

# The Meaning of the World: An Introduction to Mikhail Lifshitz

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**I. HAVING RECENTLY BEEN** pushed into the rapids of finance by the invisible yet all-powerful hand of the market, the Moscow art scene at large is deeply and understandably indifferent to theory. Speed is the order of the day, making it difficult to waste precious time on words. The age of Moscow conceptualism, which spoke and wrote incessantly, has passed into the realm of legend. By now, text is generally understood as little more than a rudimentary artifact that necessarily accompanies large, glossy color illustrations.

Of course, this state of affairs cannot help but provoke a counter-reaction. On the dark side of the moon, some people have intensified their thinking on art and its fate, in reflections that unfold in internet discussions, non-profit newspapers, studios, and, rarely, in institutional venues.

Among those who have not yet lost their taste for intellectual discussion, a clear tendency has become noticeable over the last years: interest in the Marxist debates of the 1930s is returning. The names of Gramsci, Brecht, Lukács, Benjamin, and Greenberg have been vaulted from the field of academic knowledge into the practical sphere, as their conceptions are applied to solve artistic problems, thus demanding new commentary. The bulk of attention focuses on authors who have long been famous, and now demand some kind of actualization.

Of course, not everyone is that famous, especially insofar as Soviet theory is concerned. Proof of this can be found in Mikhail Lifshitz' book *Chto takoe klassika?*

[What are the Classics?], a compendium of notes by this major yet largely forgotten Marxist thinker, published in 2005. Most have a hard time dealing with Lifshitz. Both this new compilation as well as Lifshitz's older texts regularly provoke heated discussions, often leading to bitter disputes, and sometimes reaching the apogee of scandal. It seems fitting that a similar atmosphere of antagonism surrounded the author for all of his life. This story must be told in more detail, if only to introduce the reader to the field of problems that seems so relevant today.

## II

Lifshitz was born in the small Ukrainian town of Melitopol in 1905. At the time of the October revolution, he was 12 years old. At the age of 15, in the midst of civil war, famine, and typhoid fever, he encountered Lenin's *Materialism and Empiricocriticism*, and gained his first insight into philosophy. Lifshitz dreamed of becoming an artist. In 1922, he traveled to Moscow to enroll at VKhUTEMAS, the world's leading citadel of proletarian culture, a stronghold of the most radical innovations of the day. Studying there in the mid-1920s, he became interested in the dialectics of German philosophy. He studied the German language, and pored over Schelling, Hegel, and Marx, finding his way to a highly independent view of art, which, as he put it, "was colored by the prevalent atmosphere of the renaissance of classical art on the basis of the new social formation that the revolution had created." He called this the negation of the dissolution that has beset humanity's intellectual values as the old class civilization meets with its end.



In 1922, Lifshitz wrote his first theoretical texts, including "On the Aesthetic Views of Karl Marx" and "Dialectics in the History of Art." Here is how he formulated his thoughts of the time: "Contrary to the trivial phraseology of our century, absolute beauty exists, as does absolute truth," "Relativism is dialectics for idiots," or "The time has come to say farewell to the mousy scrambling of reflection!" This stance led to intense

conflict with his avant-gardist milieu and his teachers. Further study at VKhUTEMAS became impossible.

In 1927, Lifshitz made his fundamental discovery: Marx had an aesthetic system of his own. This is something that no one had suspected at the time. Working at the Marx-Engels Institute, where he had access to a great deal of hitherto unpublished material, including *The*

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above:

Dmitri Gutov. *Science of Logic*, 2004

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*Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* and the *Grundrisse*, Lifshitz began to sift through all of Marx and Engels' writings meticulously to compile all of the passages directly or indirectly related to art. This compilation was eventually published as *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art* in 1933. This volume has been reissued and translated many times over, often being credited to other editors. In the same year, Lifshitz also first released *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx*, which was later translated into English and published in New York in 1938, and then in London in 1973 and 1976. Written at the age of 28, this text is the only book by Lifshitz to find acclaim in the English-speaking world. But even those who value this text highly are not aware that Lifshitz continued his intensive examination of the Marxian view of art for exactly 50 years to come.

