

Presented in this book is the  
documentation of the work produced  
during 1984-1985 within the  
Master of Fine Arts course at the  
Tasmanian School of Art, University  
of Tasmania.

Peter Cooper

BOOK NUMBER

2

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the staff of the  
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## Section 1

### Proposal

The work I produce during the M.F.A. course will be centred on image making as a process of communication. Exploring visual images as messages mediated by social conventions of expectation and language. Examining how visual images work to redefine the horizon of possibilities allowed the viewer by culture.

This investigation will require theoretical research on questions of how society determines an individual's consciousness and the capacity of a mind so formed to intervene and alter the determining cultures world view. I define this field of research as materialism, more specifically the cultural implications of Historical Materialism.

I propose to base my theoretical papers on Marxist thought as it has been developed through 20th century Western thinkers, using these theoretical ideas for analysis of contemporary Australian culture.

This study will be combined with my developing thought to produce visual images. These ideas will, once brought into being themselves, suggest and modify the course to be followed and so help to determine the destination of the work.

The objective would be to make images which shift the historically generated boundaries of thought, the cultural paradigm within which thought of the world must take place. The method used would be to produce images that illuminate the socially determined and exclusionary nature of the cultural paradigm. The image sources will be popular cultural traditions such as comics, magazines and childrens illustrations.

The aim is to make a body of work that as representation/  
argument/communication will have been produced through the  
interaction of their art, my biases and your institution.

## **Section 2**

### Review of the Proposal

During the final weeks of the course as I was assembling this documentation I reread my proposal for the first time since its acceptance by the school. The experience drew an involuntary groan from me which I suppose is a fair measure of the ground I have covered during the course. I put the document to one side avoiding any thought of reviewing it until the very last.

Now however looking at the proposal again I can see that while I would express my aims differently I still agree with the general substance of the position then taken.

The way I approach art in the proposal with deliberate weight placed on its social role is, I still think, the only relevant way of considering art in general.

I would not now place quite the same emphasis on art as communication. That emphasis resulted from a view that content determined form. Consequently I stressed the role of content in art against those explanations of art that concentrate on form as the significant feature of art.

However at that time I was using a fairly simple model of form and content. The position I now have is that an art object contains two contents. The first instance is a content that refers to whatever aspect of reality is being represented. In the second there is the material content of the particular tradition of art that is being developed through the work. It is from the interaction of these two facets of content, a conscious aim and an expressive tradition, that the form arises. It follows from this explanation that painting is more than just communication.



The second last paragraph of the proposal stating the intent of my work reveals a degree of confusion in my thought. The way I present the idea of art having a social function could be read to suggest a mechanistic causal relationship between the work and its audience. This error had its root, I think, in the traces of avante garde ideas about art that I still held at that time. A work of art does not have the effect of changing the view of its audience. Art expresses in the aesthetic of the culture attitudes that the audience and artist intuitively feel. Art serves to crystallize these mutual feelings into a more complete understanding.

Apart from these adjustments the basic ideas of the proposal have direct correspondence with the view I have of the works in my M.F.A. submission.

### Section 3









Halley's Comic

1985, 3.1 x 2 metres, Chalk and Pastel on Sandpaper

M.M., 1985, 2.5 x 6 metres, Chalk Pastel Charcoal on Sandpaper and Newsprint

### The Materials

When beginning the course it was my aim to extend my range of abilities. I wanted to work on a large scale with life size figures. But in a way that would allow the work to grow and develop experimentally so that parts of it could be expanded or removed as the idea developed.

Using sandpaper and pastels provided a way of achieving this. The sandpaper, readily and cheaply available in standard size sheets, enabled a large work to be produced in pieces in the studio. Sandpaper's surface has a grain that allows dense colour to be laid down directly with pastels and chalk, and because of the paper's toughness, extensive blending and correction are feasible.

Pastels and chalks combine the quality of intense colour with the direct physical nature of drawing which seems to suit my way of working.

J.V. Stalin Rides a Bike, 1985, Detail, Figures Life Size Chalk and Pastel on Sandpaper



J.V. Stalin Rides a Bike

1985 Detail Figures Life Size Chalk and Pastel on Sandpaper





J.V. Stalin Rides a Bike

1985 Detail Figures Life Size Chalk and Pastel on Sandpaper

M.M.

1985, Detail, Figures Life Size, Chalk Pastel and Charcoal on Sandpaper and Newsprint



Halley's Comic

1985, Detail, Chalk and Pastel on Sandpaper

### The Content

My work draws from and makes reference to both the imagery of popular culture and art.

The unifying theme of the paintings is an awareness of my existence as a part of a culture in motion. The rapid technical and economic development of contemporary industrial societies carries with it the potential for unexpected and sudden shifts in the outlook of social groups.

