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## The Aesthetic Views of Marx and Engels

I. A CONSIDERABLE LITERATURE has grown up around the aesthetic thought of Karl Marx (1818–1883); that of Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) has received less treatment. Every assessment properly begins with their actual essays, observations, and remarks on literature and art. The initial collection of this material was published in 1933, in Russian (*Ob iskusstvu*, ed. A. Lunacharski, M. Lifshitz, and F. P. Schiller [Moscow]). An augmented Russian edition appeared in 1938; a collection further enlarged was published in German in 1948 (*Über Kunst und Literatur*, ed. M. Lifshitz [Berlin]), and a yet larger two-volume collection, edited by Lifshitz, in Moscow in 1957. Another two volume edition, published in Berlin in 1967–68 and edited by M. Kliem, offers certain new materials without supplanting the 1948 Lifshitz edition. Marx's and Engels's youthful poems, narratives, and aesthetic views in the late 1830's and early 1840's are found in the so-called *MEGA* (*Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt a.M., 1927–, I Abt., Bd. 1). The materials from this period are most fully interpreted by A. Cornu (*Karl Marx et Friedrich Engels, la vie et leur oeuvre*, Paris, 1954–62); Cornu bases his work upon the biography of Marx by F. Mehring and of

Engels by G. Mayer. Marx's readings in aesthetics prior to 1840 are known only from letters; his research notebooks before then are lost, but exist thereafter and are surveyed to 1856 by M. Rubel ("Les cahiers de lecture de Karl Marx," *International Review of Social History*, II, iii [1957], 392–418 and V, i [1960], 39–76). The Lifshitz editions provide the primary source of other major compilations, e.g., by Jean Freville (Paris 1937, rev. ed. 1954), V. Geratana (Milan, 1954), and anonymously edited volumes in English (New York, 1947) and Spanish (Havana, 1965). In addition to the introductory essays to compilations, the chief interpretations of the aesthetic views of Marx and Engels are: Peter Demetz, *Marx, Engels, and the Poets* (Chicago, 1967; Ger. ed., Stuttgart, 1959). For a critique, see L. Baxandall, *Partisan Review*, Winter 1968, pp. 152–56; Georgij M. Fridlender, *K. Marx i F. Engels i woprosi litjeraturi* (Moscow, 1962); Andrei N. Jezuitow, *Woprosi rjealizma w estjetike Marxa i Engelsa* (Moscow, 1963); Georg Lukacs, *K. Marx und F. Engels als Literaturhistoriker* (Berlin, 1948) and *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Ästhetik* (Berlin, 1954), pp. 191–285; Pavel S. Trofimov, *Otsherki istorii marksistskoj estetiki* (Moscow, 1963), pp. 5–108; Hans Koch, *Marxismus und Ästhetik* (Berlin, 1962); Henri Lefebvre, *Contribution à l'esthétique* (Paris, 1953); Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, *Las ideas estéticas de Marx* (Mexico City, 1965); Mikhail Lifshitz, *The Philosophy of Art of Karl*

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Marx (New York, 1938: Russ. ed., Moscow, 1933); Max Raphael, *Proudhon Marx Picasso* (Paris, 1933), pp. 123–85; W. C. Hoffenschefer, *Iz istorii marksistskoj kritiki* (Moscow, 1967), chaps. V and VI; Věra Macháčková, *Der junge Engels und die Literatur* (Berlin, 1961); Franz P. Schiller, *Engels kak literaturnij kritik* (Moscow, 1933).

2. Demetz with many other Western scholars has sharply demarcated the aesthetic thought of Engels from that of Marx. To Marx is attributed European taste—to Engels, German and provincial taste; Marx is said to have been remote from the notion of realism while Engels advocated it. In truth, just as their home backgrounds were different, so were the enthusiasms of their youth. Engels, who was drawn to the ideas of the *Junges Deutschland* movement, practiced literary criticism. Marx, who was early introduced to the classical literary heritage, eagerly imbibed it, and he pursued philosophy and aesthetics (at Bonn University he was a student of A. W. Schlegel). Yet their early writings indicate converging trends of intellectual development; and with the beginning of their lifelong intimate collaboration (September 1844), their aesthetic views interpenetrated. One can speak confidently of the coalescence of their major aesthetic ideas, a unity of approach, while noting that their temperaments were not identical and that each had special interests. Thus is explained their individual accent on some topics and problems. Marx was more enthusiastic about abstract thinking, and the more systematic. Engels was the more sensitive and spontaneous. Marx was university trained. The brilliant Engels was largely self-educated. Marx's ideal, as Cornu characterizes it, was Prometheus; and Engels's, Siegfried of the *Nibelungenlied*. But the coalescence of their approaches is evident, especially in the two major critiques—E. Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris* (in *The Holy Family*, 1845) and F. Lassalle's drama *Franz von Sickingen* (see the 1859 correspondence with the author)—where their views coincide although they were not writing their analy-

ses in direct consultation. Twice Marx made plans to write systematically on aesthetics. During the winter of 1841–42 he worked with Bruno Bauer on a critique of Hegel's view of art and religion. And evidence suggests that he endeavored in 1857 to comply with a request from the *New American Cyclopaedia* for an article on "Aesthetics" (to this end, apparently, he again went through F. T. Vischer's writings, E. Müller's history of ancient Greek aesthetics, and other works). Neither undertaking was carried through to culmination. The question of how their many texts on aesthetic matters should be organized is left open. A mere chronological ordering would not in itself be especially enlightening. I will first discuss these problems: (a) whether two phases, pre-Marxian and Marxian, occur in their writings on art and literature; and (b) the patterns of structural thematic coherence to be found among their scattered ideas and comments.