It is no coincidence that Lifshitz would later characterize himself as "A Man of the Thirties," since this dramatic period in Soviet history was the central decade of his life, during which his principal ideas took shape. It is during this period that his principal ideas took shape. In 1935, he published the book *Questions of Art and Philosophy*, an anthology of his first and ultimately most important texts on the history of social thought. He soon found himself at the center of a small circle of like-minded people, who began to publish the journal *Literaturny kritik* in 1933. In the West, some of the ideas developed in this circle become famous through Georg Lukács, who was living in Moscow at the time, and became close friends with Lifshitz. The story of their relationship and their fundamental theoretical differences can be found in the chapter "Lukács" in *Chto takoe klassika?* (p 99-166).

Throughout the 1930s, Lifshitz found himself in the epicenter of the debates on the fate of art in a society that had supposedly overcome alienation. His popularity, especially among students, was widespread and profound. (I personally have met old people who are very surprised when they learn that a new generation is once again interested in this forgotten author who once was their idol; their surprise only grows when they hear that many of these new devotees are involved in contemporary art.)

In 1937, when Stalin's purges accelerated into mass terror, Lifshitz's literary activities came to a total halt. In 1941, he joined the army and was wounded in combat. He returned to an unrecognizable world. "After the war," Lifshitz later remembered, "many things changed. These were not easy times. Upon returning from military service, I felt that I had been completely forgotten. I had

reached rock bottom. Above me, there was an oceanic mass of murky water."

When Stalin died in 1953 Lifshitz greeted the onset of de-Stalinization and the "Khrushchev Thaw" with a new article in the journal *Novy Mir* entitled "The Diary of Marietta Shaginian." This polemic essay is a cutting satire on the tinsel verbosity of the Stalinist intelligentsia and its astonishing combination of epic exaltation and indifference. It provoked a frenzied response. Lifshitz was officially accused of "unhealthy, petit bourgeois nihilism" and condemned for "preaching anti-patriotic conceptions." Again, he was deprived of any broader readership for years to come.

Fame only came to Lifshitz in the mid-1960s, albeit in a scandalous form. In 1966, he published a polemic piece with the title "Why I am No Modernist" in *Literaturnaya gazeta* and followed it up with the book *The Crisis of Ugliness*. From *Cubism to Pop-Art* in 1968. Both texts subjected the entire aesthetic project of 20<sup>th</sup> art to a scathing critique, though not from the outside, but from within: Lifshitz used the most recent Western publications on cubism and pop, creating what was often read as a primer on the evolution of 20<sup>th</sup> century modernist aesthetic conceptions. In this immanent critique, Lifshitz continued to develop ideas that he had already formulated during his stint at the VKhUTEMAS. He not only rejected the bourgeois world, but also refused all those hypertrophied forms of protest that Lenin once called "communism's infantile disorders."

Most readers had little idea of the role that Lifshitz had played in the 1930s, nor did they necessarily remember his publications from the early 1950s. Thus, his attempts to call the progressive nature of modern art into question (without rejecting or distorting its material) fell upon deaf ears; Lifshitz was perceived as a living embodiment of half-baked Soviet obscurantism, who had come out of nowhere.

In 1972, Lifshitz published the book *Karl Marx. Art and the Social Ideal*. In it, he presented a collection of his work from 1927 to 1967, fully aware of the reaction that these texts would provoke in the era of the Soviet intelligentsia's massive rejection of Marxism. Although he was already 70 years old, Lifshitz held no academic titles. In 1973, he was finally awarded the degree of doctor of philosophy for this contribution, receiving the title of academician soon afterward. This late rehabilitation earns him the infamy of being the most conservative and reactionary writer of the Brezhnev-period, a reputation that persists to this day.

In the last years of his life, Lifshitz worked to systematize the ideas he first articulated in the early 1930s, many of which did not enjoy any further development due to the dramatic conditions of the time. Before his sudden death in 1983 he had not managed to finish many of his undertakings, nor did he live to see the publication of many of the projects he had completed. His huge archive remained in a great number of file-folders (around 700 in total). Incidentally, their graphic execution reveals the hand of an artist trained in the school of VKhUTEMAS.

### III

Published in 2004, the book *Chto takoe klassika?* [What are the Classics?] presents 500 pages of fragments from six of these folders. By now, more than 20 years have passed since Lifshitz' death. Since then the world has changed fundamentally, so that things that looked extremely obscure in the Soviet period now appear in a completely different light.

So what attracts artists involved in contemporary art to Lifshitz? No other author has waged such a rigorous and desperate war on the 20<sup>th</sup> century's views, tastes, and ideas, mincing no words, fearing no reprisals. The following selection of newly translated fragments will show the reader that Lifshitz wasted little energy on petty things. He was interested in the meaning of the world and meaning of human life, in subjects that the language of modern humanity refused to address, paralyzed by the efforts of several generations of intellectuals.