I don't think of these newer meanings as arising from nowhere, they have their origin within the values of the changing culture. So while I don't know what the content of the next flip flop of culture will be I do know that it must develop from what already exists in thought.

Consequently, assuming you want to give the future a hand, the place to look for its point of development is within the contradictory aspects of one's own responses to reality.

Having chosen the various images that I think best express the opposing attitudes I have toward the particular issue I am referring to, I then work to enhance parts of the meaning that these elements hold for me.

While I don't assume an audience with an identical biography to mine, I do anticipate that a generally shared cultural experience allows the possibility of engaging the interested viewer in an interaction with the picture.





J.V. Stalin Rides a Bike

1985, Detail, Figures Life Size, Chalk and Pastel on Sandpaper



J.V. Stalin Rides a Bike

1985, Detail, Figures Life Size, Chalk and Pastel on Sandpaper

Halley's Comic

1985, Detail, Chalk and Pastel on Sandpaper

M.M.

1985, Detail, Figures Life Size, Chalk Pastel Charcoal on Sandpaper and Newsprint



#### **Section 4**

Seminar One

M.F.A. ART THEORY PROGRAMME 1984

THE POSSIBILITY OF CORRECT KNOWLEDGE

## The Possibility of Correct Knowledge

This paper had its beginning with my discovery of the use in contemporary cultural theory of linguistic analysis of meaning. The disruption of my certainties caused by this form of inquiry had its compensation in the stimulation I found in the works of theorists using the method. However, because structural theory effectively demolished my prior assumptions of the nature of meaning, I had no critical criteria with which to test the claims these theorists made.

The aim when starting the research was to find a theoretical system based upon assumptions that were relatively uncompromised by linguistic analysis. Such a theory once found could be used as a viable bench mark against which the consequences of the structural approach to culture could be assessed.

The system of ideas I have chosen to use here, or perhaps the system that has chosen to use me, is dialectical materialism. Marxist-Leninist philosophy suited my purpose by being a rigorously defined body of theory. The view of consciousness contained in dialectical materialism is compatible in many areas with the idea of awareness described by linguistic theory. While at those points where the two theories clash Leninist theory, because of its combative nature, is unmoved and its precise formulation enabled me to clearly identify why there is no correspondence. By laying the two theories side by side for comparison my intention was to find the assumptions that are implicit in each theory and so to gain a better understanding of both systems.

## Linguistic Theory

The intimate relationship between language and thought allows the linguistic theorist entry to the workings of the mind. Language

provides a direct link with the mental forms that make a meaningful reality in thought possible.

Modern linguistics defines language as a system of signs. The word or sign is a unity of two aspects. This dialectical unity is formed by the word's sound image, called a signifier and the mental notion the sound triggers, called a signified.

The sign in both of its aspects is arbitrary. Words are arbitrary in the sense that there is no natural or inevitable link between a word and reality. Just as there are no natural or obvious sounds for a language to use as signifiers for various aspects of reality, so there is no inevitable link between the notions carried by the signified and reality.

While it is clear from our experience that each language divides up the vocal sound spectrum in different ways in making its unique signifiers, it is not so readily perceived by a monolingual thinker that each language also divides the continuum of reality differently when expressing its notions.

For example, with the English words 'river' and 'stream' there is a differentiation according to size. While the approximate French equivalent words fleuve and riviere are defined by their destination, a fleuve flows to the sea while a rivier is a tributary.

The meanings expressed in the words of all languages divide the continuum of reality into different ideas. As all languages operate successfully for their users it can be seen that there is no obvious necessary or right way of thinking the world.

However, if the meaning of a word is not directly derived from an external object what is the source of the meaning of words? The answer to this question can be found by returning to the example

of the river and stream. To explain to a non-English speaker what a stream is it would be necessary to refer to its difference in size from a river. This explanation reveals that the identity contained in the word 'stream' owes its meaning to the word's relationship to 'river'. It follows that the notion contained in the word stream is not itself an autonomous entity. Streams identity or existence as a meaning is dependent upon its place in a system.

Words can only carry meaning as the result of a relationship with other words. A sign existing in isolation could not signify anything. The intelligibility of words is only possible through their place within a structure of relationships.

Extending this with a further example, with colour we impose divisions upon the spectrum of visible light. Each of our colour concepts exists as a result of these cultural distinctions. Red exists not as an external thing or essence but as a negative gap in a system of relations. Other cultures can and do divide up the spectrum of light differently to produce different ways of thinking colour.

As our perception acquaints us with a semantic field rather than the pure objective world then it can be considered that the world of objects is the product of language. In the sense that reality's articulation is determined by language.

