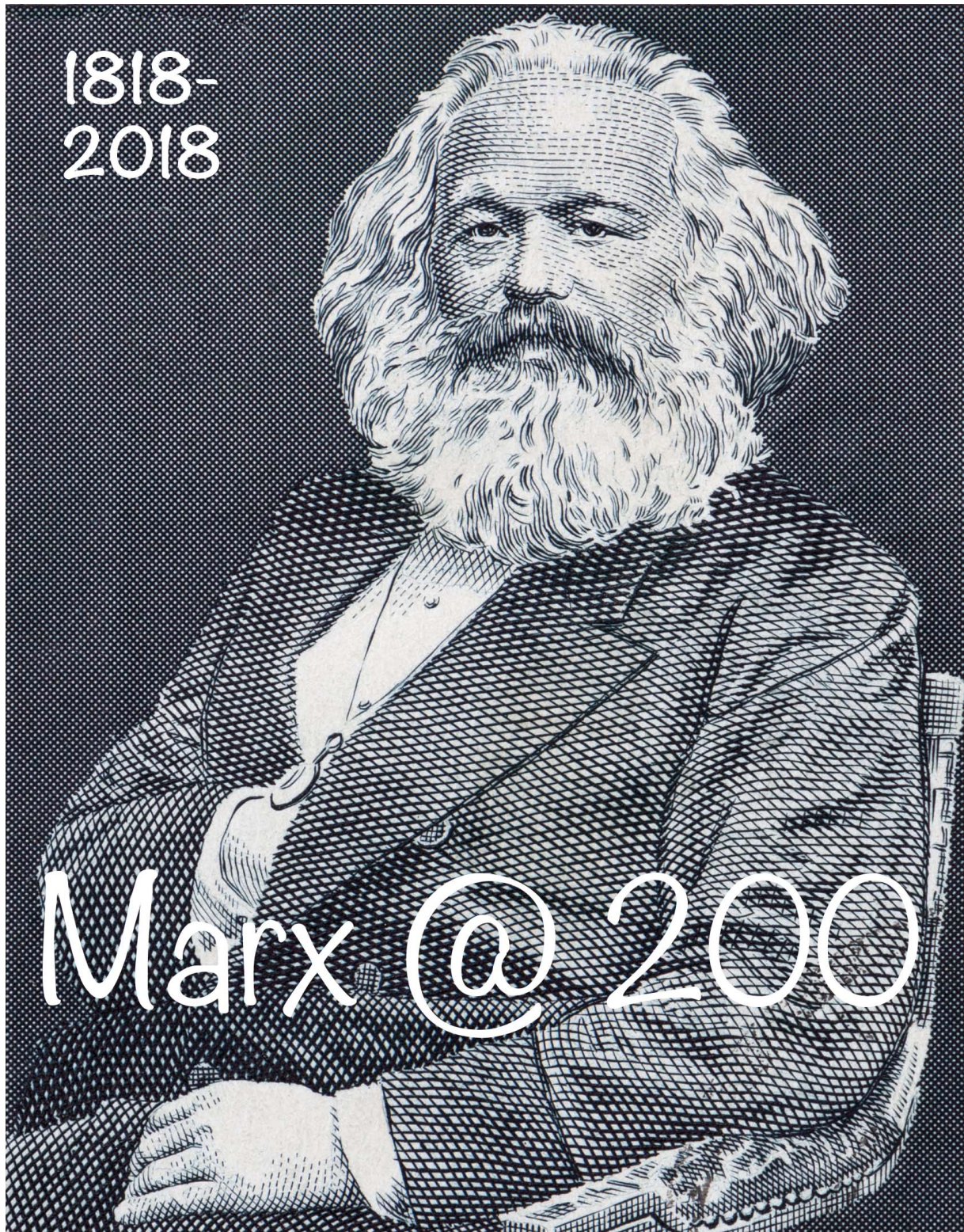


Marx @ 200: Debating Capitalism & Perspectives for the Future of Radical Theory

Edited by Christian Fuchs & Lara Monticelli

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Repeating Marx: Introduction to the Special Issue “Karl Marx @ 200: Debating Capitalism & Perspectives for the Future of Radical Theory”

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Abstract: This introduction sets out the context of the special issue “Karl Marx @ 200: Debating Capitalism & Perspectives for the Future of Radical Theory”, which was published on the occasion of Marx’s bicentenary on 5 May 2018. First, we give a brief overview of contemporary capitalism’s development and its crises. Second, we argue that it is important to repeat Marx today. Third, we reflect on lessons learned from 200 years of struggles for alternatives to capitalism. Fourth, we give an overview of the contributions in this special issue. Taken together, the contributions in this special issue show that Marx’s theory and politics remain key inspirations for understanding exploitation and domination in 21st-century society and for struggles that aim to overcome these phenomena and establishing a just and fair society. We need to repeat Marx today.

Keywords: Karl Marx, capitalism, class, bicentenary, 200th anniversary, 5 May 2018, 1818

1. Capitalism and Class 200 Years after Marx’s Birth

5 May 2018 marks the 200th birthday of Karl Marx. The *tripleC* special issue “Karl Marx @ 200: Debating Capitalism & Perspectives for the Future of Radical Theory” takes this anniversary as the occasion for discussing the relevance of Marx’s works and the Marxian critique of capitalism today. The special issue asks: How can Marx’s theory help us understand capitalism today? What type of capitalism do we live in today, 200 years after Marx’s birth? What kind of Marxian analysis, focus and praxis do we need for the analysis and critique of capitalism? Which elements of Marx’s theory and the history of Marxian theory can we best draw from in order to advance radical theory, the analysis of capitalism, and struggles for alternatives to capitalism?

With works such as *Capital*, *Grundrisse*, *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts*, *The German Ideology*, *The Communist Manifesto*, *Class Struggles in France*, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, *Contribution to Critique of Political Economy*, *The Civil War in France*, *Theories of Surplus-Value*, and many others, Marx laid the foundations for the critique of capitalism’s political economy. The approach he advanced operates with the help of categories such as the commodity, work, labour, exchange-value, use-value, value, the labour theory of value, labour-time, abstract and concrete labour, money, capital, capitalism, wages, prices, profits, fetishism, surplus-value, necessary labour, surplus labour, class, exploitation, alienation, accumulation, profit, ideology, absolute and relative surplus-value production, formal and real subsumption, co-operation, machinery, the means of production, the general intellect, the means of communication, the collective worker, the rate of surplus-value, the organic composition of capital, the rate of profit, the international division of labour, primitive accumulation, the antagonism of productive forces and relations of production, modes of production, capitalist crises, overaccumulation, the tendency of the profit rate to fall, the anarchy of the market, overproduction, underconsumption, prof-

it-squeeze, devaluation, fictitious capital, rent, landed property, transportation, the world market, uneven geographical development, global capital, colonialism, imperialism, interest, credit, the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation, circulation, reproduction, consumption, distribution, merchant's capital, departments I & II of social production, the state, species-being, Bonapartism, materialism, the dialectic, contradictions, class struggles, class consciousness, realm of necessity, realm of freedom, the commons, communism, socialism, etc.

Taken together, these categories form the foundations of a critical theory of capitalism and of its economic system, political system, cultural system, its technological paradigms, the human/nature relationship within capitalism, and aspects of subject/object and time/space in capitalism. Marx's approach is inherently critical, which means that it analyses capitalism's contradictions, its crisis tendencies, struggles and the foundation of alternatives to capitalism as the determinate negation of capitalism. The development of Marxian theory has resulted in numerous approaches, strands, interpretations, debates, and conflicts.

The rise of neoliberal capitalism in society, of postmodernism in culture and academia and of identity politics has, together with the collapse of the Soviet system, the degenerations brought about by various forms of Stalinism, and the neo-liberalisation of social democracy, resulted in a decline of Marxian-inspired theory and praxis during the past decades. Francis Fukuyama was therefore able to postulate in 1992 that the end of history had arrived and to claim that capitalism and liberal democracy would exist forever. Many academics in the social sciences and humanities have to a certain extent practiced 'Fukuyamaism' by forgetting about capitalism and the analysis of society's totality. They have instead focused on micro-analysis, postmodernism, the attack on 'grand narratives' and truth claims, and categories such as globalisation, individualisation, risk, networks, modernity, identity, etc. While Marx has increasingly become absent in theory and praxis, the class contradiction and inequalities have expanded so that he, paradoxically, in light of his absence, has become more needed than ever before.

25 years after Fukuyama's claims about the end of history, societies and sociology have changed. The notion of capitalism has in the light of capitalism's actual crisis made a return into the public and sociological vocabulary. A new world economic crisis emerged in 2008. In many parts of the world it turned into a political, social, austerity, ideological, and legitimacy crisis of capitalist society as well as into the rise of new nationalisms and authoritarian forms of capitalism (Fuchs 2018). Marx keeps on haunting capitalism in the 21st century. Talking about Marx means talking about class, capitalism, crisis and alternatives to capitalism. It is therefore evident that Marx will remain our contemporary as long as capitalism continues to exist.

Whereas in the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s it was difficult to talk about Marx without immediately being confronted with the ten unreflected prejudices against Marx that Terry Eagleton (2011) identifies, to the extent that a discussion about Marx and the critique of capitalism could not even be started, today there is more willingness to listen to what Marxist theory has to say. In the age in which neoliberal capitalism is in deep political, economic and ideological crisis and tends to turn into new authoritarian capitalisms, it has not only become evident that the market and the commodity form are unable to solve human problems but also that the time has come to once again take Marx and socialism seriously.

Capitalism is not an economic system but a type of society that is based on the logic of accumulation of money, power, reputation, visibility and their asymmetric

control. Capitalism is making and unmaking itself through crises and social struggles from above and below.

Economically, capitalism's contradictions are again and again unmaking social and economic stability. These contradictions result in socio-economic crises. Contradictions have resulted in the 2008 world economic crisis and the austerity crisis – crises that cause misery for so many people and capitalism's periphery countries such as Greece.

Spatially, capitalism is unmaking its own boundaries. It is making new milieus of accumulation and exploitation and new boundaries. Temporally, capitalism unmakes the pace of society. And it makes new standards of abstract time and abstract labour. We experience the ever-increasing acceleration of life.

Politically, capitalism makes and unmakes state power. The surveillance state has emerged. We experience a negative dialectic in which the neoliberal capitalist state turns against itself and increasingly produces the authoritarian capitalist state.

Ideologically, capitalism continuously makes and remakes political fetishisms. Political fetishism today constitutes the rise of new nationalisms, new racism and xenophobia. These phenomena can only be unmade by political movements that de-fetishise the nation.

Technologically, capitalism unmakes existing standards of productivity by making new technological paradigms. As a consequence, we have seen the rise of digital capitalism and phenomena such as social media, big data, digital labour and the Internet of Things.

At the level of the military, capitalism unmakes peace by making new forms of conflict, confrontation and imperialism.

At the level of culture, capitalism unmakes the boundaries between the universal and the particular, labour/leisure, work/play, the home/the workplace, production/consumption, the public/the private, unity/diversity, object/subject, collective/individual, nature/culture, love/hate. Under the logic of instrumental reason, capitalist liquefaction makes new contradictions in our everyday lives.

At the level of the subject, capitalism makes and unmakes our individual and collective identities and desires. Our subjectivities are becoming instrumentalised, controlled, and commodified. Emotional capitalism has emerged.

All of these processes of capitalist making and unmaking are intertwined. They constitute a multi-faceted and complex unity of diverse capitalisms. Capitalisms are crisis-prone and constitute multiple contradictions and conflicts.

To say capitalism '(un)makes' itself means that it is made and unmade by groups and classes' collective practices. The political point for a better future is that people make their own history: that they unmake inequalities, exploitation and domination.

The present introduction gives an overview of the contributions in this special issue (Section 2), discusses what we can learn from 200 years of social struggles for establishing alternatives to capitalism (Section 3), and provides a historical and political perspective on the events and writings on the occasion of Marx's centenary in May 1918.

2. Repeating Marx

Facing economic, political, ecological and ideological crises, we have to repeat Marx today. Repeating Marx does not mean mechanically applying Marx's thought to 21st-century society. It also does not mean to treat his writings as scriptures, from which one repeats one and the same quotations over and over again.

First, to repeat Marx today means to develop analyses and critiques of class and capitalism in the 21st century in a historical and dialectical manner. It means to study how capitalism, not just as economic formation but also as societal formation, is transforming and damaging human lives, society and nature. It means repeating Marx's categories – such as the commodity, labour, value, surplus-value class, exploitation, capital, domination, ideology, class struggles, means/relations/modes of production, means of communication, the general intellect, communism, etc. – in the 21st century. Marx was both a historical and a dialectical thinker. To repeat Marx in the 21st century therefore neither means to abolish his approach, theory and politics, nor to completely re-invent them, nor to leave them unchanged. That capitalism is a historical and dialectical system means that it changes through crises in order to remain the same system of exploitation. To repeat Marx therefore means to *sublate* Marx's categories based on a dialectic of continuity and change. Whereas postmodernists have preached for decades that society has completely changed, orthodox social theorists claim that nothing at all has changed. Postmodernism overestimates change. The orthodoxy that nothing ever changes in contrast overestimates continuity.

Second, the contemporary capitalist age is profoundly ideological. To understand and change society, we therefore need to repeat Marx's ideology critique. Through consumer culture and neoliberalism, we have experienced the commodification of (almost) everything and the constant presence of ideologies that justify commodity logic in all realms of everyday life. Commodity fetishism as ideology immanent to capital itself has thereby become universal. Rising inequalities have resulted in the intensification and extension ideologies that distract attention from capitalist society as the underlying cause of social problems. The most evident form of political fetishism has in recent times been the rise of new political nationalisms.

Third, to repeat Marx today means to envision and struggle for alternatives to capitalism. Marx stresses that history is not pre-determined and that humans make their own history. Even in dark times, it is never too late. And it is especially in such times important to envision alternatives and think of – and work towards – ways to overcome the gap between what could be and what is. Capitalism is not the end of history. In order to humanise society, fundamental societal change is needed.

To repeat Marx means to renew, recast, revitalise, rethink, reconsider, and reinterpret Marx today.

3. 200 Years of Social Struggles for Alternatives to Capitalism

The financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent regimes of social, political and ideological austerity – accompanied by the rise of new nationalisms and authoritarian forms of capitalism – gave new momentum to critical analyses of contemporary capitalism that are not limited to academic debates, but are starting to penetrate the public arena and mainstream discourse. Current debates focus on the possibility to envision alternatives *to* rather than alternatives *of* capitalism. If we want to take the project of envisioning and realising an alternative to capitalism seriously, it becomes clear that we have to move beyond the mere critique of capitalism and have to interpret and put into praxis Marx's legacy for the relevance of realising alternatives today.

The implication is that we have to recognise that on the one side the functioning of 21st-century capitalism is slightly different to the capitalism described by Karl Marx in *Capital*, and, on the other, that the capitalism we are living in today constitutes an evolution of 19th-century capitalism and, as such, the system reproduces itself fol-

lowing the same dynamics of exploitation, accumulation, and commodification outlined by Marxian analyses. If we then turn our focus towards the alternatives, the main questions become: What would the alternative system (or systems) to capitalism look like? How can we realise alternatives? Answering this question is probably the main challenge for radical theorists today.

The historical trajectory of capitalism is crowded with attempts to establish alternative systems. The search for alternatives took an important turn in the Paris Commune in 1871 and passed through the revolutions and resistance movements that characterised the entire course of the twentieth century – in Russia, Germany, India, Ireland, Nicaragua, Spain, Italy, Indonesia, China, Cuba, the 1968 movement, the Zapatista movement in Mexico, the most recent Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, and in the Rojava movement in Syria. History also reminds us that many of these revolutions have been and are repressed with violence, while others led to authoritarian, centralised and repressive regimes. A systematic attempt to establish a ‘socialism of the twenty-first century’ comes from Latin America and the various governments settled there in the last decade: Evo Morales in Bolivia, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Brazil, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Fernando Lugo in Paraguay, Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, or Tabaré Vázquez and José Mujica in Uruguay. The project of a socialism for the twenty-first century is characterised by the opposition to neoliberalism, a rejection of Soviet-style ‘state socialism’, and a deep focus on rethinking ‘the good living’ (in Spanish: *buen vivir*) in harmony with the nature. As defined by Michael A. Lebowitz (2016), “socialism for the twenty-first century is a *revolutionary restoration* – the return to Marx’s understanding of socialism [...] [that] puts human development, the full development of human potential at the centre”.

Nonetheless, former Brazilian president Lula’s recent controversial sentence for corruption and money laundering and the popular uprisings in Venezuela against the government of current president Nicolás Maduro constitute a sign that the so-called ‘pink-tide’ Latin American project – that started with the election of Hugo Chavez in 1998 – is encountering both internal and external challenges and, as the Venezuelan case shows, has some contradictory and problematic contours. While there is a certain crisis of the Latin American left-wing project, in the United States and Europe, the rise of socialist politicians like Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn as a reaction to the politics of the neoliberal ‘third way’ and the financialisation of the economy indicates that also in these parts of the world socialism is a force to reckon with. Corbyn and Sanders are only the two most famous examples. In other European countries, political movements and parties are explicitly recalling in their programmes aspects of equality, solidarity, redistribution and social justice and are advocating policies like universal and unconditional basic income, free education, and the expansion of the provision of public services.

All of these political programmes share not only a critique of neoliberalism as the political paradigm that has dominated the last forty years, but most importantly the consciousness that we need to establish positive, progressive, democratic alternatives capable of overcoming capitalism. To foster this urgency, there is not just the need to overcome social inequalities, but also to avoid the planet’s ecological catastrophe. Social and ecological justice are not mutually exclusive, but two essential and profoundly intertwined points of the contemporary radical Left’s political agenda. During Marx’s lifetime, the environmental crisis was not as severe and pressing as it has become today. In his critique, he described the rupture between humanity and the rest of nature caused by the modes of capitalist production that is now central to the writings of many Marxist and ecological thinkers and that has been termed the “met-

abolic rift” (Foster 2000). Marx was an early radical thinker of environmental sustainability (Fuchs 2006), when he argued that “a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the globe” and that humans have the responsibility to hand down the globe “to succeeding generations in an improved condition” (Marx 1894, 784).

Whether one believes that future society should be inspired by the principles of eco-socialism or by hyper-technological post-work ideas, the timelessness of Marxist thinking is evident throughout this special issue.

4. The Contributions in this Special Issue

This special issue celebration of Marx’s bicentenary opens with a debate between **David Harvey**, **Michael Hardt** and **Toni Negri** on the relevance of Marx and how to critically theorise capitalism today: **David Harvey** in the article “*Universal Alienation*” argues that a theory of objective alienation along with an understanding of its subjective consequences is vital for progressive politics today. In the paper “*The Powers of the Exploited and the Social Ontology of Praxis*”, **Michael Hardt** and **Toni Negri** discuss the extraction of value from the common and what forms of praxis are needed today. In “*The Multiplicities within Capitalist Rule and the Articulation of Struggles*”, **Hardt and Negri** respond to David Harvey’s article. They argue that Harvey’s reading of Marx’s notion of alienation as universal process is important. They also point out that they find the notions of formal and real subsumption best suited for pointing out the internal dynamics of capital and the relationship of capitalism, patriarchy and racism. **David Harvey**’s final response to Hardt and Negri is titled “*Universal Alienation and the Real Subsumption of Daily Life under Capital: A Response to Hardt and Negri*”. He supports Hardt and Negri’s theoretical move to extend Marx’s categories of the formal and real subsumption of labour under capital to other aspects of society and stresses that it is important to discern what it is that is being subsumed into what and what the effects of subsumption are. Harvey points out the complementary character of the categories of universal alienation and the real subsumption of society under capital. A comment by **Christian Fuchs** concludes the Harvey/Hardt/Negri-debate. Its title is “*Universal Alienation, Formal and Real Subsumption of Society under Capital, Ongoing Primitive Accumulation by Dispossession: Reflections on the Marx@200-Contributions by David Harvey and Michael Hardt/Toni Negri*”.

Silvia Federici’s article “*Marxism and Feminism*” discusses aspects of feminism and gender in Marx’s theory and argues for integrating the analyses of reproductive labour, slave labour, migrant labour, labour in the Global South and the unemployed in the critical analysis of capitalism and its division of labour.

Slavoj Žižek reflects in his contribution on the prospects of radical political and societal transformations today. His article “*The Prospects of Radical Change Today*” revisits the failures of Stalinism, poses the question of the revolutionary subject and democracy today by analysing the “interesting times” we live in today.

Erik Olin Wright’s contribution “*The Continuing Relevance of the Marxist Tradition for Transcending Capitalism*” suggests that the Marxist tradition remains relevant today for understanding how capitalism impacts human flourishing, that alternatives are possible, capitalism is contradictory, and emancipation requires social struggles.

Lara Monticelli in her article “*Embodying Alternatives to Capitalism in the 21st Century*” highlights how, after the financial collapse of 2008, Marxist scholars have broadened their focus by including in their analyses on the potential subjects of

emancipation, social movements and grassroots initiatives that are “interstitial”. She claims that the time is ripe for establishing a theory of and for prefigurative social movements.

Christian Fuchs argues in *“Karl Marx & Communication @ 200: Towards a Marxian Theory of Communication”* that Marx’s works are an important foundation for critically theorising communication, which includes understanding the relationship of communication and materialism (communicative materialism), the role of the means of communication and communicative labour in capitalism, ideology as a form of fetishised communication and fetishism as ideological communication.

Peter Goodwin in the article *“Where’s the Working Class?”* discusses the relevance of the notion of the working class in the works of Marx and Engels and the history of Marxism and situates the development of the concept of the working class in the context of political economic history. The contribution raises a number of questions about Marxism and the contemporary working class that any Marxist today needs to answer.

Friederike Beier’s paper *“Marxist Perspectives on the Global Enclosures of Social Reproduction”* discusses the notion of social reproduction from a Marxist-feminist perspective. She relates the discussion to the notions of enclosure and primitive accumulation and points out how to critically make sense of the role of unpaid domestic and care labour today.

Wayne Hope in the article *“Epochality, Global Capitalism and Ecology”* discusses how Marxist theory can explain the interconnection of global capitalism, nature, the environmental crisis, financialisation, real time and communications. He updates the contemporary discussion of the Anthropocene from a Marxist theory perspective.

Todd Wolfson and **Peter Funke’s** paper *“The History of all Hitherto Existing Society’: Class Struggle and the Current Wave of Resistance”* analyses the relevance of Marx’s notions of class and class struggles for understanding contemporary social movements. They point out the relevance of interrelating objective and subjective dimensions of class – class position and class consciousness/class struggles.

Joss Hands in the contribution *“Marx, Materialism and the Brain: Determination in the Last Instance?”* discusses how to make sense of brain activities and consciousness from a Marxian and materialist perspective. In this context, particular attention is given to the notions of the General Intellect, determination, the base/superstructure problem, and aspects of the digital.

Peter McLaren and **Petar Jandrić’s** article *“Karl Marx and Liberation Theology: Dialectical Materialism and Christian Spirituality in, against, and beyond Contemporary Capitalism”* pinpoints the convergences and discrepancies between liberation theology and the works of Karl Marx. The article contributes to the question of how to make sense of the relationship of Marxism and theology today.

Ingo Schmidt’s paper *“Reading Capital after 20th-Century Orthodoxies and Revisions”* discusses different readings of Marx’s *Capital*, which shows a plurality of approaches for understanding to continued relevance of Karl Marx and his opus magnum *Capital* in the 21st century. The article argues for a synthetic approach that avoids both orthodoxy and revisionism.

Christian Fuchs reviews **Sven-Eric Liedman’s** *Marx-biography “A World to Win: The Life and Works of Karl Marx”* that was published shortly before Marx’ bicentenary.

Bahar Kayihan in *“An Analysis of Marx’s Legacy in the Field of Communication Studies”* analyses the role of Marxist studies in the academic field of communi-

cation studies and focuses on topics such as digital capitalism, digital labour, and the digital commodity. The contribution shows the relevance of Marx in the 21st century for understanding the latest developments in communications.

Joff P.N. Bradley and **Alex Taek-Gwang Lee** in their article *“On the Lumpen-Precariat-To-Come”* discuss Marx’s notion of the lumpenproletariat. They argue that this concept has relevance for the critical analysis of capitalism today and underpin the update of this notion as lumpen-precariat by insights into the political economies of Japan and South Korea.

Paul O’Connell’s contribution *“Law, Marxism and Method”* points out elements from Marx’s works and the Marxist theory tradition that help us to critically understand the nature and role of law, the state and rights in contemporary capitalism law, state and rights. The article in this context stresses the relevance of dialectical analysis, the historical character of capitalism, and the role of class.

Chihab El Khachab’s *“Two Questions to Marxist Anthropology”* discusses the relationship of Marxist theory and anthropology. It argues that the integration of Marxism and anthropology needs to give special attention to two questions: 1) How can micro- and macro-social scales in social scientific analysis be integrated? 2) How can we distinguish between conventional ideas and ideologies through which humans guide their lives under capitalism?

Franklin Dmitryev and **Eugene Gogol’s** paper *“Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution in Permanence: Its Significance for Our Time”* analyses the relevance of Marx’s philosophy of revolution in the 21st century. They document aspects of Marx’s writings on revolution and, with the help of special reference to Raya Dunaevskaya’s Marxist humanist approach, point out the significance of his humanism and dialectical analysis for liberation struggles today.

Bryant William Sculos’ article *“Minding the Gap: Marxian Reflections on the Transition from Capitalism to Postcapitalism”* discusses the relationship between capitalism and postcapitalism by analysing some of Marx’s writings on this issue. He argues that especially Marx’s dialectics and his conceptualisation of subjectivity are of special relevance for informing 21st century political praxis.

Leila Salim Leal’s contribution *“Ideology, Alienation and Reification: Concepts for a Radical Theory of Communication in Contemporary Capitalism”* points out the continued relevance of the Marxist notions of ideology, alienation and reification for critically understanding the role of communication in 21st-century capitalism. She argues that social movements need to avoid an individualist understanding of communications in protests.

Paul Reynolds’ *“Sexual Capitalism: Marxist Reflections on Sexual Politics, Culture and Economy in the 21st Century”* focuses on the relevance of Marxian analysis for the critique of sexuality and sexual capitalism. The article shows that Marxism has become a central and important ground for exploring sexuality under capitalism in its objectifying, commodifying, alienating and exploitative forms.

Ben Whitham’s contribution *“Thinking the ‘Culture Wars’ and the Present Political Crisis With the Young Marx (and Friends)”* focuses on the writings of the young Marx as inspiration for the critique of contemporary culture wars and political crises in the context of Brexit, Trump, neoliberalism, patriarchy, new nationalisms and racism.

Christian Fuchs’ contribution *“Marx’s Centenary (1918) in the Light of the Media and Socialist Thought”* takes a historical view on Marx’s anniversary: it analyses how Marx’s centenary (5 May 1918) was reflected in the media and socialist thought.

We conclude the special issue with the English translation of **Rosa Luxemburg's** text "**Karl Marx**" that she wrote on the occasion of the 30th commemoration day of Marx's death. It deals with bourgeois criticisms of Marx, the working class, materialism, praxis, and revolutionary Realpolitik. **Christian Fuchs' postface "Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg"** asks how we can make sense of Rosa Luxemburg's reading of Marx in 2018, as her text is an occasion for thinking about what it means to repeat Marx today.

Taken together, the contributions in this special issue show that Marx's theory and politics remain key inspirations for understanding exploitation and domination in 21st-century society and for struggles that aim at overcoming these phenomena and establishing a just and fair society. These engagements with Marx's works on the occasion of his bicentenary make evident that Marxian theory is a true form of trans-disciplinary thought and activity that has inspired the critical analysis of all aspects of contemporary society, including capital(ism), class, alienation, patriarchy, racism, sexism, nationalism, ideology, communication, praxis and social struggles, the working class, social movements, revolution, post-capitalism, social reproduction, enclosures, the commons, the state, the human being, nature and the ecological crisis, culture, imperialism, warfare, etc.

"Criticism has torn up the imaginary flowers from the chain not so that man shall wear the unadorned, bleak chain but so that he will shake off the chain and pluck the living flower. [...] In the struggle against those [inhumane] conditions criticism is no passion of the head, it is the head of passion".
--- Marx (1844, 176-177)

Critique is the struggle for beauty in the world in order to make it a world for all.
We need to repeat Marx today!

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The Powers of the Exploited and the Social Ontology of Praxis

Michael Hardt and Toni Negri

Abstract: This contribution is the first part of a debate between Michael Hardt/Toni Negri and David Harvey on the occasion of Marx's bicentenary. The discussion focuses on the question of what capitalism looks like today and how it can best be challenged. This contribution asks: In what type of capitalist society are we living today? And what is the Marxian praxis that we need to challenge it? First, this paper analyses capitalism in respect to the extraction of value from the common, immaterial labour, digitisation, automation, and finance capital. The greatest abstraction in the productive process of value, in its implementation of languages, codes, immaterial articulations of being together, cooperation, affective elements, and so forth presents also in the multitude the virtuality of an extraordinary potential of resistance and autonomy from capital. Second, the paper discusses what forms of praxis are needed today. Marxian ontology is constituted and always renewed by class struggle, by the material antagonism that distributes the elements of real being and by the continuous excess of value that living labour expresses. Today, we discuss Marxian praxis in a society where intelligence is put to work at the centre of the productive process. Here emerges with great force the theme of the liberation of humans *from* work, on the basis of the transformations *of* work. Marx demonstrates how much cognitive and intellectual activity is central to production, and how much fixed capital is mixed with cognitive labour. In this context, the notion of the appropriation of fixed capital is of key importance for class struggles.

Keywords: Marx, bicentenary, 200th anniversary, capitalism, exploitation, praxis

1. Introduction

David Harvey (2017) reminds us that Marx's preferred definition of capital is "value in motion" – productive, circulatory, and reproductive movement; temporal and spatial movement; movement from one phase to another; continuous and discontinuous movement. What interests us primarily here is the discontinuous movement of capital, its historical transformation, and thus its periodization. We are convinced that for several years has been emerging a new configuration of the "technical composition" of living labour and the "organic composition" of capital. This new configuration marks a transformation of productive forces and the relations that are situated in production, in the mode of production. We have left the era in which capital organised exploitation primarily via the norms and discipline of large-scale industry and we are entering a phase in which capital tends to develop in large part through forms of the extraction of value from "common goods" and from the ever vaster social organization of the common in the form of the expanded cooperation of living labour.

This development was born of class struggle, as Marx would say, and thus of workers struggles and social movements that made impossible the reproduction of the industrial mode of accumulation and thus put in peril the maintenance of the capitalist order. We situate this rupture and the beginnings of the new dialectical structuring of class struggle, along with the progressive formation of a new mode of post-industrial production, around the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. With this in mind, we can begin to describe, the contemporary figures of "value in motion," that is, the organic composition of capital and the technical composition of living

labour that today characterise the processes of capitalist development and valorisation.

On the basis of these premises – the periodization of capitalist society driven by resistances to it – we can respond to the two questions that have been posed for us in this essay: In what type of capitalist society are we living today? And what is the Marxian praxis that we need to challenge it?

2. Capitalism Today

With regard to the first question we want to focus primarily on the new modes of exploitation as well as the power and relative autonomy of social production in the face of them. Before addressing this directly, however, we should articulate a bit more fully our understanding of the periodization of capitalist production and control. In fact, once we pose class struggle as the motor defining the transformation of the structures of capitalism from the second half of the 20th century to today, we can see more clearly the new figures that labour, exploitation, and, consequently, the very nature of capital.

Our first observation regarding the contemporary figure of capital is aimed at revealing the mutation of living labour and thus clarifying how its productivity has been intensified through the growing networks of cooperation in the mode of production. Insofar as labour-power is shown in Marx's (1867; 1885; 1894) *Capital* as "living labour" that increases its own productivity in simple and extended cooperation, and further in the organisation of manufacturing and large-scale industry; and insofar as the capitalist organisation of labour progressively re-enforces cooperation and intensifies it to the point of constructing it as a social activity; then when we enter in the current phase of capitalist development characterised by cognitive and social production, the social cooperation of labour is enormously enhanced, immersed as it is in a set of communicative networks and digital connections that increasingly permeate all the industrial assets, services, agricultural systems, and all the other figures of the economic organisation of society. Capital is, in fact, increasingly valorised by cooperative social flows in which muscles, languages, affects, codes, and images are subsumed within the material processes of production.

The neoliberal "counter-revolution" presents us with this scene following the thirty-year cycle of class struggle after World War 2 and the subsequent workers' defeat at the end of the 1970s. In the course of the last half century, the sectors of capitalist production and of society have been radically transformed, extending the primary sites of production from the factory to the social terrain. This is the meaning that should be given to the Marxian figures of the "real subsumption" of labour under capital – which can be extended to the subsumption of society itself under capital. This is not a matter only of the totalitarian extension of consumption and its eventual alienating effects (as followers of the Frankfurt School maintained), but also the *incarnation of capitalist production in society*, that is, in the languages of the market as in the vital connections of society. In order to re-establish profits, which could no longer be sufficiently sustained in the factories and traditional industries, capital strategically put to work the social terrain, and in society the mode of production came to be ever more closely interwoven with "forms of life."

How did we arrive at this situation? One narrative goes like this. A first passage was constituted by the simplification of industrial production introduced by automation. From the political point of view, this destroyed the resistance of the working class to exploitation and expelled the workers from the factory in the dominant parts of the world, thus forcing them to "put to work" – in order to resist and to survive – the

society that surrounds them. In this way the productive power of labour came to be widely extended. Now, while the automated industrial processes continued increasingly to produce material goods, outside of the roboticised factories grew ever more complex integrated productive services that connected in social labour complex technologies and fundamental sciences, industrial services and welfare. Through the development of this tendency, digitalisation and computerisation became decisive (in a second phase) in the social structuring of capital – more important, so to speak, than automation. Digitalisation and computerisation articulated in society a transformation of the composition of labour-power, adequate to the new forms of technological command, renouncing definitively the worker composition that had been constructed in and by the industrial factory. This development is strongly tendential, which means that it is becoming hegemonic at a global level – unevenly, of course, but at certain times and in certain places with extraordinary accelerations.

Now we are in position to confront the concept of exploitation and, specifically, how exploitation is transformed when, through modifications of the mode of production, it becomes an extractive function at a social level. We have described how the capitalist initiative responded to the accumulation of resistances and revolts of the 1960s and 70s, destroying the factory and socialising the mode of production. Now we can recognise the further passage to the phase of social production, which some call the society of General Intellect. The passage from Fordism to post-Fordism inaugurates a new figure of the relationship between capital and labour, showing the progressive role of social production. In the Fordist period capitalist production was structured by disciplinary regimes and accumulation was realised and centralised by the profit generated in the expropriation of surplus value, in the space that linked industrial production and planned cooperation (in the Keynesian programmes) of social labour. In the post-Fordist period, in contrast, when productive knowledges and the capacity of cooperation are spread ever more widely throughout society and the new productivity of cognitive and affective forms of labour-power start to become hegemonic, capital extracts – for its own valorisation – the social wealth produced in common and, in this sense, tends to subsume the entire social field. At this point, in effect, the centrality of extraction inaugurates a new figure of exploitation.

This new figure of exploitation requires that we revise some of Marx's assumptions and methods. In the contemporary extractive processes, the quantities of surplus labour and surplus-value, which Marx defined in *Capital* according to an analytic of temporal measure, are redefined by the cooperative, cognitive, and social nature of valorisation. Consequently, the Marxian concept of exploitation – concentrated on the different "times" of the working day of the individual worker – seems to have exhausted its theoretical and political value. When Marx explains pedagogically that in the regime of waged labour workers receive the value produced during the first hours of the working day and that the capitalist expropriates the value produced during the remaining hours, he establishes an intimate relationship between exploitation and the organisation of production. This point is essential and remains equally foundational for understanding contemporary capitalist production. But that intimate relationship no longer has the same form as it did in the period that Marx studied. Today, instead, the connection between exploitation and its organisation are defined by an ever increasing distance. This is the point on which we can recognise, as we will develop below, how finance regards productive subjects from above, abstractly, and extracts value at a distance. The "real subsumption" here becomes predominant over the "formal subsumption" when society tends toward being completely enveloped by the machine of capitalist valorisation.

This extraction of value, this planting of the valorisation on a cooperative, cognitive, and social figure of living labour, this taking possession of the common by capital, dispossessing the producers, may resemble the processes that Marx called “primitive accumulation” and that David Harvey (2003) has so effectively analysed in terms of “accumulation by dispossession” – but only in part. The “real subsumption” represents, in fact, a developed form of the organisation of the exploitation and the social division of labour. The extraction of value is thus never here a pure “dispossession” of pre-existing wealth but the appropriation of wealth produced and socially accumulated by labour-power. This new primitive accumulation of the socially produced commons by capital is not conducted by brute force but rather developed through a “rationality” by which we mean an adequation of the means to the ends of capitalist enrichment.

Let’s return to the distance between the command over exploitation and the organisation of labour. It is clear that in this distance is present and is organised, in the hegemony of the extractive form of valorisation, a wide variety of figures of exploitation. That distance is not indifferent. It is rather a space of class struggle and the productive subjectivities that operate there, being more able to cooperate socially and to productively organise cooperation, are presented on the scene in a relatively autonomous way. Given that distance, the capitalist entrepreneurs fail to organise labour in a disciplinary way, and they also fail to forge new combinations or generate new productive forms of cooperation, as Joseph Schumpeter (2017/1934) theorised in the phase of large-scale industry. Capitalist entrepreneurial command is now projected in the sphere of finance. That is where capitalist entrepreneurs act, absorbed in financial activity and attentive to the fluctuations of stock markets. In contrast, there is determined here – in the long prospective of workers’ history – a space of autonomy for living labour, which is paradoxical but decisive. Since workers have acquired a certain autonomy, they can put in action the productivity of their labour, which is very high, and thus have the capacity to pose a rupture with the capitalist productive system, articulating alternative proposals and the capacities to realise them. This is why today, in neoliberal society, the fairy tales produced by the social sciences in the service of the individualist ideologies of merit and success are aimed with full force at the class of workers, to make the distance of entrepreneurial command an irrelevant element and make the autonomy of living labour a mechanism functional to control.

It is important to note that our analysis of the relative autonomy of living labour in today’s era dominated by social production does not imply that the forms of exploitation characterised by fatigue and pain have been done away with. It does not negate the alienation that is produced by physical labour and equally (sometimes in harsher forms) by immaterial labour. It does not, therefore, imagine that labour has somehow been rescued from the inferno of exploitation. On the contrary, today’s social forms of labour, precisely in the relative autonomy in which they are posed within the social organisation of labour, are ever more subject to duress and injury, which result not only from being physically exploitation but also being so emotionally and psychically.

This leads us to one further observation, which regards the transformation of capital today into a financial-extractive force. When finance emerged as a significant component of the capitalist mode of production in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it constituted a powerful supplement to industrial capital. Finance offered instruments of abstraction and centralisation that facilitated the passage from the stage of enlarged cooperation and manufacturing to the industrial structures commanded by the great corporations and their monopolies, as well as serving as a potent weapon in the arsenal of imperialist projects. In the course of the 20th century, however, this

relationship was progressively inverted to the point that today finance dominates industry, imposing on it the fundamental norms of production (that is, of valorisation and exploitation). Behind financial rule and its ever more complex instruments, capital can seem to accumulate value that is free for the taking, a natural gift, *terra nullius*.

In reality, finance capital accumulates through the capture and extraction of the value of the common, including values and materials hidden in the earth as well as products of social cooperation. It is clear that, even though the passage to the command of finance capital can be explained by the formation of global markets and the decline of national industrial economies, by the repeated crises and the deepening of speculative operations, the hegemony of finance must still be understood in terms of the mode of production: finance functions as an apparatus of capture of natural and social values, as a power of the extraction of the common. Its processes of extraction, in fact, follow the traces of the common.

In contrast to profits generated in industry, financial forms of extraction are developed on the forms of wealth that in large part *pre-exist* the investment of capital. Whereas the automobile is product of the factory, oil and coal exist in the earth, although, of course, the extraction is itself organised in processes of production, refinement, and distribution. The distinction is even clearer when one looks at social intelligence, social relations, and territories of sociality. Whereas in the factory workers cooperate on the basis of schemes and disciplines dictated by the capitalist, here – in social production – value is produced through social cooperation not directly organized by capital. Social cooperation is in this sense relatively autonomous. All of that emphasises, once again, how the relationship of capital has been ruptured: in the face of that relative autonomy of cooperation, finance takes the form of an extractive industry.

The totalisation of the world of labour, the absorbing of production within reproduction, the financial sublimation of value in the frame of the “real subsumption” of productive society in capital have often been recognised in the theoretical developments of “Western Marxism.” But on the basis of what we have said so far, it is necessary to go beyond that. Defining this “beyond” means advancing on three terrains that we have begun to explore and reveal the “subjective” implications.

First is the terrain of labour, where the cooperative association of labour-power redefines the concept of the working class, showing it to be a multitudinous set of labouring singularities, a multiplicity of material and immaterial powers. In cooperative association, these singular powers configure virtually a plural recomposition of the working class, a recomposition through flows of subjectivation. We call that figure of the working class “multitude.”

Second, with respect to the concept of exploitation, engaging the new figures of alienation and the reification of labour means delving into the effects of subjectivation revealed by the new relationships between variable capital and fixed capital. This leads us to ask if it is possible that, wherever exploitation effects the cognitive, social, and cooperative components of living labour the dialectic of capture and appropriation of value-labour by capital is broken. And it leads us to ask too if alienated labour, appearing as a “second nature” of labour-power, is in position to break the order of exploitation (and, if so, to what extent and with what force). But we will return to this later.

Third, one must analyse how to this new nature of capital and its extractive mechanisms correspond *ontologically* the social dynamic of the common. Once the relations of discipline and control of massified industrial labour have declined and the

old criteria of measure of the value of labour (adequate to that old stage of development) have failed, extractive expropriation must be explained, as we said, in correspondence to the figure of the common. How can this be done? A first response can be that when social labour, in its different forms and levels, becomes increasingly powerful in productive activities (employing social and scientific knowledges, languages and code, schemes of cooperation and affective relations), one can observe that the same characteristics of social production, which offer the key to the extraction and accumulation of wealth on the part of finance, give also the figure of the multitude. If finance extracts value from the common, that is because it extracts it from the multitude. Both sides of this relation, or really the tension between exploitation and living labour, are thus contained in the progressively abstract nature of social production.

All readers of Marx know how he employs the concept of abstract labour as the key to understanding the value of capitalist exchange. Today, in many respects, the quantities of abstract labour and the value represented in it increase exponentially when production becomes social and when the working class appears in the figure of the multitude. When workers interiorise knowledges, for example, and socially develop them in cooperation, then the value that the multitude produces is ever larger – and, in line with Marx’s thinking, ever more abstract. But the greatest abstraction in the productive process of value, in its implementation of languages, codes, immaterial articulations of being together, cooperation, affective elements, and so forth presents also in the multitude the virtuality of an extraordinary potential of resistance and autonomy from capital.

This abstraction of labour and the valorising dimension that corresponds to it are related to the socially produced common and to its multitudinous subjectivation. The common tends to be both the foundation and the result of contemporary production. And like capital, the common too is here doubly defined by the class struggle of the multitude, both as foundation of the capitalist extraction of value and as potential for autonomy and resistance.

3. Praxis

This brings us to the second question we posed at the outset: What forms of Marxian praxis are necessary in this context? It should be obvious from what we have said thus far that Marxian theory appears as an ontology of the power of labour, without any interruption from his early manuscripts to his final articles on Wagner. We give particular importance to the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1857/588) in this regard because we consider it not merely a preparatory draft of *Capital* (Marx 1867) but a text where we find the best theoretical synthesis of Marx’s philosophical and economic writings, and also a text that weaves together the fabric of his historical writings. We should also remember that Marx’s ontology is a theory of class struggle founded on the subjectivation of living labour, a constituent ontology rather than a dialectical ontology, even one inverted to “stand on its feet”.

Mere inversion, in fact, rarely produces effects that go beyond the critique of the structures of capitalist power – or really, the unmasking of the ideology of the class adversary. And every dialectic that refuses the subjectivising prospects of the conflict and the constituent figure of the project of transformation limits critique to an objectivism (reminiscent of David Ricardo) of the theory of production and to a transcendent or transhistorical perspective of the theory of valorisation.

In contrast, the concept of capital from an ontological perspective is given as an historical figure and one produced by class struggle. In other words, the concept of

capital is posed in a relationship that recognises, within development, the continuous rupture and recomposition of capitalist command and the resistance of the subjects it puts to work (that is, constant capital and living labour). These appear as asymmetrical and intransitive powers in continuous conflict. This is a real dialectic – one with no *Aufhebung*, no teleology, and one that is kept always open to class struggle.

When we speak of ontology in this light, we mean simply to plant our feet on the ground. One can debate endlessly with philosophers about what ontology means. Echoing Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*, however, we can say that until now philosophers have understood ontology as an idea of being, whereas today must be discovered the ontological conditions of revolutionary praxis. What, then, is the ontology we want to assert, and to which struggles give meaning and direction? It is an ontology of the workers' history, that is, of being that is constructed constantly by the acts of producers, by living labour, by the multitudinous subjectivation that, in cooperation, produces and reproduces the world of life. This frame is where Marxian ontology appears. It describes the world, recognising on one side the productive forces of labour and on the other the forms and relations of production, denouncing the laws of a stupid and unjust order organised on the exploitation in production and the hierarchies in the experience and exercise of power. Marxian ontology is constituted and always renewed by class struggle, by the material antagonism that distributes the elements of real being and by the continuous excess of value that living labour expresses.

This web of relations and these conflicts constitute a landscape on which are developed productions of subjectivity and figures of emancipation adequate to the material forces that express them. Antagonism and class struggle are not, then, powers that are inscribed on a surface over a static foundation. They are powers and movements of all that exists, and they mark a surface that is also a dynamic and subjectivating foundation. They are historical powers that express multitudes of desire.

We should also note here, especially from the perspective of praxis, the importance of Marx's intuition of a tendency for production and reproduction to progressively overlap, an intuition that was renewed and extended by Western Marxism, from Lukács to the Frankfurt School. Gradually the reproductive processes are included in those of production. Against classical economics, for which reproduction is a consequence of production (and primarily included in consumption), on the basis of Marxian ontology there is instead an opening to the inclusion in production of reproduction – and an extension there of antagonism. From this standpoint, the biopolitical perspective can already be gleaned in Marxian ontology. On these bases, then, the socialist feminist argument that women's unwaged domestic labour, which was not included in the standard definitions of "productive labour" of the industrial era, today becomes centrally important – and in some sense paradigmatic – from the standpoint of the definition of exploitation as an extraction of socially produced value. It should not be surprising that a coherent line can be drawn from feminist demands for "wages for housework" to struggles on the terrain of social reproduction and against the patriarchal violence that commands over the family and society.

We should also consider the disruptive and constituent power of the processes of subjectivation that appear on the technological terrain. If one wants to deal with praxis in Marxian terms, then the problem of technology must be central because, with respect to subjectivation, it highlights the political theme of subversion in the era of social production. It is not enough to note here, against many objections, that this theme is posed clearly in the *Grundrisse* and resolved by Marx in a utopian way. This claim must be theoretically and politically reposed as a decisive site of critique when considering Marxian praxis in a society where intelligence is put to work at the

centre of the productive process. Here emerges with great force the theme of the liberation of humans *from* work, on the basis of the transformations *of* work. And here the field opens to other objectives of praxis, such as the appropriation of fixed capital by living labour, the overthrow of the alienated conditions in a productive “second nature”, and all the themes on which the productivity of worker antagonism demonstrates its power.

Let’s consider the call for the appropriation of fixed capital by living labour. This call is not metaphorical. Marx develops it concretely in *Capital*, and he begins with the demonstration of how the situation of the worker in the face (of the command) of the means of production modifies not only productive capacities but also their figure, nature, and ontology. Central, in this respect, is Marx’s account of the passage from the era of manufacture to that of large-scale industry. In manufacture there is still a subjective principle in the division of labour – and that means that the worker appropriates the productive process after the productive process has been adapted to the worker. In large-scale industry, instead, the division of labour is “objective” in the sense that the subjective and artisanal use of the machine is eliminated and machinery is used against humans. The machines not only compete with the workers but also come to command them. But here Marx’s reasoning flips and another line appears in *Capital*, when Marx recognizes that the worker and the means of labour are configured as a hybrid construction and that the conditions of the productive process constitute in large part the conditions of the life of workers, their “form of life”. The very concept of the productivity of labour implies a strict and dynamic connection between variable capital and fixed capital. But when the theoretical discoveries, science, the modes of life are taken up again, Marx adds, in the productive process through the experience of workers, this hybrid constitution increases in intensity.

We should remember here that Marx’s (1867) analysis in *Capital* is supported by the argumentation of the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1857/58), and in particular by the theorisation of the General Intellect as the material and subject of the productive process (Ibid., 706). Marx demonstrates how much cognitive and intellectual activity is central to production, and how much fixed capital is mixed with cognitive labour and its intensified productive power, such that the very concept of fixed capital is transformed by it. When Marx (Ibid., 712) proclaims that fixed capital (which is normally understood as the complex of machines) has become “man himself”, he anticipates the development of capitalism in our own time and demonstrates its radical contradictions. Even though fixed capital is produced by labour and is nothing but labour appropriated by capital, even though the accumulation of scientific activity and the productivity of what Marx calls “social intellect” are incorporated in the machines under the control of capital, and even though capital appropriates all this without paying, at a certain point in capitalist development living labour expresses the capacity to exercise the power of inverting this relationship. Living labour demonstrates, that is, its ontological priority with respect to capital and the capitalist management of social production. That means that, whereas constant capital (if it wants to enrich itself) cannot subtract itself from the use of variable capital because it cannot imagine accumulation without the extortion of value from labour of workers. Living labour can transform praxis, that is, the conditions of living, emancipating them from the command of capital. In other words, when it becomes an ever more widespread social power, living labour operates as a more independent activity, outside the disciplinary structures that capital commands – and this is expressed not only as labour-power but also, in a general way, as the productive activity of life. On one hand, past human activity and human intelligence are accumulated, crystallised as fixed capital. But, on

the other, the flow can be reversed such the living humans are able to reappropriate the productive power of capital, making it their own instrument in the life they live. Fixed capital is “man himself” in both senses.

Here the appropriation of fixed capital is no longer a metaphor but a *dispositive* that class struggle can adopt and that can be deployed as a political programme. Capital is not longer, in fact, in this case, a relationship that objectively includes the producer, imposing its command by force, but the capitalist relationship includes, now, a final contradiction: that of a producer or a class of producers that can effectively dispossess (in part or wholly) the capitalist owner of the means of production – imposing themselves as the hegemonic subject.

In a splendid passage in the *Grundrisse* Marx poses this double relation: “It requires no great penetration to grasp that, where e.g. free labour or wage labour arising out of the dissolution of bondage is the point of departure, there machines can only *arise* in antithesis to living labour, as property alien to it, and as power hostile to it; i.e. that they must confront it as capital. But it is just as easy to perceive that machines will not cease to be agencies of social production when they become e.g. property of the associated workers. In the first case, however, their distribution, i.e. that they *do not belong* to the worker, is just as much a condition of the mode of production founded on wage labour. In the second case the changed distribution would start from a *changed* foundation of production, a new foundation first created by the process of history” (Marx 1857/58, 832-833).

And this foundation can only be created indeed by revolution.

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Universal Alienation

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Abstract: This article is part of a debate between David Harvey, Michael Hardt and Toni Negri. It takes Marx's bicentenary as occasion for an update of his concept of alienation. The paper asks: how are we to interpret universal alienation and from whence does it come? Marx radically reformulated the concept of alienation in the *Grundrisse*. The humanism of the early Marx can be re-rooted and reconceptualised in the scientific mode proposed in the *Grundrisse*. In the *Grundrisse*, the universality of alienation is specific to capitalism's historical evolution. Today, alienation exists almost everywhere. It exists at work in production, at home in consumption, and it dominates much of politics and daily life. Such trends intensify through the application of information technologies and artificial intelligence. Widespread alienation has resulted in Occupy movements as well as right-wing populism and bigoted nationalist and racist movements. Donald Trump is the President of alienation. The circulation of capital as totality consists of the three key moments of production, circulation and distribution. A lot of contemporary economic struggles are now occurring at the point of realisation rather than at the point of production. Protests are therefore today often expressions of broad-based discontent. Our future is dictated by the need to redeem our debts. Under such conditions democracy becomes a sham. The big question is what forms of social movement can help us get out of the state-finance nexus. The theory of objective alienation along with an understanding of its subjective consequences is one vital key to unlock the door of a progressive politics for the future.

Keywords: Karl Marx, bicentenary, 200th anniversary, alienation, capitalism, Marxist theory

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1. Introduction

This article takes Marx's bicentenary as occasion for an update of his concept of alienation.

In *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* I identify three main threats to the future of global capitalism (Harvey 2014). The first is the relation to nature, which concerns climate change, habitat destruction and an increasing pace of ecological degradation. The second is compound growth (endless accumulation of capital) at three percent forever, which becomes more and more stressful as the exponential growth curve leaps upwards. And the third is universal alienation. This last condition, strongly associated with the first two, typically produces increasingly problematic political and geopolitical instability both within and across the state system. The most obvious manifestation of this is the rise of right wing nationalist parties and authoritarian populism as represented by Erdogan, Modi, Sisi, Orban, Trump and Putin. Universal alienation also underpins many a personal tragedy, such as that of the opioid epidemic along with deaths from chronic alcoholism in many "forgotten" parts of the United States (where life expectancy is, as a result, on the decline). It also is reflected in the suicides of rice farmers in South Korea of peasant cultivators

in India, among hill farmers in Britain, Foxconn workers in Shenzhen and unemployed but foreclosed upon homeowners in Greece, just to cite a few examples. So how are we to interpret universal alienation and from whence does it come?

“Universal alienation” is a concept that has a troubled if not peculiar history in Marx’s thought (Mészáros 1970). While alienation is prominent in his early works, such as *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, it disappears in the late 1840s as Marx explores principles of historical materialism (e.g. in *The German Ideology*) only to reappear as a central conception in the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973/1857). It then seemingly fades into the background of *Capital* (Marx 1976/1867) and disappears almost entirely in his later works and notebooks.

Most subsequent critical attempts to resurrect the concept have focused on Marx’s early works. Little attention is paid to the radical reformulation of the concept in the *Grundrisse*. Zhang Yibing’s (2014, 481) reconstruction is a significant exception. The “scientific” presentation of the concept in the *Grundrisse* was, he writes, “fundamentally different from his past use of the humanist alienation conception [...] In fact, these were two completely different conceptions of alienation; the labor alienation in the *1844 Manuscript* was a humanist value postulate; the idealized essence that it formed was at odds with reality. This was a contradiction between imaginary and real [...] The self-alienation of labor was a logical reflection, established in ideas [...] The labor alienation in *Grundrisse*, on the other hand, was fundamentally Marx’s reflection on real history. The objectified results of workers’ past labor actually became the rulers and exploiters of today’s workers. The ‘past’ created by workers becomes the ruler of the ‘present’ [...] Hired labor necessarily created a ruling power transformed out of itself: capital. This is the actual alienation of capital and labor relations that Marx describes”.

2. Alienation in the *Grundrisse*

The *Grundrisse* reformulates the concept of alienation through the application of the techniques of historical materialism to the subject matter of *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. Subsequent attempts, such as that of Rahel Jaeggi, to reconstruct the ideals of self-alienation as set out in Marx’s early work have had to surmount objections to the “essentialism and perfectionism” assumed in the humanist concept of species being. Is it possible, Jaeggi (2014, 32) asks, “to avail ourselves of the critical import of the concept of alienation without relying on the certainty of a final harmony or reconciliation, on the idea of a fully transparent individual, or on the illusion of having oneself and the world completely at one’s disposal or command”. While she answers this question in the affirmative, she does so by ignoring the revolutionary reformulation that occurs in Marx’s *Grundrisse*. While I shall concentrate on the latter, I shall also suggest that the revolution laid out in the *Grundrisse* was not so much an epistemological break as a radical reformulation. The humanism of the early Marx (particularly when re-cast in the manner that Jaeggi proposes) can be re-rooted and reconceptualised in the scientific mode proposed in the *Grundrisse*. To some degree such a reconciliation is implicit in Ollman’s (1971) work, where Marx’s value theory is understood as a theory of alienated labor. This was also my intention in resurrecting the concept of “revolutionary humanism” in the conclusion to *Seventeen Contradictions*.

So what then, would “universal” alienation mean in the light of these contrasting formulations? In the early Marx the universality is rooted in the supposed inherent qualities of our species being. The potentiality for realising those qualities is frustrated by capital. The labourers who produce capital are denied the fruits of their labor

(they stand in a relation of alienation to their product, the value they produce and to the labour process in which they engage). Alienation in production is accompanied by the growth of alien but supposedly compensatory consumerism (Gorz 1989). The individual potential to achieve self-perfection (in social relations, in the relation to nature and in the experience of the labour process) is denied. The advantage of such a formulation is that it is forward looking and aspirational. The sensual and existential experiences evoked in the early works remain important issues. The alienation of labour from the product, from its value and from the design of its production is common to *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* and *Capital*. The problem is that in the early works the understanding of alienation is not rooted in the realities of the daily life and labours of workers as constituted within a capitalist mode of production.

In the *Grundrisse*, the universality of alienation arises out of the historical tendency within capital to create the world market, to establish its social (class) and metabolic relations everywhere and to inscribe certain identifiable laws of motion into human history under the rule of the coercive laws of competition. The “universality” is specific to capitalism’s historical evolution. The capital which labour creates returns to dominate them in both direct and indirect ways as the laws of value and of capital in motion. The problem from the *Grundrisse* onwards into *Capital* then becomes to identify the laws of motion of capital and of value and to understand how these laws govern the conditions of daily life and labour for the mass of the working population. The political project is to liberate ourselves, in thought as well as in political and economic practices, from the constraints imposed by these laws of value and of motion. Alienation is not confined to labour.

In *Capital* we see that the capitalist is compelled by the coercive laws of competition to (a) increase the length of the working day to its maximum no matter what; (b) to reinvest the surplus rather than to indulge in consumer pleasures; (c) to procure relative surplus value through seeking out and adopting new technologies; (d) to produce increasing social inequality and an industrial reserve army; and much more. These are not free choices. The coercive laws of competition force capitalists to extend the working day and intensify the labour process irrespective of their good or ill will. Capitalists have then to excuse, legitimise or simply live with their own barbaric practices. The persona of many capitalists is profoundly shaped by the practices they have to perform. Unsurprisingly, many acquire a sadistic streak. Others become narcissists believing they have a God-given right to create a world in their own image no matter what the consequences for those they employ. Their wealth and well-being is essential, they suppose, to the wealth and well-being of society. Objective conditions have subjective consequences (Zhang 2011).

The verb to alienate has in fact a variety of meanings. As a legal term it means to transfer a property right to the ownership of another. I alienate a piece of land when I sell it or relinquish the right to use it to another. Exchange always involves alienation (Harvey 2014, 267). This is what is made so much of in the *Grundrisse*. Workers alienate their labour-power when they enter the factory to do whatever the capitalist commands. But alienation has a broader meaning that entails the loss of trust, fairness or reciprocity often hidden in some exchange. Workers “freely” give of their labour but do so under conditions of coercion or consent that ensure the value they produce is not returned to them but appropriated by capital. The exchange is legal but there is something fraudulent about it when looked at from the standpoint of the totality of daily life under capitalism. The capitalist appropriates the intelligence and skills of the worker, the capacities for cooperation, initiative and innovation and gives only the value of labour-power as a commodity in return. Capitalists have to do this,

given the coercive laws of competition. For the labourers, the response is a sense of loss and unfairness, of powerlessness and loss of dignity, which is prone to provoke resentment, anger and frustration. Capital produces alienation in both its objective and subjective garbs.

When Marx was writing capitalist social relations and the laws of motion dominated in only a relatively small corner of the world (Britain, Western Europe and the Eastern sea-board of the United States). Endless accumulation and global climate change were not serious threats. Now the laws and social relations of capital (commodification and monetisation) dominate pretty much everywhere. Endless accumulation and global climate change are serious dangers. But it is, Marx said as early as *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848, in the nature of capital to create the world market, to annihilate space through time, to enter into a spiral of endless accumulation, to revolutionise productive forces, and so on. Capital, unchallenged, inevitably expands geographically and intensifies its hold over us both here and ultimately everywhere. This is not primarily a moral issue but a scientific finding that has moral implications, as becomes abundantly clear from the moral outrage that suffuses the text of the first volume of *Capital*. In our own times, for example, endless accumulation produces environmental degradation which produces the moral outrage of the environmentalists.

Marx recognises, however, the contradictory character of the alienation that capital entails. Capital is not only destructive but a constructive and creative force that transforms the world in positive as well as in negative ways. In the *Grundrisse* Marx (1973/1857, 409-410) acknowledges, without irony, “the great civilizing influence of capital; its production of a stage of society in comparison to which all earlier ones appear as mere *local developments* of humanity and as *nature idolatry* [...] capital drives beyond national barriers and prejudices, as much as beyond nature worship, as well as all traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways of life. It is destructive of all of this, and constantly revolutionizes it, tearing down all the barriers which hem in the development of the forces of production, the expansion of needs, the all-sided development of production, and the exploitation and exchange of natural and mental forces”.

In passages of this sort Marx accepts individual and in some instances collective alienations as necessary to the achievement of a higher order social system in which improved material conditions can realize the promise of an unalienated life. Marx is not alone in arguing that sacrifices and losses (alienations) of this sort may be necessary to achieve a greater good. Adam Smith, for example, sought to reconcile the conflict between his moral sentiments and the cold calculus of competitive exchange by purporting to show how liberating the hidden hand of the market from state controls can produce a far greater state of material well-being in which everyone might equally share. This still remains the unfulfilled promise of liberalism. Polanyi (1957, 256-258) likewise sees the sacrifice of individual freedoms as essential to the design of collective freedoms (e.g. of a welfare state) that would redound to the benefit of all.

Debates of this sort are still with us. The Republican objection to the health care mandate in Obama’s Affordable Care Act in the United States was that it violated sacrosanct individual freedoms while the counter-argument is that all individuals will be better off in a society where everyone has instant access to adequate health care. The transcendence, rather than the rejection of alienation becomes the leitmotif of socialist politics.

3. Alienation Today

How individuals and social movements confront such contradictions becomes the big question. The individual psychologized (existential) alienation as articulated in Marx's early manuscripts here connects with a critique of the objective alienations produced through the reproduction of capital on the world market. Workers may accept the alienations of wage labour in return for sufficient access to commodities to fulfil their personal wants, needs and desires. Alienated wage labour may be offset by compensatory consumerism. In the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* Marx notes how endless capital accumulation rests on the endless production and reproduction of new wants, needs and desires backed by ability to pay. In the *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx (1964, 147-8) notes how "the extension of products and needs falls into contriving and ever-calculating *subservience* to inhuman, unnatural and imaginary appetites [...] This estrangement [...] produces sophistication of needs on the one hand and a bestial barbarization, a complete, unrefined, abstract simplicity of need, on the other".

Such contradictions operate through and across scales (from macro to micro and back again). Alienations felt and experienced by individuals in particular places and times exist in the context of alienations produced by capitalist processes of globalisation, time-space compression, accumulation by dispossession, land seizures, and the wholesale exploitation of billions of workers, men and women drawn from different cultural and geographical settings all around the world (Harvey 2003, Chapter 4).

Reflecting upon the many places I have visited these last few years and the many people I have talked to, I find it impossible not to conclude that alienation exists almost everywhere. There is abundant evidence, for example, of deep alienation with respect to contemporary forms of the labour process. The problem for labour isn't simply that there are not enough good-paying jobs to go around (which is bad enough in most areas of the world), but that there are few meaningful jobs. Widespread deindustrialisation has meant the elimination of jobs that were exploitative but meaningful (the steel worker in a bustling factory) and the rise of jobs that are exploitative but feel meaningless (like security guard in a shopping mall). Frustration at and alienation from the political process (traditional political parties in particular) is everywhere in evidence. Resentments at and frustrations with a state apparatus that fails to reassure or facilitate greater freedoms are on the rise even as they impose excessive burdens on individual rights and actions. Repressive regulatory regimes are, it seems, producing oppositional movements embracing libertarianism or what might be called a widespread non-ideological cultural anarchism. The sheer volume of nonsense paperwork and regulatory impositions has increased exponentially in many sectors and places. Daily life, meanwhile, is becoming increasingly frustrating and nightmarish: fighting extra charges on telephone bills, credit cards and arguing over health insurance reimbursements consume a vast amount of time in the United States. Bureaucratized corporations are every bit as bad if not worse than the state in relation to consumers. Their strategy is to deflect and discourage complaints rather than to deal with them. The aggregate effect is that we have less and less time for ourselves in a context where household time-saving innovations galore are increasingly available. The question looms: Where is the promised transcendence?

There is something grossly wrong with the way the state apparatus is working. Ken Loach's film "I, Daniel Blake" relates the trauma of an elderly person's encounter with the welfare services in Britain. These services, it becomes clear, are not designed to help people in need but to punish people for being needy. The good citizen

is not needy. The film evokes obvious parallels in other sectors of social provision. Are the police there to help or to discipline, surveil and repress us? Alienation is everywhere. It exists at work in production, at home in consumption, and it dominates much of politics and daily life (Lefebvre 1981).

So where are all the protest movements? In London the police kill an unarmed black man: a riot ensues and stores are looted and burned. Similar events occur in Stockholm and Paris. In Gezi Park in Istanbul an arbitrary decision to transform a central park into a shopping mall leads people to erupt in anger and to meet with police violence and repression. Within a few days the protest spreads throughout the whole urban system in Turkey: the problem is plainly not only the park but the lack of democracy and consultation about the organisation of daily life. Such struggles are not labour struggles of the classic sort (Keller 2013). They are outbreaks of popular discontent, of all those who are alienated in daily life no matter whether it's in the living space, the workspace, or wherever. Shortly after Gezi Park in the summer of 2013 a street action against rising transport fares spread like wildfire from city to city and to issue after issue in Brazil. Millions take to the streets in mass protests, only to meet with violent police repression and indifference on the part of authority.

The most typical response within a population to conditions of chronic alienation is to remain passive, resentful, morose and depressed (succumbing to drugs and alcohol) but to occasionally erupt in anger, frustration and rage, as happened in the London riots. At such moments people feel compelled to act. They want to tear down and destroy the existing order of things. They want scapegoats to blame. The capitalist class feeds them racial minorities, women, and immigrants as easy targets for blame. That mood was commonplace in many segments of the population around the USA in the summer of 2016. It had been steadily accumulating after the broadly progressive global protests in Seattle in 1999 passing through the short but surprisingly influential Occupy movement of 2011 (which also spread within the United States as well as internationally). This last case was the movement that focused on Wall Street and the "One Percent" as being at the centre of contemporary ills, only to be greeted (almost in an act of unconscious affirmation of the importance of the political point) by fierce police repression mobilized at the behest of "the Party of Wall Street," then followed by the relentless scapegoating of immigrants, racial minorities and women.

In this kind of world, we should not be surprised that right-wing populism and bigoted nationalist and racist movements thrive. With mass alienation, somebody like Trump could come along and blast his way into power. But, why Trump in particular? In the summer of 2016, I thought he had a very simple winning argument to persuade the alienated to vote for him. Trump would say: "I'm a highly successful business man. I've made a lot of money. And I'm spending my money on running for an election so I can give voice to your discontent". How many times during the campaign did he say to adoring audiences: "I am your voice!!" But then he would point to his opponent. "She went into politics to make money. Look at that money she made from Goldman Sachs – 250K for one lecture". Those forgotten guys sitting on barstools in Ohio would say: "Yes, the Clintons are on the make. They have always been out to get rich. I don't trust them but I can trust Trump because it is his money he is spending to represent us. Besides he is rude to the elites, tough on immigrants and minorities, and I can relate to that". For alienated, disempowered, frustrated and angry people, such arguments would be compelling. Trump is the President of alienation.

But where does this alienation come from and why does it seem to be intensifying and proliferating? To begin with, transformations in the organisation of production and manufacturing – deindustrialization – over the last forty years have played a criti-

cal role. Meaningful jobs and the more or less solidarity-filled communities that arose to support them (in cities like Detroit and Sheffield) have been disappearing in droves. A car plant in East Oxford and its working class community (Blackbird Leys) employed more than 20,000 workers in the 1960s but is reduced to 2,000 by the mid-1990s. Deprived of the opportunity of making cars, alienated youth in Blackbird Leys took to joy-riding cars and participating in street riots against the police in 1991-2 (Hayter and Harvey 1993). Interestingly the shift of objective experience from the factory to the street was accompanied by an ideological shift from socialist to cultural anarchist aspirations. Anarchist elements were prominent in the Brazilian uprisings of 2013 as well as in the Occupy movement of 2011. Changing objective conditions produce shifts in political subjectivities.

The increasing industrialisation and capitalisation of agriculture has likewise destroyed the economic basis for a distinctive agrarian way of life. The rice farmers of South Korea commit suicide, peasant ways of life and culture disappear and, just as important, the small rural towns that once profitably serviced agrarian activities decline precipitously. Much of Trump's support and much of the Brexit vote in Britain came from small town and rural areas that were facing catastrophic economic decline, leaving no option for the young except to migrate to already overcrowded and high rent metropolitan areas in the hope of work.

New transport and communications systems have also helped dramatically change the landscapes of production and consumption. It is possible now for sophisticated engineering, design, innovation, and even marketing of a product to be located in the United States, while production occurs somewhere else. An assembly line can be across the Mexican border in Ciudad Juarez while research, design and administration can be in Dallas or Atlanta. This works for the corporation because the skills that exist in the United States can be combined seamlessly with cheap Mexican labour. The effect is to cut out and disempower labour in the USA. The argument that Trump makes about the consequences of NAFTA for workers is to some degree correct. NAFTA is not unique. German corporations do the same with Poland, for example. Such regional configurations are now emerging all over the place (Baldwin 2016). The benefits mainly flow to the corporate elites and their hangers-on while traditional working classes in the advanced capitalist countries are disempowered and diminished economically and politically. The whole social fabric and social cohesion that once existed around factory labour gets torn to shreds. Those guys sitting on bar stools in Ohio or in pubs in Sunderland know this all too well. They also know it in the beer halls in Munich, the cafes in Italy and the bistros in France.

Such trends intensify through the application of information technologies and artificial intelligence. A production line in Mexico can be controlled from an office in Dallas. It will also soon be possible to organise driverless delivery trucks and pilotless planes. The result is an on-going but accelerating reconfiguration of the global workforce and its employment prospects. Two thirds of the job losses over the last forty years are thought to be from technological change. But in addition, work forces in the USA, Europe or Japan now have to compete with the workforces of other nation states. In the 1960s labourers in the advanced capitalist countries were protected against foreign competition and could organise to procure better wages and better living conditions within the boundaries of their nation states. But that privilege got eroded through neoliberal globalisation and now it has gotten eroded even further by technologies that foster competition between labour forces all around the world. And that of course means that in many places jobs do disappear, never to return (McKinsey Global Institute 2012). To some degree the argument that many go to Mexico or

China is correct. Even if they do not go the fear that they might go is a powerful tool for capital to drive wages down. So what are NAFTA and the proposed TPP really about? The idea that these (proposed) agreements are about free trade is nonsense. It is about the U.S. corporate elites trying to create a privileged production and marketing economic block that is antagonistic to and competitive with China and Europe. But the benefits will not accrue to ordinary people. They will go to the capitalist class and urban elites.