The former of these problems cannot be disposed of, surely, without engaging the question of the Marxian philosophy and world-view in its general development. In *Pour Marx* (Paris, 1966; Eng. ed., 1969), Louis Althusser reopened this controversy. He regards *The German Ideology* as a *coupure épistémologique* (the term is Bachelard's); in this work of 1845 Althusser locates an abandoning of the ambiguous idea of humanism in favor of a scientific, i.e., Marxist approach. The notion of such a "cut-off point" seems impossible to sustain, however. The efficacy of the Marxian world-view does not subsist in its being purely scientific—for it is social science and treats of a different kind of knowledge, and as social science certain of its obvious elements already appear in the *1844 Manuscripts*. Thus to impose this demarcation on the developing aesthetic thought of Marx and Engels would prove equally artificial: a number of the concerns they expose in early writings, such as artistic freedom vs. alienation (Marx's commentary of 1842 on censorship), art's genesis in the labor process (*1844 Manuscripts*), tendentiousness (Engels on *Junges Deutschland*), recur in their most mature phase. We shall be consider-

ing here the whole of their aesthetic thought, starting from 1842, when despite some continuing traces of the thought of Hegel and Feuerbach, the two classic thinkers of Marxism undertake the fashioning of their distinctive world-view.

This brings us to our second problem: how to go about systematizing the numerous scattered texts on art and literature. We must initially distinguish the texts which elaborate a topic explicitly and coherently from fragments which have a thesis but partially developed and thus somewhat unclear, and we must distinguish the texts from the hasty or terse comments which do not in themselves supply the tenable foundation for a thesis. I will call the first category dominant themes, the second observations, and the third remarks. Within the first category belong the discussions of the genesis of the aesthetic sense, the alienation of the artist, realism, tendentiousness, and the class equivalents of art. Among the topics comprised in the second category are the nature of aesthetic qualities and of aesthetic experience, the universally human equivalents in artworks and the enduring values of art, the comic and tragic, form and style. Within the third category belong reflections-in-passing on such themes as the distinction between science and art, the relation of philosophy to artistic creation, the hierarchy of artistic values. The discussions of *Sickingen* and the Sue novel, the most sustained writings by Marx and Engels on aesthetic matters, are a primary source for the dominant themes, around which are oriented the general methodological assumptions and formulations of both men. To exclude, on the other hand, the observations and remarks—which mostly stem from Marx—from the tally of aesthetic *disiecta membra*, would result in an unjustifiable depletion of the scope and complexity of the Marxian aesthetic discourse.

3. Debate still surrounds many issues of Marxian aesthetic thought. But, concerning the nature of certain formulations, all parties approximately agree, and most

of all on the fundamental methodological postulate that aesthetic phenomena are to be regarded as a cultural activity of *homo sapiens* in his slow progress to self-realization within the matrix of socio-historical processes. The non-isolate phenomena of the arts, which variously depend on other manifestations of culture, social, political, moral, religious, and scientific, influence in turn these other spheres of activity. Moreover, the system of mutual dependencies and complex interrelations is in each case twofold. It is synchronic, occurring across the structure of society within a given moment, and diachronic, occurring as an aspect of historical process influenced by the past, and exercising possible influence on the future nature of culture. The continual dynamic flux and change in aesthetics and the arts derive chiefly from the rise and decline of the always complex ideological outlooks which, in the final analysis, are conditioned by the general contradictions and evolution of class society. But the dynamism arises also from the contradiction between crystallized ideological outlooks and emergent attitudes, possessing a strictly emotional and conational energy of the moment, which we may call "psycho-social" and "mythological" in character. It should be further emphasized that aesthetic phenomena traverse two distinct cultural fields of development which, though interpenetrating, in some degree normally transmit their incongruence to the aesthetic phenomena as well. These related but often incongruent fields of development are the idiogenetic (comprising the stimulus of past aesthetic achievement upon present aesthetic project) and the allogenic (comprising the stimulus given the aesthetic field by that which is in other respects external to it). The above elements of the Marxian perspective, presented here in great brevity, can be embraced by the term *historicism*.

Marx and Engels framed the questions regarding the genesis and the function of art (or, more broadly conceived, regarding aesthetic consciousness) against the context of history. The development of art yielded its hidden meaning in relation to

the evolution of human civilization, the far-flung consequence of class antagonisms, the irrepressible desire of men for emancipation from tyranny, injustice, and hunger. The historical approach led them to emphasize alienation and also disalienation, and thus to make an analysis of man-the-maker, *homo faber*, who in a not distant future might gain the capacity to exchange collectively his exhaustive toil and oppressive ignorance for a mode of social being which would more resemble play: that is, when, as *homo aestheticus*, he might freely and creatively achieve the totality of his potential faculties. That aesthetic ideas and artistic expression develop with a relative autonomy within their operative traditions is recognized by this historicism. At the same time it is a methodology which cannot fail to stress the significance as elements of art of that realism and of that tendentiousness which distinctively couple and relate the artwork to the historical process and its ideologically dominant features. Additionally this methodology entails three major historicist notions without which the Marxian approach to aesthetics would be incomplete and incomprehensible. These are the stress upon human labor, which qualifies the foundation of all culture; the insistence upon the epochs of social revolution as essential to the progress of the species; and finally the view that communism is, for man, at once an ideal he sets himself and the real, historical movement of his progress. It is in light of these views that the work processes are regarded at once as the original *locus* of aesthetic activity and as a given from which aesthetic culture never can become wholly detached, that the arts are regarded as a conductor of attitudes toward radical social change, and, finally, that the inradicable idea of art as the legislator and liberator of mankind is regarded now as directly related to the communist ideal and movement.