Consequently language cannot be thought of as an instrument with which a person expresses thoughts which have their source of existence elsewhere, either in the objective external world or in the objective self; because both the external world and the self owe their identities and their existence to language's articulation of them.

For the subject, the knower of experience, the known is not a relationship between the self and exteriority since both sites are dissolved by linguistic theory into a single semantic field.

This field, our language, existed before our individual consciousnesses. For us to have a world at all is only possible because we have acquired a culture and its point of view.

Our familiarity with the external world is an illusion made possible by our encultured thought. To take this socio-historic reality for an actually existing real, which thinkers as autonomous subjects, acting individually discover and act upon, is revealed by linguistic theory to be an error.

It follows from this that we can no longer look for the determining conditions that make society possible at the level of the autonomous subject. To understand individual experience requires a study of the social norms which make experience possible.

The effect of this insight is to continue the process of decentering the subject in our theory, a movement begun by Marx. The subject loses its place as the centre and source of meaning, indeed the idea of the subject dissolves as its functions are attributed to the systems operating through it.

Here linguistic theory carries us to a break with the traditions of thought dominant in European thinking since the seventeenth century. The perspective that makes society the result of individual behaviour is reversed, revealing that it is collective social systems that make behaviour possible.

It can be seen from the foregoing that linguistic theory makes uncertain our meanings. It does so through explaining the conditions for the existence of meaning in a theoretically existing

mind. A mind abstracted from practice by using a concept of language unconnected to any external referent. The dialectical materialist approach to human consciousness is, however, an explanation of the cause of meaning. Human consciousness seen from this viewpoint is a result of the activity of mankind within and as a part of the developing material continuum of objective reality.

### Dialectical Materialism

Like linguistic theory, Marxist-Leninist theory sees the existence of consciousness only being possible as a result of each individual's culture. A person finds a pre-existing spiritual environment implemented by culture. This environment is an objectively existing cultural object which the individual has to assimilate and in doing so the consciousness and will of the individual is moulded in the culture's image. Each separate sensual impression arising in a person's consciousness is only possible as a product of a refraction of the external world through a prism of social forms of awareness that the individual has appropriated.

### Reflection

Consciousness is possible in matter because of the general attribute of matter called reflection. Reflection is manifested in the inorganic world as a capacity for bodies to change their internal states when affected by other bodies. For example, mechanical deformation resulting from a blow.

In living things reflection becomes selective and is connected with information received. An elementary form of biological reflection is irritability as a reaction by the organism to external influences.

Physiological evolution leads to newer forms of reflection until reflection reaches its highest developed stage with the ability

for specific reflection of matter as an ideal copy. We know this stage of reflection's development as our consciousness.

Our awareness of the world arises through interaction between people. The social factors of work and language caused the development of consciousness. Through the necessity of securing our material requirements, people are forced to act together in their labour. This leads to the co-ordinating of group action with ever greater levels of communication, resulting in the appearance of language.

The arrival of language signifies a qualitatively different form of reflection than that of animals. Speech is a material manifestation of thought: meanings that can exist for other people and, by virtue of that, exist for a given person.

The social nature of consciousness is revealed in its unity with language. The socially developed language is the form of existence of human consciousness, an awareness that cannot exist outside of speech.

However, consciousness is more than just language, for awareness reflects reality while language's role is to express the mental results of this reflection, raising it to the level of cultural meaning.

With language, mankind has a way of generalizing reality in abstraction from its concrete sensorily perceived features. Our ability to think reality in concepts enables us to delve beyond the appearances of the world. We can seek out the regularities and connections between things and events, to discover the essence of phenomena.

A culture's consciousness reproduces its reality in ideal images which can be related back to the objective world through subjective experience. In their practice individuals can bring



their subjective image of an aspect of reality into comparison with that same aspect existing objectively outside consciousness. Through this interaction of practice, knowledge of the objectively existing real, outside of awareness, is constantly being modified and expressed as newly experienced knowledge by individuals. The individual is therefore both constituted by society's world view and also its bearer and developer.

### Practice

From the dialectical materialist viewpoint consciousness owes its origins and development to human social interaction in labour. It is only through the material interaction of labour with nature that any idea or attitude could be formed to nature.

Practice is therefore the mediating link between objectively existing external reality and its ideal reflection in thought. All meaning arises from practice and develops upon a practical basis.

Mankind cognizes nature in order to subjugate it and turn it to our services. Human practical activity involves material contact with natural objects. For example, to alter a stone, so as to make an axe, reveals the specific properties of stone. This empirical data is a penetration into nature's secrets and results in an increasing control of reality.