Lifshitz' attention centers on nothing less than the Marxist conception of absolute truth. In these manuscripts, which were never meant for publication, he expounds this conception in projects, fragments, and aphorisms that often sound like Hegelian-Marxist Zen.

Although the last thing their author wanted was for them to remain in this unfinished form.

Actually, in our day, these thoughts are still a bit too much, even if they are expressed in such a modern, perhaps even contemporary way. Nevertheless, their influence is growing and will continue to grow, as the contemporary world satisfies us less and less. It is hard to underestimate just how significant the book *Chto takoe klassika?* really is to understanding the discussions on contemporary artistic praxis in Russia today.

While none of the speech fragments are directly about art, it will be obvious to anyone familiar with artistic problems that this is exactly what they imply. It is precisely modern art that Lifshitz is talking about when he writes of the negation of the *adaevratio rei et intellectus*, the irrationality of the world, or the dying of its sapience, not only in concrete forms, but even in the form of possibility. /

— July 2006, Moscow

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#### RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON MIKHAIL LIFSHITZ

Dmitri Gutov/David Riff, "Die Lehre von Marx ist allmächtig, weil sie wahr ist" [The Marxist Doctrine is Omnipotent Because It is True], *Springerin*. Band XI Heft 4 / Band XII Heft 1 (Winter 2006), p. 22–26. English version online at: [springerin.at/dyn/heft\\_inhalt.php?id=45&lang=en](http://springerin.at/dyn/heft_inhalt.php?id=45&lang=en).

Dmitri Gutov/David Riff, "Complete agreement is the ideal of the human race," *Chto delat/What is to be done?*

(May 2005). [www.chtodelat.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=201&Itemid=89](http://www.chtodelat.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=201&Itemid=89)

More extensive material on Lifshitz' biography can be found in English at: [gutov.ru/video/lifshitz\\_inst\\_eng.htm](http://gutov.ru/video/lifshitz_inst_eng.htm)

Gutov Dimitrij, Die marxisitische-leninistische Ästhetik in der postkommunistischen Epoche. Michael Lifsic, in: Groys, Boris, von der Heiden, Anne, Weibel, Peter (Hg.), Zurück aus der

Zukunft. Osteuropäische Kulturen im Zeitalter des Postkommunismus, Frankfurt am Main 2005. Suhrkamp, pp. 709–737). [gutov.ru/texti/Marx-aesthetics-G.htm](http://gutov.ru/texti/Marx-aesthetics-G.htm) in German.

Lifshitz' writings in the Russian original are available in electronic form at [gutov.ru/lifshitz/index.htm](http://gutov.ru/lifshitz/index.htm); and [mesnotes.narod.ru/lifshitz.htm](http://mesnotes.narod.ru/lifshitz.htm)

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# The Meaning of the World

## A Compendium of Mikhail Lifshitz

### ON THE THEORY OF THE "ABSURD" ETC.

We have only one way of judging the exterior world and our own role in it, namely through reasonable thinking, whose prerequisite is its own reasonability, which rejects the absurdity of the real. This even holds true when we attempt to express perplexity at the unreasonable nature of the world. The theory of the absurd is also a theory, both in the positive sense of the word, since it points toward a number of extreme contradictions, and in the negative, since it formalizes and rationalizes reality, creating a rationalism of the irrational.

This is why any intelligent person should resign to relative absurdity, attempting not to fall prey to panic. Panicked theories do not express the fact of absolute absurdity's existence, but only one of its particular instances, namely trauma.

Yes, but what should we do if our situation is thus? Does it really mean that we should not express it? You have to understand it, that is, express it, finding an exterior point of reference. You have to go beyond its boundaries, orienting yourself toward a broader circle of real facts.