What we are seeing is the creation of regional configurations of production and exchange under the control of some dominant class and corporate power. Capitalists create privileged regional spaces of economic activity from which they can exclusively benefit, while the working populations in their backyards gain little or nothing. The working people of the U.S don't benefit from NAFTA any more than the working people of Germany benefit from the European Union. Within each regional power block there is a hegemonic power. German capital has been the primary beneficiary of the construction of the Euro-Zone, and we know perfectly well who has not benefited from it. Greece has had value sucked dry by German and French finance capital. And the U.S tried to set up something like the TPP to do the same in the Pacific. Trump abandons it even though it would have been of great interest to the ruling classes. But who is stepping in to construct something along similar lines? China, of course. These regional reorganisations are occurring everywhere. The effect is to reconfigure how the world's labour force is mobilised for the benefit of capitalist classes and technological elites the world around.

The rate of change is accelerating. Once upon a time the textile mills were in Lowell, Massachusetts and then they went to the Carolinas and then they went to Mexico and then to Bangladesh. It took about 30, 40, 50 years for all of that to happen so adaptation initially could be slow. But what we are now seeing is a speed-up that is hard to adapt to. This speed-up largely derives from the second potentially fatal contradiction of exponential growth. The cotton mills in Baltimore were at their height in the 1920s and did not finally disappear until 1970. But now, recalcitrant populations suddenly find themselves bereft; advantages they thought they had disappeared overnight. Furthermore, the world's wage labour force has expanded dramatically. Since 1980 it has gone from around 2 to 3 billion (McKinsey Global Institute 2012). Most of China's population has come in, all of Indonesia, large segments of India, so we now have manufacturing going on in all these countries and rapid offshoring of manufacturing even from China to Bangladesh, Vietnam, Cambodia and the like.

There is something unusual about this, however. Industrialisation no longer guarantees a move very far up the GDP per capita table (as used to be the case before 1970 or so). It guarantees increasing inequality instead.

There is a very simple reason for this. A US-based corporation like Apple Computer has a high rate of profit, around 28%. Foxconn, which makes the computers in Shenzhen, has a profit rate around 3%, employing a huge labour force (now about to be made redundant by automation). There is a big gap between where value is created, which is in Shenzhen, and where it is realised, which is in the United States. This is how Walmart, the Gap, Ikea, and the like, make their money also. Conditions in this labour force are undergoing a radical reconfiguration. The biggest employers of labour in the USA in the 1960s were General Motors, Ford, and US Steel. Now it is the holding companies of McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Walmart. In these latter fields, the labour supply is increasingly precarious. The culture of young people in relationship to job opportunities is being revolutionised. They work in a coffee bar

for six months and then go somewhere else. From a traditional perspective, this looks a terrible situation, but a lot of younger people I know seem to like it. They say: “this is great, I have enough money to trolley around for a few weeks and then I’ll pick up another job somewhere else for a bit.” Younger people, even the college educated, are getting used to a precarious peripatetic lifestyle that matches the evolving structure of job opportunities. For some this appears as a peculiar kind of freedom compared to a structure of labour opportunities that attaches one person to a particular niche in the division of labour for life. It is the perverse realisation of that brief glimpse of a different world that Marx sees in *Capital*. “Large scale industry, by its very nature, necessitates variation of labour, fluidity of functions, and mobility of the worker in all directions [...] The partially developed individual, who is the bearer of one specialized social function, must be replaced by the totally developed individual, for whom the different social functions are different modes of activity he takes up in turn” (Marx 1976/1867, 617-618).

4. The Circulation of Capital as Totality

But how do we put all of this together to get a picture of how capital in general is working in our times? Consider the circulation of capital as a whole, as a totality (see Figure 1). There are three key moments in that process. One is the moment of production where capital is, as Marx put it, “valorised” by the activities of labourers engaged in a labour process of commodity production. Then there is the moment of realisation, where the value created in commodity form in production is monetised through a sale in the market. And then there is the moment of distribution when the realised money is allocated between capital and labour but also between factions of capital (landlords, merchants, financiers as well as industrial producers) and the state. Capital circulates through all of those moments.

I cannot overemphasise the importance of taking this perspective of the totality when considering how far Marx got in reconstructing the laws of motion of capital circulation and accumulation. It is a fantasy, for example, to think that financialisation is a recent feature to capital accumulation. Marx shows in Volume 3 of *Capital* that the separation of interest-bearing capital as a property relation from the circuit of industrial capital by the mid-nineteenth century produced distinctive contradictions. The crises of 1847-8 and 1857 are analysed as commercial and monetary crises with no reference to the falling rate of profit earlier identified as a primary potential source of contradiction. There is an uncanny resemblance between Marx’s descriptions of these crises and what happened in 2007-8 in the United States (see Harvey 2017, 202). Marx even notes how the defective institutionalisation of the Bank of England in 1844 played a role in deepening and extending those crises (much as the European Central Bank played a negative role from 2010 onwards), while the separation of ownership from management also produced critical tensions in the management of accumulation. Only in these terms can we make sense of Giovanni Arrighi’s detailed historical reconstruction of how hegemonic shifts in capitalist power relations on the world stage (such as the shift from the Low Countries to Britain in the eighteenth century) are preceded by and to some degree accomplished through a strong phase of financialisation.

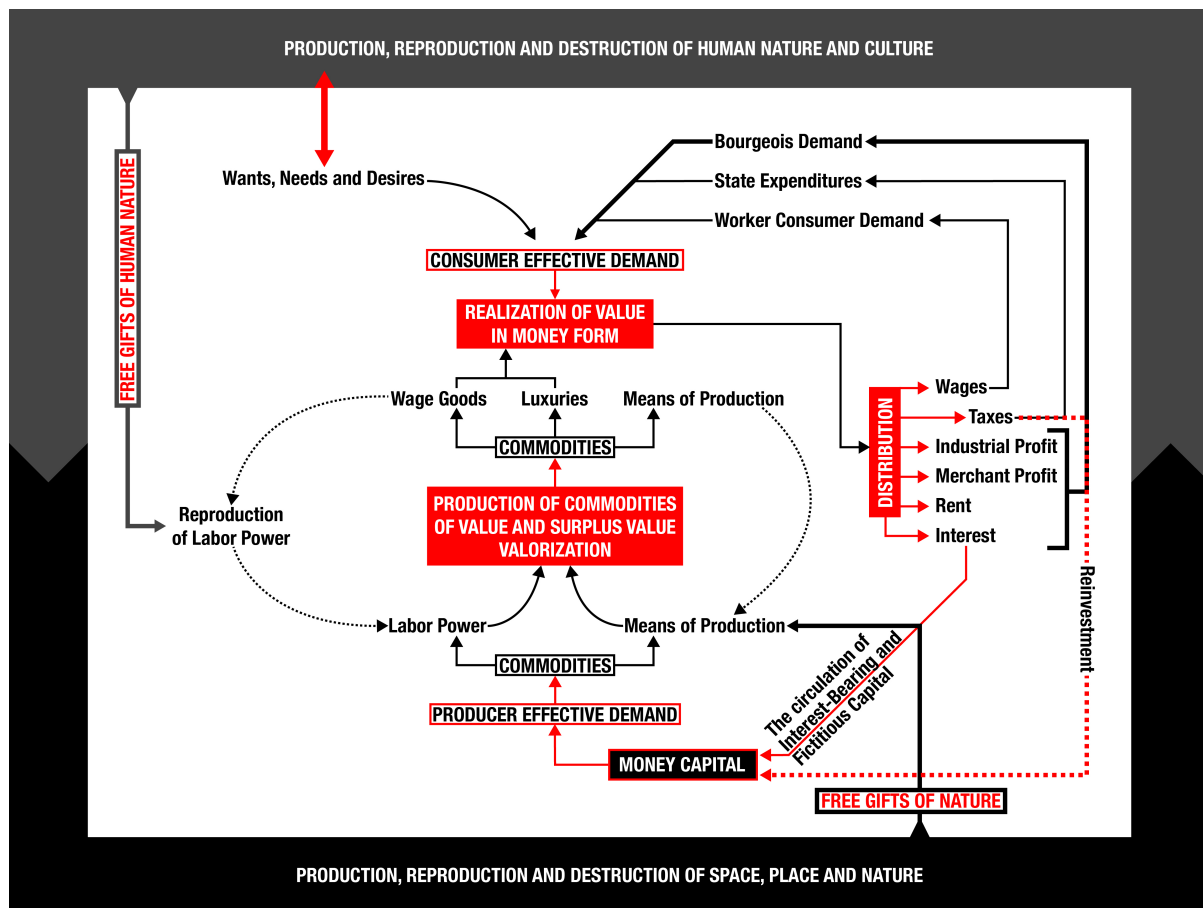


Figure 1: The circulation of capital as a whole

What is the driving force that keeps capital circulating? The classic answer is the search for profit on the part of capitalists and capitalist corporations. The focus is on the moment of production. Capitalists start the day with a certain amount of money and end the day with more money. The profit comes, Marx shows, from alienating labour and extracting surplus labour and surplus-value. The exploitation of living labour in production is the origin of profit. But the capitalist has also to realise and monetise the value congealed in the commodity through a sale in the market. This presumes there is a want, need and demand for the commodity backed by sufficient money for potential consumers to be able to pay.

What happens if there is no sale either because there is no want, need or desire or because of an inability to pay? This sometimes happens and in the 1930s it was massively so. There is no possibility of profit. Capitalists and corporations stop investing or employing labour. The economy goes into a downward spiral. It then becomes critical to create a demand so that capital can realise a profit. The Keynesian solution is to do this by ratcheting up state expenditures. The strategy of aggregate demand management, largely organised through the state, focuses on the moment of realisation. This becomes a second driver of accumulation through circulation. It is vital to look carefully at the relationship between production and realisation within the overall circulation of capital (Harvey 2017). A lot of contemporary economic struggles are now occurring at the point of realisation rather than at the point of production. But such struggles have a different structure and logic from those that occur at the point of production. Workers act as buyers not as workers when they are in the market place (Marx 1973/1857, 419-22). Conflicts at the point of realisation are between buyers and sellers. This is very different from struggles that pit capital against labour.

This is what Marx refers to as “profit upon alienation” (profit taken at the point of commodity trading).

If there is a struggle against rising rents or scamming on broadband services, for example, then all kinds of social groups will likely become involved. It is not just workers, but middle class and petty bourgeois factions (shopkeepers and restaurant owners as well as professionals) who are affected. The way property prices and rents are surging in New York City is at the centre of broad-based discontent. A movement against the rising rents and speculation in property markets would draw support from many different groups within the population. The protestors on the streets of Brazilian cities in June of 2013 or those who took part in the Gezi Park protest in Istanbul, were not from the classic working class (though many workers did ultimately join in). They were made up of a complex mix of people including disaffected and alienated middle class groups in the population with a variety of demands and interests. In Brazil the issues were increasing transport costs, investments in spectacular events like the World Cup and the Olympics at the expense of social expenditures on health care, education and housing, to say nothing of rampant corruption. Rising food prices have long been one of the main triggers of the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East (Walton and Seddon 1994).

In addition, there are all those who have long been seeking to create heterotopic spaces where they could live a relatively unalienated existence albeit in a sea of alienation. Such movements exist all over the place. They can be found in the heart of metropolitan centres as well as on the rural margins. Many of the major protests since 2000 or so have been animated by groups of this sort. Urban movements of discontent are on the rise in particular. They are often movements of populations alienated by the deteriorating conditions of daily life in the city and the lack of any kind of democracy (Lefebvre 1981). They demand empowerment and ways to ameliorate their increasing marginalisation as citizens rather than as workers. These sorts of struggle are qualitatively different to the traditional labour struggles around factory work. As factories disappear in many parts of the world, one cutting edge of anti-capitalist struggles lies in the field of realisation rather than production.

But where do the state expenditures laid out for purposes of demand management come from? If the economy is in a downward spiral then tax receipts will fall. Raising taxes will diminish not augment consumer demand. The state has therefore to create money; it has to borrow and deficit finance to push the economy into an upward spiral. But where can it borrow from? It turns out that there are mediating organisations within the circulation that command surplus money power and have the power to leverage surpluses in effect creating ever more money. This is another source of the energy that propels the capitalist accumulation system onwards and upwards. Those who have surplus funds want to put their money to work to earn a dividend. I have a private pension fund. TIAA has a fiduciary responsibility to me to put my pension money to work and get the highest rate of return. TIAA offers credit. It incentivises people to borrow money and to engage in profit-seeking. My pension fund stands accused of funding land grabs in Latin America.

But what is this debt about? It is a claim on future labour. The state of my pension fund in five years' time ultimately depends upon the value production by labourers over the next five years. Pension funds are just one example out of many institutions that engage with debt creation. There are the stockholders and the bond holders. Then there are the banks themselves that store other people's money and use it to make profit for themselves. All of these institutions want a rate of return and they are

going to push the system of endless accumulation through circulation as much as they can.

Capitalists seeking profit were probably most important in the nineteenth century. In the 1930s that began to break down and so you get the Keynesian turn to demand management centred on the state for a while. Right now, the prime source of energy behind the circulation of capital seems to lie in the field of distribution. It is the agents in distribution who are creating the debt and issuing the credit that has to be redeemed through some form of activity which is going to give me five percent per annum on my pension fund. Value and surplus-value has to be created somewhere within the system in order to redeem it. How is that done? One of the ways is to borrow even more (politely called "rolling over the debt"). In this case, a Ponzi scheme is created powering the endless circulation and accumulation of capital. Is this where the global economy is now headed? There is a good deal of evidence suggesting this is so.

But there is something else important about debt creation. Debt is a claim upon future labour. The future is foreclosed by taking on debt. This has a positive outcome when the borrowed money is put to good future use. But it quickly turns negative as debts weigh down upon the future and it becomes increasingly difficult to find ways to redeem the debts through active value production. Debt thus becomes a key form of social control. Our future is dictated by the need to redeem our debts. What is being produced is a society based on debt peonage (Hudson 2015). Capitalists understand this very well. When, for example, mortgage finance was set up in the 1930s to encourage working class homeownership as a signal piece of the American Dream, it was noted that "debt-encumbered homeowners don't go on strike." Likewise, debt-encumbered students don't cause trouble. The whole debt structure forms a vast network of social control that curtails basic freedoms and exaggerates those feelings of alienation with which I began.

When Bill Clinton won the Presidency in 1992, he outlined his ambitions for a new economic program to his Treasury Secretary, Robert Rubin (from Goldman Sachs) who reportedly objected to the plans. When Clinton asked "Why?" Rubin said: Wall Street bond holders won't let you. Clinton's famous response was: You mean to say that my whole economic program is held hostage to a bunch of fucking bond traders on Wall Street? And Robert Rubin said "Yes." Clinton came to the Presidency promising universal healthcare and delivered NAFTA, the reform of welfare as we know it, a vicious reform of the criminal justice system that led to the mass incarceration of mainly racial minorities, a reform of housing finance that culminated in the foreclosure disaster of 2007-8, and the repeal of the Glass-Steagall regulatory frameworks that constrained speculative activity on the part of banks. And that is what the bond holders wanted. This poses a big question: who is really in charge, the politicians or the bondholders? The answer is clear in the case of Greece: it is the bondholders.

But it is not only weak and small countries like Greece that are disciplined by bond holder power. The 2017 tax reform in the United States is in effect a bondholder's charter that delivers immense benefits to the oligarchs while in the long-run dispossessing the people and accelerating debt creation. It opens the path to a competition over accumulation by dispossession on the world-stage. The only way other countries can protect against capital flight, is to reduce their corporate taxes also. Britain and China were the first two major countries to suggest they might reduce corporate tax rates to below those in the USA while offering favourable treatment, against WTO rules, to foreign investors. Meanwhile, the next step in the USA is to cut essential social programmes, such as Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, which

are crucial for the mass of the population, in order to redeem the debt that has been used to fill the coffers of the oligarchs.

Under such conditions democracy becomes a sham. Everyone knows that most political parties and national governments are under the control of the bondholders and that the equivalent of the Party of Wall Street is what really rules (the Treasury Secretary of the US government has come from Goldman Sachs for most of the time during successive presidencies since 1993). As a result, alienation from politics and distrust of political parties become a norm, as does an acceleration in the growth of indebtedness alongside of the intensification of geopolitical rivalries and competition.

Credit money is, it turns out, the only form of capital that can increase without limit. Other things can, of course, increase dramatically. China in two years consumed 45% more cement than the United States had consumed in 100 years before that. China in 2007 had zero miles of high-speed train network. It now has fifteen thousand miles. What has happened in China in terms of productive activity and the creation of new use-value is astonishing. But why did the Chinese do this? When its export industries crashed in 2008 because the U.S consumer market crashed, the Chinese had to find a way to employ 20 million people who had lost their jobs. By early 2009 they apparently had a net job loss, according to the IMF/ILO (2010) report, of 3 million. This means they created 17 million jobs in about 9 months. How did they do it? They built massive physical infrastructures and whole new cities. They consumed more than half of the world's cement, more than half of the world's steel, about 60% of the world's copper. During this whole period commodity prices rose. Those countries producing raw materials for China, such as Chile, Brazil and Australia, came out of the 2007-2008 collapse pretty fast and well. China said send us the ore, send us the lithium, send us the copper, the iron ore and the soybeans. But there is a physical limit on how much cement can be consumed. The prospect of an endless exponential growth in the use of cement is terrifying (China is experiencing chronic environmental problems as a result). The Chinese also went from a low to high debt to GDP ratio in a very few years to fund this expansion. They became leading participants in the debt-creation game. Fortunately, they are mainly indebted in their own currency so they can avoid the fate of Greece or other heavily indebted countries that were forced by their creditors to implement savage austerity programs to pay off their creditors. But the Chinese debt is now viewed as a serious problem: how might it be redeemed?

This is a key global problem. The IMF reports global debt has been growing exponentially since the 1970s (International Monetary Fund 2016). There was a little blip in 2008 when it went down a bit but it jumped up again shortly thereafter. This is Ponzi finance and escalating debt peonage in action. The experts in the management and manipulation of debt peonage (the hedge funds, the private equity investors and the investment banks) come out on top. They are managing the global economy in their own interest. Trump appoints experts from Goldman Sachs to manage the economy. They typically earned their billions not by making anything but by legally robbing people of their asset values. Trump's Treasury Secretary Mnuchin took over a failing bank heavily invested in real estate and turned it around by forcing evictions and replacing affordable housing by upscale residential accommodations. This is not a labour problem. Manipulators of this sort made out like bandits from the housing foreclosures and evictions that occurred in 2007-8. George Soros legally robbed the British people of more than a billion dollars over seven days by betting against the valuation of the British pound against the German deutschmark in 1992.

Then everyone is surprised at the incredible increase in wealth inequalities in the capitalist world. What impact does all this have on the alienation of populations?

5. Conclusion

This gets me back to the roots of the deep discontent with this system. At some point we are almost certainly going to see a revolt against debt peonage. I'm surprised in some ways that the student debt movement didn't morph into a massive oppositional movement, but it's actually very difficult to get out of it for a number of reasons. A moratorium on debt or a jubilee could wipe out all debt but that would include my pension fund. This cannot be done without guaranteeing future incomes by other means. It is extremely difficult also to get mass solidarity among many individual debtors some of whom have already paid off a significant part of their debt and would resent a younger generation escaping such a burden.

At this point we are all locked in. We have to support the system because if we do not then we are the ones who get screwed. We are all locked into a system of debt peonage. This seems a perfect recipe for the production of mass alienation. The state, as it is currently structured, cannot deal with it, because, as Bill Clinton was so clearly told, governments are dependent entirely on the power of the bondholders. If they go against that power, the state loses its financial base. At the centre of it all lies what I call the state-finance nexus – the alliance between central banks (the pinnacle of the private financial system) and the treasury departments (the arbiter of power within the state). This is the nexus of power that locks all of us into debt peonage and a foreclosed future. The big, big question is how do we escape the clutches of the state-finance nexus? What forms of social movement can help us get out? There are lots of heterotopic spaces emerging where people try and live an alternative life and contract out of the debt economy. They are searching for some other way to live and refuse to get locked in. The belated hope is that somewhere and somehow a parallel form of governing and financing (perhaps with local currencies) will allow more and more people to escape into a world of unalienated social relations and autonomous forms of production and consumption. Such an anarchist strategy is unlikely to succeed. The power of the state-finance nexus has to be confronted directly. The history of the Greek problem illustrates how hard that will be.

But we also have to understand that we are also a key part of the problem. It is not just the dominant capitalist class and their hangers on who are actively engaged in foreclosing our future in order to ensure the perpetual growth of their monetary power. We are all caught in a trap. The unassuming peasant who falls for the trap of microfinance and the pensioner who demands assurances of their own financial future are all caught up in this system of debt peonage. Until we understand that and act consciously to get ourselves out of this trap, then we are not going to be able to do anything other than keep on going with the global Ponzi scheme, where debt and money will be created without limit for the benefit of a financialised capitalist class. Privileged classes will use the circulation process in such a way as to extract as much personal wealth and power as they can and while the opportunity lasts. Since 2007-2008 almost all of the gains from the recovery have gone into the pockets of the top 1%. They are by and large doing just fine. For the rest of us, the objective alienation of whatever wealth we have by the ruling classes leaves behind a bitter residue of subjective alienation from the kind of political economy that capital has constructed.

We have, in short, an amazing situation where the capitalist classes are everywhere doing extremely well, while capital in general is doing rather badly. It is foolish

to imagine that the capitalist class will do anything about such a situation. They have no incentive. And many of us are also in a situation where we do not have an immediate incentive to do anything about it either – I totally lose my pension, my house and property as financial assets if the state-finance nexus, the Bastille of contemporary capitalism, is stormed by angry mobs. This is the political dilemma inherent in the current situation. While our task may be to change the world, it is a prerequisite for revolutionary theory that we first understand it. The theory of objective alienation along with an understanding of its subjective consequences is one vital key to unlock the door of a progressive politics for the future.

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David Harvey is Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Geography at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) and author of various books, articles, and lectures that have been highly influential in the development of modern geography as a discipline and in the advancement of geographical and spatial analysis in Marxist and critical analysis. He is the author of books such as “Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism”, “The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism”, “A Companion to Marx’s Capital”, “Rebel Cities”, “A Short History of Neoliberalism”, “The New Imperialism”, “Limits to Capital”, “Social Justice and the City”, and “Marx, Capital and the Madness of Economic Reason”. David Harvey has been teaching Karl Marx’s *Capital* for nearly 40 years. He was director of the Center for Place, Culture and Politics at the CUNY from 2008 to 2014.

The Multiplicities within Capitalist Rule and the Articulation of Struggles

Michael Hardt and Toni Negri

Abstract: This contribution is part of a debate between Michael Hardt/Toni Negri and David Harvey on the occasion of Marx's bicentenary (May 5, 2018). The discussion focuses on the question of what capitalism looks like today and how it can best be challenged. In this article, Hardt and Negri respond to David Harvey's article "Universal Alienation".

Keywords: Marx, bicentenary, 200th anniversary, capitalism, exploitation, praxis, alienation, formal subsumption, real subsumption

1. Introduction

David Harvey's analysis of universal alienation provides a wonderful basis for investigation and suggests important indices for political action. The interpretative trajectory he proposes, which extends from Marx's analysis of alienation in the 1844 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (Marx 1844) to his usage in the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1857/58), opens us the analysis to a wide social field. As do other interpreters, Harvey uses the concept of alienation to characterise the objectification of our subjective capacities at work and thus to name a profound dissatisfaction and discontent in contemporary society. He illuminates rightly the exploitative nature – and also the boredom – of many jobs today, such as the "security guard in the shopping mall". This characterisation of alienation at work today, however, seems to lead him in search of "meaningful jobs" and even to look back on "the steelworker in a bustling factory" of yesteryear as a positive reference point. We do not follow Harvey in this evaluation of "meaningful" industrial labour in contrast to today's "meaningless" jobs, but that is really a minor part of his argument.

More significant and truly illuminating is how Harvey extends alienation socially, well beyond the realm of waged labour, to grasp phenomena such as the gentrification of the metropolis and the transformation of urban space into a social factory. The concept of alienation in Harvey's hands also highlights the extension of the webs of debt – individual and state debt, student debt and municipal debt – as a means to blackmail a wide range of social subjects and a weapon to command the future. Furthermore, as the "universal" modifier of alienation indicates, he reads all these phenomena from the standpoint of total social capital and from the perspective of the world market. We need to extend our vision to that level to understand how capital functions across a wide variety of spaces and scales.

What strikes us most about Harvey's essay is a claim that he makes at the very end. It is just and necessary that people revolt against the capitalist system, and people are doing that in a variety of ways. But in order to change the world, he rightly insists, "it is a prerequisite for revolutionary theory that we first understand it". It seems that for Harvey this principle helps explain why a number of recent revolts – including Occupy, the Gezi Park movement, and the 2011 UK race rebellion – have been ineffective and points instead toward a different sort of (as yet unspecified) political practice.

In our view, in contrast, this principle – understand the world before being able to change it – indicates a two part sequence: grasping the *multiplicities* that exist within capitalist rule and the varied forms that capitalist exploitation takes place in a wide field of domination (which includes axes of race and gender in addition to and in conjunction with varied forms of waged and unwaged labour) poses the need to *articulate* a range of existing struggles that challenge capitalist rule in different ways.

In order to sketch the importance of some contemporary struggles, then, we will need to explain what we mean by the multiplicities of capitalist rule. And to do that, since this exchange is explicitly in honour of Marx, let's remain in the universe of Marxian terminology.

2. From Alienation to Formal and Real Subsumption

Marx's concepts of the formal and real subsumption emphasise some of the same basic characteristics of capital that Harvey finds in universal alienation¹. In fact, the social world of the real subsumption maps closely to that of universal alienation. But the two concepts of subsumption, formal and real, are together able to illuminate better than alienation the multiplicities of capitalist rule, also providing an avenue to extend the analysis beyond Marx and hence opening up our understanding of range of forms of contemporary anti-capitalist struggle.

Let's start with Marx's account of the concepts. The distinction between formal and real subsumption for Marx (1867, 1019-1038) relies fundamentally on the genesis of labour practices and, specifically, whether they were born outside or within the realm of capitalist rule.

The formal subsumption of labour under capital is characterised by labour practices that are created outside of capitalist rule, such as a method of cutting sugar cane, and are brought under the rule of capital, for instance, by making those cane cutters into wage labourers. The subsumption of labour in such cases is merely formal, according to Marx's way of thinking, because the "substance" of the labour – or, really, the labour process – remains unchanged. The workers, in other words, are performing the same operations; they are just doing so within a new context, a new regime of rule. In the past, we have found it useful to understand the processes of imperialism in line with those of formal subsumption – in line, for instance, with the way that Rosa Luxemburg (1913) in *The Accumulation of Capital* characterises European imperialisms and their intrinsic violence in terms of an internalisation of the outside, bringing non-capitalist economies and social forms under the rule of capital.

Marx then distinguishes the process of formal subsumption from a real subsumption of labour under capital in which new labour processes are created by capital itself or, rather, within the capitalist social realm. Marx focused on how labour processes are created through the application of science, the implementations of new technologies, and the like. The labour practices are generated within capital and are fundamentally different than those that were imported from outside, and thus Marx often refers to the passage from the formal to the real subsumption as the advent of a "properly capitalist" society.

We find Marx's concepts of formal and real subsumption to be useful in a variety of regards, but we need to extend them beyond his usage in two respects for our argument here. First is required an extension from the real subsumption of *labour* un-

¹ For Marx's analysis of formal and real subsumption, see "Results of the Immediate Process of Production", included as the appendix to the English version of *Capital, Volume 1* (Marx 1867, 943-1084, especially pp. 1019-1038).

der capital, which Marx analysed, to the real subsumption of *society* under capital. In the 1970s, one of us (Toni Negri) found it necessary to read Marx's argument in the *Grundrisse* in this extended fashion when it became clear that the functioning of capitalist rule, and the forms of anti-capitalist struggle, extended well beyond the factory walls and had invested the entire social terrain (see Negri 1991 xvi; 113-134; 142). The real subsumption of society was a means to theorise, on the one hand, in other words, the extraordinarily wide and deep extension of capitalist relations of production throughout the social fabric, especially in the dominant countries. Here is where we can see clearly the point we mentioned earlier where "universal alienation" and "real subsumption" coincide. The concept, on the other hand, was part of an argument that the traditional forms of syndicalist organisation are no longer sufficient and that in order to combat capitalist rule diverse struggles across the social terrain have to be articulated.

It is important to recognise that analyses of contemporary capitalist society in terms of a real subsumption do not indicate a process of social homogenisation – as if being "properly capitalist" in Marx's terms were to imply the elimination of differences. Instead, arguments of a real subsumption must regard capitalist society as composed of multiplicities, a framework in which social differences interact. The recognition that all social relations, not just labour, tend to be subsumed under capital forces us, then, to theorise the dynamics among class, race, gender, and other axes of subordination.

It is also important to resist interpreting the passage from the formal to the real subsumption as an absolute historical passage, which Marx's analysis seems to suggest. In other words, although we find it useful to enlist these terms in a periodization argument – roughly in the 1970s we passed from a society in which the formal subsumption predominated to one in which the real subsumption did – processes of formal subsumption have by no means ceased. Capital is still working on, incorporating, and functioning alongside not just labour practices but also various social forms that come from its "outside".

In this regard, one might say there is a continuing dynamic between processes of formal and real subsumption². Whereas formal subsumption provides a hinge between the present and various pasts, illuminating the relations between capital and its outsides as well as the different paths of capitalist development, real subsumption highlights how capital continually produces and reproduces differences and structures of rule within its domain, through "properly capitalist" means.

We should be clear that we are not presenting this account of the real and formal subsumption as a departure from David Harvey's interpretation. We see our insistence on the multiplicities within capitalist rule here as completely consistent with his work. Indeed, he has long been a leading voice for recognising the differences within capital especially in terms of space, from the metropolis to the global level. Our divergence, if there is one, resides in terms of what kinds of differences are recognised, whether they are internally or externally related, and, most important, what avenues of political praxis are opened by recognition of these multiplicities.

² Harry Harootunian (1991, 9, 38) argues, for example, that formal subsumption is the general rule of capitalist development.

3. Racial Capitalism and Patriarchal Capitalism Between Formal and Real Subsumption

Scholars of racial capitalism and patriarchal capitalism, although they do not use the terms, effectively extend further these analyses of formal and real subsumption. Cedric Robinson, for instance, begins his investigation of racial capitalism by noting that when capitalist relations of production developed in Europe they employed various forms of racism that preceded it, subordinating not only Africans but also the Irish, the Slavs, and various others (Robinson 1983, 9-44). The capitalist mode of production enlisted and deployed – we might say formally subsumed – racial markers and racial hierarchies within its own structures of rule. Robin D. G. Kelley explicates further Robinson’s concept: capitalism and racism “did not break from the old order but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of ‘racial capitalism’ dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide. Capitalism was ‘racial’ not because of some conspiracy to divide workers or justify slavery and dispossession, but because racialism had already permeated Western feudal society” (Kelley 2017a)³. The fact that race and racial hierarchies pre-existed capital (and were subsequently incorporated and redeployed in capitalist society) provides one means to recognise that race is not an accidental or incidental feature of the capitalist system. Race is *constitutive* of the capitalist mode of production and essential to the continuing rule of capital. Note that the concept of racial capitalism does not merely invert the priority, that is, refuse that racism be considered as secondary to capital in order to claim that capital is subordinate to racial hierarchies. The point instead is that, on the one hand, racial and capitalist hierarchies are relatively autonomous, neither subordinate to or derivative of the other, and, on the other hand, the two have become intimately intertwined in contemporary society such that the functioning and survival of the one depends on that of the other.

Feminist theories of patriarchal capitalism have long made arguments about the history of capital and patriarchy parallel to those employed by theories of racial capitalism⁴. Like the theorists of racial capitalism, socialist feminists argued that patriarchy long preceded the advent of capital and thus was not its product. The fact that conceptions of gender and structures of gender domination existed previously, however, does not mean that patriarchy is some universal system with the same basic structures throughout history. Instead, patriarchal structures were adopted and transformed within capitalist society, creating, for instance, a new family structure along with a complex and resilient system of sexual divisions of labour. The historical precedence of gender hierarchy, in other words, does not necessitate that it remains autonomous with respect to capitalist rule, but, as it does for the theorists of racial capitalism, such historical accounts provide a vantage point for recognising that gender like race, although thoroughly interwoven with capitalist hierarchies, retains a relative autonomy. The point, as Iris Young argued in the early 1980s, is that in our analyses we must give the structures of patriarchy and capitalism equal weight and relative

³ See also Kelley’s (2017b) illuminating lecture, “What is racial capitalism and why does it matter?”.

⁴ The historical relation between patriarchy and capital, although no longer a central occupation of feminist theory, was explored in detail by a generation of socialist feminists in the 1970s and 1980s. See, for instance, the responses to Heidi Hartmann’s influential (1981) essay, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism”. Many feminists have returned recently to reconsider the debates of the 1970s. For one example, see the essays in Disch (2015).

independence while still recognizing their mutually constitutive nature and thereby demonstrating that capitalism is *essentially* patriarchal (Young 1981, especially pp. 46, 64)⁵.

There is much more to the debates over racial and patriarchal capitalism, of course, but for the purpose of our argument here we simply want to highlight a double argument that is shared by these theoretical traditions and that, moreover, furthers our understandings of the contemporary functioning of the formal and real subsumption. On the one hand, racism and patriarchy are not incidental features of the capitalist system and not subordinate to its rule, as if they were merely secondary enemies in the primary struggle against capital. They are relatively autonomous structures that have been subsumed formally within it. On the other hand, racial and gender hierarchies are not historically immutable but instead have been thoroughly transformed, reinvented, and redeployed – that is, really subsumed – within “properly capitalist” society and its global mode of production. These two claims, moreover, of formal and real subsumption, are not contradictory but instead highlight the real multiplicities that exist *within* capitalist rule. Racism and patriarchy are constitutive of capitalist society and essential to its perseverance in this double sense, between the formal and real subsumption⁶.

We should add, parenthetically, that in our recent work we have tried to investigate these multiple dynamics in terms of the common. Contemporary capitalist circuits of production and reproduction, we claim, function primarily through the extraction and expropriation of the common, both natural forms of the common and, most importantly, socially produced forms of the common. The common is not uniform or homogeneous, of course, but instead a field on which radical differences are expressed and interact, and as such the common is a framework for understanding the multiplicities within capital. But we will have to leave development of this notion to another occasion⁷.

4. Intersections of Antiracist, Feminist, and Anticapitalist Struggle

The stakes for political practice involved in highlighting the multiplicities *within* capitalist ruling structures should be clear. “By and large,” to cite Iris Young writing in the early 1980s again, “socialists do not consider fighting women’s oppression as a central aspect of the struggle against capitalism itself” (Young 1981, 64). Parallel arguments regarding race can be found throughout the history of Marxist theory and communist organising, posing anti-racism as an important but external question. In-

⁵ Cinzia Arruzza (2014) provides one recent account of this tradition of Marxist feminist theorizing. She attempts to develop a “unified theory” that puts the accent on the determining force of capital and corresponds, in certain respects, to a notion of the real subsumption (without giving significant attention to the formal). “The essential thesis of ‘unitary theory,’” she claims, “is that for Marxist feminism, gender oppression and racial oppression do not correspond to two autonomous systems which have their own particular causes: they have become an integral part of capitalist society through a long historical process that has dissolved preceding forms of social life” (Arruzza 2014).

⁶ One should at this point reverse the agency in the argument to analyze how, just as capital subsumes patriarchal and racist relations, so too, from different standpoints, they subsume capitalist relations.

⁷ For our recent effort to characterize contemporary capitalist production and reproduction in terms of the extraction of the common, see primarily Hardt and Negri (2017, 155-182) For brief illustrations of the Standing Rock pipeline protest and the Black Land & Liberation Initiative in terms of the expropriation of the common, see Hardt (2017).

stead if, as we argue, the relations among these systems of domination are internal, and if racism, patriarchy, and capital are mutually constitutive, then feminist, anti-racist and anti-capitalist struggles must intersect on equal terms. Highlighting the multiplicity within the structures of rule thus helps us recognise the importance and efficacy of a wide range of contemporary struggles and the need to interweave them in practice. And, we should note, a wide range of activists today thoroughly register the importance of this point.

This relation between the multiplicity of analysis and the intersection of struggles is illustrated clearly, for example, in the practices of “women’s strike” by the Ni Un Menos-movement in Argentina, Italy, and elsewhere. Ni Una Menos arose in response to femicide and violence against women in all its forms and all its locations – in the workplace, in the family, and on the street. Gender violence in general, and femicide in particular, is an expression of patriarchal control in its most vicious and brutal forms, and thus the movement is aimed unequivocally at challenging the structures and practices of patriarchy. But the activists are fully aware that the struggle against gender violence cannot but be also a struggle against capital.

Feminist struggle and anti-capitalist struggle come together clearly in the proposal of strike as a political tool. Argentine Ni Una Menos-activists conceived the women’s strike, first, as a tool to politicise violence against women and pose women not just as victims but also powerful subjects. The practice of the strike, second, also poses for them the intimate relation between patriarchy and capital. The strike, Verónica Gago explains, “enabled a mapping of the heterogeneity of labor in a feminist register, valuing and making visible precarious, informal, domestic, and migrant forms of work not as *supplementary* or as *subsidiary* to waged labor, but as fundamental to current forms of exploitation and value extraction” (Gago 2018). The standpoint of reproduction has long been a framework for feminist analysis to illuminate the gender hierarchies internal to capitalist social relations and relations of production.

Casting the resulting feminist practice in terms of strike is not to pose an analogy – and thus that women can go on strike in the same way that workers can – but instead to highlight an internal relation: that capital functions through gender hierarchies and cannot function otherwise. Clearly, however, such a strike cannot only take the old industrial form of blocking the factory, but instead must articulate together various forms of refusal, withdrawal, and sabotage in different social spaces. In preparation for the women’s strike in Argentina, then, Ni Una Menos conducted a research process of asking in women’s factory collectives, student collectives, community collectives, and others: What does it mean to strike where you are? How would you go on strike? And then the women’s strike itself weaves together these varied contexts and experiences. In effect, the use of the strike by Ni Una Menos illustrates an important general claim: as production becomes increasingly social, so too the traditional forms of strike must transform into a social strike⁸ (Gago 2018). With their reasoning with regard to formulating their strike, Ni Una Menos makes clear that their struggle against gender violence and against the structures of patriarchy more generally is necessarily also an anti-capitalist struggle in the fullest sense.

We would make a parallel argument regarding various examples of contemporary antiracist struggles, including the various streams of Black Lives Matter in the US and the Fallist student movements in South Africa, Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall. Activists are well aware in these cases too that racial hierarchy and white supremacy

⁸ For our analysis of the sequence social production → social unionism → social strike, see Hardt and Negri (2017, 147-150).

are intimately interwoven with capitalist rule – from police activity to the prison-industrial complex, from racialized state policies and labour regimes to racialized regimes of the expropriation of wealth, and so forth. They are interwoven to such a degree that in order to challenge white supremacy one has to also attack capitalist rule and, correspondingly, in order to challenge capitalist rule one has to attack white supremacy. Indeed, any serious threat to racial hierarchies is itself a mortal danger to capital.

One should also insist at this point that labour movements and anti-capitalist movements have to engage more seriously than they have with racial and gender hierarchies, and indeed that anti-racist movements and feminist movements need to be more directly and consciously anti-capitalist. That is undoubtedly important but it is not our primary point here.

5. From Articulation of Struggles to Constitution of the Multitude

Our argument here turns, in large part, on whether the relations among capital, white supremacy, and patriarchy are external or internal. If they were external then one might say that, although race and gender permeate capitalist society, the different struggles remain essentially separate. If instead the relations among structures of capitalist, racial, and gender hierarchies were internal – that is, if patriarchy and racism were intrinsic not to capital in the abstract but to the functioning of capital as it has developed historically – then a more profound articulation is not only possible but also necessary⁹. The feminist and anti-racist movements we mentioned earlier are, of course, not *only* anti-capitalist struggles – they are also against patriarchy, white supremacy, coloniality, and more. But the fact that they are already anti-capitalist and that anti-capitalist struggles also aim at overcoming racial and gender hierarchies signals a basis for articulation.

At this point in the argument one should develop, as a side note, a critique of the concept of *solidarity* insofar as it relies on an external notion of those relations. After the 1905 revolution in Russia, Rosa Luxemburg criticised the fact that the German proletariat was able only to express “international solidarity with the Russian proletariat”, understanding the failed uprising as external to them, and completely unable to recognise that the Russian events were, in fact, internal to their own struggle, “a chapter of their own social and political history” (Luxemburg 1906, 74). Luxemburg certainly disdains the German expressions of sympathy (tinged with condescension) for their poor Russian cousins, but her main point here is about the internal relation among struggles.

Luxemburg’s critique of solidarity (and the presumed externality of struggles) translates directly to our argument here. One might form coalitions or express solidarity across the lines of struggles against capital, patriarchy, and white supremacy, but that never alters the fundamental separation. Instead if, as the theoretical standpoints of racial capitalism and patriarchal capitalism maintain, these different avenues of struggle are really internal to one another, then the struggles of others are really diverse chapters of one’s own social and political history. *De te fabula narratur*.

The path toward a revolutionary practice has to pass through an articulation of these avenues of struggle and the many like them. But this articulation is by no

⁹ David Roediger gently criticizes David Harvey for his inability to recognize the anti-capitalist nature of the Ferguson struggles, which results, he explains, from Harvey’s theoretical distinction between capitalism, which includes gender and race oppression, and capital, which can be understood without reference to them (see Roediger 2017, 1-3).

means spontaneous or immediate. The theoretical recognition of the multiplicities within capitalist rule and the practical realisation of the intersections among struggles against patriarchy, white supremacy, and capital provide nothing more than a solid point of departure. Articulation requires a process of constitution.

One way to express this point in relation to the Marxist tradition is to insist that one cannot assume class identity as a given and immediately configure political struggle on its basis, but instead one must investigate the nature of class composition today and, moreover, one must “make” the class, that is, embark on a political operation of constitution. Such an investigation should reveal, of course, that racial and gender hierarchies are intrinsic and necessary to the contemporary processes of the production and reproduction of capital and are core elements of capitalist rule, just as the analyses of racial and patriarchal capitalism have revealed. The operation of making or constituting class, then, necessarily involves the articulation of multiple subjectivities that are internally related.

Recognising these multiplicities should make clear, in part, why we have attempted to employ the concept of multitude to interpret and translate the contemporary dynamics of class and to grasp the possibilities of political subjectivity in struggle more generally. First, in line with the point we mentioned only parenthetically above, the multitude produces and reproduces the common, which is one means of indicating the radical multiplicities within capital. Second, and more germane for our argument here, multitude indicates a terrain of political action on which articulation is possible among diverse political subjectivities. By multitude, in other words, we do not intend to name an existing subject or to point merely to sociological differences, but rather to indicate a matrix of possibilities. Third, and finally, the multitude as political subject is the result of a process of constitution, a subject that is internally differentiated but articulated through struggle in common. Multitude thus summarises for us the analytical and political trajectory that extends from the recognition of the multiplicities within capital to the articulation of struggles in a coherent political project.

The multitude may thus be an adequate mode for recognising and developing effective contestation within the society of universal alienation that David Harvey analyses. For this to be the case, one must first highlight, as we have tried to do here, the multiplicities within capital and consequently the potential and necessity of an internal articulation of struggles. This provides, in our view, both a means for appreciating the importance of existing struggles and a framework for increasing and realising their revolutionary potential.

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Hardt and Negri have co-authored the books *Labor of Dionysus* (1994), *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), *Commonwealth* (2009), *Declaration* (2012), and *Assembly* (2017). Their books are considered to be among the most influential works in political philosophy today.

Universal Alienation and the Real Subsumption of Daily Life under Capital: A Response to Hardt and Negri

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Abstract: This contribution is part of a debate between Michael Hardt/Toni Negri and David Harvey on the occasion of Marx's bicentenary (May 5, 2018). The discussion focuses on the question of what capitalism looks like today and how it can best be challenged. In this article, David Harvey responds to Hardt and Negri's previous debate-contributions.

Keywords: Marx, bicentenary, 200th anniversary, capitalism, alienation, real subsumption, daily life

I grew up in a respectable neighbourhood of working class homeowners in England. I viewed the house we lived in as a safe albeit rather claustrophobic and oppressive space to eat, sleep, socialise, read stories, do homework or listen to the radio, a place where family could dwell without outside interference. In the winter, we clustered around the smoky coal fire in the living room – the only source of heat. This produced the killer London smog of 1952. We kids played with others on the street together on summer nights. Only occasionally did we have to make way for a passing car. The milk was delivered by horse and cart. We never ate out (except for fish and chips brought in on Fridays) and Mondays was wash day when my mother (who never had a job, a sign of our respectability!) washed everything by hand in a tub with a mangle that was very hard to turn to squeeze out the water from the sheets. On Mondays the whole neighbourhood was festooned with sheets flapping in the wind (except when they froze) upon tough-to-manipulate clothes lines. By evening my mother, with hands red from washing, had ironed everything too. It was hard work.

One day in my teens there was a day of mild celebration. The debt on the house was paid off and we were full owners. I then realised that the house was also a vehicle for saving and that asset values could be passed on across generations (as happened to me after my parents died). Not far away there were estates of social housing. They looked OK to me but when I dated a girl from there my mother strongly disapproved – they were feckless people not to be trusted she said. But they too seemed to have safe and secure housing in a decent living environment and listened to the same radio shows. The difference was at election time their neighbourhood plainly supported Labour but in mine a smattering of signs for both Conservatives and Labour could be seen. My father refused to discuss either politics or religion. They only foster discord and break up families he said. Working class homeownership, promoted from the 1890s onwards in Britain, has always been a subtle instrument of social control (socialists will confiscate your house, the conservatives said).

But in the 1980s this all changed. Margaret Thatcher sold off the social housing wholesale and everyone became passionately concerned with the exchange value of their housing. The local institutions that were set aside to promote homeownership among the working classes (the building societies in Britain or the Savings and Loan institutions in the United States) stopped being local working class institutions and

became more bank-like (eventually being merged or incorporating themselves as full banks). In 1981 nearly a third of all houses in Britain were in the public sector but by 2016 that had fallen to less than 7 percent. In an ideal neoliberal world there should be no social housing at all. People began to buy places and fix them up themselves and then sell them off at a profit. The house became more and more an exchange value to be protected and manipulated to augment personal wealth. Riff-raff (like people of colour or immigrants) and the feckless should be kept out to protect neighbourhood values and positive externalities managed by getting everyone to paint their front doors and grow roses in their front yards. In the late 1980s many Saving and Loan societies got into deep financial trouble in the United States because of their risky speculative investments.

By the end of the century everything had gone a step further. Houses became an instrument of speculation (In spite of what had happened with the S&L crisis). They became an ATM machine from which people could extract wealth by refinancing their mortgages. But when housing prices declined suddenly many people found themselves “under water” with their mortgage exceeding the market value of the house. The “surface froth” that Alan Greenspan, chair of the US Federal Reserve, had cheerfully dismissed in the late 1990s, became the raging storm that swept through US housing markets in 2007-8, leaving financial institutions bankrupt and millions of people foreclosed upon as housing prices crashed. As the slow recovery took place, more and more houses and apartments were caught up in buy-to-let schemes converted into Airbnb, which quickly went from a nice idea of sharing on an occasional basis to a rabid and destructive capitalised system of converting and profiteering on temporary housing accommodation, provoking popular movements of revolt against tourism in cities like Barcelona and fervent cries for regulatory control elsewhere.

The effect was to promote the eviction of low income populations to make way for upscale investment opportunities, expensive condos, and conversions to new uses, such as Airbnb, in many neighbourhoods. It was no longer mere exchange value that drove housing market activity but a quest for capital accumulation through the manipulation of housing markets that became the aim and object of much activity. In the United States millions lost their houses to foreclosure in 2007-2010 while in the rental sector the pace of evictions from rental accommodations accelerated everywhere, with devastating social consequences for the less affluent (Desmond 2016).

What is interesting about this potted history is that it parallels almost exactly the passage from work through formal to real subsumption of labour under capital that Marx so brilliantly outlined. I am therefore delighted to support the move by Hardt and Negri to extend the use of the formal/real distinction to other issues and questions. But I do so with a caveat. We have to be much more explicit about what it is that is being subsumed into what. In the case of housing, for example, the subsumption is into the circulation of interest-bearing capital and this entails a different set of social class relations to the story that Marx revealed in his analysis of the labour process subsumed within the circuit of industrial capital. But in both cases the move from formal to real entails an inversion of a power relation. In the case of labour, the control over the instruments of labour that lie with the labourer under conditions of formal subsumption pass into the power of fixed capital over the labourer under conditions of real subsumption. In the case of housing, real subsumption through the drive for accumulation exercises a power over the urban dweller to which residents are forced to submit. The bottom line of that power is debt peonage of the sort I initially described in the paper on “Universal Alienation”. Debt peonage is a form of subsumption, in which the lives and labours of individuals become inescapably tied into the

circulation of interest bearing capital, the interest rate, and claims upon their future incomes and labour.

Subsumption within the circulation of interest-bearing capital can by-pass valorisation through production (though new housing and condo construction and conversions mean that this is not wholly so). The circulation of interest-bearing capital is in this case focused not on fixed capital but on what Marx called “the consumption fund” (Harvey 1982, 229-238). When a private equity company like Blackstone buys up foreclosed houses in California (to become the biggest landlord in the state) and takes over financially failing affordable housing complexes and converts them (via evictions) to upscale market rents using huge loans from (often shaky) pension funds, then the whole housing system becomes highly capitalised and rates of return compete with rates of return in manufacturing. Hence also the perpetual danger of speculative bubbles. Housing values and qualities become vulnerable to volatile market processes. The so-called economic recovery (that has not spread to benefit wage labour) since the crisis of 2007-8 has in part rested on booms in housing prices in all of the world’s major metropolitan areas (from Melbourne to Moscow and Sao Paulo to San Francisco and Vancouver). This in spite of the lessons of the housing crash of 2007-8 and the S&L crash of 1987.

In London such processes have been accompanied by a rising tide of youth violence and a stunning and surprising increase in the murder rate. Here is how a London housing activist understands the potential connection.

“[...] most politicians’ response to our young people killing each other is to call for more policing. I accept it’s part of the picture. But obsessively seeing the problem through the prism of ‘law and order’, often as a proxy for talking about more uncomfortable subjects, offers no real hope of solving it [...] I’m not arguing that the housing crisis is directly or solely causing rising violence among young people. A complex range of factors is involved. But my thoughts keep going back to [...] an interview with a community activist from the South Side of Chicago. *‘They knew when they tore the buildings down that they’d displace people. Children have had to move schools, some to suburban areas in the far South Side, so it’s a double displacement. The black community’s social infrastructure has been destroyed. The demolitions have also disrupted the gang structure. Today the violence is random.’* [In Britain,] [t]he generation of working class youngsters at the centre of the current wave of street violence has only known Austerity Britain. The childcare services, youth clubs, leisure facilities, education, job and housing opportunities available to their parents have been decimated” (Robbins 2018).

We are now “reaping the whirlwind” of these cuts:

“Working class communities in general and women and young people in particular have been the main targets of revanchist policies against the Welfare State. As in the US, people with black and brown skin are disproportionately likely to suffer as cities become ever-more socially and ethnically divided [...] [T]he housing crisis has deepened and scores of council estates are now threatened with demolition [...] Neoliberal and profit-driven urban policies have produced cities in which many young people literally feel they have no place. They find it almost impossible to find a home they can afford in the communities where they were born, thwarting their ability to develop independent lives. Their social networks, sense of belonging and feeling of respect

from the adult world have been stretched to breaking point. Nothing could be more perfectly calculated to create a situation in which young people don't care, either about the lives of others, or their own" (Robbins 2018).

If this is not alienation, then what is?

Youth also live in a world where there is abundant evidence that political power does not give a tinker's cuss about their lives either. In London, this was clearly demonstrated by the awful sequence of events that produced the Grenfell Towers fire of June 14th 2017. Austerity policies administered by the wealthiest local council in Britain, which subcontracted to a profit maximising private management company, led to hazardous materials being used to improve the appearance of a high rise tower that housed low income and marginalised tenants. The tower went up in a fiery inferno killing more than one hundred people. The cladding used (in the face of protests by the tenants that were ignored) mainly for cosmetic and cost saving reasons had been banned as unsafe in Europe and the United States. Subsequent investigations showed that it had been used in more than a hundred high rise towers housing low income populations across Britain. Furthermore, two years after the fire the local council had done almost nothing to find alternative accommodations for those displaced. The council did not care for social housing of any sort. Notes Colin Crouch (2017, 3), "Social housing tenants are the unwanted residue of a pre-neoliberal past". Such tenants do not command respect. Their needs are irrelevant to a local authority where many houses stand empty, as investment vehicles for ultra-wealthy foreigners seeking to park and protect their asset wealth.

Universal alienation arises in many different ways. It links to the many different forms that real subsumption under the power of capital in general takes in our times. Here, too, there are caveats that Hardt and Negri hint at but which I think are worth making more explicit. The subsumption has profound effects upon that into which the labour or the housing is subsumed. It is not merely that the subsumed can be indigestible to that which gobbles it up. The insertion of housing and the consumption fund into the circuit of interest-bearing capital has a major impact upon what interest-bearing capital is all about. The significance of interest-bearing capital changes relative to the circulation of industrial, merchant and rentier capitals. This has implications for value and surplus-value production as well as for the class relations, struggles and the social inequalities that get generated. One can only speculate on what these implications might be, but there is no doubt in my mind that they are potentially profound¹. Here, too, I applaud Hardt and Negri's willingness to go outside of the stultifying Marxist orthodoxy that refuses to acknowledge the significance of such shifts of emphasis within the dynamics of contemporary accumulation. We can debate and disagree on this or that but the spirit of our endeavours is similar.

For my part, what I can assert with some certitude, is that the production of universal alienation laid out in the *Grundrisse* and which Marx tentatively brings back into play in volume 3 of *Capital* in his initial exploratory writings on the role of finance capital, is a powerful place to start. Furthermore, this universal alienation is strongly linked to the progress of real subsumption of not only labour processes but many aspects of daily life under the power of capital in its various forms. It is out of the morass of these universal alienations that anti-capitalist movements, as opposed to nihilistic forms of protest and fascistic accommodations, must arise.

¹ I tried to deal with some of this in Harvey (2017).

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Universal Alienation, Formal and Real Subsumption of Society under Capital, Ongoing Primitive Accumulation by Dispossession: Reflections on the Marx@200-Contributions by David Harvey and Michael Hardt/Toni Negri

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Abstract: This contribution presents reflections on the contributions of and the debate between David Harvey and Michael Hardt/Toni Negri that we feature as the opening part of the *tripleC*-special issue “Marx@200: Debating Capitalism & Perspectives for the Future of Radical Theory”. My reflection contextualises the debate by a) discussing the origin and genesis of Marx’s concepts of alienation, formal/real subsumption, and primitive accumulation and b) situating the arguments in earlier works by Harvey, Hardt and Negri. This paper points out differences as well as the strong commonalities between the works of Michael Hardt/Toni Negri and David Harvey. It discusses how the categories of universal alienation, formal/real subsumption of society under capital, original/ongoing primitive accumulation of capital are related. Harvey and Hardt/Negri show that Marx’s theory and politics are alive 200 years after his birth and will haunt capitalism as long as it exists. The paper concludes by arguing that Harvey’s concept of anti-value and the autonomous notion of self-valorisation point towards democratic, commons-based alternatives to capitalism.

Keywords: Karl Marx, bicentenary, 200th birthday, universal alienation, formal subsumption, real subsumption, primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession, anti-value, self-valorisation, David Harvey, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri

1. Introduction

On the occasion of Marx’s bicentenary, *tripleC* publishes a special issue dedicated to the discussion of Marx’s relevance today. It asks how we can ‘repeat’ Marx today. The editors of the special issue invited David Harvey, Michael Hardt and Toni Negri to contribute and to discuss the relevance of Marx with each other. The starting point were the following two questions: 200 years after Marx’s birth, in what type of capitalism do we live today? What elements of Marx’s theory and the 200-year history of Marxian theory can we best draw from in order to advance radical theory, the analysis of capitalism and struggles for alternatives to capitalism today?

In their analysis, Michael Hardt and Toni Negri stress, among other elements, that Marx’s notions of formal and real subsumption can be extended in order to understand contemporary capitalism and inform political praxis. David Harvey finds Marx’s concept of alienation an important intellectual means that can be generalised into the notion of universal alienation for understanding capitalism today and informing social struggles.

The interventions, reflections and mutual comments on each other by Harvey and Hardt/Negri show that Marx is not a “dead dog” but remains very much alive today as his theory informs our struggles in 21st-century capitalism. Marx is a historical, materialist and dialectical thinker. The implication is that with the development of capitalism, also Marxian categories develop based on a dialectic of continuity and change. Harvey,

Hardt and Negri show that in order to critically theorise 21st-century capitalism, it is feasible to simultaneously ground the analysis in Marx's original works and further develop his categories.

It is not the first time that Harvey, Hardt and Negri engage in dialogue. In 2009, David Harvey reviewed Michael Hardt and Toni Negri's book *Commonwealth* in the journal *ArtForum* and Hardt and Negri responded (Harvey, Hardt and Negri 2009). The *tripleC* and *ArtForum* dialogues are not just theoretically inspiring, but also exemplary for constructive, critical debate in radical theory. The tone and style of these debates is respectful, appreciative and constructive, which has enabled clarifying theoretical commonalities and differences. One problem of lots of debates in Marxist theory is the repetition of political sectarianism at the level of theory. To put it bluntly: Marxist theorists often do not see the forest beyond the trees and instead of focusing on the critique of bourgeois, conservative and right-wing theories invest much time and energy into internal theoretical infighting that takes on the form of theoretical Stalinism: Those who should act as comrades and allies in order to collectively challenge bourgeois theory and instrumental research that support domination and the commodification of everything accuse each other of false interpretations of Marx, of not being "Marxists", advancing reactionary politics, of imperialism, racism, fascism, etc. As a consequence, political comrades are treated as enemies in the world of theory. Harvey, Hardt and Negri exemplify a different way of engaging in theoretical discussion. They also show how Marxian categories – such as alienation, formal/real subsumption, and primitive accumulation – matter today.

2. Alienation

Marx develops and uses the term "alienation" in respect to political economy the first time in the essay *The Jewish Question* that he wrote in autumn 1843 and that was published in February 1844: "Money is the estranged essence of man's work and man's existence, and this alien essence dominates him, and he worships it" (Marx 1844b, 172). In his doctoral dissertation, Marx (1841, 64) spoke in the context of Epicurus' philosophy of the "alienation of the essence".

In 1843, in a reading of Hegel in the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, Marx argues that there is also political and ideological alienation: "It is indeed *estrangement* which matters in the so-called Christian state, but not *man*. The only man who counts, the *king*, is a being specifically different from other men, and is moreover a religious being, directly linked with heaven, with God. The relationships which prevail here are still relationships dependent on *faith*" (Marx 1843, 158). "Political emancipation is at the same time the *dissolution* of the old society on which the state alienated from the people, the sovereign power, is based." (Ibid., 165).

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx specifies that capitalism results in the alienation of labour, which means a fourfold form of alienation (Marx 1844a, 276-277): 1) the alienation of humans from nature, 2) from their activities and species-being, 3) from their bodies and mind that form the human essence, 4) from the "product of his [the worker's] labour, from his life activity" (Ibid.) and as a consequence from other humans and society. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx presents economic alienation as the class relation between capital and labour:

"The emphasis comes to be placed not on the state of being objected, but on the state of being alienated, dispossessed, sold [Der Ton wird gelegt nicht auf das *Vergegenständlichkeitsein*, sondern das *Entfremdet-*, Entäußert-

Veräußertsein]; on the condition that the monstrous objective power which social labour itself erected opposite itself as one of its moments belongs not to the worker, but to the personified conditions of production, i.e. to capital" (Marx 1857/58, 831).

In *Capital Volume 1*, Marx argues that capital is an "alien power that dominates and exploits" workers and that in capitalism labour is "separated from its own means of objectification and realization" (Marx 1867, 716). In *Capital Volume 3*, Marx (1894) talks about alienation in chapters 5, 23, 27, 36, and 48. He argues in Chapter 23 that interest means the transfer of alienation from the realm of labour's exploitation into the realm of interest-bearing capital. In Chapter 48, he writes that alienation not just exists in the relationship of capital and labour, but that also rent and interest are expressions of economic alienation.

Taken together, we see that alienation for Marx on the one hand is the particular form of domination and exploitation that shapes the capitalist mode of production, in which labour creates commodities without owning the means of production and without controlling the conditions and the results of production. On the other hand, Marx sees alienation also as the universal form of domination, in which humans are not in control of the structures that affect their everyday lives. All class relations are economic forms of alienation. But alienation extends beyond the economy so that also the state and ideology alienate humans from the conditions of collective political decision-making and cultural meaning-making.

In his essay *Universal Alienation* in the present special issue, David Harvey defines alienation as universal in three respects:

1) Alienation in the economy not just entails capital's exploitation of labour, but also the realms of realisation, distribution and consumption, which means it extends to phenomena such as unemployment, consumerism, land seizure, deindustrialisation, debt peonage, financial scams, unaffordable housing, high food prices, etc.

2) Alienation entails processes beyond the economy, such as frustrations with politics, unaffordable public services, nationalist ideology, racism, police violence, militarism, warfare, alcoholism, suicide, depression, bureaucracy, pollution, gentrification, or climate change.

3) Alienation entails the geographic and social expansion of capital accumulation so that capital relations "dominate pretty much everywhere". "Alienation is everywhere. It exists at work in production, at home in consumption, and it dominates much of politics and daily life".

So, the universalisation of alienation means its extension beyond production, the economy and bounded spaces. Capital and capitalist society overcome and break down their own barriers in order to expand. In *Marx, Capital and the Madness of Economic Reason*, Harvey (2017, 47) argues that "a great deal of appropriation of value through predation occurs at the point of realization", which results in "[a]lienation upon realization" (Ibid., 196).

In all forms of alienation, humans face asymmetric power relations and conditions that hinder their control over certain objects, structures or products (external nature, the means of production, the means of communication, the political system, the cultural system, etc.) so that aspects of their subjectivity are damaged (concerning human activities, well-being, consciousness, mind/psyche, body, worldviews, social relations). Alienation is neither purely objective nor purely subjective, but a negative relationship between social structures and humans in heteronomous societies.

In *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*, David Harvey (2014) devotes Chapter 17 to the topic of “The Revolt of Human Nature: Universal Alienation”. He argues that Marxists have often excluded alienation from consideration and have cancelled it off as “non-scientific concept” (Harvey 2014, 269). But the “scientific stance failed to capture the political imagination of viable alternatives” and “could not even confront the madness of the prevailing economic and political reason” (Ibid., 269). Universal alienation is therefore a concept that in light of the danger that we may face “a less-than-human humanity” (Ibid., 264) can provide prospects for alternatives. Alienation has always been a prominent concept in socialist/Marxist humanism (Fromm 1966; Alderson and Spencer 2017). Radical socialist humanism is the best way of opposing authoritarian capitalism’s and neoliberalism’s anti-humanism (Fuchs 2018).

Consequently, Harvey argues for both the use of the concept of universal alienation and for revolutionary humanism (Harvey 2014, 282-293 [Conclusion]). Humanism argues that “[w]e can through conscious thought and action change both the world we live in and ourselves for the better” and “that measures its achievements in terms of the liberation of human potentialities, capacities and powers” (Ibid.). Harvey notes that humanism has been perverted and turned into a particularism that disguises itself as universalism but advances “imperialist and colonial cultural domination” (Ibid., 285). He therefore argues for a “secular *revolutionary* humanism” that counters “alienation in its many forms and to radically change the world from its capitalist ways” (Ibid., 287). Hardt and Negri (2017, 72-76) argue that there are parallels between autonomist and humanist Marxism: Both take subjectivity, social struggles and social change serious and oppose dogmatic Marxism and Stalinism.

3. Formal and Real Subsumption

In their article *The Powers of the Exploited and the Social Ontology of Praxis* that is part of the present special issue, Michael Hardt and Toni Negri argue that neoliberalism has advanced the formal and real subsumption of society under capital, which means that ever more spaces that were autonomous from capital have come under its influence and control and have been turned into spheres of capital accumulation, commodity production and the exploitation of labour. The commons that are available to all and produced as gift by nature or society have thereby become commodified. The subsumption of society under capital affects “muscles, languages, affects, codes”, “images”, “social intelligence, social relations”, “the cognitive, social, and cooperative components of living labour”, etc.

In the *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63*, Marx introduces the concepts of the formal and real subsumption of labour under capital:

“Historically, in fact, at the start of its formation, we see capital take under its control (subsume under itself) not only the labour process in general but the specific actual labour processes as it finds them available in the existing technology, and in the form in which they have developed on the basis of non-capitalist relations of production. It finds in existence the actual production process – the particular mode of production – and at the beginning it only subsumes it *formally*, without making any changes in its specific technological character. Only in the course of its development does capital not only formally subsume the labour process but transform it, give the very mode of production a new shape and thus first create the mode of production peculiar to it. [...] This *formal* subsumption of the labour process, the assumption of control over it by capital, consists in the worker’s subjection as worker to the supervision and therefore to

the command of capital or the capitalist. Capital becomes command over labour” (MECW 30, 92-93, emphasis in original).

Formal subsumption means that wage-labour relations are imposed on particular forms of labour without transforming the mode of production. Real subsumption in contrast means a qualitative change of the mode of production so that more radical organisational and technological changes take place. Marx speaks of formal and real subsumption as “*two separate forms of capitalist production*” (MECW 34, 95, emphasis in original). Formal and real subsumption for Marx correspond to forms of capitalist production that are based on absolute and relative surplus-value production: “I call the form which rests on absolute surplus value the *formal subsumption of labour under capital*. [...] The real subsumption of labour under capital is developed in all the forms which produce relative, as opposed to absolute, surplus value” (Ibid., 95, 105, emphasis in original).

In real subsumption, science and technology transform the production process qualitatively:

“With the real subsumption of labour under capital, all the CHANGES we have discussed take place in the technological process, the labour process, and at the same time there are changes in the relation of the worker to his own production and to capital – and finally, the development of the productive power of labour takes place, in that the productive forces of social labour are developed, and only at that point does the application of natural forces on a large scale, of science and of machinery, to direct production become possible” (Ibid., 106).

The *Results of the Immediate Process of Production* is a text of 130 printed pages that Marx wrote sometime between June 1863 and December 1866 (Ernest Mandel, in Marx 1867, 944). It is printed as appendix in the Penguin-edition of *Capital Volume 1* (Marx 1867, 948-1084), but is not contained in the German Marx-Engels-Werke (MEW). In the *Results*, Marx again takes up the question of the formal and real subsumption of labour under capital and points out the importance of machinery as method of relative surplus-value production in the real subsumption of labour under capital:

“The general features of the *formal subsumption* remain, viz. the *direct subordination of the labour process to capital*, irrespective of the state of its technological development. But on this foundation there now arises a technologically and otherwise *specific mode of production – capitalist production* – which transforms the nature of the labour process and its actual conditions. Only when that happens do we witness the *real subsumption of labour under capital*. [...] The real subsumption of labour under capital is developed in all the forms evolved by relative, as opposed to absolute surplus-value. With the real subsumption of labour under capital a complete (and constantly repeated) revolution takes place in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers and in the relations between workers and capitalists” (Marx 1867, 1034-1035).

Hardt and Negri have further developed Marx’s notions of formal and real subsumption by extending them from the realm of labour to society as totality and all of society’s moments. In *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, Negri (1991, 121) speaks of “the real subsumption of world society under capital” and says that in the passage from formal to real subsumption, capital becomes “a real subject” (Ibid., 123). In *Labor of Dionysus*, Hardt and Negri (1994) characterise real subsumption as the postmodern

phase of capitalist development:

“Postmodern capitalism should be understood first, or as a first approximation, in terms of what Marx called the phase of the real subsumption of society under capital. In the previous phase (that of the formal subsumption), capital operated a hegemony over social production, but there still remained numerous production processes that originated outside of capital as leftovers from the pre-capitalist era. Capital subsumes these foreign processes formally, bringing them under the reign of capitalist relations. In the phase of the real subsumption, capital no longer has an outside in the sense that these foreign processes of production have disappeared. All productive processes arise within capital itself and thus the production and reproduction of the entire social world take place within capital. The specifically capitalist rules of productive relations and capitalist exploitation that were developed in the factory have now seeped outside the factory walls to permeate and define all social relations – this is the sense in which we insist that contemporary society should now be recognized as a factory-society” (Hardt and Negri 1994, 15).

In *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri argue that formal subsumption means the creation of “circuits of capitalist production” and the passage from formal to real subsumption results in the production of “severe divisions and hierarchies within the capitalist globe” (Hardt and Negri 2009, 230). Real subsumption creates “new, properly capitalist forms”, whereas formal subsumption merely instrumentalises non-capitalist practices and relations (Ibid., 142). In their latest book *Assembly*, Hardt and Negri write that “*the richness of the category of formal subsumption is indeed that it reveals the economic and cultural differences of labor, land, society, and community that have been subsumed within capitalist production but maintain their connection to the territory and the past*” (Hardt and Negri 2017, 182; emphasis in original).

In *Assembly*, Hardt and Negri (2017, xix) argue that we have experienced the rise of what they term “the capitalist extraction of value [...] from the common”. We can say that subsumption has two aspects: It is on the one hand the starting point and enablement of the application of the logic of capital and commodities to a space, system, realm, practice, structure or resource. On the other hand, there can be potential resistance to subsumption – struggles for decommodification and the appropriation of the commons – so that capital needs to reproduce subsumption by means of e.g. law, ideology, corruption, the dull compulsion of the market, or physical violence (including warfare). Contemporary capitalism’s class structure is for Hardt and Negri (2017, 166-171) based on the extraction of the common, which includes the extraction of natural resources; data mining/data extraction; the extraction of the social from the urban spaces on real estate markets; and finance as extractive industry.

Hardt and Negri (Ibid., 166) discern among two main forms of the common: the natural and the social commons. These two types are further subdivided into five forms (Ibid.):

- 1) The earth and its ecosystems;
- 2) The “immaterial” common of ideas, codes, images and cultural products;
- 3) Tangible goods produced by co-operative work;
- 4) Metropolitan and rural spaces that are realms of communication, cultural interaction and co-operation;
- 5) Social institutions and services that organise housing, welfare, health, and education (Ibid.).

In his contribution *Universal Alienation and the Real Subsumption of Daily Life Under Capital: A Response to Hardt and Negri* in the present special issue, David Harvey welcomes Michael Hardt and Toni Negri's interpretation of Marx's concepts of formal and real subsumption and points out parallels to his notion of universal alienation. He stresses that it is important to be "explicit about what it is that is being subsumed into what" and about the "many different forms that real subsumption under the power of capital in general takes in our times".

4. Primitive Accumulation

Marx (1867) dedicated a long chapter of *Capital Volume I* to primitive accumulation – Chapter 24 in the German edition. In the English edition, Chapter 24's seven sub-sections were turned into seven separate chapters (chapters 26-32). Together with the concluding chapter on the modern theory of colonisation, they form part eight that is titled "So-Called Primitive Accumulation".

For Marx, primitive accumulation is the phase that "precedes capitalist accumulation" (1867, 873), "the pre-history of capital" (Ibid., 875), and capitalism's "point of departure" (Ibid., 873), where "conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, play the greatest part" (Ibid., 874). During this phase, resources are transformed into capital and humans into proletarians. Primitive accumulation is "the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production" (Ibid., 875). Marx shows that small landowners have been robbed of their land and how communal land was turned into private property. As a consequence, feudalism turned into capitalism. The history of expropriation "is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire" (Ibid., 875).

