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Author(s): Oskar Negt, Alexander Kluge and Peter Labanyi

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*The Public Sphere and Experience: Selections**

OSKAR NEGΤ and ALEXANDER KLUGE

translated by PETER LABANYI

Foreword

Federal elections, Olympic ceremonies, the actions of a unit of sharpshooters, a theater premiere—all count as public events. Other events of overwhelming public significance, such as child-rearing, factory work, and watching television within one's own four walls, are considered private. The real social experiences of human beings, produced in everyday life and work cut across such divisions.

We originally intended to write a book about the public sphere¹ and the mass media. This would have examined the most advanced structural changes within these two spheres, in particular the media cartel. The loss of publicity within the various sectors of the Left, together with the restricted access of workers in their existing organization to channels of communication, soon led us to ask if there can be any effective forms of counter-publicity against the bourgeois public sphere. This is how we arrived at the concept of proletarian publicity, which embodies an experiential interest that is quite distinct. The dialectic of bourgeois and proletarian publicity is the subject of our book.

* The following selections are taken from the Suhrkamp edition of *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung*, Frankfurt, 1972, pp. 7–25, 35–44, 66–74, and 106–108. The complete English translation is forthcoming from the University of Minnesota Press. Unless otherwise indicated, all notes are by the authors.—Ed.

1. The key category—*Öffentlichkeit*—of Negt and Kluge's book is used by them in (at least) three senses: (1) as a spatial concept denoting the social sites or levels where meanings are manufactured, distributed, and exchanged; (2) as the ideational substance that is processed and produced within these sites; and (3) as "a general horizon of social experience" (see below). The difficulty in providing a translation is compounded by the fact that Negt and Kluge often use the term dialectically, in more than one of these senses simultaneously. This, according to them, reflects real elisions and conflations in social practice. Whereas "public sphere," which has become the established translation of *Öffentlichkeit*, adequately, if inelegantly renders sense (1), it cannot grasp (2) and (3). For these latter senses of *Öffentlichkeit* not as a "sphere" but as substance and as criterion, I have taken the risk of trying to rehabilitate the term *publicity* in the hope that such an attempt to reconquer terrain colonized by capital interests is in the spirit of Negt and Kluge's project of producing not just analyses and critiques but "counter-publicity." Drawing attention to the etymological relation between *public sphere* and *publicity* only serves to highlight the gap between the latter concept's emancipatory promise and its reality as the tool of fundamentally private interests.—Tr.

Rifts in the movement of history—crises, war, capitulation, revolution, counterrevolution—denote concrete constellations of social forces within which proletarian publicity develops. Since the latter has no existence as a ruling public sphere, it has to be reconstructed from such rifts, marginal cases, isolated initiatives. **To study substantive attempts at proletarian publicity is, however, only one aim of our argument: the other is to examine the contradictions emerging within advanced capitalist societies for their potential for counter-publicity.** We are aware of the danger of concepts like “proletarian experience” and “proletarian publicity” being reduced to idealist platitudes. In this connection Jürgen Habermas speaks, far more cautiously, of a “variant of a plebian public sphere that has, as it were, been suppressed within the historical process.”² During the past fifty years the concept “bourgeois” has been repeatedly devalued; but it is not possible to do away with it so long as the **facade of legitimation** created by the revolutionary bourgeoisie continues to determine the decaying postbourgeois forms of the public sphere. We use the word *bourgeois* as an invitation to the reader critically to reflect on the social origins of the ruling concept of the public sphere. Only in this way can the fetishistic character of the latter be grasped and a materialist concept developed.

We are starting from the assumption that the concept **proletarian** is no less ambiguous than **bourgeois**. Nonetheless, the former does refer to a strategic position that is substantively enmeshed within the history of the emancipation of the working class. The other reason we have chosen to retain this concept is because it is not at present susceptible to absorption into the ruling discourse; it

2. Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Neuwied and Berlin, 1969, p. 8. In favor of the concept of “plebian” publicity chosen by Habermas is the fact that throughout its history the proletariat never attempted to constitute a public sphere on its own, without bourgeois or lumpen-proletarian ingredients. It was the heterogeneous urban lower classes, who can be described as “plebian,” who attempted during the French Revolution or the class struggles in nineteenth-century France to fashion a public sphere appropriate to them. Moreover, the imprecision of the concept, which makes it serviceable for historical analysis (it has to be able to embrace wholly heterogeneous individual historical moments), is indicated by the term *plebian* rather than by *proletarian*, which appears to have a more exact analytical significance. Despite this, we have opted for *proletarian* because in our view we are dealing not with a variant of the bourgeois public sphere but with an entirely distinct conception of the overall social context present in history but not grasped by the latter term. Thus a plant where there is a strike or an occupied factory is to be understood not as a variant of the plebian public sphere but as the nucleus of a *conception of publicity that is rooted in the production process*. Furthermore, the same difficulty would arise when one speaks of the people (a concept that Habermas places in quotation marks), since in the latter the nature of workers as engaged in production fails to find expression. For the method of analysis pursued here and in what follows, the dialectic between a historical and a systematic approach is of central significance. The systematic approach looks for precise concepts and terms that are analytically articulate and capable of distinguishing phenomena. The historical approach must, if it is to capture the real movement of history, again and again sublimate the apparent precision of systematic concepts, in particular their tendency to exclude. For this reason, the adoption of the concept of a proletarian public sphere can be understood only in this dialectical context; it lays no claim to being more precise than, for instance, the term *plebian public sphere*, although our different choice of words indicates that our analysis is heading in a different direction.

resists categorization as part of the symbolic spectrum of the bourgeois public sphere which so readily accommodates the concept of “critical” publicity. There are objective reasons for this. Fifty years of counterrevolution and restoration have exhausted the labor movement’s linguistic resources. The word *proletarian* has, in the Federal Republic, taken on an attenuated, indeed an anachronistic sense. Yet the real conditions it denotes belong to the present, and there is no other word for them. We believe it is wrong to allow words to become obsolete before there is a change in the objects they denote.³

Whereas it is self-evident that the bourgeois public sphere is not a reference point for bourgeois interests alone, it is not generally assumed that proletarian experience and its organization are equally a crystallizing factor—for a public sphere which represents the interests and experiences of the overwhelming majority of the population, insofar as these experiences and interests are real.⁴ Proletarian life does not form a cohesive whole, but is

3. It is not our intention as individuals to replace historically evolved key concepts that denote unsublated real circumstances and do not have a purely definitional character. The fashioning of new concepts is a matter of collective effort. If historical situations really change, then new words come about too.