Like Lenin to Gorky on his mood in Leningrad but...not the Hegelian abstraction of resignation. (p. 421-422)

### "DIFFERENTIAL OPTIMISM"

The theory of the "gap." All becoming should be considered from this vantage. The truth is all good and well, but happiness is better. Without happiness, there is no truth. But happiness itself belongs to truth. Its force may be weak, but truth is not just a simple illusion, an epiphenomenon, but something objective. Not two parallel lines—subjective consciousness and the practical powerlessness of the spirit, but the crossing from one into the other, though interrupted, contradictory, uneven, with retreats and setbacks, yet still actual and

real. This is exactly why one needs to measure the whole by those islands of objective truth, which—even though they are happiness, grace-time—are more universal than silent centuries. First of all, consider the law that Aristotle already knew and that Pugachev expressed in his fable about the eagle and the raven. Second of all, while there is no such thing as uninterrupted happiness as the fundament of truth, there is a constant return of goals, a rebirth of creative energies. (p. 425)

Our world is not the best and not the worst of all possible worlds. It is somewhere in the middle, but this middle is mediocre, while it should be—and this is the tendency toward the good—*die wahre Mitte* [the true middle], *mesotes* [more to the middle] in the sense of *akrotes* [higher up]. (p. 426)

"And that's it?" An inevitable exclamation that expresses the fact of a person's finitude. Various means of overcoming this fact are themselves infected by finitude—love, labor. Ideal means of reuniting with the absolute hold more freedom: creativity of the spirit, games, alcohol... In the first case, the ideal has a certain real basis; in the second case, it is an illusion. It is no coincidence that alcoholism is often connected to creativity as a professional ailment that is neither necessary nor at all desirable. (p. 426)

### VERUM – FACTUM [TRUTH – FACT]

There is always a correspondence between reason and the factual world; in this sense, irrationalism is wrong. Then again, irrationalism grows from the fact that this correspondence is not necessarily harmonic. Retribution for the failure to correspond is also a form of correspondence. In this sense, open discrepancy, incongruity, absurdity—if one looks at them from the dialectical point of view, in historical cross-section—take on a new meaning.

### THE MEANING OF THE WORLD

Nothing would be easier than to throw this problem overboard, though that wouldn't make it go away. But, meaning is not exterior, but interior, and it exists. It exists because everything disparate has some universal content; thus, it is not an unconditionally new addition to cognition, a synthesis without an a priori, but a summing-up of knowledge back to basic principles. The more of the new this sum contains, the greater its universal meaning. Logical primacy does not correspond to primacy in time, meaning that meaning lies ahead of phenomena. This is also the other side of "meaning." It lies in both the return to the basic principle, and in that this principle is ahead, in the "for what." As a whole, it is universal. (p. 426-27)

The idea of absurdity is the most extreme expression of irrationalism (which Dada already contains.) It is the negation of logodicy, *adaevatio rei et intellectus* [the adequacy of things and reason]. Not irrationality as the best means of comprehending the world, but the irrationality of the world itself, the dying of its sapience, not only in the present concrete form, but also in the form of possibility.

On modern Western philosophy's antagonistic attitude toward Hegel and the question of the world's rationality, "logodicy."

It is precisely Hegel's formula "everything real is rational" that contains the statement of its unreasonableness, in the only form available not only to Hegel, but also in other [similar] periods. This formula was a paradoxical expression of the distance between the demands of reason and the facts of the real world. The dialectical character of becoming is justified by this distance. Justified, but also emphasized.

It is precisely this distance that modern



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above:  
**Mikhail Lifshitz after breaking through enemy lines in 1941.**

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Western philosophy makes such efforts to eliminate. It would have us accept the world as an unreasonable world and not as reason's being-other. This, ostensibly, is what the great emancipation from the burden of belief in the Other comes down to. By the way, the changing image of Hegel in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is most apparent in Kroner, Hartmann. Its beginning can already be found in Dilthey.

#### THE ABSURD 2

The absurd: the lowest and highest of functions come together in one and the same organ. But is this really that absurd?

The highest function should not overrate itself, lest it lose its high ground. Isn't this is a principle for a whole series of similar questions? Isn't logodicy based on the principle of relativity?

If people were to ride better on the bad, they would not be the better for it.

The demands of reason are not alien to this world. Quite on the contrary: one cannot demand anything except for that which is given in this world as a possibility. Reason is the reason of the world. Only that there is a concrete distance between reality and demand. Like in Nekrasov: "the worse that you will find your fate, all the more you tolerate." (p.429-430)

#### ON THEODICY

Nota bene! Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed (Bacon). But can one even avoid obeying its laws at all? One cannot, but one can. And if one can, then only in the sense of a distortion. In the same way, one can obey nature, both in the sense of holding it high and raising oneself onto higher ground. In this sense, even our commonplace notions assume that the relationship with nature is not simply undifferentiated mechanical causality. Instead, nature itself leaves a space for the objective

difference between the normal and the abnormal, the meaningful and the meaningless, truth and lies, good and evil, the positive (not in the conventional sense, but as positive positivity) and the negative—alias [in other words] a space for human freedom, ethical responsibility. Despite Kant!