In the report (to the Central Council of the International) *Value, Price and Profit*, Marx (1865, 129) argues that primitive accumulation should in fact be called primitive expropriation because it means the separation of the producers from the means of production. "*Separation* between the Man of Labour and the Instruments of Labour once established, such a state of things will maintain itself and reproduce itself upon a constantly increasing scale, until a new and fundamental revolution in the mode of production should again overturn it, and restore the original union in a new historical form" (Ibid.).

Rosa Luxemburg interpreted primitive accumulation not just as the early, violent stage of capitalism, but as an ongoing process. Marx hinted at such an understanding by saying that primitive accumulation has to "maintain itself and reproduce itself" (Marx 1865, 129). "The accumulation of capital, seen as an historical process, employs force as a permanent weapon, not only at its genesis, but further on down to the present day" (Luxemburg 1913, 351). Luxemburg argues that capital creates milieus of primitive accumulation that "provide a fertile soil for capitalism" (Ibid., 397).

David Harvey (2003) has interpreted Luxemburg's concept of ongoing primitive accumulation as accumulation by dispossession, the central feature of neoliberal capitalism. "A general re-evaluation of the continuous role and persistence of the predatory practices of 'primitive' or 'original' accumulation within the long historical geography of capital accumulation is, therefore, very much in order, as several commentators have recently observed. Since it seems peculiar to call an ongoing process 'primitive' or 'original' I shall, in what follows, substitute these terms by the concept of 'accumulation by dispossession'" (Harvey 2003, 144). Methods of accumulation by dispossession include e.g. privatisation, commodification, financialisation, the management and manipulation of crises, and state redistribution (Harvey 2005a, 160-165). Through accu-

mulation by dispossession, “predatory activity has become internalized within capitalism (through, for example, privatization, deindustrialization or the erosion of pension and welfare rights orchestrated largely through the credit system and the deployment of state powers)” (Harvey 2006, xvii). “Capitalism would long ago have ceased to exist had it not engaged in fresh rounds of primitive accumulation, chiefly through the violence of imperialism” (Harvey 2010, 306).

Hardt and Negri in their article *The Powers of the Exploited and the Social Ontology of Praxis* argue that the subsumption of society under capital is the “new primitive accumulation of the socially produced commons by capital”. They write that this process resembles what David Harvey describes as accumulation by dispossession, which he conceives as ongoing primitive accumulation. Subsumption does not necessarily operate only “by brute force” (as in warfare), although physical violence can also be involved. Other methods used can include the law, illegal practices tolerated by the state, corruption, the neoliberal ideology of entrepreneurship, ideologies that create and reproduce capitalist hegemony, financial markets, and other forms of violence.

Hardt and Negri prefer to define primitive accumulation as a phase in capitalist development and to use the term (formal and real) subsumption for what Luxemburg and Harvey characterise as ongoing primitive accumulation. In *Assembly*, they discern among “three broad phases of capital: the phase of so-called primitive accumulation, by which we mean here simply the period in which capital was accumulated primarily through the expropriation and enclosures of the commons in Europe and elsewhere through the various forms of theft that accompanied European conquest and colonization; the phase that stretches from the birth of manufacture through the dominance of large-scale industry over the global economy; and, finally, the contemporary, post-Fordist phase characterized by the realization of the world market and the forms of extraction typical of finance” (Hardt and Negri 2017, 184-185).

As part of the present special issue, Hardt and Negri argue in their essay *The Multiplicities within Capitalist Rule and the Articulation of Struggles* that they prefer to use the concepts of formal/real subsumption over the use of (ongoing primitive) accumulation and universal alienation. They say that the concepts of formal and real subsumption allow to best capture the inner and outer dynamics of capitalism: Formal subsumption subsumes something from the outside into capital, whereas real subsumption qualitatively transforms capital’s inner dynamics. Hardt and Negri write that the concept of subsumption allows the argument that racism and patriarchy are older than capital and relatively autonomous, but have become subsumed under capitalism, creating racial capitalism and patriarchal capitalism so that capitalism, racism and patriarchy have become “intimately intertwined”. Patriarchy and racism are relatively autonomous and therefore only formally subsumed. At the same time, they have transformed capitalist production and so have also become really subsumed under capital. Capitalism as form of exploitation and other forms of domination are identical and different at the same time, they form a dynamic dialectic, a totality with open and overgrasping moments that are mutually producing each other.

The notion of ongoing primitive accumulation – that goes back to Rosa Luxemburg and has, among others, been used by Harvey and Marxist feminists such as the “Bielefeld School of Feminism” (Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, Maria Mies, Claudia von Werlhof) –, can be employed in a manner comparable to Hardt and Negri’s use of the notions of the formal and real subsumption of society under capital (see Fuchs 2016, Chapter 26 for a detailed interpretation of the concept of primitive accumulation based on Marx, Luxemburg, Marxist feminism and Harvey). Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen and Werlhof (1988) argue from a feminist perspective that capitalism requires milieus of

primitive accumulation for its reproduction. Capital cannot exist without making use of unpaid resources stemming from nature, nonwage/unremunerated labour (such as housework), and the periphery. “Women, colonies and nature” are “the main targets of this process of ongoing primitive accumulation” (Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen and Werlhof 1988, 6). They form inner colonies of capitalism. This process corresponds to what Hardt/Negri term formal subsumption of society under capital. In neoliberal capitalism, the inner colonies transform the very nature of capitalist production so that housewifised labour that is “a source of unchecked, unlimited exploitation” emerges (Mies 1986, 16). This process corresponds to what Hardt/Negri term the real subsumption of society under labour: The precarious reality of the houseworker, the unemployed, and the Global South is taken as model for qualitatively transforming capitalism into neoliberal capitalism. Primitive accumulation thereby not just forms inner colonies of capitalism, but also qualitatively transforms wage-labour and capitalism’s core relations. Primitive accumulation and formal/real subsumption are both suited means for the Marxian explanation of the role of domination in capitalism and the relationship of class and domination.

The notion of primitive accumulation in Luxemburg’s meaning of the term helps to grasp capitalism’s “‘inside-outside’ dialectic” (Harvey 2003, 141). Not everything is subsumed under capital accumulation. For hope, resistance and potentials for alternatives to thrive, outside spaces that transcend the logic of capital are important. The potential for the creation of such spaces of hope (Harvey 2000) and resources of hope (Williams 1989) always remain and constitute material foundations of the principle of hope. “Hope is thus ultimately a practical, a militant emotion, it unfurls banners. If confidence emerges from hope as well, then the expectant emotion which has become absolutely positive is present or as good as present, the opposite pole to despair” (Bloch 1986, 112).

Within capitalist society, we find experienced spaces, conceptualised spaces and lived spaces (Harvey 2005b, 105-106) in which hope and struggles for alternatives to capitalism can develop. But capitalism is a totality, which means that everything that exists in contemporary society is related to capital. Capital accumulation implies an imperialistic character: It tries to subsume social relations into its inner dynamic in processes of original primitive accumulation (that can also be termed processes of formal subsumption) in order to create inner colonies of accumulation that are cheap or gratis resources instrumentalised in capital accumulation. Capitalism through crises and destruction also wrecks parts of its inner dynamics, which requires to create new spheres of accumulation and instrumentalisation. At the same time, existing inner milieus also need to be economically, politically and ideologically reproduced in order to hinder resistance and alternatives. Original primitive accumulation is thereby constantly repeated and reproduced as an ongoing process. At certain moments, capitalism’s inner colonies can become models for the qualitative transformation of capitalist production, distribution, circulation and consumption into a new capitalist regime of accumulation. In such cases, spheres of ongoing primitive accumulation and formal subsumption can become models for a new regime of accumulation (corresponding to the real subsumption of society under capital). Social struggles resist original and ongoing primitive accumulation, formal and real subsumption, by trying to create spaces that stand outside the logic and influence of capital.

The capitalist welfare state and the public university are good examples: They are funded out of general taxation and do not follow the logic of capital accumulation. But they create resources that capital requires and subsumes: skilled workers, skilled managers, reproduced labour-power, scientific knowledge and technological innovations

that take on the form of fixed capital, etc. The welfare state and the public university are therefore within capitalism always formally subsumed, at the same time inside and outside of capital. The rise of neoliberal capitalism has brought a qualitative shift: Many public institutions have become directly spheres shaped by the logic of capital. Education, health care and other public services have become commodities, public institutions define profit goals, public service employees have constant pressure to increase efficiency and face the threat of being laid off due to cuts and austerity, etc. The model of precarious life and labour that has shaped the lives of houseworkers, the poor, the unemployed and the Global South for a long time, has become capitalism's regime of accumulation that shapes and qualitatively transforms social relations, including the welfare state and the public university.

Although the theoretical perspectives of Harvey and Hardt/Negri are highly compatible, one can identify certain differences and nuances, for example in respect to the relationship of capital, racism, and patriarchy. Hardt and Negri in the present special issue argue that capitalism, patriarchy, and racism have "equal weight" and are "on equal terms". They form a multiplicity of contradictions with relative autonomy. David Harvey (2014, 8) argues for the existence of a unity within the diversity of such contradictions and therefore says that the contradictions of capital form the "economic engine of capitalism".

"Racialisation and gender discriminations have been around for a very long time and there is no question that the history of capitalism is an intensely racialised and gendered history. [...] Contemporary capitalism plainly feeds of gender discriminations and violence as well as upon the frequent dehumanisation of people of colour. The intersections and interactions between racialisation and capital accumulation are both highly visible and powerfully present. But an examination of these tells me nothing particular about how the economic engine of capital works, even as it identifies one source from where it plainly draws its energy. [...] wars, nationalism, geopolitical struggles, disasters of various kinds all enter into the dynamics of capitalism, along with heavy doses of racism and gender, sexual, religious and ethnic hatreds and discriminations" (Ibid., 7-8).

As an implicit critique of postmodernism – that David Harvey (1990) sees as the ideology corresponding to the flexible regime of capitalist accumulation – Harvey (2014, 10) argues that it is "surely myopic, if not dangerous and ridiculous, to dismiss as 'capitalo-centric' interpretations and theories of how the economic engine of capital accumulation works in relation to the present conjuncture. Without such studies we will likely misread and misinterpret the events that are occurring around us. Erroneous interpretations will almost certainly lead to erroneous politics whose likely outcome will be to deepen rather than to alleviate crises of accumulation and the social misery that derives from them".

The economic and the non-economic are at the same time identical and different: They are all realms of social production, which is the economic moment of the social that binds together all human existence. All social spaces and systems have their relative autonomy from the economy and not just overgrasp into, but also shape the economy. In capitalism, the economic moment takes on the form of the logic of capital accumulation and general commodity production, circulation, distribution and consumption. In capitalism, society's moments are as a consequence at the same time shaped by and shaping the logic of capital and to specific, variable degrees more or less autonomous from it. Capital's imperialist logic aims to subsume as many social relations

as possible directly and indirectly under the logic of capital. Progressive social struggles have concrete goals but can only be emancipatory if they are struggles against capital.

5. Conclusion: Anti-Value Struggles and Self-Valorisation

The contributions by and the discussion between David Harvey and Michael Hardt/Toni Negri in the present special issue show that 200 years after Karl Marx's birth, his theory and politics remain of key importance for critiquing capitalism and envisioning and informing struggles for alternatives. Hardt, Harvey and Negri have consistently shown that Marxian categories, such as capitalism, labour, class, class struggles, etc. remain vital for interpreting and changing contemporary society. In the Marx@200 special issue, they show that this is also true for the categories of alienation and formal/real subsumption.

We can summarise some key results of the present reflection-paper:

- **Alienation as Marx's most universal critical category:** For Marx, alienation is both the specific form of the object-subject dialectic that constitutes capitalism as well as the general process of domination, by which humans are continuously put out of control of the structures that constitute their lives. Alienation is a particular Marxian category as well as the most universal critical category he uses for characterising domination.
- **Three aspects of universal alienation:** David Harvey shows that alienation is universal in three respects: 1) Alienation extends beyond production into the realms of realisation distribution and consumption; 2) it extends beyond the economy into politics, culture, social relations, and subjectivity; 3) it has in neoliberal capitalism been generalised as the commodification of (almost) everything and accumulation by dispossession, which has resulted in far-right phenomena such as Donald Trump (for a detailed analysis of the rise of Trump's political economy and ideology and the associated transformation of capitalism, see Fuchs 2018).
- **The relationship of capital and its outside:** Capitalism has always lived from economically instrumentalising non-capitalist milieus, practices, structures, and social systems. The subsumption of non-capitalist social relations into capitalism again and again also transforms the capitalist modes of production, reproduction, circulation, distribution and consumption. These two processes can be explained both with the help of Marx's notion of primitive accumulation and his notions of formal and real subsumption.
- **Original/ongoing primitive accumulation, formal/real subsumption:** Whereas Hardt/Negri interpret primitive accumulation as the original phase of capitalism, Harvey sees it as an ongoing process of accumulation by dispossession. The distinction between original and ongoing primitive accumulation corresponds to the notions of formal and real subsumption of society under capital.
- **The reproduction of capitalism:** For capitalism to continue to exist, it needs to again and again subsume social relations under capital. Subsumed social relations can subsequently also qualitatively transform capitalism itself. There are certain initial processes that start off specific forms of alienation and accumulation within capitalist society. Formal subsumption and original primitive accumulation (by dispossession) are categories characterising this point of subsumption. But capitalism needs to be reproduced, otherwise it enters a crisis phase and its potential demise. As a consequence, capitalist practices aim at the ongoing reproduction of alienation, primitive accumulation and the subsumption of society under capital. Marx identified

both original and ongoing aspects of alienation, subsumption and primitive accumulation. Capitalism reproduces itself through the dialectic of ongoing and primitive accumulation and the dialectic of formal and real subsumption.

The approaches of Toni Negri/Michael Hardt and David Harvey share the political perspective of a commons-based, participatory-democratic society as alternative to capitalism – democratic commonism. As the means to this end, they propagate radical reformism, the dialectic of reform and revolution, or what Rosa Luxemburg in the conclusion to the Marx@200 special issue (the first English translation of her article titled “Karl Marx”) terms “revolutionary Realpolitik”. The political question is how political praxis can turn the contradictions of capital and value into alternatives to capitalism. These alternatives are not sufficiently characterised as “post-capitalism” because one thereby only names a later stage of society but not its desirable quality as democratic commons-based society.

David Harvey (2017, Chapter 4) distinguishes between anti-value arising from debt and devaluation in crises from “the active anti-value of political resistance to commodification and privatisation” that defines “an active field of anti-capitalist struggle” (Harvey 2017, 76). He argues that such struggles include consumer boycotts and “struggles over realization” (Ibid., 200) for example over telephone bills, credit card fees, etc. (Ibid., 199) and anti-debt struggles as struggles over distribution.

The category of anti-value can both mean *Nicht-Wert* (not-value) and *Gegenwert* (opposition to value). These are two moments of a dialectic of struggle: The opposition to value constitutes struggles that aim at a society based on not-value, i.e. goods and social relations that are defined by their meaningfulness for human use and not by the logic of exchange and capital accumulation.

Marx uses the notion of “not-value” (*Nicht-Wert* in German) in a passage in the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1857/58, 295-297), where he discusses the dialectic of capital as not-labour and labour as not-value and not-capital. Not-value is “purely objective use value” (Ibid., 296). Under capitalism’s dull compulsions, labour is “*absolute poverty*” (Ibid.). But at the same time, work is the “the general possibility of wealth as subject and as activity” (Ibid.) and therefore the source of commodities, capital and value. Not-value is also the determinate negation of capital, commodities and value. Not-value is the revolutionary sublation of capital and capitalism, the moment of political praxis.

David Harvey’s stress on anti-value as moment of political praxis has clear parallels to autonomist Marxism’s notion of self-valorisation. Marxists do not agree on the theoretical question of whether the alternative to value is another form of value or the abolition of value, which relates to the question of whether value is a capitalist or a more general phenomenon. But notwithstanding pure terminology, there are parallels between Harvey’s notion of anti-value and Hardt/Negri’s concept of self-valorisation. Capital “consists solely in its own motion as self-valorizing value” (Marx 1867, 425). Toni Negri opposes capital’s self-referential character by the working class’ potential for self-referential autonomy, in which work does not produce capital and commodities, but an end-in-and-for-itself, i.e. products that satisfy humanity’s need and thereby do not serve class distinctions.

Negri (1991, 148) contrasts the concept of capital’s self-valorisation to worker self-valorisation. Self-valorisation means the “independence of the worker-subject” (Ibid., 135), “non-work” (Ibid., 149). Negri (Ibid., 148) writes that proletarian self-valorisation starts with the refusal of work in capitalism and comes to full effect in communism (Ibid.). Michael Ryan says in the introduction to the English translation of Negri’s (1991) *Marx Beyond Marx* that Negri defines self-valorisation as “working for oneself as a

class, asserting one's own needs as primary to capital's need for value" (Negri 1991, xxx). Harry Cleaver (1992, 129) defines self-valorisation as "a process of valorisation which is autonomous from capitalist valorisation – a self-defining, self-determining process which goes beyond the mere resistance to capitalist valorisation to a positive project of self-constitution" that constitutes a "working class for-itself". "Auto-valorisation and sabotage are the double figure of one and the same object – or, better, they are the two faces of Janus, the gateway to the constitution of the subject" (Negri 1992, 82). In *Assembly*, Hardt and Negri re-affirm self-valorisation as struggle against digital capital(ism): "Exploit yourself, capital tells productive subjectivities, and they respond, we want to valorize ourselves, governing the common that we produce" (Hardt and Negri 2017, 123).

David Harvey (2017, 77) points out the parallels between his concept of anti-value and the autonomist notion of self-valorisation: "The working class (however defined) is the embodiment of anti-value. It is on the basis of this conception of alienated labour that Tronti, Negri and the Italian autonomistas build their theory of labour resistance and class struggle at the point of production. The act of refusal to work is anti-value personified. This class struggle occurs in the hidden abode of production". Harvey stresses in the present special issue (in respect to Hardt and Negri) that "[w]e can debate and disagree on this or that but the spirit of our endeavours is similar". It is only out of the opposition to "nihilistic forms of protest and fascistic accommodations", as Harvey stresses in the present special issue, that "anti-capitalist movements" can arise that create, as Hardt and Negri say at the end of their first contribution to the present publication, a new foundation of production. Only then will real subsumption be reversed so that capital becomes subsumed under society in a process of political sublation of capital that abolishes exploited labour and necessity and establishes the realm of human freedom.

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Marx and Feminism

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Abstract: This contribution focuses on aspects of feminism and gender in Marx's theory. Marx's methodology has given us the tools and the categories enabling us to think together gender and class, feminism and anti-capitalism. However, his contribution is an indirect one because Marx never developed a theory of gender. It is important to include the role of reproductive labour, slave labour, migrant labour, labour in the Global South and the unemployed in the critical analysis of capitalism and its division of labour. Reproductive labour is the largest activity on this planet and a major ground of divisions within the working class. A different Marx was discovered in the 1970s by feminists who turned to his work searching for a theory capable of explaining the roots of women's oppression from a class viewpoint. The result has been a theoretical revolution that has changed both Marxism and Feminism. What was redefined by the realisation of the centrality of women's unpaid labour in the home to the production of the work-force was not domestic work alone but the nature of capitalism itself and the struggle against it. This meant to turn Marx upside down to make his work important for feminism.

Keywords: Karl Marx, 200th birthday, anniversary, feminism, gender

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1. Introduction

Marxism and feminism are two of the most important radical movements of our time. Understanding their relation is crucial for the possibility of overcoming the division that capitalism has created within the global proletariat and for the question of what strategies and what struggles we need to build a more just society.

I will try to assess what is the significance and the importance of Marx's work to contemporary feminist theory and feminist movements and, at the same time, what are its main limits and where we need to go beyond Marx.

My argument here is that Marx has given an important contribution to the development of a feminist perspective and that at the same time feminists have demonstrated the limits of Marx's analysis, in that it is conducted from the viewpoint of a particular sector of workers, the waged industrial workers, the working man, in whose name the First International was formed, while it marginalises the experience of the wage-less of the world, those whose labour fuelled capitalist accumulation but outside of contractual relations. In doing so, it gives us a partial understanding of capitalist relations.

2. The Presence and Absence of Gender Relations in Marx' Work

Marx's contribution to feminism has been an indirect one. It is found in his methodology, his materialist conception of history, his analysis of the capitalist exploitation of

labour. To the feminists like myself convinced that we cannot eliminate gender oppression unless we change society from the bottom up, his methodology has given us the tools, the categories enabling us to think together gender and class, feminism and anti-capitalism.

However, his contribution is an indirect one because Marx never developed a theory of gender. From his earliest writings, we find in his work many pronouncements indicating an understanding of the importance of gender relations and denouncing the oppression of women in capitalist society, especially in the bourgeois family.

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, echoing Fourier, Marx (1844, 296) argued that the man-woman relation is a measure of social progress, it tells us the extent to which and how much “man’s *natural* behaviour has become human”. In *The German Ideology* he speaks of the “slavery latent in the family” (Marx and Engels 1845/46, 33) as the father appropriates the labour of women and children. In his translation of Jaques Peuchet’s essay *On Suicide*, he showed the destructive consequences of bourgeois morality on women’s lives, often leading them to suicide (Marx 1845). In the *Communist Manifesto*, he derides the bourgeois family as built on adultery, and treating women like private property (Marx and Engels 1848). Throughout these writings the target is private property, the fact that the capitalist class sees and treats women as property and uses them for the transmission of private property. In *Capital Vol. 1*, Marx (1867) analyses the capitalist exploitation of women’s labour, but his focus is on women as factory workers.

Few political writers have described as powerfully the brutality of capitalist work outside of slavery as Marx has done in his description of the exploitation of women and children’s labour in the factory system. But despite his eloquence, his account is more descriptive than analytic and is remarkable for its absence of a discussion of the gender issues that it raises.

We are not told, for instance, how the employment of women and children in the factories affected workers’ struggles, what debates it prompted within workers’ organisations or how it affected women’s relations with men, except for some moralistic comments to the effect that factory labour encouraged promiscuous behaviour, degraded women’s “moral character”, and made them neglect their maternal duties. Never are women portrayed as subjects of struggle, as capable of fighting on their own behalf¹. Mostly they appear as victims, although their contemporaries noted their independence, their boisterous behaviour, and their capacity to defend their interests against the factory owners’ attempts to reform their ways.

Marx’s treatment of women’s labour in the factory system is shaped by the belief that capitalism, and in particular large-scale industry, creates the material foundation for a higher type of family and society, and for more egalitarian relations between women and men. He argues in *Capital Volume 1* that modern industry creates a different type of human being, free from personal dependence and not fixed in any particular type of skill, therefore capable of engaging in a broad range of activities and continuous development of human capacities. Industrial work is for Marx a higher form of work, overcoming all specialisation (always stultifying for Marx) giving workers what Alfred Marshall would later call a “general ability” to work.

¹ The only reference to a female factory workers’ struggle is on page 551, where he mentions power-loom weavers going on strike in Wiltshire over the question of time-keeping (Marx 1867, 551).

Thus, while decrying the barbarous conditions of work in the factories, Marx saw women's employment in industrial labour as a positive factor. It liberated them from the patriarchal hold of the father in the cottage industry, created more egalitarian relations, by making them collaborate with men, and exposed them to a higher form of work eliminating all social and biological distinctions.

I make these observations drawing on Marx's scattered pronouncements in *Volume 1*. As in his previous writings, gender issues have a marginal place in *Capital*. In a three-volume text of thousands of pages, only in about a hundred we find any references to family, sexuality, housework, and generally as passing observations.

References to gender are missing where they would be most expected, as in the chapters on the social division of labour or the one on wages. In all of *Capital Volume 1* there are only two references to domestic labour and in footnotes. Even in his analysis of the reproduction of labour-power, in the chapter entitled "Simple Reproduction" (Marx 1867, Chapter 23) there is no mention of women's work.

3. A Partial Understanding of Reproduction

Marx acknowledges that labour-power, our capacity to work, is not a given. Being daily consumed in the work-process, it must be continuously (re)produced, and this (re)production is as essential to the valorisation of capital as "the cleaning of machinery" (Marx 1867, 718), for it is the production of the capitalists' most precious means of production: the worker itself. However, he places its realisation solely within the circuit of commodity production. The workers – Marx imagines – use their wages to buy the necessities of life – and by consuming them they reproduce themselves. In other words, the production of labour-power, the production of the worker, is accomplished through the consumption of commodities produced by waged workers. Thus, "the value of labour-power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of its owner" (Marx 1867, 274) and it is determined by the labour-time necessary for the production of the commodities that the workers consume.

At no point in *Capital* does Marx recognise that the reproduction of labour-power entails women's unpaid domestic work – to prepare food, wash clothes, raise children, make love. On the contrary, he insists on portraying the waged worker as self-reproducing.

Even when considering the needs that the workers must satisfy, he portrays them as self-sufficient commodity-buyers, listing among their necessities for life food, housing, clothing, but awkwardly omitting sex, whether they are obtained in a familial set-up or purchased, suggesting an immaculate male workers' life, with only women being morally tainted by industrial labour (Marx 1867, 275). The prostitute is thus negated as a worker, and relegated to an example of women's degradation, being pictured as belonging to the lowest sediment of the surplus population, the *lumpenproletariat* that in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* he had described as "the refuse of all classes" (Marx 1852, 149).

Even when referring to the generational reproduction of the workforce, Marx makes no mention of women's contribution to it, and rules out the possibility of any autonomous decision-making on their part with regard to procreation, referring to it as the "natural increase of population" (Marx 1867, 788), commenting that "the capitalist may safely leave this to the workers' drives for self-preservation and propagation" (Marx 1867, 718), suggesting that procreation is a natural phenomenon, which contradicts the previously cited comment that female factory workers' neglect of their maternal duties practically amounted to infanticide.

Marx also implies that capitalism does not depend on women's procreative capacity for its self-expansion, given its constant creation of a "surplus population" through its technological revolutions. In reality, capital and the state have been so concerned with population movements that the advent of capitalism marked an extension of the prohibitions against all forms of birth control, in many cases in place even today, and an intensification of the penalties for women tampering with procreation.

Marx also ignored that the most important commodities for the reproduction of labour-power in Europe, those that fuelled the Industrial Revolution – sugar, tea, tobacco, rum, cotton – were produced by slave labour, and that since at least the late 17th century an international division of labour, an international assembly line, had been created that cut the cost of producing the industrial work-force, connecting waged and enslaved workers, in ways prefiguring the present use of immigrant labour, serving to cut the cost of producing the industrial work-force. The plantation system was a key step in the formation of an international division of labour that integrated the work of the slaves into the (re)production of the European industrial workforce, while keeping enslaved and waged workers geographically and socially divided. But there is no analysis of slave labour in *Capital's* discussion of the working day and the accumulation process, only passing references, although the International supported the boycott of cotton during the Civil War.

Why this blindness? Certainly in the case of housework we can see a masculine bias that naturalises reproductive activity and makes it appear, in comparison with industrial labour, as an archaic form soon to be superseded by the progress of industrialisation. In addition, the working class family was all engaged in factory labour and little housework was done in the home. Another possible reason is that Marx was always thinking organisationally and did not see the social forces capable of transforming housework in a revolutionary direction.

4. The Wage Illusion and Its Consequences

But there is something more that is very central to Marx's work. Marx does not see the wageless as central subjects of capital accumulation and anti-capitalist struggle. Paraphrasing Keynes, he was subject to the 'wage illusion' believing that waged industrial work was the key terrain of capital accumulation and the terrain as well where the struggle for human liberation would be fought, whereas other forms of work would be superseded by capitalist development. As I have shown in *Caliban and the Witch* (Federici 2004), his analysis of primitive accumulation concentrated on the formation of wage labour while there was no analysis of the change in the organisation of domestic reproductive activities.

This was to have major consequences for Marxist theory and politics. In his understanding of the working day and the struggle over the working day, Marx ignores that the wage mobilises not only waged workers but unwaged labour as well, that it extracts surplus labour also from the unwaged, which means that the working day is much longer and wider than the one computed on the shop floor. One consequence of Marx's under-theorisation of domestic work is that *his account of capitalist exploitation and his conception of communism ignore the largest activity on this planet and a major ground of divisions within the working class.*

Politically the most problematic consequence of Marx's blindness to the importance of unwaged workers in capitalist accumulation and struggle is that he was not able to fight against the assumption, predominant in the socialist movement, that the interest of the waged industrial worker represented the interest of the entire working class – an assumption that has led many anti-colonial theorists to conclude that Marxism was

irrelevant to their struggle. He did not see how crucial to the containment of the class struggle would be the divisions that the capitalist class was able to construct through the wage relation, and in particular through the differential between waged and unwaged labour along the lines of gender, race, and age. He also could not see that rather than unifying the global proletariat, capitalism's worldwide expansion, through the creation of a colonial, 'underdeveloped' world, would deepen these divisions.

Not last, Marx did not realise that that the work of the inspectors and reformers he so often quoted in *Capital* was not an idle, hypocritical exercise, but was part of a process of reconstitution of the proletarian family – with the introduction of the family wage, the gradual expulsion of women from the factory and the beginning of an investment in the reproduction of the work-force that would go a long way to pacify the working class as well as stimulate a new form of capitalist accumulation.

Through this move, capital was able to dispel the threat of working class insurgency and create a new type of worker: stronger, more disciplined, more resilient, more apt to make the goals of the system his own – indeed the type of worker that would look at the requirements of capitalist production “as self-evident natural laws” (Marx 1867, 899). This was the kind of worker that enabled end-of-the-century British and US capitalism to make a technological and social shift from light to heavy industry, from textile to steel, from exploitation based upon the extension of the working day to one based upon the intensification of exploitation. This is to say that the creation of the working class family and the full-time proletarian housewife were an essential part and condition of the transition from “absolute” to “relative” surplus-value production. In this process, housework itself underwent a process of “real subsumption”, for the first time becoming the object of a specific state initiative binding it more tightly to the need of the labour market and the capitalist discipline of work.

These criticisms are necessary if we are to distinguish what in Marx's works remains crucial and what we need to abandon if we believe that our task – and here we agree with Marx – is to build a society where *production is for life, for the happiness of the community instead of life being functional to production and the private accumulation of wealth.*

5. Feminism, Marxism, and the Question of “Reproduction”

Marx as a proponent of “women's emancipation” through participation in social production mostly understood as industrial labour has inspired generations of socialists. However, a different Marx was discovered in the 1970s by feminists who, in revolt against housework, domesticity and economic dependence on men, turned to his work searching for a theory capable of explaining the roots of women's oppression from a class viewpoint. The result has been a theoretical revolution that has changed both Marxism and Feminism.

This revolution included works such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa's (1975) analysis of domestic work as the key element in the production of labour-power or Selma James' (1975) location of the housewife on a continuum with the “wageless of the world”, who nevertheless have been central to the process of capital accumulation, the redefinition by other activists of the movement of the wage relation as an instrument for the naturalisation of entire areas of exploitation and the creation of new hierarchies within the proletariat. All these theoretical developments and the discussions they have generated have at times been described as the “household debate”, presumably centring on the question whether housework is or is not productive. But this is a gross distortion. What was redefined by the realisation of the centrality of women's unpaid labour in the home to the production of the work-force was not domestic work alone but the nature

of capitalism itself and the struggle against it.

It is not surprising that Marx's discussion of "simple reproduction" was a theoretical illumination in this process, as the confirmation of our suspicion that never would the capitalist class have allowed so much domestic labour to survive if it had not seen the possibility to exploit it. Reading that the activities that reproduce labour power are essential to capitalist accumulation brought out the class dimension of our refusal. It showed that this much despised, always taken for granted labour, always dismissed by socialists as backward, has in reality been the pillar of the capitalist organisation of work. This resolved the vexed question of the relation between gender and class and gave us the tools to conceptualise not only the function of the family, but the depth of the class antagonism at the roots of capitalist society. From a practical viewpoint, it confirmed that, as women, we did not have to join men in the factories to be part of the working class and conduct anti-capitalist struggle. We could struggle autonomously, starting from our own work in the home, as the "nerve centre" of the production of the workforce. And our struggle had to be waged first against the men of our own families, since through the male wage, marriage and the ideology of love, capitalism has empowered men to command our unpaid labour and discipline our time and space.

Ironically, then, our encounter and appropriation of Marx's theory of the reproduction of labour-power, in a way consecrating Marx's importance for feminism, also provided us with the conclusive evidence that we had to turn Marx upside down and begin our analysis and struggle precisely from that part of the "social factory" that he had excluded from his work.

Discovering the centrality of reproductive work for capital accumulation also raised the question of what a history of capitalist development would be like if seen not from the viewpoint of the formation of the waged proletariat but from the viewpoint of the kitchens and bedrooms in which labour-power is daily and generationally produced.

6. Envisioning Different Futures

The need of a gendered perspective on the history of capitalism – beyond "women's history" or the history of waged labour – is what led me, among others, to rethink Marx's account of primitive accumulation and discover the 16th- and 17th-century witch-hunts, as foundational moments in the devaluation of women's labour and the rise of a specifically capitalist sexual division of work.

The simultaneous realisation that, contrary to Marx's anticipation, primitive accumulation has become a permanent process, also puts into question Marx's conception of the necessary relation between capitalism and communism. It invalidates Marx's stage view of history that depicts capitalism as the purgatory we need to inhabit on the way to a world of freedom and that attributes a liberating role to industrialisation. This miscalculation that Marx and generations of Marxist socialists have made is today all too obvious. Today, no one would dare to dream, as August Bebel (1904) did in *Woman Under Socialism*, of the day when food would be all chemically produced and everyone will carry with him a little box of chemicals wherewith to provide his food supply of albumen, fat and carbon hydrates, regardless of the hour of the day or the season of the year.

The rise of eco-feminism which connected Marx's devaluation of women and reproduction with his view that humanity's historic mission is the domination of nature strengthened our stand. Especially important have been the works of Maria Mies (1986) and Ariel Salleh (1997), who have demonstrated that Marx's effacement of reproductive activities is not an accidental element, contingent to the tasks he assigned to *Capital*, but a systemic one. Salleh stresses that everything in Marx establishes that

what is created by man and technology has a higher value. History begins with the first act of production. Human beings realise themselves through work. A measure of their self-realisation is their capacity to dominate nature and adapt it to human needs. And all positive transformative activities are thought in the masculine: Labour is described as the father, nature as the mother, the earth too is seen as feminine – *Madame la Terre*, Marx calls it, against *Monsieur le Capital*.

Eco-feminists have shown that there is a profound connection between the dismissal of housework, the devaluation of nature, and the idealisation of what is produced by human industry and technology.

As industrialisation is eating the earth and scientists at the service of capitalist development are tinkering with the production of life outside of the bodies of women, the idea of extending industrialisation to all our reproductive activities is a nightmare worse than the one we are experiencing with the industrialisation of agriculture.

Not surprisingly, in radical circles we have been witnessing a “paradigm shift”, as hope in the Machine as a driving force of “historical progress” is being displaced by a refocusing of political work on the issues, values, relations attached to the reproduction of our lives and the life of the ecosystems in which we live.

We are told that Marx too in the last years of his life reconsidered his historical perspective and, on reading about the egalitarian, matrilinear communities of the American North East, he began to reconsider his idealisation of capitalist, industrial development and to appreciate the power of women.

Nevertheless, the Promethean view of technological development that Marx and the entire Marxist tradition have promoted, far from losing its attraction, is making a comeback, with digital technology playing for some the same emancipatory role that Marx assigned to automation, so that the world of reproduction and care work – that feminists have valorised as the terrain of transformation and struggle – is risking being again overshadowed by it. This is why, though Marx devoted limited space to gender theories in his work, and presumably changed some of its views in later years, it remains important to discuss them and to stress that his silences on this matter are not oversights, but the sign of a limit his theoretical and political work could not overcome but ours must.

It is important, then, that as we celebrate Marx’s work we refocus our politics on the production of our material life, and the life of the ecosystems in which we live, and draw inspiration for the struggle of the present from the experience of those who have most contributed to its preservation: women as care workers, subsistence farmers and indigenous people, forming now a new International that unfortunately often comes into conflict with those who continue to see their future in participating in the capitalist exploitation of the Earth (like the miners who applauded Trump’s election) or see the task of the struggle as pushing for more capitalist development.

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The Prospects of Radical Change Today

Slavoj Žižek

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Abstract: In this contribution, Slavoj Žižek takes the occasion of Marx's bicentenary for reflecting on the prospects of radical change today. First, it is shown that under Stalinism, Lenin's works were quoted out of context in an arbitrary way in order to legitimise any political measure. Marxism thereby became an ideology that justified brutal subjective interventions. Second, this contribution poses the question of the revolutionary subject and democracy today. It stresses the role of both contingency and strategy in revolutions. In political assemblages taking place on public squares, the inert mass of ordinary people is transubstantiated into a politically engaged united force. The basic political problem today is how to best reconfigure democracy. Third, this contribution analyses the "interesting times" we live in. These are times that feature multiple crises, right-wing populism à la Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen, the lower classes' opposition to immigration, and the refugee crisis. Questions about human rights and their violation and about radical change need to be asked in this context.

Keywords: Karl Marx, bicentenary, radical change, Lenin, democracy, revolutionary subject, capitalism, right-wing populism, refugees, immigration, human rights, Slavoj Žižek

1. Lenin Navigating in Uncharted Territories

In his *State and Revolution*, a kind of preparatory theoretical work for the October Revolution, Lenin (1917) outlined his vision of the workers' state where every kukharka (not simply a cook, especially not a great chef, but more a modest woman-servant in the kitchen of a wealthy family) will have to learn how to rule the state, where everyone, even the highest administrators, will be paid the same worker's wages, where all administrators will be directly elected by their local constituencies which will have the right to recall them at any moment, where there will be no standing army. How this vision turned into its opposite immediately after the October Revolution is the stuff of numerous critical analyses; but what is perhaps much more interesting is the fact that Lenin proposes as the normative ground of this "utopian" vision an almost Habermasian notion of "the elementary rules of social intercourse that have been known for centuries and repeated for thousands of years in all copy-book maxims" (Lenin 1917, 467) – in Communism, this permanent normative base of human intercourse will finally rule in a non-distorted way: only in a Communist society,

"freed from capitalist slavery, from the untold horrors, savagery, absurdities, and infamies of capitalist exploitation, people will gradually become accustomed to observing the elementary rules of social intercourse that have been known for centuries and repeated for thousands of years in all copy-book maxims. They will become accustomed to observing them without force, without coercion, without subordination, without the special apparatus for coercion called the state". (Lenin 1917, 467)

Two pages later, Lenin (1917, 469) again states that “we know that the fundamental social cause of excesses, which consist in the violation of the rules of social intercourse, is the exploitation of the people” – does this mean that revolution is normatively grounded in some kind of universal rules which function as eternal “human nature”? And maybe we find an echo of Lenin’s preoccupation with “elementary rules of social intercourse” even in his critical remarks on Stalin’s brutal manners from the last months of his life. But the reference to human nature is not Lenin’s last word – in another passage of *State and Revolution*, he seems to claim almost the opposite: he surprisingly grounds the (in)famous difference between the lower and higher state of Communism in a different relation to human nature: in the first, lower, stage, we are still dealing with the same “human nature” as in the entire history of exploitation and class struggle, while what will happen in the second, higher, state is that “human nature” itself will be changed:

“We are not utopians, we do not ‘dream’ of dispensing *at once* with all administration, with all subordination. These anarchist dreams [...] serve only to postpone the socialist revolution until human nature has changed. No, we want the socialist revolution with people as they are now, with people who cannot dispense with subordination, control and ‘foremen and accountants’. [...] A beginning can and must be made at once, overnight, to replace the specific ‘bossing’ of state officials by the simple functions of ‘foremen and accountants’, functions which are already fully within the ability of the average town dweller and can well be performed for ‘workmen’s wages’”. (Lenin 1917, 430; 431)

The interesting point here is that the passage from the lower to the higher stage (of Communism) does not primarily rely on the development of productive forces (beyond scarcity) but on the changing human nature. In this sense Chinese Communists (in their most radical moment) were right: there can be a Communism of poverty (if we change human nature) and a Socialism of (relative) prosperity (“goulash Communism”). When the situation is most desperate (as it was in Russia during the civil war of 1918-1920), there is always the millenarian temptation to see in this utter misery a unique chance to directly pass to Communism; Platonov’s (1978) *Chevengur* has to be read against this background... Lenin thus seems to oscillate between a Habermasian reference to eternal natural rules of social exchange and a change in human nature itself, the rising of a New Man – in what are Lenin’s oscillations and tensions grounded?

Let us turn to Jean-Claude Milner’s perspicuous analysis of the imbroglios of modern European revolutions which culminated in Stalinism. Milner’s starting point is the radical gap that separates exactitude (factual truth, accuracy about facts) and Truth (the Cause to which we are committed):

“When one admits the radical difference between exactitude and truth, only one ethical maxim remains: never oppose the two. Never make of the inexact the privileged means of the effects of truth. Never transform these effects into by-products of the lie. Never make the real into an instrument of the conquest of reality. And I would allow myself to add: never make revolution into the lever of an absolute power” (Milner 2016a, 246).

To justify this claim to absolute power, the role of proverbs is significant in the Communist tradition, from Mao’s “revolution is not a dinner party” to the legendary Stalinist

“You cannot make an omelette without breaking the eggs”. The preferred saying among the Yugoslav Communists was a more obscene one: “You cannot sleep with a girl without leaving some traces”. But the point made is always the same: endorsing brutality with no constraints. For those for whom God (in the guise of the big Other of History whose instruments they are) exists, everything is permitted... However, theological reference can also function in the opposite way: not in the fundamentalist sense of directly legitimizing political measures as the imposition of the divine will whose instruments are revolutionaries but in the sense that the theological dimension serves as a kind of safety valve, a mark of the openness and uncertainty of the situation which prevents the political agents to conceive of their acts in the terms of self-transparency – “god” means we should always bear in mind that the outcome of our acts will never fit our expectations. This “mind the gap” does not only refer to the complexity of the situation into which we intervene; it concerns above all the utter ambiguity of the exercise of our own will.

Was this short-circuit between truth and exactitude not Stalin’s basic axiom (which, of course, had to remain unspoken)? Truth is not only allowed to ignore exactitude, it is allowed to refashion it arbitrarily.

At a certain level, Stalin’s break with Lenin was purely discursive, violently imposing a radically different subjective economy. The gap between general principles (“historical laws”) regulating reality and pragmatic improvised decisions still palpable in Lenin is simply disavowed, and the two extremes directly coincide: on the one hand, we get total pragmatic opportunism; on the other hand, this pragmatic opportunism is legitimized by a new Marxist orthodoxy which proposes a general ontology. What this means is that Lenin himself was not a “Leninist”: “Leninism” is a retroactive construction of Stalinist discourse. The key to Leninism as (Stalinist) ideology is provided by Mikhail Suslov, the member of the Politburo responsible for ideology from late Stalin’s years to Gorbachev. Alexei Yurchak (2017) pointed out how neither Khrushchev nor Brezhnev would release any document until Suslov looked it over – why?

“[I]n 1990, Fyodor Burlatsky, a former advisor to Khrushchev and Andropov, described a technique that Suslov used to manipulate Lenin’s words. Suslov, who occupied the position of the Politburo’s head of ideology, had an enormous library of Lenin’s quotes in his Kremlin office. They were written on library cards, organized by themes, and contained in wooden file cabinets. Every time a new political campaign, economic measure, or international policy was introduced, Suslov found an appropriate quote from Lenin to support it. Once in the early 1960s, young Burlatsky showed Suslov a draft of a speech he prepared for Khrushchev. Having carefully studied the text, Suslov pointed to one place and said: ‘It would be good to illustrate this idea with a quote from Vladimir Il’ich [Lenin].’ When Burlatsky replied that he would find an appropriate quote, Suslov interrupted: ‘No, I will do this myself.’ Burlatsky writes: ‘Suslov dashed to the corner of his office, pulled out one drawer and put it on the table. With his long, thin fingers he started very rapidly flipping through the cards. He pulled out one and read it. No, that’s not it. Then he pulled out another one. No, still not right. Finally he took another card out and exclaimed with satisfaction, »Ok, this one will do.«’. (Burlatsky 1990, 182)

Lenin’s quotes in Suslov’s collection were isolated from their original contexts. Because Lenin was an extremely prolific writer who commented on all sorts of historical situations and political developments, Suslov could find appropriate quotes to legitimate as ‘Leninist’ almost any argument and initiative, sometimes

even if they opposed each other. Another writer remembered that ‘the very same quotes from the founders of Marxism-Leninism that Suslov successfully used under Stalin and for which Stalin so highly valued him, Suslov later employed to critique Stalin’ (Tel’man 2011)” (Yurchak 2017, 173).

This was the truth of Soviet Leninism: Lenin served as the ultimate reference, a quote from his legitimized any political, economic, cultural measure, but in a totally pragmatic and arbitrary way (incidentally, exactly in the same way that the Catholic Church referred to the Bible). One should also raise the question to what extent Lenin himself sometimes referred to Marx in a similar way. In other words, the reference to Lenin posed no boundaries whatsoever: any political measure was acceptable if legitimized by a quote from Lenin. Marxism thus becomes a “world-view” allowing us the access to objective reality and its laws, and this operation brings a new false sense of security: our acts are “ontologically” covered, part of “objective reality” regulated by laws known to us, Communists. However, the price paid for this ontological security is terrible: exactitude (in the sense of truth about facts) to which Lenin was still committed disappears, facts can be voluntarily manipulated and retroactively changed, events and persons become non-events and non-persons. In other words, in Stalinism the Real of politics, brutal subjective interventions which violate the texture of reality, returns with a vengeance, although in the form of its opposite, of the respect for objective knowledge.¹

Following the Stalinist turn, Communist revolutions were grounded in a clear vision of historical reality (“scientific socialism”), its laws and tendencies, so that, in spite of all its unpredictable turn, the revolution was fully located into this process of historical reality – as they liked to say: Socialism should be built in each country according to its particular conditions, but in accordance with general laws of history. In theory, revolution was thus deprived of the dimension of subjectivity proper, of radical cuts of the real into the texture of “objective reality” – in clear contrast to the French Revolution whose most radical figures perceived it as an open process lacking any support in a higher Necessity. Saint-Just wrote in 1794: “Ceux qui font des révolutions ressemblent au premier navigateur instruit par son audace. / Those who make revolutions resemble a first navigator, who has audacity alone as a guide” (de Saint-Just 2004/1794, 695).

Today, even more than in Lenin’s time, we navigate in uncharted territories, where there is no global cognitive mapping. But what if this lack of clear cognitive mapping is what gives us hope that there is a way to avoid totalitarian closure (see Milner 2016b)?

2. Elections, Popular Pressure, Inertia

Yanis Varoufakis opens up his *Adults in the Room* with a report on how, on 16 April 2015, in a dark corner of a DC hotel bar, Larry Summers told him: “‘Yanis, you made a big mistake.’ Faking steeliness, I replied, ‘And what mistake was that, Larry?’ ‘You won the election!’ came his answer” (Varoufakis 2017, 6).

In what precise sense was the electoral victory of Syriza a mistake? In accepting the electoral game, in winning at the wrong moment or...? The second round of the

¹ Suslov’s manipulative approach strangely echoes one of the basic features of Stalin which enabled his rise to power: in the early years of his political activity, till around 1922, Stalin effectively acted as a kind of factotum of the Bolshevik party, doing (also) small bureaucratic jobs which were beneath the interest of other big Bolshevik leaders providing flats for them, etc.). Later, with his full rise to power, he gradually became more totem than fact, as they say...

French presidential elections in May 2017 confronted us even more strongly with this old dilemma of the radical Left: vote or not (in the parliamentary elections)? The miserable choice le Pen / Macron exposed us to the temptation of ceasing to vote altogether, of refusing to participate in this more and more meaningless ritual. To make a decision in such situations is full of ambiguities.

The argumentation against voting subtly (or openly) oscillates between two versions, the “soft” one and the “strong” one. The “soft” version specifically targets the multiparty democracy in capitalist countries, with two main arguments: (1) media controlled by the ruling class manipulate the majority of voters and do not allow them to make rational decisions in their interest; (2) elections are a ritual that occurs every four years and its main function is to passivise voters in the long periods between the two elections. The ideal that underlies this critique is that of a non-representative “direct” democracy with continuous direct participation of the majority.

The “strong” version makes a crucial step forward and relies (explicitly or not) on a profound distrust of the majority of people: the long history of universal suffrage in the West shows that the vast majority is as a rule passive, caught in the inertia of survival, not ready to be mobilised for a Cause. That’s why every radical movement is always constrained to a vanguard minority, and in order for it to gain hegemony, it has to wait patiently for a crisis (usually war) which provides a narrow window of opportunity. In such moments, an authentic vanguard can seize the day, mobilise the people (even if not the actual majority) and take over. Communists were here always utterly “non-dogmatic,” ready to be parasitic on another issue: land and peace (Russia), national liberation and unity against corruption (China)... They have always been well aware that mobilisation will be soon over, and have been carefully preparing the power apparatus to keep them in power at that moment (In contrast to the October Revolution that explicitly treated peasants as secondary allies, the Chinese revolution didn’t even pretend to be proletarian: it directly addressed farmers as its base).

The big (defining) problem of Western Marxism was the one of the lacking revolutionary subject: how is it that the working class does not complete the passage from in-itself to for-itself and constitute itself as a revolutionary agent? This problem provided the main *raison d’être* of its reference to psychoanalysis, which was evoked precisely to explain the unconscious libidinal mechanisms that prevent the rise of class consciousness inscribed into the very being (social situation) of the working class. In this way, the truth of the Marxist socio-economic analysis was saved and there was no reason to give ground to the “revisionist” theories about the rise of the middle classes, etc. For this same reason, Western Marxism was also in a constant search for other social agents who could play the role of the revolutionary agent, as the under-study replacing the indisposed working class: Third World peasants, students and intellectuals, the excluded... up to the refugees.

The failure of the working class as the revolutionary subject lies already in the very core of the Bolshevik revolution: Lenin’s art was to detect the “rage potential” of the disappointed peasants. The October Revolution won due to the slogan “land and peace” that was addressed to the vast peasant majority and helped seizing the short moment of their radical dissatisfaction. Lenin had been thinking along these lines already a decade earlier, which is why he was horrified at the prospect of the success of the Stolypin land reforms that aimed at creating a new strong class of independent farmers. He wrote that if Stolypin succeeded, the chance for a revolution would be lost for decades. All successful socialist revolutions, from Cuba to Yugoslavia, followed this model of seizing the opportunity in an extreme critical situation, co-opting the national-liberation or other “rage capitals”. Of course, a partisan of the logic of hegemony would

here point out that this is the very “normal” logic of revolution, that the “critical mass” is reached precisely and only through a series of equivalences among multiple demands that is always radically contingent and dependent on a specific, unique, even set of circumstances.

A revolution never occurs when all antagonisms collapse into the big One, but when they synergetically combine their power... But the problem is more complex: the point is not just that revolution no longer rides the train of History, following its Laws, since there is no History, since history is a contingent open process; the problem is a different one: it is as if there IS a Law of History, a more or less clear predominant main line of historical development, and that revolution can only occur in its interstices, “against the current”. Revolutionaries have to wait patiently for the (usually very brief) period of time when the system openly malfunctions or collapses, seize the window of opportunity, grab the power which at that moment as it were lies on the street, is up for grabs, and then fortify its hold on power, building repressive apparatuses, etc., so that, once the moment of confusion is over, the majority gets sober and is disappointed by the new regime, it is too late to get rid of it, and the revolutionaries have become firmly entrenched... Not only this, but Communists also have always carefully calculating the right moment to stop popular mobilisation.

Let’s take the case of the Chinese Cultural Revolution that undoubtedly contained elements of an enacted utopia. At its very end, before the agitation was blocked by Mao himself (since he already achieved his goal of re-establishing his full power and getting rid of the top nomenklatura competition), there was the “Shanghai Commune”: one million workers who simply took the official slogans seriously, demanding the abolition of the State and even the Party itself, and the direct communal organisation of society. It is significant that it was at this very point that Mao ordered the army to intervene and to restore order. The paradox is that of a leader who triggers an uncontrolled upheaval, while trying to exert full personal power – the overlapping of extreme dictatorship and extreme emancipation of the masses.

The most visible aspect of “popular presence” is thus the assemblage (in the sense of gathering of large groups in central public spaces, like the hundreds of thousands of Egyptians on Tahrir Square who forced Mubarak to resign). And an important open question is: How does cyberspace presence/pressure operate? What are its potentials? Popular presence is precisely what the term says – presence as opposed to representation, a direct pressure directed at representative organs of power; it is what defines populism in all its guises, and (as a rule, although not always) it has to rely on a charismatic leader. Examples abound: the crowd outside the Louisiana Congress that supported Huey Long and assured his victory in a key vote, crowds exerting pressure on behalf of Milošević in Serbia, crowds persisting for days in Tahrir Square during the Arab Spring or in Istanbul during protests against Erdoğan, etc.

In such a popular presence, “people themselves” make palpable their force beyond representation, but this direct presence is simultaneously people’s radical self-alienation or, rather, transubstantiation in another mode of being. In a short poem written apropos the GDR workers’ uprising in 1953, Brecht quotes a contemporary party functionary as saying that the people have lost the trust of the government: “Would it not be easier”, Brecht slyly asks, to “dissolve the people and elect another?” (Brecht 1953). Instead of reading this poem as a case of Brecht’s irony, one should take it seriously: yes, in a situation of popular mobilisation, the “people” is in a way replaced, transubstantiated – the inert mass of ordinary people is transubstantiated into a politically engaged united force.

One should always bear in mind that the people's permanent presence equals a permanent state of exception. So what happens when people get tired, when they are no longer able to sustain the tension? Communists in power had two solutions (or, rather, two sides of one and the same solution): the party reign over the passive population and a fake popular mobilisation. Trotsky himself, the theorist of the permanent revolution, was well aware that people "cannot live for years in an uninterrupted state of high tension and intense activity" (Mandel 1995, 81), and he turned this fact into an argument for the need of the vanguard party: the self-organisation in councils cannot take over the role of the party which should run things when the people get tired. And, to amuse the people and to maintain appearances, an occasional big spectacle of pseudo-mobilisation can be of some use, from Stalinist parades up to today's North Korea. In capitalist countries there is, of course, another way to dispel popular pressure: (more or less) free elections – recently in Egypt and Turkey, but it worked also in 1968 in France. One should never forget that the agent of popular pressure is always a minority – even Occupy Wall Street was, with regard to its active participants, much closer to 1% than to 99% from its big slogan.

Should we then just ignore elections? Whatever (secret) elections are, they measure something in a purely numeric way – the percentage of the population which stands behind the main publicly presented political options. That's why Communists in power unconditionally have to stick to the form of free secret elections even if the outcome is a totally predictable 90% or more of votes (after 2 years of their reign, even the Khmer Rouge performed this ritual), or, even more, to the form of multi-party democracy, as in Poland and the GDR. And how many people are aware that even China is today a multi-party democracy with seats allotted to other "patriotic" forces apart from the Communist Party? Plus are some kind of elections not necessary to form the leading body of the ruling party itself? This was the great problem already in early Bolshevism: is it possible to have an inner-party democracy without some kind of democracy in the society outside the party? So how to keep the space open for an authentic feedback from the people outside the party circle? The problem was never that the Party nomenklatura didn't know what the people really thought – through their secret services they were always all too well informed about it.

The Chinese model is here the most consistent one: members of the de facto ruling body (7 members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China) are elected at a Party congress every 8 years or so, and there is no debate – at the end of the congress, they are simply presented as a mysterious revelation; the selection procedure involves complex and totally opaque behind-the-screen negotiations, so that the assembled delegates who unanimously approve the list learn about it only when they vote. We are not dealing here with some kind of secondary "democratic deficit": this impenetrability is structurally necessary (within an authoritarian system, the only alternatives are a de facto monarchy as in North Korea or the traditional Communist model of a leader who simply stops ruling when he dies).

The basic problem is thus: how to move beyond multi-party democracy without falling into the trap of direct democracy? In other words: how to invent a different mode of passivity of the majority? How to cope with the unavoidable alienation of political life? This alienation has to be taken at its strongest, as the excess constitutive of the functioning of an actual power, overlooked by liberalism as well as by Leftist proponents of direct democracy. Recall the traditional liberal notion of representative power: citizens transfer (part of) their power onto the state, but under precise conditions: this power is constrained by law, limited to very precise conditions of its exercise, since the people remain the ultimate source of sovereignty and can repeal power if they decide so. In

short, the state with its power is the minor partner in a contract which the major partner (the people) can at any point repeal or change, basically in the same way each of us can change the contractor which takes care of our waste or health... However, the moment one takes a close look at an actual state power edifice, one can easily detect an implicit but unmistakable signal: “Forget about our limitations – ultimately, we can do whatever we want with you!” This excess is not a contingent supplement spoiling the purity of power but its necessary constituent – without it, without the threat of arbitrary omnipotence, state power is not a true power, it loses its authority.

The way to undermine the spell of power is thus not to succumb to the fantasy of a transparent power; one should rather hollow out the power edifice from within by way of performing the separation between the form of power edifice and its agent (the bearer of power). As it was developed decades ago by Claude Lefort (1981), therein resides the core of the “democratic invention”: in the empty place of power, i.e., the constitutive gap between the place of power and the contingent agents who, for a limited period, can occupy that place. Paradoxically, the underlying premise of democracy is thus not only that there is no political agent which has a “natural” right to power, but, much more radically, that “the people” themselves, the ultimate source of the sovereign power in democracy, doesn’t exist as a substantial entity. In the Kantian way, the democratic notion of “the people” is a negative concept, a concept whose function is merely to designate a certain limit: it prohibits any determinate agent to rule with full sovereignty (The only moment when “the people exists” are the democratic elections, which are precisely the moments of the disintegration of the entire social edifice – in elections, the “people” are reduced to a mechanical collection of individuals). The claim that the people does exist is the basic axiom of “totalitarianism”. And the mistake of “totalitarianism” is strictly homologous to the Kantian misuse (“paralogism”) of political reason: “the People exists” through a determinate political agent which acts as if it directly embodies (not only re-presents) the People, its true Will (the totalitarian Party and its Leader), i.e., in the terms of transcendental critique, as a direct phenomenal embodiment of the noumenal People...

Critics of representative democracy endlessly vary the motif of how, for a priori formal reasons and not just on account of accidental distortions, multiparty elections betray true democracy. But while accepting this critical point, one should not only accept it as the price to be paid for any actually functioning democracy. One should even add that it is because of such a minimal “alienation” signalled by the term “representative” that a democracy functions. That is to say, what this “alienation” points towards is the “performative” character of the (democratic) choice: in such a choice, people do not vote for what (they in advance know that) they want – it is through such a choice that they realise/discover what they want. A true leader does not just follow the wishes of the majority; s/he makes the people aware of what they want.

This is why democracy retains its meaning even if the choice given is the one between very similar programmes – precisely such an empty choice makes it clear that there is no predestined bearer of power. The logical implication of this premise is Kojin Karatani’s (2003) idea of combining elections with lottery in the procedure of determining who will rule us. This idea is more traditional than it may appear (he himself mentions Ancient Greece) – paradoxically, it fulfils the same task as Hegel’s theory of monarchy. Karatani takes here a heroic risk at proposing a crazy-sounding definition of the difference between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of the proletariat: “If universal suffrage by secret ballot, namely, parliamentary democracy, is the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, the introduction of lottery should be deemed the dictatorship of the proletariat” (Karatani 2003, 183). Wasn’t this also the underlying idea of

Lenin (1917) when, in his *State and Revolution*, he outlined his vision of the workers' state where every kukharka (not simply a cook, especially not a great chef, but more a modest woman-servant in the kitchen of a wealthy family) will have to learn how to rule the state? From (electoral) democracy to lotocracy...

Does this mean that expertise doesn't matter? No, since another separation enters the frame here: the separation between S_1 and S_2 , between Master-Signifier and expert-knowledge. The Master (people through voting) decide, make the choice, but the experts suggest to them what to choose – people want the appearance of choice, not real choice-making. This is how our democracies function – with our consent: we act as if we are free and freely deciding, silently not only accepting but even demanding that an invisible injunction (inscribed into the very form of our free speech) tells us what to do and think. As Marx knew long ago, the secret is in the form itself. In this sense, in a democracy, every ordinary citizen effectively is a king – but a king in a constitutional democracy, a king who only formally decides, whose function is to sign measures proposed by executive administration. This is why the problem of democratic rituals is homologous to the big problem of constitutional democracy: how to protect the dignity of the king? How to maintain the appearance that the king effectively decides, when we all know this is not true? What we call “crisis of democracy” does not occur when people stop believing in their own power, but, on the contrary, when they stop trusting the elites, those who are supposed to know for them and provide the guidelines, when they experience the anxiety signalling that “the (true) throne is empty”, that the decision is now really theirs. There is thus in “free elections” always a minimal aspect of politeness: those in power politely pretend that they do not really hold power, and ask us to freely decide if we want to give them power – in a way which mirrors the logic of a gesture meant to be refused.

But how is this different from “totalitarian” Communism where voters are also compelled to go through the empty ritual of freely choosing (voting for) what is imposed on them? The obvious answer is that in democratic elections there is a minimal free choice, a choice that minimally matters. But a more important difference is that in “totalitarian” Communism the gap between Master-Signifier and expert knowledge disappears – how? The distance between Lenin and Stalin concerns precisely this point. So where do we stand today with regard to this dilemma?

3. Welcome to the Boredom of Interesting Times!

There is an old Chinese curse (about which nobody in China knows anything, so it's probably a Western invention) which says: “May you live in interesting times!” – interesting times are the times of troubles, confusion and suffering. What makes our time “interesting” is that the basic premise of classical Marxism (the premise which grounds its request for the “unity of theory and practice”) is losing its pertinence. According to this premise, by its objective social position – that of the “part of no-part” (Rancière) of the social edifice, the point of its “symptomal torsion” (Badiou) –, the working class is pushed towards the correct insight into the state of society (its basic antagonism) and, simultaneously, towards the action to be taken to set it straight (the revolutionary transformation).

Does this still hold today? Does the rise of the populist fury and rage not bear witness to an irreducible break in the “unity of theory and practice”? It is as if the “objective” social position of those exploited and marginalised no longer pushes them towards a clear “cognitive mapping” of their predicament, which would engage them in a universal emancipatory struggle, but rather expresses itself in frustrated and occasionally violent impotence that betrays their loss of basic orientation. So, instead of a united

front, local lower classes fear immigrants who take refuge in fundamentalism while the trade-unions fight for the welfare of those whom they represent, more against other parts of the working class than against the capital – can one imagine their united front? The projected unity is necessarily and continuously undermined by the counter-force that is immanent to the ongoing process of class struggle: the conflict between local lower classes and immigrants (or between feminist struggle and workers struggle) is not an externally imposed abomination caused by the manipulations of the enemy propaganda but the form of appearance of the same class struggle. Local workers perceive immigrants as the stooges of the big capital brought into their country to undermine their strength and to compete with them since their wages are lower. Immigrants see local workers, even if they are poor, as part and parcel of the Western order that marginalises. No easy preaching about how they are actually on the same side can be effective in such a situation where competition is real.

Therein resides the fatal limitation of the attempts to counter the rise of Rightist populism with Leftist populism, a populism that would listen to the real concerns of ordinary people instead of trying to impose on them some high theoretical vision of their historical task: the fears, hopes, and problems “real people” experience in their “real lives” always appear to them as moments of a certain ideological vision. As already Althusser knew, ideology is not a conceptual frame externally imposed on the wealth of reality, it is our experience of reality itself. In order to break out of ideology, it is not enough to get rid of the distorting ideological lenses – hard theoretical work is needed.

One of the most visible effects of the new backlash of racism caused by these ambiguities is the mobilisation of the obscene underside of ideology. When the black conservative Ben Carson was competing to become Republican presidential candidate, he presented his life-story as progress from a juvenile delinquent to a moral Christian. However, when journalists probed into his past, they were surprised to discover that he never had been a delinquent: he was all the time a modest well-behaved boy. But now comes the true surprise: in response to this discovery, Carson’s propagandists insisted that Carson effectively WAS a delinquent in his youth. Why this weird insistence? Wouldn’t it be better for Carson to appear in the eyes of his supporters (mostly white Christian conservatives) as a good boy from the beginning? No: his delinquent past perfectly fitted his image, that of the usual black boy caught in crime and other vices who found strength in hard work, discipline, and Christianity. This is what his supporters wanted to see: not simply a good black boy (as such, he would have to be recognised as one of us, fully equal to us), but somebody who first fully enjoyed being black in its transgressive aspects (sins of “lower” races always fascinated white conservatives, they were clearly an object of ambiguous envy), and then found strength to castigate his black wildness and become a moral Christian like us... Recall that Carson also claimed that slavery, deplorable as it was, helped blacks to discover and accept Christianity: the role of Christianity in this story was precisely to civilise the savage blacks by way of integrating them into white culture.

It is only against this background that we can understand how Donald Trump, a lewd and destitute person, the very opposite of Christian decency, can function as the chosen hero of the Christian conservatives. The explanation one usually hears is that, while Christian conservatives are well aware of the problematic character of Trump’s personality, they have chosen to ignore this side of things since what really matters to them is Trump’s political agenda, especially his anti-abortion stance. His success in making Neil Gorsuch a member of the Supreme Court could result in the overturning *Roe vs. Wade*, which would for Christian conservatives obliterate all his sins... But are

things as simple as that? What if the very duality of Trump's personality – his high moral stance accompanied by personal lewdness and vulgarities – is what makes him attractive to Christian conservatives? What if they secretly identify with this very duality? Exactly the same goes for Poland's current de facto ruler Jarosław Kaczyński who, in a 1997 interview for *Gazeta Wyborcza*, inelegantly exclaimed, "It's our fucking turn" (Teraz kurwa my). This phrase (which then became a classic locus in Polish politics) can be vaguely translated as "It's our fucking time, now we are in power, it's our term", but its literal meaning is more vulgar, something like "now it's our time to fuck the whore" (after waiting in line in a brothel) (see Sierakowski 2017). It's important that this phrase was publicly uttered by a devout Catholic conservative, protector of Christian morality: it's the hidden obverse which effectively sustains Catholic "moral" politics.

The Communist side is also not far behind in similar vulgarities. For example, in his speech at the Lushan party conference in July 1959, when the first reports made it clear what a fiasco the Great Leap Forward was, Mao called the party cadre to assume their part of responsibility, and he concluded the speech with admitting that his own responsibility, especially for the unfortunate campaign to make steel in every village, is the greatest – here are the last lines of the speech:

"The chaos caused was on a grand scale and I take responsibility. Comrades, you must all analyze your own responsibility. If you have to shit, shit! If you have to fart, fart! You will feel much better for it." (Mao 1959)

Why this vulgar metaphor? In what sense can the self-critical admission of one's responsibility for serious mistakes be compared to the need to shit and fart? I presume the solution is that, for Mao, to take responsibility does not mean so much an expression of remorse which may even push me to offer to step down; it's more that, by doing it, you get rid of responsibility, so that no wonder you "feel much better for it" like after a good shit – you don't admit you are shit, you get rid of the shit in you... this is what the Stalinist "self-criticism" effectively amounts to.

The important lesson here is that this coming-open of the obscene background of our ideological space (to put it somewhat simply: the fact that we can now more and more openly make – racist, sexist... – statements which, till recently, belonged to private space) in no way means that the time of mystification is over, that now ideology openly displays its cards. On the contrary, when obscenity penetrates the scene itself, ideological mystification is at its strongest: the true political, economic and ideological stakes are more invisible than ever. In short, the public obscenity is always sustained by a concealed moralism, its practitioners secretly believe they are fighting for a cause, and it is at this level that they should be attacked.

The problem is not that Trump is a clown. The problem is that there is a programme behind his provocations, a method in his madness. Trump's (and others') vulgar obscenities are part of their populist strategy to sell this programme to ordinary people, a programme which (in the long term, at least) works against ordinary people: lower taxes for the rich, less healthcare and workers' protection, etc. Unfortunately, people are ready to swallow many things if they are presented to them through laughter.

On May 18 2017 I had a conversation with Will Self at Emmanuel Centre in London (Žižek and Self 2017). Its most memorable moment (for me, at least) occurred when Self – while broadly agreeing with me that, if things will go on the way they do now, our societies are doomed, and an unthinkable catastrophe lies ahead – reproached me for still counting on some big "revolutionary" act that will turn the (global) tide and prevent this sliding towards catastrophe. His main reason was that, with our way of life, we are

so deeply immersed into the process of (not only ecological) self-destruction that no awareness of what we are doing can stop us doing it. Self then asked the public how many of them have smart phones, reminding them that each phone needs coltan, a precious metal from Congo where it is mined by de facto slave labour in a way detrimental to the environment. So what can we do, after we admit we are all co-responsible and unable to actively intervene? Self's answer: nothing big, just pay taxes (to enable the state to maintain minimal order of law and welfare) and enjoy your isolated life, yanking... My reply (which I failed to articulate properly there) is that such a cynical-hedonist stance fits perfectly those in power, that it is ideology at its purest: any collective counter-act is in advance devalued ("Who are you to protest? Are you not also using coltan? So what right do you have to put the blame on big corporations?"), so all we can do is remain private citizens who masochistically enjoy their guilt and withdraw in private pleasures...

The latest Italian electoral results as well as the difficulty of forming a new coalition in Germany merely confirm the disappearance of the modest Social-Democratic Left and the rise of the new populism as the only (fake) alternative to global capitalism. This state of things does not mean that we are lost. It rather points in the direction of the lines from Joel 3:14 – "Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision." – that provide the first accurate description of the moment when a society is at a crossroads, confronted with a choice that may decide its fate.

This is the situation of Europe today. Every anti-immigrant populist would fully agree with this claim: yes, Europe's very identity is threatened by the invasion of Muslim and other refugee multitudes. But the actual situation is exactly the opposite: it is today's anti-immigrant populists who are the true threat to the emancipatory core of the European Enlightenment. A Europe where Marine le Pen or Geert Wilders are in power is no longer Europe. So what is this Europe worth fighting for?

The true novelty of the French Revolution resides in the distinction between citizens' rights and human rights. One should reject here the classic Marxist notion of human rights as the rights of the member of bourgeois civil society. While citizens are defined by the political order of a sovereign state, "human" is what remains of a citizen when he/she is deprived of the citizenship, finding him/herself in what in an artillery one calls the open space, reduced to the abstract talking body. Recall the Calais camp before it was dismantled – as Jean-Claude Milner (2016a, 259) wrote, "those who are assembled there from 2000 are not guilty of anything, they are not accused of anything, they do not infringe upon any part of the law; they are simply there and they live". It is in this sense that the universal human rights should remain our regulative when we negotiate the difficult relationship between the constraints of citizenship and particular ways of life. Without this compass we inevitably regress to barbarism.

In his reading of the (in)famous difference between human rights and citizens' rights, Milner (2016a) rejects the Marxist critical notion of human rights as the rights of the member of the bourgeois civil society: for Milner, the citizen is the member of a community, sharing its specific culture, while a human being is what remains of a citizen when s/he is deprived of his/her citizenship – human rights are "natural" rights only in this sense of the externality to a particular culture, they have nothing to do with eternal nature since they apply to what remains of a citizen after s/he is subtracted from a specific polis. In this sense, their "nature" is a retroactive effect of culture, it applies to a human being reduced to the zero level of a speaking body:

“[...] one gains a glimpse into the real of the rights of the body in examining what goes on when they are denied to individuals. Every day brings us a new example. I do not have to think about bombs and poisonous gasses, I think about Calais: those who are assembled there from 2000 are not guilty of anything, they are not accused of anything, they do not infringe upon any part of the law; they are simply there and they live; the proof that they live is that sometimes they die. Nobody knows what languages they are speaking and anyway one doesn't listen to them. One only knows that they speak. They are therefore reduced to the status of speaking bodies; by the settlement to which they are submitted they literally render visible in a negative way the real of the rights of man/woman. [...] These rights are openly distinguished from the rights of a citizen since refugees are precisely not the citizens of Calais and mostly do not want to become that.” (Milner 2016a, 259).

