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PRIVACY FORM OF THE INDIVIDUAL
AND ENVIRONMENT FORM OF SOCIETY* (1977)

I.

The forms in which psychology in bourgeois society defines its objects seem to force themselves upon the researcher of their own accord. Nothing seems more self-evident than to start out with the individual who finds himself in a natural environment. To be more exact: nothing seems more self-evident than to explain the modes of behavior and of experience of individuals by their environmental circumstances which act directly upon the organism, whether through the behavioristic stimulus-response schema or through some other paradigm, and regardless to what extent and in what way a modification of the environmental influences by the organism-variables may be recognized. The individual appears here as one-sidedly dependent upon the environmental conditions which he did not bring about and cannot influence, but a knowledge of which, in principle, makes his "behavior" predictable. Accordingly, in such a view, statements can be made about "the individual" which are precise, abstract and general in the sense of natural science: insofar as particular (perhaps even experimentally reproducible) conditions are present, "the individual," no matter what time or place, will exhibit particular behavior.

The self-evident way in which this basic structure forces itself upon the researcher time after time has a real basis. It is the daily experience of

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innumerable individuals in bourgeois society. Standing alone, they face an environment that is ready-made and "closed." Their isolation within a social environment on which they experience a one-sided dependency, is not mere appearance, but hard reality. This reality gives rise to a basic conception of the relationship between the individual and society, but it reflects only one layer, and in this sense the most superficial — although the most directly experiences — of this reality. "Layer" here refers as much to the history of this reality as to the functional interconnection of its present events. In reality, individuals are already socially mediated, and society is historically produced through the action of countless individuals and generations of individuals. The individual as a starting point is already the result of the historical practices of individuals themselves. The bourgeois individual, however, is oblivious to this form from the start, because the social relations force him to rely on himself. In any event, the historical consciousness of the interaction between individual and society would not directly alter his historical situation. The external confrontation with a social environment is hard reality for the individual.

The researcher-subject is a member of the same world and finds himself in the same basic situation. "Subject" can here, in line with Althusser, be literally translated as "the subjugated." The researcher-subject also is directly subjugated, from the start, to the forms which are provided every individual by society as his "social space." For the psychologist — who has another subject as his object — the problem becomes particularly acute. Subjugated by the same form-determination as his object-subject, he sees by means of this determination. This subjugatedness of his way of seeing necessarily remains unconscious to him; to become conscious of it he would have to break through it. It is exactly this "self-evidence" with which things appear to him which is a symptom of his subjugation to these forms. If one limits oneself to

grasping what appears in these forms of privacy, then no matter how hard one tries to develop and secure the theoretical and methodological instrumentarium of science, in this case psychology, when measured against the opportunities for cognition, the result will remain 'science' only in a very rudimentary sense. Not to know what one is doing is the opposite of science. Therefore, one needs from the outset a conscious derivation and justification of the basic concepts which define the object. In the present case, we must carefully seek the derivation of the bourgeois 'private form' of the individual and its corresponding specific 'environmental form' of society.

Our main concern here is the definition of psychology's object. But now it becomes clear that what must be objectified are the forms in which each object spontaneously appears. Unconscious subjugation to the determinants of everyday consciousness must give way to conscious control of these determinants. Everyday consciousness can be transcended only by means of scientific cognition of the determining forces of everyday life. As long as this cognition is not attempted or is not successful, the consciousness of the scientist will remain bound to the given forms of reality instead of being comprehensive objective knowledge.

For scientific cognition, the cognized social world does not remain as all-embracing, as 'an environment,' but it must be grasped in a comprehensive way. In other words, science must explain comprehensively society's pseudo-naturalness, i.e. why it appears in the form of an environment. In the absence of an analysis of the appearance of an environment in the form of a "thing," the latter is simply spontaneously reproduced in consciousness.

But can this be done at all? Is this task not a Munchhausen dilemma? One cannot pull oneself out of a swamp by one's own hair. There is no real rational starting point which is not embedded in and mediated by the everyday

experiential world. The problem is clear, but the path to solving it is problematic. The problem is: how to gain knowledge via the forms in which everything is spontaneously thought to begin with.