This thought could be used in order to introduce notions, values, meanings, and absolute truth into materialism. Even into the materialist image of nature. Instead of ancient (and the most recent) theology.

Basically, the point is to smash (or, to be more precise, to show the relativity, see Marx on necessity and freedom in Volume 3 of *Capital*) the Kantian opposition of mechanical causality, "nature," and ethical "freedom," the world of values. The old materialism and dogmatic Marxism, up to Plekhanov, retains this antithesis. Exceptions can be found in earlier forms of materialism (of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries).

Along with the proof of knowledge's objectivity, disproving its formal-subjective quality. (p. 431-432)

#### EXPEDIENCY AND NECESSITY

Human reason was created by nature. Consequently, it cannot be declared to be unreasonable. After arising in nature, reason presents it with a bill, asking for the meaning of all existence. Reason is satisfied by the element of rightness, "logic" in nature. In essence, it is a concentrate of this rightness itself, its subjective expression and extension. But at the same time, it finds that:

1. Logic does not coincide with the real, that is, the unreasonable and the un-right also exists in nature; it is logical in a causal sense, but its logic in the sense of its ultimate goal and perfection (congruent with the demands of reason) is relative at best, a result of protracted becoming, but not its beginning.

2. Furthermore, reason cannot make sense of sense itself. "This is how the world works." But what the hell is all of this? Particulars can be explained and understood to meet the demands of reason. But on the whole, all that jazz is a tie-in sale. Such compulsion is enemy to the nature of reason. Either reason is an instrument that is only justified in its application to the finite; in this, positivism is just, at least in part (cf. Boltzmann). Or a reality that corresponds to reason has yet to be made, that is nature, having made reason, finally satisfies it in the process of development (Engels). Reminiscent of Aristotle, this thought is the latter idea is less compulsory than the former. ("Do you know of anything better?" Diderot?). Still, reason—like *Totalität*—is in a certain state of contradiction with this "primitive accumulation." Here, the Hegelian doctrine of the result as a beginning can come to our aid.



So basically “And what now?” as Omar Hayam put it. These pretenses of reason—its demands, the knowledge of its own infinity—lie in contradiction to its historical possibilities; that is a fact. And these are the gnoseological roots of agnosticism. (p. 442-443)

#### REASON AND REALITY

Is the world reasonable? Everything in the world is stupid enough. One could agree with this, but under one condition: the most stupid thing in the world is the existence of reason (capable of judging the reasonability or idiocy of the surrounding world).

Our existing world is quite stupid. But it would be even more stupid to imagine correcting it according to the reason we command. This stupidity consists in using reason and its universality to clean and darn something that is finite, so that it takes on a random nature. Poor imagination! But in comparison to it, the organic historical concrete is far richer, far more solid. (p. 443-444)

#### ON THE QUESTION OF “THEODICY”

Hegel justifies historical necessity; he does not justify the interests and needs of the little man. But he also does not blur over or idealize the

de facto tragedies, victims, or dissipations of the natural process. His point of view is harsh but true. However, it also carries false comfort.

The proper solution to this question consists in a relative acknowledgement of the natural course of events. But under the conditions of choosing a path to be taken, it also means finding the maximum, the differential of given concrete frameworks, borders, scales. The latter goes against Voltaire, just as it goes against Hegel. We can change the course of events for the better, but within limits of some sort (more on this elsewhere); to a certain point, we need to resign ourselves to the inevitability of the evil that comes with good. In this, both Hegel and Voltaire are right. Sacrifices are necessary; it is in the nature of things that the spontaneous process is not harmonious; it is only reasonable in the final analysis. But in the end, the ultimate justification of the means through the needs of the world process supplies no comfort whatsoever; it is in the nature of things to tend toward a higher level of harmony; all one has to do is to protect the natural course of things from forceful, arbitrary intervention, from crude pretenses (even these too are somehow natural, historically natural), and in this

Voltaire is right, though his view also lack a historical understanding of the process as it unfolds. (p. 447)