Milner (2016a, 260-261) insists on the “vulgar” materiality of these rights: they are more basic than the rights to reunion, free speech, opinion, etc. Before that comes the material base of a body: water, food, hygiene, minimal space of privacy. If individuals are deprived of this, their “higher” human rights disappear. Human rights are first such basic material rights: toilets, kitchen, healthcare. Rights begin with the space for secretion – this the sad base of my story about the different shape of European toilets (Žižek 1997, 3-4). Insofar as human rights (as distinct from the citizens' rights) were first proclaimed in the French Revolution, one should note the irony of the fact that Calais is a French city.

Here, of course, we enter a double game: Marxists emphasise “material” rights against freedom of opinion and the press, etc. (but fail to deliver them when in power), while “bourgeois democracies” emphasise other freedoms. The lesson here is that universal human rights are – in their very universality – historically produced and specified; their exact extent and content is a matter of socio-political struggles. Is already Milner's renaming them “the rights of man/woman” not the effect of contemporary feminist struggles? And we should bear in mind that although humans who are covered by these rights are “proletarian” in the sense of being deprived of citizenship, they are nonetheless not abstract Cartesian cogitos – they come as individuals embedded in a specific way of life often in conflict with the way of life of the country in which they dwell as refugees.

So we have to take into account here three levels: the abstract universality of a human being qua bearer of human rights, the particularity of a specific way of life to which an individual belongs, and the singularity of citizenship as the mediating moment between the two extremes (as a citizen, I am universal, but universal as belonging to the singularity of a state). The interaction of these three levels cannot but engender multiple difficulties – suffice it to recall the vagaries of power that plague contemporary attempts to enact radical emancipation.

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The Continuing Relevance of the Marxist Tradition for Transcending Capitalism

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Abstract: No idea is more closely associated with Marx than the claim that the intrinsic, contradictory dynamics of capitalism ultimately lead to its self-destruction while simultaneously creating conditions favourable for a revolutionary rupture needed to create an emancipatory alternative in which the control by the capitalist class of investments and production is displaced by radical economic democracy. Marx's formulation of a theory of transcending capitalism is unsatisfactory for two main reasons: 1) the dynamics of capitalism may generate great harms, but they do not inherently make capitalism unsustainable nor do they generate the structural foundations of a collective actor with a capacity to overthrow capitalism; 2) the vision of a system-level rupture with capitalism is not a plausible strategy replacing capitalism by a democratic-egalitarian economic system. Nevertheless, there are four central propositions anchored in the Marxist tradition remain essential for understanding the possibility of transcending capitalism: 1. Capitalism obstructs the realization of conditions for human flourishing. 2. Another world is possible. 3. Capitalism's dynamics are intrinsically contradictory. 4. Emancipatory transformation requires popular mobilization and struggle. These four propositions can underwrite a strategic vision of eroding the dominance of capitalism by building democratic-egalitarian economic relations within the contradictory spaces of capitalism.

Keywords: Karl Marx, 200th anniversary, transcendence of capitalism, real utopias, socialism, contradiction, crisis

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1. Marx's Argument

No idea is more closely associated with Marx than the claim that the intrinsic dynamics of capitalism contain deep contradictions that ultimately lead to its self-destruction, and what's more, these dynamics simultaneously create conditions favourable for a revolutionary rupture needed to create a new form of society much more conducive to human flourishing. The first part of the argument constitutes a strong prediction about the destiny of capitalism: In the long-term, capitalism is an unsustainable social order and will inevitably come to an end. This is a much stronger claim than simply that capitalism generates harms of various sorts and suffers from periodic crises. It is a prediction that capitalism ultimately destroys itself. The second part is somewhat less deterministic: The dynamics that destroy capitalism open up new historic possibilities (especially because of the development of the forces of production and human productivity) and, at the same time, create a collective agent – the working class – capable of taking advantage of those possibilities to construct an emancipatory alternative through revolution. How long it will take before this

latent capability will actually result in the realization of this alternative, and precisely what the alternative will look like, depends on range of more contingent processes: the dissemination of revolutionary ideology, the emergence of robust solidarities, the development of forms of political organisation able to give coherence to struggles, and so on. Taken as a whole, therefore, the theory embodies an interplay of deterministic claims about the inevitable self-destructive demise of capitalism and the emergence of favourable structural conditions for revolution with less deterministic claims about the timing and institutional design of an emancipatory future beyond capitalism.¹

This duality of deterministic and nondeterministic claims is part of what made Marx's theoretical ideas such a compelling basis for political movements. The nondeterministic elements validate the importance of purpose-filled collective agency and the willingness of individuals to join in the struggle for a better world. The deterministic elements give reasons for optimism: Even when the obstacles to revolution seem daunting, anti-capitalist forces could believe that 'history is on our side' and eventually the conditions will be 'ripe' for a revolutionary break-through.

2. The World Today

We now live in a world very different from the one in which Marx formulated his theoretical ideas, and it is difficult to sustain the exuberant optimism of Marx's theory of the future beyond capitalism. Two issues are especially salient.

First, some of the key empirical predictions, crucial for the overarching aspiration for transcending capitalism, have not been born out: Rather than becoming steadily more homogeneous, the working class has become increasingly fragmented, internally unequal, and heterogeneous in all sorts of ways, impeding the broad class solidarity needed for sustained collective action against capitalism; capitalism has proven much more resilient in responding to crises with new modes of accumulation; the capitalist state has proven much more flexible in absorbing popular demands and counteracting crises, while resorting to effective repression when needed; the material standards of living of most people in developed capitalist societies and many in poorer regions of the world, have continued to rise, even during the recent decades of relative economic stagnation.² Other predictions of Marx, of course, have been

¹ There is a longstanding debate within the Marxist tradition over how deterministic Marx himself was about the destiny of capitalism. There is no ambiguity in his views that the contradictions of capitalism would necessarily destroy its conditions of existence. His model of capitalism contains no prediction about how rapidly this will occur, but it is clear about the ultimate demise of the system. I believe that in his major writing, Marx was also prepared to make strong predictions about the destiny beyond capitalism: Once the structural conditions favourable to a rupture are present, eventually a revolutionary break-through would occur. The precise timing was contingent on ideological and political processes, but not the ultimate outcome. Rosa Luxemburg is famous for saying that the choices facing humanity were "socialism or barbarism", which implies that an emancipatory future beyond capitalism is not inevitable even in the long run; barbarism is also a possibility. Marx did not express such ambiguity. In any case, regardless of Marx's own views on this, many people who identify with the Marxist tradition today adopt a much less deterministic view about the overall trajectory of capitalism and especially about the possibilities and prospects after capitalism.

² This last point is worth emphasizing. While it is true that real wages have been relatively stagnant for the median wage-earner in many rich countries since the early 1980s, nevertheless the material standards of living – the bundle of what people actually consume – of the median household have risen on virtually every indicator over the past four decades.

spot on: Capitalism has become a global system, reaching the far corners of the world; the forces of production have developed in astonishing ways, tremendously increasing human productivity; capitalist markets deeply penetrate most facets of life; economic crises, sometimes severe, are a persistent feature of capitalist societies. The problem is that none of these trends are central to the core prediction that capitalism necessarily destroys its own conditions of existence while simultaneously creating an historical subject capable of its overthrow. These dual linked propositions have lost credibility.

Some people argue that new crisis tendencies unforeseen by Marx, especially catastrophic climate change, may make capitalism not simply undesirable, but unsustainable. Of course, if, as some environmentalists claim, global warming will ultimately make human life impossible, capitalism would also be impossible. But short of such apocalyptic outcomes, it is not obvious that climate change poses a mortal threat to capitalism as such. The terrible effects of capitalism on the environment are one important reason to oppose capitalism, but the irrationality and undesirability of capitalism do not imply its unsustainability. Climate change is like war: Just as war is often good for capitalism because of the role of the state in assuring capitalist profits in war industries, there is a huge amount of money to be made out of the massive public works projects needed for climate adaptation. Climate change may threaten the specific neoliberal form of capitalism, but it is much less clear that in and of itself it renders capitalism as such unsustainable. Furthermore, unlike the specific dynamics proposed by Marx, even if the climate crisis made capitalism unsustainable, it does not simultaneously create favourable conditions for the powerful, cohesive forms of solidarity needed for an emancipatory overthrow capitalism; it generates no latent “historical subject” comparable to Marx’s vision of the proletariat.³

The second reason why Marx’s optimistic vision has lost credibility is the tragic history in the 20th century of the attempts at constructing an alternative to capitalism in the aftermath of socialist revolutions. It is very difficult to have confidence that even if crises create the opportunity for revolutionary political forces to seize power, that they will have the capacity to actually construct an emancipatory alternative.

Marx himself never gave much attention to the problem of either the design of socialism, or to the actual process through which it would be constructed. Basically, he felt that given his prediction of the conditions under which this task would be undertaken – the decay of capitalism, the emergence of a powerful, extensive working

Some of this is due to the increase in labour force participation of women, but much of it is due to significant improvements in the quality of many products and the availability of cheap mass produced consumer goods. Inequality has increased dramatically, but this has gone along with modest improvements in median living standards.

³ There are other arguments people make to support the proposition that the endogenous dynamics of capitalism ultimately destroy its conditions of possibility, in particular, capitalism needs endless growth, but endless growth is impossible (Harvey 2014, chapter 15), or the rapid acceleration of automation will ultimately destroy the conditions of profitability for capitalist firms (Mason 2016, Rifkin 2014). I do not have space in this essay to explore these arguments, but briefly: (1) *Growth*: Capitalist investment and competition do foster growth, but this does not inherently imply a growth in physical output, nor does it imply that across the cycles of growth and decline there must be net growth overtime. (2) *Automation*: The idea that automation will destroy capitalism depends on a specific use of the Labour Theory of Value in which only labour generates value and only surplus labour in the form of surplus value generates profits. If one rejects the LTV, then there is no reason to believe that high levels of automation necessarily undermine system-level profits.

class, and the existence of a class conscious revolutionary movement – the creative forces of the collectively organized working class would figure this out through a process of experimental trial-and-error. The experience of the 20th century does not provide much evidence to support this expectation.

Why the revolutions of the 20th century never resulted in robust, sustainable human emancipation is, of course, a hotly debated matter. Was this simply because of the economic backwardness of the places where revolutions occurred, or strategic errors or problematic motivations of leadership? Or do the repeated failures to build sustainable emancipatory alternatives through attempts at radical ruptures in social systems reflect the impossibility of the task? Perhaps attempts at system-ruptures will inevitably unravel into such chaos that revolutionary parties, regardless of the motives of their leadership, will be compelled to resort to pervasive violence and repression to sustain social order, and such violence, in turn, destroys the possibility for a genuinely democratic, egalitarian process of building a new society. The unintended negative consequences of what it takes to carry out a system-rupture may overwhelm the intended emancipatory goals. Regardless of which (if any) of these explanations are correct, the evidence from the revolutionary tragedies of the 20th century is that system-level rupture doesn't work as a strategy for social emancipation.⁴

3. The Robust Anchors for Continuing a Marxist Theory of Transcending Capitalism

In the 21st century, therefore, it is no longer plausible to see the “laws of motion of capitalism” as inevitably destroying the viability of capitalism while simultaneously creating favourable conditions for its emancipatory transcendence through a revolutionary rupture. This does not mean, however, that the Marxist tradition has lost its relevance for both the scientific understanding of contemporary society and the efforts to create a better world. In particular, four central propositions, firmly anchored in the Marxist tradition, remain essential:

Proposition 1. Capitalism obstructs the realisation of conditions for human flourishing.

The sharpest indicator of this is persistent poverty in the midst of plenty, but the harms of capitalism extend beyond material deprivation to other values important for human flourishing: equality, democracy, freedom, and community. The source of these harms of capitalism is above all its class structure, understood as the power relations through which investment, production, and distribution are organised. The class relations of capitalism create harms through a variety of familiar mechanisms: exploitation; domination; alienation; the conversion of economic power into political power; destructive forms of competition; the expansion of markets in ways that undermine community and reciprocity.⁵ The harms embodied in these processes can be ampli-

⁴ This, of course, does not prove that a ruptural strategy for system-level transformation could never work at some time in the future, but currently there are no theoretical arguments sufficiently compelling to neutralize the empirical evidence from past failures.

⁵ Many writers in the Marxist tradition also argue that the harms of capitalism are generated by markets as a mechanism of economic coordination. Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, for example, in their various writing on participatory economics, argue that not only must the class relations of capitalism be transformed, but that markets must be eliminated if social emancipation is to occur in a sustainable fashion. In contrast, I argue that the harms of markets in capitalism come from the distinct form of capitalist markets, and that even in a

fied or moderated by various countervailing processes, especially organised through the state; but it nevertheless remains the case that capitalist class relations continually generate harmful effects.

Proposition 2. Another world is possible.

The harms generated by capitalism provide ample grounds for resistance to capitalism and for the *desire* for an alternative. By themselves, however, harms do not demonstrate that an alternative to capitalism is actually possible.

The theoretical argument that another world is in fact possible is perhaps the most fundamental idea of the Marxist tradition: An emancipatory alternative to capitalism, in which the control by the capitalist class of investments and production is displaced by radical economic democracy, is realisable.⁶ Marxists are not alone in identifying harms generated by the ramifications of capitalism and its class relations. Indeed, many of the relevant mechanisms identified within the Marxist tradition have been incorporated into non-Marxist social science. What is distinctive to the Marxist tradition is the argument that a fundamental alternative to capitalism is not simply *desirable*, but also *viable* and *achievable*. This is what changes Marxism from simply a critique of capitalism into an emancipatory social science.

Of particular importance in the Marxist tradition is the idea that the development of the forces of production within capitalism opens up new possibilities for human flourishing which are blocked by the continuing dominance of capitalist relations of production. The advances in human productivity make it possible, under suitable social relations of production, to drastically reduce the amount of time people need to spend producing their means of livelihood, thus expanding what Marx (1981/1894, 958-959) called “the realm of freedom”. This liberation of human activity, however, can only occur if capitalism is replaced by socialism, understood as a democratic, egalitarian, solidaristic organisation of the economy.

Proposition 3. Capitalism’s dynamics are intrinsically contradictory.

Capitalism cannot achieve a stable equilibrium in which everything fits together into a coherent, functionally integrated whole. Even if there is no inherent tendency for capitalist contradictions to reach an intensity to make capitalism unsustainable, they repeatedly destabilise and undermine existing institutional configurations. In particular, the relationship between capital accumulation and the state is always fraught with contradictions. The state continually faces incompatible imperatives for reproducing capitalism: There are inconsistencies between what is optimal in the short-run and the long-run; between what is best for different sectors of capital; between the imperatives for social peace and capital accumulation. Sometimes these inconsistencies are pretty well managed, but forms of state regulation and intervention which stabilise capitalism in one period often become obstacles to accumulation in another and insti-

democratic-egalitarian economy, markets will almost certainly play an important role. For a debate between Robin Hahnel’s views and my own, see Hahnel and Wright (2016).

⁶ Marx himself did not frame the idea of socialism as radical economic democracy, but this is basically what it means to say that the working class collectively controls the means of production. There are many possible institutional forms through which this idea could be realised, but the heart of the matter is a democratic-egalitarian structure of power over the economy.

tutional lock-in makes smooth adjustments impossible. The result is periodic crises, which open spaces for new possibilities and transformative struggles.

Proposition 4. Emancipatory transformation requires popular mobilisation and struggle.

The realisation of emancipatory possibilities requires collective action and mobilisation from below. Struggles are ultimately over power, and these inevitably involve confrontation. While positive class compromises⁷ may be one of the outcomes of struggle, such compromises will only become part of a larger project of social transformation when they are backed by robust popular mobilisation. For such compromises to occur, elite allies may be crucial, but emancipatory social transformation will not simply be the result of the initiatives of enlightened elites.

Emancipatory transformation also requires building new institutions that embody the emancipatory ideals, and these too must be grounded in the collective organisation and initiative of the masses. The social emancipation of the masses must, at its core, be the self-emancipation of the masses. There may be a constructive role for “social engineering” from above guided by experts, but in a sustainable process of emancipatory social transformation, such social engineering must itself be democratically subordinated through effective mechanisms of popular empowerment.

4. A Strategic Logic of Transcending Capitalism for the 21st Century

The four propositions above have a pedigree that can be traced back to Marx. They constitute fundamental parameters of the on-going Marxist tradition with which virtually everyone who describes their views as “Marxist” would almost certainly agree.⁸ They are not, however, sufficient to formulate a strategic vision for transcending capitalism in the 21st century. Here I will focus on one specific additional theoretical argument which I think is critical for understanding the possibility of a future beyond capitalism.

Every process of social transformation involves the interaction of two kinds of social change: social changes that occur “behind the backs” of people as the cumulative, unintended consequences of their actions, and social changes that are the intentional result of conscious strategy. In Marx’s original theoretical formulation, conscious, strategic action for emancipatory transformation was mainly important in two contexts: First, in creating the necessary political organisation and forms of consciousness of the masses needed to overcome capitalism when conditions made this possible; and second, accomplishing the arduous task of constructing the new society after the revolutionary seizure of power. Constructing socialism for Marx would certainly require sustained conscious action, with a continual process of learning-by-doing and experimentation. Viable socialist institutions could not simply be the unintended by-product of the actions of revolutionaries. But Marx did not see conscious strategy as playing an important role in creating the underlying structural conditions needed for a revolutionary rupture in the first place. Those conditions include the

⁷ The term “positive” class compromise identifies a situation in which a compromise is not simply the result of a balance of forces (a “negative class compromise”), but embodies real solutions to problems within capitalism that also contribute to consolidating popular power. For an extended discussion of positive class compromise, see Wright (2015, chapter 11).

⁸ These propositions are particularly important for understanding the possibilities of transcending capitalism, but there may be other propositions which could legitimately be considered essential elements of the Marxist tradition for other purposes.

massive development of the forces of production; the homogenisation of the conditions of life of the working class; the falling rate of profit; the increasing social character of production as the scale of organisation and division of labour increases. None of these are the result of a conscious strategy to create the needed conditions for emancipatory transformation; they are the result of the “laws of motion” of capitalism which propelled it along a trajectory which would eventually make capitalism vulnerable to overthrow. For Marx, although the structural conditions that make possible emancipatory transformation are the cumulative side-effect of human actions, they are not primarily the result of conscious strategy to create those conditions.

Marx was certainly correct in understanding history as the interplay of structural conditions and conscious strategy, but I do not think the particular sequencing implicit in his theory of the revolutionary transcendence of capitalism is adequate. Specifically, if, as I have argued, a ruptural strategy for transcending capitalism is not plausible, then if radical economic democracy is to be a future beyond capitalism, the task of consciously building it through strategic action needs to begin inside of capitalism itself. This requires going beyond Marx’s view that capitalism becomes increasingly “social” in character as an unintended by-product of the laws of motion of capitalism. It requires a different understanding of the potential for strategies to deliberately affect the functioning and trajectory of existing economic systems by building the alternative to capitalism within economic systems still dominated by capitalism.

To understand the issues in play here, it will be helpful to begin with a stylised contrast between two ways of understanding the idea of a social “system”. One metaphor for understanding a system is that of an organism. An organism is an integrated system in which all of the parts functionally fit together into a coherent whole. An organism is a “totality”. Another metaphor for a system is an ecosystem. Think of a lake. A lake consists of water in a landscape, with particular kinds of soil, terrain, water sources and climate. An array of fish and other creatures live in its water and various kinds of plants grow in and around it. Collectively, these constitute the natural ecosystem of the lake. This is a “system” in that everything affects everything else within it, but it is not like the system of a single organism in which all of the parts are functionally connected in a coherent, tightly integrated whole. Social systems, in general, are better thought of as ecosystems of loosely connected interacting parts rather than as organisms – tightly integrated totalities – in which all of the parts serve a function.

Now consider capitalism. No economy has ever been – or ever could be – purely capitalist. Capitalism is defined by the combination of market exchange with private ownership of the means of production and the employment of wage-earners recruited through a labour market. Existing economic ecosystems combine capitalism with a whole host of other ways of organising the production and distribution of goods and services: directly by states; within the intimate relations of families to meet the needs of its members; through community-based networks and organisations in what is often called the social and solidarity economy; by cooperatives owned and governed democratically by their members; through non-profit market-oriented organisations; through peer-to-peer networks engaged in collaborative production processes; and many other possibilities. Some of these ways of organising economic activities can be thought of as hybrids, combining capitalist and non-capitalist elements; some are entirely non-capitalist; and some embody democratic-egalitarian-solidaristic principles that prefigure an emancipatory alternative to capitalism. Some of these non-capitalist forms are functionally hitched to capitalism, and in one way or another contribute to the stability of capitalism; others are in tension with capitalism; and some

are both functional for and in tension with capitalism. We call such a complex economic ecosystem “capitalist” when it is the case that capitalism is dominant in determining the economic conditions of life and access to livelihood for most people. In a parallel manner, a socialist economy is an economic ecosystem in which democratic-egalitarian relations are dominant.

Marx certainly recognised that real societies were never purely capitalist, and contained a variety of non-capitalist economic forms, especially vestiges from earlier modes of production. He even acknowledged that some of these non-capitalist forms could be thought of as prefiguring a future socialist economy. In particular, by the 1860s he came to appreciate the anti-capitalist character of worker cooperatives. The virtue of these experiments, for Marx, were primarily ideological: “By deed instead of by argument, they have shown that production on a large scale, and in accord with the behests of modern science, may be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of hands” (Marx 1962/1864, 383). Cooperatives thus contributed to creating the ideological conditions for challenging capitalism, but Marx did not see them as part of a strategy of actually building a more democratic, egalitarian economy within a system that was still dominated by capitalism.

The strategic problem, then, is whether or not it is possible erode the dominance of capitalism within this complex economic ecosystem by expanding the weight of alternative, non-capitalist economic activities organized through democratic-egalitarian-solidaristic relations. This way of thinking about the process of transcending capitalism is in certain respects like the typical stylised story told about the transition from pre-capitalist feudal societies in Europe to capitalism. Within feudal economies in the late medieval period, proto-capitalist relations and practices emerged, especially in the cities. Initially this involved merchant trading, artisanal production under the regulation of guilds, and banking. These forms of economic activity filled niches and were often quite useful for feudal elites. As the scope of these market activities expanded they gradually became more capitalist in character and, in some places, more corrosive of the established feudal domination of the economy as a whole. Through a long, meandering process over several centuries, feudal structures ceased to dominate the economic life of some corners of Europe; feudalism had eroded. This process may have been punctuated by political upheavals and even revolutions, but rather than constituting the basis for a rupture in economic structures, these political events generally served more to ratify and rationalise changes that had already taken place within the socioeconomic structure.

Of course, the process of transcending capitalism, if it were to happen, would not be a recapitulation of the process through which feudalism was eroded and eventually superseded by capitalism. In particular, eroding feudalism was not a *strategy* of proto-capitalist merchants, but rather a long-term unintended consequence of their profit-making practices. Strategy would have to play a significant role in eroding the dominance of capitalism and displacing it by a radical economic democracy. Here is the basic scenario:

Economic activities organised around democratic-egalitarian relations emerge where this is possible within an economy dominated by capitalism. These activities grow over time, both spontaneously and as a result of deliberate strategy. Some of these emerge as adaptations and initiatives from below within communities. Others are actively organised by the state to solve practical problems, either in the form of the direct state provision of goods and services as in classic state sector production, or in the form of state-funded collaborations with civil society organizations. These alternative economic relations constitute the building blocks of an economic structure

whose relations of production are, to a variable degree, characterised by democracy, equality, and solidarity. I have referred to these building blocks as *real utopias*: “Utopias” insofar as they embody emancipatory ideals and aspirations; “real” insofar as they can be built in the world as it is in order to push it towards a world that could be⁹ (Wright 2010). Struggles involving the state take place, sometimes to protect these spaces, other times to facilitate new possibilities. Periodically what seems to be structural “limits of possibility” are encountered, and to go beyond such limits may require more intense political mobilisation directed at changing critical features of the “rules of the game” within which capitalism functions. Often such mobilisations fail, but at least sometimes political conditions allow for such changes, and the limits of possibility expand. Eventually, the cumulative effect of this interplay between changes from above and initiatives from below may reach a point where the democratic, non-capitalist relations created within the economic ecosystem become sufficiently prominent in the lives of individuals and communities that capitalism can no longer be said to dominate the system as a whole.¹⁰

As a strategic vision, eroding capitalism is both enticing and far-fetched. It is enticing because it suggests that even when the state seems quite uncongenial for advances in social justice and emancipatory social change, there is still much that can be done. We can get on with the business of building a new world within the interstices of the old. It is far-fetched because it seems implausible that the accumulation of emancipatory economic spaces within an economy dominated by capitalism could ever really erode and displace capitalism, given the immense power and wealth of large capitalist corporations and the dependency of most people’s livelihoods on the well-functioning of the capitalist market. Surely if non-capitalist emancipatory forms of economic activities and relations ever grew to the point of threatening the dominance of capitalism, they would simply be crushed.

There are thus reasons to be sceptical. Two issues are particularly vexing. First, there is the problem of the state. The idea of eroding capitalism depends in significant ways on initiatives by the state. But the state in capitalist society is not simply a neutral apparatus that can be readily used by social forces opposed to capitalism. It is a particular kind of state – a capitalist state – designed in such a way as to systematically protect capitalism from threats. Eroding capitalism, therefore, is only possible if, in spite of the in-built class biases of the capitalist state, it is nevertheless possible use the state to facilitate the expansion of emancipatory non-capitalist relations that point beyond capitalism. The fact that the capitalist state is not an instru-

⁹ The idea of real utopias is not restricted to emancipatory aspirations for alternatives to capitalism. Real utopias include constructing alternative institutions for the state and democracy, the family and gender relations, community and cultural identity, and any other aspect of social relations which generate obstacles to human flourishing

¹⁰ This strategic vision for a future beyond capitalism bears a certain affinity to Gramscian arguments about the conditions for struggle against a hegemonic capitalist system. Gramsci argued that in capitalist societies with strong civil societies and effective states, it was impossible to seize power through a “war of manoeuvre.” What was needed was a “war of position” to build a coherent, mobilised counter-hegemony in civil society. The idea of building economic institutions organised through democratic-egalitarian relations within an economic system dominated by capitalism is parallel to the idea of a counter-hegemonic “war of position.” The difference is that Gramsci still saw the war of position as the prelude to an eventual war of maneuver in which a revolutionary seizure of power would occur and make possible a system-level rupture. The scenario presented here does not presuppose a culminating rupture.

ment ideally suited to the erosion of capitalism does not mean it cannot be used imperfectly for that purpose. The trick for anti-capitalist political forces is to exploit the internal contradictions within the state and the contradictions it faces in solving problems within capitalism in order to expand the possibilities for creating democratic, egalitarian, solidaristic economic alternatives. A key to this possibility is the quality of democracy within the capitalist state: The more deeply democratic is the capitalist state, the greater the possibility of state policies supporting the conditions for non-capitalist alternatives. Struggles to “democratize democracy” – to use an expression of the Portuguese sociologist, Boaventura Santos (2007) – are thus pivotal to the prospects for eroding capitalism.

However, for the capitalist state to be used even imperfectly in a strategy to erode capitalism, there must be political forces mobilized to use it for these purposes. Eroding capitalism, like any strategy, needs collective actors. Strategies don’t just happen; they are adopted by people in organizations, parties, and movements. This is the second vexing issue. Where are the collective actors for eroding capitalism? In classical Marxism “the working class” was seen as the collective actor capable of challenging capitalism. Few people today see the working class as sufficiently homogeneous to readily become what used to be called the “Subject of history”. Rather, the formation of a politically coherent collective actor for a potent anti-capitalism of the 21st century will require bringing together people from a much more heterogeneous set of structural locations in the economy and society, with much more diverse identities. Class remains at the centre of such collective action, since, after all, the objective of struggle is the transformation of the class structure; this is what eroding capitalism means. But the political identity of the collective actor must be forged around the values of democracy, equality and solidarity rather than simply class as such, and this means constructing such a collective actor with people from a much more heterogeneous set of locations in the social structure. This is a daunting task. Figuring out how to do it is a central problem for the Left in the world today.

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Embodying Alternatives to Capitalism in the 21st Century

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Abstract: The goal of this article is twofold. First, to illustrate how in the last decade a growing number of critical and Marxist thinkers committed to discussing and developing theories of change have started to broaden their focus by including social movements and grassroots initiatives that are “interstitial”, i.e. initiatives that are developing within capitalism and are striving to prefigure a post-capitalist society in the here and now without engaging in contentious, violent and revolutionary actions and activities. To achieve this, I mainly focus on the work of four authors: Erik Olin Wright, John Holloway, Ana C. Dinerstein, and Luke Martell. The second goal of this article is to understand why these interstitial movements are getting so much attention from critical scholars and to argue that the time is ripe for establishing a theory of (and for) prefigurative social movements. The article closes with some brief reflections on the future of radical thinking that includes an invitation, directed mostly at the young generation of critical and Marxist scholars, to begin a dialogue with theories of change developed within other disciplines, to engage with activists, and to experiment with participatory methods and techniques.

Keywords: Karl Marx, bicentenary, 200th anniversary, capitalism, crisis, utopia, prefigurative social movements

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“The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to *change* it.” (Karl Marx, 11th Thesis on Feuerbach)

1. Introduction: The Beginning of the End?

The deleterious effects of contemporary capitalism were evident long before the so-called Great Recession. I am referring here to the reproduction of exploitative mechanisms towards workers, the financialisation of the economy, the skyrocketing inequalities of income both between and within countries, the complicity between politicians and multinational corporations, the accumulation by dispossession, the diffusion of

mass-consumerism and commodity fetishism, the degradation of the environment and depletion of natural resources; the pollution of our air, land and sea; and alarming levels of global warming. Already in the late 20th century there was evidence of an unprecedented wave of mobilisations and protest on a global scale against what was identified as the system driving all these destructive phenomena: profit-driven globalisation. Claims for a more just, egalitarian and sustainable economic system were embraced by the alter-globalisation movement under the popular slogan “Another World is Possible”. But it was not until the financial collapse of 2008-2009 that the debate passed from an accusation of the adverse effects of globalisation to a systemic critique of expansionary global capitalism and its economic, social and environmental consequences.

The financial crisis and the subsequent austerity measures imposed by both right-wing and social democratic governments and the so-called ‘Troika’ (European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund) ignited mobilisations in the United States, United Kingdom, Greece, Spain and much of Europe shaking the established political and institutional settlements. Anti-austerity protests were followed by the formation of new political parties and civic organisations conveying the movements’ claims and grievances: Syriza in Greece, Podemos and Barcelona En Comú in Spain, the People’s Assembly Against Austerity in the United Kingdom, and many others. At the same time, within established parties – the Democrats in the United States and the Labour Party in the United Kingdom – candidates with explicitly socialist and radical ideas and policies in their political programmes, namely Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn, attained unprecedented popularity, especially among young people. University students, especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries, also mobilised against rising tuition fees and cuts to university funding. Moreover, the inability of economists to foresee the financial collapse gave new momentum to the critique of the paradigms of rationality and utility maximisation underpinning much of neoclassical economics, and a vibrant new student-led movement for economic pluralism emerged demanding more space for heterodox economics in undergraduate and graduate economic degrees.

The growing willingness to critique the status quo was evident not just among groups of activists, students, radical political groups and parties, but also in mainstream newspapers and media outlets, with many articles and op-eds describing capitalism as an unsustainable system and even arguing that the 2008 subprime crisis was a sign of capitalism’s imminent, inevitable end (see Jeffries 2008; Mason 2015). The idea that capitalism was on its death-bed also influenced cultural production. For example, in Oakland, Oregon, there was a temporary exhibition titled the “Museum of Capitalism” constituted of a collection of objects, artefacts, installations, archival documents, photos and videos on the “historical phenomenon of capitalism”.¹ Just as we had museums documenting the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the time had now come to treat capitalism as belonging to the past. Thus the need of a museum “for establishing justice for the victims of capitalism and preventing its resurgence”.²

The mainstreamisation” of critiquing capitalism quickly revived interest in explorations of what post-capitalistic futures would look like. Jeremy Rifkin’s book *The Zero Marginal Cost Society* and Paul Mason’s *Post-Capitalism: A Guide to Our Future*, published respectively in 2014 and 2015, present broadly similar accounts of the society

¹ From the website: <http://www.museumofcapitalism.org/about/>

² From the website: <http://www.museumofcapitalism.org/about/>

of the future: They claim that open-source technological advancements will allow society to produce goods at almost zero marginal cost and in an environmentally sustainable way leaving people with the time, energy, and resources necessary to transform the economy by organising collectively and collaboratively. Albeit problematic in some respects³, Paul Mason's argument proves to be a bit more politically audacious than Jeremy Rifkin's one, in its proposal to implement a universal basic income and to progressively socialise monopolies and the financial sector. The notion of "post-capitalism" is now used as a buzzword by academics, journalists, politicians, activists, IT experts, CEOs of multinational companies, and entrepreneurs risking to become an uncritical and harmless ideology.⁴

It is nevertheless evident that we have yet to witness the end of capitalism. If anything, we are spectators of its incredible *resilience*, of its remarkable capacity to survive its own periodic crises and find new spatial and technological fixes. "Data capitalism" – understood as a form of capitalism where data about individuals' socio-demographic characteristics, tastes, political preferences are harvested through social media and commodified – is only the latest example of capitalism's transformative capacity.

In light of all this, it is clear that, two hundred years after the birth of Karl Marx, his intellectual legacy is more relevant and topical than ever. But engaging with Karl Marx's, Marxian and Marxist theories today has to go beyond a mere critical assessment of contemporary capitalism and its effects. Instead it must be used as a means to push forward theories and practices aimed at producing progressive social change and emancipation. In other words, the engagement with Marx's legacy should be, to put it bluntly, an engagement with his political perspectives. For this purpose, it is useful to go back to the most influential and radical political document ever produced by Karl Marx in his lifetime: *The Communist Manifesto*. In the *Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels state that:

"Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie possesses [...] this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonism. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat." (Marx and Engels 2016/1848, 5)

If we make an attempt to translate this statement into today's society, we can see that the "two hostile camps" Marx and Engels were describing are nowadays at their most divided: on the one side, we have what activists of the Occupy movement have defined as the 1 per cent – the world's richest elites – and on the other side, the 99 per cent – exploited workers in various sectors of the economy, exploited in different ways, through different mechanisms, in different parts of world. How to achieve, in this context, the "society of free and associated producers", the "association of free individuals" that Marx and Engels described in the *Communist Manifesto* as the society in which "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (Marx and Engels 2016/1848, 50) is far more challenging. If we agree that the only way to achieve socialism is to transform or supplant capitalism – at least in the form it has assumed in the last two hundred years – we can then consider how this can be achieved. This opens up the age-old and bitter debate within the radical Left on how we should go about changing the system. History is scattered with collective attempts

³ For a critical review of Paul Mason's excessive optimism towards the emancipatory power of IT, see Fuchs (2016).

⁴ On the mainstreamisation of the critique to capitalism in "interesting times", see Žižek (2018) in this issue.

to achieve socialism, and both their accomplishments and tragic failures have been immortalised. The question, then, is how to transition to a socialist society without replicating the destructive mistakes of the past.

This debate gained renewed vitality after the financial collapse of 2008, resulting not only in the above-mentioned “mainstreamisation” of critiquing capitalism, but in a renewed interest in Marxist theories. In recent years, critical scholars have come forth with a variety of theories, interpretations and perspectives. The goal of this article is twofold. First, to illustrate how in the last decade a growing number of critical and Marxist thinkers committed to discussing and developing theories of change have started to broaden their focus by including social movements and grassroots initiatives that are “*interstitial*”, i.e. initiatives that are developing within capitalism and are striving to prefigure a post-capitalist society in the here and now without engaging in contentious, violent and revolutionary actions and activities. To achieve this, I mainly focus on the work of four authors: Erik Olin Wright, John Holloway, Ana C. Dinerstein, and Luke Martell. The second goal of this article is to understand why these interstitial movements are getting so much attention from critical scholars and to argue that the time is ripe for establishing a *theory of prefigurative social movements*. The article closes with some brief reflections on the future of radical thinking that includes an invitation, directed mostly at the young generation of critical and Marxist scholars, to begin a dialogue with theories of change developed within other disciplines, especially political ecology. Succinctly put, I believe that any worthwhile advancement in theories of social change must attribute the same level of centrality to both the social and ecological consequences of expansionary global capitalism.

2. Utopia as an Emancipatory Strategy

“Utopia is on the horizon. I move two steps closer; it moves two steps further away. I walk another ten steps and the horizon runs ten steps further away. As much as I may walk, I'll never reach it. So what's the point of utopia? The point is this: to keep walking.” (Galeano 1995)

The financial crash of 2008, the worst since the 1930s, has been, similarly but even more powerfully than the previous ones, a crisis of capitalism. A crisis detonated at the heart of the contemporary capitalist system, the United States of America, and has affected, like in an inexorable domino, not only the financial and political institutional institutions of Europe, but also the material lives of millions of its citizens. To many of those affected, this chronology of events was entirely unexpected. But as the Canadian scholar Max Haiven puts it, “the present austerity crises only come to a surprise to the imaginations of those who have, until recently, been the primary beneficiaries of a global system of exploitation” (Haiven 2014, 6). Thus, it was not until the unimaginable happened (at least for the white, middle-class American and European citizen) that a critique of the status-quo and the necessity to rethink the economy and society started to be perceived with a sense of unprecedented urgency. In other parts of the world where the atrocities of capitalist accumulation by dispossession, exploitation and colonial (and neo-colonial) domination have been a reality for centuries, popular mobilisations and community-based, grassroots initiatives have been growing and spreading since the 1990s, forming a “movement of movements” (Mertes et al. 2004) – the multitude (Hardt and Negri 2005). Back in the United States and in Europe, soon after the 2008 financial crash, the concept of “utopia” has started to proliferate in the public debate, in the slogans of activists and social movements, and, increasingly, in the work

of academics within the social sciences and humanities, including some critical and Marxist scholars.⁵

It is well known that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels expressed severe criticism of utopian socialism. In the *Communist Manifesto*, they ironically describe such experiments as “fantastic pictures from the future of society” (Marx and Engels 2016/1848, 69):

“They reject all political, and especially all revolutionary action, they wish to attain their ends by peaceful means, and endeavour, by small experiments, necessarily doomed to failure, and by force of example, to pave the way the new social gospel.” (Ibid.)

Only a few pages later, they continue:

“They still dream of experimental realization of their social utopias, of founding isolated ‘phalanstères’⁶ of establishing ‘home colonies’ [...] and to realize all these castles in the air, they are compelled to appeal to the feelings and purses of the bourgeois.” (Ibid., 71)

One point of critique that Marx and Engels develop is that these isolated experimental communities and initiatives, inspired by utopian thinkers like Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier and Robert Owen, developed in an historical moment (the early 19th century) where the proletariat – the subject of history in Marxian philosophy – was still in its infancy, without any class consciousness or emancipatory ideas that could lead to a revolutionary movement. That said, Marx’s perspective on utopian socialism and experimental socialist initiatives presents some exceptions. The most notable is provided by Marx’s writings on workers’ cooperatives that regarded them as a new form of production emerging within the old capitalistic form⁷:

“These factories [co-operative factories] show how, at a certain stage of development of the material forces of production, and of the social forms of production corresponding to them, a new mode of production develops and is formed naturally out of the old.” (Marx 1894, 456)

After Marx’s death, successive generations of Marxist scholars have been looking with scepticism at any intellectual or concrete endeavour inspired by utopian socialism or experimentalism. Marxist scholarship underwent a “statist turn” (Jossa 2005, 12). It was not until the 1960s and the wave of mobilisation started in 1968, that a more positive interpretation of the concept of utopia – seen as the natural tendency of humankind to strive for a better future – regained popularity among critical scholars through

⁵ Ruth Levitas’ (2016) book *Utopia as Method. The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* is an essential read for anyone interested in theories at the crossroads between utopian studies and social theory. It provides also a historical excursus on the use of the concept of utopia in social theory.

⁶ “A phalanstère (or phalanstery) was a type of building designed for a self-contained utopian community, ideally consisting of 500–2000 people working together for mutual benefit, and developed in the early 19th century by Charles Fourier. Fourier chose the name by combining the French word phalange (phalanx, the basic military unit in ancient Greece), with the word monastère (monastery)”. Retrieved from Wikipedia on April 4 2018. <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phalanstère>.

⁷ For an exhaustive analysis of Marx’s views on workers’ cooperatives, see Jossa (2005).

the writings of Frankfurt School thinkers Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse. In his masterpiece trilogy *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch (1986/1984) uses the concept of “concrete utopia” to refer to humans’ efforts to anticipate the “not-yet” in a continuous, autopoietic process within the present.

One hundred and seventy years after the publication of the Communist Manifesto, utopian thinking, dismissed and mocked by most Marxist intellectuals, is making an impressive come-back into the contemporary debate of the radical Left. Interestingly, as I will illustrate below, all of these intellectuals are using the term escorted by a “legitimising” adjective (real utopia, concrete utopia, interstitial utopia, current utopia) to underline that the utopias they are writing about are profoundly embedded in social reality. The etymology of the word “utopia”, coined by Thomas More in 1516, in fact, is composed by the Greek prefix “ou” (non) and the noun “topos” (place)⁸ – a non-place, an impossible place. By consequence, the use made by contemporary social theorists contrasts sharply with the traditional negative conception of the term, historically deployed to refer to unachievable goals, naïve beliefs, and unrealizable projects.

A decade after the financial crash, in the midst of a crisis of imagination (Haiven 2014), the intellectual efforts of a growing number of radical scholars seem to go beyond a mere critique of capitalism. Increasingly, the debate is focusing not only on the individuation of the subjects of emancipation and a strategy aimed at overcoming capitalism, but also on envisaging how society will be constituted in post-capitalist times. As part of this endeavour, scholars have begun trying to identify *niches of progressive social change* that already exist within capitalist society and to understand their transformative potential, their paradoxes and the causes of their failures.

A prominent Marxist scholar, Erik Olin Wright, uses the term “real utopias” to describe the emancipatory strategies that are built within capitalism but strive to transcend it (see Wright 2018, in this issue). By using the metaphor of an ecological system to describe capitalism, in his acclaimed book *Envisioning Real Utopias*, Wright (2010) discusses three, non-mutually exclusive, emancipatory transformations to overcome capitalism: the ruptural, the symbiotic, and the interstitial. Whereas the first two strategies refer to disruptive revolutions (the former) and positive systematic cooperation between social forces (the latter), the third emancipatory strategy – the interstitial one – is described as a “process of metamorphosis in which relatively small transformations cumulatively generate a qualitative shift in the dynamics and logics of a social system” (Wright 2010, 321). Interstitial activities and processes develop as niches within the old system, despite the old system, prefiguring a post-capitalist system. While on the one hand, Wright recognises that a number of interstitial activities – worker-owned co-ops, ecological communities, fair trade networks – can play a role in fostering social change, he is, on the other hand, much more sceptical when it comes to assessing their potential for overcoming the capitalist system. In the piece written for the present special issue, Wright (2018) argues that if they ever “grew to a point of threatening the dominance of capitalism, they would simply be crushed”.

Interstitial activities assume a pivotal role also in John Holloway’s theory of emancipation. Distancing himself from orthodox Marxism, Holloway’s perspective is centred on the struggle for recognition and social validation of the “human doing” outside the logic of capital (Holloway 2002a, 29). These concrete human actions, kept free from being transformed into “abstract labour” in the constant process of subsumption of

⁸ The etymology of the word ‘utopia’ is a contested terrain. In fact, another possible interpretation sees the word as composed by the prefix ‘eu’ (Greek for ‘good’) and ‘topos’ (Greek for ‘place’) thus forming the word ‘eutopia’. The meaning then would be ‘the good place’.

capitalism, constitute “cracks” within the dominant capitalist system. These cracks are spaces where “we stop making capitalism” (Holloway, quoted in Dinerstein 2012, 529), spaces where the interstitial revolution takes place. While Erik Olin Wright declares that the state could facilitate emancipatory non-capitalist relations within the existing capitalist regime (2018, 10), Holloway’s position is that interstitial initiatives are exactly linked to the necessity of rejecting the role of the state. “Change the World Without Taking Power”, claims the title of his provocative book published in 2002 (Holloway 2002a). One could not be faulted for thinking that the perspectives of Wright and Holloway are irreconcilable. It is nonetheless possible to find common ground. Both recognise how problematic it is to deploy the Marxian concept of the “proletariat” in contemporary theories of emancipation. In other words, they both point out how difficult it is to identify the revolutionary subject as such. On the one side, for Wright this requires “bringing together people from a much more heterogeneous set of structural locations in the economy and society” (Wright 2018). Instead, for Holloway the working class “is permanently being constituted in a process that is based in the constant and violent process of separation of object from the subject” (Dinerstein 2012, 528).

What is particular to Holloway’s theory of interstitial revolution is the emphasis placed on the *urgency of ‘doing here and now’*. Instead of postponing the time horizon for a revolution capable of overthrowing capitalism, Holloway underlines the need to collectively imagine alternative futures and to enact them and replicate them in the present. This idea has had a great influence on many social movements in the last two decades, the most notable examples being the Zapatista movement⁹ and the Occupy Wall Street movement. Holloway’s provocative writings have generated a vibrant debate among radical thinkers and inspired a new generation of scholars to further develop and elaborate his intellectual legacy.

Among them, the work of Ana Cecilia Dinerstein and her colleagues in the book *Social Sciences for an Other Politics: Women Theorizing without Parachutes* (Dinerstein 2016) is particularly pertinent, since it fruitfully attempts to combine Bloch’s perspective on the “not-yet” and concrete utopia with Holloway’s theory of interstitial revolution. Defining herself as an Open Marxist, Dinerstein focuses her attention on the social movements of Latin America such as the Zapatistas, the piqueteros in Argentina, and the indigenous struggles for self-determination. In her view, concrete utopias “denaturalize” economic categories of employment, production, and consumption through experiential and experimental practices – what Holloway terms the “human doing”. Concrete utopia “emerges and evolves within, against and beyond the social relation of capital and its institutions. Concrete utopia is not outside capital” (Ibid., 52). To incorporate concrete utopias into a critical Marxist appraisal of political economy, Dinerstein boldly calls for a “decolonization of Marxism”, that is a call to read Marxian economic writings in the key of Bloch’s theory of hope (Ibid., 59).

The final example of the return of utopian thinking among Marxist scholars worth highlighting is Luke Martell’s (2018) recently published article “Utopianism and Social Change”. Martell shows, through an exhaustive excursus on modern and contemporary utopian scholarly production, that “current utopias ground the future in current experiment and demonstration” (Martell 2018, 7). His argument goes against what he defines as the “false dichotomies” posed by the critics of utopian thought: utopia has been criticised for not being a materialist solution and for constituting a potential threat to pluralism and liberalism. Warning against the perils of totalitarian utopias resulting in the regimes of the 20th century, Martell concludes by addressing the question of

⁹ For a comment on the relevance of the Zapatista movement, see Holloway (2002b).

whether utopias can foster or undermine positive social change. His answer is that the “current utopias” (as opposed to what he calls “future utopias”), such as intentional communities, free universities, or co-ops “can represent the material and conflictual basis for change within current society, rather than a retreat from this” (Ibid., 10). Similar to Dinerstein, he claims that they “pursue change based on material experience [...] rather than on theory or ideology about the future” (Ibid., 7).

At this point the reader is probably wondering whether there is a substantial difference between Martell’s current utopia, Dinerstein’s concrete utopia, and Wright’s real utopia, in other words, whether they are referring to the same social phenomena. Wright’s utopia is defined as “real” since it is conditional on its feasibility and achievability (Dinerstein 2017), whereas Bloch’s concrete utopia deployed by Dinerstein points at transforming “hope from an emotion to a political problem for the capital” (Ibid.).¹⁰ Finally, Martell’s point of view can be placed somewhere in between Wright’s and Dinerstein’s positions: concerned about underlining its materialist nature and its potential emancipatory role, he stresses that it is precisely its experimental and experiential nature that is crucial for wider social change in the future.

To proceed with my argument, though, I find it more useful to highlight what all the above-mentioned scholars have in common. It is undeniable that they are all talking about activities, experiments and initiatives that, despite their small scale and the difficulties they encounter in surviving within capitalism (and not being co-opted by it), assume an important role in the critical study of capitalism because they are striving to concretise alternative forms of social reproduction through transformative everyday practices.

What is it, then, that we are talking about?

3. Beyond Resistance: A Sociology Of and For Prefigurative Social Movements

“We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings.” (Le Guin 2014)

In the last two decades, several initiatives have been mushrooming around the world: community and urban gardens, worker-owned coops, producer-consumer coops, ecological and intentional communities, co-housing coops, food sovereignty initiatives, occupied and worker-managed factories, participatory budgeting, and direct democracy at local level. At the same time, revolutionary and contentious social movements, the most notable examples being the Zapatistas in Mexico and the People’s Protection Units (YPG) and the Women’s Protection Units (YPJ) in Rojava (Federation of Northern Syria), have placed at the core of their strategies principles of direct democracy, cooperative economy, ecology and women’s leadership, influenced (especially the latter) by the eco-feminist and political-ecological thought of scholars like Silvia Federici and Murray Bookchin. Similarly, hard hit by the consequences of the austerity measures imposed by the Troika, Greek civil society started to organise from below, forming a constellation of grassroots initiatives centred on the values of *solidarity and*

¹⁰ Dinerstein (2017) thoroughly examines the difference between Wright’s “real utopias” and Bloch’s (and her) formulation of “concrete utopia” in a blog post titled “Concrete Utopia. (Re)producing Life in, against and Beyond the Open Veins of Capital”, published in December 2017 on Public Seminar, a blog project by The School for Social Research in New York.

mutualism followed by other groups in countries like Italy, Spain, and Portugal. In the field of social sciences and humanities, the debate on these grassroots initiatives has gained prominence but a comprehensive theoretical and analytical framework is still lacking.

My argument is that all these experiences, putting aside their interstitial nature and the different socio-economic and political contexts from which they have emerged, share an important trait: they are *prefigurative*, meaning that they embody their ultimate goals and their vision of a future society through their ongoing social practices, social relations, decision-making philosophy and culture. These interrelated processes, unfolding over time, involve collective experimentation with the production and circulation of new meanings and future-oriented social norms (Yates 2015). In this sense, we can hypothesise that we are witnessing the emergence of a *new wave of social movements* differing in its features, claims and strategies from the historical class-based movements of the 19th century, from the new social movements of the Sixties and Seventies, and even from the alter-globalisation movement of the late Nineties and early 2000s. If these prefigurative social movements constitute the real/concrete/current utopias that new generations of critical scholars and Marxists are starting to look at as potential subjects of emancipation, it becomes a crucial task, then, to disentangle their ontological, epistemological and phenomenological characteristics. In other words, the task is to build a sociology of and, most importantly, *for* prefigurative social movements.

The term “prefigurative” appears for the first time in the writings of the American anthropologist Margaret Mead in 1973. She uses the term to indicate the advent of a “prefigurative culture” where “it will be the child – and not the parent and grandparent – that represents what is to come” (Mead 1973, 204). In this sense, prefigurative culture is future-oriented and differs from “postfigurative” and “configurative” cultures: In the former, cultural transmission is strongly affected by the worshipping of ancestors and traditions from the past, whereas the latter – arising after the collapse of a postfigurative culture – has a transitional nature and is present-oriented. It is not until 1977, however, that the word appears in critical scholarship, in Carl Boggs’ (1977) essay “Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers’ Control” published in the magazine *Radical America*. In his essay, pointing at the “failure of Marxism to spell-out the process of transition”, Boggs uses some historical examples, like the Biennio Rosso in Italy and the uprisings of students and workers in the 1968 French May to outline the defining features of prefigurative communism:

“Prefigurative strategy, on the other hand, views statism and authoritarianism as special obstacles to be overturned; its goal is to replace the bureaucratic state with distinctly popular institutions. Ideally, this tradition expresses three basic concerns: fear of reproducing hierarchical authority relations under a new ideological rationale, criticism of political parties and trade unions because their centralized forms reproduce the old power relations in a way that undermines revolutionary struggles, and commitment to democratization through local, collective structures that anticipate the future liberated society” (Boggs 1977).¹¹

The concept of prefiguration gained popularity with the wave of alter-globalisation movements in the late Nineties (Maeckelbergh 2011) and then became one of the main tenets of the Occupy Wall Street movement (Graeber 2013). Ten years after the financial crash, prefiguration – conceived as the need to live and strive to reproduce in the

¹¹ Accessed online at this link: <https://libcom.org/library/marxism-prefigurative-communism-problem-workers-control-carl-boggs>.

present the kind of society we envision for the future – is central to all the social movements and grassroots initiatives mentioned above. For them prefiguration plays an even more central role than it did in the alter-globalisation and the Occupy movements, where it was reflected mostly in the practices of horizontalism and direct democracy deployed in their decisional processes. “This is what democracy looks like” is the chant that demonstrators shouted while marching on the streets of Seattle during the protests against the WTO in 1999. Today, looking at the ecological communalism of the Protection Units in Rojava or the focus on radical everyday lifestyles of certain intentional communities, it is clear that prefiguration is conceived by these movements as the need to *rethink holistically* our relationship towards nature, the economy and society, or - as Dinerstein (2017, 53) puts it - to “denaturalize” capitalist logic.

Nowadays prefiguration can be seen as part of the repertoire of action of several movements and grassroots initiatives. Some of them are *defending* spaces from capitalist accumulation. Close to the North-Western French coast, in an area called Notre Dame de Landes, a movement of people have spent the last ten years occupying and living on an agricultural plot of land to prevent an airport being built on it. In the ZAD – *Zone à Défendre*, a French acronym for “area to defend” – contentious action against police attempts to evict the activists (the latest eviction attempt is currently being resisted at the moment of writing in April 2018) is blended together with prefigurative practices such as permaculture, organic farming, and the production of goods like dairies and bread. Other groups deploy prefigurative practices to *restore* spaces of former capitalist production. RiMaflow and Vio.Me are two examples. Two former factories, the first in the North of Italy and the second close to the Greek city of Thessaloniki, have both been recovered by dismissed employees after they were closed-down in the early 2010s. The conversion of these two factories did not only involve the restarting of new productive activities through workers’ self-management, it also led to a flourishing of solidarity activities (e.g. free medical ambulatories) and international networks with other worker-owned cooperatives in Europe and Latin America. Finally, for a third group of movements, prefiguration is concretised through the *creation* of new spaces through experimentation with alternative modes of producing, consuming and living. The most notable examples are producer-consumer co-ops, intentional communities, and eco-villages. The latter can be described using the prism of Paolo Virno’s “theory of exodus”, according to which “the most powerful way of opposing capitalism and the liberal state is not through direct confrontation but by means of engaged withdrawal” (Graeber 2004, 60).¹²

The diffusion of movements deploying – explicitly or implicitly – prefigurative practices and discourses has given rise to a range of critical appraisals that question the *effectiveness* of prefiguration in opposing or supplanting capitalism. At the heart of these critiques, we find Chantal Mouffe’s argument that the Occupy movement failed in constructing an *anti-hegemonic narrative* and in identifying precise, targetable “nodal points of power” against which to direct the movement’s agonistic efforts (Mouffe 2013,

¹² In the same book, David Graeber continues: “A revolution on a world scale will take a very long time. But it is also possible to recognize that it is already starting to happen. The easiest way to get our minds around it is to stop thinking about revolution as a thing – ‘the’ revolution, the great cataclysmic break – and instead ask ‘what is revolutionary action?’. We could then suggest: revolutionary action is any collective action which rejects, and therefore confronts, some form of power or domination and in doing so, reconstitutes social relations, even within the collectivity – in that light. Revolutionary action does not necessarily have to aim to topple governments. Attempts to create autonomous communities in the face of power [...], would, for instance, be almost by definition revolutionary act” (Graeber 2004, 45).

75). According to Mouffe, the Occupy movement lacked a political strategy capable of establishing precisely who the 1 per cent – the enemy – was, and was weakened by its unwillingness to translate and organise claims in the sphere of institutional and representative politics (see Decreus et al. 2014). If we expand the focus to include what I argue to be the diverse constellation of prefigurative movements that have flourished since Occupy, it is easy to see how Mouffe’s critique can be directed at them as well. It is in fact a difficult and arduous task to recognise who or what constitute the *nodal points of power* for a worker’s co-operative, urban garden, or ecovillage, although it is easier for those initiatives that include contentious actions in their repertoire like the above mentioned ZAD or the protection units in Rojava. The red thread connecting all of these movements is precisely that they seek to push towards the realisation of a post-capitalist society by *embodying* it in the present. By and large, then, the analytical dichotomy between “strategic” and “prefigurative” movements put forward by Mouffe and others does not help us to understand their emancipatory potential (Maeckelbergh 2017).

In an attempt to constructively re-interpret the Occupy movement and the Indignados movement in light of Mouffe’s critique, Decreus et al. (2014, 145) affirm that “if the terrain of struggle cannot be clearly located or determined, social movements will have to create it by themselves. It is in relation to this observation, that one should understand the symbolic and artistic character of radical protest movements today”. This point reduces prefigurative practices to symbolic, artistic and theatrical acts and, while it might be enough to capture the role of prefiguration within the Occupy and Indignados movements, it certainly does not do so for the myriad of movements that we are addressing in this article. We are left then with some vexing questions: Who constitutes the *collective identity* of these movements, the “we”? Can we locate “*the political*” in these movements or are they – as some would argue – mere post-ideological, post-political and ephemeral laboratories?

Revisiting Alberto Melucci’s volume *Challenging Codes* published in 1996 provides timely hints for reflection. Many of the features described by Melucci in his book have eventually been deployed by subsequent generations of social movement scholars to refer to the alter-globalisation movement and still prove valuable to understand prefigurative movements. Movements “announce what is taking shape even before its direction and content has become clear” (Melucci 1996, 1), states the author in the introduction. These movements claim “a desire for immediate control over the conditions of existence and to claim independence from the system” (Ibid., 102). At the same time, these prefigurative movements aim at a participation that is not mediated by institutional and representative politics, which is why they display disinterest in seizing state power, and do not recognise a separation between the public and the private sphere. By consequence, instead of being post-political, prefigurative movements end-up *(re)politicizing what is usually non-politicized*: everyday life, the spaces of private, economic and social (re)production through “conscious processes of organization” and not-necessarily through confrontational actions (Melucci 1996, 77).

It takes little to realise that a serious engagement with these movements calls for a *re-conceptualisation* of social movements and a recognition that traditional frameworks utilised to assess the effectiveness of movements are inadequate. In the case of prefigurative movements, social change is achieved through a “plural configuration of practices” and iterative processes of experimentation, re-organisation, and re-imagination (Yates 2015). In the last ten years, we have witnessed an upsurge of these movements that, rather than constituting “isolated” units – or islands like in Thomas More’s utopia – are *locally rooted*, but closely *interconnected* through national and

transnational networks. Examples are the RIPESS network of social and solidarity economy initiatives, the Co-operative Housing International, the Global Ecovillage Network, La Via Campesina, the Transition Town network, or Genuino Clandestino in Italy. The list could go on to form a heterogeneous and global tapestry: some networks have been established more recently than others, some are informal rather than formal, some collaborate with institutions and international organisations while others are keen to protect their autonomy from national and supranational institutions.

The question is if and to what extent they are managing to “transcend capitalism” as Erik Olin Wright (2018) puts it. Although a discussion on the criteria and temporalities required to determine the successes or failures of prefigurative movements is beyond the scope of this article¹³, a brief reflection on the ways in which prefigurative movements bring about social change leads us to a crucial realisation: Every effort to prefigure a post-capitalist society in the “here and now” is quickly destined to be confronted by the dominant mechanisms of primitive accumulation, expropriation, privatisation of the commons and commodity fetishism (see the contributions by Harvey and Hardt/Negri in this special issue). In fact, prefigurative movements are struggling to survive *in the context of capitalism* in which they are immersed.

At this point it is useful to share an illustrative example. I recently visited one of the biggest and oldest intentional communities in the world, where a lush green forest is growing in a previously desert plain thanks to a massive reforestation project by its inhabitants. Permaculture and organic farms are producing fruits and vegetables for a large part of the community. The rest of the products needed are bought from surrounding local producers and distributed through a co-operative supermarket where inhabitants can go and take as much as they need as part of their monthly allowance. All of the electricity consumed in the community is produced off-grid thanks to solar and wind energy. Cutting-edge technologies are deployed to calculate the most efficient way to irrigate cultivated lands without wasting the precious and scarce resource that is water. Waste is kept to a minimum through conscious consumption, recycling and re-utilisation. The inflow of cash coming from hundreds of thousands of tourists visiting every year to attend activities, workshops, and courses are re-distributed by a central committee to each inhabitant through a monthly basic income. All that said, the city plan that this community is following to reach its target of 50,000 inhabitants is being challenged by encroaching private property speculation. The rising influx of tourists and visitors in the last years has resulted in a boom of guest-houses and hotels being built in nearby villages thus driving up the prices of land and gentrifying the surrounding areas. This is making it very difficult for the intentional community to preserve what they call the ‘green belt’ (the forest grown thanks to their reforestation efforts in the last 50 years) on which they plan to expand. At the same time, many inhabitants are struggling to survive on the monthly allowance and are therefore working ‘outside’ of the intentional community. This creates economic inequalities between those who rely solely on the internal basic allowance and those who earn a salary by working in the capitalist economy. The relationship with the state is also problematic. If on the one side, the state has been sponsoring and financing some of their activities and projects, on the other side tensions are emerging between those within the community who want to maintain autonomy and prevent co-optation and those who see an opportunity to scale-up and disseminate initiatives and practices.

Borrowing Chatterton’s and Pickerill’s definition, prefigurative movements such as this one can be characterised as being “*anti, despite, and post-capitalism*” movements

¹³ On this point, see Maeckelbergh (2017).

(2010, 14). Labels aside, having to interact with the capitalist context (the state and the market) is inevitable for prefigurative movements. Here is the most controversial point: Isn't it exactly through the interaction with the capitalist context that prefigurative movements are going to erode it? Isn't it exactly when a municipality, a state, a supranational institution or even a multinational corporation starts to recognise, for instance, that the social and solidarity economy is a 'best practice' and thus starts to encourage its growth through funds and favourable policies, that prefigurative movements can consider themselves as having succeeded in their goals? Or is this co-optation nullifying their efforts?¹⁴ The answer to these questions are far from straightforward. In his essay for the present special issue, Wright (2018) states that "the problem [...] is whether or not it is possible to erode the dominance of capitalism within this complex economic system by expanding the weight of alternative, non-capitalist economic activities organized through democratic-egalitarian-solidaristic relations". In Wright's view, in sum, transcending capitalism is inevitably linked to the incremental expansion of alternative economic practices over traditional capitalistic ones. This requires rethinking the conventional modes through which work, production and consumption are organised in contemporary society.

In an attempt to provide a framework to interpret collectives engaging in political consumerism as a form of political participation, Forno and Graziano coined the definition of "sustainable community movement organizations" to define "a social movement organization that has the peculiarity of mobilizing citizens primarily via their purchasing power and for which the main battlefield is represented by the market where its members are politically concerned consumers" (2014, 142). Whether or not "battling" in the marketplace is enough to transcend capitalism can be discussed, as well as the fact that purchasing power is directly dependent upon the availability of economic resources which, we know, are unequally distributed across the population. While Forno and Graziano are primarily concerned with the shift in consumers' "consciousness", the encompassing link between work, production and consumption to realise a post-capitalist society is at the heart of theories about the "commons" created by a group of radical scholars including J.K. Gibson-Graham, Silvia Federici, George Caffentzis, Peter Linebaugh, and Massimo de Angelis. From the perspective of this group of scholars, a post-capitalist society should be achieved through the *process of commoning*, that is "a specific multifaceted social labour through which commonwealth and the community of commoners are (re)produced together with the reproduction of stuff, social relations, affects, decisions, cultures" (De Angelis 2017, 123). This process, which reminds us about Bloch's autopoietic process towards the "not-yet" possible futures, comprises two essential moments: decision making and "doing together". Interestingly, De Angelis points out that there is a difference between social movements and the "commons": The former are focused on claiming for alternatives, the latter embody the alternatives through practices. A synthesis can be found in what he calls "commons movements", i.e. movements that engage in both protest and practice.

In her contribution to the present special issue, Silvia Federici concludes by invoking the need to "refocus our politics on the production of our material life, and the life of the ecosystems in which we live" (Federici 2018). Prefigurative movements are moving in this direction. They are not merely movements of resistance against the status quo, but they are trying, through their concrete practices, to oppose capitalism as a

¹⁴ On the risks of co-optation in the case of co-operatives, see Sandoval (2016).

moral system, a system dictating what is ‘valuable’ and what is not.¹⁵ In other words, prefigurative movements have the goal of *going beyond capitalist morality and normativity* and coming forth with alternative forms of moral, economic and social (re)production.¹⁶ Prefiguration, to sum up, is now an integral part of contemporary social movements, and – as the various examples above show – various interpretive frameworks are starting to emerge. Hence my call to join forces and establish a *sociology of and for prefigurative social movements*. The “for” is as important as the “of”: through their work scholars can help these movements to be self-reflexive, to think about themselves as pioneers of change in a process of trial and error that characterises all experimentations.

4. Conclusion

“Are there still other possibilities? Of course there are [...] Whichever option is chosen, it will not be the end of history, but in a real sense its beginning. The human social world is still very young in cosmological time. In 2050 or 2100, when we look back at capitalist civilization, what will we see?” (Immanuel Wallerstein 2014, 163)

This article set out to describe how, ten years after the financial collapse of 2008, there is a growing awareness of the unsustainability of capitalism. Despite the criticism expressed by Marx towards socialist utopianism and experimentalism, two hundred years after his birth, there is also a resurgent interest among new generations of Marxist scholars in the idea of utopia, conceived as a continuous *process* of striving in the present towards an alternative society. Terms such as “real utopia”, “concrete utopia” and “current utopia” are now being deployed by scholars to describe the emergence of “new social movements” that are not only opposing capitalism but also prefiguring post-capitalist societies. These movements are *re-thinking* and *re-politicising* conventional modes of production, consumption and living by *defending, restoring* and *creating* spaces of resistance and experimentation.

Within the social science more broadly we have seen a flourishing of parallel literatures interested in these movements, all published within the same temporal span (2008-2018) by scholars coming from different, albeit adjacent, disciplines: social theory, political economy, political ecology, social movement studies, sustainability transitions studies, consumer studies and environmental studies. Due to the simultaneous way in which these literatures have emerged it is difficult to find substantial cross-references between them, although they are clearly analysing the same social phenomena. Cross-pollination that transcends disciplinary boundaries would therefore be enormously fruitful for the development of new theoretical and analytical frameworks.

More than providing a rebuttal to those scholars who critique prefigurative movements for being inefficient, post-political and post-ideological, this article constitutes an invitation firstly to create an *interdisciplinary sociology of prefigurative social movements*, and secondly *for* them by engaging in a constructive dialogue that can enhance

¹⁵ On capitalism as a moral system, see Max Haiven’s and Alex Khasnabish’s book *The Radical Imagination* (published by Verso in 2014) and the website of their project (ceased in 2017): <http://radicalimagination.org/>.

¹⁶ In the book *Sociology, Capitalism and Critique*, Hartmut Rosa comes forth with the concept of *resonance* as a new mode of existence opposed to alienation (in its two forms: repulsion and indifference) and evokes the prerequisite of de-synchronizing from capitalist acceleration at macro, inter-social and micro levels (Dörre, Lessenich and Rosa 2015, 280-303).

their emancipatory and transformative potential and help them to think through strategies and manage challenges, rather than simplistically dismissing them. “Fellow-travelling” (Keucheyan 2014) with prefigurative social movements could create a dialogical process in which practice is nourished by research as much as research is nourished by practice. To conduct *transdisciplinary research* effectively, though, we need be open to experimenting with participatory, visual and creative methods that can help overcome the “observer-researcher” modality in which the former is simply the passive object of study. This may in turn require further reflections about alternative ways of producing and disseminating knowledge outside of traditional academic institutions that often act as constraints on innovation.

Finally, it is time to lay the age-old debate about whether change can be achieved best through strategies aimed at seizing political and institutional power or through grassroots, prefigurative initiatives to rest. Both are striving to resist and supplant capitalism and establish more just and egalitarian economic systems. The key question moving forward is *how* strategies at the macro and micro level can be connected and fine-tuned to attain the common goal which has so far proved elusive. This arguably represents one of the greatest challenges for the future of radical theory.

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Karl Marx & Communication @ 200: Towards a Marxian Theory of Communication

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Abstract: This contribution takes Marx's bicentenary as occasion for reflecting on foundations of a Marxian theory of communication. It aims to show that Marx provides a consistent account as foundation for a critical, dialectical theory of communication. The article first discusses the relationship of communication and materialism in order to ground a communicative materialism that avoids the dualist assumption that communication is a superstructure erected on a material base. Second, the paper provides an overview of how Marx's approach helps us to understand the role of the means of communication and communicative labour in capitalism. Third, it conceives of ideology as a form of fetishised communication and fetishism as ideological communication. Given that communicative capitalism is a significant dimension of contemporary society, it is about time to develop a Marxian theory of communication.

Keywords: Karl Marx, bicentenary, 200th birthday, anniversary, communication, critical theory of communication, critical political economy, Marxist theory, capitalism

1. Introduction

May 5, 2018, marks Karl Marx's bicentenary. He was born on May 5, 1818. 100 years later, the German socialist and historian Franz Mehring, author of one of the first biographies of Karl Marx (Mehring 2003/1936), wrote on occasion of Marx's centenary: "Karl Marx's centenary directs our view from a gruesome presence to a brighter future just like a bright sunbeam that breaks through dark and apparently impenetrable cloud layers [...] Tireless and restless critique [...] was his true weapon. [...] To continue working based on the indestructible foundations that he laid is the most worthy homage we can offer to him on his one hundredth birthday"¹ (Mehring 1918, 11, 15).

Given the gruesome presence we live in today that features the expansion and intensification of nationalisms and neo-fascisms, the threat of a new World War, environmental, economic and political crises, Mehring's words are as true on the occasion of Marx's bicentennial as they were 100 years ago.

Marx was first and foremost a critic and critical theorist, which entailed that he was a critical economist, critical philosopher, critical political scientist, critical sociologist, critical journalist, and revolutionary activist. The task of this contribution on the occasion of Marx's bicentenary is to show that he was also a critical communication scholar. This circumstance has often been forgotten in radical theory because communication is often ignored or dismissed as being an unimportant superstructure.

¹ Translated from German. German original: „Wie ein heller Sonnenstrahl, der durch düstere und scheinbar undurchdringliche Wolken-schichten bricht, so lenkt heute der hundertste Geburtstag von Karl Marx unseren Blick aus einer grauenvollen Gegenwart in eine hellere Zukunft [...] die rast- und ruhelose Kritik [...] ist seine wirkliche Waffe gewesen [...] So fortzuarbeiten auf den unzerstörbaren Grundlagen, die er gelegt hat, ist die würdigste Huldigung, die wir [...] [ihm] an seinem hundertsten Geburtstage darbringen können“.

The article shows in three steps how Marx's works can ground a critical theory of communication: Section 2 introduces aspects of communicative materialism. Section 3 discusses means of communication and communicative labour. Section 4's focus is on foundations of ideology critique. Section 5 draws conclusions.

2. Communication's Materiality: Dialectical, Critical, Communicative Materialism

In the *Theories of Surplus-Value*, Marx speaks of the existence of "non-material production" (Marx 1867-63, 143) that entails the production of books and paintings, artistic creation, writers, engineers, the work of "executant artists, orators, actors, teachers, doctors, clerics, etc." (Ibid., 144). In a newspaper article, he speaks of privileges as "immaterial goods" (Marx 1848, 477). In the *Grundrisse*, Marx argues that value is "something immaterial, something indifferent to its material consistency" (Marx 1857/58, 309).