To set a labour goal, say of reproducing stone axes, requires the existence in thought of an ideal image of the manufacturing process. This ideal model is not simply the expression in words of the process, rather it is an adequate experiential knowledge of the method. An awareness of the concrete material interaction of human stuff and stone needed to reproduce the object in space.

Making anything presumes a co-ordinated mental programme of action combining both the possibilities of human dexterity and energy with the properties of the material to be changed during the activity. The mental image of the world produced through practice, must be an ideal which is made from the united objective properties of two objects. In the case of the axe the two are social man and stone as they exist in the process of production. Consequently consciousness of the world, the ideal image we have of reality, cannot be thought of as a purely mental image conjured out of a disinterested contemplation of raw nature.

Therefore acceptance of the idea that practice is the mediating link between the mind and externally existing reality carries with it the implication that the reality known in consciousness should itself be thought of as practice.

From this position it can be seen that the subject and object of knowledge is not nature in the raw but nature, both the human identity and its world, being transformed by practice. An aspect of objective reality that lies outside of the expanding sphere of practice generated knowledge, cannot be known in thought.

As a result of this view, the function of awareness is not to seek information from a static given reality, since the world seen in consciousness is not an objective external reality as it exists from God's eye view, but rather a humanized mental terrain. A field of view that past generations of humans have produced as their practice illuminated the specific areas of their activity.

It follows from this view that reality exists in our minds as dead identity. A map gained from past human practice is the starting point for our living thought as it begins each moment of present

activity. The purpose of cognition is then not to contemplate the world as it appears to exist because that is merely the trace of past practice. Rather the function of thought is to transform the world and, in so doing, the basis of knowledge will itself change.

### The Concrete

Practice in its social entirety produces a cultural reality carrying people within its trajectory. At the beginning of every labour process a goal is posited so that at the activities end we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at the activity's commencement.

This image of a needed and desired future can only exist and be expressed because of a specific socio-historic consciousness. A social awareness that is itself the product of past practice. In carrying through our labour aims we effect change not only on the material with which we work, but also, in the realizing of our purpose, we change slightly society's reality and consequently its future needs.

A newer goal successfully achieved confirms the method used to satisfy the desire. This method becomes a necessary practice if people are to achieve their desired future, an objective concrete reality to which people must subordinate their wills. The things we need, our desires, are meanings generated by past practice and thus, in order that we fulfil our desires, it is necessary to understand the concrete nature of the existence of human needs within our present practices.

### The Concrete in Thought and Reality

Because mankind does not act upon nature from outside but confronts it as one of its forces, human material activity is linked at every stage with, and mediated by, objective reality. Consequently,

since practice produces our ideal, forms of thought governing people's action in practice, are the reflections of the real laws of the objectively existing world. Subjective consciousness realizes these regularities in thought as reason and logic. So the rules of thought transpire to be also the general rules by which nature itself develops, revealed to mankind by their practical, activity transforming nature.

The forms of human thought have been laid down by history. They have objective existence, independent of the will and consciousness of individuals to whom the rules of thought are counterposed as the structure of an historically developed system of culture. An individual can think only in so far as he or she has appropriated the logical determinations historically moulded before them.

#### Knowledge

Immediate contemplation of the objects of nature itself is bound up with the features and forms that have been stamped upon it by the transforming activity of mankind.

Both the contemplating mind and the world contemplated are the products of history. Consequently the real object for human contemplation is the forms of activity of the social transformation of nature. Contemplation is always immediately concerned not with objects, but the objective activity on society's objects. It is precisely the alteration of nature by mankind that is the most essential and immediate basis of human thought.

#### Truth

Truth is a property of human knowledge in relation to an object. The world itself is not true or false, truth always refers to our knowledge of things not the things themselves.

Because the reality of dialectical materialism is seen as the product of a developing practice, truth is not understood to mean an exhaustive and complete knowledge entirely coincident with an external object.

In a developing reality, knowledge to be truthful, must reflect the process of that reality's transformation. For Marxist-Leninists true knowledge is a maximal coincidence of the understanding of some limited part of the world at a moment in its development within our practice. Such knowledge, if it is true, will be borne out by practice and when it is proved by practice, it can then be considered objective knowledge.

Objectively true knowledge is a unity of the two aspects, relative and absolute truth. The absolute end of this unity reflects properties, qualities and laws of reality, and cannot be disproved in the future because its objective content does not depend upon consciousness. The relative end of the unity of objective truth is the human expression of the knowledge's content and consequently is always an historically specific statement of meaning.

Seen from this viewpoint truth is not a static state of knowledge but a process of ever deeper reflection of the practical transformation of reality by labour.