#### “DIFFERENTIAL OPTIMISM”

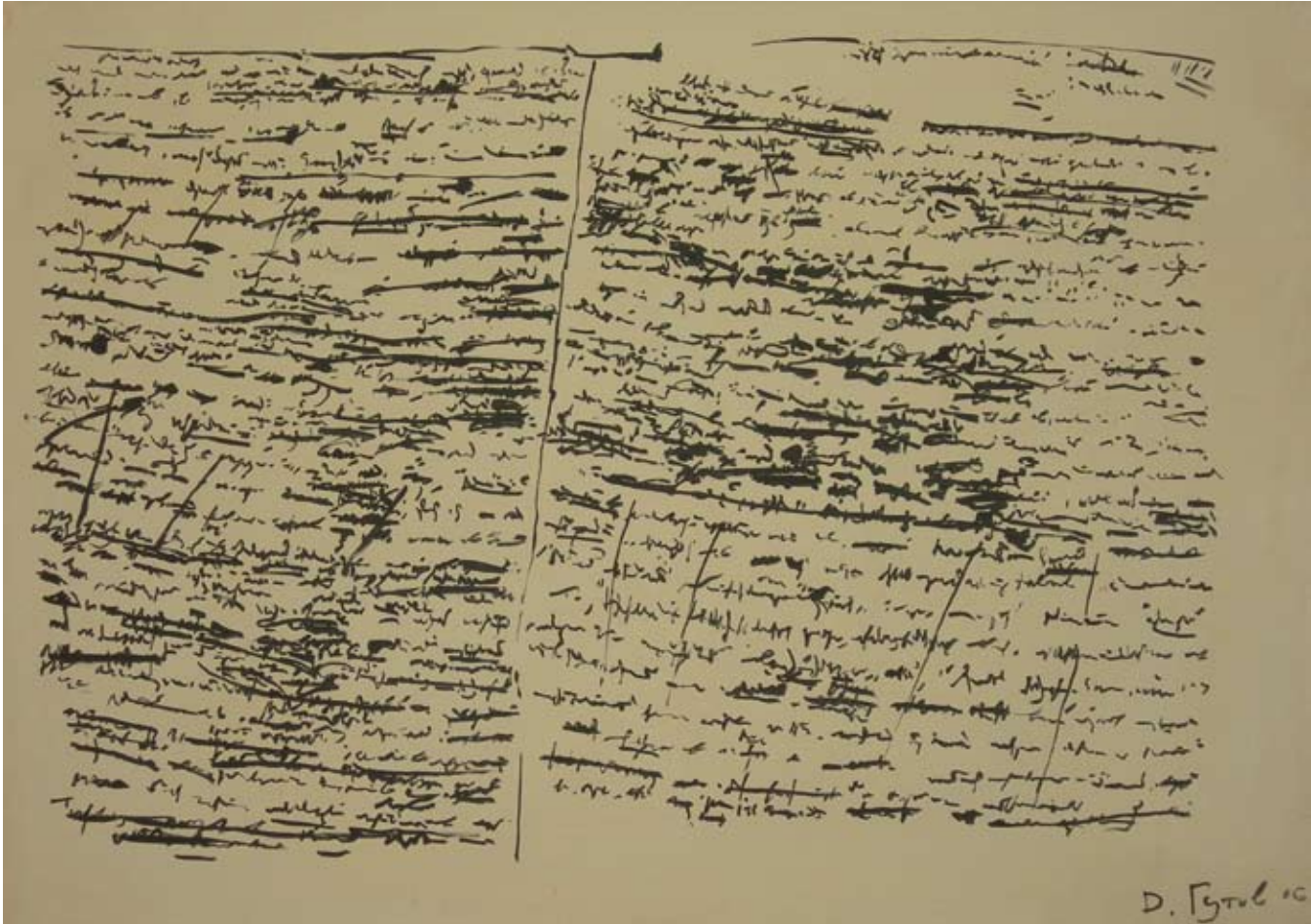
Justice exists, but its scale is not comparable to the duration of human life. This is why historical justice often manifests itself as local injustice. (p. 451)

#### HISTORY AND SYSTEM. HISTORIA AETERNA

There is a kind of history that is more logical than logic itself, and there is a kind of logic that has a purely historical meaning. The logical system of the “ancien regime,” for example, and any purely formal logic at that. In regard to the relative historical necessity of form, the act of breaking is a purely historical act; that is, contingent bare facts and not logic compose its iron logic. And this throughout creation!

Here, logic only cuts to the surface for the first time, and as return back to its basics; rounded off, the logical system is no more than a product of history. Of course, this all has a direct bearing on the question of whether the world is reasonable. In a narrower sense, reason is only a product, a fact that overrates





itself as a universal standard. Yet actually, simple facts and the fleeting senselessness of contingency give rise to reason.