According to these assumptions, information and its production are not part of the "material base", but of the "superstructure". Such a dichotomy between materiality and immateriality can indeed be found in particular versions of Marxist thought. So for example the *Small Dictionary of Marxism-Leninism* defines the superstructure as "ideas (political, legal, cultural, scientific, ideological, moral, artistic ones)" (Buhr and Kosing 1979, 46). It understands the superstructure as the "ideological societal relations of a societal formation" (Ibid.) and consistently speaks of "institutional and ideal contents" (Ibid., 47). The problem is that the question about matter is one about the world's substance and ground. If one assumes that there is something immaterial in the world, then there must be two substances – matter and spirit. The implication then is not just religious and esoteric, namely that spirit exists as a substance in the universe, but the human mind is also seen as independent from matter.

Marx does, however, not frequently use the concept of immateriality. He mainly employs it in drafts. In *Capital*, he in contrast says that "the ideal is nothing but the material world" translated in "the mind of man" and into "forms of thought" (Marx 1867, 102). He also writes about "the intellectual potentialities [*geistige Potenzen*] of the material process of production" (Ibid., 482). In the *German Ideology*, Marx says that the "production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men – the language of real life" (Marx and Engels 1845/46, 36). The mind "is from the outset afflicted with the curse of the being 'burdened' with matter" (Ibid., 43-44).

Taken together, these formulations imply that information and communication are forms of matter and that the production of information is part of the material production process. When Marx speaks of the "material intercourse of men", then he not just describes the human thought process, but how humans in the communication process co-relate their thoughts and thereby produce a new whole. By stressing that communication is "the language of real life", Marx foregrounds that information and communication are not unreal or immaterial, but part of humans' production and reproduction processes in everyday life.

But just like communicative idealism that sees communication as a superstructure, also a vulgar communicative materialism should be avoided. Stalin's writings on linguistics are an ideal-type of vulgar communicative materialism: Language "radically differs from the superstructure. Language is not a product of one or another base, old or new, within the given society, but of the whole course of the history of the society and of the history of the bases for many centuries" (Stalin 1972, 5). Language is "common to all members of that society, as the common language of the whole people. Hence the functional role of language, as a means of intercourse between people,

consists not in serving one class to the detriment of other classes, but in equally serving the entire society, all the classes of society” (Stalin 1972, 5-6). “Language, on the contrary, is connected with man's productive activity directly, and not only with man's productive activity, but with all his other activity in all his spheres of work, from production to the base, and from the base to the superstructure. [...] For this reason the sphere of action of language, which embraces all fields of man's activity, is far broader and more comprehensive than the sphere of action of the superstructure” (Ibid., 9). “Language, as a means of intercourse, always was and remains the single language of a society, common to all its members” (Ibid., 20).

Stalin's writings on language fulfilled an ideological purpose: He wanted to stress that language is the constituting feature of the nation. In *Marxism and the National Question*, Stalin (1913, 306) stresses for example that “a common language is one of the characteristic features of a nation”. Instead of seeing its ideological and dominative character, Stalin reified the nation.

The humanist Marxist Leo Kofler (1970) criticised Stalin's approach to language as reductionist and mechanistic:

“Stalin primarily notices language's emblematical technical, *phonetic-morphological* side, i.e. its relatively *fixed* side. However, his dialectically untrained eye is not capable of seeing what has inadequately been called the ‘stylistics’, but can better be termed language's ‘*life*’ as the fully valid and true essence of language. His writing completely neglects this side of language. But this ‘*life*’ constitutes the *ideological* and therefore *changing* moment of language, or, better expressed, the ideological and therefore *necessarily* changeable moment of language. Technology and life of language are related to each other like form and content”² (Ibid., 135-136)

Kofler's point is that Stalin only focuses on the syntax and technology of language and leaves out its use, contents, semantics, and pragmatics. A dialectical approach to language needs to take into account its formal and semantic side, aspects of technology and culture, the economic and non-economic, etc.

A small number of approaches that are today widely ignored, forgotten or undiscovered have within Marxist theory stressed the material character of communication. Raymond Williams points out that many Marxist approaches separate the economy and culture and are not “materialist enough” (Williams 1977, 92, 97). It is idealist to separate “‘culture’ from material social life’ (Ibid., 19). In such idealist approaches, “intellectual and cultural production [...] appear to be ‘immaterial’” (Williams 1989, 205). Williams criticises approaches that separate matter and ideas either temporally by arguing that first comes “material production, then consciousness, then politics and culture” or spatially by assuming that there are levels and layers built on the economic

² Translated from German. Original: „Stalin bemerkt an der Sprache vornehmlich nur ihre zeichenhaft technische, ihre *phonetisch-morphologische*, also ihre relative *starre* Seite. Hingegen ist sein dialektisch ungeschultes Auge nicht in der Lage, das, was man sehr unzulänglich die ‚Stilistik‘, etwas besser das ‚*Leben*‘ der Sprache bezeichnet hat, in ihrer vollgültigen, ja das wahre Wesen der Sprache ausmachenden Bedeutung zu erkennen. In seiner Schrift wird diese Seite der Sprache vollkommen vernachlässigt. In diesem ‚*Leben*‘ liegt aber das *veränderliche*, weil *ideologische*, oder besser das ideologische und deshalb *zwangsläufig* veränderliche Moment der Sprache. Technik und Leben der Sprache verhalten sich zueinander wie Form und Inhalt”.

base (Williams 1977, 78). Language and communication are material practices of production (Ibid., 165). Williams speaks of “the material character of the production of a cultural order” (Ibid., 93; for a detailed discussion of how the communication concept is related to William’s cultural materialism, see Fuchs 2017b).

Georg Lukács (1986a; 1986b) argues with his concept of teleological positing that goal-oriented production is the key feature of humans and society. Language and communication are for Lukács key features of society, a complex that enables the social reproduction of society (for a detailed discussion, see Fuchs 2016a, Chapter 2). Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1983) stressed the work-character of communication (see Fuchs 2016a, Chapter 6). Horst Holzer (1975, 30) stresses that “humans *produce communicatively* and *communicate productively*” (see Fuchs 2017a).

Such approaches foreground the material character of communication, which means that communication is the material production and reproduction process of social relations, social systems, organisations, groups, institutions, subsystems, society, and sociality. Communication is at the same time identical and non-identical with the economy and the work process: Just like all production, communication is purposeful: It aims at creating social relations. But communication also has a *differentia specifica* that makes it different from other work processes: It creates and spreads meanings and therefore is a meaning-making production and work process.

Figure 1 shows the relationship of the economic and the non-economic. Communication is a process that spans across both realms.

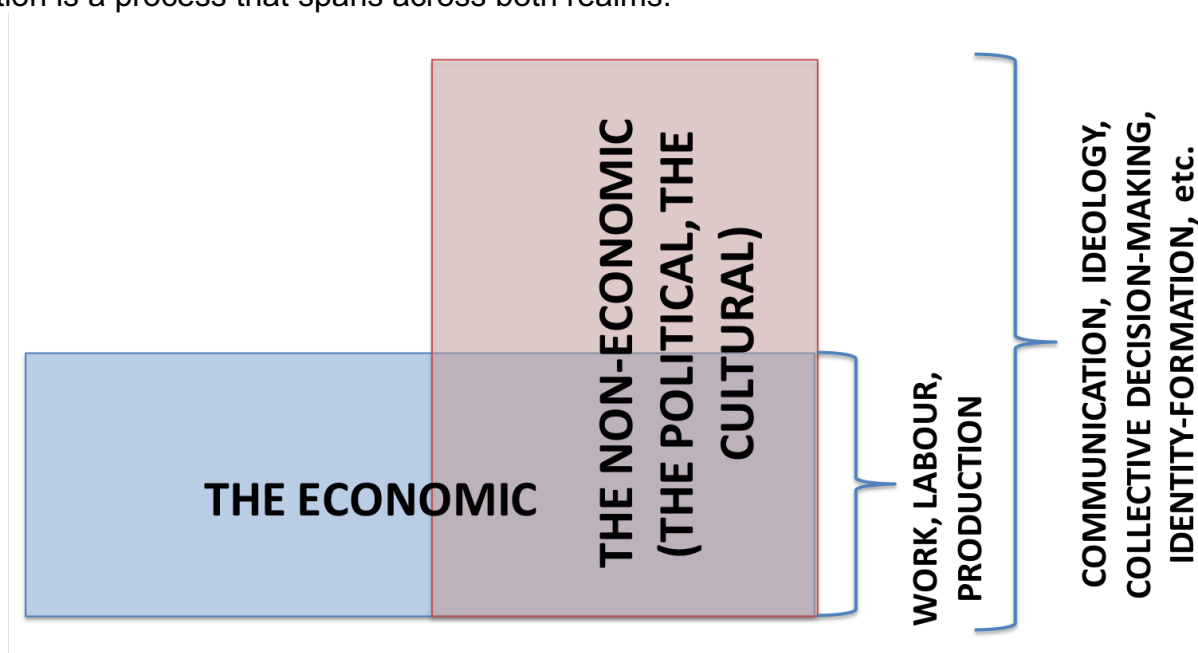


Figure 1: The relation of the economic and the non-economic in society

That communication is a particular type of production is one of its important features. But it is not just production, but social production. We do not produce and communicate alone and in isolation, like Robinson Crusoe on his island, but in company, in common, and in processes of co-operation. Marx stresses the social character of communication:

“Language is as old as consciousness, language *is* practical, real consciousness that exists for other men as well, and only therefore does it also exist for me; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of

intercourse with other men. Where there exists a relationship, it exists for me: the animal does not *'relate'* itself to anything, it does not *'relate'* itself at all. For the animal its relation to others does not exist as a relation. Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all" (Marx and Engels 1845/46, 44).

That communication and language are social also means that humans develop, create and communicate names for instances of being because "they use these things in practice, [...] these things are useful to them" (Marx 1881, 539). "At a certain stage of evolution after their needs, and the activities by which they are satisfied, have, in the meanwhile, increased and further developed, they will linguistically christen entire classes of these things which they distinguished by experience from the rest of the outside world. [...] Thus: human beings actually started by appropriating certain things of the outside world as means of satisfying their own needs, etc. etc.; later they reached a point where they *also denoted them linguistically* as what they are for them in their practical experience, namely as *means of satisfying their needs*, as things which 'satisfy' them" (Ibid.).

One of Marx's main critical sociological insights is that in capitalism and society in general, everything existing in and in constituted through social relations: The commodity, capital, capitalism, labour, money, value, classes, exploitation, domination, social struggles, communism, etc. are social relations. Marx in this context compares humans to the commodity:

"In a certain sense, a man is in the same situation as a commodity. As he neither enters into the world in possession of a mirror, nor as a Fichtean philosopher who can say 'I am I', a man first sees and recognizes himself in another man. Peter only relates to himself as a man through his relation to another man, Paul, in whom he recognizes his likeness. With this, however, Paul also becomes from head to toe, in his physical form as Paul, the form of appearance of the species man or Peter" (Marx 1867, 144, Footnote 19).

Marx here stresses that the human species and the human being are constituted through social relations. By making a metaphorical comparison to the commodity, he neither means that all social relations are instrumental and aimed at profit nor that social relations are a form of exchange. He rather stresses that the commodity as social relation reveals something about capitalism and society in general. In commodity exchange, buyer and seller relate to each other and exchange products (such as money and certain goods) as equals that were created under specific social conditions. A quantitative relationship of exchange is established. At the same time, any commodity exchange just like any other social relation has general features of human sociality such as the use of means, content, meanings, context, and impacts of communication.

Social relations need to be produced and reproduced. Communication is the production and reproduction process of social relations and therefore of society. Marx stresses that language and communication are social relations and that they constitute social relations. Society is possible because it is based on the social character of language and communication and the communicative character of social relations.

"Not only is the material of my activity given to me as a social product (as is even the language in which the thinker is active): my *own* existence *is* social activity, and therefore that which I make of myself, I make of myself for society and with the consciousness of myself as a social being" (Marx 1844c, 298).

“Production by an isolated individual outside society – a rare exception which may well occur when a civilized person in whom the social forces are already dynamically present is cast by accident into the wilderness – is as much of an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living together and talking to each other” (Marx 1857/58, 84).

“As regards the individual, it is clear e.g. that he relates even to language itself as his own only as the natural member of a human community. Language as the product of an individual is an impossibility. But the same holds for property. Language itself is the product of a community, just as it is in another respect itself the presence [Dasein] of the community, a presence which goes without saying” (Marx 1857/58, 490).

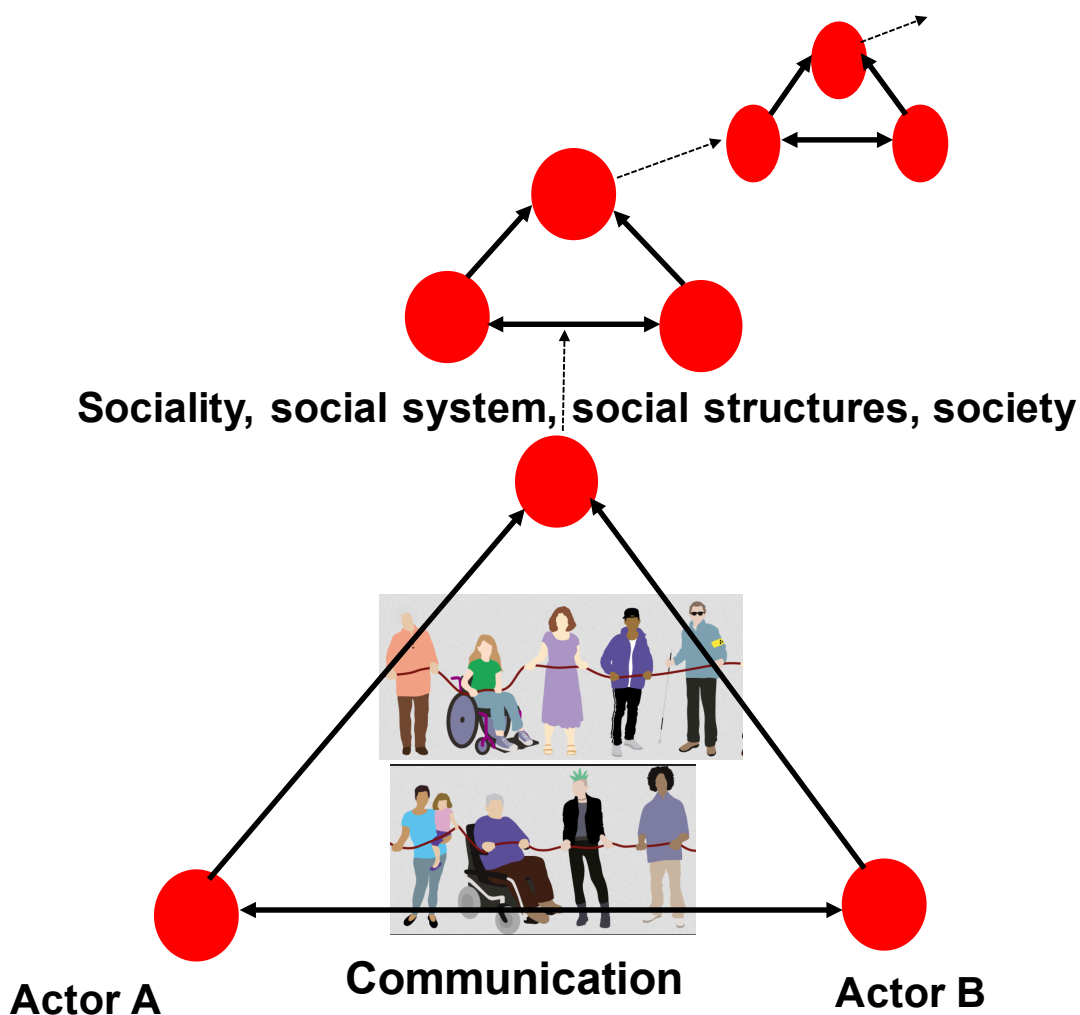


Figure 2: Model of communication as social production process

Figure 2 shows a model of communication as social production process: Humans through communication produce the social that enters into new communication processes so that sociality is an open totality. Humans produce and reproduce the social (including social relations, social structures, social systems, groups, organisations, institutions, subsystems, society) and the (re-)produced social structures again and

again enter new communication processes that in a self-reflexive manner create and re-create social structures. Expressed differently, one can say that society is a realm constantly emerging out of the dialectic of structures and human agency, in which communication is the productive process of mediation, in which humans co-produce social structures that enable and constrain human action so that the dialectic constantly dynamically reproduces itself, human sociality, social structures and society. Communication is the productive mediating process that organises the dialectic of structure and agency as open totality.

Marx not only analysed the communication process, but also the role of the means of communication and cultural/communicative labour in capitalism.

3. The Means of Communication and Communicative Labour in Capitalism

In *Capital Volume 1*'s technology-chapter "Machinery and Large-Scale Industry", Marx (1867) advances a dialectical concept of technology. He stresses that capitalist technology has a contradictory character: It advances new potentials for co-operation and welfare for all, but is under capitalist conditions also a means of exploitation and domination. Capitalist technology is ambivalent, ambiguous and contradictory (for a detailed discussion, see Fuchs 2016b, Chapter 15). Marx's dialectical approach to technology and society allows us today, in the age of social media, big data, the Internet of things, cloud computing, mobile communication, industry 4.0, artificial intelligence, etc., to avoid techno-optimism that celebrates every innovation and is uncritical about negative impacts as well as techno-pessimism that fights technology as such and wants to return to a society without modern technology that is shaped by toil. The point of progressive technology and communications politics is to appropriate, transform, re-design, re-shape the means of production and the means of communication as particular means of production into a progressive direction, which requires societal change along with technological transformation.

So Marx on the one hand stresses the dominative role of capitalist technology: "Every development of new productive forces is at the same time a weapon against the workers. All improvements in the means of communication, for example, facilitate the competition of workers in different localities and turn local competition into national, etc." (Marx 1847, 423). "[N]o improvement of machinery, no appliance of science to production, no contrivances of communication, no new colonies, no emigration, no opening of markets, no free trade, nor all these things put together, will do away with the miseries of the industrious masses; but that, on the present false base, every fresh development of the productive powers of labour must tend to deepen social contrasts and point social antagonisms" (Marx 1864, 9).

On the other hand, Marx argues that modern technologies can be appropriated and transformed. So for example, he writes that the worker's "appropriation of his own general productive power" (Marx 1857/58, 705) has the potential to foster "the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them" (Ibid., 706).

Marx stresses that there is a dialectic of society's temporal and spatial aspects and the development of technology and communications (the means of communication). Technologies do not develop arbitrarily. In class societies, their emergence is shaped by particular interests and power structures. At the same time, technology development and use is not determined, but also has a degree of unpredictability.

Capitalism reaches spatial and temporal limits that it tries to overcome in order to avoid crisis and continue accumulation. "Capital is the endless and limitless drive to go

beyond its limiting barrier” (Marx 1857/58, 334). Capital accumulation requires: 1) labour power; 2) means of production (raw materials, technologies, infrastructure); 3) commodity markets; 4) capital and capital investment. Globalisation and imperialism are strategies to cheapen the access to labour power and means of production, as well as to gain access to new commodity markets and opportunities for capital export and capital investment. New transport and communication technologies are medium and outcome of the globalisation of capitalism: The “revolution in the modes of production of industry and agriculture made necessary a revolution in the general conditions of the social process of production, i.e. in the means of communication and transport. [...] the means of communication and transport gradually adapted themselves to the mode of production of large-scale industry by means of a system of river steamers, railways, ocean steamers and telegraphs” (Marx 1867, 505-506). It is no accident that the Internet became so important in a new phase of the globalisation of capitalism.

The globalisation of production lengthens the turnover time of capital, the total time it takes to produce and sell commodities, because the commodities have to be transported from one place to another. As a consequence, capitalism strives to develop technological innovations in transport and communications in order to speed-up the production and distribution of commodities and the circulation of capital. “Economy of time, to this all economy ultimately reduces itself” (Marx 1857/58, 173).

Capitalism is shaped by the drive to expand and accumulate capital and power. Capitalism’s inherent imperialistic character requires that the exploitation of labour, commodity sales, and political rule are organised across spatio-temporal distances. Capitalism therefore advances the development of technologies that allow the organisation of capitalism by traversing long spatial distances in short time. In addition, there is a capitalist tendency of acceleration. Acceleration is based on the principle of accumulating more economic, political and cultural power in less time. Acceleration means that more commodities are produced and consumed, more decisions made and more experiences organised in ever less time.

As a tendency, the capitalist logic of accumulation calls forth processes of acceleration, globalisation, and financialisation as capitalist strategies and what David Harvey (2003) terms temporal, spatial and spatio-temporal fixes that aim at temporarily overcoming capitalism’s inherent crisis tendencies. “The spatio-temporal ‘fix’ [...] is a metaphor for a particular kind of solution to capitalist crises through temporal deferral and geographical expansion” (Harvey 2003, 115). Capitalism tends to defer crises geographically and into the future, but again and again reaches its limits that express themselves as crises. The development of new technologies is embedded into the search for spatio-temporal fixes to capitalism’s immanent crisis tendencies.

The transport of humans, information, and commodities is a key feature of capitalism. The means of transport and the means of communication therefore play a significant role in the organisation of accumulation. The following quotes show the importance that Marx gives to the phenomenon of the “shortening of time and space by means of communication and transport” (Marx 1865, 125):

“If the progress of capitalist production and the consequent development of the means of transport and communication shortens the circulation time for a given quantity of commodities, the same progress and the opportunity provided by the development of the means of transport and communication conversely introduces the necessity of working for ever more distant markets, in a word, for the world market. The mass of commodities in transit grows enormously, and hence so does the part of the social capital that stays for long periods in the stage of

commodity capital, in circulation time – both absolutely and relatively. A simultaneous and associated growth occurs in the portion of social wealth that, instead of serving as direct means of production, is laid out on means of transport and communication, and on the fixed and circulating capital required to keep these in operation” (Marx 1885, 329)

“The main means of cutting circulation time has been improved communications” (Marx 1894, 164).

“The more production comes to rest on exchange value, hence on exchange, the more important do the physical conditions of exchange – the means of communication and transport – become for the costs of circulation. Capital by its nature drives beyond every spatial barrier. Thus the creation of the physical conditions of exchange – of the means of communication and transport – the annihilation of space by time – becomes an extraordinary necessity for it. Only in so far as the direct product can be realized in distant markets in mass quantities in proportion to reductions in the transport costs, and only in so far as at the same time the means of communication and transport themselves can yield spheres of realization for labour, driven by capital; only in so far as commercial traffic takes place in massive volume – in which more than necessary labour is replaced – only to that extent is the production of cheap means of communication and transport a condition for production based on capital, and promoted by it for that reason” (Marx 1857/58, 524-525).

Marx not just describes the importance of the means of communication in capitalism, but also how the production of knowledge and communication develops due to capitalism’s need to increase productivity. Increasing productivity requires scientific progress and expert knowledge in production. The rising importance of knowledge and communicative labour is a consequence of the capitalist development of the productive forces. Marx in the *Grundrisse* anticipated the emergence of what some today term informational capitalism or digital capitalism or cognitive capitalism. He speaks in this context of the general intellect: “The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a direct force of production, and to what degree, then, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it” (Ibid., 706).

Also in *Capital*, Marx stresses the importance of the communication industry for capitalism. He argues that the “communication industry” that focuses on “moving commodities and people, and the transmission of mere information – letters, telegrams, etc.” is “economically important” (Marx 1885, 134). He writes that there are capitalists who “draw the greatest profit from all new development of the universal labour of the human spirit” (Marx 1894, 199). Today, these capitalists are CEOs, managers, and shareholders of transnational communication corporations such as Apple, AT&T, Verizon, Microsoft, China Mobile, Alphabet/Google, Comcast, Nippon, Softbank, IBM, Oracle, Deutsche Telekom, Amazon, Telefónica, etc.

Theories of the information society, whose ideal-type is Daniel Bell’s (1976) approach, claim that information production has become dominant in the economy and has radically transformed society into a new formation. Marxists are often critical of such claims that entail the danger of overlooking and downplaying the continuities of capitalism. Consequently, neoliberal ideologues often celebrate new technologies as

radically transforming everything towards the better. But in wanting to avoid technological determinism and idealism, Marxists often simply ignore the role of communications technologies and information production in the economy and society. The point is that today we experience the interaction of many capitalisms, including digital capitalism, communicative capitalism, finance capitalism, mobility capitalism, hyper-industrial capitalism, etc. (Fuchs 2014, Chapter 5).

Autonomist Marxism, especially the version advanced by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, has based on the notion of Marx's general intellect stressed the rise of knowledge in capitalism. "General intellect is a collective, social intelligence created by accumulated knowledges, techniques, and knowhow. The value of labor is thus realized by a new universal and concrete labor force through the appropriation and free usage of the new productive forces. What Marx saw as the future is our era" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 364). "Just as in a previous era Lenin and other critics of imperialism recognized a consolidation of international corporations into quasi-monopolies (over railways, banking, electric power, and the like), today we are witnessing a competition among transnational corporations to establish and consolidate quasi-monopolies over the new information infrastructure" (Ibid., 300). Hardt and Negri are among the limited number of radical theorists who have taken the role of communication in capitalism serious.

Marx was also visionary in respect to the emergence of the Internet. He envisioned a system that enables establishing "interconnections", where "each individual can acquire information about the activity of all others and attempt to adjust his own accordingly", and "connections are introduced thereby which include the possibility of suspending the old standpoint" (Marx 1857/58, 161). Doesn't Marx here give a perfect description of the Internet? Can we say that Karl Marx invented the Internet?

Another important contribution that Marx made to ground foundations of a critical theory of communication is his critique of ideology.

4. Ideology as Fetishised Communication, Fetishism as Ideological Communication

Marx critically theorised ideology and practiced the ideology critique of religion, bourgeois thought and capitalism. In his very early works, he stressed that ideologies create illusions and deceive and criticised religion as ideology:

"Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people. To abolish religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is to demand their *real* happiness. The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the *demand to give up a state of affairs which needs illusions*" (Marx 1844b, 175-176).

For Marx, the belief in religion is an ideological expression of a dominative society. He criticised left-wing thinkers such as Bruno Bauer and Ludwig Feuerbach for stopping at the critique of religion and not seeing how it is related to capitalism and necessitates the critique of capitalism. For Marx, "the criticism of heaven" has to turn "into the criticism of the earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*" (Ibid., 176).

The *German Ideology* is a draft book that Marx and Engels wrote for gaining self-understanding of the contemporary German philosophy and left-wing critique of their time. In the *German Ideology*, Marx argues that in "all ideology men and their relations

appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*” and that “this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process” (Marx and Engels 1845/46, 36). It here becomes evident that Marx conceives ideology based on Hegel’s dialectic of essence and appearance: Ideologies make existence appear different from how it really is. It hides the true essence and state of the world behind false appearances and communicates these false appearances as truths and nature. Ideology makes being appear as immediate, but illusionary reality whose simplicity hides the underlying complexity of the world that cannot always be experienced directly. Hegel (1991, Addition to §112), argues that the “immediate being of things is [...] represented as a sort of rind or curtain behind which the essence is concealed”. For Hegel, the truths hidden behind appearances are part of the world’s logic. In contrast, for Marx the process of hiding, naturalising, concealing and making truth disappear is an immanent expression of and practice in class societies.

In *Capital*, Marx (1867, 163-177) developed the insight that ideology hides power relations and naturalises domination into the concept of commodity fetishism. The commodity is a “mysterious” and “a very strange thing” (Ibid., 163). “The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social” (Ibid., 164-165).

The very structure of capitalism makes commodities, capital, money, classes, etc. appear as natural properties of society. Because of the division of labour and the mediated character of capitalism, producers and consumers do not directly experience the whole production process of the commodity. In everyday capitalist life, we are primarily confronted with commodities and money as things, whereas the production process and its class relations remain hidden. Capitalism is thereby in itself ideological in the very practices of capitalist production. Fetishism is ideological just like ideology is fetishist: Ideology fetishises certain changeable social relations as static, unchangeable, natural, thing-like entities.

The commodity is bound up with a peculiar capitalist form of language and communication: “Commodities as such are indifferent to all religious, political, national and linguistic barriers. Their universal language is price and their common bond is money” (Marx 1859, 384). In *Capital*, Marx argues that the commodity’s price (the monetary expression of a commodity’s average value) and value are the commodity’s language:

“We see, then, that everything our analysis of the value of commodities previously told us is repeated by the linen itself, as soon as it enters into association with another commodity, the coat; Only it reveals its thoughts in a language with which it alone is familiar, the language of commodities. In order to tell us that labour creates its own value in its abstract quality of being human labour, it says that the coat, in so far as it counts as its equal, i.e. is value, consists of the same labour as it does itself. In order to inform us that its sublime objectivity as a value differs from its stiff and starchy existence as a body, it says that value has the appearance of a coat, and therefore that in so far as the linen itself is an object of value [*Wertding*], it and the coat are as like as two peas. Let us note, incidentally, that the language of commodities also has, apart from Hebrew, plenty

of other more or less correct dialects. The German word '*Wertsein*' (to be worth), for instance, brings out less strikingly than the Romance verb '*valere*', '*valer*', '*valoir*' that the equating of commodity B with commodity A is the expression of value proper to commodity A" (Marx 1867, 143-144).

Price information communicates the value of a commodity. Capitalism has its particular form of capitalist communication, in which things appear to speak to humans. The sales process is a de-humanised form of communication, in which humans do not interact with each other, but the commodity speaks to humans through its price and advertising. The commodity form is a capitalist medium of communication that because of its fetishist character hides the social relations and power structures, in which humans communicatively produce and productively communicate and constitute and reproduce class relations and exploitation. The commodity form is a reifying and fetishistic form of communication that speaks to humans in categories of things and prices of things. Horst Holzer (1975, 45) stresses in this context that the "communicative character of commodities and the commodity character of communication" form the "foundation of an illusory synthesis at the level of society as a whole"³. The commodity form not just communicates prices, but also communicates that the commodity and capital are the natural organisation forms of society as a whole. Given the reified and alienated status of the commodity in capitalism, the commodity form of communication (advertising as audience/user commodity, communicative labour-power as commodity, access to information and communication as commodities, communicative contents as commodities, communication technologies as commodities, etc.) can also appear as natural properties of communication.

"The social relations of production embedded in goods are systematically hidden from our eyes. The real meaning of goods, in fact, is *emptied* out in capitalist production and consumption" (Jhally 2006, 88). Capitalist production through the fetishism of commodities empties out the real meaning of commodities and renders the real communication processes and their power structures that organise commodity production invisible. Advertising is a form of fetishised communication that gives and communicates artificial meanings to commodities. "Production empties. Advertising fills" (Ibid., 89). Advertising is so powerful because it tells commodity stories and provides meanings about goods and the economy. It uses various strategies for doing so, e.g. black magic, a commodity communication strategy, where "persons undergo sudden physical transformations" or "the commodity can be used to entrance and enrapture other people" (Ibid., 91). "The real function of advertising is not to give people information but to make them feel good" (Ibid.). Advertising is a secular form of religion, a magic communication system (Williams 1980). Advertising is a system of commodity fetishism: It promises satisfaction and happiness through the consumption of things (Jhally 2006, 102). Advertising is propaganda that promotes the ideology of human happiness through consumption of commodities. But advertising is not just a form of ideological communication that acts as commodity propaganda. It is also a peculiar commodity itself that is produced through the exploitation of audiences' and users' labour that creates attention and data (Smythe 1977; Fuchs 2014; 2015).

In his *Comments on James Mill's "Elements of Political Economy"*, Marx (1844a) makes clear that the language of commodities is not a true form of communication, but

³ Translation from German. German original: Der „Kommunikativ-Charakter der Waren und der Warencharakter der Kommunikation“ sind die „Basis einer scheinhaften gesamtgesellschaftlichen Synthese“.

an alienated and alienating type of communication characteristic for capitalism. In capitalism, language and communication are ideologically deformed, fetishising and naturalising:

“The only intelligible language in which we converse with one another [in capitalism] consists of our objects in their relation to each other. We would not understand a human language and it would remain without effect. By one side it would be recognised and felt as being a request, an entreaty, and therefore a *humiliation*, and consequently uttered with a feeling of shame, of degradation. By the other side it would be regarded as *impudence* or *lunacy* and rejected as such. We are to such an extent estranged from man's essential nature that the direct language of this essential nature seems to us a *violation of human dignity*, whereas the estranged language of material values seems to be the well-justified assertion of human dignity that is self-confident and conscious of itself” (Marx 1844a, 227).

For Marx, the fetishist character of language and communication in capitalism is not limited to the economy, but extends itself into the realms of politics and culture, where the state, bureaucracy, the ruling parties, the nation, nationalism, wars, racism, etc. appear through ideologies as natural forms of human communication and society. So whereas an economic form of ideology operates in the commodity's and capital's social form, we also find political ideologies in capitalism that act in a fetishist manner and in doing so aim at justifying dominant group's rule and distract attention from how capitalism and domination are at the heart of inequalities and other problems of society.

The most significant ideological and societal shift that societies around the world face today is the emergence of new nationalisms. In contemporary capitalism, neoliberal capitalism has turned into new authoritarian capitalisms signified by new nationalisms and political phenomena such as Donald Trump (USA), Brexit, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (AKP, Turkey), Viktor Orbán (Fidesz, Hungary), Heinz Christian Strache (Freedom Party of Austria), Norbert Hofer (Freedom Party, Austria), Sebastian Kurz (Austrian People's Party), the Alternative for Germany (Germany), Narendra Modi (Bharatiya Janata Party, India), Rodrigo Duterte (PDP-Laban, Philippines), Marine Le Pen (National Front, France), Geert Wilders (Party for Freedom, The Netherlands), Nigel Farage (UK Independence Party), Jarosław Kaczyński (Law and Justice Party, Poland), Andrej Babiš (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens, Czech Republic), the Finns Party (Finland), Golden Dawn (Greece), Jobbik (Hungary), the Danish People's Party, the Sweden Democrats, etc. The analysis of new forms of authoritarian capitalism is a key task for a Marxist theory of communication and ideology today. It has to involve an analysis of the structure of ideology, the way it is communicated over various media, including not just traditional ones (newspapers, speeches, television, radio), but also mobile media, social media and the Internet, its societal causes, and social struggles that could constitute alternatives.

Features of right-wing authoritarianism include hierarchic leadership, the friend/enemy-scheme, the friend-enemy-scheme, patriarchy, and the belief in militarism and law and order as means for responding to conflicts (Fuchs 2018). Right-wing authoritarian ideology involves the presentation of refugees, immigrants, foreigners, foreign states, or other groups as enemies of the nation that threaten its social cohesion and/or culture. Nationalism is an ideology that constructs a fictive national unity of capital and labour by opposing the nation to a foreign enemy and thereby distracts attention from how social problems are grounded in class, exploitation and domination. Nationalism

is a “misty veil” that “conceals in every case a definite historical content” (Luxemburg 1976, 135). Nationalism is a political fetishism that communicates the nation in the form of a “we”-identity (a national people) that is distinguished from enemies (outsiders, other nations, immigrants, refugees, etc.) that are presented as intruders, aliens, sub-humans, parasites, uncivilised, etc.

Marx did not limit the analysis of ideology and fetishism to the economy, but also criticised political fetishisms such as nationalism. So for example in 1870, he discussed the role of nationalism in distracting attention from class struggle and benefiting the ruling class. He analysed the creation of false consciousness among the working class in one country so that it hates immigrant workers and workers in the colonies. He specifically addressed that question in respect to Ireland as a British colony:

“Ireland is the BULWARK of the *English landed aristocracy*. The exploitation of this country is not simply one of the main sources of their material wealth; it is their greatest *moral power*. [...] And most important of all! All industrial and commercial centres in England now have a working class *divided* into two *hostile* camps, English PROLETARIANS and Irish PROLETARIANS. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who forces down the STANDARD OF LIFE. In relation to the Irish worker, he feels himself to be a member of the *ruling nation* and, therefore, makes himself a tool of his aristocrats and capitalists *against Ireland*, thus strengthening their domination *over himself*. He harbours religious, social and national prejudices against him. [...] This antagonism is kept artificially alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short by all the means at the disposal of the ruling class. *This antagonism is the secret of the English working class's impotence*, despite its organisation. It is the secret of the maintenance of power by the capitalist class. And the latter is fully aware of this” (Marx 1870, 473, 474, 475).

For Marx, overcoming ideology requires overcoming capitalism, class society, exploitation, and domination.

5. Conclusion

In Marx's works, there is a number of important elements of a critical theory of communication, including the following ones:

- Communication is a material process, in which humans produce and reproduce social relations, social structures, social systems, groups, organisations, institutions, society, and sociality.
- Society is possible because it is based on the social character of language and communication and the communicative character of social relations.
- Communication has both economic and non-economic features.
- Marx opposed technological determinism by a dialectic of technology and society that sees technology (including the means of communication) as having a contradictory character in class societies.
- Technologies do not develop arbitrarily. In class societies, their emergence is shaped by particular interests and power structures. At the same time, technology development and use is not determined, but also has a degree of unpredictability.
- Marx stressed that there is a dialectic of society's temporal and spatial aspects and the development of technology and communications (= the means of communication).

- With the notion of the general intellect, Marx anticipated the emergence of communicative/informational/digital/cognitive capitalism.
- Marx critically theorised ideology as fetishist form of communication. Ideology hides the true essence and state of the world behind false appearances and communicates these false appearances as truths and nature.
- Capitalism has its particular form of capitalist communication, in which things appear to speak to humans. The sales process is a de-humanised form of communication, in which humans do not interact with each other, but the commodity speaks to humans. The language of commodities is not a true form of communication, but an alienated and alienating type of communication characteristic for capitalism.
- The fetishist character of language and communication in capitalism is not limited to the economy, but extends itself into the realms of politics and culture, where the state, bureaucracy, the ruling parties, the nation, nationalism, wars, racism, etc. appear through ideologies as natural forms of human communication and society.

Struggles for socialist alternatives are struggles for “the *positive* transcendence of *private property as human self-estrangement*”, “the real *appropriation* of the *human essence* by and for man”, “the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e., human) being”, “humanism”, “the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species” (Marx 1844c, 296).

Such a society would be a true communication society, in which social relations would not be shaped by asymmetric power structures and exploitation, but controlled by the community of humans who act, produce, decide and live in common based on the common control of society. Commons-based communication means to make something common to a community. It is a process of commoning.

The term communication in modern language is derived from the Latin verb *communicare* and the noun *communicatio*. *Communicare* means to share, inform, unite, participate, and literally to make something common. A heteronomous and class-divided society is a society based on particularistic control. Struggles for the commons in contrast aim at overcoming class and heteronomy and to make society a realm of common control. In an economy of the commons, the means of production are owned collectively. In a polity of the commons, everyone can directly shape and participate in collective decision-making. In a culture of the commons, everyone is recognised. In such a participatory democracy, humans speak and communicate as a common voice. They own and decide together and give recognition to each other.

A communicative society is not a society in which humans communicate because humans have to communicate in all societies in order to survive. A communicative society is also not an information society, in which knowledge and information/communication technologies have become structuring principles. A communicative society is a society, in which the original meaning of communication as making something common is the organising principle. Society and therefore also communication’s existence then correspond to communication’s essence. A communicative society is a society controlled in common so that communication is sublated and turned from the general process of the production of sociality into the very principle on which society is founded. A communicative society also realises the identity of *communicare* (communicating, making common) and *communis* (community). Society becomes a community of the commons. Such a society is a commonist society. Commons-based media enable communication whose “*primary freedom [...] lies in not being a trade*” (Marx 1842, 175).

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Where's the Working Class?

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Abstract: From the Communist Manifesto onwards, the self-emancipation of the working class was central to Marx's thought. And so it was for subsequent generations of Marxists including the later Engels, the pre-WW1 Kautsky, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky and Gramsci. But in much contemporary Marxist theory the active role of the working class seems at the least marginal and at the most completely written off. This article traces the perceived role of the working class in Marxist theory, from Marx and Engels, through the Second and Third Internationals, Stalinism and Maoism, through to the present day. It situates this in political developments changes in the nature of the working class over the last 200 years. It concludes by suggesting a number of questions about Marxism and the contemporary working class that anyone claiming to be a Marxist today needs to answer.

Keywords: Marxism, proletariat, working class, self-emancipation

1. Introduction

None of the authors in this Marx bicentenary issue believe that Marxism will be two hundred years old on May 5, 2018. Newly born babies, even ones who would turn out to be as sharp as Karl Marx, do not have such world views ready-made in their heads. It took more than two and a half decades for Marx to become a Marxist and for Marxism itself to be born. As to exactly when that was – and why – there would be a range of differing opinions. When Marx first immersed himself in political economy and articulated his theory of alienation in the 1844 Manuscripts? After an epistemological break with his early Hegelianism whose scientific maturity was first fully displayed in *Capital* or indeed the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*? Or, at the extreme, was Marxism as a systematic doctrine a creation of Engels after Marx's death?

This article takes the (probably majority) view that Marxism was born in the mid-1840s and (perhaps more controversially) that the birth was the development by Marx (and Engels) of their theory of revolution as the self-emancipation of the working-class. This article follows that thread through the history of Marxism, and concludes by suggesting some of the questions it poses for those of us who might want to claim to be Marxists today.

2. Marx, Engels and the Self-Emancipation of the Working Class

The working class became a central part of Marx's thinking after his arrival in Paris in late 1843. By 1846 Marx and Engels had developed their fully-fledged theory of the revolutionary self-emancipation of the working class. The process is outlined in some detail in Löwy (2005) and Draper (1977a; 1977b). Both authors emphasise the impact on Marx's thinking of his direct or indirect encounters with working class communists and working class struggle – the move from comparatively backward Cologne to the great metropolis of Paris; the direct experience of working class communist secret societies in Paris from the Spring of 1844 (Löwy 2005, 50); Engels' experience of English

workers (and English and Scottish political economy) as published alongside Marx in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* of 1844; the Silesian weavers revolt in June 1844; and finally Marx's first trip to Britain, under the auspices of Engels, in July 1845 and his meetings there with left Chartists.

In his *Introduction to a Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, written in late 1843 and January 1844 shortly after his arrival in Paris, Marx, for the first time explicitly envisaged the working class as the agent, or at least instrument, of revolution – although still very much in the language of (however critical) Young Hegelianism. The proletariat was the new universal class, “a sphere which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the *complete loss* of man and hence can win itself only through the *complete re-winning of man*. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the *proletariat*” (Marx 1844a, 186). He concludes: “The *head* of this emancipation is *philosophy*, its *heart* is the *proletariat*” (Ibid., 187). This still has a distinctly elitist tinge to it. For *philosophy* read (radical Young Hegelian) *philosophers*, and, on the worst interpretation the proletariat could simply be seen as cannon-fodder for the intellectuals. But in a polemic with Arnold Ruge over the Silesian Weavers revolt, published in August 1844, Marx makes clear, again for the first time, that the proletariat itself can make its own communist philosophy: “not one of the French or English uprisings had such a theoretical and conscious character as the uprising of the Silesian weavers [...] recall the *song of the weavers*, that bold call to struggle, in which there is not even a mention of hearth and home, factory and district, but in which the proletariat at once, in a striking sharp and unrestrained manner, proclaims its opposition to the society of private property.” (Marx 1844b, 201).

A few months later, in the *Holy Family* (written in late 1844, published in 1845) Marx makes clear that his concept of the revolutionary role of the proletariat is not one of glorification but of objective assessment.

“When socialist writers ascribe this world-historic role to the proletariat, it is not at all [...] because they regard the proletarians as *gods*. Rather to the contrary [...] It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment regards as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being* it will historically be compelled to do [...] A large part of the English and French proletariat is already conscious of its historic task and is working to develop that consciousness into complete clarity”. (Marx and Engels 1845, 36-37)

The theory takes a final step to seeing communist consciousness developing in the proletariat itself in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels 1845/46; Löwy 109-116) and culminates in some of the well-known ringing phrases of *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Marx and Engels 1848). It should not be supposed that these formulations about the self-emancipation of the proletariat are simply a product of Marx's youth. As Michael Löwy observes:

“The theory of revolutionary self-emancipation by the proletariat was not a ‘youthful episode,’ a transitory moment abandoned by the ‘mature’ Marx. It remained, for the entire period between 1848 and his death, one of the fundamental assumptions of his political activity. It lights up and helps to endow with their true meaning his great political and politico-ideological battles, the German rev-

olution of 1848-1850, the fights against Lassalle and Bakunin, the Paris Commune, the critique of opportunism in German Social-Democracy". (Löwy 2005, 149)

3. The Second and Third Internationals

For at least forty years after Marx's death this fundamental link between Marxism and the self-emancipation of the working class was taken as a given by virtually everyone who considered themselves a Marxist. It was reasserted on numerous occasions by Engels during the twelve years that he survived Marx.

At least at a verbal level it formed a cornerstone of the leading party of the Second International, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Thus the Erfurt Programme of 1891, by which the party shed its previous compromises with the Lassalleans, asserted that:

"This social transformation [from capitalism to socialism] amounts to the emancipation not only of the proletariat, but of the entire human race, which is suffering from current conditions. But it can only be the work of the working class" (Erfurt Programme 1891).

And, in his lengthy popular gloss on the programme, *The Class Struggle* written in 1892, the SPD's leading Marxist theoretician, Karl Kautsky devoted much attention to the development and political role of the proletariat (Kautsky 1892, particularly sections II and V).

The volte-face of the SPD into supporting its own government in 1914 raises the question of whether all of this was simply lip-service. But we should note two things in this context. First until 1914 this lip service was accepted at face value by, amongst others, Lenin. Second within the SPD there was a substantial left current (see Schorske 1955) many of whom were later to be founders of the German Communist Party, including Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin and Franz Mehring. One can scarcely accuse them of simply paying lip-service to the revolutionary self-emancipation of the working class.

Rosa Luxemburg, in particular, wrote some of the most powerful works of the pre-World War 1 period on the self-activity of the proletariat as a preparation for its revolutionary self-emancipation, most famously *Reform and Revolution*, written in response to Eduard Bernstein's revisionism, and *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, commenting on the spontaneous strike waves in the 1905 Russian revolution and their relevance for German Social Democracy (Luxemburg 1900; 1906).

Amid a huge upsurge in working-class self-activity in Europe after the First World War the call of the Bolsheviks to break from the compromised Social Democratic parties, and form new revolutionary Communist Parties in a new revolutionary Communist International met with a huge and enthusiastic response. Here it was clear that the self-emancipation of the proletariat was an essential, very likely *the* essential, component of Marxism.

Two quotes from the period, one from towards its beginning, one from towards its end, from thinkers who have subsequently been (misleadingly) grouped into the distinctly academically-oriented construct "Western Marxism" (Anderson 1976, 25-26) bear this out. First the Italian Communist, Antonio Gramsci, writing in 1919 in relation to the factory councils of Turin:

“The socialist State already exists potentially in the institutions of social life characteristic of the exploited working class. To link these institutions, co-ordinating and ordering them into a highly centralized hierarchy of competences and powers, while respecting the necessary autonomy and articulation of each, is to create a genuine workers’ democracy here and now – a workers’ democracy in effective and active opposition to the bourgeois State, and prepared to replace it here and now” (Gramsci 1919, 65)

Second the Hungarian Communist Georg Lukács writing in 1924 the opening of his little book *Lenin*:

“Historical materialism is the theory of the proletarian revolution. It is so because its essence is an intellectual synthesis of the social existence which produces and fundamentally determines the proletariat: and because the proletariat struggling for liberation finds its clear self-consciousness in it” (Lukács 1970, 9).

4. Who Were the Proletariat and What Were They Supposed to Do?

Given that the proletariat was so central to Marx and Engels’ thought from the mid-1840s onwards what precisely did they understand by the proletariat? First it should be understood that from the beginning they used “proletariat” and “working class” interchangeably. As Engels put it explicitly in March 1845 in his preface to *The Condition of the Working Class in England*: “I have continually used the expressions workingmen (*Arbeiter*) and proletarians, working-class, propertyless class and proletariat as equivalents” (Engels 1845, 304).

This flexibility of usage persisted in the work of both Engels and Marx, and of subsequent Marxists. But alongside that early flexibility, there was a clear conception of who that proletariat/working class was. Engels makes the point explicitly – this time in his *Principles of Communism*, a catechism-like presentation of many of the ideas soon to be incorporated in the *Communist Manifesto*:

“*Question 2*: What is the proletariat?”

Answer: The proletariat is that class of society which procures its means of livelihood entirely and solely from the sale of its labour [...] whose whole existence is dependent on the demand for labour, hence [...] on the fluctuations resulting from unbridled competition. The proletariat [...] is, in a word, the working class of the nineteenth century.

Question 3: Then there have not always been proletarians?

Answer: No. Poor folk and working classes have always existed [...] But such poor, such workers who live under the conditions just stated, that is proletarians, have not always existed, any more than competition has always been free and unbridled” (Engels 1847, 341).

So, for Marx and Engels, the proletariat consisted of those who lived by selling their labour (or rather, as the pair were soon to refine their economic terminology, their labour power) under capitalism. Even this wide definition clearly excludes peasants and other true petty-bourgeois (those who owned their own means of production). In most of their writings, Marx and Engels went further, implicitly narrowing down this broader definition to urban workers and assuming that these were concentrated in factories. So

excluded from the “core” proletariat were agricultural labourers and the then not at all insignificant category of domestic servants.

Various remarks in Marx’s economic writings make further exclusions but also explicitly assert some important (at least to subsequent debates) inclusions. So excluded were wage workers directly employed by government (since, for Marx, they did not produce surplus-value). But explicitly included were service workers (i.e. workers producing non-material goods) and “white collar” workers (Marx gives the example of a teacher in a private school) and workers in distribution (Draper 1977b, 34-35). As Hal Draper observes, these economic qualifications and clarifications, on the one hand separate Marx’s view of the proletariat, from the caricature of “dirt splattered, horny-handed blue collar toilers”, but on the other hand they leave one with the apparently perverse result that “an editorial supervisor of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* may be a proletarian while a Navy Yard shipfitter is not” (Ibid., 35-36). But these are not only “extreme” examples, they were also, in Marx’s time fairly uncommon ones.

With the benefit of hindsight, two observations need to be made about these conceptions of the proletariat:

First, on either a broader or a narrower definition the proletariat were a distinct minority in Marx’s time in Western Europe and North America, never mind on a world scale. Major “developed” Western European economies (for instance France) retained a majority or near majority agricultural sector, dominated numerically by peasant proprietors, until the Second World War. But the corollary of this is that from the time that Marx “discovered” the proletariat in the mid-1840s, the proletariat on any definition unquestionably continued to grow – in Europe and North America until well into the second half of the twentieth century, and in Asia, most notably and dramatically in China, until the present day.

Second, the niceties that Marx’s economic enquiries drew or explicitly didn’t draw about the boundaries of the proletariat were not of a great deal of social or political importance until well into the second half of the twentieth century. The proletariat or working class, both objectively and subjectively, were by and large manual, by and large urban, and if they satisfied these two criteria behaved exactly like proletarians even if they were in direct state employment. In hindsight Marx certainly greatly exaggerated the communist consciousness of the Silesian weavers’ revolt of 1844 in his contemporaneous polemic, or a writing a few months later similarly exaggerated when he said that “a large part” of the English and French proletariat was already conscious of its historical role. But with equal hindsight we can also say that for over a hundred years after Marx (and Engels) “discovered” the proletariat, proletarians organised and struggled in large numbers, and in very significant numbers numerically dominated mass parties which proclaimed themselves Marxist, like the German SPD before the First World War and the European Communist Parties after it.

5. Marxism without the Proletariat?

Given the history we have just described the notion of Marxism without the proletariat seems a strange one. But one of the first schools of thought along these lines flourished for a short while precisely during the period when in the rest of the self-labelled Marxist world the fundamental link between Marxism and the working-class was seen as a truism. This school of thought was Russian “Legal Marxism” of the 1890s whose most notable figure was Peter Struve and who were formally part of the then very loose Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party, as was Lenin. They used Marxism, like Lenin, against the peasant-oriented Narodniks, to argue that capitalism was developing in Russia. But that was all. Unlike Lenin they did not add to this the need for working

class struggle (Zinoviev 1973, 38-47). In effect “Legal Marxism” was an ideology of the developing Russian capitalist class, a verdict confirmed by the very rapid movement of Struve and its other leading figures into being founders of the openly-capitalist Cadet Party soon after the end of their “Marxist” period.

Russian Legal Marxism was of course a very specific product of a very specific time in the history of a very specific country. It would be unwise to generalise very much from it. But what it does illustrate is that it is perfectly possible for self-described “Marxists” to eliminate the proletariat from their “Marxism”, and in doing so to produce not only something quite different from what Marx, Engels or their successors would have recognised, but also something that hitches “Marxism” to the interests of a quite different class.

Since the early years of the Communist International and the ending of the years of revolutionary upsurge in Europe that followed the First World War, we can identify two wide-ranging tendencies which have laid the ground for various types of self-styled “Marxism” without the self-emancipation of the working class. The first is most obviously political but with deep (and various) social roots, the second most obviously social but with numerous and varied political implications. The first is the rise and dominance of what, for want of a less contentious word, I shall call Stalinism. The second is the ups and downs in class struggle and changes in social structure over the last hundred years. I will deal with each in a very short and simplified way, from the point of view of what consequences they might have for the relation between self-styled Marxism and the self-emancipation of the working class.

First, Stalinism. From late 1923, on the back of the defeat of the revolutionary wave in Western and Central Europe, the consequent isolation of the Russian Revolution, and the social and political disintegration of the Russian working class which had made the October Revolution, the bureaucracy in Russia represented by Stalin advanced its position. By 1928 with the first five-year plan, the turn against the peasants, the final liquidation of any sort of inner-party dissent and crash industrialisation, Stalin and the bureaucracy that he represented consolidated themselves into a national ruling class (Harman 1967).

This had profound consequences on the international stage:

“In the period 1924-28 the Comintern became a ‘centrist’ body – Trotsky coined the term ‘bureaucratic centrism’ to describe its policies – though it still carried, with increasing distortions and degeneration, something of the tradition of its revolutionary years. After 1928 the last elements of these were progressively liquidated, just as the last elements of workers’ power in the USSR were liquidated” (Hallas 1985, 165).

“Marxism” for most people became whatever the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy proclaimed it was. From 1928 to 1934 that was a mechanical and disastrous ultra-left turn (to coincide with “collectivisation” of agriculture and crash industrialisation). From 1934 it was the distinctly right-wing turn of the Popular Front. With the exceptions of the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939-41, and their exit from the post-war coalition governments in Western Europe in 1947/48, popular frontism persisted in the orientation of the Communist parties right through to the demise of the Soviet Union.

In the years following the Second World War, Stalinism could present itself as a considerable success story, not merely in the USSR, but also outside. New regimes identical to Stalin’s USSR – the “People’s Democracies” – were created by the Red

Army in Eastern Europe. Elsewhere, in China and North Vietnam similar regimes were established by Communist Party-led peasant armies.

From the perspective of Marxism as revolutionary self-emancipation the consequences of these developments were three-fold.

First, for most self-described Marxists either within the Stalinist countries or in the Stalinised Communist Parties outside them, Marxism became a somewhat lifeless doctrine, where quotes from the masters, were regularly employed to defend the vested interests and latest policy turns of a national bureaucratic ruling class. Even for many “independent” Marxists, employing Marxist methods in academic disciplines like economics or history, this meant that the self-emancipation of the working class took a back seat.

Second, decades of popular frontism, coupled with the victories of distinctly non-working class revolutions in China and elsewhere, meant that the concept of the working class, as a class with distinct characteristics, could seem rather less central to the political practice of Marxism, than the vaguer, wider and (often opportunistically) more flexible category of “the people”.

Thirdly, if emancipation can be brought about by either Stalin’s Red Army or Mao’s People’s Liberation Army, without any obvious activity by the working-class then what becomes of working-class *self*-emancipation?

Alongside the political phenomenon of Stalinism, have been the social phenomena of the ups and downs of class struggle and changes in class structure. Again, I will be very simplified and schematic.

From Marx and Engels onwards, Marxists have never claimed that the working-class as a whole always has a revolutionary, or indeed a socialist, class consciousness. On the one hand, as some of the quotations I have already cited indicate, even at their most optimistic (e.g. Marx and Engels 1845, 36-37) Marx and Engels proposed that this was a *tendency* rooted in the nature of the proletariat. Marx, Engels and their successors also readily recognised that there are ebbs and flows in the class struggle, which along with various political, economic and social factors, can inhibit or encourage class consciousness. Among the factors identified by Marx and later Marxists as affecting levels of class struggle and socialist consciousness have been the state of the economy, the influence of reformist political or trade union organisation, labour bureaucracy and aristocracy, nationalism, conscious stratagems by the ruling class, influence of the petty bourgeoisie, etc. And one of the claims for Marxist political organisation from *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* onwards, was that it was through a revolutionary party that the most aware of the proletariat, could conduct propaganda and agitation to maximise the effect of class struggle in bringing to socialist consciousness the mass of their fellows. This, of course, entailed often highly detailed and highly specific discussion of tactics and organisation. That is what many of the most famous works of “classical” Marxism (e.g. Lenin (1902) and Luxemburg (1906)) are all about.

One important set of factors which Marxists from Marx onwards identified as holding back the development of revolutionary or socialist consciousness by the working class is the existence of various real social divisions among wage earners – foremen and those they manage, skilled and unskilled, blue and white collar etc. It is out of some of these divisions that the concept of the “aristocracy of labour” developed – although it should be noted here that skilled craft workers have played an important part in the labour movement and in its revolutionary side from the start, including in the early Communist Parties.

To hugely simplify, we can note that these social divisions among wage workers were perceived among Marxists as having very little impact on the centrality of the

working class to their theory until after the Second World War. White collar workers were growing, but so too were “classic” blue collar (with the continued move from countryside to city in Europe and America). And, with ups and downs in class struggle (and among the ups was the huge one following the First World War during which the Communist International was established) for more than 90 years after Marx’s death blue collar workers in Europe and America continued to build and grow trade union organisations, and in the latter of those years were joined in that effort by large numbers of white collar or professional workers.

However, in the boom decades of the 50s and 60s growing affluence appeared to many commentators to be accompanied by diminished class consciousness – supposedly particularly evidenced in the declining vote for and decline in participation in working class (generally social democratic) parties. Such views, sometimes summed up under the heading of the “embourgeoisement” thesis, were advanced, with varied degrees of nuance, generally by observers from the right of social democracy. But they, and the facts to which they alluded, had an impact on many Marxist intellectuals. One of the most notable examples is Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy’s widely read *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order*, first published in 1966. Having analysed and critiqued that order, Baran and Sweezy, turned to what might bring it to an end:

“The answer of traditional Marxist orthodoxy – that the industrial proletariat must eventually rise in revolution against its capitalist oppressors – no longer carries conviction. Industrial workers are a diminishing minority of the American working class, and their organized cores in the basic industries have to a large extent been integrated into the system as consumers and ideologically conditioned members of the society”. (Baran and Sweezy 1968, 349)

Instead, Baran and Sweezy saw the likely threats to American monopoly capitalism being the wars waged by “revolutionary peoples [which] have achieved historic victories in Vietnam, China, Korea, Cuba and Algeria” and the “socialist countries show[ing] by their example that it is possible to use man’s mastery over the forces of nature to build a rational society satisfying the human needs of human beings” (Baran and Sweezy 1968, 351; 352).

Monopoly Capital exemplifies two types of “Marxism without the working class” which were a product of a perceived prolonged downturn in domestic class struggle. The first is Marxism as pure critique (in this case mainly economic) of capitalism. The second type, in the conclusion just cited, sees an agency of change but not a working class one – instead we have the “revolutionary wars” of the oppressed peoples or peasants of what was then termed the underdeveloped world. Both types were very much products of their time and the latter was to be taken up with considerable vigour in the following decade by various strands of Maoists in America, Western Europe and elsewhere.

The conventional post-war wisdom of the passivity of the working class was shattered by the huge upturn in industrial and political militancy, particularly in Western Europe, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, whose high points included the French May Events of 1968, and the Italian Hot Autumn of 1969. This upturn featured militancy by the classic industrial working class – for instance the carworkers, who had been both the subject of Gramsci’s attention in 1919, and the attention of the sociologists of “embourgeoisement” in the 1960s. It also featured extensive militancy by white collar and

professional wage-earners, who during this period joined unions and took part in industrial action in historically unprecedented numbers. Were these too part of the working class, making up for the decline in blue collar and manufacturing employment? Marxists at the time pondered the question (see Wright 1978, 30) and some (for instance Callinicos and Harman (1987)) readily concluded that most white-collar and professional wage-earners were part of the proletariat.

The four decades since the upsurge of working class militancy in the late sixties and early seventies have seen further enormous changes in both occupational and class structure and politics. Very schematically, we can list some of the most notable of these:

- The decline in manufacturing and blue-collar employment in the “advanced” economies of Europe and North America has continued.
- Unionisation in these economies has steadily declined from its highpoint in the late 1970s.
- White collar wage earners have continued to expand in numbers (now considerably outnumbering blue collar in these economies), but with some very different patterns of employment – for example the decline of some big routine white-collar workplaces and the rise of new occupations linked with information technology.
- Alongside these developments in Europe and North America, has gone a massive expansion of the numbers of wage earners, including a massive expansion of blue collar and manufacturing wage earners, in much of the rest of the world. On at least one measure there can never have been more proletarians on the earth than there are now. But it may also be the case that they have rarely been less organised.
- These four decades have also been the decades of the dominance of neo-liberalism – and there is clear connection between that and some of the trends I have just noted. The ideological dominance of neo-liberalism has been shaken by the crash of 2008 and its austerity aftermath. That in turn has produced a growth in the intellectual attractions of Marxism and also a “populist” revolt by many of those who now realise how much they have been short-changed by neo-liberalism’s “achievements”. However, to date, much of that “populist” revolt has taken a distinctly right-wing form and those right-wing politics have seemed particularly attractive among sections of the “classic” industrial blue-collar workers.

6. Questions for Today’s Marxists

A rise in intellectual attraction of Marxism as critique of a failed system alongside the rise of right-wing politics with an apparently proletarian base – that seems a recipe for “Marxism without the working class”.

In these circumstances there are a number of questions which those of us who might want to consider ourselves Marxists need to address:

First, and most fundamental: Is it possible to be a Marxist without accepting the self-emancipation of the working class as an integral part of Marxism? For those who want to reply “Yes” two further questions follow:

- (a) How does this make Marxism different from any other critique? In other words what ever happened to “the point is to change it”?
- (b) Or is there perhaps some other agency of change – perhaps a reconstituted “people” for the 21st century? If so we need to know the details.

For those whose reply to our fundamental question is a firm “No” three further questions follow:

- (a) Is the proletariat still centred around blue collar workers and/or manufacturing but has the weight of these now decisively relocated from its previous bases in Europe and North America?
- (b) Is the proletariat, on the other hand, equally centred among the new white collar occupations, particularly those associated with information technology? And if so are the tools developed by Marxists in the seventies to analyse these groups still adequate? If not what are the new ones?
- (c) And finally – whether we choose positive answers to (a) and/or (b) – what leads us to believe that this 21st century proletariat will act as a class seeking its self-eman-cipation?

These are not easy questions and they don't have easy answers. But any of us who wants to be called a Marxist two hundred years after Marx's birth needs to ask them, and make a serious start on giving answers.

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Marxist Perspectives on the Global Enclosures of Social Reproduction

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Abstract: Women's unpaid care and domestic work is gaining relevance in policy-making as well as in academia. Feminist scholars and activists have lobbied successfully for the integration of unpaid care and domestic work into the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 5.4) of the United Nations in the hope for greater recognition of women's contribution to the economy. Policy documents about social reproduction highlight women's disproportionate share of reproductive activities as an obstacle to women's economic empowerment and as a relic of 'traditional' gender roles. Social reproduction is thereby not understood as a merit in itself, but as an obstacle to women's participation in paid labour. Policy implications will enable certain empowerment effects for some women, but at the same time promote the increasing privatization and commodification of reproductive work across the globe. Rising inequalities between the Global North and South and between women along the categories of class and race will be one major result. To theoretically explain such contradictory effects of the recognition of social reproduction, I use the concept of 'enclosures' based on Marx' 'primitive accumulation'. Feminist scholars use the concept to explain how unpaid care and housework is commodified or de-commodified to integrate women into the paid labour force or to reduce the costs of social reproduction according to the needs of the economy. The sudden interest in unpaid care and domestic work e.g. in the Sustainable Development Goals can therefore be seen as process of double enclosure, which integrates women into the paid labour force, but also sets the grounds for the further commodification of domestic and care work. This paper aims to critically discuss the sudden interest in unpaid domestic and care work and its contradictory effects from a Marxist feminist perspective and reflects on feminist strategies and movements in global governance. After introducing Marxist perspectives on social reproduction, the question if and how feminist ideas and concepts have been appropriated, the effects and implications of global policies on social reproduction and global inequalities, as well as possible counter-strategies will be discussed.

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Keywords: social reproduction, primitive accumulation, enclosure, unpaid work, housework, care, gender, global inequality, intersectionality, economic empowerment, United Nations, sustainable development goals, politics of appropriation, feminism, feminist strategies

1. Introduction

Women globally spend on average about three times as much time on unpaid care and domestic tasks as men (UN 2017b). After decades spent in a shadowy existence, unpaid care and domestic work are suddenly widely debated in the context of global

governance and considered as the missing piece of the puzzle in understanding women's smaller participation in the paid labour force (OECD et al. 2014). International governmental organisations, like the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Union and the United Nations are even integrating the recognition of social reproduction into their social and development policies (EU 2016; OECD et al. 2014; UN 2015).

Does this sudden interest mark a final success after decades of interventions and lobbying by feminist networks and movements, like the 'wages for housework' movement in the 1970s (e.g. Cox and Federici 1975; Dalla Costa and James 1972) or more recently by transnational feminist movements in the context of global governance (Razavi 2007)? Or, to put it simply: Is the private finally political and, as such, recognised by the state(s)? Judging from a Marxist perspective, these new developments should warrant a more sceptical appraisal, especially because the new social policies link the recognition of reproductive work to women's economic empowerment, aka their exploitation in the paid labour force (EU 2016; OECD et al. 2014; UNDP 2016b).

In this article, I argue that these policies focusing on women's integration into paid labour can be elucidated as instruments of enclosures based on Marx's concept of primitive accumulation, which he introduced in *Capital, Vol. I* (Marx 1867/1890). Therein, he describes mechanisms of appropriation or enclosure of spheres (e.g. commons or unpaid work), which used to be external to the capital accumulation process and how the (continuous) reproduction of capitalism is based on such mechanisms (e.g. Brown 2009; De Angelis 2001; Glassman 2006; Hartsock 2006; Sanyal 2014). Feminist materialist critique has exposed that women's unpaid housework as an external sphere is itself not outside, but constitutive for capitalist accumulation and that non-regular work is the basis on which the formal economy is built. Processes of enclosure are therefore important to understand atypical and non-traditional forms of exploitation, especially in the Global South, which have been – to a large extent – neglected by Marxist scholarship (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 2000; Mies 1986).

The renewed interest in unpaid care and domestic work in global governance and its probable impacts even leads to a process of *double enclosure*: First, the policies aim at including women into the modes of production through their so called 'economic empowerment', whereby unpaid work is appropriated in the process. Second, as a concomitant of women's incorporation into the global formal economy, the further commodification of social reproduction is induced.

The commodification of social reproduction means that formerly unpaid domestic tasks are transformed into paid work in and outside of private households. Paid care and domestic work will most likely still be carried out by women at most precarious conditions due to the labour intensity or "cost disease" (Baumol 2012) of the care sector and its limited capacity to increase productivity, besides cutting the costs of labour (Madörin 2011).

I will show that both processes of enclosure, women's integration into the paid workforce and the further commodification of care and domestic tasks, will further exacerbate inequality, especially between women along the categories of ethnicity/race and class. The double enclosure is ironically based on the appropriation of feminist theory and practice, which identified the economic role of social reproduction in the first place. To make my argument, I will first (section 2) elaborate on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the new interest in social reproduction in global governance before I turn to (section 3) the concept of

primitive accumulation and its de- and reconstructions by Marxist and feminist scholars. I will then (section 4) use the example of the SDGs and its Goal number 5.4, which entails the recognition of unpaid care and domestic work to illustrate how the feminist conceptualization of social reproduction is being appropriated through its formal recognition and why it can be theorised as a double form of enclosure. I will furthermore explore some likely effects on the sexual and international division of labour and its social and economic inequalities, before I conclude with possible feminist Marxist counter strategies (section 5).

The significance of social reproduction for gender relations is not new in feminist thinking and activism. It was made prominent by feminists in the 1970s through the international campaign ‘wages for housework’ (Cox and Federici 1975; Dalla Costa and James 1972). Feminist and materialist literature theorising social reproduction has furthermore emphasised the substantial meaning of unpaid care and housework for the reproduction of capital relations (e.g. Bakker and Gill 2003; Donath 2000; Federici 2012a; Mies 1986; Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas 2014). The function of social reproduction for capital accumulation, as well as the contradictory relation between the reproductive and productive spheres, are also central to feminist scholarship (e.g. Federici 2014; Fraser 2016; Hartsock 2006).

I build on this rich body of feminist literature in order to grasp the complex mechanisms in which global social policies relate to and expropriate women’s unpaid work on a global scale. Broader definitions of reproduction include sexual reproduction as well as the reproduction of social structures and systems, in which education plays a major role (Althusser 2014). For the purpose of this article, I use social reproduction to describe unpaid work in the realm of the home, including care, domestic, voluntary and subsistence work, carried out for family members as well as the broader community (cf. Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas 2014).

2. The Sustainable Development Goals and the Recognition of Social Reproduction in Global Governance

The Agenda 2030 and the respective Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) mark a major breakthrough compared to the preceding Millennium Development Goals (Kabeer 2015). Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in October 2015, the 17 SDGs, 169 targets and 232 indicators are setting a strong framework for global politics and promise ‘transforming our world’ in the next 15 years. The universality of the Agenda is built on ‘Global Partnership’ and “global solidarity, focussed in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable [...]” (UN 2015).

Although the implementation process is viewed with scepticism due to insufficient financing¹, the SDGs are acclaimed for their transformative potential and designated as a “new global governance approach” (Stevens and Kanie 2016). The ‘Leave No-one behind’ Agenda was a direct consequence of the critique on the omission of social and economic inequalities in the ‘Minor Development Goals’ (Stuart and Woodroffe 2016). This new focus on vulnerable and marginalised groups supposedly follows an intersectional approach and includes the categories of sex, age, disability, race,

¹ The further financing and implementation strategies of the SDGs were operationalised by the donor states in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda 2015, in which specific goals and targets like “Social protection for all” (SDG 1.3) are marginalised and its financing left unclear. In contrast to the focus of the SDGs on global partnerships, important details are determined by donor countries alone without much civil society involvement (Stuart and Woodroffe 2016).

ethnicity, religion, economic or other ‘status’ and thus links economic inequalities with ‘group based’ discrimination (SDG 10). The paradigmatic shift in policies was triggered by reflections about human capital and the realisation that growing inequalities have a negative effect on development and economic growth as promoted by European states and the OECD (Razavi 2007). Two studies were published shortly before the ratification of the SDGs: The International Monetary Fund (Ostry, Berg, and Tsangarides 2014) and the OECD (OECD and Cingano 2014) identified high levels of inequality within and between countries as a hindrance for economic growth. It is therefore no surprise that the Agenda 2030 is built on the creed of economic growth as a remedy for poverty and unemployment (UN 2015).