This knowledge is not gained by catapulting everyday consciousness into the "beyond" of true abstractions. All well-intentioned buzzwords, such as essence-appearance, surface-depth, do not get us any further. *The transition, the development from one form of thought to the other is abandoned.* The degradation of everyday reality to a "mere world of appearance" is a verbal stunt; in fact, the reality of the everyday is the most directly solid. To deny its reality is to behave like an ostrich, albeit a learned one. In the last few years, hardly anything has been so mystifying for certain critical minds as the talk about the mystification of consciousness (above all through forms of value). There is no completely different world behind the everyday world. To think that there would be to revert to metaphysical thinking, or what Nietzsche calls "behind-the-world" thinking. In order not to fall victim to the illusion of a world allegedly existing behind the forms determined by our everyday consciousness, we must investigate the transition from consciousness-in-spontaneous-forms to consciousness-about-spontaneous-forms. Let us formulate the task, then, in such a way that we avoid the otherworldly consciousness and the denial of the reality of everyday life. The structure directly experienced in everyday life must be explainable as an "aspect" of a comprehensive interconnection (which therefore functions in relation to other "aspects" of the interconnection).

II.

In view of this problem, there is no excuse not to refer back to the insights of Marx's critique of political economy. Herein is the founding of an epochal thrust of consciousness — although the ruling interests of the economic forms of capitalism are irreconcilably opposed to a general acceptance of this offer for cognition. The revolutionary advance of the critique of political economy over classical political economy does not lie in its application of the labor theory of value — although Marx was the first to accomplish this free of contradictions; it lies in the fact that Marx provided a scientific explanation of the economic forms in which classical economy tries to discover quantitative relations and laws, without, however, calling into question these forms or social categories (money, capital, wages, etc.) themselves.

Marx solved this epistemological problem with the help of the historical-logical method, which does not simply deal with "complete phenomena" in everyday life in their finished forms, but grasps them in the "flow of their motion" within the practical necessity in which they arose.

From the everyday world, he takes up the simplest economic form — that of the commodity — which everyone knows, "even if they know nothing else." Through analysis of these forms, he discovers their structure and their laws of motion. He grasps them as they are constituted by social praxis, and thus comes upon at the same time their fixed status relative to individual praxis, which will find these forms ready-made in each case. Marx at the same time encounters the law of the further development: of these forms to higher ones, comprised in the genetic series running from the simplest value-form through the form of money to the form of capital, and its appendage, the form of wages.

This method implies both a historicization of the logical and a logic of the historic.¹

The historicization of the economic forms of bourgeois society enters into a characteristic kind of tension with it. For it is the forms which constitute this socio-economic formation. To conceive of these forms in historical terms means to conceive of this formation itself in historical terms. Comprehensive scientific cognition of this formation also means to conceive of it as having once arisen and as being transitory. More precisely it means to conceive of it in its contradictory nature and its law governed process of development to its own limits and to the threshold of a higher social order. For scientific cognition, the existing society therefore remains not an eternal natural necessity; on the contrary, it appears as what it is — a historically specific social form.

A comprehensive critique of the constituting forms of this society and of the consciousness which remains unconsciously in it, as though they were the natural forms of the social, creates, with the theoretical analysis of its pseudo-natural character — which continues to exist in reality — the indispensable prerequisite for making, on the one hand, the natural foundations of the social, and on the other hand, its general historic determinants, into the subject of investigation. As early as the "Theses on Feuerbach," Marx defined the standpoint of materialist dialectics as that of human society or social humanity. For the comprehensive scientific cognition of social forms which cannot remain within these forms, there is no other standpoint. In the critique of political economy, Marx transformed his insight, which in the "Theses on

¹ The introductory nucleus of Marx's analysis of the value-form is investigated in detail in my *Vorlesungen zur Einführung ins "Kapital"* [Introductory lectures on "Capital"] (Köln, Second Edition, 1976). This investigation cannot be recapitulated here, but it is nevertheless essential to refer back to its results in what follows. In particular the concept of the >objective forms of thought< is isolated and generalized from *Capital* there.