Let us join these few explanatory comments to the basic methodological perspective of Marx and Engels. In considering art a specific form of social consciousness, one can only mean in this domain

that: (a) desires, sometimes contradictory beliefs, rather than fully rationalized opinion must play a considerable role; (b) the individuality of the artist's vision has a paramount importance, however it may have been developed in and conditioned by a social milieu; (c) the transaction of the artist with the reality of nature—although mediated, as it must be, through culture—bears a strong imprint of naïveté and a unique freshness: the artist seeks to culturalize nature anew and does so in striking his bargain with reality in its totality.

Turning now to a closer look at the chief aesthetic issues raised by Marx and Engels, we cannot fail to emphasize that our presentation is an effort to *reconstruct* the aesthetic body of their *disiecta membra*; we shall focus upon their texts which are, generally speaking, most relevant to key questions and solutions in European aesthetic thought up to and including the present. We have concluded that in general the aesthetic thought of Marx and Engels is integral with their broader world-view. From this conclusion, however, two different and mutually incompatible addenda have at times been deduced, and both have to be rejected. The first—and it is notoriously common—says the Marxian approach is extrinsic to every question of art, i.e., it is only general-philosophical or socio-political. The other addendum—see Robert C. Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (London, 1961)—terms the whole of communist theory “fundamentally *aesthetic* in character”: in other words, something of a quasi-Schillerian anthropology with the ideal *des spielenden Menschen*.

4. Marx's reflections on the genesis of the aesthetic sense could not, in his time, be founded upon empirical data. Like others, he therefore devised a strictly philosophical argument, directing it against the theistic and naturalistic solutions to this problem. Without recourse to the seventeenth century's *je ne sais quoi*, or to a naturally endowed specific instinct, or to a divinely endowed specific impulse, Marx explained the aesthetic sense as having emerged during the historical process of

human labor. It is thus for Marx a specifically human faculty distinguished from the drives of the animal world. *Homo faber* develops and refines his aesthetic sense while shaping work skills, mastering the material world in practice and idea. An active artistic competence is therefore initially achieved: the physical world is made over to the harmonious use or measure (*Mass*) of man, while at the same time outlet is found for the human play capacity (*Spiel seiner eignen körperlichen und geistigen Kräfte*). *Homo faber* is in process of becoming *homo ludens*. The aesthetic sense in its stricter, contemplative aspect is a derivation of later development; called by Marx the "mineralogical sense," it is dependent upon relatively apractical detachment. Thus Marx's account of the objective and subjective appropriation (*Aneignung*) by primitive man of reality to his needs may be reformulated, as, through a social praxis which unfolds his aesthetic (more precisely, artistic) sense, this man all the while affirms himself (his "human essence"). Certain texts related to this dominant theme offer problems. In discussing precious metals in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx declares that their colors constitute "aesthetic properties" which stimulate "the most popular form of aesthetic sense." True, Marx calls this a widespread rather than historically rudimentary phenomenon. Nonetheless, having asserted some primary, sensuous physical qualities, he seems at least to qualify the notion of structural artistic qualities (*Mass*) historically evolved by man in his labor process, as the foundation of the aesthetic sense. Might one construe two types of aesthetic qualities here, neither excluding the other, with color-sensitivity being an innately endowed and natural capacity, exercised to be sure by a labor-constituted mankind in its leisure? This conciliatory hypothesis is ruled out by the *1844 Manuscripts* and *Capital*. A knowledge of those works leaves one no other possibility than to try to reconstruct Marx's notion of the developmental stages of the aesthetic sense. The following would appear to be a fair representation

of Marx's view: (a) originally man artistically shapes the construction of his objects, expressing his power to master humanly the material world. (b) At length his object's structure (inherent measure, proportion) can become the pivotal purpose of the artistic process; to this stage, in which a predominant functionalism is departed from, is linked the emergence of apractical aesthetic contemplation. (c) Responsiveness to certain properties—such as color, sound, and shape—appears when the aesthetic sense has become highly conscious, definite, and relatively autonomous. It is the final step of the rudimentary process in which art and its subjective components devolve from mankind's labor. In Marx's world-view this process occurs over millions of years, from early paleolithic times to the late neolithic era. We have but offered a schema for defining the relations wherein aesthetic properties acquired various kinds of significance for man; our reconstruction of this Marxian historical concept is supported and clarified by Marx's observations on the nature of art and of aesthetic experience in general. In the *1844 Manuscripts* measure (*Mass*) is held to be the objective foundation of beauty; the *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* stresses the compact structure of antique Greek art (*geschlossene Gestalt, Form und gegebene Begrenzung*) in describing its achievement. The notion of *Mass* within the total world-view of Marx has been interpreted variously. In the present context, it appears to indicate both the reproduction of the structures of physical reality and those specific qualities of symmetry, regularity, proportion, and harmony which comprise a coherent whole that rivals reality. *Mass* denotes in any case the inner compact structure of the artwork—even where stress is given to reproducing the structure of real objects. Such stress, vitally significant to the nature of the aesthetic properties of primitive art, is found to reappear, especially in the realm of the applied arts, throughout the entire history of culture. However, Lukacs, whose treatment of mimesis in *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen* (1964) re-

mains the best and most thorough on this Marxian topic, in discussing Marx's notion of *Mass* overstates its mimetic aspect. Lukacs seeks and fails to show that in the Marxian concept all art is mimesis. Similarly, Marx's observations regarding the peculiarity of the aesthetic experience appear to contradict the view presented by Lukacs in part. In the *1844 Manuscripts* Marx notes that a merchant as merchant sees no beauty in minerals and, in the *Contribution*, he comments that a diamond affords aesthetic pleasure on the breast of a girl but not in the capacity of a ware. In the latter passage, he treats the aesthetically pleasing object as having a usefulness (use-value) as opposed to the exchange-value of such objects treated as commodities. It is evident that for Marx the use-value of the aesthetic object does not, however, coincide with a practical or applied function (the grinder's use of a diamond). This apractical nature of the aesthetic experience is underscored in Marx's several descriptions of labor under non-capitalistic conditions in *Capital*, or in the *Grundrisse* where he says of medieval handicraft: "This work is still half artistic, it has still the aim in itself (*Selbstzweck*)."