Feminist scholars regard the SDGs with “cautious optimism” (Kabeer 2015) and welcome the stand-alone-goal on gender equality (SDG 5), which aims to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, as a huge success in comparison to the limited approach to gender equality of the MDGs (Esquivel 2016; Razavi 2016). The integration of unpaid care and housework into the SDGs is one example of successful lobbying of feminist networks in the hope for greater recognition of women’s contribution to the economy (Razavi 2016; UN 2015; 2017a). Target 5.4 aims to “recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate” (UN 2015). Despite a long history of feminist interventions, mainstream international political economy as well as economic and social policies² have – apart from a few exceptions (e.g. Beijing Platform for Action) – repeatedly failed to recognise the importance of social reproduction for achieving gender equality (Donath 2000; Elson 1998).

This new interest in unpaid care and domestic work should be considered in relation to the crisis or depletion of social reproduction due to demographic changes in the Global North and the rising participation of women in the formal workforce (Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas 2014; Winker 2015). Unpaid domestic and care work is interpreted as one of the main obstacles to women’s economic empowerment by numerous policies and policy papers (e.g. Bibler and Zuckerman 2013; European Parliament 2017; EU 2016; OECD et al. 2014; UNDP 2016a; 2016b; Williams 2010). Even though this reduction of the situation of women to human capital³ was widely criticised (Esquivel 2016; Fraser 2016; Kabeer and Natali 2013), it was the major contribution of a feminist scholarship to identify and clarify the interdependence between paid and unpaid work in the first place (Antonopoulos 2009; Himmelweit 1995).

² The experience of feminist research on social protection policies in welfare states in the Global North shows that social policies are never gender neutral, but rather deeply entrenched in an androcentric logic. The motivation for women’s protective legislation was, for instance, used to exclude women from certain jobs or to enforce women’s role as wives and mothers. The “male breadwinner” model is still imbedded in most policies in northern welfare states (McPhail 2003; Pascall 1997). At the same time, policies are a result of agency and intensive lobbying of trade unions, labor and women’s movements – the same applies to the development policies, which are deeply influenced by transnational feminist movements and “governance feminism” (Halley et al. 2006; cf. Lovenduski 2005).

³ The means of gender equality to the end of economic growth was recently emphasised by McKinsey&Company in the study “The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women’s Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth” (McKinsey Global Institute 2015).

I will now turn to the Marxist concept of primitive accumulation and new enclosures as a theoretical perspective which can help to understand the way social reproduction is addressed in the SDGs and other global policies, as well as its effects and policy implications for social, economic and gender inequalities.

3. Feminist Perspectives on Primitive Accumulation and New Enclosures

The concept of primitive accumulation is currently having a revival in academic scholarship across disciplines. It is used to explain a wide range of phenomena and problems of our time, including land grabs in the Global South (Hall 2013), the debt economy (e.g. Sassen 2010), the emergence of a new imperialism through “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2004), the appropriation of nature (e.g. Moore 2017), time (e.g. Brown 2009), life and knowledge (e.g. De Angelis 2001) or web 2.0-communication (e.g. Ekman 2012). Although social and ethnic inequalities, such as the constitution and reproduction of difference as another effect of primitive accumulation (Walker 2011), are widely debated, gender relations are systematically left out (apart from a few exceptions in feminist scholarship, which I will turn to later). I argue that an intersectional lens, which includes race, class, gender as structural categories and main drivers of the reproduction of inequalities (e.g. Crenshaw 1991; Davis 2008; Yuval-Davis 2006), enhances our understanding of new forms of enclosures, since the appropriation-process builds on already existing inequalities and incorporates them to make them more compatible with the logic of capital accumulation (De Angelis 2001).

The concept of ‘primitive accumulation’⁴ was introduced by Marx (1990/1867, 873-940) to describe the ‘original sin’ or the prerequisite for capital accumulation. Marx referred to primitive accumulation as the division of the masses from their means of production, which includes two processes central to the emergence of capitalism. First and foremost, the creation of a “free” and “unattached” labour force which was forced to sell its labour power and second, the transformation of land and other means of production into capital. Revisiting Marx description of primitive accumulation from a feminist perspective raises another thought-provoking aspect: the fact that Marx reflects the redefinition of primitive accumulation as a process of emancipation (from serfdom) by bourgeois historians can be linked to the integration of women into the labour force, which is interpreted as their emancipation by most dominant forms of feminism (Farris 2017). The dialectic relation between extra-economic domination and economic exploitation is what makes the concept of ‘primitive accumulation’ so intriguing for feminist theory, especially in order to understand reproductive work in a globalised economy.

Marx describes primitive accumulation as a historical process and a one-time and concluded event, which was criticised and refined by Rosa Luxemburg (2003/1913), who theorised colonialism and the dissemination of colonial rule as an absolute precondition for capital accumulation: “Only the continuous and progressive disintegration of non-capitalist organisations makes accumulation of capital possible” (Luxemburg 2003/1913, 397). Before the concept gained more prominence in the 1990s under the name of ‘new enclosures’ (e.g. Midnight Notes Collective 1990), the feminist scholars Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomson and Claudia von Werlhof

⁴ The term ‘primitive accumulation’ as a translation for “ursprüngliche Akkumulation” is in a sense misleading, since “ursprünglich” literally means primary or original. ‘Primitive’ should therefore not be understood in an atavistic or barbaric sense.

has supplemented primitive accumulation to entail not only territorial enclosures, but also extra-economic spheres, namely women's care and housework, as "the last colony" (Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen and Von Werlhof 1988) and linked its role in capital accumulation to subsistence farming in the Global South. Gender relations are therefore not a random principle, but constitutive for capitalist accumulation: "capitalism has to use, to strengthen, or even to invent, patriarchal men-women relations if it wants to maintain its accumulation model" (Mies 2014, 170).

The 'Bielefeld approach'⁵ theoretically enriched the concept of primitive accumulation by showing that processes of enclosure are still constitutive for current capitalist accumulation (Soiland 2016). The fact that capitalism itself relies on these spheres and, therefore, has an interest in maintaining them (temporarily) outside of capital accumulation, while profiting from the cheaper social reproductive costs of labour, added another analytical aspect to the concept of primitive accumulation, which later on was described as 'temporal fix' (Harvey 2001; Jessop 2006). Another relevant aspect in the work of Maria Mies was the concept of *Hausfrauisierung* (housewifisation) as paradigmatic for the connection between unpaid and paid work. It describes the spread of precarious, part-time and undervalued jobs and the devaluation of work (Mies 1982), which became one of the main characteristics of labour in the era of globalisation. These theoretical contributions have been widely ignored by newer reflections on enclosures, which at the same time neglect the gender dimension of enclosures to a large extent (Soiland 2016).

Feminist scholars have used the concept of enclosures to explain how unpaid care and housework is commodified or de-commodified in order to integrate women into the labour force or to reduce the costs of social reproduction according to the needs of the economy (e.g. Bakker 2007; Feministische Autorinnengruppe 2013; Hartsock 2006; LeBaron 2010; Mies 2014; Soiland 2016). Silvia Federici (2012b) accordingly calls women the "shock absorber" of neoliberal globalisation. In the book 'Caliban and the Witch' she supplements the concept of primitive accumulation with "an accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class, whereby hierarchies built upon gender, as well as "race" and age, become constitutive of class rule and the formation of the modern proletariat" (Federici 2004, 63). Existent intersecting inequalities are thus appropriated and exacerbated during the process of enclosure (cf. Walker 2011).

Notwithstanding the importance of the theoretical contributions of the Bielefeld scholars and Silvia Federici, I would contest their romanticised view of the common as associated with nature and managed in a collective way. This conceptualisation of primitive accumulation as violent in contrast to a peaceful and collective common prevents a deeper understanding of the enclosure process and the reasons for its success (cf. Mezzadra 2011). State regulations and policies establish new enclosures in times of capital accumulation's crises (Harvey 2004), because the continuous reproduction of the capitalist modes of production and the social reproduction of the labour force has to be ensured by the state (Althusser 2014; cf. McIntosh 1978; Fraser 2016). Although enclosures can be violent in their effects, governance or governmentality, to use Foucault's term, is legitimised by targeting the alleged well-being of the population (Foucault 2008). The process of enclosure is thereby complex, rather subtle and has contradictory effects, which enable certain aspects of freedom or emancipation and at the same time produce and reproduce inequalities, which I will

⁵ A name Maria Mies has opposed due to of the lack of institutional support by the University of Bielefeld (Mies 2001).

show in the following chapter. It is important to keep in mind these ambivalences, as they create opportunities for the contestation of enclosures.

4. The Example of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Double Form of Enclosure of Social Reproduction

“[...] the emergence of feminism and the category of the ‘independent woman’ in the west is related to colonial expansion and the re-construction of an ‘other’ woman ‘elsewhere’.” (Rosemary Hennessy 1990, 261)

I will use the example of the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations to illustrate how social policies addressing social reproduction can be understood as a double form of enclosure. By aiming to integrate women into the paid workforce, reproductive activities are devalued and thereby create the precondition for their commodification. The first form of enclosure concerns women’s further integration into the paid workforce while the second bears on the commodification of care and domestic tasks. Both forms are based on the appropriation of feminist claims about the recognition of housework and of feminist scholarship, which has theorised and operationalised the measurement of social reproductive work (e.g. Antonopoulos and Hirway 2010; World Bank, Blackden and Wodon 2006; Connelly and Kongar 2017; Esquivel et al. 2008). The quantification of reproductive work by feminist political economists has shown its economic relevance in (inter)national accounts, where the Gross Domestic Product and other economic measurements have failed (e.g. Madörin 2011). Whereas feminist scholars have consequently argued for transfer payments and redistribution measures, the same numbers are used by neoliberal think tanks and institutions to emphasise the unused economic potential of unpaid care work (e.g. McKinsey Global Institute 2015).

I do not want to deny that paid work has emancipatory effects for women and enables more leeway for freedom. However, I argue that the respective policies and their implications for gender, social and ethnic inequalities have contradictory effects and are one drastic example of the appropriation of feminist theory and praxis. I will concentrate on the aspects that illustrate the double form of enclosure of women’s unpaid work through SDGs as well as problematic rationalities and probable effects.

4.1. The Enclosure of Social Reproduction through Women’s Economic Empowerment

The implementation praxis of SDG 5.4 has yet to be seen and evaluated, but different policy papers and initiatives already indicate priorities and probable tendencies. One prominent example is the Public-Private-Partnership “UN High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment”, which includes representatives of the UN, businesses and NGOs. The Panel identified different drivers to accelerate women’s economic empowerment, among them: “Recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid work and care” (UN 2017a), which refers to the ‘3R-framework for policy response’ by Diane Elson (2008), which was publicly represented by the Women’s Budget Group in Great Britain (UNPD, Fälth and Blackden 2009). Framing the goal to recognise and value care and domestic work as a means to integrating women into the paid global workforce can also be found in other policy papers, for instance by the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 2017) or UNDP (2016b). In a recent study about employment strategies for migrant women in Europe, Sara Farris (2017) has shown how the neoliberal notion of women’s emancipation through their economic participation is extremely problematic and ambivalent. The policies and programmes

stigmatise other practises and cultures as backward since empowerment seems to be inseparably linked to economic factors. At the same time, economic inclusion leads to the exploitation of migrant women in low or unpaid precarious jobs in the care sector to mitigate the crisis of social reproduction in the Global North.⁶

The Eurocentric notion of women's empowerment through their participation in paid jobs applies both to the context of development and international cooperation (Chant and Sweetman 2012; Rankin 2001) and to the way social reproduction in the Global South is addressed by international organisations and NGOs. Despite regional differences in the gendered distribution of care and domestic tasks, it is important to note that the 'gender care gap' is significant everywhere and that, on average, women spend between four to five hours a day on this work in almost all regions of the world (OECD et al. 2014).

However, policy papers mainly address the reduction of social reproductive tasks in the Global South by emphasising the relatively low level of infrastructure and its effects on time spent on household activities such as fetching water, firewood and other daily goods. Hence one main strategy to integrate women in the paid workforce is to reduce the burden of unpaid work by investing in infrastructure and technology in developing countries (e.g. World Bank, Blackden and Wodon 2006; CSW 2017; OECD et al. 2014; Razavi 2007; Roberts 2008).⁷ The problem from a materialist feminist perspective is twofold: First, the underlying notion that social reproductive work has no value in itself and should therefore be reduced. This reduction contradicts the goal of recognition if it is achieved through efficiency increases instead of redistributive measures. Second, the modernisation theory rationale, which builds on technology and infrastructure as a universal panacea and thereby legitimises the further privatisation in the Global South (Banerjee-Guha 2013).⁸ The second point is imperative for the enclosure of subsistence farmland as means of production.

Nancy Fraser (2012) and others have shown that the integration of women into the global workforce is a neoliberal strategy, which is deeply linked to the crisis of capitalism and the need for women as a cheap and dispensable workforce. Although these observations describe the transition from a Fordist breadwinner model to a Post-Fordist adult worker model, the economic "empowerment" of women in the Global South will much likely have similar effects and lead to neo-colonial dependencies as well as new and entrenched inequalities. The SDGs can therefore be understood as an instrument to enclose and devalue women's reproductive work.

4.2. Enclosure through the Commodification of Social Reproduction

The other form of enclosure through the formal recognition and valuation of social reproduction lies in the implications and effects for the further commodification of care and domestic tasks. The respective indicator of goal 5.4 measures the "proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location" (UN 2017c).

⁶ Her study focuses on migrant women in the Netherlands, France and Italy, but her critique can be easily transferred to development projects in the Global South, which follow a similar agenda.

⁷ Studies have shown that an improved infrastructure can reduce women's time spent for household chores, but the gendered division of unpaid domestic and care work is unlikely to change (ADB 2015).

⁸ The critique of the modernisation theory rationale is widely debated in post-development theory (e.g. Ziai 2007).

States have to report their progress made on the SDGs⁹ and are even ranked by private initiatives, like the ‘SDG Index and Dashboard’ by the Bertelsmann foundation and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Secretariat (2017). This global benchmarking technique is part of a tendency of evidence-based policy-making in global governance on the basis of statistics, rankings and accountability measures (Lepenies 2015; Norris 2014). Benchmarking is critically reflected in global governmentality literature because it transports the neoliberal notions of competition and self-conduct (Larner and Le Heron 2004), which shift the responsibility for the remedy of policy problems to developing countries (Clegg 2015). Indicators depoliticise social problems and make them appear as objective, scientific knowledge for evidence-based policy-making (Merry 2016).

The indicator of goal 5.4 does not measure the provision of social services, which will likely result in the ascription of women’s higher contribution to social reproduction to ‘traditions’ or ‘cultural’ causes. In this way, global social policies are emblematic in their construction of “third world women” (Mohanty 1984) (and men) as less emancipated and backward. Kate Bedford (2009) has examined how the World Bank tries to tackle gender stereotypes by aiming to increase men’s caring responsibilities and has also shown how the respective programmes were stigmatising mostly poor and rural men as lazy and irresponsible. The programmes were thereby enforcing a neoliberal and heteronormative two-partner sharing model (Ibid.).

Women’s disproportionate share of reproductive activities is indeed explained with ‘traditional’ or ‘cultural’ norms and gender roles by various policies and policy papers (CSW 2017; UNDP 2016a). Feminist historians have linked the devaluation of social reproduction to the historical division of productive and reproductive work in the advent of capitalism (Bock and Duden 1976); the term ‘traditional’ is therefore misleading. Gender inequalities in countries of the Global South cannot be separated from colonialism and its implementation of a sexual division of labour and the construction and enforcement of gender inequalities (Federici 2011; 2005). The practice of employing female domestic workers from poorer and mostly rural families also has its roots in colonial rule (Meyiwa 2012).

Since many countries in the Global South have been severely hit by austerity politics and structural adjustment programmes under IWF and World Bank (Rai 2004), their capacities for social infrastructure are deeply limited. Other proposed ways to achieve SDG 5.4 include the reduction of unpaid care, domestic and subsistence work through infrastructure and technology, as I have shown above. The reduction (and redistribution to some extent) also includes the further commodification of unpaid care work by transforming the tasks into precarious, insecure and low paid jobs. This is insofar astonishing as the phenomenon of ‘global care chains’ and the rising inequality between women on a global level is widely debated in feminist literature on social reproduction (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Hochschild 2000). ‘Global care chains’ describe the feminisation of migration due to the growing demand for care workers in the industrialised countries of the Global North (Ibid.). In contrast to the dimension of this phenomenon, which concerns 53 million domestic workers worldwide, of which 83% are female, this aspect is not addressed by most policies in relation to the

⁹ The reporting process focuses only on national states and therefore omits the role of transnational companies and institutions such as the International Monetary Fund in shaping and influencing global power structures. Since no government is legally bound to implement the goals, major policy changes seem very unlikely and are furthermore dependent on the lobbying and pressure of civil society and women’s rights organisations (Esquivel 2016).

recognition of care work (ILO 2013).¹⁰ The opposite is the case: By not measuring the paid share of care and domestic work in households, and not disaggregating the data acquired about the time spent on paid domestic and care activities by race or ethnicity, the shift from unpaid to undervalued and precariously paid domestic work is not even recognised. To phrase it bluntly: The global commodification of care and its implicit delegation to migrants and other women who are economically forced to take those jobs is not only obscured but even desired and structurally inscribed in the implementation framework of the SDGs. The commodification and delegation of care and domestic work improves the numbers and shows ostensible success on the global benchmarking systems. The ‘crisis of social reproduction’ in the Global North is, as a result, addressed in the context of global governance by transforming social reproductive work into (low) paid work and thereby further entrenching inequalities between women along the categories of class and race.

Feminist scholars are questioning whether the solution of the crisis of social reproduction is even possible in capitalism (e.g. Fraser 2016). Since the economic logic of social reproduction is so divergent from other economic sectors (Baumol 2012), the state has to intervene to secure the continuous reproduction of the work force. In the case of the SDGs these state interventions or enclosures are built on a global system of ethnic, social and gender inequalities between and within countries in the context of neo-colonial dependencies (Dossa 2007; Sanyal 2014). The effects will in consequence compound and not tackle those inequalities.

It is therefore important both to ask the heretical question how feminist networks and scholars contribute to those enclosures and, more broadly, to try to shed some light on the politics of appropriation, hopefully inciting some reflections about possible feminist counter strategies and interventions.

5. The Quandary of Appropriation and Possible Counter Strategies

The contributions of a transnational feminism including feminist movements, networks and scholars have had a major influence on the integration of gender aspects in global and national policies, Gender Mainstreaming being the best-known example (e.g. Caglar 2013; Friedman 2003). The case of the enclosure of social reproduction through the SDGs shows how ambivalent this final success story can turn out, because its valuation seems to be vaporized and reversed. Frequently, the discourse on the appropriation of feminism (e.g. Fraser 2012) nostalgically idealises earlier forms of feminisms or somehow implies the purity of a ‘true’ feminism, which neglects the fact that feminism has in its hegemonial and predominant form always been liberal or neoliberal (Farris 2017). The search for the culprit, feminism or the state, is in itself misleading, because feminism has long been institutionalised and incorporated in governmental administration and policies (Halley et al. 2006; Lovenduski 2005). Feminist scholarship has accordingly reflected whether the state is the right addressee for emancipatory politics (Longwe 1997) or if it is at all possible to “dismantle the master’s house, with the master’s tools” (Lorde 1983). Nevertheless, the state, or in this case global governance institutions, are explicitly or implicitly addressed by most feminist actors and scholars to solve or at least mitigate the contradiction between capitalism and social reproduction (e.g. Elson 2016; Fraser 2016; Visel 2013; Williams 2010).

¹⁰ The International Labour Organization (ILO) being one exception (Visel 2013).

The question what kind of political interventions are less prone to appropriation remains. In the case of social reproduction, Marxist feminists also addressed the state by claiming ‘wages for housework’ and thereby highlighted the importance of unpaid household chores for capital accumulation (Cox and Federici 1975; Dalla Costa and James 1972). Revisiting their statements retrieves the contradictions between emancipatory aspects of women’s economic empowerment and its enclosures, but also opens up perspectives beyond the regulation of the state: “It is one thing to organise communally the way we want to eat (by ourselves, in groups, etc.) and then ask the State to pay for it, and it is the opposite thing to ask the State to organise our meals. In one case we regain some control over our lives, in the other we extend the State’s control over us” (Federici 1975, 7). This example illustrates how feminist movements need spaces to organise outside international governmental frames which have determined the transnational women’s movement for centuries (see Caglar, Prügl and Zwingel 2013). Otherwise the SDGs and other social policies have the chance to undermine, de-radicalise and silence political struggles on the basis of rhetorical appropriations (cf. Weber 2017). Taking the concept of enclosure seriously means that it can be contested, re-appropriated and reversed (De Angelis 2001). The valuation and re-appropriation of social reproduction does not only concern everyone, but transforms everyone’s life.

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Epochality, Global Capitalism and Ecology

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Abstract: What type of capitalism do we live in today? My answer to this question draws upon two interrelated lines of argument. Firstly, I will argue that we inhabit an epoch of global capitalism. The precursors of this kind of capitalism originated from the late nineteenth century when the development of telegraph networks, modern transport systems and world time zones provided a global template for industrialisation and Western imperialism. From about 1980 a confluence of global events and processes brought a fully-fledged global capitalism into being. These included the collapse of Fordist Keynesianism, national Keynesianism and Soviet Communism along with First, Second and Third World demarcations; the international proliferation of neo-liberal policy regimes; the growth of transnational corporations in all economic sectors; the predominance of financialisation and the reconstitution of global workforces. Secondly, I will argue that the shift from organic surface energy to underground fossil energy intertwined the time of the earth with the time of human history as nature was being instrumentalised as a resource for humanity. Understanding the capitalist relations of power involved here requires that we rethink the emergence of industrial capitalism in the historical context of a world system built upon unequal socio-ecological exchange between core and periphery. Today, global capitalism has intensified the anthropogenic feedback loops associated with CO₂ emissions and climate change and universalised the organisational frameworks of profit extraction and socio-ecological destruction. I refer here to the transnational systems of fossil fuel capitalism along with their interlinkages with financialisation and advertising/commodity fetishism. From the preceding lines of argument I will briefly outline the intra-capitalist and planetary-ecological crises out of which transnational coalitions of opposition might emerge.

Keywords: epochality, global capitalism, global modernity, real time, Anthropocene, Capitalocene, fossil capitalism

1. Introduction

Remembering the bi-centenary of Karl Marx's birth immediately invokes a simple yet complex question – what kind of capitalism do we live in today? If Marx, in a second life, was our contemporary what elements of the economic system would he recognise? Which of his arguments about capital would need revision and/or further development? With these questions in mind, I provide here an anthropogenic narrative of global capitalism's epochal distinctiveness. One central distinguishing feature – financialisation – will be considered in relation to Marx's own writings on the subject. Then, global capitalism is re-analysed from a global ecological standpoint which emphasises the instrumentalisation of nature and the multiple ramifications of growing fossil fuel emissions. In so doing, the strengths and weaknesses of Marx's environmental insights will be evaluated. After explicating the ecological crises of global capitalism, I will consider the prospects of collective action among oppositional groups and classes.

2. Epochality, Globality, Capitalism

From about 1980, a new epoch of capitalism emerged centred around globalisation; a general referent for those processes of change which interconnect human activity worldwide (Jameson 2010; Held et al. 1999). Here, Alf Dirlik identifies a distinctive contemporary form of globalisation which he calls “global modernity” (2007). This contrasts with an older Eurocentric modernity associated with Western imperialism, colonialism and the presumption of civilizational progress. Global modernity is marked by a plurality of modernities arising from internally differentiated cultural histories – Confucian, Arabic, Islamic, African, Japanese and Western. The disappearance of the First, Second and Third Worlds after the collapse of the Soviet bloc allowed different modernities to intermingle across different geographic scales. Such developments also led to the reinvigoration of previously suppressed religions and ethnic minorities.

Multiple expressions of global modernity were enabled by the mass mediated transformation of print, speech and audio-visual materials and the exponential growth of Internet infrastructures. Interpersonal, international, transnational, global-local and trans-local modes of communication were enabled by the extensity and density of real time electronic networks. Cross border flows of news, fashion, music, and lifestyles converged with everyday socio-economic connections within and between diasporic communities. These same electronic networks also globalised capitalist systems of finance, management, production, labour exploitation and commodity exchange. And real time electronic communication projected a global present which obscured a major epochal shift toward global capitalism. To support these assessments, a short excursus on the nuances of epochality is first required.

Beyond simple definition, the nature and constitution of *epochality* is variously understood and essentially contested. From a natural-scientific viewpoint, human beings are enmeshed within long-term patterns of galactic, ecological and bio-social evolution. Evolutionary eras are demarcated within established scientific disciplines, such as cosmology, astronomy, geology, climatology, biology and geography. Within each discipline, epochal markers and periodisations are contingent upon new scientific discoveries and new technologies of investigation and experimentation. Natural-scientific conceptions of evolutionary change differ from views of history associated within the idea that epochs are brought into being by collective self-consciousness. From this perspective, human beings in different cultural settings have the reflexive ability to shape historical change and epochal understandings of historical time. On such matters, macro-historians who operate across disciplinary boundaries often hold different views about epochal demarcation. This, in turn, reflects discrepant understandings about the relative significance of continuity and discontinuity as drivers of historical change. Within French intellectual culture, for example, Fernand Braudel was convinced that manifestations of historical change occurred over extended timespans of *long durées*. Deep, enduring patterns of cultural demography, economic production, trade and institutional authority were privileged over conventional periodisations and any event-centred chronicles of history-in-the-making.

Braudel’s perspective, as exemplified in the Annales School of historical enquiry, was opposed by Sorbonne Sociology Professor George Gurvitch. Historian Olivia Harris (2004, 164) has succinctly outlined his approach: “the outer surface of social reality is manifested in institutions, infrastructures, and organizations, while the hidden depths are dynamic, effervescent, the source of creativity and revolution”. Gurvitch argued that the intellectual schemas of continuity should not be imposed upon the historical reality of breaks and unexpected contingencies. On this account, societies in history are constructed through the will of social actors. Major conflicts within society express

opposing manifestations of history. Braudel's view holds that the will of social actors is borne by historical processes and that the intellectual preference for discontinuity leads to arbitrary and artificial reconstructions of the historical process.

These countervailing perceptions of history and epochality are of global importance. For Braudel, the *long durée*, as a formulation of world history, supervened and flowed through regional, national and pan-regional histories. The opposing perspective foregrounds the punctuations of world history. Here, global historian Timothy Brook (2009, 381) suggests that an "unmanageable thick cable" of "interwoven historical narratives" and "local time lines" can be cut across "in a way that touches all time-lines but declines to reproduce any of them, by narrating global history in terms of moments".

The demarcation of epochs is not necessarily an objective exercise. In the European context, Kathryn Davis criticises a secularisation narrative whereby a feudal and religious Middle Ages centred upon salvation presaged the evolution of Renaissance humanism, Enlightenment values and modern political ideologies. The associated emergence of mercantile and industrial capitalism reinforced the idea that the past could be delineated retrospectively. For Davis, tacit acceptance of this narrative, and the periodisations within, legitimises a reductive account of European history and distorts the writing of global history. More specifically, she states that "the sixteenth and seventeenth century writing of a 'feudal' past for Europe mediated the theorisation of sovereignty and subjection at crucial moments of empire, slavery and colonialism" (Davis 2008, 7). On this reading, the construction of epochs serves the interests of institutionalised power and obfuscates oppositional demarcations of historical change.

3. Global Capitalism

From the preceding discussions, I would argue that the epochal distinctiveness of contemporary global capitalism cannot be appreciated without a sense of its historical antecedents. There are continuities as well as sharp discontinuities between earlier and later forms of capitalism. One learns this from Dwayne Winseck and Robert Pike's account of global communications expansion between 1860 and 1930 (Winseck and Pike 2007).

In Western capitalist countries and the largest urban regions in the developing world, railway and telegraph networks proliferated. These networks interlinked with steamship routes to interconnect major cities such as London, Paris, New York, Berlin, Vienna, Istanbul, Cairo, Bombay, Peking, Singapore, Tokyo, Mexico, Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. At the same time, an international system of news gathering and dissemination became coordinated by commercial news agencies (e.g. Reuters, Agence France Press, Havas, Associated Press). From 1900, global communications expansion intermeshed with the construction of electricity grids, lighting systems and wireless networks. Within this general overview, one must also include the establishment and gradual implementation of world time zones, meridians and the international dateline. These developments contributed to the emergence of an integrated world economy, especially among the major countries (Winseck and Pike 2007, 43). The process of integration was coterminous with the economic imperialism of Western European nations generally and Great Britain in particular. In the latter case, Mike Davis (2001) depicts a "late Victorian world economy" centred around financial supremacy and a favourable balance of trade framework which disguised Britain's industrial decline (relative to Germany and the United States). Without detailing the contours of this world economy, it is clear that the prosperity of Britain and other imperial powers depended upon the dispossession, exploitation and marginalisation of non-Western cultures. One

must also acknowledge that early modern communications, transport and time zone grids underpinned the later emergence of global modernity and global capitalism. What took shape, though, was not simply a new phase of world economic integration (after an intervening period of world wars, depression, decolonisation and Cold War geopolitics). The epochal distinctiveness of contemporary global capitalism derived from a confluence of world-historical events and developments. It is these that I now consider.

Political economist William Robinson (2004) argued that world economic activity had become dominated by transnational corporations (firms with headquarters in more than three countries). He drew from various World Investment Reports published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and from privately commissioned financial reports to outline the growth of such corporations (7,000 in 1970, 60,000 in 2000) alongside the increase in cross border mergers/acquisitions (Robinson 2004, 55; 58). Between 2000 and 2007 inclusive, such deals in excess of US\$1 billion totalled 1,335 (compared with 479 from 1992 to 1999) (UNCTAD 2008, 5-6). In all areas of capitalism, cross border mergers and acquisitions have affected horizontal and vertical integration, global economies of scale and strategic alliances (in the areas of financial syndications, capital investment, research and development distribution and marketing). By 2000, the 500 largest transnational corporations controlled approximately 80 percent of the world's foreign investment, 30 percent of global output and 20 percent of world trade (Buckman 2004). Subsequently, transnational corporate investment was drawn to the urban-industrial growth poles of South and East Asia. The emergence of China as the world epicentre of low-cost manufacturing at the expense of large Western economies provided new profit opportunities for transnational corporations.

Such developments suggest that the initial integration of the world economy between 1860 and 1930 has advanced considerably in scale and density. During the 1980s and 1990s, with the proliferation of neoliberal policy regimes and the collapse of the Soviet bloc, national circuits of capital became functionally integrated into new global circuits of capital accumulation. In this context, Robinson argues that there has been a "progressive dismantling of autonomous or auto-centric national production systems and their reactivation as constituent elements of an integral world production system" (Robinson 2004, 16). This relies upon a vast mosaic of supply chains involving raw materials mining, subcontracting, outsourcing and allied arrangements. These developments draw our attention to the "global worker" (Dyer-Witthford 2010, 2015), variegated by an increasingly complex division of labour strongly associated with the service sector, universalised by the incorporation of female workers, the growth of production centres outside the West and flows of migrant labour. New jobs and occupations with many hierarchies are connected directly to information-communication technologies (ICTs) as indicated by the rapid growth of the internet and mobile phone use. The computer industry, for example, contains a software sector incorporating business applications and digital games designed and engineered in North America, Western Europe and Japan. Programming jobs have been typically outsourced to subcontractors in Eastern Europe, South Asia and South East Asia. In the hardware sector, salaried engineers and architects design and prototype phone, gaming and specialist computer devices. Assembly of these devices has been performed in Central America, Eastern Europe and southern China. Manual labour also entails mining the specialist minerals necessary for consumer electronics and excavating parts from toxic e-waste disposal sites in Asia and Africa (Dyer-Witthford 2010, 2015; Fuchs 2013).

From these observations, it is evident that information-communication technologies (ICTs) became a new and substantial sector of capital accumulation. Hardware, software and dot.com corporations joined landline-based telecommunication corporations who could develop or purchase Internet services, cable and broadband connections, satellite hook-ups and wireless communication services (Harris 2001). By 2003, 18 of the top 100 non-financial corporations came from the ICT sector (World Investment Report 2005, 267-269). Between 1995 and 2000, the telecommunications industry ranked second after commercial banking in the global mergers and acquisitions market (Jin 2005, 295). The emergent ICT sector engaged with a media-entertainment system transformed by convergences of technology, content ownership and cultural consumption. Advances in Internet applications, digital television and mobile telephony blurred traditional separations between broadcasting, computing, telecommunications and consumer electronics.

Media-ICT infrastructures precipitated real-time networking within and between transnational corporations. For Manuel Castells, this was an historic development indicated by the pre-eminence of the “network enterprise”. Within this organisational model, firms remained the primary unit of capital accumulation, property rights and strategic management while routine business practices were performed by flexible and ad hoc networks (Castells 1996, 2001).

The co-evolution of global finance with ICT infrastructures was pivotal to the formation of global capitalism. This process stemmed from the disintegration of national Keynesianism and the Bretton Woods monetary system and by the emergence of a Eurodollar market, the precursor of a vast, stateless banking system. It is important here to appreciate that investment banks, commercial banks, insurance companies and new financial organisations, such as hedge funds and private equity firms, were not just a means of intermediation among businesses. Rather, they were pro-active corporate operators who “targeted changes in macro-economic fundamentals, prices of underlying commodities (like corn and oil), market indices (exchange rates, the price of bonds and shares), financial indicators (e.g. interest rates) or aggregate indicators (e.g. stockmarket indices)” (McKenzie 2011, 202). The general purpose was to take financial positions across multiple indicators over specified periods of time. These were manifestations of derivatives trading; contractual agreements between willing parties to buy or sell a stock, bond or commodity at a future date at an agreed price. After Bretton Woods, such trading became a routine risk-management exercise for financial institutions, transnational corporates, merchant importers and export producers.

Crucially, however, derivatives also became a central means of speculation. Thus, *financial* derivatives did not involve with assets which were associated with bulk commodities or grounded in production. Rather, they became exclusively connected to the medium of money and its technological means of circulation; underlying assets did not have to be purchased or sold. Edward LiPuma and Benjamin Lee, in their *Financial Derivatives and the Rise of Circulation*, pointed out that financial derivatives grew “exponentially, starting from virtually nothing in 1973 to become 30 years later, according to estimates produced by the Bank of International Settlements, the planet’s largest, most profitable and most influential market” (LiPuma and Lee 2005).

This new and unprecedented phenomenon exemplified the broader processes of financialisation whereby M-M profit circuits become internalised within the whole of capitalism. Relevant developments included shareholder-driven structures of corporate governance, the direct involvement of non-financial corporations in financial markets and the financial liberalisation of banking and monetary policy in developing coun-

tries (Lapavistas 2013). Overall, financialisation is more than a longstanding cyclic phenomenon of speculation and collapse, a parasitic deviation from the “real” economy or an epiphenomenon of over-production or underconsumption. More accurately, as Christian Marazzi argues, “we are in a historical period in which finance is *co-substantial* with the very production of goods and services” (Marazzi 2011, 27-28).

In Marx’s time, finance and money were largely incorporated within the world expansion of industrial production and trade. Nevertheless, even from our contemporary standpoint, his insights remain prescient. In *Capital Volume One*, Marx argues that for capitalism to reproduce itself money capital has to be realised through production, productive capital must be realised in commodity form, and commodities must be realised as money in market exchange. Money surpluses accruing to capitalists can then be reinvested in production. This general sequence depends upon the extraction of surplus-value from labour during the production process. In *Capital Volume Two*, which explicitly addresses the circulation of capital, Marx explains that merchant capitalists may purchase commodities cheaply and sell them at a profit (M-C-M’) and that money lenders and speculators may employ money to create monetary profit (M-M’). This latter circuit, notes Marx, may form “an independent movement peculiar to [the individual capitalist’s] capital value, a movement which proceeds in part within the general circulation of commodities, in part outside it, but which always retains its independent character” (Marx 1885, 136). Through this lens “the production process appears simply as an unavoidable middle term, a necessary evil for the purpose of money-making” (Ibid., 137). Consequently, “all nations characterized by the capitalist mode of production are periodically seized by fits of giddiness in which they try to accomplish the money-making without the mediation of the production process” (Ibid., 137). Marx also realised that worker incomes could be expropriated by financial profiteers independently of the production process. According to Costas Lapavistas (2013), certain passages from the *Theories of Surplus Value* maintain that the charging of interest to workers is unrelated to the extraction of surplus-value. In the *Grundrisse* and *Capital Volume Three*, Marx discusses the practices of usury. For Lapavistas (2013, 145), these understandings of expropriation are “vital to the analysis of financial profit earned from trading financial assets as well as from capital gains”. He remarks that “financial profit earned from mortgage and consumption loans to households or from handling pension or other funds” may accrue to “the holders of financial assets or to financial institutions as fees, commissions and proprietary profits” (Ibid., 145). Clearly, these manifestations of financialisation are more fundamental to capitalism today than they were to capitalism in the nineteenth century. Our critical understanding of them, however, derives, initially, from Marx’s writings.

As explained, the demarcation of epochs can be historically misleading and ideologically driven. Ruling power-blocs periodise the past and direct the future in order to advance their hegemonic interests. The arrival of global capitalism, however, was unannounced beyond the scattered milieus of Left intellectuals and anti-corporate activists. Transnational ruling elites and classes, supranational state organisations and neoliberal governments instead propagated a discourse of market forces, market freedom, individual choice, liberalisation, deregulation and globalisation, in contradistinction to the perceived failures of Soviet-bloc statism and national Keynesianism. Such circumstances led one leading Western intellectual to eschew epochal history altogether.

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is,

the endpoint of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. (Fukuyama 1989, 1)

Francis Fukuyama further claimed that the exhaustion of viable alternatives to Western liberalism was built into the worldwide spread of consumer culture, television technology and diverse music expression (Ibid.).

Beyond the obvious Western hubris, Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis comported with the communicational and informational affordances of global modernity. The ubiquitous spread of real time electronic networks facilitated a de-historicised cosmopolitan global present. Ideological manifestations of real time pervaded communication frameworks, architectures and lifeworlds: for example, global television news, Internet fora, social media platforms, cyberculture, cityscapes of spectacular consumption and transnational corporate branding. In the latter context, Robert Goldman and Stephen Papsen's analysis of television advertisements from transnational corporations across all economic sectors revealed a metanarrative of global interconnectedness and universal humanism. Such advertising told a "de-historicized story about capital" (Goldman and Papsen 2011, 202). Capitalism had no apparent source and existed in "the form of grand signifiers that appear to be autonomous in every sense except for their relationship to the individual subject" (Ibid., 202). These findings can be read as an ideology critique of Fukuyama's "end of history" and as a verification of global capitalism's epochality.

4. Earth, Epochality and Global Capitalism

Understanding the ecological dimensions of global capitalism requires us to reconcile natural-scientific chronologies of epochal change with anthropogenic accounts of how people collectively construct their own epochal histories. This realisation underlines Paul Crutzen's 2000 declaration that the Anthropocene should follow the Holocene on the Geological Time Scale (Hamilton, Bonneuil and Gemenne 2015; Crutzen 2002). He and fellow researchers argued, from stratigraphic evidence, that human activities involving large-scale carbon (CO²) emissions had measurably changed the global climate such that a new geological turning point could be identified. Subsequently, a range of other scientists from climatology, biology, oceanography, geo-chemistry, atmospheric chemistry and orbital satellite programmes maintained that the Earth system was shifting into an Anthropocene epoch characterised by anthropogenic global warming, ocean acidification, melting ice sheets, sea-level rise and species extinction. These outcomes, in the absence of adequate counter-measures, point to a hotter world, unruly climate, extreme weather events, submerged coastal settlement, mass migrations, destroyed agricultural systems, new, unequal sufferings and violent geopolitics. In short, we confront "the reality that human action and Earth dynamics have converged and can no longer be seen as belonging to distinct, incommensurate domains" (Hamilton, Bonneuil and Gemenne 2015, 3).

This judgment is scientifically valid but historically misleading. That life on earth is fragile and uncertain for every species results from the particular actions of powerful vested interests rather than "human action" per se. The conventional Anthropocene narrative excludes the fact that certain industries, enterprises and classes have been primarily responsible for increasing CO² emissions and overlooks the insight that capitalist expansion has been contingent upon unequal socio-ecological exchange (Angus 2016; Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016).

Marx was aware of this inequality even though he sometimes saw the development of productive forces as an inevitable feature of human progress. Within *Capital Volume I*, such ambiguity is encapsulated in the section on “Large-Scale Industry and Agriculture”. Marx states, in defence of the nutrient cycle, that “all progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is a progress toward ruining the more long-lasting sources of that fertility” (Marx 1867, 638). In a preceding passage, Marx declares, from an evolutionist perspective, that “conscious, technological application of science replaces the previous highly irrational and slothfully traditional way of working” and that the “capitalist mode of production completes the disintegration of the primitive familial union which bound agriculture and manufacture together when they were both at an undeveloped and childlike stage” (Ibid., 637). He does acknowledge that this “creates the material conditions for a new and higher synthesis, a union of agriculture and industry on the basis of the forms that have developed during the period of their antagonistic isolation” (Ibid., 637).

The nature of this possible synthesis, however, is not explored. The strongest case for Marx’s ecological prescience has been advanced by John Bellamy Foster. He argues, along with other researchers, that Marx conceived of a metabolic rift between human societies and nature resulting from the destructive logic of capital. Awareness of this rift revealed environmental perspicacity rather than deference to the inevitable advance of the productive forces (Foster 2000; Foster, Clark and York 2010). In defence of this position, Michael Löwy links Marx’s section on “Large-Scale Industry and Agriculture” (section 10 in *Capital Volume I*’s longest chapter “Machinery and Large-Scale Industry”, see Marx 1867, 636-639) with a corresponding chapter from *Capital Volume III* entitled “The Genesis of Capitalist Ground Rent” (Marx 1894, 917-952). Both chapters consider the relationship between industry, agriculture and soil exhaustion. For Löwy, they reveal Marx’s understanding of the metabolic rift “between human societies and the environment” under capitalism (Löwy 2017, 15). In the introduction (Chapter 37) to *Capital Volume III*’s part six that holds the title “The Transformation of Surplus Profit into Ground Rent”, Marx observes that:

“the entire spirit of capitalist production which is oriented towards the most immediate monetary profit – stands in contradiction to agriculture, which has to concern itself with the whole gamut of permanent conditions of life required by the chain of human generations” (Marx 1894, 754, Footnote 27).

From this and other passages¹, Marx is seen to perceive a radical opposition between “the immediatist logic of capital” and the possibility of a form of an agriculture “based on a much longer temporality and in a sustainable and intergenerational perspective, which respects the natural environment” (Löwy 2017, 16). Overall, the association Marx makes “between the brutal capitalist exploitation of the proletariat and of the earth” is said to lay “the theoretical ground for a strategy articulating class struggle and ecological struggle, in a common fight against the domination of capital” (Ibid., 15). One can concur with the purpose of these struggles while acknowledging the historical limits of Marx’s prescient contributions. On this matter, Joe Kovel observes that critical conceptions of unequal socio-ecological exchange were not fully understood during

¹ Löwy’s citation of the relevant passage draws upon an earlier 1959 translation of *Capital Volume III* from the Institute of Marxist-Leninism Moscow and International Publishers in New York.

Marx's time. The debasement of eco-systems on a planetary scale only become publicly apparent during the late twentieth century. And the idea that prefigurative eco-socialist communities (arising from climate justice activism) might complement working class struggle was entirely unanticipated during Marx's lifetime (Kovel 2011).

Those who criticise today's anthropogenic discourses from a left-ecological perspective hold different positions on the periodisation and sharpness of epochal change. After considering some of these differences, I will argue that the epochal distinctiveness of global capitalism has a planetary-ecological dimension.

Within a modernising nineteenth-century world economy integrated by trade, time zones, and transport and communication networks, the British industrial revolution accelerated coal extraction and CO² emissions. For Andreas Malm, these concurrent developments were the foundation of fossil fuel capitalism and anthropogenic global warming (Malm 2016a). Although the earth system effects of early fossil fuel combustion were cumulative rather than immediate, their historical significance is retrospectively clear. Beginning with coal, Britain produced 80 percent of global CO² emissions in 1825 and 62 percent in 1850 (Malm 2016a, 13). Eventually, the extraction and consumption of fossil fuels spread to other capitalist economies in Western Europe and North America. A further spike in carbon emissions occurred between 1950 and 1973 with the spread of oil-fuelled patterns of Fordist production and consumption and the increase in international air travel (McNeill and Engelke 2014; Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016; Brevini and Murdock 2017).

These accounts suggest that the entirety of industrial capitalism became locked into carbon-energy extraction, CO² emissions and the multiple feedback loops of anthropogenic global warming. Jason Moore, however, insists that anthropogenic and eco-socialist narratives based on the industrial revolution de-emphasise the significance of the Capitalocene – the intercontinental expansion of mercantile capitalism and the instrumentalisation of ecological nature from 1450 to 1750. This period saw the deforestation of European landscapes, the plunder of gold, silver, copper, iron, forest products and wildlife from the Americas and the enslavement of indigenous and African populations. Their collective labour drove entire systems of agriculture and trade based upon spices, cereals, tobacco, sugar and cotton. Thus, the Capitalocene was built upon the systematic appropriation of labour power, food, energy and raw materials. These “four cheaps” (cheap labour, cheap food, cheap energy, cheap raw materials) underpinned the relations of power and wealth that emerged after 1450 and made possible the nineteenth- and twentieth-century fossil fuel booms (Moore 2015; 2016; 2017a; 2017b).

More recently, Moore argues that the potential sources of ‘cheap nature’ have contracted sharply. Since the 1970s, low-cost frontiers of oil extraction – in Alaska, the Gulf of Mexico, West Africa and the North Sea – have been superseded by high-cost frontiers in Northern Canada. There, plentiful tar sand deposits are carbon intensive and expensive to refine. Meanwhile, there are no new land frontiers on which to grow cheap food, just as global warming undermines the existing capacities of livestock farming and crop growth. In China, the world's last reservoir of massive cheap labour is diminishing. Since the early 2000s, growing worker militancy in ports, cities and industrial estates has pushed up wages (Moore 2016). Moore remarks that “today there is nowhere to run. Much of what we have seen global capitalism achieve over the past decade has been a shifting of costs – from one capitalist to another- and especially from capital to the vast majority. And, there has been another vector of cost shifting which has been accelerating in recent years: from the present to the future” (ibid., 114).

Moore proceeds to cite “financialisation and the polarisation of income and wealth” as primary indicators of social and temporal cost shifting (Ibid., 114).

At the same time, increases in CO² emissions reflect the interlock between transnational corporate expansion and China’s manufacturing boom. Between 1751 and 2010, half of all CO² emissions from fossil fuel combustion occurred after 1986. Since 2000, the rate of CO² emissions growth has tripled compared to the 1990s. From 2000 to 2006, 55 per cent of such growth worldwide derived from China; in 2007 that figure was 66 per cent (Malm 2016a, 328-329). Over these years, China’s economic transition from agriculture to industry required abundant reserves of cheap labour and cheap energy resources (domestic coal and imported oil). The state needed to finance the building of power plants and electricity grids capable of delivering coal-based energy to manufacturing plants. Finished goods were sent to major ports and domestic/overseas markets via oil-consuming road, rail and air vehicles. Thus, as China became the epicentre of world manufacturing, multiple corporations profited from each element of the capital realisation process – energy extraction, assembly line production, transportation and commodity exchange. Malm succinctly outlines the global-epochal nature of these developments.

Globalisation has produced the greatest separation between energy, production and consumption in documented history, the chains often taking fossil fuels from deposits in one country to combustion in another where commodities are manufactured for sale in a third; every year more carbon – solid and embodied – is shuffled across borders. (Malm 2016a, 374)

Yet the geo-spatial totality of carbon intensive global capitalism is not readily apparent. The real-time imperatives of a globally-mediated consumer culture occludes the economic origins and temporal ramifications of anthropogenic climate change. This is not a one-way process, however. As I will explain, crisis tendencies within global capitalism allow transnational coalitions of opposition to develop.

5. Global Crises

The illusion of a globally mediated present which transcends epochal history cannot be sustained, universally or indefinitely. Global capitalism as such is riven by financial and earth-ecological vectors of crisis. Together, their manifestation generates obstacles and opportunities for the proponents of eco-socialist change. In general, crises arise from internal contradictions whereby a system rule or course of action generates an opposing system rule or course of action (Bhaskar 1991). These countervailing tendencies may proceed to a point of crisis such that system reproducibility cannot be guaranteed. Crises of capitalism and its earth-ecological foundations are temporally ambiguous. They can open up breakthrough possibilities involving relations of production, new forms of social production, new political organisations and new socio-ecological projects. Equally, however, the temporality of crisis can instil a sense of repetition rather than future possibility (Osborne 2010). Official attempts to remedy a crisis situation may simply reproduce its underlying contradictions.

The 2007-2008 financial crisis, for example, reflected the incommensurability between the realisation of capital and financial speculation. In the former process, as I have described, money capital is realised through the production process, productive capital is realised in the form of commodities, and commodities are realised as money in market exchange. Money surpluses throughout the capitalist economy are, potentially, reinvested in production. However, this general schema M-C...P...C’-M’ cannot

be guaranteed; the employment of money to generate speculative profit (M-M') circumvents and disrupts the capital realisation process. The realisation of capital occurs *over* time. Business-related knowledge systems such as registries, clearing houses, balance sheets, account statements and audits are inherently chronological. They maintain commercial and public memory such that businesses can make soundly-based, future-oriented decisions. But within global capitalism, these sequential and temporal requirements contradict the real time imperatives of M-M' speculation and the short-termist profit calculations of financialised corporations.

This contradiction became apparent during the 2007-2008 financial crisis. Unfolding events were driven by a perfect storm – over leveraged investment banks engaging in undocumented derivatives speculation, the securitisation of Anglo-American household debt, the spread of Anglo-American mortgage derivatives and the unprecedented global connectivity of these developments. The bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in September 2008 was a global news event which sent panic waves through the multi-billion dollar commercial paper and short-term money markets. Within 36 hours, collapsing stock markets wiped US\$ 600 billion off global equity prices. Consequent bank failures throughout the United States and Western Europe were followed by a worldwide recession which drove more than 50 million people into extreme poverty (Soederberg 2010).

The new ideas, institutions and policy directions which might have stabilised the global capitalist system were not available. Thus, the Anglo-American bank bailouts, the creation of bank holding companies and light-handed financial regulation reproduced the contradiction between capital realisation and M-M' circuits of financial speculation. Over-the-counter derivatives trading, a cardinal feature of M-M' circuits and financialised capitalism, remained. Investment banks and other financial interests strongly resisted the G20 conference directive of April 2009 that standardised derivatives contracts “should be traded on exchanges or electronic trading platforms where appropriate and be cleared through central counterparties by the end of 2012 by the latest” (Morgan 2012, 405).

As national and supranational attempts to remedy the financial crisis reproduced the excesses of financialised capitalism, the burden of crisis shifted to governments, national polities and citizens. In the US, UK and Western Europe, debt-ridden banks were recapitalised out of tax revenues and the sale of government bonds to financial institutions. The subsequent introduction of austerity policy packages in those countries and others led to uncontrollable recessionary spirals, worsening poverty and social dislocation. Although China's 2008-2009 neo-Keynesian stimulus package diverged from this structural tendency, such a response cannot be guaranteed in future (Cook 2012; Harris 2012). China's further integration into the global economy with its financial volatilities is helping to establish the preconditions for a larger and less manageable world financial crisis.

More fundamentally, global capitalism cannot continue without destroying the ecological and biospheric wellsprings of its existence. The growing cost of monetising the “four cheaps” (energy, raw materials, food, labour) coincides with the intensification of greenhouse effects and anthropogenic feedback loops as CO² emissions increase further. Without adequate countermeasures the next 100 years will see rapid deteriorations of our physical environment. Global warming, temperature increases, sea-level rise and extreme weather will threaten the cohesion of societies, economies and political systems. If one considers this predicament from a time-related perspective, an underlying contradiction becomes evident – the evolutionary dynamics of geo-biospheric time and the temporalities of human life it contains clashes with the short-

termism of unrestrained capital accumulation. As Andri Stahel has observed, systematic fossil fuel extraction exemplifies this contradiction:

[...] the value of these fuels is given by human production time which is only the labor required to capitalize them and not the millions of years of the systemic time within which they were produced. From the long span of systemic time and its long term processes, the carbon cycle entered the short term and accelerating historical time of the capitalist accumulation process (Stahel 1999, 128).

Under present conditions, the accelerating short-termism of capital accumulation is myopic and the “long term processes” of geo-biospheric evolution are existentially threatened. However, the resulting global crisis unfolds differently from the global financial crisis even though they are integrally connected. As Rob Nixon observes, the violence of socio-ecological destruction is “neither spectacular or instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (Nixon 2011, 2). Yet, evidence of these worsening repercussions, and their coordinated logic, cannot be entirely hidden. The inchoate sense that an earth system crisis is at hand cannot be ignored.

These two crises of global capitalism have precipitated militant political responses worldwide. A detailed account of these is not possible here. I will instead outline the minimal threshold for an effective counter-power coalition and identify the key modalities for collective practice. Organised labour, throughout China and worldwide, must expand its capacity to disrupt, synchronically, the just-in-time supply chains of transnational corporations. Successful strategic outcomes will require multilevel alliances with the precariously employed and the wageless poor. Next, a coalition of counter-power should draw upon the early objectives of the Occupy movement to build a global protest network explicitly focused upon the delegitimation of financialised capitalism.

Associated research hubs should also inform alliances of populist anti-austerity movements with the capacity to develop pre-figurative forms of socio-economic cooperation and the electoral mandate to claim local and national state power. The eco-socialist dimensions of this coalition centres around the transnational climate justice movement and its uncompromising defence of the ecological commons. As Andreas Malm has suggested, its substantive manifesto should include, at the very least, a complete moratorium on all new facilities for extracting coal, oil or natural gas, the non-fossil fuel generation of electricity, especially wind and solar, major public investment in renewable energy projects, the cessation of forest burning and the initiatives of massive reforestation programmes (Malm 2016b).

Across different localities, multiple formations of ecological and socialist activism should challenge global capitalism’s capacity to erase its own historicity. This requires a collective sense of globality which extends beyond the general nomenclature of globalisation. Oppositional coalitions must nurture a two-level epochal awareness which stresses global capitalism’s universal structure as well as the multi-perspectival standpoints of those who confront its material reach and power. Such an accomplishment will enable serious public reflection on the *finitude* of global capitalism – a necessary precursor to the rupture of the system. Oppositional constructions of global-epochal consciousness must temporalise the global present such that historical patterns of socio-ecological depredation, including CO² emissions, are given contemporary relevance. Correspondingly, the impact of geo-biospheric depletion on the futurity of social relations and human life must be recognised as a precondition for revolutionary change.

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“The History of all Hitherto Existing Society:” Class Struggle and the Current Wave of Resistance

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Abstract: Across the last decade we have witnessed a growing wave of resistance across the globe. In this article we argue that it is critical to utilise class analysis to understand contemporary social movements. We maintain that class analysis begins with understanding class as a series of relations and/or processes that condition both the objective and subjective dimensions of class. Following this, we illustrate how sectors of the contemporary working class are in struggle, yet struggle differently, based on their structural location as well as differing nature of their resistance. In taking this approach to class and social movements, we argue that scholars can begin to unmask the central role of capitalism and the attending regimes of accumulation in the current wave of resistance even when they appear disconnected.

Keywords: Karl Marx, social movements, resistance, class analysis

“Only struggle educates the exploited class. Only struggle discloses to it the magnitude of its own power, widens its horizon, enhances its abilities, clarifies its mind, forges its will.” (Lenin 1917, 241)

1. Introduction

Over the last ten years we have lived through a profound wave of struggle. In response to the 2008 economic crisis, communities have been rising up across the globe, forging diverse forms of political organisation, both temporary and permanent, through which to build power and make change. This emergent wave of struggle has often times been focused on the state, and ranged from occupations, and armed militias to electoral campaigns and party-building projects. Scholars of contentious politics have kept pace with as social movement studies have produced a great deal of scholarship. Moreover, through the lens of the current wave of struggle, social movement scholars have seemingly loosened the shackles of some of the dominant theories of the field from resource mobilization and political opportunity structures to new social movement theory.

Punctuated by research focused on North Africa and the Middle East, the Anti-Austerity struggles across Europe, Occupy Wall Street and the more recent wave of resistance from the Umbrella Protests in Hong Kong and Nuit Debout in France to #BlackLivesMatter, the growing field has offered compelling concepts around the complex role of social media, the short-term efficacy of protest camps, the rapidly changing repertoires of contention and the possibility of a neo-anarchist populism to

¹ This article was written collaboratively by the two authors: there is no first author. The authors' names appear in random order.

name a few critical insights. However, while there has been some significant research into the contemporary wave of struggle, in the majority of this scholarship there is scant mention of capitalism and the changing nature of class or the role of class-based resistance therein. In fact, the bulk of social movement scholars dismiss class and capitalism as useful categories for analysing socio-political dynamics in general, and social movement politics in particular.

In many ways, the current state of social movement studies reflects Ellen Meiksins Wood broader critique of the academy as infected by a contagion she identified as “the retreat from class” (Wood 1986). Her broad argument is that scholars have abandoned the concept of class arguing that there is no necessary relationship between material circumstance or one’s position within the social structure, and their correspondent ideology or worldview. However, along with a few other social movements scholars including the contributions in Barker et al.’s volume (2013), Cox and Nielsen (2014), Della Porta (2015) and Fuchs (2013) we contend that within social movement studies it is critical to bring back both capitalism, and in the case of this essay, class (see also Lamas, Wolfson and Funke 2017; Funke et al. 2017; Wolfson 2014).²

While we have witnessed a diversity of struggles emerge in the last decade, we argue that the central engine of this wave of resistance is the 2008-09 economic crisis and the growing instability of neoliberal capitalism as well as inequality and growing precarity of people across the globe. An analysis of both the current logic of capitalism and the character of contemporary class struggle is thus critical to understanding the nature of this profound current wave of protest.

Given the above, in this essay, we seek to begin to redress this gap in the literature by offering a structural analysis of social movements through a re-articulation of a theory of class struggle that is congruent with both this conjuncture in our political and economic order as well as the burgeoning forms of resistance to this order. Broadly we argue that to understand the current wave of resistance it is critical to use a class analysis. Accordingly, in the remainder of this article we aim to make two main interventions. First, for us, a class analysis begins with understanding class as a series of relations and/or processes that condition both the objective and subjective dimensions of class. With this in mind we use the categories of “exploitation” and “collective struggle” to examine how different regimes of accumulation create different fragments of the working class (i.e. wage-labour, precarious labour, the dispossessed). Following this, we illustrate how these class fragments struggle, yet struggle differently, based on their structural location as well as differing nature of their resistance. We argue that in taking this approach to class and social movements, we can unmask the central role of capitalism and the attending regimes of accumulation in the current wave of resistance even when they appear disconnected. Moreover, with this lens we believe scholars can begin to see both the fragmentation or class de-composition and possibility for class re-composition in this broad epoch of contention.³

² For a more general defence of class as an explanatory category see Wright (2015, 139-156).

³ In this essay, we focus on the relationship between the capitalist mode of production and class at the point of production. In a planned future project, we seek to encompass the other dimensions of the social relations of production such as production, exchange, and distribution as well as modes of regulation

2. Mapping the Coordinates of Capitalism and Class

In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx offered one of his most extended discussions on the process of class formation. He wrote:

“Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle [...] this mass becomes united and constitutes itself as a class for itself” (Marx 1847, 211).

Here Marx articulates the objective (in-itself) and subjective (for-itself) dimensions of class or what can also be seen as two moments in the process of class formation. It is fair to say that the process of transforming from a group of people with a set of shared lived conditions and common interests into a cohesive political force is somewhat mystified in Marx’s class-in-itself and class-for-itself formation. At the same time, the quote opens the door for the two key interconnected premises in the theory of class we want to develop. First, class is relational and shifting over space and time. Second, class exists at the intersection of its objective and subjective dimensions. Classes of people are structurally situated, but as history has shown, that alone does not create class-consciousness or forms of class-based resistance. It is through, what E.P. Thompson calls a process of “self-making”, that people see themselves as aligned as a class with a set of shared interests.

2.1. Class as a Relationship

In contrast to much of the writing on class, we hold that class is not a static category and cannot be understood simply through a social stratification model, instead class is a series of social relationships that are conditioned by capitalism and its shifting instantiations over space and time. Detailing this argument Ellen Meiksins Wood explains:

“The concept of class as relationship and process stresses that objective relations to the means of production are significant because they establish antagonisms and generate conflicts and struggles; that these conflicts and struggles shape social experience ‘in class ways’, even when they do not express themselves in class consciousness or in clearly visible formations; and that over time we can discern how these relationships impose their logic, their pattern, on social processes. Purely ‘structural’ conceptions of class do not require us to look for the ways in which class actually imposes its logic, since classes are simply there by definition” (Wood 1986, 82).

Her point is that if we want to understand the impact of the material dimensions of capitalism on class, we must look at the processes or relationships that emerge out of the mode of production and therefore play a key role in conditioning the lived experience of class. In this essay we point to three relationships that condition how class is experienced:

1. The relation between a class and the regime(s) of accumulation
2. Class intra-relationships, or the relations amongst individuals within a class or across sectors of a class
3. Class interrelationships, or relation between classes

To the first, different lived experiences emerge through diverse dynamics of exploitation. For instance, take the Fordist regime of accumulation as compared to neoliberal or a more flexible regime of accumulation. It is clear that the nature of work has transformed under the more flexible and informational regime of accumulation and this impacts the nature of work and the interaction amongst workers along with other things. To see class as a set of processes or relations is to see how the structure of the accumulation process operates on the working class. Moreover, this can be seen across time as well as across space if we look at different models of capitalism in a particular moment, across the U.S. and Europe for instance.

Second, it is critical to analyse the relationships within a class, in other words across sectors of the same class in a particular conjuncture. One of the key contributions of the Occupy Movement was the introduction of the concept of “the 99%”. A class concept to be sure, the 99% allowed the burgeoning Occupy movement to unmask the dynamics of capitalism while prophesising the battle lines in the struggles to come. While the 99% was a clarion call, the concept also obfuscates the divisions amongst the broad working class in the 21st century as it does not allow for us to recognise the differences amongst the broad 99%. This reality impacted the ability of the Occupy movement to forge powerful links across different sectors of the working class as there was not an integrated analysis of those differences and how they impact protest dynamics. Therefore, we argue, that in order to understand the working class or classes in general and movement dynamics in particular we must recognise the relationship of different sectors within the same class. We discuss this in more detail later, when we look at the relationship between three broad sectors of the working class: traditional working class, precariat, and the dispossessed.

Finally, relationships between classes play a critical role in class formation. Thompson speaks to this in his preface to *The Making of the English Working Class* when he argues “[a]nd class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared) feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves and against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs” (Thompson 1963, 9). Here Thompson is marking that class-consciousness is more completely expressed once class actors understand that their interests are opposed to other class interests. This point echoes a famous from Marx and Engels at the beginning of *The Communist Manifesto*:

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes” (Marx and Engels 1848, 482).

In this quote, Marx and Engels famously argue that the conflict between classes is the engine of history. They add however, that at times it is hidden and at times it is open. Here they are touching upon the fluid relationship between the classes driven by the process of recognising class interest, a point that has become increasingly mystified as the ruling class aims to govern through consent.

2.2. Objective and Subjective Class Dimensions

This brings us to the second interrelated premise that we contend is key for thinking through class as it pertains to social movements in the 21st century. To understand class, we must recognise the subjective processes through which people become a class for itself, but these processes must still be rooted in an understanding of the objective dimension of class. Class is not open. Unlike many of the post Marxist theorists that have overturned the materialist dimension of class dynamics (Holloway, Laclau and Mouffe), we see class as conditioned by structural location vis-à-vis the mode of production in general and the specific regime of accumulation in particular (Wright 1979).

At the same time, as we have seen throughout history, one's material conditions do not necessarily account for when and how people begin to think and act as a class. The mediation between structural location of individuals and forms of class-based collective struggle is precisely the aspect of class and class formation that we want to explore in the remainder of this essay. Adapting the more abstract conception of objective and subjective class dimension in order to capture complexities of the ongoing mediation between structural location and class consciousness "on the ground" we offer two categories: exploitation and collective struggle.

We take the category of exploitation from the different regimes of accumulation in contemporary capitalism, which call forth at least three objective and distinct sectors of the working class (wage-labour, precarious-labour, and the dispossessed). In this sense, exploitation allows us to show the variety of currently co-existing modalities of objective class positions. Collective struggle we derive from the subjective class dimension and use it to discuss the identity and identity constructing aspects of class formation; the multiple ways by which the various objective class sectors gain (or not) class-consciousness.

In the remainder of the essay we will explore these two aspects in class making through the lens of the contemporary wave of resistance. First, we will look at how movements are conditioned by structural location as it relates to the regime(s) of accumulation and the resulting forms of exploitation. Following this, we will examine how differently situated sectors of the working class have dominant patterns whereby they have undertaken the process of self-making through collective struggle. We contend that through this we can begin to see multiple structural locations of the working class and how these locations and the difference in forms of exploitation lead to different forms of resistance.

3. Exploitation: Objective Class Dimension

In the most general terms, capitalist exploitation, the appropriation of surplus-value from the actual producer, occurs through regimes of accumulation. Following Harvey and Cini et al. (2017), we suggest that in contemporary capitalism there are two regimes of accumulation or ways that surplus-value is appropriated, and argue that they in turn, generate three distinguishable sectors of the working class:

1. accumulation through expanded production, which generates wage-labour and precarious-labour;
2. accumulation through dispossession, which generates the diverse sector of the dispossessed.

While these two regimes (expanded production and dispossession) can bleed into each other, we think it useful to differentiate between them as ideal-types as they

bring forth three distinct objective class locations or sectors of the working class, which in turn – as we will argue in the following part – generate variegated protest and mobilising dynamics. Still, and unlike for instance Guy Standing, we are not suggesting that these class sectors are distinct classes but rather that the respective regimes of accumulation generate variegated experiences of exploitation within the same broad working class.

To elaborate, we build on David Harvey. Examining the ways in which profits were generated since World War Two, Harvey differentiates between two types of capital accumulation. Alongside accumulation through expanded production, which is the process within a capitalist economy where surplus-value is converted into capital, Harvey building on Rosa Luxemburg argues that there is also a distinct socialised dynamic of capital accumulation whereby society is dispossessed of what are publicly held realms by way of turning them into sites for private profit. While Marx, who conceptualised this process as “primitive accumulation”, saw it as an initial way that capitalism fashioned class winners and loser, Luxemburg and more recently Harvey see it as an ongoing and necessary dynamic of capitalism. Harvey calls this ongoing process “accumulation by dispossession” (2005, 159). Through this bifurcation, Harvey differentiates between profit generated within the existing capitalist system and “accumulation by dispossession” where sectors that were formerly outside the capitalist market logic, are now governed by the profit motive. The consequences of these two coexisting regimes of accumulation are different forms of class-based struggles given differing experiences of exploitation.

Somewhat schematically put, accumulation through expanded production, which generates profits extensively (i.e. increasing working hours) or intensively (i.e. increasing productivity), brings forth two distinct segments of the current working class. First, what we might call the traditionally understood wage labourers: the so-called Old Left, ranging from factory workers to service sector employees. Alongside this, however, we see accumulation through expanded production as forging another segment of the class, which we call precarious labour or the “precariat”. Akin to Engels and Marx’s discussion of the “reserve army of labour”, this sector of the working class is made up of the un- and underemployed.⁴ Here, capital is generated directly through the exploitation of the individuals in this sector as well as indirectly through the pressure this “reserve army of labour” puts on the on other sectors of the working class. Put simply, the presence of potential wage labourers stifles resistance by the contemporary wage labourer as the threat of being replaced looms.⁵ An additional aspect to be considered is that with the gig economy where a growing mass of workers are employed, the conditions of work are rapidly transforming, changing protest dynamics among this sector of the working class, as we will discuss in the next section. Lastly, the precariat bridges the traditional wage labourer and the dispossessed, as this more insecure worker is particularly vulnerable to the effects of dispossession.

According to David Harvey, accumulation by dispossession generates profits in four main ways (2005, 160): “privatization and commodification”, “financialization”, “the management and manipulation of crisis”, and “state redistributions”. As Cini et al. (2017) detail, this modality of capital accumulation in turn generates a particular sector of the working class, or, as we argue, a particular class location. It is clear that the majority of the population is affected by the dynamics of accumulation by disposses-

⁴ Marx divides the reserve army of labour into four layers (floating to pauperized)

⁵ While we do not have the space in this essay to develop this further, we explore elsewhere the utility of linking this precarity sector of the working class to a distinct third regime of accumulation by precarious-labour.

sion as capital expropriates public assets such as water or energy utilities, pushes debt on society (e.g. housing bubble), orchestrates and uses crisis (e.g. banking crisis become sovereign debt crisis). At the same time, accumulation by dispossession also brings forth a distinguishable sector of the working class such as students, the elderly, and those living at the margins that are disproportionately affected by these dynamics of accumulation.

To reiterate we are offering this schema for heuristic purposes as these groups can and do partially overlap and bleed into each other, are relational, and constitutive of each other. For instance, a former unemployed person might move to the wage labour segment, privatisation of schools lead to the expansion of wage labour industry, etc. Important for our purposes here is that these three groups call for different practices of how the subjective class dimension unfolds in general and how the sectors mobilise and protest. Moreover, it can help us devise strategies for struggles over class formation across these sectors. It is to these dynamics we now turn.

4. Collective Struggle: Subjective Class Dimension

Building on the work of Henri Lefebvre, Peter Marcuse (2009) convincingly argued that different parts of the working class are differently located, experience exploitation differently and thus forge diverse types of resistance. Marcuse differentiated between the deprived (e.g. poor and working class) on one hand and the discontented (e.g. students and the new poor) on the other.

Here there are two important points we want to highlight. First, in this analysis, those materially oppressed by capitalism (the deprived) and those alienated by the terms and conditions of capitalist society (discontented) are oppressed differently and consequently the character of their struggles emerges differently, with the deprived fighting predominately on material grounds while the discontented struggle largely on ideological grounds around issues of freedom, power and fulfilment of self. These differences in structural location, lead to different forms of struggle and shapes the relationship across sectors of a class. In this section we want to build on Marcuse, recognising that social location plays a critical role in logics of resistance. However, in order to better understand the process by which capitalism creates deprivation and discontent as well as respectively different mobilisation dynamics, we diverge from Marcuse as he does not offer a structural analysis for why the deprived or discontented emerge, whereas we focus on different processes of capital accumulation (as sketched above) and link them to diverse protests logics (as discussed in the next section).

As we argued above, objectively, the contemporary working class – in our typology – is made up of three core segments (wage-labour, precarious labour, and the dispossessed), which come about through two regimes of accumulation. In the following section we want to suggest that these distinct regimes of accumulation and the diverse sectors of the working class that they bring forth, call for different dynamics and strategies for generating class struggle. Organising on factory floors, or among students concerned with growing debt and joblessness, or across the atomised and splintered work environments of Uber drivers, take on different strategies and organisational forms.

Overall, we argue that the processes to generate class consciousness (subjective dimension) today are arguably more challenging as the dynamics of neoliberalism have compelled class fragmentation or what autonomist Marxists would call “class decomposition” and therefore there is a lessening of shared work and life experienc-

es, which in turn makes it more difficult to create organisation and develop a class-based identity.