Feuerbach" could be taken as a mere declaration of intent, into a systematic method of acquiring knowledge and forming concepts. The capitalist mode of production is investigated as a historically specific form of social production. As specific, it demonstrates a specific contradictoriness: the social asserts itself "from behind" — by means of the private. The private itself can be conceived of as a specific social form of the negation of the social. Marx designates this contradictory connection in its simplest form, by the analysis of the equivalence-form whose third characteristic is that "private labor becomes its opposite, labor in its direct social form." This characteristic of the equivalence-form is the expression of the basic characteristic of the capitalist form of society. Its specific contradiction characterizes both its form of motion and its necessary development to the borders of a higher form of society in which social labor will no longer appear in private form but rather directly as the labor of social humanity.

Marx showed that capitalist society in its movement and development is determined by the basic contradiction that it is at one and the same time both an organism of social production and an inorganic, atomistic chaos of private activities. In other words, it is social production under the dominance of private property. This contradictory society cannot live without constantly reproducing the contradiction at a rising level of socialization. The development of the means of production demands a constantly higher level of socialization of their productive use; the private barrier becomes constantly more absurd and destructive in its effects. The capitalist mode of production develops the conditions for the "contradiction" on the specific level of conscious action in the image of the working class, its organizations and struggles, in a way which is just as much governed by law as the basic contradiction which we have just mentioned. Thus the capitalist mode of

production produces at the same time its exploited human element and its constantly rising level of socialization as a rising self-conscious element of the higher social formation. Bourgeois society cannot live at all except by bringing forth the formative elements of the higher social order forth out of itself. These formative elements also include the products of "general labor," as Marx described scholarly activity. In this way, capitalist society brings forth out of itself the elements of immediate social production and thereby the criteria for a radical critique of the existing society—even if this is marked by the basic contradictions of capitalist society and functionalized by the class struggle, but still in real terms out of itself, without any world hidden behind it or any utopian beyond.

Marx's well known dictum to the effect that the anatomy of man provides the key to the anatomy of the ape, therefore takes on in the critique of political economy the concrete significance of a key function of the perspective of directly social humanity for the anatomy of capitalist society. This at the same time points to the partisan character of this theory. It concerns the comprehensive scientific cognition of the basic social forms, and it becomes clear that this comprehensive cognition is possible only when it runs counter to the interest of capital on the basis of the elements of direct social production.² Insofar as "bourgeois" science remains within the social forms, it reproduces in thought the pseudo-natural character of capitalist relationships, and to that extent stands at the same time within the trammels of spontaneous capitalist ideology and on the bourgeois standpoint of capital. These are two sides of the same coin, which are, however, to be treated in different ways.

III.

² ((2)) Cf. W. F. Haug, "Die Bedeutung von Standpunkt und sozialistischer Perspektive für die Kritik der politischen "Ökonomie" ["The Meaning of Standpoint and Socialist Perspective for the Critique of Political Economy"], in *Argument* 74/1972 (reprinted in W. F. Haug, *Bestimmte Negation [Determined Negation]*, Frankfurt, 1973.

The central category for the scientific grasping of the consciousness which arises spontaneously in the capitalist economic forms of everyday life is the category of *the objective forms of thought*. Insofar as individuals must mediate their lives in action within determined economic forms, they learn the objective lawfulness of action-in-these-forms. Their consciousness is conceived here not as autonomous, in the sense of a mechanically functioning apparatus, which passively reflects an external existence. On the contrary, consciousness stands here as what it in fact is — namely conscious, active existence in determined economic forms. These economic forms are the fundamental forms of social praxis, and hence the forms of social praxis of individuals. Individual praxis in these forms mediates consciousness, just as consciousness mediates this praxis. Thinking, from the standpoint of the praxis of life in these forms, is subject to their "logic." Rather, it must subjugate itself to this logic, in order to mediate successful practice. Its subjugation is not a point of departure but rather a result. The economic forms consequently condition forms of thinking which are precisely objective forms of thought. In relation to immediate economic praxis, the thoughts in these forms are altogether fitted to the necessities. From the standpoint of everyday exchange-praxis, it is not inappropriate to conceive of value as a thing, or as a relationship between things, for it is in fact dealt with in this form. This form-immanent functional consciousness is false insofar as it is generalized to presumed consciousness *about* things and relationships. It remains embraced by objective economic forms and knows nothing about this embrace, but reproduces it spontaneously and unconsciously.