Because of the material-mediated nature of practice produced thought, the solution of the problems of practice always involves us in being forced to think in ways determined by matter. Logical necessity drives a road for itself and so long as practice lasts, ever truer knowledge is the inevitable path of human thought.

Having laid out the basic views of thought held by linguistic theory and dialectical materialism, it becomes possible to arrive at some conclusions about their differences. Linguistic theory has the

merit of making explicit the prior assumptions that lie implicit in all thought. Using that theory, it is possible to achieve a degree of objective separation from one's own thought, to stand aside and watch the way your meanings are cobbled together in order to make sense. I find this a liberating release from the obligation of seriousness that permeates our cultural identity. However, this escape in no way excuses us from the imperative of making sense. The theory's bright promise of liberation through the subversion of meaning, boomerangs on its users to become a denial of the validity of any deliberate purpose or action.

This weakness is exposed in much of the writing of linguistic cultural theory. The fault has its root in the abstraction of language from reality: when considered as an isolated thing, idealism takes over and the theory becomes theology.

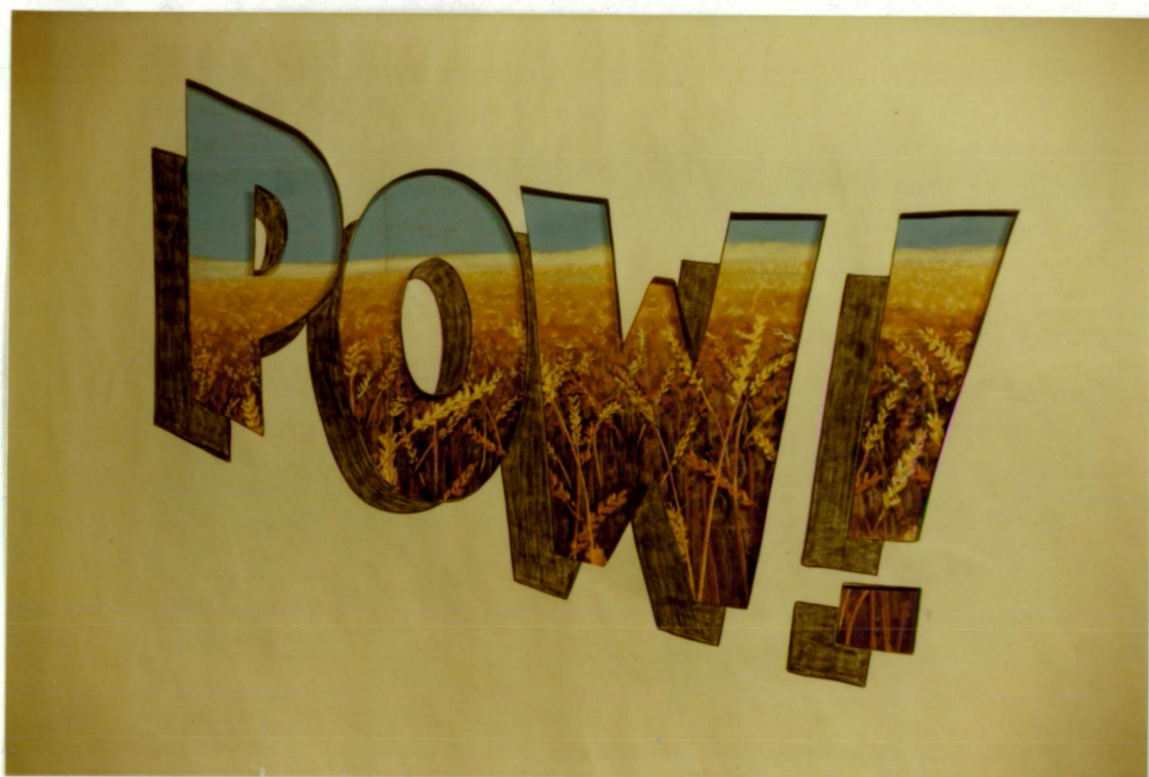
The Marxist-Leninist view of consciousness avoids an abstract identity by immersing the mind within, and as a part of, the developing social totality. Linking awareness at every point with a concrete reality of which it is a part, dialectical materialism is able to provide a fully developed understanding of material reality. This commitment to an austere and rigorous materialism enables the system to maintain the objectivity that makes it Theory with a capital T.

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M.M.

1985, Detail, Figures Life Size, Chalk Pastel and Charcoal on Sandpaper and Newsprint

## Section 5

**Seminar Two**

**M.F.A. ART THEORY PROGRAMME 1984**

**THE MOVEMENT OF THOUGHT**

## The Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete

The outlook of the dialectical materialist assumes that in the objective world there are no things existing in isolation, all objects have universal links with the rest of reality. Objective reality exists as a unity of interacting things which are found in the form of related groups, the sub-systems of reality.