4. The concept of the proletarian public sphere is not our invention. It is used in various ways in the history of the labor movement, but in an often quite unspecific manner. So far as the period after the First World War is concerned, one feature, especially with reference to the communist parties, can be discerned that is significant for the way in which this concept is used. Proletarian publicity is not identical with the party. Someone who appeals to the proletarian public sphere also has the party in mind, but above all the masses. It is striking that the concept of public sphere employed in this context always depicts the mobilization of the masses or the party members for specific decisions that are either controversial or cannot be executed within the organizational apparatus. Thus there is talk of actions “that are calculated seriously to lower the estimation of party in the eyes of the proletarian public sphere” (Hermann Weber, *Die Stalinisierung der KPD in der Weimarer Republik*, documentary appendix, Rote Texte, Reihe Arbeiterbewegung, n.d., p. 416). There is an appeal to the proletarian public sphere when the aim is either to implement the decision and analysis of a specific sector within the party leadership or to criticize it as something that is irreconcilable with the interests of the proletariat as a whole. This instrumentalizing appeal to the masses and their acclamation corresponds, however, precisely to one of the principles of the bourgeois public sphere. Proletarian publicity does not operate in this way. The concept has here a sporadic, ad hoc quality, which is ascribed to the masses from outside. This situation is signalled by the fact that the party organization and the masses are no longer united in a common framework of experience. A still more graphic example of the way in which the concept of proletarian publicity is used is provided by the parallel action organized by Trotsky and his supporters alongside the official October demonstration during a phase in the development of Soviet society in which there was in practice only a small chance that Trotsky’s Left Opposition could assert itself. Lenin, too, refers in various ways to appealing to the party so as to carry through certain decisions against the majority in the party leadership. In all these cases the proletariat is seen as a totality, as the material carrier of a specific publicity. With Marx, the concept proletarian incorporates a sense that is not contained in sociological and political-economic definitions of the working class, even though it is their material foundation. The practical negation of the existing world is subsumed within the proletariat, a negation that needs only to be conceptualized for it to become part of the history of the political emancipation of the ruling class. In his *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* Marx says that all the demands of the working class are forms of expression of the mode of existence of this class itself. “By proclaiming the *dissolution of the hitherto existing world order* the proletariat merely states the *secret of its own existence*, for it is *in fact* the dissolution of that world order. By demanding the *negation of private property*, the proletariat merely raises to the rank of

characterized by a blocking of any genuine coherence. That horizon of social experience which does *not* do away with, but rather reinforces this blocking, is the bourgeois public sphere.

What is striking about the prevailing interpretations of the concept of the public sphere is that they attempt to bring together a multitude of phenomena and yet exclude the two most important areas of life: **the entire industrial apparatus of businesses and family socialization. According to these interpretations, the public sphere derives its substance from an intermediate realm which does not specifically express any particular social life-context, even though this public sphere allegedly represents the totality of society.**

The characteristic weakness of virtually all forms of the bourgeois public sphere derives from this contradiction: namely that the bourgeois public sphere excludes substantial life-interests and nevertheless claims to represent society as a whole. To enable it to fulfill its own claims, it must be treated like the laurel tree in Brecht's *Stories from the Calendar*, about which Mr. K. says: it is trimmed to make it even more perfect and even more round until there is nothing left. Since the bourgeois public sphere is not sufficiently grounded in substantive life-interests, it is compelled to ally itself with the more tangible interests of capitalist production. For the bourgeois public sphere, proletarian life remains a "thing-in-itself": exerting an influence on the former, but without being understood.

Today the consciousness industry, advertising, the publicity campaigns of businesses, and administrative apparatuses—together with the advanced production process, itself a pseudo-public sphere—overlay, *as new production public spheres*, the classical bourgeois public sphere. Their roots are not public: they work the raw material of everyday life, which, in contrast to the traditional forms of publicity, derive their penetrative force directly from capitalist production. By circumventing the intermediate realm of the traditional public sphere (the seasonal public sphere of elections, public opinion), they seek direct access to the private sphere of the individual. It is essential that proletarian counter-publicity confront these public spheres permeated by the interests of capital, and does not merely regard itself as the antithesis of the classical bourgeois public sphere.

Practical political experience is the crux. The working class must know how to deal with the bourgeois public sphere, the threats the latter poses, without allowing its own experiences to be defined by the latter's narrow horizons. The bourgeois public sphere is of no use as a medium for the crystallization of the experience of the working class—it is not even the real enemy. Since it came into being, the labor movement's motive has been to express proletarian interests in its own forms. Parallel to this ran the attempt to contest the ruling class's

a *principle of society* what society has made the principle of the *proletariat*, what, without its own cooperation, is already incorporated in *it* as the negative result of society" (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, London, 1975, p. 187).

enlistment of the state. Marx recognizes this when he describes the theft of wood as analogous to the propertied class's theft of the public sphere by appropriating the executive power of the latter without paying for it, but rather by engaging thousands of gendarmes, foresters, and soldiers for its own interests. **If the masses try to fight a ruling class reinforced by the power of the public sphere, their fight is hopeless; they are always simultaneously fighting against themselves, for it is by them that the public sphere is constituted.**

It is so difficult to grasp this because the idea of the bourgeois public sphere—as the “bold fiction of a binding of all politically significant decision-making processes to the right guaranteed by law, of citizens to shape their own opinions”⁵—has, since its inception, been ambivalent. The revolutionary bourgeoisie attempted, via the emphatic concept of public opinion, to fuse the whole of society into a unity. This remained merely a goal. In reality, although this was not expressed in political terms, it was the value founded by commodity exchange and private property that forced society together. In this way, the idea of the bourgeois public sphere created, in the masses organized by it, an awareness of possible reforms and alternatives. This illusion repeats itself in every attempt at political stock-taking and mass mobilization that occurs within the categories of the bourgeois public sphere.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, after centuries of preparing public opinion, bourgeois society constituted the public sphere as a crystallization of its experiences and ideologies. The “dictatorship of the bourgeoisie” articulates itself in the compartmentalizations, the *forms* of this public sphere. Whereas the bourgeois revolution initially makes a thoroughgoing attempt to overcome the limits of the capitalist mode of production, the forms—for instance the separation of powers, the division between public and private, between politics and production, between everyday language and authentic social expression, between education, science, and art on the one hand and the interests and experiences of the masses on the other—prevent even the mention of social criticism, of counter-publicity, and of the emancipation of the majority of the population. There is no chance that the experiences and interests of the proletariat, in the broadest sense, will be able to organize themselves amid this splitting of all the interrelated qualitative elements of experience and social practice.

We do not claim to be able to say what the content of proletarian experience is. But our political motive in this book is to uncouple the investigation of the public sphere and the mass media from its naturalized context, where all it yields is a vast number of publications that merely execute variations on the compartmentalizations of the bourgeois public sphere. What we understand by “naturalized” is evidenced by the ambivalence—in almost every case

5. Jürgen Habermas, Introduction to *Theorie und Praxis*, Frankfurt, 1971, p. 32.

unrecognized—of the most important concepts associated with the key phrase *public sphere*: public opinion, public authority, freedom of information, the production of publicity, mass media, etc. All these concepts have specific historical origins and express specific interests. The contradictory development of society is sedimented in the contradictory nature of these concepts. The knowledge of whence they derive and who employs them tells us more about their content than can any excursions into philology or the history of ideas.

The bourgeois public sphere is anchored in the formal characteristics of communication; it can be described as a continuous historical progression, insofar as one focuses on the ideas that are concretized within it. **But if, by contrast, one takes its real substance as one's point of departure, it cannot be considered to be unified at all, but rather the aggregate of individual spheres that are only abstractly related.** Television, the press, interest groups and political parties, parliament, army, public education, public chairs in the universities, the legal system, the industry of churches are only apparently fused into a general concept of the public sphere. In reality, this general, overriding public sphere runs parallel to these fields as a mere idea, and is exploited by the interests contained within each sphere, especially by the organized interests of the productive sector. What are overriding are those spheres that derive from the productive sector, which is constituted as nonpublic, as well as the collective doubt—a by-product of the capitalist mode of production—about the capacity of the latter to legitimate itself. Both these tendencies come together and combine with the manifestations of the classical public sphere, as these are united in the state and in parliament. For this reason, the decaying classical public sphere is no mere specter, behind which one could come into direct contact with capitalist interests. This last notion is just as false as the contrary assumption that within this aggregated public sphere the politicians could take a decision that ran counter to the interests of capital.