5. Struggles over Class-Formation within Each Sector

While the different regimes of accumulation condition the ways in which exploitation is experienced as well as other lived aspect of class, they do not help us understand why or how class location leads to processes of class struggle. In the rest of this paper, we look closely at the different sectors of the working class. While we do not have the space to fully examine the subjective processes of struggles over class formation across the sectors we do look at the dominant logics of protest as they have been expressed within these sectors in the last 10+ years. In particular, we emphasise 4 dimensions:

- 1) The dominant figure of resistance,
- 2) The emancipatory horizon
- 3) The dominant organisational form
- 4) The dominant movement-building strategy

6. Expanded Production and its Protest Logic

For Marx and many Marxists the principle regime of accumulation works through expanded production. While the logic of this regime of accumulation has transformed over time from a Fordist to a flexible regime, accumulation operates through extensive and intensive processes. Capital is thus generated by thrusting increasing numbers of workers into a relationship where they create surplus-value, which in turn is converted into capital. This regime of accumulation has led to two distinct sectors of the current working class: the traditional working class of wage-labour and precarious labour.

6.1. Wage-Labour/Standard Labour

This sector of the working class is dominated by traditional working class actors, ranging from the industrial proletariat to service and public sector workers. The ideal-typical form political protest of this segment of the working class takes, revolves around struggles for (expansion of) the welfare state including publicly funded education, health and disability insurances, and pension systems. The dominant form of organisation that has emerged in response to this form of exploitation are labour unions, the labour movement more generally and political parties that have been tied to the labour movement.

Accordingly, the organising model tends to rely on representative and hierarchical organisational formations, focused on economic issues. Finally, Marxists have typically seen this segment of the working class as the primary protagonist because of their location vis-à-vis the point of production, and accordingly, this class segment has played a critical role in class struggle as well as class compromise across the 20th century into the 21st century.

6.2. Precariat

The second sector we derive from the accumulation by expanded production is the precariat. Guy Standing defines the precariat as those “people living through insecure jobs interspersed with periods of unemployment or labour-force withdrawal (misnamed as ‘economic inactivity’) and living insecurely, with uncertain access to

housing and public resources” (2014, 16).⁶ Composed of the under- and unemployed, the dominant figure of resistance ranges from the low-wage service sector workers in the so-called “pink colour” retail industry (e.g. janitors, Walmart employees) to the growing mass of adjunct teachers. This segment of workers is employed but stands apart from the standard labour sectors as they are under-salaried and importantly have very little security. Alongside these workers, the precariat also includes the growing mass of independent contractors and gig workers, from cab and Uber drivers, to domestic workers, graduate students and many others who find themselves in temporary or insecure work situations. Finally, we see workers who are unsalaried (and mostly women) such as partners and mothers, performing reproductive work in homes as a further key actor of the precariat. The emancipatory horizon of this group is arguably diverse but during times of low class consciousness mainly aims to “escape” this sector, seeking to join the standard labour sector. The dominant organisational form and movement-building strategy (or lack thereof) is similarly diffuse as the work and life worlds of individuals in this sector are atomized and isolated.

7. Dispossessed

Harvey’s work has introduced the concept of accumulation by dispossession. Indebted to Rosa Luxemburg, accumulation by dispossession is the ongoing process of taking what were public goods and placing them under the capitalist profit logic by way of privatization and commodification, financialisation, through crisis and state action (Harvey 2005, 160). Consequently, accumulation by dispossession generates very different mechanisms of amassing profit compared to accumulation by expanded production as it is atomising and incremental, often obscuring the underlying profit motive.

The dominant figure of resistance of this sector of the working class is highly diverse, ranging from students to people fighting against racism, patriarchy, or environmental degradation. In addition to struggles that appear to be predominately defensive battles (e.g. preventing the expansion of charter schools or opposing new drilling or mining explorations), the focus and aim of many of these struggles revolve around questions of identity and self-actualisations. The dominant organisational form and strategy of mobilisations by the dispossessed have also taken on distinctive characteristics, stressing unconventional forms of political organising including working outside of formal institutional channels (Calhoun 1993), shifting away from more hierarchical organisational forms to networks as alternative configurations (Melucci 1985), and seeking bottom-up and participatory political practices.

Contrary to the more traditional struggles against accumulation by production, movement-building strategies of struggles against accumulation by dispossession have in large part been critical of representative structures and institutional politics. Instead, voluntarism, spontaneity, and grassroots consensus-based decision-making and prefigurative politics have been embraced.

Important for our purposes here is that while organisers and activists of the dispossessed ordinarily do not rely on a deep critique of capitalism as it pertains to their struggles, we argue that the often-claimed post-material character of these struggles is misleading (see also Cini et al. 2017). Rather than understanding them as uncon-

⁶ While we focus in this essay on production relations as the dimension of class relations, Standing adds relations of distribution and relations to the state as dimension of class relations.

cerned with capitalism, they are “born of the crisis of Fordism, as manifestations opposing various processes of dispossession, which took place globally after the 1970s economic crisis as way to solve the problem of falling capital profitability” (Cini et al. 2017, 441). Accumulation by dispossession (e.g. expropriation) is fundamentally about generating new capital opportunities and commodification attempts. While fighting off shore drilling is of course an environmental problem, it is only fully understandable when we recognise the underlying class-nature. Similarly, the LGBT movement, as Hetland and Goodwing convincingly show, has been significantly shaped by capitalist dynamics (Barker et al. 2013). Hence, through class analysis we see that issues of the dispossessed are also structured by the capitalist profit logic, leading their struggles to be what E.P. Thompson calls “class struggle without class” as participants (and analysts) often do not recognise these struggle’s class character (yet).

8. Conclusion

From a Tunisian revolution in 2010 that was sparked by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi to a farmer rebellion that rocked India in 2017, the world has watched a groundswell of resistance movements. Recognising the material dimension of these struggles, the goal of this essay has been to bring capitalism and class back into the analysis of mobilisations, protests, and social movement politics writ large. Our contention is that in order to make out the distinct nature of these resistance movements it is critical to see class as a series of relations. This in term allows us to see how the structural dimensions of capitalism condition different class fragments (using the category of exploitation) while recognising the importance of subjective class dynamics (employing collective struggle as analytic window) in the “making of the working class”.

While this is an initial exploration into the role of class in the contemporary wave of resistance, there are critical research questions scholars must address pertaining to questions of class formation across the splintered fragments of the working class. Further developing this lens will enable scholars to recognise the differences in protest dynamics across the class and the possibility of a broad class re-composition.

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Marx, Materialism and the Brain: Determination in the Last Instance?

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Abstract: It is well acknowledged that there is not one but many Marxes, and one area where this has been most evident is in the question of technological and economic determinism. This article traces some key moments in this debate and attempts to locate their most recent iteration in disagreements over the place of the human brain in both historical agency and value creation in so called ‘cognitive’ or ‘post-Fordist’ capitalism. Of significant interest in the current configuration – or rather composition – of capital is the place of the digitisation of the labour process and its relation to, and integration with, human cognition and volition. Arguments over the attention economy and the power of post-Fordist capitalism to distract and direct is a significant variation of the question of ideology and the latest variation of the base/superstructure debate. This article will unpack the aforesaid issues to offer an articulated perspective in order to make the argument that taking a balanced view of determination will allow us to acknowledge that – drawing on the argument of determination in the last instance – we can hold both of these ‘Marxes’ to be simultaneously valid. Here, a revisiting of Marx’s concept of General Intellect will be undertaken, wherein the productive capacity of living labour is employed in both active agency and the capture of value, in which the plasticity of the living brain becomes the pivot point for both exploitation by, and resistance to, capital.

Keywords: brain, consciousness, digital labour, intention, autonomous Marxism, base, superstructure, determinism, plasticity

1. Introduction

We live in a time of climate catastrophe, infrastructure collapse, appalling social deprivation and hardship. Generations born in even the most prosperous countries have little hope of reaching the same standard of life as their parents. Yet never in history has there been such wealth, such astonishing accumulations of money, goods and opportunity. The technological wonders of the 21st century render the needs of physical labour and want an unnecessary burden, yet still the misery, the soul-destroying brutality of this world, expands without seeming limit. Mechanisation and digitalisation of the economy, instead of liberating the time of workers towards the cultivation of free expression and self-development, has merely shifted the contradictions of capitalism onto the terrain of the human brain. As such the brain can now be regarded as the key organ of capitalist production. The aim here is thus to survey some of the perspectives that inform this shift and to open up a space for further reflection, and in particular to explore how this pertains to questions of determinism and the relation of base to superstructure.

Much of this trajectory is entirely explicable within the writing of Karl Marx as the unfolding of the logic of capitalism. Yet one question remains stubbornly unanswered – why does capitalism persist? In the 200 years since the birth of Karl Marx such

questions have been raised and debated repeatedly. The fact that we still turn to Marx for answers is testament to the enduring power of his ideas.

It is well recognised that there are many Marxes, and a multitude of Marxisms, so we need to ask: which Marx should we be turn to? Étienne Balibar (2017, 4) tells us that, “Marx was not led by his theoretical activity towards a unified system, but to an at least potential *plurality* of doctrines which has left his readers and successors in something of a quandary”. However, Balibar also sees this as a distinct advantage, which springs from the openness of Marx’s method. One area of ambiguity, and one that is of direct relevance here, is the alleged ‘break’. The ‘break’ occurred somewhere between *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* and *The German Ideology*. Louis Althusser (2017, 4), the leading proponent of such, placed this in 1845. The break is alleged between a humanistic Marx – still influenced by the idealism of Hegel and attached to a view of the human as torn between an authentic self-determined species-being and the alienation of labour – and the post-break Marx, who was committed to understanding the human in the context of the scientific unfolding of history and the internal contradictory economic logic of capital.

This matters because it concerns the question of where to place the human being, and the human brain, in the chain of determination. The answer leads to very different proposals as to what we are to do in order to bring about change. In the crudest terms: do we marshal our collective intelligence to force change, or do we stand by at the ready to let capital destroy itself and harness the inevitable unfolding of communism?

Balibar agrees that there is undoubtedly such a break, but that there is more than one such break, and these breaks are as much to do with adaptations to historical shifts and events as a complete abandonment of early naive positions. For example, the failure of the revolutions of 1848 was just as significant as 1845 (Balibar 2017, 9). Thus, the case can be made for Marx as a reactive and flexible thinker whose ideas can and should be reviewed and reapplied to different historical moments, and as such his continuing value is in this flexibility.

It is perhaps then helpful to offer a clarification here, a simplistic but useful distinction between four orientations to Marx: firstly, an orthodox rigidly deterministic reading rooted only in the economic writings; secondly, a recognition of the humanistic early Marx but the positing of a clear break, with a commitment to the ‘mature’ post-break Marx, in which a purely ‘scientific socialism’ is maintained; thirdly, a downplaying of the break, in which the humanism of the early Marx is present throughout his later works; finally an orientation that recognises the fundamental importance of the economic, but which recognises the multiplicity of Marxes and that a balanced view of the whole Marx is necessary.

It is this final position that I shall be working towards in the article, via an address to the other three. The connecting factor is the need to recognise the significance in each approach of the consequences towards our understanding of the place of the brain, consciousness, and as such agency. I will go on to argue that in our current configuration of capitalism it is over the brain that the struggle is at its most intense and where the stakes are highest.

2. Orthodox Marxism

The orthodox interpretation, or more pejoratively known as ‘Vulgar Marxism’ is represented by the writings of, for example, Stalin, Kautsky, and Plekhanov. Orthodox Marxism is characterised by Erik Olin Wright as a, “highly deterministic version of historical materialism”, in which, “human history was held to follow a well-defined tra-

jectory of stages, driven by the development of the forces of production (roughly, technological capacity) and their interactions with relations of production (roughly, real property relations)” (Wright, Levine and Sober 1992, 11).

The source of much of this interpretation comes from one of the most famous statements of Marx, “The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (Marx 1987, 263).

Such a view is rigidly reproduced by Joseph Stalin and expressed in the text, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, which became the orthodoxy of the 2nd International. Stalin tells us that “Marx’s philosophical materialism holds that the world is by its very nature *material* [...] and that the world develops in accordance with the laws of movement of matter” (Stalin 1938). Such a narrow interpretation tends towards a clockwork version of materialism and of dialectics. Stalin also makes a number of inferences from this position regarding consciousness and the brain. He states that consciousness is simply an epiphenomenon resulting in a derivative form from the brain, as the material substrate of thought, and by inference is fully determined by its relation to its material situation: “consciousness is secondary, derivative, since it is a reflection of matter, a reflection of being; that thought is a product of matter which in its development has reached a high degree of perfection, namely, of the brain, and the brain is the organ of thought” (Ibid.). This position is one that Stalin draws on from Lenin, citing Lenin’s claim that “Consciousness is only the reflection of being, at best an approximately true (adequate, perfectly exact) reflection of it” (Ibid.).

This is a situation in which the mental and spiritual life of a society is entirely secondary to its material conditions and Stalin is unambiguous in this claim: “Whatever is the being of a society, whatever are the conditions of material life of a society, such are the ideas, theories political views and political institutions of that society”. By placing the brain as coterminous with the base, and the mind as a secondary offshoot, akin to an aspect of the superstructure, it renders agency nothing but a submission of consciousness to the logic of history. This is both a socially, but also scientifically, naïve reading of the capacity of the brain and is in line with a view of the worker as utterly subsumed within capital, and in need of salvation by the insights of a vanguard with the insight track to history.

3. Structural Marxism

Such views are now widely dismissed as overly crude and deterministic. An alternative approach, that still maintains a commitment to a ‘science’ based approach, is characterised as the second position offered above, and can be broadly captured by the idea of ‘relative determinism’. Relative determinism states that there is a definite determinate course, maintaining a distinction from the ‘voluntarist’ strain of Maoist thought, that John Molyneux has characterised as “absolute indeterminism”, and which posits “the idea that human beings can do whatever they want without constraint” (Molyneux 1995) and which is arguable no Marxism at all, and is also a naïve assumption in relation the brain’s plasticity (see Section 6 for more).

Relative determinism offers a compromise position that there are determining conditions, but these do not constitute a fatalistic absolutism. In this scenario a chosen course of action can push towards one or another outcome that is not inevitable. Again, Molyneux argues that “If in a given situation a particular desired outcome is either probable but not guaranteed or hangs in the balance, then every action taken

towards that outcome (provided, of course, it is not counterproductive) increases the probability of it occurring and is therefore valuable” (Molyneux 1995).

Relative determination is broadly the ‘democratic centrist’ or Trotskyist position, in which history “hangs in the balance between strongly determined alternatives” (Ibid.) and is only marginally variable from the Stalinist position. Crucially it states that “in every concrete situation there is a definite limit on what we by our conscious action can achieve” (Ibid.). Again, the worker is reduced to a reliance on a cadre gifted with the capacity to discern the direction of history, and when the moment is ripe nudge it in the right direction. The brain in this scenario is either seen as a passive aspect of fixed capital, or in the cadre becomes a consequentialist calculation machine.

A more nuanced variation of this position is the idea of determinism in the last instance, wherein there are multiple factors as play in any situation that produces an ‘overdetermined’ trajectory. Such a view has its roots in the structural Marxism of Louis Althusser, and it was adopted and reframed within the tradition of British Cultural Studies precisely as a way of rebalancing and reconceptualising the ‘base/superstructure’ division.

Stuart Hall explores the ways in the base/superstructure metaphor needs to be re-thought and asks, “can we think this problem in such a way as to retain a key premise of historical materialism: the premise of ‘determination in the last instance’ by what is sometimes misleading re-referred to as ‘the economic’?” (Hall 1977, 44). The important point being the retention of ‘historical materialism’ which comes under question when there is a drift towards the position of the “*absolute* autonomy” of the superstructure from base, which the purely voluntarist traditions tends towards. Hall argues that “Marx had established that the economy is determinant in the last instance, but that the superstructures had their own ‘affectivity’, which could not be simply reduced to the base” (Ibid., 53). Hall is drawn towards Althusser’s structural Marxism as a way of accounting for this tension, and while by no means accepting it in its entirety but does import the ‘decentring of the subject’. Hall is not without scepticism, but in the end believes, it is an “extremely weak but useful conceptualisation”, yet Hall (2016, 110) is “not disposed to give it up”. This implies some autonomy in the brain’s capacity to absorb and reframe a situation, but in this still loosely Althusserian understanding of subjectivity it is placed in the, again, subordinate structural relation to its ideological situation – it’s real conditions of existence being only accessible through officially sanctioned means, contrary to current scientific understanding of brain plasticity (see Section 6).

Ellen Meiksins Wood is much less forgiving of Althusser; with the aspects of the decentring of the subject being of particular concern, she describes Althusser’s achievement as having “redefined the relations between base and superstructure in such a way that the vagaries of human agency could be ‘rigorously’ excluded from the science of society, insisting on completely ‘structural’ determinations, while at the same time allowing for the unpredictable specificity of historical reality” (Meiksins Wood 1995, 50). The withering reading is intensified when she makes the point that Althusser “did little to shift the terms of Marxist theoretical debate decisively away from the terrain established by Stalinist orthodoxy. The base/superstructure model retained its mechanical character and its conceptualisation of social structure in terms of discrete, discontinuous, externally related ‘factors’, ‘levels’ or ‘instances’” (Meiksins Wood 1995, 51).

With regard to ‘levels’, we find ourselves in familiar territory as to the place of the brain. Here the brain is judged as a subsumed element of the base, albeit somewhat less directly, through the process of submission to the ideological state apparatuses.

Although these are deemed to be relatively autonomous there is almost no scope for autonomy within the process of interpellation.

4. Humanist Marxism

There is thus one concept, or rather capacity, which all these positions leave out – indeed actively undermine – that of will, volition or to use Raymond Williams's term, 'intention'. Such is the third, humanist oriented, position referred to above. Such an orientation is taken by Erich Fromm (2004) or Norman Geras (1983), who insist on Marx's commitment to a human nature that is open, creative and agential. But here I would also place, perhaps problematically but unapologetically, Raymond Williams (2005). In his essay on base and superstructure, amongst a number of his other writings, Williams attempts to reinforce the fundamental importance of intention, no doubt at risk of accusations of voluntarism. Williams explicitly attempts to recognise the base/superstructure relation as neither dissolvable into a completely totalising whole, nor divisible into a set of discreet autonomous levels. As such Williams argues that, "when we talk of 'the base' we are talking of a process and not a state", meaning that "[w]e have to revalue 'determination' towards the setting of limits and the exertion of pressure" (Williams 2005, 34). As such, he certainly argues against a stark distinction of base and superstructure, recognising, with Lukács, that a notion of totality can be "compatible with the notion of social being determining consciousness" (Ibid.). But Williams believes that totality can be an empty concept if we just have interacting forces, hence the question of what is determining what becomes overly complex and opaque. As such "the key question to ask about any notion of totality in cultural theory is this: whether the notion of totality includes the notion of intention" (Williams 2005, 36). Williams invokes a rather unclear use of 'intention' which echoes a somewhat ambiguous use elsewhere in his writing. However, he is clear that intention is not an individual or simple expression of a choice or rationale, pertaining to a specific decision, but rather a social entity. Williams explains that "any society has a specific organisation, a specific structure, and that the principles of this organisation and structure can be seen as directly related to certain social intentions, intentions by which we define the society" (Ibid.).

A social intention then is an active force that contributes to an understanding of the totality of a situation and that, to an extent, determines it. The fact that Williams wishes to remain true to a Marxist position means he is not prepared to grasp such intention as arbitrarily arrived at, but always out of a concrete set of circumstances. This echoes one of the most frequently cited of Marx's statements, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx 1979, 103). As such Williams also links intention to the idea of hegemony: "Indeed I think that we can properly use the notion of totality only when we combine it with that other crucial Marxist concept of 'hegemony'" (Williams 2005, 37). This is not a surface ideology but a practice which "saturates the society" and which "emphasises the facts of domination" (Ibid.).

This reminds us of the need to comprehend how such saturation continues to occur, in order to combat it. As such there is a compelling case for developing the understanding of intention further, beyond the science that was available to Williams the time, and in light of the digital revolution and the continuing intensification of Post-Fordism.

5. Autonomist Marxism

This idea of the centrality of intention as a determining factor brings us to another strand of Marxism, born of the Italian Autonomist movement, and which has been operative in reframing Marxism around working class movements as the driving force of capitalist development – but taking into account the post-structuralist critiques of humanism and shifts in subjectivity associated with the move to Post-Fordism – which reflects the fourth position offered above. It also brings us into contact with another of Marx's important writings that have added to the richness of base/superstructure debates and which unambiguously reemphasise the importance of Marx for today, that is the so called 'Fragment on Machines' in the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973, 690-712).

There is a very fruitful resonance between the developments in Autonomous Marxism and the humanistic strand of British Cultural Studies mentioned above. This is one that offers a way to draw out the significance of Marx for the current social and technological configuration of capitalism that emphasises an understanding of the brain as a productive and active force, without reverting to an essentialist conception of human nature. For the Autonomists Marx's notion of 'general intellect' is of primary importance, in that regard it is worth quoting Marx's in full:

Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules etc. These are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature. They are *organs of the human brain, created by the human hand*; the power of knowledge, objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it. (Marx 1973, 706)

There are few more direct indications of the significance of the brain in Marx's writings. This certainly cannot be put down to be part of his 'early' 'humanistic' phase, given its estimated authorship is around 1857, at least 12 years after the 'break'. Here it is the human brain and human collective will that are the determinate features, of course there could be a temptation here to claim this as direct support for a voluntarist conception, and another full reversal of the line of determination, something that can, according to the key Autonomist thinker Paolo Virno, "hardly be called a 'Marxian' thesis" (Virno n.d.). However, this would be a naïve position and one should read Virno's point as a somewhat ironic jab at orthodox readings of Marx. In fact, Marx is clear in the fragment that the general intellect is no sooner recognised than it is subsumed. It is the ever-increasing sophistication of machinery that threatens to absorb the collective skills and knowledge of living labour into fixed capital (dead labour), this is a parallel shift from the formal to the real subsumption, that is the move from artisanal pre-capitalist labour, parasitically captured by capital, to a fully developed factory system.

Carlo Vercellone (2007, 24), another proponent of the autonomist school, argues: "The subsumption of the worker to capital becomes real when it is imposed inside the production system and no longer only outside it". Vercellone stresses that "[t]he compulsion to wage-labour is no longer merely of a monetary nature, but also of a technological nature, rendered endogenous by technical progress. In such a way, the individual labour-power of the producer, increasingly reduced to a simple living ap-

pendage of the system of machines, ‘now...refuses its services unless it has been sold to capital’” (Ibid.). The attempt to render labour as mere appendage is counter-balanced by shifts in the Fordist era to political democratisation, the welfare state and mass education and the tendency towards ‘diffuse intellectuality’ which produced “the crisis of the first dimension of real subsumption”, entailing the “incessant struggle of wage-labourers for the re-appropriation of knowledges and the emancipation from the economic compulsion of wage labour” (Ibid., 25).

Thus, the shift from the real subsumption to the general intellect is one of a continuing process of capital’s subsumption of labour, though in this instance it is the process of information technology moving to absorb the entirety of human capacity that inheres in the human brain. Yet, at the same time, it opens up the possibility for labour to reclaim knowledge and to reverse the real subsumption, indeed with the possibility at some stage to eliminate subsumption all together. This is because of a fundamental backstop in the process of real subsumption, which is precisely that the brain cannot be fully absorbed into the machinery nor reproduced within it: “[i]n the cognitive-labour-producing knowledge, the result of labour remains incorporated in the brain of the worker and is thus inseparable from her person” (Ibid., 33).

Vercellone, sees this as the logic of the *Fragment on Machines*, and one that foreshadows the challenge to Post-Fordism. Vercellone (2007, 28) reads Marx as believing that, “the deepening of the real subsumption can create certain conditions favourable to a collective reappropriation of knowledges insofar as ‘living labour’ is able to reconvert part of its surplus into free time”. One key aspect to developing this challenge towards an emancipatory logic is the condition that this free time be converted into “the education of a diffuse intellectuality” (2007, 29). No wonder education has been relentlessly under attack as a public good in the most crisis ridden capitalist economies.

As soon as “[t]he principal ‘fixed capital’ becomes ‘man himself’” (Ibid.) then the imperative to capture this is intensified, returning us to the condition of the formal subsumption, “in the sense that it is based essentially on the relation of monetary dependence of wage-labourer inside the process of circulation” (Ibid., 31). In this form of capitalism then, in order to maintain its grip, capital has to act as an external force directly on the brain. It can therefore be no surprise that we have increasingly become witness to the development of, for example, affective mechanisms aimed squarely at the nervous system. Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi has explored such practices as inducing new kinds of pathological relations to work. He has termed this relation ‘neuro-totalitarianism’ in the context of what he calls ‘the soul at work’. In the book of that name Berardi tells us, in line with the broader understanding of cognitive labour, “*hi tech* workers invest their specific competencies, creative, innovative and communicative energies in the labour process; that is, the best part of their intellectual capacities” (Berardi 2009, 78). However, while such workers are in some senses less alienated and, as we have seen, subsumed by capital, than their industrial predecessors, their distance, but at the same time monetary reliance, means that they need to be perpetually on call. When workers are called to give, they must give everything and as such “Info-workers can be seen as “neuro workers”. They prepare their nervous system as an active receiving terminal for as much time as possible” a process that Berardi (2009, 90) compares to “the constant stress of a permanent cognitive electrocution”.

In a generalised condition of cognitive electrocution that spreads out from cognitive labour into the entire social sphere, wherein social activity itself is drawn into this process of digital formal subsumption, we live in something akin to a “multilayered

dimension of *technomaya*” wherein “[d]igital technology has given a power to the media that is directly acting on the mind, so that the spell of the media-sphere has wrapped itself around the psychosphere” (Berardi 2014, 6). The extent of the misery caused by this is indicated by the huge increase in mental illness and suicide that has occurred in the Post-Fordist era, “in the last 45 years suicide rates have increased by 60% world-wide” and Berardi puts this down to the fact that “An epidemic of unhappiness is spreading over the planet” because “[s]emiocapitalism is infiltrating the nervous cells of conscious organisms, inoculating them with a thanato-political rationale” (Ibid., 13).

Semiocapitalism includes the drive to capture attention that is typical of the digital platforms that have come to dominate digital life since the early 21st century. The monetarisation of attention, in terms of both the targeting of advertising but also in the user generation of new content, can be seen as something akin to the becoming labour of the social. This expanding condition ensures that the struggle within historical materialism is now over the brain itself. For example, Google is referred to by Berardi (2014, 14) as “the most refined attention-draining machine” that has now been further boosted by the development of the smartphone that is “pervading every moment of the day and night”. Berardi concludes by suggesting that this “manipulation of neural systems” (Ibid., 25) needs to be understood in light of the neuro-plasticity of the brain. The ability of the brain to assimilate and adapt to contextual inputs makes the brain the material end point of capital’s attempts to capture it in value creating circuits, “intervening on the neural system, redirecting neural activity and reshaping synaptic pathways” (Ibid.).

6. Conclusion: Plasticity and Determination in the Last Instance

The moulding of the plastic brain has always been the focus of capitalism, but it has gone from being a derivative to a primary aim in the shift to post-Fordism, as Marx himself pre-empted in the *Fragment on Machines*. In this configuration Berardi (2014, 25) does offer some cause for hope, surmising that the neuro-plastic aspects of the brain “invites a process of sabotage and subversion of the dominant modes of mental wiring”. Although Berardi’s references to neuro-plasticity are fleeting there is nothing here that is unreasonable.

In essence neuroplasticity means the brain is significantly moulded by its environment and is perpetually affected and adapted to its context, “The adult brain is not only capable of changing, but it does so continuously throughout life” (Constandi 2016, 4). But the brain is not changing passively, it is always actively filtering, modelling, reworking, and feeding back on itself. As the leading scholar in the humanities and social sciences on this topic, Catherine Malabou (2008, 13), demands regarding the plastic brain: “securing a true plasticity means insisting on knowing what it can do and not simply what it can tolerate”. This is supported by the brain’s ‘modulational’ capacity which means plasticity adds to it, “the functions of artist and instructor in freedom and autonomy to its role as sculptor”, brains don’t just receive information but, “have the power to form or to reform this very information” (Ibid., 24).

The need for a consciousness of plasticity to be harnessed, collectively, to reflexively take back control of the brain’s own volitions, is the pivot point of the contemporary struggle against capital. Harnessing must also take account of the leaps forward in understanding pre-conscious affective aspects of the brain, but nevertheless here we can propose the brain as operating as the source of determination in the last instance – not merely another aspect of overdetermination – as would be the conclusion from earlier representations of the base/superstructure or determinism/agency

question. These earlier incarnations may be appropriate to their times, and to their contemporary understandings of the brain, but we are now in a position to again refresh Marx in light of changes to capitalism, and also the emerging insights of neuroscience.

To recognise the brain as determining in the last instance is not to take a pure voluntarist position, but to understand that the brain is under the immense pressures of neuro-totalitarianism inherent in the Post-Fordist economy and embedded in the dialectic of historical materialism, but also with the power to adapt, to rework and to reinvent. The prevailing condition is one in which the brain's modulational capacity is habitually concealed, repressed and nominally diverted to tasks not best served to its own thriving – but in the end it is the brain itself which is the substrata that supports the rest of the mechanism of capital.

Malabou (2008, 1) makes a direct analogy of brain plasticity to Marx and historical materialism, telling us: “Humans make their own brain, but they do not know that they make it”. So it is we still can talk of historical materialism to the extent that the brain has become caught in a dialectic with the machinery of fixed capital. As Malabou tells us “to talk about the plasticity of the brain means to see in it not only the creator and receiver of form but also an agency of disobedience to every constituted form, a refusal to submit to a model” (Ibid., 6). For Malabou, the imperative is for us to gain consciousness of this plasticity, of its capacity. In doing so we should make sure we are not merely submitted to the logic of capital, in particular the kind of digital, flexible networked capitalism discussed above, so she asks, “*What should we do so that consciousness of the brain does not purely and simply coincide with the spirit of capitalism?*” (Ibid., 12). Therefore, the struggle is to gain control of consciousness, in that sense the task is as it ever was – but is now more immanent than ever given the brain's foundational importance for capital.

Berardi (2014, 27) talks about the need to “disentangle the autonomy of the general intellect from its neuro-totalitarian jail”. This seems to me like the best call to arms for a Marxism of the 21st century and a suitable renewal of the project that was born with Marx himself 200 years ago – so to answer my earlier question, we must marshal our collective brains to bring about change, but this must instigate a change in the mode and relation of production that is currently parasitic on the brain, or ultimately it will be a superficial and fruitless enterprise.

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Karl Marx and Liberation Theology: Dialectical Materialism and Christian Spirituality in, against, and beyond Contemporary Capitalism

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Abstract: This paper explores convergences and discrepancies between liberation theology and the works of Karl Marx through the dialogue between one of the key contemporary proponents of liberation theology, Peter McLaren, and the agnostic scholar in critical pedagogy, Petar Jandrić. The paper briefly outlines liberation theology and its main convergences with the works of Karl Marx. Exposing striking similarities between the two traditions in denouncing the false God of money, it explores differences in their views towards individualism and collectivism. It rejects shallow rhetorical homologies between Marx and the Bible often found in liberation theology, and suggests a change of focus from seeking a formal or Cartesian logical consistency between Marxism and Christianity to exploring their dialectical consistency. Looking at Marxist and Christian approaches to morality, it outlines close links between historical materialism and questions of value. It concludes that the shared eschaton of Marxism and the Christianity gives meaning to human history and an opportunity to change it.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, liberation theology, Karl Marx, Christianity, Jesus Christ, eschaton, socialism, Kingdom of God, individualism, collectivism, freedom

1. Introduction

Peter McLaren is one of the leading architects of contemporary critical pedagogy and the key force behind its shift from postmodernism “to ‘the Marxist-humanist trajectory’ spanning from authors with various Marxist tendencies and the neo-Marxism of the Frankfurt School to the original works of Marx” (Jandrić 2017, 160). In 2015, Peter published the ground-breaking book *Pedagogy of Insurrection* (McLaren 2015) which develops the tradition of liberation theology in and for the context of the 21st century.

Pedagogy of Insurrection builds on two dialectically intertwined pillars: (1) Peter’s revolutionary critical pedagogy conceived in the context of the Marxist-humanist trajectory. (2) The Latin American tradition of liberation theology, which McLaren studied through decades of work in countries from Mexico to Venezuela and through works of key historical figures such as Paulo Freire, José Porfirio Miranda, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, Hugo Chávez, and others.

During the past years, Peter McLaren and Petar Jandrić co-authored several dialogical pieces (e.g. McLaren and Jandrić 2014; 2015; 2017a; 2017b) dedicated to diverse themes such as the relationships between revolutionary critical pedagogy and information technology, the relevance of Marxism in and for the age of digital reason, and liberation theology. Written in a dialogic format, these conversations expose exchanges between two generations of radical scholars, between a Christian believer

and an agnostic, and between the Eastern European and the (Latin) American approaches to understanding Marx's legacy. Prepared for the occasion of Karl Marx's 200th birthday, this dialogue draws from our earlier insights and develops Peter's work in *Pedagogy of Insurrection* to explore links between contemporary Marxian thought and liberation theology and point towards future developments of alternatives to capitalism.

2. Karl Marx and Liberation Theology

Petar Jandrić (PJ): What is liberation theology; under which circumstances did it develop¹?

Peter McLaren (PM): Liberation theology, which was born out of the self-theologising of radical Catholic Action communities in America Latina² is systematically opposed to the trenchant conservative politics of white evangelical America in the U.S. who encourage individual charity over economic and transformation and distributive social justice so familiar to many living in the richest country in the world. There arose among both lay persons and clergy within the Catholic Church grievous concern surrounding the economic consequences following the rise of Latin American populist governments of the 1950s and 1960s – especially those of Perón in Argentina, Vargas in Brazil, and Cárdenas in Mexico. In failing to eradicate dependency, poverty and injustice, and carrying the burden of helping both to legitimate and reproduce the power and authority of the capitalist state for over five centuries, liberation theologians considered the Church an egregious failure in its mission to create the Kingdom of God, which they understood in the context of creating a just society on Earth, not some misty paradise beyond the pale of distant clouds, but a world in the here and now. Liberation theology, which coalesced into a movement throughout the 1960s and 1970s, attempted to establish the potential for a return of the role of the Church to the people (similar to the conditions that existed in earliest Christian communities) by nurturing critical-autonomous 'protagonistic agency'³ among the popular sectors, creating the conditions of possibility for consciousness-raising among peasants and proletarianised multitudes.

PJ: What are the main points of convergence between liberation theology and the works of Karl Marx?

PM: In his 1980 masterwork, *Marx against the Marxists: The Christian Humanism of Karl Marx*, José Porfirio Miranda, who was educated at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and who had previously studied sociology in the Frankfurt School, argues that Marx was a Christian humanist who understood the extortionate and unscrupulous characteristics of Christianity and how it was turned into a fraudulent and profiteering caricature of the Gospels when Christianity became the God of empire. Post-Vatican era liberation theologians such as Miranda have recognised and attempted to transcend the role of the Church as reproductive of structural sin (the social relations of capitalist exploitation) to the form of liberating praxis, creating the conditions of possibility to find justice in history. According to Boff, in the first post-Vatican II era (1965-70):

¹ A more detailed history of liberation theology can be found in (McLaren 2015; McLaren and Jandrić 2017a).

² There were protestant variants as well; since the 1960s, many variants of liberation theology have emerged such as Jewish Liberation theology, Black Liberation Theology, Feminist Liberation Theology, and Latino/a Liberation Theology.

³ Coined by Peter McLaren, the term protagonistic agency emphasizes Paulo Freire's (1972) idea of being the subject of history rather than the object of history.

[...] there arose an extraordinary effort on the part of the clergy to divest itself of the signs of power, to enter more deeply among the people, living their ministry not as someone above and beyond the faithful (priest), but as a principle of encouragement, unity, and service (ordained minister). (Boff 1982, 96)

In the second post-Vatican age (1970-80), campesinos and lay people began to organise themselves into base communities, “where there is an experience of a true ecclesiogenesis” (Ibid.).

Boff (1982, 98) contends that the poor serve as the sacrament of Christ, who, “as eschatological judge [...] judges each one according to the love that either liberates from poverty or rejects its plea”. The idea of God as eschatological judge permeates Miranda’s magisterial works of liberation theology. Rather than antiseptically cleaving liberation theology from Marx’s historical-dialectics, as one often discovers in the congeries of opinions of liberation theologians, Miranda sees their intimate connection as a leavening of social justice. Neil Hinnem (2013) is correct in locating the convergence between Miranda’s understanding of the biblical perspective on history and Marx’s historical-dialectics in Miranda’s articulation of orthopraxis and his concept of historical events, the most important event for Miranda being the intervention of Yahweh into human history. As Hinnem (2013) writes:

History is not an evolutionary process: rather, it is punctuated by revolutionary events. For Miranda, these events are the interventions of God in history for the sake of human justice, culminating in the Christ event, ushering all believers in the Kingdom of God. This event leads, consequently, to the Kingdom’s underlying hope, its absolute command, that justice be achieved. “In the historical event of Jesus Christ”, writes Miranda, “the messianic kingdom has arrived.”

For Miranda, the Bible is a subversive document that preached communism long before the time of Karl Marx. Miranda sees much in common between history as liberation from alienation as described by Marx, and the eschaton, or the divine plan for the realisation of the Kingdom of God.⁴

3. The False God of Money

PJ: Socialist society may be very close to the Kingdom of God, yet Marxist and Christian methods for achieving the eschaton seem quite different. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels write “Workers of the World, Unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains!”⁵; Matthew 5:5 says “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth”. What about these differences in views to human agency, Peter? What is their relationship to labour?

PM: For Marx, human beings clearly are subjects, subjects of history. The subject of history is related to Marx’s concept of living labour, of labour-power, the potential for labouring, the capacity for labour, its possibility and potency. It is living labour that is

⁴ A more detailed elaboration of concordances between the Christian Kingdom of God and Marx’s prophecy of the future socialist society can be found in (McLaren and Jandrić 2017a; 2017b).

⁵ We are well aware that this phrase is a popularisation that does not exist in the *Communist Manifesto* – yet it does adequately describe the dichotomy between Marxist and Christian views to human agency.

present in time and throughout human history as possibility, whereas objectified labour serves the means and instruments of production and has no role in liberation from oppression. Marx describes how the capitalist production process makes relationships between persons seem as relationships between things. For Marx, capital grounds all social mediation as a form of value, and that the substance of labour itself must be interrogated because doing so brings us closer to understanding the nature of capital's social universe out of which our subjectivities are created. Because the logic of capitalist work has invaded all forms of human sociability, society can be considered to be a totality of different types of labour. What is important here is to examine the particular forms that labour takes within capitalism. In other words, we need to examine value as a social relation, not as some kind of accounting device to measure rates of exploitation or domination. Consequently, labour should not be taken simply as a 'given' category, but interrogated as an *object of critique*, and examined as an abstract social structure.

For Marx, the commodity is highly unstable and non-identical. Its concrete particularity (use-value) is subsumed by its existence as value-in-motion or by what we have come to know as "capital". Value is always in motion because of the increase in capital's productivity that is required to maintain expansion. The dual aspect of labour within the commodity (use-value and exchange-value) enables one single commodity – money – to act as the value measure of the commodity. Thus, the commodity must not be considered a thing, but a social relationship. You could describe the "soul" of capitalist production as the extraction from living labour of all the unpaid hours of labour that amounts to surplus-value or profit. Marx's analysis of the fetishism of the commodity form bears a strong kinship to the New Testament's references to "false gods". But, as Lebacqz argues:

[...] in spite of its affinity with Marx's analytic methods and social goals, the view of justice provided in liberation theology is not simply a new version of "to each according to need". Justice is not a simple formula for distribution. Justice would not be accomplished merely by offering programs that meet basic needs of the poor. Justice requires the kind of liberating activity that characterizes God's behaviour toward the poor and oppressed [...] there is no separation of "love" and "justice". God's justice is God's love or compassion on those who suffer. God's love is God's justice or liberation of the oppressed. (1986, 107)

Marx was a humanist, and this is clear in both his private letters but also his published works, but whether he was a Christian humanist as Miranda maintains remains very much an open question.⁶

PJ: Marxism aims at social change through collective action, while Christianity is much more focused to individual development. Obviously, this is not an either-or relationship – as Paulo Freire (1972) would say, collective acts of emancipation are necessarily preconfigured by individual consciousness. What is your take on this tension between (Christian) individualism and (Marxist) collectivism?

PM: The emphasis in Christianity on otherworldliness (don't worry if the bad people are not caught and punished, they will be punished in the afterlife) has often been used as a moral justification for the consecration of deception, either by encouraging passive resistance to exploitation or labelling the unmasking of deeper truths about empire as too subversive, too "anti-American" – a posture that tends to make people unworldly or uncaring about others. Yet, as De La Torre (2015, 162) warns: "History demonstrates the futility of simply denouncing unjust social structures for those whom the

⁶ A more detailed elaboration of this question can be found in (McLaren and Jandrić 2017a).

structures privilege will never willingly abdicate what they consider to be their birth-right". The mere moral exercise of political power through passive protest is not a convincing answer since

[...] the idea of the moral exercise of political power ignores what political power is: the state is (not as an abuse but by definition) "the monopoly of legitimate violence". While parts of the state machine may be "very peaceful", the threat of violence, backed up by armed forces, is always presupposed. And the practice of politics, whether in office or in opposition, is always war (mainly class war) carried on by other means. Non-violent politics is a contradiction in terms. (Collier 2001, 104)

So instead of fighting to change the structures of oppression, people either focus on remaking themselves as individuals into better persons (there are plenty of self-help books out there) or they become indelibly indifferent to politics or political change.

Marxism rejects this Cartesian sense of "liberty of indifference" (changing oneself rather than changing the world) and "the preference for autoplasmic solutions which underlies it" (Collier 2001, 100). While one is necessarily changed by changing the world (what we call praxis), that does not mean that all attempts to change ourselves are unnecessary or futile – since resistance to oppression requires us to adapt to changing circumstances, and adaptation requires all kinds of strategies of self-change. After all, in his *Theses on Feuerbach* Marx (1976/1845) writes that: "The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*". If we act as if the eschaton has already arrived, and we are preparing for the reign of God, then is this not a necessarily a quixotic predicament, but a form of pre-figurative politics.

Letting the reign of God be prefigured in our present lives, whether we image that reign to be a communist society or the Kingdom of God, there is no guarantee that our good actions will bring about its completion – but if we post-date our best ethics to the future communist society or Kingdom of God, then our good actions will, at least, have intrinsic values in themselves. Our organisation and actions should prefigure the socialist revolution or the coming of the Kingdom of God. While it may be true that means do not always resemble ends, Collier argues that "[s]o long as human authority exists, it should as far as possible be organized so that the greatest power serves the least powerful with all its might" which in its contemporary form is called "the dictatorship of the proletariat" (Collier 2001, 122).

PJ: Both the Bible and Marx's works can be read in many different ways – I surely don't need to remind you of historical atrocities which resulted from certain readings of both doctrines... While it is tempting to seek concordances between seminal Christian and Marxist texts, I would like to ask a more fundamental philosophical question: How commensurable are the philosophies of Marxism and Christianity?

PM: Denys Turner (1983) has contributed some important insights with respect to the compatibility of Marxism and Christianity that are worth repeating here. Both Marxism and Christianity are compatible with a materialist theory of history yet hold to a denial of ontological materialism. We are talking here not about a formal or Cartesian logical consistency between Marxism and Christianity but a dialectical consistency.

It is true that there exists no coherent synthesis between Christian doctrines and Marxist theory, but that all the more makes it imperative that we abandon the rhetorical homologies often found in liberation theology – "the *anawim* [the poor and the oppressed referred to in the Old Testament] become the proletariat, liberation becomes

redemption politicised, alienation is original sin [...] the priesthood metamorphosed into Lenin's revolutionary leadership" (Turner 1983, 211-212). These homologies are useful, politically, to inspire the struggle of impoverished communities against well-armed death squads, but they must not be viewed as strict equivalences, since this could lead to uncritical forms of triumphalism.

PJ: I'm glad we're on the same page!

PM: While Marxism and Christianity seem to be incommensurable languages, both are constitutively necessary to explain reality and to understand what forces and relations shape the human condition. Both are part of the praxis of history and can be viewed as historically conditioned action systems, defined by their relationship to historical contingencies. As Turner (1983) reminds us, Marxism requires abolishing the conditions which require it – capitalist exploitation. Similarly, according to Turner, Christianity will realise itself only at the cost of its abolition *as Christianity* since its realisation will become a fully human reality rather than a sacred reality – a fully socialised humanity and a fully humanised society consisting of love.

However, as Turner (1983) cogently argues, because God is non-identical with the contingencies of any particular form of history, our full humanity can only be known through aspirations for liberation which cannot be realised in practice. We need to secure the conditions of that absence of a presence which we can only symbolise and understand heuristically. We cannot love, we cannot be free, we cannot know God, we cannot know how we can live without oppression, because the Kingdom of God has not been realised; we can only work as Christians and Marxists *to secure the conditions of the possibility of loving and living freely*. Under capitalism, under the prevailing institutional structures of exploitation, love and freedom can only ever be ideological. We can only anticipate love in its absence, we can never truly see love fulfilled under the conditions of capitalism. In the conditions of bourgeois society, any further claims about love are only ideological. In a world of dehumanised, alienated social relationships, we can only symbolise love through its absence, and so we can say that love, and generosity, and goodness, and Christ are present in this world *but present only in the form of their absence*.

4. The Morality of Dialectical Materialism

PJ: Speaking of the conditions of freedom, and of anticipation, we enter directly into the area of morality. Christian morality is quite theoretically robust, yet, as Rosen (2000, 21) says, "the question whether Marx's theory has a moral or ethical dimension is one of the most controversial of all issues of Marx interpretation". What is your take on that question?

PM: Marxism is, in this sense, morality itself, because, as Turner (1983, 215) argues: "it consists in the knowledge of what to do given the 'facts'". Marxism is the fundamental science of capitalism and reveals morality in capitalist society to be ideologically bourgeois. Marxism is thus all that morality can be – it represents the outer limits of morality – given today's existing conditions of capitalist exploitation and oppression. Marxism is "the theory and the practice of realizing the conditions of the possibility of morality" (Ibid., 215), while at the same time, it is not possible for Christianity to be regarded as coterminous with Marxism even when Marxism "is demonstrably the scientifically warranted response" to "the conditions of any particular historical epoch" (Ibid., 213). And this is true "even if it follows from the fact that Christianity can know itself and the nature of its praxis only through the Marxist criticism of it" (Ibid., 213). So while Marxism argues about "the impossibility of moral knowledge in capitalist conditions", it exists as a revolutionary form of praxis in that it points out how it is impossible

for capitalism to conform to its own truth in practice “since conformity is structurally impossible for capitalism” (Ibid., 213).

Christianity attempts to “symbolize the depths of what is to be human in the form of a sacredness, in the form of the refusal to admit what is most fully human could be compatible with the conditions of alienation and exploitation which historically obtain” (Ibid., 213). Thus, Christianity recognises love as the point of its praxis but it is a love which, under capitalism, can only be anticipated. Turner makes a prescient point when he argues that the absence of morality in Marxism is not in any sense a “*mere* amor-alism” because it reveals that it is capitalism, not Marxism, which is amoralistic. In other words, Marxism reveals the “platitudinous imperatives, so forthcoming from Christians, to ‘love’ within conditions of gross and systematic exploitation” (Ibid., 216) and Christianity’s “transhistorical pretentiousness” in believing that Christ’s presence in history is not historically contingent, that is, not dependent on any particular historical or economic conditions.

Adopting a transcendent morality among Christians is what Turner rejects as Christian “fidelism” which focuses on the Kingdom of God being “within you”. This is not to deny the presence of God, but that such presence is not in the form of some supernatural text which has already been written; rather, “the unwritten text *is* present in the struggle to write it” (Ibid., 219). This is very much like the popular proverb by Antonio Machado that one makes the road by walking (*Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar*). Both Marxism and Christianity have the resources within their own traditions for rejecting immorality – for instance, for rejecting meta-moral principles where, for example, communist society is made into a moral absolute or Christianity is presented as an already written moral text to which only Christians or particularly enlightened Christians have access.

According to Turner, Marx rejected theism as false, because it “supposes an opposition between God and man” (Ibid., 165) and he criticises atheism “because it accepts the terms which theism lays down and can speak of man only indirectly, that is, via the negation of theism” (Ibid., 165). Marx rejected the theologically and politically conservative Christianity of his day, as well as the radical Christianity that made its appearances throughout his lifetime. Marx claims that questions pertaining to the existence of God arise only among those who fail to understand their own natural human origins. Turner recognised that Marx rejected contemporary immanentist theologies because he viewed them as a partial regression to negative atheism itself. While Marx rejected negative atheism, Turner does not take that to mean Marx was not an atheist.

PJ: I could somehow swallow that Marx was not a (complete) atheist, but it cannot be disputed that he was very anti-clerical. How does liberation theology, with its close relationships to the Church, absorb Marx’s negativity towards its own being?

PM: Marx was anti-clerical, and so would any rational person be during the time of Marx who recognised that Jesus was the antithesis of clericalism, a clericalism whose world-denying conciliar prohibitions infected by monarchism and paternalism, disallowed justice for all. It was a temporal power that germinated autocracy and was leavened by obedience to a hierarchy that almost always sided with the imperial and structural intentionality of the state. It was clear to Marx and like-minded others that the ecclesiology that developed from the law, especially canon law, gave the papacy unrestricted power over the laity, resulting in a religious hubris of unrelenting fidelity to empire. It had ripped away from early Christianity sanctioned disobedience to imperial law. Now it demanded compliance to the dictatorship of the ruling class and its despotic commands often leading to brutishness, cruelty and unvarnished terror, to prioritising sacred laws over human welfare and making the Law of Christ coextensive with the

Law of Empire and its imperial covenant directed at capital accumulation by dispossession.

In liberation theology, however, there must be a principled intransigence towards authoritarian power rather than a creative adaptation to it, an ecclesiogenesis⁷ that lives in dialectical tension between the pneumatological⁸ and doctrinal aspect of the church and the base of the Church of the Poor. The Church proclaims a Kingdom of God that it can never put into practice, similar to capitalism that installs the very conditions (wage labour, value augmentation, social relations of production) under which wealth and prosperity are available onto to a few. Yet both cannot abandon the teachings they cannot follow.

PJ: Marx was a scientist, and his worldview is based on dialectical materialism. Liberation theology is religious, and its worldview is based on faith. How do you reconcile these radically different approaches to reality?

PM: Today in our efforts to create a society constructed upon principles of social justice we have approached our projects as scientifically distilled data – big data serves both as our compass and our destination. But allegiance to data removes the consensus-generating process that is part of collective reflection and systematic rationality, as Miranda explains so well. Interpersonal dialogue has to be part of the object of study and rational reflection – since relations between people are the basis of the relations between things. We can't forget this. As Miranda (1980, 306) notes, the "communitarian process leading to consensus can evade the arbitrariness or naiveté of extrascientific motives only if we, in all frankness, realize that dialogic discussion does exist, that it is moral in character, and that it is thus a matter of conscience". Without this consideration articulated by Miranda, and reflected in Paulo Freire's (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, we will etherise the role that our conscience must play and fall prey to corruption and self-interest.

We can't separate norms and facts, facts and value, for this expunges meaning from history, and both Marx and the teachings of the gospels recognise this. As Miranda (1980, 307) notes, "The eschaton of Marx, which is the same as that of the gospel, is what gives meaning to history". The project of immanentising the eschaton is one that has historically struck fear in the hearts of conservatives who use the term pejoratively because it refers to attempts to bring about the Kingdom of God in the immanent world. The conservatives equate this with socialism, communism, anti-racism and even Nazism. But reading the Gospel from below mandates that such a project is already in the making, with the intervention of Christ into human history. It is rejected by conservatives for fear of the rise of totalitarianism. But at the root of such fear is that panic in the hearts of those who stand to lose their wealth and status should a state of egalitarianism and equality be achieved.

PJ: What is the main message of Marx's work for liberation theology positioned in, against, and beyond contemporary capitalism (cf. Holloway 2016)?

PM: All of us can become blinded by virtue of our own interests, whether we are atheists, agnostics, Christians, Christian communists, or members of other religious faiths. For example, the capitalist does not realise that what is sold in the transaction between the capitalist is labour-power, not labour – sold at its exchange value,

⁷ The term 'ecclesiogenesis' is used by liberation theologian Leonardo Boff to describe the new ecclesiological experience within the Basic Christian Communities created in Latin America in which attempts are made by popular constituencies to create authentic Christian communities. Participants see this as creating a new form of church outside of the institutional structures of the traditional Catholic hierarchy (see Boff 1986).

⁸ In Christianity, the term 'pneumatology' refers to the study of the Holy Spirit.

and so the capitalist is wilfully blinded to the fact that labour-power produces much more than it is worth simply as exchange value (the labourer works much more than it takes to reproduce his or her own necessities for survival) and operates out of a motivated amnesia that the capitalist has been stealing surplus value from his workers. The Christian and the capitalist rarely think deeply about Marx's notion of value, and both adhere to the empiricist expression "price of labour", which hides the fact that the wage system is, in reality, a form of slavery. This, according to Marx, is an epistemological issue as much as a moral issue. As Miranda points out, Marx did not adhere to a materialist dogmatism that limited epistemology to social class. He recognised that the very mechanism of cognition itself is ideological, and that there are moral values embedded in the process of cognition – that within the apologetics and empiricist ideologies of economists there exists hidden interests which he viewed as ideological.

It is worth remembering Miranda's (1980, 303) insight: "Empiricism sticks to things. Marx dissolves things into relations between persons because conscience is not troubled by any moral obligation whatsoever when it confronts things". Hence, it is important for both Christians and Marxists to remember that exploitation and oppression can only be overcome by a sincere willingness to know the truth. Yes, truth is always partial, contingent and contextual, but it can be known. Which is why I believe the work of Marx is so essential to Christianity and why liberation theology needs to be continually reinvented for the current times, especially after such brutal efforts by the Reagan administration and Pope John Paul II to silence it, and efforts by right-wing dictatorships throughout Latin America to crush it by murdering priests and exponents of the Church of the Poor in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, especially today, the world needs liberation theology, which, by the way, is not restricted to Christianity or Christians but to all those who seek justice in these exceedingly brutal times.

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Synthesis Wanted: Reading *Capital* after 20th-Century Orthodoxies and Revisions

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Abstract: The article distinguishes between revisionist and orthodox readings of *Capital* and identifies two waves of innovations in Marxist political economy. The first produced the classical theories of imperialism; the second produced a diversity of Neo-Marxisms and new orthodoxies sowing the seeds for the 1000 Marxisms developing in the age of neoliberal globalisation. Reading all of these approaches to Marxist Political Economy in context, the article suggests and offers a key to the understanding of capitalist development and socialist movements in the 20th century. Using them as background for a new reading of *Capital* also allows an understanding of contemporary capitalism and considerations of socialist futures.

Keywords: Marxist political economy, revisions, orthodoxies, crises, class struggle, imperialism, socialism

1. Introduction

Among the 1000 Marxisms that have developed over the last decades (Tosel 2005), there must be 50 or more ways that draw on Marx's *Capital* to make sense of present-day capitalism and its crises. Point at the rise of global finance, the new imperialism or the reorganisation of work. Complain about the mysteriousness of commodity fetishism, corporate greed or the low tide of working class struggles. See the profit rate falling or effective demand lacking. No matter which way you follow, most of these interpretations are marked with signs warning you not to leave the one-and-only way from *Capital* in order to establish a proper understanding of capitalism today. In some ways, you may not even notice that you follow the tracks of *Capital* as analyses are overburdened with more contemporary left jargon. Treading beaten or almost invisible tracks makes it difficult to figure out what *Capital* and past readings of it really might contribute to an understanding of today's world. Are Marx's theoretical concepts, and those of his followers, applicable today? Or does their usage create the impression that things are the same now as they were when these concepts were first developed? Maybe some concepts were ahead of their time and reality is catching up to the conclusions they implied just now? Other concepts may need updating.

This article aims at opening a debate on these questions, a debate that will put past readings of *Capital* in their respective historical contexts and thereby shape the focus for a new reading of *Capital*. This larger project, to which this article only contributes some preliminary thoughts, rests on the proposition that past readings carry the marks of the historical juncture at which they were invented. It further rests on the proposition that these readings can serve as keys to understand these respective junctures and thereby lay the foundation, in combination with a new reading of *Capital*, to develop a deeper understanding of present-day capitalism than that which is possible on the basis of existing Marxist analyses.

The article distinguishes between orthodox and revisionist readings of *Capital*. Orthodox readings seek to establish or maintain coherence within Marxist debates but

run the risk that, over pursuing this goal, they turn into dogmas that lose touch with reality. Revisionist readings, by adjusting and amending concepts developed in *Capital*, seek to reconnect the debate to recent empirical realities. Ironically, though, such revisions can turn into dogmas just like orthodox readings. The final section of this article outlines ideas for a synthesis of orthodox and revisionist readings as basis for a new reading of *Capital* and analyses of present-day capitalism.

2. Orthodoxies

If laying bare the law of motion of modern society was the ultimate aim of *Capital*, the motivation to do so was to provide socialists with a scientific basis from which they could derive strategies and around which they could rally support. Towards this end, Marx and Engels began popularising *Capital* as soon as Volume 1 (1867) was published. Besides Engels' (1877) *Anti-Dühring*, to which Marx contributed a chapter on political economy, Kautsky's (1887) *Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx* may have been the most paradigmatic and influential text. Though coming out shortly after Volume 2 of *Capital* (1885), Kautsky's text drew exclusively on Volume 1. Providing readers with short analyses of the extraction of surplus-value from living labour power and the combined processes of the development of the forces of production and working class immiseration. At the same time, Kautsky argues, the increasing socialisation of production prepares the working class to throw off the yoke of capitalist exploitation and power.

The focus on working class immiseration may have been persuasive at the time Kautsky wrote *Economic Doctrines* but this changed with the long boom beginning a few years after its publication. The boom led Bernstein (1893/1899), until then a close companion of Engels and Kautsky, to charge the latter with passively awaiting the breakdown of capitalism instead of pushing for social reforms. In point of fact, Kautsky had never used the notion of breakdown; in later editions of *Economic Doctrines* he explicitly rejected it. Some of his followers, including Luxemburg (1897/1899), picked up this notion and defended it against Bernstein.

Luxemburg (1913), in spite of being considered a theoretician of breakdown and orthodoxy par excellence, actually revised some of the arguments that Marx put forward in *Capital II* in order to explain long boom periods and to reject the idea of an automatic breakdown. During the Roaring Twenties that followed the First World War and the post-war economic crisis, it was Grossmann (1929) who turned Bernstein's charge that Kautsky advocated a theory of breakdown into an orthodoxy and defended it against the revisionism of Luxemburg on the left and Bauer and Hilferding on the right. He wanted to demonstrate that the recovery in the mid-1920s was just the last flicker of life of a moribund system. Capitalist breakdown, Grossmann argued, was imminent. Under these conditions, the class compromise on which the social democratic concept of organised capitalism relied was just not possible. Rather than hanging on to such illusions, communists should prepare for revolution. Yet Grossmann directed his fire not only at Hilferding and Bauer as chief advocates of class compromise but also at Luxemburg. This may be explained by the fact that the leadership of the German communist party, of which Grossmann was a member, was pushing adherents of Luxemburg out of its ranks since the mid-1920s.

Theoretically, Grossman distinguished much more systematically than Marx between cyclical fluctuations and the long-run trajectory of capitalist accumulation. Drawing on the law of the tendential fall of the rate of profit in *Capital III* (1894), Grossmann argued that the counteracting factors Marx had identified had run their historical course. As a result, the organic composition would rise faster than the rate of surplus

value. The rate of profit would fall to a point where further investment wouldn't produce any additional capital. This is a situation Grossmann, following Marx, calls absolute over-production of capital. It represents an insurmountable limit to capital accumulation. The contradiction between the systemic need to maximise profits and its means, the implementation of labour-saving strategies and thus productivity enhancing technologies, led capitalism to its point of no return.

The year 1929 was the perfect year for Grossmann to publish the *Law of Accumulation and the Breakdown of the Capitalist System*. Yet the Great Depression, the Nazi regime and the Second World War led to the unprecedented destruction of capital, the diffusion of major technological innovations and drastically expanded forms of state intervention that ushered in a thirty-year boom, rendering the notion of 'capitalist breakdown' obsolete. At the height of the boom, even cyclical fluctuations were considered a thing of the past. Soviet Marxism maintained that capitalism was stuck in a general crisis but increasingly identified the spread of communist regimes and anti-imperialist revolution – instead of internal contradictions of the capitalist system – as its causes. The theoretically more stringent but empirically unsupported orthodoxy that Grossmann had invented survived only on the margins of the Marxist left. Its chief proponent, the council-communist Mattick, had adopted Grossmann's theory – despite the latter's affiliation with Soviet communism – in the midst of the depression (Mattick 1934). During the long boom, he defended it persistently against Neo-Marxist efforts that modified or even abandoned the theory of a falling profit rate (Mattick 1966; 1972). Without restoring profitable investment opportunities, Mattick (1969) argued, state intervention had created some kind of artificial boom. The underlying weakness of the capitalist economy makes it impossible to pay for these interventions. Escalating government debt would lead to inflation and a return to open crisis. In the 1970s, when the long boom ended, this argument was quite persuasive. In the 1960s, though, only some New Leftists seeking alternatives to social democratic class collaboration and communist bureaucracy turned to Mattick or Grossmann. Many more adopted the Neo-Marxism perspectives that Mattick detested so much, or went all the way back to Marx. This going back to the roots was quite understandable as the then-existing orthodoxy seemingly put theoretical purity ahead of engagement with facts that didn't fit the orthodox picture, while revisionist readings, more willing to confront reality, were suspected of leaving socialist commitments along with Marxist political economy behind. At the same time, Soviet Marxism used quotes by Marx, Engels and Lenin to justify every turn of the party line. Reading Marx's original texts was all the more inviting as new ones, ironically with the help of the Marxist-Leninist institutes in Moscow and East-Berlin, were coming out, notably the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript* (Marx 1844), *the Results of the Direct Production Process* (Marx 1864) and the *Grundrisse* (1859).

New readings of *Capital* along with first-time readings of previously unavailable texts produced two new orthodoxies: Autonomist Marxism (Wright 2017), largely based in Italy, and Value-Form Marxism (Hoff 2017, part 3), very much centred in West Germany. Both are much more products of collective intellectual work than previous orthodoxies that were represented by outstanding individual thinkers. Whereas Grossmann and Mattick based their theories of capitalist breakdown on the law of the tendential fall of the rate of profit in *Capital III*, these new readings turned back to Kautsky's focus on *Capital I*, albeit in very partial ways. Kautsky, though putting more emphasis on the production of surplus value and wages than on other parts of it, did cover the entire range of topics Marx discussed in Volume 1. Value-Form Marxism, by contrast, has been mostly concerned with Marx's analyses of commodity exchange and money while

autonomist Marxism looked almost exclusively at the direct production process and the composition of capital that was transformed into the concept of class composition. These different foci not only marked a departure from the focus on profit rates and crises that was of overarching importance to Grossmann and Mattick, it also led these new orthodoxies to radically different conclusions.

Autonomist Marxists started from a critique of the class collaboration of unions and workers' parties. This collaboration, they argued, relied on skilled workers' attempts to convert their productive role in production into material gains. Yet, by replacing skilled workers with unskilled workers, thereby creating a new class composition, capitalists undercut the bargaining power of unions, and created a new type of worker that didn't have stakes in the capitalist machine. Turning Grossmann and Mattick, but also any other economic theory of crises, on their heads, Autonomist Marxists argued that these new mass workers would squeeze capitalist profits with escalating wage demands and their refusal to listen to their bosses. Other theories identified the internal contradictions of the capitalist mode of production as reasons for crises. They either pointed at labour-saving technologies that would lead to falling profit rates and investments or a lack of aggregate demand produced by capitalist efforts to cut back labour costs. Workers and their struggles played a passive role in both cases. Autonomist Marxists, by contrast, saw workers' struggles as the cause of a profit squeeze and crises.

The upsurge of labour militancy in the late 1960s seemed to confirm the arguments hammered out by Autonomist Marxists since the early 1960s. But things changed in the 1970s when a series of crises, whatever their causes may have been, led to the resurgence of mass unemployment, something largely unknown during the long boom, and put labour militancy, along with governments turning from class collaboration to anti-labour policies, to rest. Since then, increasingly arcane worlds of finance have developed and created a world after their own image. As it happens, this image is similar to that which arises from reading Value-Form Marxism. This coincidence is quite ironic if one considers that this current in Marxist political economy has no intentions of analysing actually existing capitalisms. Against the downgrading of *Capital*, or Marxism at large, to a source of propaganda slogans, Value-Form Marxism has aimed at restoring Marx's critical impetus. To this end, Value-Form Marxists shifted their focus from class struggle, in which workers' parties had often presented themselves as workers' legitimate representatives, to the different forms of value and the fetishisms produced by these forms. As a result, class agency became unthinkable. Capital, understood as a social relation, between buyers and sellers turns into an automatic subject that subordinates not only individuals but entire classes – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat alike – to its imperatives. The question whether the fetishisms on which this subordination of human agents to social structures relies could give way to class consciousness, based on workers' experiences or maybe with a little help from the Marxist critique of political economy, remains outside the focus of Value-Form Marxism.

Yet breaking free from the revisionist trajectory that, according to Value-Form Marxists, led to the transformation of Marx's critique of political economy to a legitimization device for workers' parties is difficult. After all, Value-Form Marxism shares its focus on circulation and finance with the godfather of revisionist Marxism it set out to criticise – Rudolf Hilferding (1910), the author of *Finance Capital*.

3. Revisions

Bernstein was the true godfather of revisionism, of course. He swiftly moved from his original efforts to renew Marxism to abandon it. This left Marxists with the choice to either defend established Marxist doctrines or accept Bernstein's charge that these

doctrines were out of touch with reality and continue his original renewal efforts. The classical theories of imperialism (Hilferding 1910; Luxemburg 1913; Lenin 1916) were the theoretical outcome of such efforts. As revisionism was so much identified with Bernstein's post-Marxism at the time, the authors of these theories surely didn't see themselves as revisionists. Looking back, though, it is quite clear that they did much more than just slightly modifying Kautsky's orthodoxy.

Reading *Capital* as an analysis of historical capitalism in England at the time Marx wrote the book, Hilferding found that many concepts, namely those of money and finance, needed an update to account for the changes that occurred since Marx's days. As most significant, of course, he considered the merger between industrial capital and banks into finance capital. But he also broadened the scope of Marxist political economy to include the state and the world market, issues on which Marx had envisioned separate books beyond the three volumes of *Capital*.

The unfinished character of *Capital* was also Luxemburg's point of departure that allowed her to present herself as a true follower of Marx while also making significant changes to his work. But her way of change was rather different from Hilferding's, who read *Capital* historically and drew, though in an uneven matter, on pretty much all aspects covered in the three volumes of *Capital* with the notable exception of the production process. Hilferding shares this omission with Luxemburg. But apart from that, Luxemburg read *Capital* logically, as abstract reconstruction of the laws governing capitalist development without being visible to the observing eye. She claimed that Marx, in *Capital II*, made the theoretical assumption that expanded reproduction would not be limited by any lack of aggregate demand. She further claimed that Marx, had he lived long enough to finish *Capital*, would have relaxed this assumption. She took it upon herself to carry on Marx's work – as she understood it. To this end, she argued that, in fact, accumulation in a pure capitalist system is constrained by insufficient demand. She used this theoretical argument to demonstrate how capitalism developed historically through the conversion of non-capitalist milieus into new markets. From this angle, the wave of colonial conquest she witnessed was, economically, just one particular, though politically highly significant form of capitalist expansion.

Unlike Hilferding and Luxemburg, Lenin did not go back to *Capital* to develop his theory of imperialism, but built on Hilferding's *Finance Capital* – with a proto-Keynesian twist. Recognising revisionist, or maybe it is better to say 'reformist', deviations like nobody else, he saw quite clearly how *Finance Capital* could be used as a road map to organised capitalism instead of identifying the weakest link in the imperialist chain where revolutionaries could score first victories. Hilferding didn't see economic breakdown on the horizon and thought that even cyclical crises could be contained to a large extent as capitalist monopolies controlled such a large share of total capital that they could always expand investments in branches lacking demand and curtail them in branches suffering from overcapacities. This argument, which Hilferding further fleshed out in his concept of 'organised capitalism' following the First World War, was, in fact, an anticipation of Keynes' demand-management – but without Keynes' theory of crises. Yet it was precisely this theory that Hobson (1902) anticipated and that Lenin implanted into Hilferding's theory of imperialism.

Hilferding had shown why finance capital pursued imperialist policies but this analysis implied that other policies would also be possible, for example those of organised capitalism, in which working class movements through their parties and unions would form a countervailing power to finance capital. Hobson's theory, to be sure, included the same implication as Hilferding's. Lenin's blend of Hilferding's reformist Marxism with Hobson's social liberalism produced exactly the analytical results he needed to

support his revolutionary politics. In this blend, capitalists kept wages for the working class majority at a minimum and thereby created a state of permanent underconsumption. Overcoming the limits of domestic markets required – this was Hobson’s argument – capital export. Carried out by finance capital – this was drawn from Hilferding – capital export would lead to colonial conquest, imperialist rivalries, and war. This would unsettle the capitalist order and open the door for socialist revolution.

Lenin’s expectation of a political breakdown was as appropriate at the time as Grossmann’s expectation of economic breakdown roughly a decade after the Russian revolution. But both – Luxemburg’s dire outlook on the future of capitalism could be added here – were wrong in assuming that this breakdown would herald working class revolution in the West. Lenin’s theory of imperialism, combined with his unconditional support for national self-determination, was flexible enough to explain the process of anti-colonial revolution but, after the Second World War, his underlying economic diagnosis of capitalist decay turned out to be as wrong as Grossmann’s prognosis of economic breakdown. During the long boom, revisionist Marxism found itself in a similar situation from which it had started in response to Kautsky’s orthodoxy. Capitalism wasn’t in crisis, not even stagnating. Social reforms that didn’t go beyond embryonic stages in the late 19th century transformed capitalism beyond recognition, seemingly creating the organised capitalism Hilferding had envisioned prematurely during the crisis-torn 1920s. While the orthodox line from Kautsky to Grossmann and Mattick seemed entirely out of touch with reality, a new wave of revisionist Marxism sought to make sense of the long boom.

An underlying assumption of these Neo-Marxisms was that, in the final analysis, Lenin’s diagnosis was correct but that the Second World War had created exceptional conditions offering capitalism another lease on life. One of these conditions, identified by Neo-Marxists like Emmanuel (1972) and Mandel (1972, Chapter 11), was neo-colonial exploitation of countries that, unlike the communist regimes in China, Cuba or Vietnam, did not dissociate themselves from the capitalist world market. More in polemical than analytical fashion, Lenin (1916, Chapter 8) had mentioned rentier states in which entire populations would live off colonial exploitation. During the long post-WWII-boom, Marxists began to wonder how much neo-colonial exploitation contributed to the boom. To this end, they applied Marx’s labour theory of value to conditions where wages, productivity and their respective growth rates were different between centres and peripheries.

The centre-periphery framework, within which the question of unequal exchange was discussed, dates back to Baran (1957) who later, in collaboration with Sweezy (1966), shifted the Neo-Marxist focus radically from the production of surplus-value to its realisation. Baran and Sweezy (1966) argued that capitalism in its competitive stage, as analysed in *Capital*, found nearly unlimited markets in the pre-capitalist economies it replaced. While industrialisation gave it a competitive advantage over subsistence and craft production, the stockpiling of machinery did outpace productivity growth and led to a falling profit rate. Monopoly capitalism, on the other hand, is constrained by insufficient aggregate demand. A stagnation trap it could overcome during the post-WWII-era because of wasteful spending, such as the sales effort and military spending, created additional demand without further increasing production capacity. Military spending, to be sure, sustained the imperialist conditions under which unequal exchange occurred.