The explanation of the spontaneous everyday consciousness in capitalist society as being structured through such objective forms of thought, explains at the same time its subordinate and formally "received" correctness, and its lawful falsity: hence the important Marxian concept of *necessarily false*

consciousness, in which not only the "false" must be emphasized as is often the case, but also and primarily, the "necessity", which in the first place is a practical necessity of life for the individual.

Objective forms of thought exist not only on the level of the historically-specific economic forms of capitalism. Corresponding forms also exist on the level of the general social structure and on that of the metabolic process taking place through the mediation of labor between man and the natural world. Up to now, the first level, critical of capitalism, has been pre-eminent in historical-materialist science. The connections on the other two levels have been largely neglected. For these reasons, an impermissible kind of generalization in which, for example, all forms of thought were interpreted as mere reflexes of capitalist-economic forms, could make head way. This was based on a mechanistic concept of the determination of forms of thought by economic forms in which the intermediary position of individual life activity was eliminated (as, for example by Alfred Sohn-Rethel and, as an economic "reflex theory of consciousness" by Joachim Bischoff and "Project Class Analysis").

If one keeps in mind the fact that only in extreme cases do "pure " phenomena in consciousness and behavior, conditioned by a single connection in a complex reality, occur, and that the rule is rather to find superimpositions of various types in which the specific levels mediated by personal life activity, are entered into by specific connections, and in which the actually prevailing side will structure consciousness as dominant form of thought — if one bears in mind this complexity, one will see that an analytical instrumentarium is the precondition for the scientific reproduction of such phenomena in thought. Special attention should be paid in this matter to the relationship of tension between the various aspects of opposing and

hierarchically structured phenomena.

IV.

The individual in an external relationship to a seemingly natural social environment - this is how in the first place, the basic structure is forced upon the consciousness of the researcher with false obviousness. We can now be more precise about the spontaneous point of departure of bourgeois consciousness. The seeming naturalness of society is explicable by its determination by bourgeois forms: the connections between the activities of individual producers of goods presents itself from behind blindly, as if accidentally and in any case in addition, mediated through circulating things; Marx called these products of labor which have become goods, reflecting the basic contradiction linguistically, *social things*, and the social relationships of individuals, reified. The social structure determined by relationships of production depending on the private division of labor gives the products of human labor what is referred to as their *fetish-character*, and this refers not only to goods and money, but in a dominant way to the means of production which function in the form of capital. It is precisely the social which appears naturalized, and the material-natural which appears as something social. These relationships necessarily inject a false naturalness into consciousness.

Not only the means and products of labor, but also individuals have their specific form impressed upon them by the social relationships. In capitalist society the individual is determined by the social form of privacy, and is a private individual or a private person. Thus, it is the historically specific position and possibilities of action of the private person in commodity producing society that spontaneously forces itself upon consciousness as the self-evident starting point of psychological research.

The private form-determination of the personal - seen from a scientific point of view, which is to say, from a historical-social scientific point of view - is anything but self-evident. It is a late historical product, in the closest inner interrelationship to the society which appears as an external environment. In scientific terms, the private can be conceived only historically and in the all-embracing connections of all private persons, their relationships and forms of activity.

Only the abstract distinction between the social form of the private person, and the simple human individual makes possible the investigation of the constitution of form-determined individuals of this kind in their inner contradictoriness, and in a perspective which is critical in a forward-pointing sense.

We now know how it is that in our capitalist society the product of historical-human practice surrounds the individual like an alien, non-human natural world. The individual is born into it as into the ready-made world which he not only does not experience in the perspective of its being grounded in the community, but does not cognize as a process at all. It embraces him without question, and is in this sense an environment (around-world).^{*} His own private world is formed by the individual inwardly in a kind of hollow space. The immediate model of the private individual must be *the private acquisition of the alienated-social*.