To simplify our account, concrete examples have been restricted to two relatively recent mass media: the media cartel and television. We have not examined in detail other spheres such as the press, parliament, interest groups and political parties, trade unions, or science and research. Individual aspects of proletarian publicity are discussed in a series of commentaries.

Our political motive in this book is to provide a framework for discussion which will direct the analytical concepts of political economy downward, toward the real experiences of human beings. Such discussion cannot itself be conducted in the forms provided by the bourgeois or the traditional academic public sphere alone. One needs to have recourse to investigative work which brings together existing and newly acquired social experience. It is plausible that such investigative work would concern itself, above all, with the material bases of its own production, the structures of the public sphere and of the mass media.

*The Public Sphere as the Organization
of Collective Experience*

At the heart of our investigation lies the question of the use value of the public sphere. To what extent can the working class utilize the public sphere? Which interests do ruling classes pursue via the public sphere? Each of the latter's forms will be examined according to these interests. Because it is historically a concept of extraordinary fluidity, it is difficult to define the use value of the public sphere. "*Public and public sphere* reveal a diversity of competing meanings which derive from different historical phases and, when simultaneously applied to bourgeois society in the epoch of industrial advance and the welfare state, amount to an opaque combination."⁶

To begin with, underlying usage, there is a restriction: the concept "public sphere" is understood as the "epochally defining category" (Habermas) of the bourgeois public sphere. This sense is, however, derived from the **distributional context** of the public sphere. The latter thus appears as something invariable; its phenomenal forms conceal the actual **structure of production** and, above all, the genesis of its individual institutions.

Amid these restrictions, the category's frame of reference fluctuates confusingly. The public sphere denotes specific institutions and practices (e.g., public authority, the press, public opinion, the public, publicity work, streets, and public places); it is, however, also a general horizon of social experience, the summation of everything that is, in reality or allegedly, relevant for all members of society. In this sense publicity is, on the one hand, a matter for a handful of professionals (e.g., politicians, editors, officials), on the other, something that concerns everyone and realizes itself only in people's minds, a dimension of their consciousness.⁷ In its fusion with the constellation of material interests in our "postbourgeois" society, the public sphere fluctuates between being a facade of legitimation capable of being deployed in diverse ways and being a mechanism for controlling the perception of what is relevant for society. In both its guises, the bourgeois public sphere shows itself to be illusory, but it cannot be equated with this illusion. **So long as the contradiction between the growing socialization of human beings and the attenuated forms of their private life persists, the public sphere is simultaneously a genuine articulation of a fundamental social need.** It is the only form of expression that links the members of society, who are

6. Habermas, *Strukturwandel*, p. 11. The reading of this book is prerequisite for the following, in particular with reference to the genesis of the bourgeois public sphere.

7. In social practice these two uses of the concept are repeatedly confused. Something that is purely private is regarded as public simply because it belongs within the ambit of a public institution or is provided with the stamp of public authority. Something that counts as private, such as the rearing of young children, is in reality of the greatest public interest.

merely “privately” aggregated via the production process, by combining their unfolded social characteristics with one another.⁸

This ambiguity cannot be eliminated by definitions alone. The latter would not result in the actual “utilization of the public sphere” by the masses organized within it. **The ambiguity has its roots in the structure and historical function of this public sphere.**⁹ It is, however, possible to exclude at the outset *one* incorrect use of the concept: the shifting back and forth between an interpretation of the intellectual substance of and real need for public, social organization and the reality of the bourgeois public sphere. The decaying forms of the bourgeois public sphere can neither be redeemed nor interpreted by alluding to the emphatic concept of a public sphere as decided by the early bourgeoisie. The need of the masses to orient themselves within a public horizon of experience does nothing to ameliorate the fact that the public sphere acts as a mere system of norms whenever this need is not genuinely articulated within the latter. The alternation between an idealizing and a critical view of the public sphere leads not to a dialectical, but to an ambivalent outcome: at one moment the public sphere appears as something that can be utilized, at the next, as something that cannot. What needs to be done, rather, is to investigate the ideal history of the public sphere together with the history of its decay, so as to bring out their identical mechanisms.

8. In “On the Jewish Question,” Marx analyzes the nineteenth-century state. According to Marx, the “political annulment of private property not only fails to abolish private property but even presupposes it” (*Collected Works*, p. 153). By the very fact that the state declares that distinctions of birth, class, and education are unpolitical, it does not sublimate them as such but confirms them as materially existing elements on which it itself is based. The problem is not that it sublimes these differences but that it takes up a negative stance toward them: this is the manner of its recognition. What takes place here is a kind of duplication of society into, as Marx says, “a heavenly and an earthly life: life in a political community in which he [man] considers himself a communal being, and life in civil society, in which he acts as a private individual. The relation of the political state to civil society is just as spiritual as the relation of heaven to earth” (*ibid.*, p. 154). For the nineteenth-century state, the public sphere corresponds to this celestial realm of ideas. This concept of the public sphere is ambivalent. On the one hand, it tends to hold fast to this parallelism of state and civil society, it draws its validity from state authority; on the other hand, it has the tendency to distinguish itself from the state as a kind of “control and conscience mechanism.” In this capacity it is capable of assembling, at a synthetic level, people’s socialized characteristics accumulated within the private sphere and within the alienated labor process. Publicity in this sense is distinct from both the socialized labor process as well as from private existence and from the state. The ambivalence of the concept makes it impossible objectively to define what is in reality of public interest; what we are dealing with is not a material but a constructed level.

9. Compare the more precise determination of the essential mechanisms of bourgeois publicity in later sections of this book: “The Repression and Occlusion of the Bourgeois Public Sphere by the Organized, Non-Public Production Public Spheres of Modern Big Industry” and “The Most Progressive Appearances of the Consciousness Industry.” [Omitted here — Ed.]

