Wyndham Lewis, *Blast* (London: John Lane, 1914), 133, 59.