Scientific theory of such relationships is not possible as an ideal parallel process to private acquisition. It is possible only as part of a consciously anticipatory, all embracing human acquisition of the historical product. To conceive in scientific terms what is engendered by history leads to a corresponding engendering of history itself. "Why should what is made

^{*} In German, *Umwelt*. C.S.

conscious not be made consciously?"³

5. Marx solved our original problem, which appeared to be a *Munchhausen* dilemma, by grasping the object in the "history of its formation," - that is, by analyzing its movement and development in the practical, mediating connections of its necessity. To sum up this pioneering scientific rule in a formula: Marx solved the fundamental social-scientific problem, not analytically-reductively, but "from the bottom to the top"⁴ — and that is what is meant by dialectical materialist methodology. Thus, for the individual sciences — whether they investigate social objects, whether it is the determination of their form as sciences-in-society which must be analyzed, an irrevocable preparatory task has been accomplished, and the result is that we have at our disposal a theoretical framework for the study of social interconnection. The more closely a science is related — subjectively or objectively — to social processes, the less it can avoid the consequences of ignoring this scientific preparatory accomplishment. Science emancipates itself from the narrow, unscientific forms in which it originally developed, only when the directly given forms are mediated — i.e. when its real mediatedness can be theoretically grasped. Without this mediation, without this critique, it remains in what Karel Kosik called the pseudo-concrete. And as long as the social formation is not changed, the narrow forms of science persist in reality, even if they are analyzed critically in theory.

Bourgeois psychology begins — like more or less all bourgeois science — - without criticism, in the spontaneously reproduced "natural forms" of social

³ *Vorlesungen zur Einführung ins "Kapital"*, p. 190.

⁴ This methodological rule, assessed by Marx as the rule of the "sole materialistic, and hence sole scientific, procedure," (cf. MEW 23, p. 393 ff.) will be concretized in my *Outlines for a Theory of the Ideological*. [W.F.Haug, *Commodity Aesthetics, Ideology & Culture*, New York & Bagnole: International General 1987, pp. 59-87. < <http://www.wolfgangfritzhaug.inkrit.de/documents/Umriss-engl.doc>>]

life — in this case, bourgeois life. If it remained this way we would not even have a bourgeois science deserving of the honored title of science, because up to that point it is simply unscientific. In reality, in its development, bourgeois science had to confront social limitations, corresponding to the historical situation and to the objects it was studying. But where the limitations were not in the society but were the absolute limitations of bourgeois society itself, it came up against historical limitations that it could not overcome without crossing over to scientific socialism.

Bourgeois psychology is limited science-in-bourgeois-forms; within these forms it gains thorough knowledge of objective and practical matters. However, the social fate of the technologies that it finds, and its attempt at their theoretical explanation, remain determined by the mechanisms of bourgeois society. Ute Holzkamp-Osterkamp has illustrated such states for the past 50 years of bourgeois motivation research.⁵ In the final analysis, all scientific efforts in bourgeois forms share this fate: either their findings are functionalized as weapons in competition and class struggle, which give rise to counterweapons, (rendering them obsolete), or they become powerless attempts to tame a system without being able to touch its "wild" foundation — i. e. private ownership of the means of production and profit as the driving force and determining purpose of production -or even wanting to be able to.

With the help of the form-analytical instrumentarium of the critique of political economy, it is possible to solve the problem of the beginnings of critical science — in this case critical psychology. While uncritical psychology in bourgeois society begins with the mindless reproduction of the situation of the private individual in commodity producing society, critical psychology begins with a comprehensive critique of these relations and with the historical derivation of its moments. It is then able to proceed to

⁵ ((5) Cf. the beginning of Ute Holzkamp-Osterkamp, *Grundlagen der psychologischen Motivationsforschung [Foundations of Psychological Motivation Research]*, Volume 1, 1975.

the study of concrete individual processes. Conceptually undoing the pseudo-natural character of social phenomena as it spontaneously reproduces itself as an objective form of thought in consciousness, is the pre-requisite for the conscious investigation of the natural foundations of social human beings. This lays the foundation for a theory of personality which no longer remains within the limits of privacy.