It is of significance in this respect that Marx deems aesthetic experience to possess a synthetic character: as a commingling of intellectual, emotional, and sensual elements, it is a-theoretical. Thus in Marx's "Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy," the intellectual and the religious appropriations of reality are explicitly distinguished from the artistic. And in a letter referring to A. Ruge's criticisms of Shakespeare, Marx scoffed at the suggestion that appreciation of the latter should be based on whether or not he possessed a "philosophical system." An artistic world-view was clearly not to be confused with other modes of cognition. Marx and Engels never explicitly treated the relation of moral and aesthetic values, except in attacking the shallow pietistic morality of E. Sue's novel. On the other hand, Marx's anthropological ideal—the rich harmonious individuality embodying the whole of human powers—is arrived at

by an organic unification of aesthetic and ethical principles. That this is so, however, in no way undermines the conclusion we are led to as we examine Marx's observations on the nature of art and the aesthetic experience—namely, that he regarded both the subject and the object constituting an aesthetic field as somehow complete and harmonious structures; at the moment of the experiencing of artistic values, each evinces a relative autonomy in respect to other human functions and to the larger setting; so that subject and object together momentarily constitute a "rival world" to that in which we live. This autotelicism nonetheless incorporates cognitive and ideological functions—art's specific integration, and the experience of art which enriches the human psyche, evince links with the world which are never severed. The observations of Marx and Engels concerning form support our interpretation. For them, form is the ensemble of artistic means, or the requisite harmonious organization of elements within a total aesthetic structure. That they wrote little on problems of form is to be explained only in part by Engels's letter to Mehring (1893), in which he declared they had been "bound" first to lay the main emphasis on content. Marx's and Engels's discussion of *Sickingen*, in fact, shows them committed to *Gehaltästhetik* priorities—which, we may stress again, in no way contradicts their view that the realized artwork is an autotelic structure. For both men, style consisted of the individual quality of an artwork. This observation they did not elaborate in respect to the general discussion of the nature of art. We shall not attempt to make that link, the evidence being useful for guesswork only.

Consideration of the issues presented above leads one to the subject of the alienation of the artist and of art as a dominant theme. Marx centered his investigations on the capitalist epoch. Some of his comments on the artist's situation in pre-capitalist society offer reason, however, to believe that in this domain as in all others he regarded alienation as a concomitant of human activity throughout the

brief history of civilization. During the ascent of the species from purely animal existence—this process of a progressively socialized mankind, which has at the same time occurred only through the most disastrous social oppression, exploitation, and struggle—artistic alienation was evinced as at once a contributory cause and one major consequence of religious ideology, of the church as an institution, of the various political formations of power, etc. However, the intensity of alienation is qualitatively heightened with the appearance of the capitalist marketplace. When art becomes a commodity intended for a quite unknown purchaser, pricing becomes a competitive imperative which is often depreciative of the level and the effort of workmanship. What is more, the community of values, of interests and taste and knowledge, which once bound the artist and public collapses in the society of increasing expertise and depersonalized calculation. The people most excluded from the values of art are the new urban working class, who have neither the wages nor the leisure to gain access. At the same time individuality here and there gains new possibilities and “freedom” as all communal bonds excepting the money nexus are broken down; some superior art is produced, but it bears the traces of its epoch and, moreover, is the prerogative of an elite, while for others there is but cheap and stupid trash and spectacle. It is not surprising that Marx and Engels should have gazed fondly at Greek antiquity as an era of unmatched aesthetic expression. For them, with respect to aesthetic achievement, the Renaissance and the Middle Ages too dwarfed the present. The subsequent period had seen the gradual triumph of the capitalistic organization of production, which affected all areas of human activity and, therefore, all modes of consciousness as well. Not only the exploited but also those who benefit from exploitation are deprived of aesthetic realization by an alienation threefold in character: (a) Laboring man, *homo faber*, is parted from his product; the ownership of capital determines its use or exchange. (b) The owners’ competition for profit determines

the very process of production: setting for it a uniformity, repetitiveness, tempo, etc., which makes of work a routine to which both owner and worker are enslaved; for this system the human automaton is wanted, while creative activity becomes dysfunctional and alien. (c) The channeling of human potential to serve the need of capitalistic profit in every area of experience causes the estrangement of man from his “human nature.” Given this social system the artist, like any factory hand, became “free” to offer or withhold his income-producing services as and where he chose. But he could not evade the larger necessities imposed on survival and achievement by the system. His ability might be exploited freely, for his art had somehow to go into this marketplace which appropriated it to serve various needs, all ultimately shaped or engendered by capitalist growth. If the artist planned to ignore a living income and to thwart otherwise the system’s instrumental designs upon his art, he might survive, but not without his production suffering estrangement for other, because less worldly, reasons. Vanished was the era when Milton could spin out his poetry as does a spider his web. Indeed, many forms of art and poetry languished or disappeared as their preconditions were subverted. Neither the bourgeoisie nor the proletariat now constituted an apt public for recognizing and welcoming the best in contemporary art, or even for responding to the classical heritage. Beyond the estrangements of human potential in this desolate era, however, Marx anticipates a time of disalienation, of communism.