Each group of things is a relatively discrete unity the identity of which is determined by the interaction of its component parts. Similarly the nature of each particular thing within a system is determined by the role it plays in the processes of its unifying system.

The interaction of things within each unity causes that group to change and this movement through the infinity of links between the things of reality leads to the overall motion and development of the objective world.

Society is a sub-system of reality, an object developing independently of any awareness we may have of it. However, because our consciousness is the result of our material practice, awareness itself is mediated by objective reality.

Therefore the mind is a developing part of the social system, and because the content of awareness is an image of matter as it undergoes transformation through practice, forms of thought such as reason and logic are reflections of the rules and regularities of the nature of objective reality when it undergoes development.

It follows that by correctly deducing the nature of thought it becomes possible to realize the course both of society and its knowledge as it unfolds.

## Reality

Accepting the idea of a practice-produced consciousness of reality, it is clear that our mental images of things existing in the external world reflect only those aspects of the object that have been illuminated through our practice. We can only have defined those facets of each thing that have been specifically revealed by the course of our activity.

Consequently our awareness of things, their appearance as mental images for us, is never a complete knowledge of the thing as it actually exists. We can know an object only in so far as our practical needs have illuminated it for us.

Therefore the image of the world as it appears in our minds is illusory in the sense that reality itself does not exist as the external vista of understood meaning perceived by our consciousness.

The field of knowledge that constitutes our mental image of the world is a geography of reality mapped by our practice thus far in its development. Reality exists for us as an internal image rather than an external world.

A newer meaning emerging into our consciousness should not be considered as something purely existing 'out there' which has been freshly discovered. Meaning can only arise from a process of differentiation within the already existing interiority of our minds, not as a direct perception of raw nature.

Practice-produced reality is a coherent system of mankind's relation to nature. An articulated concreteness organised in itself. Our thought is the precise and direct expression of this system of society and things.

As a result of this insight the philosophical problem of the relation of abstract thought to concrete reality ceases to be one of the relation between a verbally expressed abstract idea to an externally existing sensorially given concrete thing. Instead it emerged as the problem of the relationship between the discrete elements of the humanized mental geography called reality; the question of how the internally divided aspects of our concrete reality relate to each other within the whole.

It can be seen that this formulation of the relationship between the mind and objective reality involves us in a break with the traditions of thought dominant in our culture.

We usually consider the sensorially perceived objective thing given in perception to be concrete. While thought about the thing is seen as abstraction, by speculating mentally, we move away from the hard empirical facts and thought becomes mere opinion.

Marxism reverses this hierarchy by making the directly perceived thing abstract, while the process of cognizing the thing's true meaning as it exists as an element of the reality of practice is seen as the elevation of thought to the level of concrete knowledge.

#### The Concrete

The concrete is the name given to each of reality's systems of relations within which particular things exist. Because the unity defines the role played by each of its component parts, the system of relations in effect determines each thing's identity. That a thing can be this particular thing involves it being part of a particular set of relations.

Because a thing can only exist as an identity for itself and for us as an element of a certain system, it is always perceived as an individual manifestation of a certain set of relations at a

particular moment in the development of the system.

Consequently the system itself must be regarded as logically primary to each of its component things. For a thing to be understood correctly requires that it be interpreted in this way.

### The Abstract

The opposite of the concrete is the abstract, a thing is abstract as it exists in reality and as it appears in perception at each separate and relatively isolated moment.

An object seen under such circumstances is abstracted from the identity-giving relations of its system, separated from the reciprocating movement it has with the other things of that system. If a thing is explained as it appears without regard to its defining system, only one-sided abstract knowledge can emerge.

### The Concrete in Thought

While the concrete is primary with respect to the abstract, both in the objective system and in thought about the system, the concrete is not itself a thing. The concrete can exist only through its discrete elements as their specific combination of synthesis and unity.

The concrete system can never be directly reflected in thought, it exists in thought only as a unity of diverse definitions. Each definition records a moment actually distinguished in the existence of the structure.

Consequently mental reproduction of the concrete is realized as a movement from the abstract to the concrete. This movement is achieved through the logical combination of particular definitions into an aggregate, overall theoretical, picture of reality.

For example the star and planets of our region of space exist abstractly as separate things at each isolated moment. However,

the mind by logically combining these fragments of empirical abstract data forges the diverse definitions into a concrete structure and reveals the unity of the solar system. The system of relations that gives each of the planets and their star their specific identity.