The Concept of Experience and the Public Sphere

The public sphere possesses use value when social experience organizes itself within it.¹⁰ In the practices of the bourgeois life and production, experience and organization stand in no specific relation to the totality of society. These concepts are primarily used *technically*. The most important decisions about forms of organization and the constitution of experience *antedate* the establishment of the bourgeois mode of production. "What we call private is so, only insofar as it is public. It has been public and must remain public precisely in order that it can be, whether for a moment or for several thousand years, private."¹¹ "In order to be able to isolate capital as something private, one must be able to control wealth as something public, since raw materials and tools, money and workers belong, in fact, to the public sphere. One can, as an individual, act in the market, buy it up, for example, precisely because it is a social phenomenon."¹²

The fact that whatever is private is dependent on the public sphere also applies to the way in which language, modes of social intercourse, and the public context itself come into being. Precisely because the important decisions about the horizon and organization of experience have been taken in advance, it is possible to exert control in a purely technical manner.¹³ Added to this — so far as

10. This concept is here initially used in a generalized sense; it will be more precisely defined in due course. The organization of social experience can be employed either on behalf of a specific ruling interest or in an emancipatory fashion. For instance, scientists can be interested in the exchange and hence the organization, particularized and autonomous, of their scientific experience, whose object is the domination of nature on a world scale in the forms of the scientific public sphere; such experience, which is collective to only a restricted degree, will not as a rule tend to solidify into a political general will that embraces the whole of society. Another example is the interest of the ruling classes to bind the real social and collective experience of the majority of the population to the illusion of a public sphere and an alleged political general will and thereby to organize this experience as static. Whereas in the case of many industrial products such as chairs, bicycles, the use value elements are the same for almost every person, determining the use value of publicity is fundamentally dependent on class interest, on the specific relationship between particular interests that are bound up with a particular public sphere and with the whole of society.

11. Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, "Kapital und Privateigentum in der Sprache," *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, no. 7 (1972), p. 44.

12. *Ibid.*

13. The real interplay between experience, its organization, and the horizon of publicity is, for bourgeois relations of production as well, dialectical and does *not* operate in a technical manner. This is not visible to everyday consciousness because the historical production of experience, organization, and publicity disappears into its product, the public sphere that defines the present. What can be perceived is the distributional apparatus of this public sphere, from which, again, experience is derived. This distributive public sphere is, however, as before, in reality defined by its *production structure* as the overdetermining factor; this structure is based not only on previous production, but repeatedly reproduces itself from out of the everyday experience of human beings who are subsumed under it. If one grasps the essential connections, then production is that which overdetermines the public sphere. The latter, however, appears not only to be separated from this context of production but also as something specific, as a realm of its own. In reality, however, the material nexus is that the production of publicity preceded commodity production, just as the production of the circulation and distribution sphere in the framework of commodity production is also the prerequisite of production, but the *production of this separation* is no longer visible in this separation.

bourgeois society's awareness of its own experience and its organization is concerned—is an almost constant analogy with the existing practice of universal commodity production.

The abstraction of value that underlies the latter and has the entire world in its grip—in other words, the separation of concrete and abstract labor—provides the model and can be recognized in the generalization of the activities of the state and the public sphere: in the law. Although the anarchy of commodity production is motivated by private interest, in other words, by the opposite of the collective will of society, it develops models of general relevance. **These models are mistaken for and interpreted as products of the collective will, as if the actual status quo, which has only been recognized retrospectively, rested on the latter.**

The structures of this bourgeois tradition also determine the way of life and production practices of the present, in which classes and individuals are themselves no longer citizens in the sense implied by that tradition. Today's middle classes, the sectors of the working class influenced by the bourgeois way of life, students, the technical intelligentsia are all successors of the narrow propertied and educated bourgeois stratum of the nineteenth century and recapitulate under late capitalist conditions individual components of its patterns of experience and organization. The purely technical application of the latter in the contexts of the domination of nature and of social function is, however, no more natural than it was in the bourgeois epoch itself. Perhaps the possibility of purely technical functioning rests on a high level of learning processes, of the socialization required by these learning processes, and of the social, public preconditions that are subjectively experienced as second nature. **The fact that all these preconditions are in fact dialectical emerges only if one goes back to this prehistory.**

In the classical theory of the bourgeoisie, this many-layered quality is reflected in the opposition between the concept of experience derived from the Humean tradition¹⁴ and the critique of that tradition in the philosophy of Hegel.

14. The concepts of empirical experience, of receptivity, the recognition of that which is given, "merely contemplative materialism," attempt to bracket out the subject as a distorting factor. This concept of experience thereby appears to satisfy the requirement of increased objectivity. To be distinguished from this is a second level of the concept of experience within bourgeois philosophy that is grasped in terms of production. For Kant, only that which is the product of the subject is the object of experience; this subject itself produces the rules and laws of the structure of the phenomenal world. It experiences only that which it has itself previously produced. For only thereby is it possible to create a framework of experience that is distinct from mere imagination. This framework of experience is the functioning of the subject, which can, however, function only when it has a counterpart, a block (Adorno), a thing in itself against which it can work and which cannot be dissolved in this mechanism of experience produced by the subject. One can put it as follows: the material of the subject's experiential production can never be wholly appropriated. Everything that is real experience, which can also be verified and repeated by other reasoning subjects, is the expression of a process of production that is based not on isolated individuals but denotes the activity of a collective societal subject into which all the activities of engagement with external and internal nature

“This dialectical movement which consciousness performs on itself—both on its knowledge and on its object, insofar as the new true object emerges for consciousness from this movement itself—is, in fact, what is known as experience.”¹⁵ This describes the real workings of bourgeois society and any other society, whether or not the empirical subjects of this society are aware of the dialectic. In what follows, the concept of organized social experience derives from Hegel’s definitions, which also underlie the work of Marx. This is not to deny that the concepts of experience and organized experience (the dialectical social mediation of experience) play only a subsidiary role in Marxist orthodoxy.

An individual worker—irrespective of which section of the working class he belongs to and of how far his concrete labor differs from that of other sections—makes “his experiences.”¹⁶ The horizon of these experiences is the unity of the proletarian life-context.¹⁷ This context embraces both the various levels on which this worker’s commodity and use value are produced (socialization, the psychic structure of the individual, school, the acquisition of professional knowledge, leisure, mass media) and—what is inseparable from the latter—his enlistment in the production process. It is via this unified context, which he “experiences” publicly and privately, that he absorbs “society as a whole,” the totality of the context of mystification.¹⁸ He would have to be a philosopher to understand how his experience—which is both preorganized and unorganized, which both molds and merely accompanies his empirical life—is produced. He is prevented from understanding what is taking place through him because the media through which experience is constituted, that is, language, psychic organization, the forms of social intercourse, and the public sphere, all participate in the mystificatory context of commodity fetishism. But even if he did understand, he would still have no experience. Not even philosophers could produce social experience on an individual basis. Before the worker registers this lack, he encounters a concept of experience derived from the natural sciences which has a real function and a suggestive power in that narrow sector of social practice whose object is the domination of nature. He will take this scientific body of experience, which is not socially but technically programmed, as the very form in which experience is secured. This will lead him to “understand” that there is

are drawn. Experience is in a strict sense simultaneously a production process and the reception of societal agreements about the manifestation or rule-boundedness of objects.

15. G. W. F. Hegel, Introduction to *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, vol. 2, Glockner, ed., Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt, 1964, p. 78. Further see Theodor W. Adorno, “Erfahrungsgehalt,” in *Drei Studien zu Hegel. Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, Frankfurt, 1971, pp. 295–325.

16. On the differentiation of industrial work see Horst Kern and Michael Schumann, *Industriearbeit und Arbeiterbewusstsein*, Part 1, Frankfurt, 1970, along with the bibliographical references given there.

17. Reimut Rieche, *Proletarischer Lebenszusammenhang*, typescript, Frankfurt, 1971, and *Die proletarische Familie*, Frankfurt, 1971.

18. On the concept of the context of mystification, see Adorno, *Drei Studien zu Hegel*.

nothing he can do with “experience,” that he cannot alter his fate with its help. It is a matter for his superiors in the workplace and for specialists.