At a level of unparalleled mastery of the world and society, with the economy of scarcity (even in its highest form) surpassed, life will again acquire an aesthetic substance resembling that of primitive times. Highly productive and knowledgeable, man will come into his own as *homo ludens*. If Marx did not presume to offer a detailed concept of the future, he did touch upon three of its elements. Individual creative capacities would be developed fully: every one who is potentially a Raphael will become so. Work would take on an aesthetic

character, evolving as a *Selbstbetätigung*, or free play, of physical and psychic faculties. And man's possibilities or versatility would become universal: there will be no professional painters but only painting itself among the unlimited possible activities of every one. To single out any one of the three elements must lead to confusion. Kostas Axelos in *Marx, penseur de la technique* (Paris, 1961) takes up a one-sided notion of *Arbeit als freies Spiel*, and concludes that Marx believed that art in the traditional sense would wither away. One may suggest that Marx indeed anticipated all the three great effects which would result from the definitive emancipation of man and from the accompanying revaluation of all values. In what degree was his expectation utopian? A satisfactory answer will be given only by future historical development. For their part Marx and Engels, from 1844 to the end of their lives, focused their attention continually upon the nature of capitalism. They maintained that the liberation of mankind was predicated upon the ending of the historically atavistic and oppressive division between "stupid, ignorant masses" and "solitary geniuses." Proletarian revolution would secure this advance. And disalienated man would emerge as *homo aestheticus*.

The remaining dominant themes of Marx and Engels have a bearing on the alienation problem inasmuch as works of art evince an ideological standpoint. The involvement of an artist in class strife—whether he is aware or unaware of it, whether he depicts social antagonisms or presents his viewpoint tendentially—has a bifurcated significance: on the one hand, it is opposed to alienation; on the other hand, it is imprinted with it. Nowhere do Marx and Engels reflect upon particular artworks in order to locate the presence of artistic alienation defined as such (although the alienation of artists is discussed in terms of experiences which have a similar effect upon, say, scholars or journalists). If, parenthetically, we may extrapolate, their remarks on revolutionary art suggest that where ideological engagement is emphasized in an artwork, its

structural autotelicism will in some degree have been neglected. Indubitably, on the other hand, they regard the ideological engagement of an artist as blatant alienation when he served reactionary class forces, but the opposite of alienation when he defended the standpoint of the progressive class. They did not use the term *class equivalent* (it was introduced by Plekhanov), yet the many allusions in their writings to artists of the past and present show that they did assess an artist's standpoint through reference to demonstrable ideological class values. They located such values (let us emphasize) not in an artist's class of origin but rather in the manifest data of his artworks. As to the ideological equivalents they defined: these were most often of socially broad significance and associated the artist (Dante, Chateaubriand) with the conscious *Weltanschauung* of an entire historical class. Sometimes the equivalent was defined more narrowly in association with a particular political outlook (Shelley, Heine, *Junges Deutschland*). Marx and Engels most frequently took this course in writing of their contemporaries. It was natural that they did so and that they should make much use of the dichotomy of bourgeoisie/proletariat to represent the principal contending positions. But since other, non-predominant classes might simultaneously achieve artistic representation, they did not confine themselves to this formulation: thus mentions of the literary representatives of the shopkeepers described in Marx's *18th Brumaire*, or the ideological involutions of Goethe which Engels dissects with care. Their use of class analysis is clearly sensitive, flexible, and based upon the work of art. And it is not always the paramount issue, nor is it to be raised in an univocal way. Thus the tragical is their chief category when they discuss the representations both of a premature revolution (the *Sickingen* correspondence) and an *ancien régime* in its myopic struggle to survive (in Marx's "Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law"). Incidentally, their observations on the tragical laid no claim to affording the adequacy of a theory.

The analysis of class equivalents has



both its foundation and its test in their notion of realism. The term does not occur in Marx, whose comments on the Sue novel, the play by Lassalle, and the great nineteenth-century novelists of England, however, prove that his notion coincided with what Engels expounded in letters to Minna Kautsky and Margaret Harkness. Realism is the artistic-cognitive value of an artwork. Their comments on Balzac demonstrate that the definition of the cognitive equivalent is broader than that of the ideological (which we have seen to be class-situated). Thus while an artist's realist tendency will manifest his attitude toward contemporary class strife, a direct correlation of the artistic-cognitive values and the socio-political or philosophical opinions of the artist does not necessarily obtain. Balzac was a professed and quite sincere Royalist; nonetheless his cycle of novels constitutes an indictment of Royalist doctrine. Marx and Engels examined the cognitive equivalent of an artwork for the range and scope of its historical perspective. In this respect they scrutinized, not the expression of a strictly given class outlook, but rather the capacity to express the dominant and typical traits of socially conflicted reality in a given period. As historical typicality entails freshness of character and event, the notion of realism demands individuality and specificity (cf. their remarks on Shakespeare). Engels's emphasis on fidelity to detail should not, however, be regarded as the essence of his position. Here Marx's comment (*Capital*, vol. III) about "many variations and gradations" whereby typicality may be embodied appears relevant. Realism was a dominant theme explicitly developed as such. But while it has often and most regrettably been taken as the fundamental and virtually sole principle of Marxist aesthetics, lacunae are evident. For example, Marx and Engels did not state whether in their view, optimally, typical characters always must be set in typical circumstances, and whether such circumstances always should entail typical characters. Nor did Marx and Engels affirm whether in every case depiction of the typical patterns of reality in its social dynamism should include the