Once expressed and accepted, this theoretical explanation of the relationship of these astronomical bodies to each other becomes a part of our view of reality and permeates our thought. At the mention of the solar system each of us can conjure up a mental model, or meaning, of the system. However, no-one has ever seen it. Even if it were possible to proceed to a position in space from which the solar system could be observed it would look nothing like the image we have of it. Nonetheless, by imposing our theoretical model upon the empirical data we could perceive the system.

The ascent from the abstract to the concrete is the mode whereby thinking assimilates the concrete, reproducing it as the mental image of the concrete.

#### The Notion

As can be seen from the foregoing, cognition moves from the particular to the general. In practical thought the abstract appearance of the thing to be worked upon is the first stage of its cognition.

The object appears as a mental image or notion which is the identity of that thing produced by past human interaction with that particular aspect of reality. The object always arrives in consciousness as a socially implemented contemplation.

However, the notion is not the goal of thought, the mental appearance of the thing is the raw material of our activity's starting point. The thing under consideration can only be acted upon and



transformed in reality to the degree of our control over it. The scope of practical activity is tied to the level of our understanding of the object to be worked on. Our knowledge or degree of control over things is only possible because of our ability to determine their identity-giving systems. This occurs as the content of our notions is enhanced by concepts.

The concept works by logically processing empirical data to bring the abstract thing in question into a correspondence with the way it exists as a part of a developing system.

### The Concept

The concept is not itself a thing, it has no empirical identity, concepts exist as a special form of consciousness through which empirically stated facts are expressed more concretely. The concept works to ensure that things are considered with regard to a property which each thing has specifically as an element of a system.

Concepts can be thought of as an illumination of the things of the mind made possible by our experiential awareness of the recurring regularities of the objective world. The rules of matter that we have detected during our practical interaction with matter are expressed through concepts as an aggregate of ideas such as cause, possibility, quality, property, quantity, necessity, etc.

By using these rules of objective reality's systematic development, the mind breathes life into our socially received abstract notions. Concepts enable us to manipulate reality successfully and to mentally reproduce the unseen systems they hint at as our explanatory theories.

Through the use of concepts such as cause and effect, specific events can be given connections they would otherwise lack. The

sensually given diversity of reality is given its meaning and order as the concept articulates it into a unity.

The ordered meaning of our world view results from the ability of concepts to give us theoretical models expressing the systems that give each thing its identity, these systems are the objects' defining universal.

### The Universal

If a thing is explained without reference to the concrete interconnections that constitute its genuine nature, only abstract knowledge is obtained.

As the identity of each particular thing is determined by its role in a system, it follows that a full understanding of an object requires that its system or universal be revealed.

However the concrete universal exists only through its discrete elements, consequently it itself is not directly observable and so must be deduced logically.

To find the system of a thing one analyses it from the standpoint of its anticipated universal, to single out in the object what it is that constitutes its universality.

For example people seeing a planet moving across the sky at first might perceive no connection with the Earth. The thing and its observation point may well be two separate and unrelated entities and no awareness of a universal connection will be possible. However, over time the regularities of the passage of the planet might emerge in consciousness, leading to the conclusion that a relationship existed between the motion of the planet and the Earth's position. From this insight a system of relations or a universal that would explain the events can be realized.

The awareness of a relationship makes it possible to produce a theory that tells us why the planet appears as it does, its identity, and conversely, why from where we are viewing it, it looks that way, which gives our planets identity. The two objects define each other as opposites in the system, their relationship is a unity of opposites.

In this example to find the universal we began with an abstract notion, a light in the sky, with whatever meaning-content society at that time gave it. We analysed it to single out the aspect or identity that makes it a part of a system, its perceived regularities. Having defined this facet of the existence of the thing we are able to use our conceptual awareness of the rules of reality's systematic development to deduce its opposite. The opposite is the other polarity of the relationship that is giving both things their identity.

As the newly revealed system emerges as an explanatory theory, its elements take on the meaning given by the theory. The things are now seen in people's minds as notions whose meanings become a part of the world view of society.

It can be seen from this that it would be useless to try and explain reality from its appearances, as though such notions were pure reality. Because the content of our mental images refers to a thing only as it is perceived, as an identity within a theoretical model.

As human practice develops, ever greater complexity of empirical fact is revealed. These facts have to be explained and contained by existing theories. Periodically the newer data overwhelms the explanatory power of a theory and bursts it. A newer theory must emerge to illuminate the facts with a different light as the content of our notions deepens.

### The Movement of Thought

For an empirical fact to enter consciousness as a meaning, it is dependent upon our theories. Meaning is the unity produced by the dialectical interaction of facts and theories.