*The Processing of Social Experience
by the New Production Public Spheres*

The traditional public sphere, whose characteristic weakness rests on the mechanism of exclusion between public and private, is today overlaid by *industrialized production public spheres*, which tend to incorporate private realms, in particular the production process and the life-context.¹⁹ These new forms *seem* to

19. On the concept of the industrialized production public sphere (one can employ the singular insofar as one is clear that this overdetermining “public sphere” is an accumulation of numerous individual public spheres, which are as diverse and as distinct from one another as the elements of the capitalist productions process itself):

(i) *The production public sphere has its nucleus in the sensual presence of publicity that takes as its point of departure the objective process of production—society as it exists.* This includes the organizational structure of production as a whole as well as “industry as the open book of human psychology” (Marx), in other words, both what has been internalized in human beings and the outside world: the spatial existence of bank and insurance company palaces, city centers, and industrial zones, along with the work, learning, and life-processes within and alongside factories. Because the overwhelming objectivity of this production nexus becomes its own ideology, the doubling of society into a “heavenly and earthly life,” its division into a political community and the private, disappears: the earthly residue itself counts as a celestial realm of ideas. It is only within this public/nonpublic whole that the contradictions give rise to new doublings and mechanisms of exclusion.

(ii) *The consciousness industry, together with the nexus of consumption and advertising,* in other words, the production and distribution that are attached to the sphere of secondary exploitation, overlay and ally themselves with the primary production public sphere.

(iii) *The publicity work of firms and that of societal institutions* (interest groups, parties, the state) constitute an abstract form of the individual production public spheres and enter into the aggregate of the latter as an additional overlay.

In this *aggregate* of industrial production public spheres, traditional labor organizations or industrial relations law—even elements of the student movement—constitute from an emancipatory perspective an incorporated ornament, *even if from the perspective of nonemancipation they are real and effective partial forces.* One can get an idea of how the production public sphere overdetermines the political public sphere in the classical sense (seasonal elections, professional politics) if one bears in mind how natural it seems that the threat of the collapse of large economic units, Krupp or the Ruhr coal industry, which are after all private enterprises, becomes a public matter and compels intervention by the state. It would, for instance, be conceivable that a dismantling and building up of entire industrial regions, for instance in the wake of the European Economic Community (E.E.C.) development, could take place on account of real shifts in the production public sphere. Since there is an interplay between all elements of this organic whole, in atypical cases it can come about that political decisions too have a dominant impact; as a rule, however, this dominance is initiated here too by real infrastructural forces—for instance by the mass doubt that is a by-product of the production sphere (cf. the referendum vote against the E.E.C. entry in Norway).

The prototype of the production public sphere in early capitalism is the linking of housing and social amenities with the factory complex as in the case of Krupp. Nowadays there develops alongside the plants of individual concerns a plant in the wider sense which embraces the totality of social production. The social contract, which could only be counterfeited by the revolutionary bourgeoisie, is in the industrial production public spheres positively produced as an internalization of the objective impact of the social order. This totalization of the public sphere has two effects: the social totality is

people to be no less public than the traditional bourgeois public sphere. **Here, and in what follows, we understand that which is public as an aggregate of phenomena that have quite different characteristics and origins. What is public does not have a homogeneous substance at all.** It always consists of numerous elements, which give the impression of belonging together but are in reality only externally joined. In this light, the classical public sphere is originally rooted in the bourgeois life-context, yet separates itself from this context and from the production process. By contrast, the new production public spheres are **a direct expression of the domain of production.**

1. The classical public sphere of newspapers, chancelleries, parliaments, clubs, parties, associations rests on a quasi-artisanal mode of production.²⁰ By comparison, the industrialized public sphere of a computer, the mass media, the media cartel, the combined public relations and legal departments of conglomerates and interest groups, and, finally, reality itself as a public sphere transformed by production, represent a superior and more highly organized level of production.²¹

2. The ideological output of the production public spheres, which permeates the classical public sphere and the social horizon of experience, embraces not only the unadulterated interests of capital—as articulated via the large interest groups of industry—but also the interests of the workers in the production process insofar as these are absorbed by the structure of capital. This represents a complex conjuncture of production interests, life interests, and legitimation needs. The production public sphere is—since it is not just an expression of overdetermining production apparatuses, but also the vehicle of life interests that have entered in it—no longer obliged then to resolve its contradictions as a mere reflex of the dictates of capital. **Instead of excluding the classical public sphere, the production public sphere—as it is intermeshed with the classical public sphere—oscillates between exclusion and intensified incorporation: actual situations that cannot be legitimated become the victims of deliberately manufactured nonpublicity; power relations in the production process that are not in themselves capable of legitimation are charged with legitimated interests of the whole and thereby presented in a context of legitimation. The differentiation between public and private is replaced by the contradiction between the pressure of production interests and the need for legitimation.** The structure

rendered public and, as a counter-tendency, extreme efforts are undertaken, in the interest of maintaining private property, to prevent this from occurring.

20. Kurt Tucholsky manages to capture this fundamental situation when he itemizes what is necessary to found a political party in the Weimar Republic: one chairman, one telephone, one typewriter.

21. The encounter between these different levels of public sphere, for example, takes the following form: a public prosecutor and a secretary will come up against thirty lawyers and sixty public relations specialists of a chemical firm if they try to bring to light an instance of environmental pollution.

of capital is as a result enriched, becomes capable of expansion; the spectrum of possible capitalist solutions to contradictions is, simultaneously, narrowed. The result is a type of transformation society, which is dominated by the capital relationship.²² In relation to the classical public sphere, the production public sphere thus seems to possess no mechanism of exclusion that would dislodge it from its foundation of interests and weaken it. **In relation to the social horizon of experience, however, identical mechanisms are reiterated in the aggregated and intermeshed classical and production public spheres.**

3. If the demands of the classical public sphere collide with those of the production public sphere, the former, as a rule, give way. **The ideality of the bourgeois public sphere is here confronted with the compact materiality of the new production public spheres.** Even within the latter, those interests that regularly assert themselves are either those with the most direct connection to the profit interest or those that are capable of amassing more life-context [*Lebenszusammenhang*] within themselves. The intersections between the various production public spheres are characterized by fissures and a wealth of contradictions. These include the intersections between private consciousness industry and public service television; between mass media and the press, on the one hand, and the publicity work of conglomerates, on the other; between state publicity and monopolies of opinion; between the publicity of trade unions and that of employers' organizations, and so forth. Papering over these fissures is the task of a special branch of publicity work. This is necessary because there is no equilibrium among the production public spheres but, rather, a struggle to subsume one beneath the others.²³

4. It is the function of this cumulative public sphere to bring about agreement, order, and legitimation. This public sphere is, however, subordinated to the primacy of the power relations that determine the domain of production. **For this reason, the work of legitimation within this public sphere can be carried**

22. The *culs de sac* [*Aporien*] that derive from this are in part new and in part extensions of those of the classical bourgeois public sphere at a higher level of organization. The claim of every public sphere to sovereignty resides in its capacity to legitimate itself: the legally established order. An authentic history of the bourgeois public sphere would, however, have to admit that its history is the history of force, just as this force continually reproduces itself within the production process. If the public sphere accumulates legitimation, it becomes stronger as a public sphere but must separate itself from production interests that cannot be legitimated—it becomes increasingly untenable as a production public sphere. If, on the other hand, it introduces more interests into its framework, it again becomes stronger, “obligatory” for the more powerful elements of society—but in doing so it renders its real existence, namely the contradictory structure of the production process, public and thereby tends to sublimate its own foundation and endangers the validity of private property.