Of course, this does not mean that there are many reasons. Since: 1. The highest form of concreteness is a reasonable system in its development. 2. It follows that we must differentia the logical system when it cuts through to the surface from facts, initially taken as *intentio obliqua*,<sup>3</sup> but hence *intentio recta*.<sup>4</sup> Hegel does not make this distinction, which is the weak side of his dialectic. (p. 453)

The history of nature as such is the symbolic step of the universal. The province of human madness is a hypertension of historical form. A development, torn from its subject. In this sense, its interrelation—both diachronic and synchronic—needs to be examined from the viewpoint of differentiability and cyclicity. This is this tragedy of material reality. It also contains the answer to the question of whether materialism relativizes “eternal,” metaphysical problems, divesting them of meaning through its social historical explanations. (p. 454)  
We should say thank you to the real world. Not for being so amazingly logical, but for allowing

us to understand its incongruity and illogicality. In this sense, the world is reasonable. (p. 454)

#### THE HISTORICAL (FACTUAL) AND THE REASONABLE (LOGICAL). LIMITATIONS OF THEIR DISPARITY

Another logic is possible, broader than the reason that we command. This logic is taught by reality itself, which has more cunning than we do. But this is not an argument against reason, but an argument for its expansion. Our reason is not limited in principle, but it is weak. In this sense, the lessons of the skeptics can be useful.

These considerations should balance my usual line of argumentation, when I reject talk of myth’s supremacy over reason and of the unconditional relativity of truth. The orators do not notice how they themselves make exceptions for their own thoughts, their own reason. Indeed, there is no way that we can jump from our skin, and it would be stupid to the utmost for reason to play at overcoming its own bounds with the help of inexact reasoning. But to realize the weakness of even the strictest thought, to see the possibility of its

defeat and the necessity to accept facts as facts, to return to them is human, all too human. I repeat that it is important throughout to keep from forgetting the boundary between the possible and actual reasonability of objective processes, without mixing them up as Hegel did, in the spirit of a teleology of the Leibnizian ilk. (p. 455-56)

#### PRODUCTIVE PERIODS AFTER THE EMBRYONIC STAGE AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS TOWARD CONCENTRATION

The phenomenon of the cycle in time and in development is the same force that is formalized as it advances.<sup>5</sup> Simultaneously, it is also the cycle’s self-absorption, the nocturnal specter, the night.

“Morning.” It’s the same thing: the morning of humanity’s day, a period of fresh creativity, decisions. “Tomorrow is a new day.”<sup>6</sup> Descartes’ proof. And then, the day develops as history, as life. Our realization of what we have already attained grows stronger, as we become more and more absorbed in formal commonalities, in self-consciousness. See Hegel, in *The Philosophy of the Spirit*, I think, on the morning

for gathering in public squares (ancient Greece) and evening for sessions of parliament (self-absorption).

Periods of organic adaptation or night. The formula “tomorrow is a new day,” however, leads us to ponder the role of night, sleep, embryonic periods and other periods of organic adaptation, which are apparently crucial to later periods when “the stars come out,” when new relationships are established to the surrounding infinity of the world during productive periods. The meaning of such epochs in history—the Middle Ages as a precondition for the rise of the Renaissance, an organic adaptation in which the conclusion of the “self-consciousness” (“dissolution”) of the antique world are drawn while sleeping.

The epoch of the Restoration, the period after the reforms in Russia, “reactionary epochs” in general, nocturnal epochs (p. 457)

#### CYCLE/FATAL DISTORTION OF THE SOCIAL WILL

On this occasion, one must note that uprisings in reactionary forms from below punish the limitations of progress, its fall from grace (which is basically what a cycle entails). As such, they reanimate the repressed old, galvanizing outdated orders to take on the meaning of protest, justifying crimes against civilization.

In this sense, the tragedy of Socrates, according to Hegel, does not differ from the tragedy of Antigone, while Shakespeare (no matter how the provincial wise man Pinsky may one-sidedly interpret my thoughts in this regard) is not simply just a minstrel of the past. This song on the past grows into a breakthrough to the future. This gives rise to the attempt to reconcile opposite, to break the vicious cycle. Art does not only express and reflect the cycle of the philosophy of history, but represents a tragic and comic attempt to step beyond its boundaries into the sphere of full truth. This, in fact, is “poetic justice” (p. 458)

#### IS THERE REASON IN THE WORLD?

Where does our reason come from? The concretization of several sides of reality: its universal content (you can’t ask everything—

Boltzman—“The cannon should not overshoot the means”). So you want to pull yourself up by your own hair?—It won’t work.