We know where the facts come from, they arise 'out there', however, where do the theories come from? Theories emerge from existing meaning as the complexity of the scope of practice constantly produces newer facts to test existing theories. When a theory is perceived to be no longer able to satisfactorily explain the array of facts, a newer explanation must appear if practice in that area is to be able to continue to develop.

However, the meanings, the mental tools we have to produce this more comprehensive theoretical expression of the same facts, are the product of past theory. A new theory, no matter how revolutionary its content may seem, is always a further development of values created by previous development.

For example, a critical reinterpretation of the older explanatory formula of the cause of night and day which is, that the sun revolves around the Earth, produced the newer formula of the Earth spinning before the sun.

The rational core of the old theory, that the origin of night and day could be found by explaining the relationship existing between the Earth and the Sun, remains unchanged by the new theory. All that has been discarded is the conception that the old theory comprised in itself an exhaustive expression of the essence of the facts.

At the time of its inception the consequences of the newer theory included a radical shift in the world view of society, with

its image of the place of mankind in God's universe. However, the newer theory was directly produced out of the concrete content of that past world view.

Cognition rolls forward from content to content, world view to world view, each new result contains its own beginnings, in the sense that all past meaning can only have existed because of the relation between empirical facts of practice and its contemporary theory, or more precisely through the linking of the facts to their universal concrete system. As each development of theory is the deepening of our understanding of the correct place of each object in its concrete system, so the movement in thought from the abstract to the concrete is an ever truer reflection of the starting point of our knowledge.

The notion preserves itself at each stage, raising the whole mass of its antecedent content. Our concrete knowledge of the world leaves nothing behind as it develops: at each new stage it enriches and concentrates itself upon itself. In the movement of knowledge we shed only our abstract explanations.

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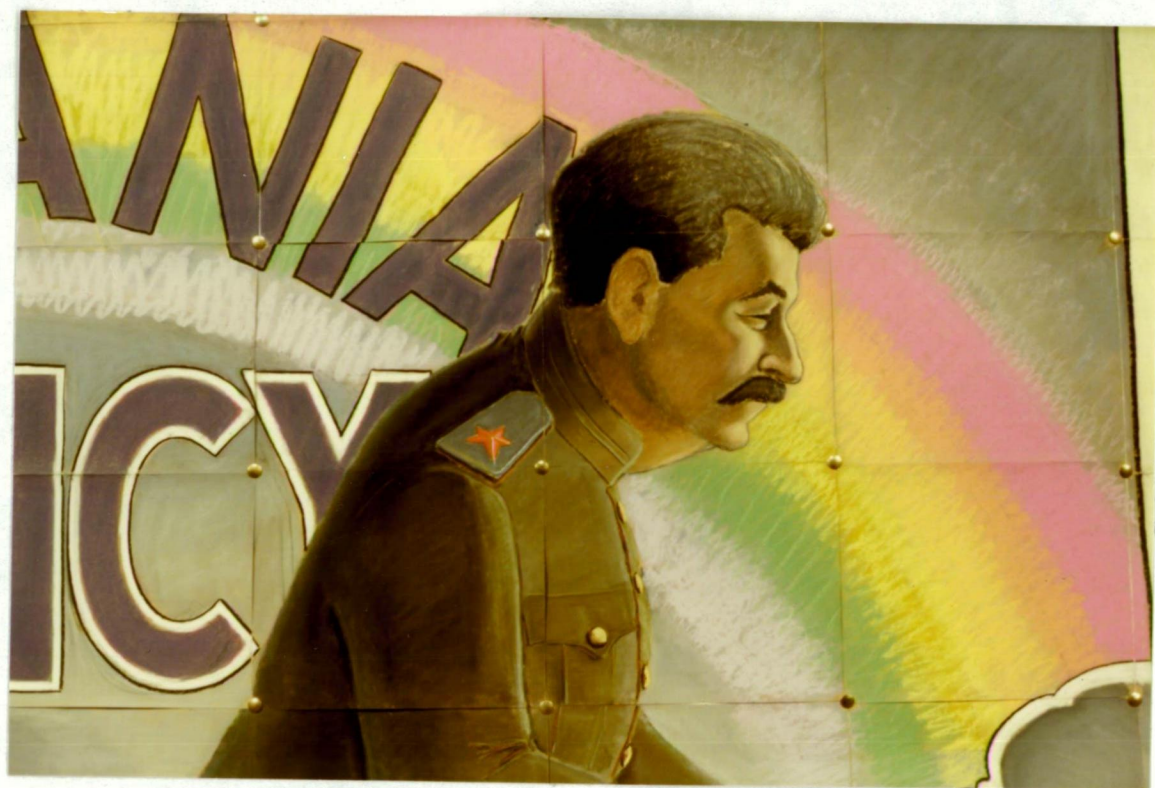
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