23. In this connection, the public service structure of a production public sphere such as television says nothing about its ability to assert itself. On the one hand, a higher degree of public service, “ideational,” statutory elements will result in a separation from the characteristic profit interest that governs society. This separation weakens. On the other hand, public service television also indirectly binds profit interests of its suppliers and itself obeys a value abstraction of a special kind: it is making “legitimation profits.”

out and overseen only distributively, and it can itself be changed only superficially, since its real history is taking place nonpublicly in the domain of production. As in the classical bourgeois public sphere, but for different reasons, the productive structure of publicity, and the nonpublic experience linked with it, separates itself from its mere manifestation in the apparatus of distribution—publicity as a finished product that is publicly experienced.

5. This is in no way altered by the fact that the state, as a summation of the classical public sphere, itself influences a significant part of the private sector by its interventions. On the contrary, the same rules apply to the state's contribution to the production public sphere.

6. Any change in this structure, any movement within the public sphere's system of legitimation, opens the possibility for a formal subsumption of sections of society under the control of other sections. The fact that this is how the public sphere operates in reality—its utilization by private interests, which have, of course, enriched themselves with the interests of those engaged in the domain of production and have thereby become incontestable—makes it difficult coherently to incorporate critical experience into the public sphere.

7. If the function of the public sphere were wholly transparent, if it corresponded to the early bourgeois ideal of publicity, then it could not continue to operate in this form. **This is why all the control stations of this public sphere are organized as arcane realms.** The key word *confidential* prevents the transfer of social experience from one domain to another. The mechanism of exclusion is admittedly more subtle than that of the classical bourgeoisie, but no less effective.

8. The bourgeois public sphere's network of norms is under occupation by massive production interests to such a degree that it becomes an arsenal that can be deployed by private elements.²⁴

24. One can speak of a network of norms in the sense that norms are dislodged from their original historical context. In this substanceless formal shape they are taken up by the strongest capital interests and often turned precisely against demands that hold fast to the original historical content of these norms. Thus, for instance, the basic right of *press freedom*, which is intended to defend a press that is independent, critical, and rests on a diversity of opinions against the absolutist state, is interpreted by the Springer concern in such a way that it protects the latter's production interests, which destroy this very diversity of opinion. The exploitation of the historically evolved framework of public norms described here can already be found in the classical public sphere, but it is exacerbated in the era of the production public sphere. In both situations the system of publicly sanctioned norms appears to the profit interest as a second nature awaiting its exploitation. The norms cast off products for exploitation as trees do fruit. The more abstract the level, the more fruitful and opaque. At the level of the *global economy*, the norms of the world currency system are in the foreground. The most powerful capital interest, that of the United States, enjoys so-called special rights of withdrawal from the world currency fund, while the same norms are not accessible to the developing countries. Every ruling of the E.E.C. similarly contains norms that harmonize the structures of whole branches of industry in the interests of large production apparatuses. At a *national level*, safety, control, censorship, and quality regulations, originally intended to protect a general interest, are reinterpreted, however, in alliance with private interests into mechanisms to exclude competition. There-

9. Reiterated in the amalgamation of classical public sphere and the new production public sphere is **the rejection of the proletarian life-context as it stands**. Life-context is acknowledged insofar as it fits in with the realization of capital's interest in exploitation [*Verwertungsinteresse*]. In the process, capital's form of expression modifies itself; it accommodates itself to real needs, but must, however, simultaneously model all real needs so that it can slot them into its abstract system. To everyday experience this yields a confusing picture, wherein the life-context is simultaneously integrated into production and the public sphere, and yet is at the same time excluded because in its concrete totality it is not recognized as an autonomous whole.

10. Marx says that, for the nineteenth-century proletariat, the abstraction of everything human, even of the semblance of the human, has in practice been achieved. The old and new public spheres of bourgeois society can respond only with palliatives; **they provide, without any real change in the class situation, the semblance of humanity as a separate product**. This is the foundation of the culture industry's pauperism [*Pauperismus*], which destroys experience.²⁵ In the consciousness industry, but also in the public practice of aggrandizement and the ideological manufacture of the other production public spheres, **the consciousness of the worker** becomes the raw material and the site where these processes realize themselves. This does not alter the overall context of class struggles, but augments them with a higher, more opaque level. The position is

fore it was possible after 1975, for example, to drive Volkswagen competition from American markets with the aid of safety regulations for automobile production. The most consistent exploitation of public norms is the so-called syndicate structure, which during the Third Reich represented the typical form of economic organization. Within this system the structuring of branches of industry adequate to the interests of the concern is accomplished by setting up statutory semistate institutions via which redistributions of economic wealth and attenuations of production and distribution take place. Organized on a private basis, such syndicates would come up against the ban on cartels—in statutory form they are perfectly feasible. An example of this is provided by the first piece of Federal legislation in the field of media policy, the so-called Film Subvention Law. In this case the legislative division of competence between federal and provincial levels was exploited by particular interests in the commercial cinema in such a way that the medium, which comprises cultural and economic dimensions, was to be subsidized in an abstract economic fashion, since federal legislation has competence only for the economic side of film. The result of this is the so-called “schmaltz-cartel” [*Schnulzen-Kartell*], a law which favors only certain films financed by concerns while bracketing out independent productions as merely “cultural.” In the Film Subvention Bureau set up in the wake of the Film Subvention Law, representatives of parliament, the churches, and television work together with certain sectors of the film industry so that there arises a mixture of public and private power that is completely inscrutable. What is characteristic of this is the confusion of areas of responsibility: Bundestag deputies become, as presidents of this bureau, representatives of economic interests, thereby being subject to the legal monitoring of ministries which they themselves, as parliamentary deputies, control. Such constitutional nonsense would not have been possible in the classical public sphere; in supranational organizations above all, it becomes the norm.

25. See Jürgen Habermas, “Die Dialektik der Rationalisierung. Vom Pauperismus in Produktion und Konsum,” in *Merkur*, vol. VIII (1954), pp. 701ff. Reprinted in *Arbeit, Erkenntnis, Fortschritt*, Amsterdam, 1970, pp. 7ff.

thus altered insofar as those parts of the life-context that had not hitherto been directly valorized by the interests of capital are now likewise preorganized by society. So the proletarian life-context is split into two halves. One is reabsorbed into the new production public spheres and participates in the process of industrialization; the other is disqualified in accordance with the systems of production and the production public sphere by which society is determined. The proletarian life-context does not as such lose its experiential value; but the experience bound up in it is rendered “incomprehensible” in terms of social communication: it ultimately becomes private. As a result, those domains that relate to human activities that are not directly necessary for the production process and the substructure of legitimation are subjected to an organized impoverishment. At the same time, publicity work, the production of ideology, and the “management” of everyday life—the latter in particular via pluralistically balanced leisure and consciousness programs—appropriate as raw material human desires for a meaningful life and aspects of consciousness in order to erect an industrialized facade of legitimation. Real experience is torn into two parts that are, in class terms, opposed to one another.