socially emergent elements, or whether the depiction of those elements in decay might be adequate. This ambiguity about a positive rendering of the social dynamism is a question of realism. As such it is distinct from another dominant theme, that of tendentiousness, on which Marx and Engels are clear. Realism, as Engels declared in his letter to Minna Kautsky, signifies a rendering of the implicit dialectics of social reality, the trend or tendency spontaneous to history. Consistently Marx and Engels differentiated what may be termed latent, inherent cognitions of tendency from explicit and didactic tendentiousness characteristic of *l'art engagé*. In his polemics with the German poet Freiligrath, where Marx explained that to be an artist responsible to the revolutionary party means nothing other than to express the historical tide, the emergent importance of the oppressed proletariat, Marx emphasized the innate *Tendenz* of all genuine, truthful creation. In his essay on the poetry of Georg Weerth, however, Engels offers praise of a manifest tendentiousness whereby the artist as a missionary seizes the future from the womb of the present and holds it before the readers' gaze. The former function of *Tendenz*, we can see, is correlated with artistic-cognitive values, and the latter with ideological commitment.

The remarks of both men on a hierarchy of artistic values, together with Marx's observation on art's enduring values, relate closely to another dominant theme, most appropriately termed the universally human equivalent of art. Marx directly touched upon this issue only in analyzing the heroine Fleur de Marie, of Sue's novel. She manifests a vitality transcending her bourgeois milieu; and even the author, in his otherwise clumsy, moralistic caricature of human values, was compelled to acknowledge her *joie de vivre*. Universally human equivalents are implicit throughout Marxian thought, however: in the prospect of disalienation, and in the value attributed to rich individuality, victorious will, spontaneity of enthusiasm, and intellectual passion, as these qualities are animated in and ex-

pressed by, for example, Aeschylus and Shakespeare. Marx's important, somewhat obscure passage on the glory of Greek art is relevant here. It can chiefly be considered as (a) an excursus on the formal, harmonious qualities achieved in the art of antiquity (cf. Max Raphael, cited above). This interpretation should not deflect our attention, however, from two other crucial criteria for art's endurance to be found in the passage. These are (b) its capacity to express artistically the whole of a society (here mediated by a mythology, which is in turn rooted to a specific level and kind of economic maturity), and (c) its expression of the highest human values, of man's total self-affirmation (here by a naïve and young people, for whom art provides the fullest means of such expression). Criterion (b) refers to art's cognitive equivalent while (c) refers to its universally human equivalent. Cognitive and universally human values intermingle; and both exact the criterion of (a) adequacy of form to the values embodied. Finally there is the criterion of (d) a progressive orientation (in a strict sense the ideological equivalent). This value cannot appear alone, according to Marx and Engels; as artistic value it must have adequate formal expression and it is, moreover, the (disguised) expression of universally human values. A hierarchy or priority of the values here described was never explicitly formulated by either man. We have already found in their aesthetic ideas a *Gehaltästhetik*, however; and of the content values—if we consider Marx's great attachment to the Greek model and the ideal of an unalienated mankind both in primitive communities and in the communist future of an emancipated humanity—priority perhaps must go to universally human values of art. More than this suggestion we cannot hazard. But let us recall that along with the four kinds of value discussed above and the dominant themes to which they correspond, originality of artistic style was highly esteemed by both men. How this value is related to the others, how its effect is registered in the total aesthetic matrix, one again cannot say without resorting to interpolation. Our ef-

fort at reconstructing the aesthetic views of Marx and Engels can only point to this lacuna.

5. The study of the sources or incentives for the aesthetic thought of Marx and Engels has not to date been thoroughgoing. The reliance of scholars upon preconceived ideas has led to misinterpretations of three kinds. One approach (e.g., Lifshitz) almost wholly neglects idiogenetic, that is, intra-aesthetic, influences. A second (e.g., Jezuitow) sees in the developing views on art of both men an "ontogenetic" recapitulation of the "philogenetic" progress, in German and European aesthetics, between the late Enlightenment and Hegel. Yet another approach (e.g., Fridlender) mechanically takes over into aesthetics the dictum of Lenin that German classical philosophy, English political economy, and French utopian socialism were the chief sources of Marxism. None of these procedures satisfies. One can no longer doubt the centrality and high importance of the idiogenetic stimuli; this has empirically been confirmed after thorough research on the period from the Enlightenment to Schiller by my student Stanislaw Pasura in his doctoral dissertation, "Marks a klasyczna estetyka niemiecka" (Warsaw, 1967). The parallels between Marx's conceptions and those of German aesthetics from this time are striking. In Marx's letters of 1837 to his father and his reading excerpts to 1842 (*MEGA*, pp. 115–18) there is evidence of an ardent study of the literature of aesthetics and of a knowledge of it far surpassing what was to be expected of a philosophy student of the time. The early writings of Engels leave us in no doubt that he devoured the aesthetics of the *Junges Deutschland* movement and, through it, Lessing and Goethe and Schiller. There is evidence proving that Marx returned in 1851–52, 1857, and 1874 to a study of the aesthetic heritage; and there must have been other times. We shall not itemize the individual works Marx and Engels are definitely known to have read; rather we want to consider the (obviously vital) stimulation exercised more generally upon them by the

