Marx is dead, Jesus lives.¹

Here we are, in the heart of Germany. We shall now have
to talk metaphysics while talking political economy.²

The political sea change that occurred with the fall of the
Berlin wall entailed major changes not just for the people
who had lived under real socialism. The victors of the Cold
War – the democratic market economies of the West – have
also undergone immense transformations. The discussion
on globalisation is an attempt to take account of them. One
does not need to be a Marxist to recognise in globalisation
the triumphal return of the old capitalism: the aggravation
of ecological problems and international conflicts goes hand
in hand with the withering away both of social security and
of the possibilities for state intervention in the economy. So
far, there is no end in sight.³ The explanations offered by
the protagonists of this development are so blatantly based
on the primacy of the economy (such as on notions of the
competitive pressures of the ‘world market’)⁴ as to obviate
the need for substantiating the hypothesis that the theoretical
and socio-philosophical response to this situation can
only consist in a return to Marx’s comprehensive analysis
of capitalism (section 1.2).⁵

Yet according to Marx, base and superstructure do not
constitute an unmediated whole. Because of the relatively

¹ Norbert Blüm, ca. 1990.
² Marx, MECW 6, p. 161.
³ Brecher 1994 speaks of a ‘race to the bottom’.
⁵ Especially once the phantasm of a ‘communist world revolution’ is off the table, which merely
led Marxists to disregard Marx’s economic writings (2.2.6, 2.3.3, 2.6.2).
autonomous dynamics of the superstructure, arguments and approaches inherited from the Cold War constellation survive the demise of that constellation’s economic base. While the economy pages of quality dailies refer regularly to Marx, post-1989 German philosophy hardly takes notice of him (excepting the traditional anti-communism that continues to project its notions onto Marx in a fallacious manner). Yet as a school of thought, German Marxism was already dead before 1989. It has been demonstrated in Chapter Two of this study that philosophical Marxisms and refutations of Marx have largely been built on the sand of German ‘spirit’. The need to explain Marx away is often already evident in the basic approach of the philosophical paradigms I have examined. The only reason these paradigms have proven so successful is that German Marxism did much to prepare this altercation by proxy, which occurs ‘upon the terrain of spirit’. The philosophical critiques of Marx I have considered have not stood up to closer scrutiny. Thus nothing really stands in the way of contemporary philosophy’s engagement with Marx, apart from discursive habits. However, in philosophy, which is so far removed from practice, such habits die harder than elsewhere. The fact that philosophy has forgotten about Marx has negative consequences for its comprehension of reality. The following part of this study, Chapter Three, presents examples to show that Marx’s critique of philosophy can be applied to contemporary philosophemes.

When Marx disappeared from philosophy’s consciousness after 1989, many socio-philosophical models ceased to be grounded in the economic base. When such models deal only with norms, and when they do so on the idealist assumption that norms are what ‘constitutes’ or ‘generates’ society, the narrow focus of the normative approach is aggravated, and normative social philosophy results – a theoretical overloading of normativity that assumes an increasingly free-floating character the more it shuts itself off from social reality. Sections 3.1 to 3.4 show just how important it is to criticise the historical foundations upon which this occurs; this was done in Chapter Two. The further we proceeded in our exposition, the more our references to Marx’s theory were mediated by that theory’s reception history. This is why we did not discuss social philosophy until late in our exposition. The way social philosophy relates to its object of inquiry is generally problematic.

Today, social philosophy addresses an ever-changing range of themes in a methodologically haphazard way. Often, the ‘method’ consists simply in adopting the terminology of an author who happens to be topical. It often remains unclear what the terms employed – such as ‘normativity’ or ‘community’ – actually refer to. Social philosophy neglects the problem of how it relates to its object of inquiry, preferring to blindly let itself be taken wherever past terminological decisions lead it. Whenever social philosophy is confronted with the real world, it becomes clear just how unfortunate a state of affairs this is. In such a situation, the adoption of an approach culled from the history of

6. For recent examples, see Löw 2001 and Gehrhart 2002.