I think, therefore what I think can be thought, or by-itself, or something that is unthinkable for another thought.

The notion of reason contains its opposite. That which does not fit into the current given scheme of the universal in reality or objectively (into the “rational order”) is irrational. The rational or reasonable turns into opposite, since it is not absolutely identical to itself. The reasonable cannot be with itself, if it is not unreasonable at least in part.

The irrational is that which does fit into the scheme of reason in reality. Objectively, it is that side of reality that has not yet settled into rational forms and turns against them, the unreasonable in nature and society. Irrationalism is a misrepresentation that mixes up reality with the unreasonable.

The irrational and the rational go over into one another. Their extremes are identical (giraffe).

Any abstraction of reason is limited, not only in our minds, but in rational forms of reality. The crisis of physico-teleology. This is the source of what remains beyond its boundary. It is also—dynamically—where indignation against these forms arises. Heraclites’ tonus and the Stoics: tension. Countering reason.

Is the world reasonable? Yes, but reason is the concrete meaning of being, and everything concrete is broader than any one-sidedness including reason in any narrow, lop-sided sense of the word; that it, it includes the unreasonable since it includes concrete meaning [...] but excludes even reason itself, because it is only reason, because it is beneath itself. This (the dialectic of truth) is the real answer, so unlike Nietzsche’s paradox of the lie. An analogy: my formula of realism. The same can be said of the truth. The truth exists but only because it both includes untruth and excludes abstract truth. This (general) formula has to have a name (type). (p. 466-467)

#### THE FORMULA OF THE WORLD

Pre-formation? Libretto? No, just as little as a senseless scattering of facts from which typical

forms are compiled through selection and transition from the less probable to the more probable (here, senseless order are actually also irrational).

*Natural selection takes place under conditions of more and more concrete pre-formations; there is no such thing as abstract selection.* This pre-formation grows, becoming more and more concrete. In a fantastic stroke of genius, Hegel expresses this as the idea of the *developing god* (stolen and feuilletonized by Nietzsche). Yet still, it seems to me that this process has a flipside: god is born in history, but he also dies like great Pan. (p. 487-488)

#### WONDER

How strange, how wondrous: why is it that we humans are at the center of the universe. Isn’t this false pride? In this sense, Bruno and the enlightenment philosophers were somewhat one-sided: one has to understand that we think as a result of this all too relative world, but once we think, there is no reason to be surprised at the absoluteness of our thinking. The same holds true for individual human beings: the fact that I understand or think places me at the center of the world; this fact itself is the result of a wondrous, quasi-miraculous coincidence of circumstances, selections, developments. But since *this miracle has already taken place*, we are its consciousness, its voice. *One must cultivate respect for this voice of the absolute.* Hegel probably wanted to say something to this effect.

But I have been trying to express this thought for my entire life. But I can’t. I’m not clear enough.

What I need is a good example! (p. 490)

**1** Lifshitz is referring to Lenin’s famous letter to Gorky July 21, 1919, when Leningrad was still Petrograd. Answering the writer’s accusation that the Bolshevik revolution was being carried out with the help of thieves and without the participation of the intelligentsia, Lenin writes: “We are doing everything to involve the (non-White-Guardist) intelligentsia in the battle. [...] One cannot see this in Peter yet, since Peter is a city that has lost an immeasurable amount of ground (and heads) to the bourgeois public (and the “intelligentsia”), but in most of Russia, it is an irrefutable fact [...] If one observes, one has to observe at the bottom, where one can overlook a new world being build, in provincial worker’s settlements or villages; here, one need not politically grasp the sum of extremely complex data; one can limit oneself to observing.” (Vladimir I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 51, p. 25).

**2** This note is written in German.

**3** The second developmental level of consciousness, when it become opaque, irrational, and ideological, losing the immediacy of a “transparent mirror.”

**4** Mikhail Lifshitz interprets these themes as follows (cf. File No. 144, p. 195): “The terminology comes from Bretano, though it works differently there. In recto is when the object finds its direct expression; in oblique is when it is reflected and involves the conditions of place and time with the consciousness of all immediate perception.”

**5** Trans. note: English in the original.

**6** Trans. note: The Russian idiom literally reads: “Morning is wiser than evening.”