dominant aesthetic thought of their time. This entails in the first place German classical aesthetics—not Hegel alone as its “summit,” as some have said, but also the stimulus of many predecessors and in many ways. The fascination of Greek culture for Marx and Engels stems from Winckelmann, and an entire tradition of German philosophy leads up to the posing of the alienation problem. Winckelmann, Kant, Schiller, and minor writers too (e.g., K. Heydenreich, M. Herz) contrasted the ideal of the rich, harmonious personality against the atomization of contemporary life. That art should play the leading role in achieving man’s inner integration and full adaptation to the social world was a widespread view. Bearing a certain eschatological stamp, this aesthetic anthropology is found even in the most general speculative writings of the time: Fichte’s Letters of 1794 (“Über Geist und Buchstab in der Philosophie”), or the anonymous essay “Das älteste System-program des deutschen Idealismus” (1796, attributed by Cassirer to Hölderin, by Walzel to F. Schlegel, by Allwohn and Zeltner to Schelling, and even to Hegel—see A. Nivelle, *Les Théories esthétiques en Allemagne de Baumgarten à Kant*, 1955). There were numerous commentaries also on the progress of artistic alienation, observed by G. Forster in “Die Kunst und das Zeitalter” (*Thalia*, no. 9, 1789), by Fichte in the aforementioned work, by A. W. Schlegel in “Briefe Über Poesie, Silbenmass und Sprache” (*Horen*, 1795), and finally by Hegel (his notion of the “Zerfallen der Kunst”). This trend in thought—which could be termed Rousseauian—finds the contemporary of Marx, F. T. Vischer, speaking of capitalist society’s sterile, authoritarian, and bureaucratic apparatus which destroys beauty and in particular degrades the aesthetic demands of the working masses (*Ästhetik*, 1846–57, t. II, 1, § 364, 375–76). The correlation of the genesis of the aesthetic sense and art with the labor process appears in A. W. Schlegel (op. cit.); he indicated a primary and primordial role for rhythm, and traced it in the natural and the social relations of man with the world. He also suggested that the artist-

specialist was unknown in primitive society and the autonomization of art occurred at a later time. Marx probably benefited from the thought of Schiller on this topic too. Schiller had differentiated the animal senses from those strictly human; the latter, being more detached from reality, made possible a *freie Ideenfolge* and the emergence of a *Spieltrieb* which impart to man’s actions and his products a particularity of form and result at last in *ästhetischer Schein*. As to the nature of the aesthetic, Marx’s thought points back to the *freies Spiel der Seelenkräfte* of Kant. But the solution to this problem in its subjective/objective aspect—i.e., the thesis concerning the harmony of the aesthetic object correlated with the autotelic and integral character of the aesthetic experience—Marx had ready in Heydenreich, Herz, and Schiller. That this line of thought was then prevalent is evident enough—cf. K. Chr. F. Krause’s *Abriss der Ästhetik* (1837). And there is no doubt that the 1844 *Manuscripts* employ notions and even phrasings identical with those of Feuerbach in *The Essence of Christianity* (1841). Marx’s and Engels’s emphasis on the artistic value of “content” points to the tradition of *Gehaltästhetik* from Schiller through Hegel to the young Vischer; and to *Junges Deutschland* as well. Like the representatives of the latter group, they rejected Hegel’s belief that art was in permanent decline; and from this group they learned to respect tendentiousness in an artwork. They were also in accord with the view of Vischer (*Ästhetik*, t. II, 2, § 484) that beauty is possessed of its own tendency, contained in the artwork itself. The stimulus of Hegelian aesthetics is especially apparent in the references of Marx to the comic and the tragic, the reflections on the enduring glory of Greek art, and of course the concept of the typical, which is central to the position of both men on realism. Thus German classical aesthetics must be considered the principal influence. But let us recall that the issues of alienation and disalienation could as well have been discovered from the writings of Rousseau and the utopian socialists; Diderot likewise had seen the genesis of

art in the process of labor; and the controversy around realism (which profoundly modified the German notion of "*das Besondere im Allgemeinen*") stemmed from the ideas of Lessing and Diderot on heroes typifying a social condition, the prefaces of Balzac's novels, the impact of the literary and painterly movement of the 1840's and 1850's (G. Sand, Courbet, Champfleury, English novelists of the rank of Dickens and Thackeray). The subsequent battle over Zola and the naturalistic novel affords a background to Engels's letters concerning realism—and his acknowledgment of a realistic "truth of detail" cannot be detached from his emphatic concern for typicality of character and situation, which he directed against the naturalistic current. Thus his letter of December 13, 1883, to Laura Lafargue declares that Balzac's "revolutionary dialectics" taught him more of the history of France during 1815–48 than had the professional historians. The first class interpretation of art, however tentative and deficient, appears with Mme. de Staël and the French *doctrinaires* (Guizot, Ballanche, de Barante). To this account of sources we must finally add that Marx, a vastly erudite scholar, surely went behind the historically immediate aesthetic principles, much as he did indeed learn from these writers and thinkers. The conceptions of Plato, Aristotle, and Dürer were components of his intellectual inheritance.