*The Workings of Fantasy as the Form
in which Authentic Experience Is Produced*

In all previous history, living labor has, along with the surplus value extracted from it, produced something else—fantasy. The latter has many layers and develops as a necessary compensation for the experiences of the alienated labor process. The intolerability of his real situation creates in the worker a defense mechanism that protects the ego from the distresses an alienated reality imposes.²⁶ Since living, dialectical experience would not be able to tolerate this reality, the latter’s oppressive dimension is taken up into fantasy, where the nightmare quality of reality is absented. To transform the experience bound up in fantasy into collective practical emancipation, it is not sufficient simply to use the fantasy product; rather one must theoretically grasp the relation of dependency between fantasy and the experience of an alienated reality. **In its unsublated form, as a merely libidinal counterweight to unbearable alienation, fantasy is itself merely an expression of the latter. Its content is therefore inverted consciousness. Yet by virtue of its mode of production, fantasy represents an unconscious practical criticism of alienation.**²⁷

26. E.g. Anna Freud, *Das Ich und die Abwehrmechanismen*, Munich, 1971, p. 137: “The development of reactions serves as a safety device against the return of the repressed from within, fantasy conversely to deny distress from the outside world.”

27. In this context one can interpret the following passage by Marx in a more literal sense than is customary (see letters from Marx to Ruge in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, vol. 1, pp. 345ff.).

In that case we do not confront the world in a doctrinaire way with a new principle:
Here is the truth, kneel down before it! We develop new principles for the world out of

Without a doubt these workings of fantasy, for which exploitation supposedly has no use, have hitherto been suppressed on a vast scale: human beings are expected to be realistic. But at the very sites of this suppression, it was not possible for bourgeois society entirely to assimilate proletarian consciousness and imagination or simply subsume them under the valorization interest [*Verwertungsinteresse*]. The suppression of fantasy is the condition of its freer existence in contemporary society. One can outlaw as unrealistic the spinning of a web around reality, but if one does this it becomes difficult to influence the direction and mode of fantasy production. The existence of the subliminal activity of human consciousness—which, owing to its neglect hitherto by bourgeois interests and the public sphere, represents a partly autonomous mode of experience by the working class—is today threatened because it is precisely the workings of fantasy that constitute the raw material and the medium for the expansion of the consciousness industry.

The capacity of fantasy to organize one's own experiences is concealed by the structures of consciousness, attention spans, and stereotypes molded by the culture industry, as well as by the apparent substantiality of everyday experience in its bourgeois definition. The quantifying time of the production process—composed of nothing but linear units of time, functionally linked with one another—is generally hostile to fantasy. But it is precisely the former that is helpless before the specific time scale, the “time-brand” (Freud) of fantasy.

The workings of fantasy are in an oblique relation to valorized time [*zur verwerteten Zeit*]. The specific movement of fantasy, as described by Freud, fuses

the world's own principles. We do not say to the world: Cease your struggles, they are foolish; we will give you the true slogan of struggle. We merely show the world what it is really fighting for, and consciousness is something that *it has* to acquire, even if it does not want to.

The reform of consciousness consists *only* in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in awakening it out of its dream about itself, in *explaining* to it the meaning of its own actions. Our whole object can only be—as is also the case in Feuerbach's criticism of religion—to give religious and philosophical questions the form corresponding to man who has become conscious of himself.

Hence, our motto must be: the reform of consciousness not through dogmas, but by analyzing the mystical consciousness that is unintelligible to itself, whether it manifests itself in a religious or a political form. It will then become evident that the world has long dreamed of possessing something of which it has only to be conscious in order to possess it in reality. It will become evident that it is not a question of drawing a great mental dividing line between past and future, but of *realizing* the thoughts of the past. Lastly, it will become evident that mankind is not beginning a *new* work, but is consciously carrying into effect its old work.

This is by no means, as it were, a passage that has not yet been permeated by the materialist method, and which employs *dream* only as an image. On the contrary, this represents a movement that is materializing itself within individual consciousness but does not as yet have the *form* of consciousness. This is expressed empirically not only in the stream of association that accompanies the lifelong labor process but also in the historical sedimentations of this stream of consciousness in the shape of cultural products and modes of life.

within each moment immediate present impressions, past wishes, and future wish-fulfillment.²⁸ Beneath the opposition between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, fantasy will display in all people the same mechanism, which attempts to associate present, past, and future. This mechanism is itself not class-specific. But, the fantasy material that is converted by means of these associations—and in particular the degree of distortion of the former under the pressure of the reality principle of society and the influence of the fragmentation of personal time—is entirely dependent on one's position within the production process. The same applies with respect to whether this fantasy material is expressed in a stunted or fully developed form.

It is important to recognize that fantasy relates to a concrete situation in a threefold sense: **to the situation within which a wish arose, to that of the immediate impression that has been processed, and to the imagined situation of the fulfillment of the wish.** Just such situations are, however, in the proletarian life-context, “damaged situations.” In the real life cycle they appear disjointed, intermingled with other moments, transposed hither and thither without regard for the fantasy linked to them. The chaotic quality of fantasy is not an aspect of its true nature but of its manifestation in situations indifferent to its specific mode of production. The latter, moreover, remains reactive: it takes its cue from reality and therefore reproduces the distorted concreteness of this reality.

Whereas standard language and instrumental rationality do not cross the boundary between bourgeois and proletarian publicity, colloquial language and the workings of fantasy are exposed to the conflict between them (as attempts to express and grasp life). The junction between bourgeois and proletarian publicity, between the bourgeois and the proletarian articulation of the circumstances of everyday life, does not exist as a spatial, temporal, logical, or concrete threshold—which could, for instance, be crossed by vigorous translation work. Proletarian publicity negates bourgeois publicity because it either dissolves, destroys, or assimilates the latter's elements. For opposite reasons, the bourgeois public sphere does the same with every manifestation of proletarian publicity not supported by working-class power, and thus cannot repel attacks. Coexistence is impossible. It is true that centers for

28. Freud describes this by means of an example. It is, to be sure, no accident that he takes it from the labor process, even though the essay is about writers.

Take the case of a poor orphan lad, to whom you gave the address of some employer where he may perhaps get work. On the way there he falls into a day-dream suitable to the situation from which it springs. The content of the fantasy will be somewhat as follows: He is taken on and pleases his new employer, makes himself indispensable in the business, is taken into the family of the employer, and marries the charming daughter of the house. Then he comes to conduct the business, first as a partner, and then as successor to his father-in-law (Sigmund Freud, “The Poet and Day-Dreaming,” in *Collected Papers*, vol. IV, London, 1971, p. 178).

the articulation of proletarian interests can confront corresponding bourgeois centers in one and the same society; but when they come into contact, their interaction proves unreal. Fantasy that is drawn away from this point of conflict therefore takes on that travestied form that has hitherto made it impossible to conceive of science, education, and aesthetic production as organizing forms of the fantasy of the masses or, conversely, of incorporating fantasy, as it manifests itself among the masses, in emancipatory forms of consciousness appropriate to the level of industrial production. In this way, one of the raw materials of class consciousness, the imaginative faculty grasped as a medium of sensuality and fantasy, remains cut off from the overall social situation and frozen at a lower level of production—that of individuals or of only random cooperation. The higher levels of production in society excludes this raw material. At the same time, industry—in particular the consciousness industry—tries to develop techniques to reincorporate fantasy in domesticated form.