Such is the idiogenetic background for the development of Marxian aesthetics. We have already shown, however, that the aesthetic thought of Marx and Engels cannot be dissociated from their general world-view. The non-aesthetic context is of first-rate importance. If Hegelian aesthetics did not exert the sole or the main influence on Marxian thought in this domain (notwithstanding the key importance of such ideas as *versinnlichter Geist*, *Weltzustand*, *das Typische*), Hegelian philosophy did indirectly shape the body of dominant themes, observations, and remarks we have been discussing. No less can we neglect the profound influence on their aesthetics of the entire great philosophical movement pushing to the fore the

historicist perspective, which appears at the start of the eighteenth century and develops through Montesquieu and Rousseau, Winckelmann and Herder, the French *doctrinaires* and Hegel's historiography, to the English economists and French historians. The modern idea of progress, shading into utopianism, is a related and important non-aesthetic influence. Having come to the fore in European thought during the revolutionary 1770's, this trend of social and political ideology interjected its desire for the justice and wisdom of collective life either back into a distant past or toward a distant future—and the more it did so, the more unbearable became the capitalist system to its representatives. The *1844 Manuscripts* echo this sigh for the "noble savage" in the description of primordial, unalienated man. The vision of harmony between man and society in ancient Greece—here Marx followed Winckelmann, Hölderlin, Hegel, and others—likewise partakes of this trend. For Marx, however, the notion of a better human condition was oriented primarily toward the future, and here he and Engels joined others who discerned an undeniable human progress: Condorcet, and Fichte; the eighteenth-century utopians such as Morely or Don Deschamp; the "industrial utopians" Saint Simon and Owen.

And last, Romanticism. Though one cannot fail to note their incessant philosophical, ideological, and aesthetic struggle against the *Romantische Schule*, against Schelling and Solger, though in the context of their time, Marx and Engels were anti-romantics; nonetheless the prevailing matrix of aesthetic controversies, of modes for framing antinomies, could not but become the cradle of their reflections in this domain. The influence appears in the way they structure questions about (a) the freedom of the artist versus his responsibility to nation, society and mankind; (b) the artist as lonely virtuoso of beauty or priest of eternal truth versus his revolutionary commitment; (c) a peculiarly aesthetic function of art versus cognitive and moral functions; (d) unbridled individualist fantasy versus artistic obedience to definite laws of the spirit or of nature;

(e) *aut delectare aut prodesse*. That Marx and Engels could not condone such antinomies is evident—but to shake off entirely their pervasive influence upon the period was another matter.

We have thus far seen what Marx and Engels accepted and critically assimilated in structuring their intellectual premises; it remains to consider what they rejected, for a sketch of their negative choices is likewise instructive and symptomatic. They directly or indirectly attacked the objective idealism of Krause, Weisse, and Hegel, and the subjective idealism of Kant, Fichte, the *Romantische Schule*. Rejecting the art-for-art's-sake doctrine, they opposed a trite didacticism with virtually the same determination. They respected the value of form but opposed formalism. While they never disclaimed the presence of a natural impulsion underlying aesthetic experience, they could not accept the naturalistic notion of a particular aesthetic instinct somehow common to man and other animals.

6. In view of the tremendous panorama of their latent or manifest sources, Marx and Engels might perhaps be thought to have contributed almost nothing to the history of aesthetic thought. Indeed the attempt has been made, by a number of Western scholars on the subject, to more or less blur much of their conception into that of Hegel and the French realist doctrine in the 1850's. The counterpart practice of some Soviet scholars has been to identify Marxian thought with the views of Belinsky or Chernyshevsky. In each case, the endeavors are based on an impermissibly selective use of data. Having sought here to reconstruct Marxian aesthetics without any extrapolations, in an unavoidably outline form, we do not find the whole of its lineaments reducible to the sum of the existing sources; nor are its parts identical with other, coeval propositions. Marx approached the problems of alienation and disalienation in an entirely new way because of his innovating historiography. He reframed the terms of the old dilemma which saw art both as debilitated and dying out, and as the hope

and comfort of a suffering mankind. The *homo aestheticus*—Marx concluded—could be prognosticated, but his advent demanded the radical socio-political transformation of all mankind. And so too the artist had to make a choice: would he delude himself in an ivory tower, or participate in revolutionary progress by embracing its vicissitudes to the very end? Tendentiousness has a new meaning for Marx and Engels, not found in the writings of their predecessors. *Tendenz* is reconceived in light of the Marxian worldview, and historical reality is described as "tendentious." The question of realism is here modified. To the notion of the Hegelian type (*der Dieser*) depicted in definite circumstances, their idea of realism introduces a consciousness of the historically dynamic elements; ideology is here considered a component of artistic choice and discrimination, the nature of a profound and true tendentiousness being such as to further the artistic-cognitive values unified within the aesthetic entity. Again, the genesis of aesthetic consciousness is newly interpreted in the perspective of dialectical and historical materialism. The use of new theoretical calipers and chemicals on the metamorphosis of *homo faber* into *homo ludens* suggests strongly that art is a consummate social phenomenon, and even the process of its autonomization must be regarded and understood historically. Finally the class equivalence of art was the Marxian topic accepted as such by all students of the subject. While class equivalence had earlier been educed, Marx and Engels made a thesis of it, and they explored its complexities. We may properly conclude that at least *the dominant themes of Marx and Engels raised new issues* in nineteenth-century aesthetics.

To suggest that their aesthetic ideas comprise a full-blown theory would be an overstatement. But to dismiss these ideas as fortuitous and incidental speculations, or as utterances of sheer taste and preference, would not be less irresponsible. For we believe our reconstruction demonstrates that these aesthetic ideas have an internal coherence undisturbed by any serious in-

consistency; organized and sustained by a well-developed philosophy about several dominant themes, these ideas are addressed to problems considered in all traditional aesthetic treatises and up to today to be among the most significant and fundamental. About this one should be emphatic. It is of course true that Marx and Engels wrote on certain problems not at all. The body of their aesthetic thought is

not all-encompassing; they offer no final system. The contribution made by an aesthetic approach, however, eludes definition by such a test. A proper standard would be the originality of the contribution in its own time, and its influence on theory, criticism, and even artistic creativity in the future. By this test the aesthetic ideas of Marx and Engels have historical and theoretical importance.