Insofar as fantasy follows its own mode of production, which is not structured by the process of exploitation, it is threatened by a specific danger. Fantasy has a tendency to distance itself from the alienated labor process and to translate itself into timeless and ahistorical modes of production “which do not and cannot exist.” It would prevent the worker from representing his interests in reality. This danger is not, however, as great as may appear from the bolstered standpoint of the critical-rationalistic tradition of thought. As fantasies move further away from the reality of the production process, the goal that drives them on becomes less sensitive. Therefore, all escapist forms of fantasy production tend, once they have reached a certain distance from reality, to turn around and face up to real situations. They establish themselves at a level definitively separated from the production process only if they are deliberately organized and confined there by a valorization interest.²⁹

Fantasy in the dissociated sense of modern usage is a product of the bourgeoisie. Accordingly, the word does not denote the underlying, unified intellectual productive force which represents a specific process with its own laws. **On the contrary, this productive force is from the outset schematized according to the alien principles of capitalist valorization. It is in this process that what is subsequently called fantasy is created by dissociation and confinement.**³⁰ That

29. This can be an interest in economic exploitation or in legitimization profits. The latter are the currency that enables subsumption under specific power relations. This can entail legitimization out of a desire for orthodoxy or also entertainment or new news values that are intended to justify subsumption under a news industry. The bourgeois novel, of which Lukács says that it does not have to be read but devoured, offers, at least in part, a comparable framework in which for long stretches fantasy moves alongside reality and not within it. It is absurd for Lukács to demand that precisely this quality of the “hermetic” work of art must be imported into socialism.

30. The *internment* of fantasy takes place in two respects: elements of it are absorbed as a cement to sustain alienated conditions of work, life, and culture. Ultimately, for instance, on the assembly line

which, from the standpoint of valorization, appears particularly difficult to control, the residue of unfulfilled wishes, ideas, of the brain's own laws of movement, which are both unprocessed and resist incorporation into the bourgeois scheme, is depicted as fantasy, as vagabond, as that component of the intellectual faculties which is unemployed. **In reality, fantasy is a specific means of production engaged in a process that is not visible to capital's interest in exploitation: the transformation of the relations between human beings and nature, along with the reappropriation of the dead labor of generations that is sedimented into history.**³¹ Fantasy is thus not a particular substance—as when one says: “so-and-so has a lot of imagination”—but the organizer of mediation. It is the specific process whereby libidinal structure, consciousness, and the outside world are connected to one another. If this productive force of the brain is divided up to such a degree that it cannot obey the laws according to which it operates, the result is a significant obstacle for any emancipatory practice. This means that an important tool is lost for the self-emancipation of the workers, the precondition of which is an analysis in the social and historical sense, by analogy with the principle of the reappropriation of the repressed as developed by Freud for an *individual* life history.³²

and in sweated labor, it consists almost solely of the internalized imagination of the consequences—real or imagined loss of love, punishment, isolation, etc.—if one were simply to escape from confinement. Here fantasy transforms itself into discipline, “realism,” apathy. Other parts of this same energy, which appear to be floating around freely, roam through past, present, and future, but on account of their own libidinally directed laws of motion seek to avoid contact with alienated actuality, with the bourgeois reality principle. They were interned in the ghettos of the arts, reveries, beautiful feelings.

In the process of this partition the “realistic” and “unrealistic” elements of fantasy developed opposing need structures and capacities. Their opposition is not, by mere addition, capable of being reunited. Their combination into an effective intellectual productive force presupposes the reactualization of the entire prehistory of this partitioned fantasy activity.

31. By contrast with the bourgeois usage of the term *fantasy*, Freud therefore rightly speaks of *dream-work*, *grief-work*, the *work* of the imaginative faculty, etc. These are, however, only partial aspects of fantasy as a productive force which can develop itself as a whole only when its own laws of movement enter into the reality principle, against which it wears itself out, in the shape of a new reality principle.

32. What Freud is concerned with is the reappropriation of individual life history and its conflicts. The medium of analysis here is language. For the emancipation of social classes, the reappropriation of the dead labor bound up in the history of the human race, the medium of analysis is, by contrast, not verbal language but a language in the wider sense that embraces all mimetic, cultural, and social relationships as means of expression. The analysis of language is here only one aspect. The most important medium for a self-analysis of the masses would be work. It is, however, in part due to the partitioning of fantasy as a productive force, not understood as an agent of communication between past, present, and the desire for an autonomous identity in the future, but can operate only in the immediate context of the alienated labor process. If one sees the process of social revolution not in the form of public events, but as a specific process of labor and production, it becomes clear what political significance the productive force underlying fantasy possesses. Unless it is organized, the process of social transformation cannot be taken up by those who produce the wealth in society.

*Proletarian Publicity as a Historical
Counter-Concept to Bourgeois Publicity*

By contrast with the bourgeois class in which the interests of individuals are organized and implemented in private and public form alternately, the interests of workers can, since they are unrealized, be organized only if they enter into a life-context, in other words, into a proletarian public sphere. Only then do they have the chance to develop as interests, instead of remaining mere possibilities.

The fact that these interests can be realized as social labor power only through the needle's eye of their valorization as labor power for commodities makes them initially mere objects of other interests. If subsequently they are directly suppressed, in other words, if they are not socially valorized, they survive as living labor power, as raw material. In this capacity, as extraeconomic interests, they are—precisely in the forbidden zones of fantasy beneath the level of taboos—stereotypes of a proletarian life-context organized only in rudimentary form not susceptible to additional suppression. Therefore they cannot be assimilated either. **In this respect, they have two characteristics: by their defensive attitude toward society, their conservatism, and their subcultural character, they are once again mere objects; but they are, simultaneously, the block of real life that stands against the valorization interest.** As long as capital is dependent on living labor as a source of wealth, this element of the proletarian life-context cannot be extinguished by repression.

This state of affairs represents the initial phase of the constitution of proletarian publicity, and indeed at every stage of social development. Where attempts are made to fit this block into the interests of capital, for instance by the subsumption of the life-context under the program and consciousness industry or the new production public spheres, the accompanying oppression and exclusion produce the substance, appropriately differentiated, of a newly emergent block. On this block of proletarian life interests is based Lenin's belief that there is no situation without some solution. It is no contradiction that, initially, at the level of social mediation depicted, no concrete solutions present themselves. Capital cannot destroy this block, and the proletariat cannot take hold of society from within it.

In reality, this founding phase of proletarian publicity is only rarely encountered in this pure form. It is concealed by more highly organized levels of proletarian publicity.³³ For the history of the labor movement, it is above all two aspects of this higher level of organization that have been important. It is necessary to distinguish them, since all forms of proletarian publicity are the

33. As against this, it would not be concealed by the pure form of the bourgeois public sphere. It is precisely the result of exclusion and suppression, in other words, the very opposite of this bourgeois public sphere.

qualitative expression of the proletarian life-context and therefore tend—by contrast with the costumed character of the rapidly changing bourgeois public spheres—to exclude more developed forms.