Sticking closer to Marx’s analytical framework than Baran and Sweezy, Mandel (1972) made similar arguments about unequal exchange, arms spending and mass consumer society. But he also looked at the effects of automation on employment and

the production of surplus-value. Renewed interest in the production process was in the air. While Mandel looked at it very much from the capitalists' point of view, asking how technological change affects profits, Braverman (1974), arguing within Baran and Sweezy's framework of monopoly capitalism, looked at the degradation of work under the Taylorist regime in factories and offices. His analysis shows similarities with Autonomous Marxists' delineation of the mass worker. But where the latter was considered a revolutionary agent of change, Braverman's deskilled workers tightly controlled by management suffered increasing alienation that didn't fan the flames of discontent.

Whatever nuances distinguished the Neo-Marxisms coming forth during the long boom, the shared assumption that the boom wouldn't last turned out to be the Achilles' heel of all of them. The expectation that the end of the boom would lead to a reawakening of class struggle from below, which was openly advocated by Mandel and found more restrained expression in Sweezy's *Monthly Review*, turned out to be as wrong as similar expectations during the Great Depression of the 1930s. That last major crises had fostered Nazi-rule in Germany and the New Deal in the US, eventually leading to a Keynesian wave of accumulation. The crises of the 1970s, which ended the Keynesian wave – though accompanied by an upsurge of labour militancy and a host of new social movements – signalled a neoliberal wave of accumulation (Schmidt 2011; 2014). In the tracks of various Neo-Marxisms, but also orthodox readings of *Capital*, Marxists did a lot to understand this new wave. But hopes for resurgence of socialist mass movements were on the wane. Marxism has gone through several crises since Bernstein and his revisionist companions had challenged Kautsky's orthodoxies. But it seems the crisis Althusser declared in 1977 was of a different kind. Previous crises, beginning with the revisionist debate Bernstein and his followers had triggered in the Second International, led to new interpretations and further developments of Marxist theory, including the critique of political economy, and new socialist strategies. Such adjustments were accompanied by bitter debates, maybe even the breaking up of existing and the establishing of new organisations. However, the crisis that began in the late 1970s led to an unravelling of previously existing ties between Marxist theory and socialist politics. Value-Form Marxism, it could be argued, was the vanguard of this unravelling. Even Marxist currents who claimed to maintain ties to political practice lost their anchoring in socialist movements and found their social basis increasingly in university departments rather than shop-floors and communities.

4. Synthesis: A Short Outline

Taking revisionist and orthodox readings of *Capital* from its publication to the emergence of 1000 Marxisms together, two waves of major re-interpretations and innovation can be distinguished. We experienced the revisionist wave from Hilferding's (1910) *Finance Capital* to Lenin's (1916) *Imperialism*, the return to or revision of Marx, the emergence of Autonomist Marxism, and the crises of the 1970s that put new and old orthodoxies and Neo-Marxisms to the test. The revisionist wave had to explain late 19th-century prosperity that didn't seem to fit Kautsky's orthodoxy. It also broadened the scope of Marxist political economy to include the uneven development of the world market, i.e. imperialism, and the state about which Marx had written quite a bit, just not in *Capital*. Marxists in the 1960s had to explain an even stronger boom than their predecessors at the turn of the century. They also had to show that Marxist political economy could explain neo-colonialism and the Keynesian state.

The Great Depression, on the other hand, didn't challenge Marxists to rethink then-dominant interpretations of *Capital*. Grossmann's (1929) *The Law of Accumulation and*

the Breakdown of the Capitalist System was more a systemisation of various interpretations rather than an innovation. Another basic tenet of Marxism – that crises of capitalism lead to socialist revolution – needed serious rethinking, though. Revolutionary efforts in the aftermath of the First World War were short-lived and the depression, though triggering some resurgence on the left, provided fascism, i.e. the organised counterrevolution, with a mass basis. Western Marxism (Anderson 1976) with its focus on culture and mass consciousness offered an explanation to why crises may lead to discontent but not necessarily to socialist revolution. But it also marked a turn from the critique of political economy and class politics to philosophy. Originating in the interwar period, Western Marxism was booming in the 1960s and left its mark on the second wave of innovation in political economy. Baran and Sweezy's analysis of the sales effort and consumerism in *Monopoly Capital* reads like a companion piece to Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). Value-Form Marxism took Western Marxism's engagement with Marx's early writings, notably the concept of alienation, as a point of departure for its explorations of the various forms of fetishism Marx had identified in *Capital*. Autonomist Marxism used the open Hegelianism in *Grundrisse* to get past the subordination of theoretical inquiry to socialist and communist parties' respective doctrines. However, unlike Western Marxism in general and Value-Form Marxism in particular, Autonomist Marxism didn't pay a philosophical farewell to class struggle but used philosophy as a means to move from interpreting to changing the world.

Philosophical inspiration going back to the emergence of Western Marxism in the 1920s wasn't the only feature that distinguished the second from the first wave of innovation in Marxist political economy. The first wave saw Marxists, all of them solidly anchored in Europe's socialist workers' movements, pondering the effects of imperialism on the future of socialism in Europe and abroad. Whatever their analytical and tactical differences were, they shared internationalist commitments and made anti-imperialism an indispensable part of Marxian socialism, which set them apart from the revisionist social democrats who, more or less openly, supported imperialism. During the second wave, it was only the Neo-Marxists who, building on the theories of imperialism produced during the first wave, maintained internationalist commitments and built relations to non-Western Marxists. For Mattick, as for Grossmann before him, the developments in the non-Western world were only of interest with regard to their effects on the average rate of profit: unlike the Neo-Marxists who saw anti-colonial revolutions as an alternative to the bureaucratic rule in Eastern Europe and were also hoping it would unlock the revolutionary process in the West, which, after the Second World War, had been marginalised by the tripartite blocs between government, capital, and labour. Breaking up these blocs was also a major goal of Autonomist Marxists. Yet, rather than hoping that revolutionary sparks flying in the periphery would light a fire that would eventually reach the capitalist metropolises, they had their eyes on a new generation of mass workers in the metropolises' factories.

As diverse as the arguments put forward by second wave innovators of Marxist political economy were the political implications they drew from their respective analyses. They ranged from Autonomists who saw workers pushing capitalism against the wall of crises and thereby preparing their own liberation, to Neo-Marxists and adherents of the theory of capitalist breakdown more or less eagerly expecting the next crisis to serve as a wakeup call for a dormant workers' movement, to the resigned Value-Form Marxists thinking that there wouldn't be anyone to pick up the call. As if such mutually exclusive conclusions didn't make it difficult enough to rebuild a Marxist so-

cialism beyond adherence to Soviet communism, the feminist and ecological movements that were part of the wave of protests from the late-1960s to the late-1970s turned out to be an even greater challenge for all Marxists of all stripes.

Not that there weren't efforts to build a socialist feminism or eco-socialism, some of them using *Capital* to find angles on the role of women and nature in the capitalist system. With hindsight, *Capital* and the theories of imperialism produced by first wave Marxist innovators are obvious points of reference for an analysis of the relations between capitalism, gender, and ecology. After all, the debate on household labour, one of the focal points of 1960s and 1970s feminists, was a response to the capitalist penetration of private households. The same is true for 1970s environmental movements who responded to the increasing awareness that capital's quest for endless accumulation was incompatible with limited natural resources. If late 19th-century colonisation gave rise to the theories of imperialism by Hilferding, Luxemburg, Lenin and a few others and the adoption of anti-imperialism to the socialist agenda, one would have expected the same to happen in response to the colonisation of households and nature during the post-WWII-prosperity. However, theoretical debates on these issues never congealed into a mass-based socialism adding purple and green to its red banner. One of the reasons for this failure was certainly that workers' movements were already unsettled by the unexpected and fast succession of rising militancy in the late 1960s and economic crises and mass unemployment from the mid-1970s onwards. This didn't create much appetite to take on new issues such as feminism and ecology. These uncertainties were further aggravated by changes in the composition of the workforce. Autonomist Marxism had been very sensitive to the declining share of skilled workers who had been the backbone of workers' movements for so long. However, the mass workers to which they had assigned the role of revolutionary agency so enthusiastically in the 1960s felt the sting of automation and relocation only a few years later. At the same time, the rise of a new professional middle-class from which women's and environmental movements recruited so many of their activists made it easy to posit the working class and against the new middle class and its social movements.

Another obstacle to the building of a red, purple and green socialism was Soviet communism. Whether dissident Marxists secretly maintained hopes for socialist renewal in the East or loudly denounced Soviet rulers as betrayers or even socialist imperialists, the very fact that one of the Cold War contenders claimed to represent the traditions of Marx and Lenin made the Soviet Union the common point of reference for all Marxists, including critics of Marxism-Leninism. But that was also the reason why so many feminists and environmentalists didn't want anything to do with Marxism. Understandably enough, many of them considered the combination of Soviet power and electrification, going back all the way to Lenin, as just another incarnation of patriarchal rule and environmental destruction.

To be sure, Soviet communism had been an embarrassment for a lot of Marxists for a long time. What happened over the 1970s, though, was that even the most persistent believers in the transformation of party dictatorship into a socialism with a human face lost faith after the Soviet invasion following the Prague Spring and the declaration of martial law following the Solidarność uprising in Poland. At the same time, Euro-communism, an effort of communist parties in the West to emancipate themselves from Soviet guidance, turned into a convergence with social democracy, which confirmed orthodox warnings that any deviation from Moscow would inevitably lead into the revisionist morass. This may not have been a major deterrence if social democracy was still in its ascendance as standard-bearer of the welfare state. However,

the late 1970s saw not only the various New Lefts and new social movements in retreat but social democracy as well.

Paradoxically enough, the neoliberal counter-offensive, culminating in the collapse of the Soviet Union and Chinese communists' turn to world-market integration, resulted in the creation of a capitalist order ever more resembling the images of capitalism emanating from the pages of Marx's *Capital*. However, today's capitalism does not represent the actualisation of the capitalist mode of production in its ideal average that Marx detected, historical references to industrial capitalism in England notwithstanding. Today's capitalism is one that bears the marks of colonial conquest and neo-colonialism as much as those of the struggles against capitalist exploitation in workplaces and households in centres and peripheries. (Re-)Reading Marxist political economies from the classical theories of imperialism to various Neo-Marxisms, the Autonomist and Value-Form Marxisms and tentative encounters with feminism and ecology can serve as a key to understand capitalist developments and the fortunes of socialism in the 20th century. (Re-)Reading *Capital* can help to tie the ends of these diverse revisions and orthodoxies together in a way that allows both an understanding of today's capitalism and thinking about socialist futures.

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Reflections on Sven-Eric Liedman's Marx-Biography "A World to Win: The Life and Works of Karl Marx"

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Abstract: The English translation of Sven-Eric Liedman's Marx-biography *A World to Win: The Life and Works of Karl Marx* was published two weeks before Marx's bicentenary. This article presents reflections on Liedman's book and asks how one should best write biographically about Marx. The paper compares Liedman's biography to the Marx-biographies written by Jonathan Sperber (*Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life*) and Gareth Stedman-Jones (*Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion*). A biography is a way of repeating a person's life, works and age in a process of reconstruction and retelling. The question that arises is how to write a biography as a dialectical text.

Sven-Eric Liedman: *A World to Win: The Life and Works of Karl Marx*.
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1. Introduction

Sven-Eric Liedman is professor emeritus of the history of ideas at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. He published his first Swedish book on Marx in 1968. It was focused on the young Marx. Fifty years later, Verso published his Marx-biography *A World to Win: The Life and Works of Karl Marx*. The book was first released in Swedish under the title *Karl Marx: en biografi* (*Karl Marx: A Biography*) in 2015. Jeffrey N. Skinner translated it from Swedish to English.

The English version of Liedman's biography was published eighteen days before a very special occasion: May 5, 2018, marks Karl Marx's bicentenary. As a consequence, lots of public attention is given to Marx's works and life in 2018, including new academic publications, novels, events, conferences, exhibitions, documentaries, films, monuments, discussions, reports on television and radio and in newspapers and magazines; memes, hashtags (#Marx200, #KarlMarx, #Marx) and postings on social media, etc. New Marx-biographies published in 2018, such as Sven-Eric Liedman's *World to Win: The Life and Thought of Karl Marx*, are therefore likely to receive significant attention.

Writings on Marx can broadly be categorised into introductions to his theory, updates of his works in respect to contemporary society, and biographies. Marx's collected works amount to 50 volumes in the English *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, 44 volumes in the German *Marx-Engels-Werke*, and 114 volumes in the ongoing publication of the German *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA²). Given such a voluminous oeuvre, it is a challenge to write about Marx. Updates of Marx's theory for 21st-century society necessarily have to limit themselves to specific aspects. Introductory works either have to provide brief introductions to a body of works (see for example Heinrich 2012) or have to focus on more in-depth discussions of specific works such as *Capital*

(see for example Harvey 2010; 2013; Fuchs 2016a) or *Grundrisse* (see for example Choat 2016; Negri 1991; Rosdolsky 1977). Given that Marx worked on a general theory of capitalism, it is possible to engage with his works without always discussing details of his life.

2. Jonathan Sperber's and Gareth Stedman Jones' Marx-Biographies

Writing Marx-biographies poses a different set of challenges. Given the political nature of Marx's life and works, it is not really possible to disentangle the discussion of his personal life from his writings, his political activities and the political and historical context. They need to be treated as a differentiated, dialectical unity that forms a biographical whole. Marx's works on critical political economy, society, politics and philosophy formed an integral aspect of his life. The personal situation of Marx and his family and political developments influenced his writings. But Marx-biographies do not always live up to the need of presenting Marx in such a dialectical manner, where intellectual works and personal and political life form a differentiated and integrated totality. Francis Wheen's (1999) widely acclaimed *Karl Marx* presents Marx's life without going into any detail of his works. In recent years, the two most widely read and discussed Marx-biographies have been Jonathan Sperber's (2013) *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* and Gareth Stedman Jones' (2016) *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion*. Both books illustrate the problems of bourgeois Marx-biographies.

Sperber's (2013) goal is to put Marx in "his nineteenth-century context" (Ibid., xviii). He thinks that the study of Marx's ideas in themselves and Marxist theory are "useless pastimes" (Ibid., xviii). Consequentially, Sperber's book focuses much more on Marx's life than his works. And insofar as he engages with Marx's writings, the presentation remains extremely superficial and incomplete. For example, Sperber argues in Chapter Eleven (titled "The Economist") that Marx's economic theory is "framed by five conceptual distinctions" (Ibid., 427): use-value/exchange-value, exchange/accumulation, labour/labour-power, constant capital/variable capital, rate of surplus-value/rate of profit. But one can add many more dialectical relations that Marx focused on: concrete labour/abstract labour, simple form of value/expanded form of value, commodity/money, worker/means of production, necessary labour-time/surplus labour-time, single worker/collective worker, absolute/relative surplus-value production, formal/real subsumption, relations of production/productive forces, etc. (Fuchs 2016a). And these dialectics are not static, but result in sublations that constitute capitalism's dynamics and crisis-tendencies. But in Sperber's account, the dialectic is barely mentioned.

The goal of Stedman Jones' (2016) biography is to "pay as much attention to Marx's thought as to his life" because Marx's writings stand in "particular political and philosophical contexts" (Ibid., xv). But Stedman Jones' readings and interpretations of Marx are too superficial and not up to the standards of Marxian scholarship (see Fuchs 2016b for a more detailed discussion). To give just one of many examples, Stedman Jones (2016, 394) claims that the *Grundrisse*'s "[m]ention of wage labour was also sparse and unspecific". But the term "wage labour" is in the English Penguin-edition of *Grundrisse* used 163 times, Marx along with the category of surplus-value introduces the one of surplus labour, analyses capitalism's class contradiction as the one between capital on the one side and labour as "the real *not-capital*" on the other side (Marx 1857/58, 274), anticipates that in a free society the "measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time" (Ibid., 708), etc. What remains is a biography that is much more substantial in presenting Marx's life than works. Stedman Jones fails to achieve his self-set task of presenting the unity of Marx's thought and life. The reason why his Marx-biography is relatively successful has less

to do with its quality and more with the fact that Penguin-books tend to sell independent of their content because of this publisher's reputation and marketing efforts.

Sperber's and Stedman Jones' books share the approach of presenting Marx as a thinker whose influence and works are limited to the nineteenth century. Stedman Jones (2016, 5) writes that his aim is "to put Marx back in his nineteenth-century surroundings". Sperber (2013) claims that "Marx's life, his systems of thought, his political strivings and aspirations, belonged primarily to the nineteenth century" (Ibid., xviii), that Marx is "more a figure of the past than a prophet of the present" (Ibid., xix), and that one must see "Marx in his contemporary context, not ours" (Ibid., xx). Both authors historicise Marx based on an undialectical concept of history that conceives of history as closed and bounded process and disregards the fact that Marx simultaneously worked out an analysis of capitalism in general, capitalism's genesis and contradictory development logic, and 19th-century reality.

Sperber and Stedman Jones reproduce one of the most widely held prejudices against Marx, namely that his theory is outdated and has no relevance in 21st-century society. Terry Eagleton (2011, 1-11) argues that the claim of Marx's obsolescence is the first of ten common prejudices about Marx. He asks: "What if it were not Marxism that is outdated but capitalism itself? [...] There is thus something curiously static and repetitive about this most dynamic of all historical regimes. The fact that its underlying logic remains pretty constant is one reason why the Marxist critique of it remains largely valid" (Ibid., 9-10). Marx's categories are not limited to 19th-century capitalism, but invite their appropriation and development for the analysis of 21st-century capitalism based on a dialectic of historical continuity and change (Fuchs and Monticelli 2018).

3. Sven-Eric Liedman and Franz Mehring

By explaining "not only who Marx was in his time, but why he remains a vital source of inspiration today" (Liedman 2018, xii) and taking into account "the last few decades of intensive research concerning the *Grundrisse* and in particular *Capital*" (xi), Liedman takes an approach that is qualitatively different from Sperber and Stedman Jones. He conceives of history and biography not as closed, but open-ended, dialectical process. The book is comprised of 14 chapters on a total of 627 pages. It starts by not just setting out Marx's early years, but that he was "a child of the French Revolution 1789" and of "the Industrial Revolution" (21). And the biography does not simply end with Marx's death because Liedman is convinced that Marx's critical theory will continue to be relevant at least as long as capitalism exists. Liedman describes Marx's death in chapter 14, but the same chapter describes the history of Marx's theory in the 20th century by presenting both orthodox and unorthodox Marxian approaches. Liedman's book ends by saying that Marx "lives on as the great critic of capitalism", who presents "a possible utopia for our time as well" (627) and whose "entire toolbox of critical instruments" (625) continues to "inspire topical criticism of capitalism's latest achievements, the failings of politics, and the genuflection of the contemporary world of ideas before a fetish like the market" (626) so that Marx attracts "the people of the twenty-first" century (626).

One of the strengths of Sven-Eric Liedman's book is that he provides thorough introductions to Marx's works that he contextualises in Marx's life and politics, history, societies' development at the time of Marx, and the contradictions of capitalism. It shares the same methodological approach as Franz Mehring (2003/1918) uses in the Marx-biography *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life* that was published on the occasion of Marx's centenary in 1918. One hundred years later, on the occasion of Marx's bicen-

tenary, Liedman without a doubt published the 21st century's thus far best Marx-biography. Mehring's work was certainly the best Marx's biography available at the time of Marx's centenary. Mehring was together with the likes of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht a member of the group of people, who in 1914 in light of the Social Democratic Party of Germany's agreement to war credits founded the Gruppe Internationale that became the Spartacus League in 1916 and in December 1918 the Communist Party of Germany. Mehring knew Engels and Marx's daughter Laura. Rosa Luxemburg contributed a chapter on *Capital's* volumes 2 and 3 to his Marx-biography. Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* were first published in German in 1932. His *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* was (except for the famous introduction that Marx published in 1844 in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*) first released in German in 1927. In 1918, the part of the *German Ideology* that focuses on Feuerbach had not-yet been published. Marx's *Grundrisse* were first published in 1939-1941. Mehring's introduction to Marx's works and life was at the height of the time of Marx's centenary, but could not take into account important works that were unpublished at that time. One hundred years later, Sven-Eric Liedman provides a successful update that stands in the Mehring's tradition of writing Marx's biography based on a dialectic of intellectual works and personal and societal life.

Liedman devotes 28 pages to the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (Chapter 5, 133-160) and 24 pages to the *German Ideology* (172-196). He rejects Althusser's claim that there is an epistemological break between the young and the older Marx, but stresses at the same time the concepts such as alienation underwent some change in Marx's works. Marx shows in the *German Ideology* that consciousness "is inseparable from matter from the very beginning. Spirit is also directly linked to language, without which no intellectual communication or development is possible" (194). The *German Ideology* grounded the "materialist concept of history" (196). Liedman traces and documents the influence of Hegel's dialectical philosophy on Marx's works. Chapter 7 (219-266) situates the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in the context of the revolutionary times of 1848/1849.

4. Capital and Grundrisse

Capital and *Grundrisse* are arguably two of Marx's most important works, which is why Liedman devotes 54 pages that form Chapter 10 to *Grundrisse* and the 72-page long Chapter 11 to *Capital*. In comparison, David McLellan (2006) in the fourth edition of *Karl Marx: A Biography* discusses the *Grundrisse* on seventeen pages (Ibid., 272-288) and *Capital* on sixteen pages (Ibid., 308-325).

Liedman's focus is on the text, context and prospects of these crucial writings. The basic distinction of answers to the question how *Grundrisse* and *Capital* relate to each other is one between those who see *Grundrisse* as a mere fragment and preparatory work that came to fruition in *Capital* and those who treat *Grundrisse* as an original work in itself that resisted the Soviet canonisation and orthodoxy of Marx built around *Capital*. Liedman's reading dialectically mediates both positions: "The *Grundrisse* points forward to *Capital*, but also contains much else that bears witness to Marx's entire multifarious world of ideas. It is both a preparatory work and a work in itself" (394).

Liedman's presentation of the *Grundrisse* focuses especially on the dialectic of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption; the difference between the *Grundrisse* (written in 1857/58) and *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (published in 1859) ("The *Grundrisse* is an adventure in reading. *A Contribution* is a

walk among a number of well-groomed concepts”: 380-381), forms which precede capitalism (with a special focus on the notion of the Asiatic mode of production and the transition to capitalism), work in capitalism and the realm of freedom.

Capital's three volumes are with their more than 2,000 pages simply too extensive in order to be covered in detail in any introduction to Marx's life and works. So for example, the *Marx-Engels-Werke* edition of *Capital* consists of 2,213 pages, excluding endnotes, indexes and the tables of content (Volume 1: 802 pages, Volume 2: 518 pages, Volume 3: 893 pages). Liedman provides a reasonable approach by focusing besides the book's context on *Capital's* structure, the commodity, concrete and abstract labour, money, commodity fetishism, surplus-value, constant and variable capital, the formula of capital, machinery, the circulation of capital, departments I and II, the transformation problem, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, fictitious capital, crises, the trinity formula, and classes. Chapter 11 furthermore provides a brief overview of some of the interpretations of *Capital*. Liedman stresses in respect to *Capital* again the influence of Hegel's dialectics on Marx. He argues that *Capital* is based on the dialectics of essence and appearance, form and content, surface and depth.

5. Marx and Engels

Liedman gives special attention to the intellectual and personal relationship of Marx and Engels (125-131; 467-525). He shows that it is a mistake to assume that only Engels was interested in natural science and that Engels is to blame for the vulgar interpretation of Marxian dialectics. Marx himself engaged in in-depth studies of not just languages, philosophy, literature, economics, history, technology and anthropology, but also of the natural sciences and mathematics. The communist chemist Carl Schorlemmer was not just a friend of both Marx and Engels, but also influenced both intellectually. Also the chemist August Wilhelm von Hofmann's lectures in London influenced Marx's thinking. Liedman stresses that Marx based on insights from the natural sciences thought of development as transition from quantity into new qualities and processes of emergence. But it is clear that although nature and society are linked through human production, they are not one and the same because human work constitutes the *Aufhebung* of nature in society. So there is also an emergent leap between nature and society (Fuchs 2006).

Liedman argues that the schematic, orthodox, dogmatic interpretation of the dialectic was based on a reductionist interpretation of Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* and *Anti-Dühring* that disregarded that Engels spoke of the spiral form of development as the fourth dimension of the dialectic and focused on three dialectical laws. Liedman stresses that the three dialectical laws (the contradiction, the transition from quantity to quality, the negation of the negation) became a dogma, “but it can safely be said that no one has been drawn to the tradition from Marx, or even Engels, owing to these laws. They have become an extra burden that can only be defended with all sorts of more or less sophistic reasoning” (499). Both the orthodoxies of Stalinism and the reformist strand in the Second International were built on the interpretation of society's development as deterministic natural law of history that disregarded the dialectical difference between nature and society and therefore Marx's insight into the dialectics of agency and structures and of chance and necessity in society that he summarised in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx 1852, 103).

Liedman does not mention that Stalin (1938) in his infamous catechism *Dialectical*

and Historical Materialism that was published in the Soviet “short course” on Bolshevism does not consider the negation of the negation and sublation (*Aufhebung*) as dialectical principles operating in society, but rather presents society as governed by natural laws. The same is true of Mao’s (1937) *On Contradiction*. Stalin and Mao reduced the dialectic in society to one natural law, the law of contradiction. “The law of contradiction in things, that is, the law of the unity of opposites, is the fundamental law of nature and of society and therefore also the fundamental law of thought” (Mao 1937, 311). As a consequence, it became possible to argue that the USSR and China had overcome capitalism and based on the “process of development from the lower to the higher” (Stalin 1938, 109) therefore constituted “a Socialist system” (Ibid., 119). Therefore, anyone questioning the socialist character of the Soviet or Chinese system or the authority of Stalin and Mao was considered a counter-revolutionary. The reductionist interpretation of the dialectic turned into an ideological method for justifying terror.

The dogmatic Stalinist dialectic dominated Soviet-inspired philosophy. Two examples shall illustrate this circumstance. In 1937, the Leningrad Institute of Philosophy’s (1937) *Textbook of Marxist Philosophy* in line with Stalin defined “the law of unity and conflict of opposites” as “the basic law of dialectic” (1937, 152), whereas the negation of the negation was denied separate relevance by being reduced to “one of the concrete forms of manifestation of the law of the unity of opposites” (Ibid., 359). Manfred Buhr and Georg Klaus argued in the *Philosophical Dictionary* of the German Democratic Republic that the negation of the negation “is not the fundamental law of the dialectic” (1964, 381). Against orthodox interpretations of Marx, Liedman stresses the heterodox approaches of for example Rosa Luxemburg, Ernst Bloch, Antonio Gramsci, Georg Lukács, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor W. Adorno, the Praxis Group, Agnes Heller, or Karel Kosík.

We need to think of the dialectic as complex and open process. The dialectic is the absolute recoil that posits its own preconditions (Žižek 2014). Self-reference and self-constitution as processes in which something returns into itself as something different that constitutes a new positive difference that makes a difference can only occur because the dialectic is a fire that needs to burn. The dialectical fire extinguishes a contradiction and thereby itself. This extinguishment is at the same time a self-kindling of the dialectic and the kindle of a new fire, in which the old is sublated as the new and constitutes a new contradiction. The dialectic is the absolute recoil in and through being a fire that continuously extinguishes and kindles itself. In society, human praxis is the dialectical fire of social change.

6. The General Intellect and Nationalism

Only a reader lacking intellectual depth will completely agree with all that is written in a particular book. So the present reader also identifies some shortcomings of Liedman’s *A World to Win*, of which two shall be mentioned.

Liedman discusses that Marx in the *Grundrisse* points out that in communism, work “must also become general” so that the individual becomes a “universally knowledgeable specialist” (392). But he misses to explicitly mention the concept of the general intellect and the importance of the notion of fixed capital in the *Grundrisse*. As a consequence, Liedman claims at the end of his book that “Marx underestimated the ability of capitalism to integrate new technologies” (617) and that he did not “imagine the third [technological] revolution – of electronics and biotechnology” (618). But when Marx writes in the *Grundrisse* that the “development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a direct force of production” (Marx 1857/58,

706), then he anticipates the emergence of a knowledge economy that is based on the technological revolution brought about by computing and microelectronics.

The Grundrisse's "Fragment on Machines" has influenced Marxist debates on technology and knowledge and should therefore form an essential part in an introduction to the *Grundrisse* (see Fuchs 2016a, 360-375). Marx sees the importance of science and knowledge in production emerging from the capitalist development of the productive forces that increases productivity in order to try to maximise profits. At a certain stage, the increasing role of science and knowledge's role in capitalism turns from quantity into the new quality of a knowledge economy as distinct mode of the organisation of labour and capital within capitalism, but at the same time creates new antagonistic forms.

Liedman argues that Marx "had not paid sufficient attention to the irrational sides of human life" (621), that "[h]e and his fellow thinkers did not see that nationalism was just as natural an element in modern society as its opposite, internationalism" (Ibid.), and that he was "blind to the nationalist overtones in the Second French Empire" (Ibid.).

Kevin B. Anderson (2016) shows in his meticulous study *Marx at the Margins. On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* that "Marx's critique of capitalism" is "far broader than is usually supposed. [...] he expended considerable time and energy on the analysis of non-Western societies, as well as that of race, ethnicity, and nationalism" (Ibid., 237). "Marx's theorization of nationalism, ethnicity, and class culminated in his 1869-70 writings on Ireland" (Ibid., 243). It is also not true that Marx disregarded the role of nationalism in Napoleon III's French Second Empire (1852-1870).

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx (1852) uses the term *Bonapartism* for analysing Napoleon III's dictatorial rule. Napoleon III staged a coup d'état and gained power in 1851. A feature of Bonapartism is that "the state seem[s] to have made itself completely independent" (Marx 1852, 186). In *The Civil War in France*, Marx argues that nationalism forms an important feature of Bonapartism at the ideological level: Bonapartism "professed to save the working class by breaking down Parliamentarism, and, with it, the undisguised subserviency of Government to the propertied classes. It professed to save the propertied classes by upholding their economic supremacy over the working class; and, finally, it professed to unite all classes by reviving for all the chimera of national glory" (Marx 1871, 330).

Marx stresses the role of nationalism as ideology that constructs a fictive national ethnicity in order to deflect political attention from the class contradiction. In the age of Donald Trump and new nationalisms, Marx's insights into nationalism form important foundations of a critical theory of nationalism and authoritarian capitalism (Fuchs 2018). Consider the following passage, in which Marx in 1870 analysed the role of ideology in distracting attention from class struggle and benefiting the ruling class:

"Ireland is the BULWARK of the *English landed aristocracy*. The exploitation of this country is not simply one of the main sources of their material wealth; it is their greatest *moral power*. [...] And most important of all! All industrial and commercial centres in England now have a working class *divided* into two *hostile* camps, English PROLETARIANS and Irish PROLETARIANS. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who forces down the STANDARD OF LIFE. In relation to the Irish worker, he feels himself to be a member of the *ruling nation* and, therefore, makes himself a tool of his aristocrats and capitalists *against Ireland*, thus strengthening their domination *over himself*. He harbours religious, social and national prejudices against him. [...] This antagonism is kept artificially alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit,

the comic papers, in short by all the means at the disposal of the ruling class. *This antagonism is the secret of the English working class's impotence, despite its organisation. It is the secret of the maintenance of power by the capitalist class. And the latter is fully aware of this*" (Marx 1870, 473; 474; 475; compare also Marx 1869).

Isn't Marx here precisely describing elements that are at the heart of today's new nationalisms? Nationalism's ideological separation of the working class into autochthonous workers and immigrant workers as two hostile camps, the strengthening of capital's power over labour through nationalism, the role of the media in the ideological spread of nationalist sentiments, nationalism as the exertion of the capitalist class' ideological power, etc.

7. Conclusion

Despite certain imprecisions in its conclusions, there is no doubt that Sven-Eric Liedman's (2018) *A World to Win: The Life and Works of Karl Marx* is a major achievement: It provides an excellent biographical account that dialectically integrates the presentation of (personal and societal) life and Marx's works. Two hundred years after Marx's birth, Sven-Eric Liedman renews the practice of dialectical Marx-biographies that was started on the occasion of Marx's centenary in 1918 by Franz Mehring's *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life*.

Recently, debates on Marx-biographies have often taken on the following typical form:

A: "What's the best newer Marx-biography that I should read? I heard about Gareth Stedman Jones' *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion* and Jonathan Sperber's *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life*. Can you recommend these books? Which one should I read?"

B: "They are both bourgeois crap. Don't read any of the two".

A: "But what newer Marx-biography written in the 21st century should I then read? Which one do you recommend?"

Sven-Eric Liedman's main achievement is that answering the latter question has now become possible.

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An Analysis of Marx's Legacy in the Field of Communication Studies

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Abstract: New communication technologies strengthen existing power relations, helping to maintain class inequalities and alienating people. In the new communication age, human subjectivity itself has become a commodity. This paper analyses the role of Marxist studies in the academic field of communication studies. It focuses on the relevance of Marx's views for understanding communication in the digital era, Marxist communication studies after the expansion of digital media, and new dimensions of communication that have been incorporated into Marxist literature. Topics that matter in this context include the intersection of play and work, media economics in the age of digital communication, digital labour, the online games industry, targeted advertising, newly emerging social inequalities, and surveillance and privacy issues. Also an outlook for potential future Marxist studies of communication is given.

Keywords: communication studies, digital capitalism, digital media, Marx, Marxist studies

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1. Introduction: Is There A Trend Towards Marxist Studies?

"We're dreaming again about the future,
by lifting our eyelashes from our toes,
we're looking into the mountains, horizons, clouds."
-- Şükrü Erbaş, Aykırı Yaşamak

Marx's approach remains the most important theory for criticising contemporary society. Changes in the last century have made Marx's theory even more important. Since the 1800s, Marx's works have influenced many disciplines. Communication studies is one of these fields. While in *Capital*, *Grundrisse*, and other works, communication is not considered as a separate topic, Marx focuses on issues such as communication, technology, and even automation. Although of course digital labour did not matter during his own time, Marx's views have a central significance in understanding this phenomenon today. Marx argued that capital has the inherent tendency to substitute labour by machines and that this will not be to the benefit of workers, but serves the profit interest of capital. Digitalisation has transformed the whole of society, and accordingly it has also transformed communications. Every stage of communication, from the production process of information to an audience's reception process, has changed. This transformation has left many journalists out of business, has brought the concept of unpaid labour to the forefront, and has turned users into commodities.

Data from Web of Science¹ covering articles, book reviews, proceeding papers, editorial materials and reviews shows that there are 17,998 articles published between 1975 and 2017 that mention “Marx”, “Marxism” or “Marxist theory” in their title or abstract. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, when looking at the number of Marxist articles published since 1975, there was a significant increase in some periods. However, it seems that this volume also diminished from time to time. In the 1970s and in the late 1990s, there was a relatively low level of Marxist publications indexed in Web of Science. Fuchs (2014a, 269) argues that the rise of neoliberalism, commodification, the rise of post-modernism, the lack of trust in alternatives to capitalism, and the relatively low presence and intensity of socio-economic struggles influenced the conditions for conducting Marxist studies.

The data obtained from Web of Science indicates that there has been an increase in the number of articles that mention “Marx”, “Marxist theory” or “Marxism” in two periods – the 1980s and the post-2008 period. The interest that has taken place since 2008 can be explained both by the role the political-economic crisis of capitalism and the increased relevance of digital technology. It can be said that the economic crisis that started in 2008 might have resulted in an increase of the critique of the capitalist system. According to Vincent Mosco (2012, 570), “the global economic crisis that filled the headlines beginning at the end of 2008 led to a resurgence of popular interest in the work of Karl Marx”. Although the number of Marxist articles has in recent years increased in comparison to previous ones, there are studies showing the ratio of Marxist to non-Marxist studies. İrfan Erdogan (2012, 354-357) analysed academic articles that were published between 2007 and 2011 and found that 210 articles out of 1,010 mentioned Marx’s name. The share of those using a Marxist methodology (excluding post-Marxism) was only 7.3%.

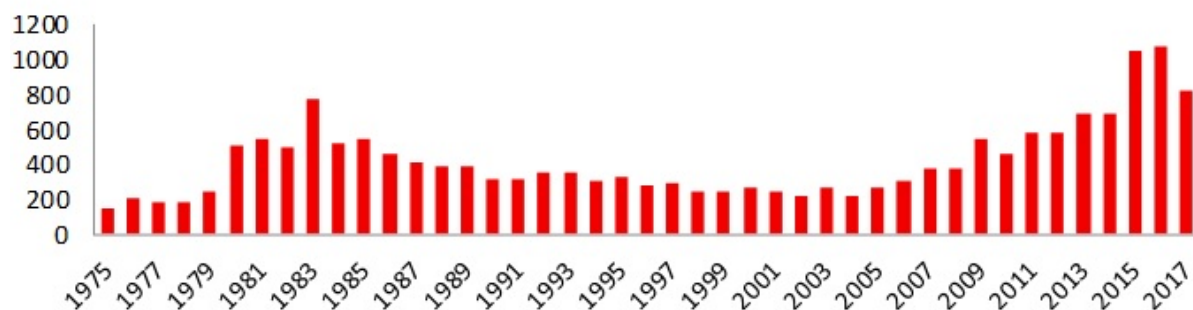


Figure 1: Annual number of articles that mention “Marx”, “Marxist theory” or “Marxism” in their title or abstract. Data source: Web of Science, 1975-2017

Even though Marxist approaches only account for a small portion of all published knowledge, it is evident that Marxist studies’ relevance has increased in recent years. The power of capital continued to advance during the 2000s (Schiller 2000; Jameson 2011). One reason for this is that new communication technologies are strengthening existing power relations, helping to maintain class inequalities and alienating humans.

¹ Web of Science covers: Science Citation Index Expanded, Social Sciences Citation Index Expanded, Arts and Humanities Citation Index, Conference Proceedings Citation Index – Science edition, Conference Proceedings Citation Index – Social Science + Humanities edition, Emerging Sources Citation Index, Book Citation Index, Index Chemicus and Current Chemical Reactions.

In the new communication age, humans' subjectivity has become a commodity. According to data from Web of Science, since 2015 there has been a dramatic increase of the number of studies that mention "Marx", "Marxist theory" or "Marxism". The Marxist analysis of digital media and digital labour may have contributed to this trend.

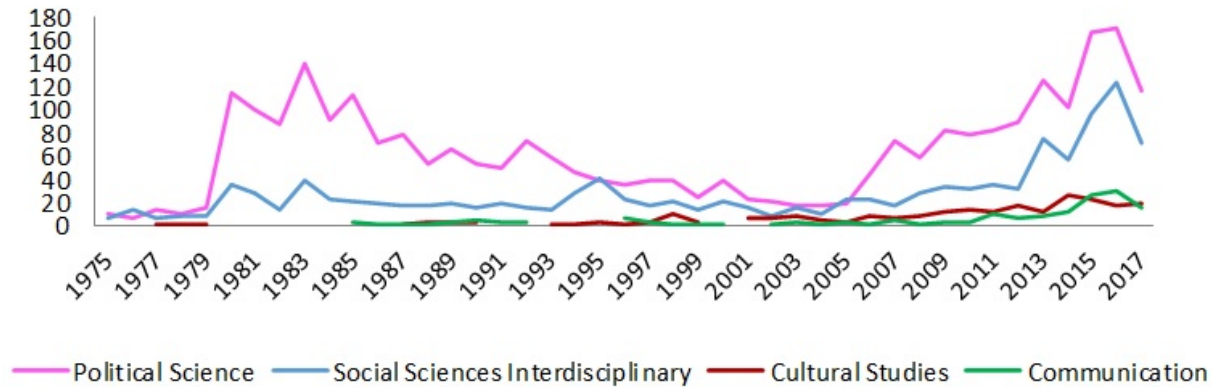


Figure 2: Annual number articles from various academic disciplines that mention "Marx", "Marxist theory" or "Marxism" in their title or abstract, data source: Web of Science, 1975-2017

There are also other developments that may indicate an increased interest in Marxist studies within the social sciences. Conferences such as "Digital Labour: Workers, Authors, Citizens"; the 4th ICTs and Society Conference, "Critique, Democracy and Philosophy in 21st Century Information Society: Towards Critical Theories of Social Media"; the 5th ICTs and Society Conference, "the Internet and Social Media at a Crossroads: Capitalism or Commonism? Perspectives for Critical Political Economy and Critical Theory"; the 6th ICTs and Society Conference, "Digital Objects, Digital Subjects: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Activism, Research & Critique in the Age of Big Data Capitalism"; or the 13th Conference of the European Sociological Association, "(Un)Making Europe: Capitalism, Solidarities, Subjectivities" were just some of these conferences. In the context of communication studies, the journal *TripleC* has been a platform for Marxian studies and has also featured special issues dedicated to that topic.

2. Foundations of Marxist Communication Studies

Since Marx's first works which were published in the 1840s, the Marxist literature has also been the basis for the work of communication. Marx (1993/1858, 524) argues:

"Capital by its nature drives beyond every spatial barrier. Thus the creation of the physical conditions of exchange – of the means of communication and transport the annihilation of space by time – becomes an extraordinary necessity for it. Only in so far as the direct product can be realized in distant markets in mass quantities in proportion to reductions in the transport costs, and only in so far as at the same time the means of communication and transport themselves can yield spheres of realization for labour".

This passage indicates that communication is a tool of commodification. Horst Holzer (2017, 712) suggests that capital is interested in the press market and that the audience market needs a medium that helps propagate the capitalist system in the form of advertisements. For this reason, communication should be taken into account when analysing capitalist society. Likewise, Benedict Anderson (1991, 37) argues that the press strengthens the capitalist system and that the phase of what he terms print capitalism constitutes the origin of capitalism.

Academics in the fields of communication and cultural studies have conducted a variety of studies that are based on Marx's approach. From 1923 onwards, the Frankfurt School's thinkers, including Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Benjamin, used a Marxist framework to criticise capitalist society. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) emphasise that the Enlightenment that criticised dogmatism became dogmatic and in a negative dialectic turned against itself. In addition, they introduced the concept of the culture industry that has had huge impact on the field of communication studies. Also Herbert Marcuse (2007, 14) analysed cultural products. He argued that cultural products reinforce false consciousness when they as commodities try to create one-dimensional thought and behaviour and a system in which ideas, aspirations and objectives are presented as fixed and unchangeable.

Massification and mass production was also an interest of Walter Benjamin (2008), whose essay on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction emphasises that mechanical production changed the aura and the conditions of the work of art. In addition, thinkers such as Louis Althusser, Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch have also emphasised the importance of ideology and culture. According to Althusser (2014, 144), the media form an ideological state apparatus that is an important medium for the reinforcement of the capitalist system. Herman and Chomsky (2010, 2) argue that media play an important role in the manufacturing and reproduction of consent.

Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch, who helped develop Western Marxism, argued that culture and ideology are key domains of capitalism. Gramsci's thoughts on the concept of hegemony also made a contribution to the foundations of understanding communication. Thinkers such as Lee Artz, Christian Fuchs, Peter Golding, Wayne Hope, Ursula Huws, Armand Mattelart, Vincent Mosco, Robert W. McChesney, Eileen Meehan, Bernard Miège, Graham Murdock, Kaarle Nordenstreng, Dan Schiller, Herbert Schiller, Dallas Smythe, Colin Sparks, Janet Wasko, and Yuezhi Zhao have made important contributions to the critical understanding of the political economy of communication. From the 1960s onwards, cultural studies has become one of the most influential approaches for studying communication. In the late 1970s, post-modernism emerged as an influential approach to the study of communication and culture. Fredric Jameson (1984) stresses that post-modernism is the cultural logic of late-capitalism. David Harvey (1990) added that postmodernism is an ideological manifestation of the emergence of capitalism's flexible regime of accumulation. At the same time, capitalism has increasingly given rise to digital technologies. As a consequence, academics working in the field of communication studies have started to analyse digital capitalism.

3. The Relevance of Marx in the Era of Digital Capitalism

Digital media has become an important part of everyday life. Computers, the Internet, mobile devices, social networks and instant messaging have established new social realities. Progressive social change cannot automatically materialise itself on Facebook, YouTube or Twitter. It also requires social spaces where humans engage in face-to-face interaction and protest (Fuchs and Mosco 2016, 4).

Mobile devices and social networks do not automatically bring about social freedom. Although Marx lived in a different capitalist period, he advanced thoughts that anticipated digital capitalism. For example, in the *Grundrisse*, he discussed capital's use of machines: "For capital, the worker is not a condition of production, only work is. If it can make machines do it, or even water, air, so much the better. And it does not appropriate the worker" (Marx 1993/1858, 498). He here stresses that capital's purpose is profit and it treats workers and machines that substitute workers as a means to that end. What is most important to capital is making profit, rather than the state of the tools that help to make it.

Marx (Ibid., 520) wrote of "the invention of the spinning machine, which supplied a greater product in the same labour time, or, what is the same thing, required less labour time for the same product – less time delay in the spinning process". Capital prefers a machine that produces an amount and value of commodities in less time to a number of workers who produce the same amount over a longer period of time. As a consequence, capital will yield more products in the same period of time. Marx (Ibid., 701) also wrote:

"Fixed capital, in its character as means of production, whose most adequate form [is] machinery, produces value, i.e. increases the value of the product [...] Capital employs machinery, rather, only to the extent that it enables the worker to work a larger part of his time for capital, to relate to a larger part of his time as time which does not belong to him, to work longer for another. Through this process, the amount of labour necessary for the production of a given object is indeed reduced to a minimum, but only in order to realize a maximum of labour in the maximum number of such objects".

Mechanisation benefits capital and extends the workers' labour time: "The most developed machinery thus forces the worker to work longer than the savage does, or than he himself did with the simplest, crudest tools" (Ibid., 708-709). Moreover, Marx (Ibid., 739) says that if "capital could possess the machinery without employing labour for the purpose, then it would raise the productive power of labour and diminish necessary labour without having to buy labour. The value of the fixed capital is therefore never an end in itself in the production of capital".

In *Capital*, there is a sentence that clearly summarises Marx's views of labour: "An instrument of labour is a thing, or complex of things, which the worker interposes between himself and the object of his labour and which serves as a conductor, directing his activity onto that object" (Marx 1990/1867, 285). The era of digital capitalism has not reduced or done away with exploitation. In the digital era, digital communications is a means of intensifying labour and increasing the rate of surplus-value.

Martin Nicolaus, the English translator of the *Grundrisse*, writes in his foreword that Marx shows that the means of communication enrich not labour, but capital:

"Thus all the progress of civilization, or in other words every increase in the powers of social production, [...] in the productive powers of labour itself – such as results from science, inventions, division and combination of labour, improved means of communication, creation of the world market, machinery etc. - enriches not the worker, but rather capital" (Nicolaus 1993, 21).

Antonio Negri (1993, 90) in his analysis of post-Fordist capitalism writes that

“[the] proletariat embodies a substantial section of the working class that has been restructured within processes of production that are automated, and computer controlled processes which are centrally managed by an ever-expanding intellectual proletariat, which is increasingly directly engaged in labour that is computer-related, communicative and in broad terms educative/formative”.

Inspired by the thoughts of Marx, many thinkers have analysed communication technology's role in capitalism, domination and standardisation (see for example Horkheimer and Adorno 2002; Marcuse 2007; Benjamin 2008; Jameson 1984). According to Jameson (1984, 79), technology is not something that transforms society, but a medium that helps to maintain the status quo. Communications and networks are tools for the organisation of multinational capitalism.

Digital networks have added a whole new dimension of alienation by turning users' subjectivity into a commodity. The producer becomes the product; targeted advertising is an important aspect of digital capitalism (see Fuchs 2017b, 2014c). When enrolling in social networks, users are sharing personal information and this data is used by advertisers to sell more products. Moreover, there are privacy violations in constant data surveillance. Communication studies scholars have started analysing such phenomena based on Marxist theory.

4. Marxist Communication Studies in the Age of Digital Media

Marxist communication scholars in the digital era are interested in a variety of topics including online advertising, online alienation, digital labour, digital capitalism, the intersection of play and labour ('playbour'), digital monopolies, big data, the online game industry, digital inequalities, online surveillance, online privacy, nationalism online, racism online, digital communication in the context of class struggles, the digital commons, alternative online media, digital alienation, etc.

Dan Schiller argues that contemporary capitalism can best be characterised as digital capitalism (2011, 925). Marxist communication scholars have used the notion of digital labour for both paid and unpaid labour practices in the context of digital environments (Terranova 2000; Mosco and McKercher 2007; Manzerolle 2010; Fuchs 2010; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d; Fuchs and Sevignani 2013; Scholz 2013; Brown 2014; Pfeiffer 2014). According to Christian Fuchs (2014c, 351), digital labour is in fact alienated digital work. Labour is in capitalism alienated from itself, its instruments, objects and products.

The digital labour discourse is no longer just a debate limited to communication studies. It is also discussed within broader Marxist studies. For example, David Harvey (2017, 56-105) asserts that in advanced capitalist societies factory labour is replaced by other forms of labour, and digital labour is among them. Technology mediates digital labour that takes place everywhere. The difference between digital labour and other forms of labour is not only de-spatialisation: the dominant digital platforms are based on advertising and are generally characterised by unpaid labour and new forms of exploitation:

“What was initially conceived as a liberatory regime of collaborative production of an open access commons has been transformed into a regime of hyper-exploitation upon which capital freely feeds. The unrestrained

pillage by big capital (like Amazon and Google) of the free goods produced by a self-skilled labour force has become a major feature of our times. This carries over into the so-called cultural industries". (Harvey 2017, 96)

"It is also interesting that some of the most vigorous sectors of development in our times – like Google and Facebook and the rest of the digital labour sector – have grown very fast on the back of free labour". (Ibid., 102)

In *Assembly* (2017), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2017, 119-273) write about the changing composition of capital with reference to the digitalisation of labour. They suggest that labour is transformed by digital platforms that track users' behaviour and generate web search hierarchies. Users create content without any payment, their content is sold to other users, and this process never stops. Users both produce and consume day and night. Another difference between digital labour and earlier forms of labour is the absence of a boss who imposes the division of labour. In digital labour, the division of labour is constituted by the relationships among users. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2017, 97- 98) say that "cooperative forms of social labour can and should be opened for common use." This emphasis represents their argument about private property that "the common is not property". Thus, if digital labour can be opened for common use, one of the main pillars of capitalism will eventually be removed.

A couple of other scholars within the field of communication studies have analysed digital alienation, which has become a prominent issue within Marxist communication studies (Andrejevic 2011; Comor 2010; Fuchs and Sandoval 2014; Krüger and Johanssen 2014). Advertising and branding are core features of the capitalist system today, which is why scholars are interested in this topic. Fuchs (2014b, 111) argues that advertising is one of the industries that is dominated by a huge amount of unpaid labour.

Advertising is also related to other phenomena, such as big data. Organising targeted advertising requires the generation, storage and processing of big data. Big data creates new ethical problems because of algorithms that enable and conduct surveillance. Fuchs (2017a; 2017b) argues that big data has emerged from the surveillance-industrial complex that combines state surveillance and corporate surveillance of digital data and the Internet. Big data serves surveillance, surveillance serves capitalism. Sebastian Sevignani (2017, 82) sees surveillance as an aspect of the commodification of information. "[M]ost politicians and corporate leaders believe that the future of capitalism lies in the commodification of information" (Barbrook 1998, 135). Targeted advertising is one of the mechanisms that keep the capitalist system going. It fosters sales and consumption and thereby the production of ever more commodities and ever newer commodities.

Users' activities, sociality, knowledge, and networks become a product of their own work when they publish things on social media. Metaphorically, one can therefore say that the user has become a commodity. What is meant by this formulation is that human subjectivity has become ever more commodified and has reached the realm of human cognition and communication. Human subjectivity is also a use-value that enables social networking in online communities (Fuchs and Sevignani 2013, 259). The online game industry, MMORPGs and many other user-generated platforms are also transforming consumers into both prosumers and their subjectivity into commodities. Creating an avatar in an online game run by a for-profit company is unpaid labour.

Online games are the most direct expression of the blurring line between labour and play. More generally speaking, neoliberal capitalism has turned free time into labour time and makes cultural labour appear as play, fun, and enjoyment. Increasingly, we no longer realise that we are workers and are exploited, because labour feels like fun.

According to Fuchs and Sevignani (2013, 261), the concept of inverse commodity fetishism is a term that defines people's use of social media platforms and online games: on corporate social media, we do not experience the commodity, but only social interaction. The commodification of subjectivity is hidden behind the immediate social experience. Fuchs and Sevignani argue that classical commodity fetishism is inverted.

5. The Future of Marxist Communication Studies

Communication scholars will continue to study digital capitalism's transformation. For doing so, basic texts, such as Marx's works, will continue to be guiding lights for critical analysis. Douglas Kellner (2002, 31-41) argues that the works of Frankfurt School thinkers can be used to analyse communicative capitalism that has been dramatically shaped by new media and computer technologies. The culture industry, media capital, and digital technology mediate everyday life. Fuchs and Sandoval (2014, 515) also suggest that "critical theory can inform potential and actual struggles for a better world". According to Fuchs and Sevignani (2013, 287), if William Morris and Herbert Marcuse lived today, they would criticise today's digital media landscape, in which users predominantly consume the cultural works of celebrities and culture has not been democratised despite the false claims that we live in a participatory culture (see Fuchs 2017b, Chapter 3). Besides the works of Marx, the whole history and tradition of Marxist theory and Marxist cultural theory, starting with the work of Frankfurt School thinkers, can today be used as the main starting point for future studies (see Fuchs 2016). Fuchs (2014a), for example, argues that Dallas Smythe's works are helpful in three ways. Smythe: a) reminds us of the importance of Marxism, b) stresses the distinction between administrative and critical research that is a crucial line of struggle in the time of neoliberalism and the new capitalist crisis, and c) puts forward a concept of the audience commodity that has informed the digital labour debate (see Fuchs 2014c; 2015). Marxist theory is the most important framework for analysing contemporary society and its communicative structures and practices.

Marxist studies allow us to show that the things that are thought to be real often do not really reflect the truth, but are ideological in character. So for example, according to Fuchs (2016, 172), users who claim that Facebook is great often only think about immediate individual advantages and fail to notice the role that digital exploitation and digital surveillance play in online communication.

Rapidly evolving technology and artificial intelligence continue to transform digital labour. In particular, we need more studies that empirically study the working conditions in the rapidly changing digital industries.

A Marxian analysis of communication should:

"[...] demonstrate how communication and culture are material practices, how labour and language are mutually constituted, and how communication and information are dialectical instances of the same social activity, the social construction of meaning. Situating these tasks within a larger framework of understanding power and resistance would place communication directly into the flow of a Marxian tradition that remains alive and relevant today". (Mosco 2009, 44)

Fuchs (2014a, 284) argues that capital accumulation, class relations, domination and ideology and class struggle are key aspects of society today and its analysis.

6. Conclusion

Marxist scholarship has gained new importance since 2008. The study of digital media, digital labour and other dimensions of digitality has become a significant aspect of Marxist studies. Marxism has to a significant degree shaped communication studies. Digitalisation, artificial intelligence and automation have resulted in the substitution of feelings by algorithmically generated information. The liquid relations that Bauman refers to in *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (2013) have resulted in real relationships and feelings being replaced by liquid connections. Digitalisation does not merely affect emotions. It affects everything concerning humans and society. Benjamin's (2008) work maintains its importance today as this age is witnessing unprecedented digital reproduction that is destroying originality. However, not only art, but also media products, culture and even human subjectivity have become commodities in the digital age.

Digitalisation has affected and transformed society in its totality. Marx's analysis of labour has become more important than ever. Along with the works of Marx, the whole history and tradition of Marxist theory should also be considered today in new ways in order to analyse the new dimensions of capitalism.

Analysing communication means analysing the production, circulation and consumption of information. A Marxist analysis of communication requires a focus on both labour and ideology. False consciousness has now become extreme false consciousness. The fact that humans love social media does not mean that they are not exploited. There is an ideological illusion that makes people who use social networks often think they are benefiting from these networks, although the economic benefits go to Google, Facebook, etc. without their noticing it.

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On the Lumpen-Precariat-To-Come

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Abstract: As a prolegomena to writing a critique of contemporary capitalism which takes into account its semiotic, affective dimensions and which emphasises the notion of hyper-capitalism with Asian characteristics, and in considering the nature of the floating, heterogeneous population of the lumpenproletariat in the Asia-Pacific region in the 21st century, the authors believe they remain faithful to Marx and the 11th thesis on Feuerbach. Bringing a unique perspective to the debate and raising pressing issues regarding the exploitation of the lumpenproletariat, we are not content to merely revisit the concept of the lumpenproletariat in Marx's writings such as *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) but to apply this concept to the contemporary conditions of capitalism and especially to the loci of the precariat in Asia. Our goal is to begin to account for the changing demographic of labour flows, the precarity of life, the modern day slavery which takes place in our time. In examining the passage from the lumpenproletariat, hitherto defined as “non-class” or “people without a definite trace”, to lumpen-precariat, defined as people not seen in Asian economies (refugees, the illegally employed, illegal migrants, nationless foreign labour, the withdrawn clan, sex industry workers, night workers; those behind walls, gated communities, and other entrance-exit barriers), this paper discloses not only the subsistence of those in the non-places of the world – in the technocratic-commercial archipelago of urban technopoles – but also and, arguably more importantly, on the Outside, namely the rest of the planet, the other six-sevenths of humanity. This paper looks for “a” missing people, “a” singular, people yet to come, those exiled, excluded and unseen – sited on the edges of respectable society.

Keywords: lumpenproletariat, Japan, Korea, Marx, Deleuze, Guattari

1. Introduction

Certain déclassé, degraded or degenerated elements of the proletariat are named by Marx as the *lumpenproletariat* (Draper 1972; Thoburn 2014). In *On the International Workingmen's Association and Karl Marx*, Bakunin (1971, 294) describes this concept as “the ‘riffraff’, that ‘rabble’ almost unpolluted by bourgeois civilization”. The lumpenproletariat signifies the destitute, the lowest of the low, the underclass, the social scum. Put in contemporary parlance, this element is without work, education or vocational training. It is the proletariat of the proletariat. The lumpenproletariat constitutes the heterogeneous, waste, unproductive expenditure. As such it is unassimilable. It is the modern day NEET, the coinage of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the *freeta* in Japan (the portmanteau of the English word freelance and the German word *Arbeiter* or labourer). It is the precariat. This abject element works in the labour force – often informally, sometimes illegally and casually, forming a disposable class whose work is manifestly precarious and so their existence too as they are essentially *without place*. Their space is outside or on the margins of the law. They are the spectres of the spectacle of hyper-consumption. Put another way, the lumpenproletariat *en mass* does not constitute work as their *œuvre* is excluded from the world of work and reason (Lingis 2017).

For Mikhail Bakunin, the lumpenproletariat carries “in its heart, in its aspirations, in all necessities and the miseries of its collective position, all the germs of the socialism of the future” (Bakunin 2004, 48). Why? Because the lumpenproletariat is a revolutionary class untarnished by power relations, unpolluted by “bourgeois civilization”, there is no surplus-value to sell. As a reserve army of labour it is radical as it is rootless. The lumpenproletariat is composed of untouchables, prostitutes, rioters, revolutionaries, even poets and artists – the good, the bad and the ugly. In other language, this heterogeneous mass is comprised of those schizos, hysterics, paranoiacs as invoked in Deleuze and Guattari’s work (1983). The lumpenproletariat is the Ur-proletariat; it is present in all societies in the metakosmia or *intermundia* of the world, subsisting there in the middle of things with the possibility to act, to act as a catalyst, to seek out the limits of capitalism.

Marx discusses the concept of the lumpenproletariat in various places. First used in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels 1845/46), it then appears at length in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Marx 1852), or also in *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels 1848). In volume one of *Capital* (Marx 1867), in Chapter 25.4, entitled “Different Forms of Existence of the Relative Surplus Population. The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation”, Marx (1867, 797) describes the actual lumpenproletariat as “vagabonds, criminals, prostitutes”. In 1848, in Chapter One of *The Communist Manifesto*, the lumpenproletariat is named the “dangerous class”, the social scum, “that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society” (Marx and Engels 1848, 494). While it has no revolutionary self-consciousness in itself, it nevertheless, for Marx, is tied to the question of the proletarian revolution. Outside society, in the *intermundia*, between worlds, it carries the transcendental potential to transform the inner workings. Yet, Marx in *The Communist Manifesto* believes it is nigh possible for this “dangerous class” to be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution. He writes:

[That] passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue (Marx and Engels 1848, 494).

Marx describes this composition in depth in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in which he speaks of the lumpenproletariat as “the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither” (Marx 1852, 149). It is composed widely of outlaws, vagabonds, discharged soldiers and ex-cons, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, pimps, brothel keepers, porters, tinkers and beggars. While this remains worthy of scholarly exegesis, we must constantly update this list. In the 21st century, the lumpenproletariat or exploited multitude is without tribe, clan, without employment: a living dead or permanent underclass. The question asked by Marx remains profound: How to transform the waste product of society, the disposable, surplus, the nonassimilable and nongovernable into a mass capable of ushering in a new epoch? (Stallybrass 1990). This is taken up by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. He grants the lumpenproletariat a role in the envisioned African revolution. Fanon writes: “So the pimps, the hooligans, the unemployed, and the petty criminals throw themselves into the struggle like stout working men [...] The prostitutes too, and the maids who are paid two pounds a month, all who turn in circles between suicide and madness, will recover their balance, once more go forward, and march proudly in the great procession of the awakened nation” (Fanon 1963, 130).

Félix Guattari picks up on Marx's focus on the role of desire, the production of subjectivity and its importance as a tool of revolutionary momentum and imagination in the first half of the 18th century. While Marx's understanding of the social subject is deemed distinct from Guattari's own sense, which is to say a focus on fantasy, social creativity or "transversality", Guattari says: "I am glad to find in Marx – and no longer the 'young Marx' – this re-emergence of subjectivity". He writes: "[N]owadays the margins (the emarginati), the new forms of subjectivity, can also affirm themselves in their vocation to manage society, to invent a new social order, without thereby having to take their directions from [...] phallogocratic, competitive, brutal values. They can express themselves through their becomings of desire" (Guattari and Rolnik 2008, 416). In the wake of the student uprisings in 1968, Guattari – deliriously – in "Students, the Mad, and 'Delinquents'" a paper delivered at the Third International Congress of Psychodrama, Sociodrama, and Institutional Therapy, held in Baden, September, 1968, designated revolutionary militant escapees, "the Katangais" or thugs - as those who in fleeing control could be conceived as prototypes of the "new man" of the future socialist society.

2. Japan

It is clear that 200 years after the birth of Marx, the composition of the lumpenproletariat has changed from "vagabonds, criminals, prostitutes", pariahs and untouchables, to precarious workers, a working poor, to contract staff, day staff, zero hour contract staff, and more desperately to the underclass or permanent underclass. Marx's distinction between the revolutionary labouring poor and the reactionary lumpenproletariat no longer holds under the global conditions of contemporary exploitation.

I ask my Japanese students about the term. They stumble for the smartphones for the answer. I tell them that *ルンペン* (lumpen), a Japanese word, is from German. The word is tied to *浮浪者* (furousha) which formally means vagrancy. It is a verb too: to wander, or to bum about. Synonymous nouns include a vagrant, a street urchin, a waif, a tramp, or hobo. It is also synonymous with a jobless or unemployed person. A hobo's life is translated as *ルンペン生活* (lumpen seikatsu). I tell them that in Samuel Johnson's 1755 Dictionary, the lumpenproletariat is designated "wretched, vile, or vulgar" – a sub-human class. They form the lowest level of the proletariat, unskilled workers, the precariat, the unemployed or underemployed, the working poor, alienated from the society they serve. No one knows of its existence and meaning. No student I have come across knows of its existence and meaning. More than this, few want to know of its existence and meaning, save compromising their blissful, convenient everydayness.

The question "how can Marx's theory of the lumpenproletariat help us to understand capitalism today?" in hyper-authoritarian Asian economies found in Korea, Japan, Singapore, and the Philippines is a timely one as it considers the various modes of composition of the lumpenproletariat in metropolises like Seoul, Tokyo, Singapore, or Manila. The neologism *lumpenprecariat* is used here to distinguish it from the historical sense of lumpenproletariat in Marx and the modern sense of precariat in Japan, as discussed by Franco Berardi (2009), Anne Allison (2013), and others. We are looking to assess the formation of the precariat of the precariat, the lumpen of the precariat, the waste and wasted of all levels of the socius.

In Japan, the heterogeneous formation of the lumpenproletariat has been designated the "*working poor*". Loulia Mermigka (2010, 138) designates the lumpenproletariat as those without fixed political allegiance. It is a heterogeneous collectivity of "high school and university students, unnameable proletarians [...] refugees, immigrants and civilians". Such a group may Mermigka explains, "choose to participate in

the violent expression against the police, against chain stores as symbols of the society of the spectacle, against the banks as symbols of financial capital, and against public buildings as symbols of the state” (Ibid.). Mermigka argues it is timely to analyse and search for “the anarchist subjectifications” and new revolutionary connections with the lumpenproletariat and with minorities (Ibid., 140). Following Deleuze and Guattari, Mermigka argues that it is from within “the unnameable proletariat, the unemployed and the minorities” (Ibid.) that new lines of flight will be drawn and “vital connections made against the automation of the capitalist axiomatic and its bureaucratic programming” (Ibid.). Out of this world of bums, outcasts and multitude in the Asian region, we must forecast the possibility of another world and people.

In Japan, the composition of the lumpenproletariat may have shifted somewhat. The multitude work but do so precariously (Berardi 2009; Allison 2013). They remain a non-class, a “people without a definite trade, *gens sans feu et sans aveu* [men without hearth or home]” as Marx (1850, 62) says in Part I of *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850* and they vanish as soon as they are spotted (see König and Kremers 2008). This form of subaltern, identity is without home, without employment, without a state. It is a precipitate on the meniscus of the socius.

There are tens of thousands of young people who work the night shift in Tokyo to make rice balls and sandwiches for the convenience stores. Many of these young people I suspect are without official paperwork. They lead a precarious existence outside the normal way of the world. Japan cannot survive without them. They are not seen. And intentionally so. If they were seen the whole system would collapse. This is the other side of the middle class dream, the lumpenproletariat who work in the shadows, in the dark, working the night shift away from respectable Japanese society. Their existence is not seen.

In the early 1980s I began reading Marx when dogmatic ideas and mantras about the revolution to come were very much out of vogue. And after 1989, little was left but to indulge in the spectre of Marx. Yet I continue to read him now even though talk is less about species-being (*Gattungswesen*) and the return of man to man and more about the object and non-human relations. Furthermore, the trauma of the Anthropocene has rightly redirected questions back to the needs of humanity. Yet, it is Marx’s work which redirects my attention so as to think about the precarious lives of vast swathes of humanity. This is less a desire to interpret the world renew and more a desperate need to transform material reality to help those born into this world. Yet, gone are the days when “we” could take inspiration from Marx’s (1843, 187) claim in the *Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law* that “[b]y proclaiming the *dissolution of the hitherto existing world order* the proletariat merely states the *secret of its own existence*, for it is *in fact* the dissolution of that world order.”

As both perpetrators and victims of Integrated World Capitalism (Guattari and Negri 1990), we, without the democratic right to vote, who must move around the globe to work, we, the lumpenproletariat, dare not organize and contest the way of things – lest we are sent back home. We have a membership to the most docile generation that has ever existed, according to Agamben.

Our revolutionary energy is spent elsewhere – on computer games, porn, gambling, endless forms of intoxication to escape the reality of the working day. Moreover, it is not so much that the “people are missing” as Deleuze and Guattari insist but that they are invisible. We do not see them. And “we” do, but do not wish to. These are the people who work in the factories and farms on shadowy apprentice schemes which escape Japan’s strict immigration laws. Those who start work late and finish only in the early morning. We see groups of them at the train stations getting on buses in the

evening; young, precarious, downcast and illegal. They are the people which polite society does not wish to see but hypocritically demands. Who or what is this lumpenproletariat, this “industrial reserve army”? Its composition are the Filipino women who service the sex industry, who are sometimes forced into prostitution or, if not, who come freely to work for several months to save money for those back home. Žižek talks about this reality too, those from Bangladesh who work in the Middle East on the construction sites, whose passports are taken away; as private citizens they are not allowed to visit the malls and supermarkets they have built as workers. He writes in *Living at the end of Times* (Žižek 2010, x):

[N]owhere are the new forms of apartheid more palpable than in the wealthy Middle Eastern oil states – Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Dubai. Hidden on the outskirts of the cities, often literally behind walls, are tens of thousands of “invisible” immigrant workers doing all the dirty work, from servicing to construction, separated from their families and refused all privileges.

Žižek asks the right questions, “what do you want, what kind of society do you want?” Yet, for those on the outskirts of society, there is no reply, other than a long, brooding silence. There is no rejection of the life of the city, there is no desire for withdrawal, no purist commitment to authenticity; those destitute populations in the outer zone of the “archipelago of urban technopoles” (Lingis, quoted in Sheppard, Sparks and Thomas 2005, 192) only want to belong to the inner circles of the city – who want to exploit others, who want to enjoy their will to revenge. In *The First Person Singular*, Lingis (2007, 85) puts the universal brotherhood of man in question:

The lumpenproletariat, the inner-city poor, the slum dwellers do not form a homogeneous class, but instead milieus, clans, marginals, packs, and gangs linked by attractions and repulsions, sympathies and antipathies, alliances, and penetrations where individuals are coupled on to a few implements and a few luxury objects and to other individuals. Cues, watchwords, passwords order these couplings. They are discontinuous utterances. They are not derived from a coherent ideology.

Marx’s views are not altogether prejudicial. He writes of the honest and “working” lumpenproletariat (Marx 1857/58, 271): “From whore to pope, there is a mass of such rabble. But the honest and ‘working’ lumpenproletariat belongs here as well; e.g. the great mob of porters etc. who render service in seaport cities etc.” This springs to mind Lingis’s comments in *Dangerous Emotions* in his chapter entitled “Joy in Dying” in which he speaks of the role of the hero:

Heroes do not merely occupy their minds with the oppression and misery of a whole people and derive out of this pity for others, felt as a personal affliction, the forces with which to anticipate a future and construct a strategy of liberation. They are those who understand not only the suffering of the downtrodden, but also their bravery [...] Their cause is not to enlist the whole people in the service of an idea that sacrifices the present to the future, only to extend the world of work and reason to the marginalized, to those languishing in shantytowns and adrift in the filthy nights of cities. Their cause and their struggle is to think and work for a world where the laughter of those on doorstoops, in dingy bars, on the docks, and in the fields will be heard over the guffaws of the rich and powerful (Lingis 2000, 169-170).

From the above it can be seen that it is timely to write a social critique of the masses of people, the slum dwellers and marginals, living in “hopeless economic conditions and cultural collapse of the outer zone” (Lingis, quoted in Sheppard, Sparks and Thomas 2005, 205). Lingis (2000, 156) continues:

The sacred is not only what sovereignly places itself outside the world of work in sumptuous splendor; it is also what the world of work and reason relentlessly drives out, torments, and crushes. The delinquent, the derelict, the senile, the lumpenproletariat – this living human waste, more difficult to dispose of than the industrial waste of high-tech America – excites the most vehement repugnances.

3. Korea: Bitcoin and the Lumpenproletariat

The lumpenproletariat, christened by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, is the by-product of capitalism. Its members are working class, but do not recognise themselves as such, that is, they are a working class without class consciousness. When Marx and Engels coined the term to criticise the “underclass” they regarded the lumpenproletariat as those who are not able to think about the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. For Marx and Engels, the lumpenproletariat is the “dangerous class” who are ready to collaborate with reactionary forces at any moment. However, this presupposition should be revised once observing the existence of the lumpenproletariat. They still seem to be the dangerous underclass, but not in the Marx and Engels’ sense. In a different way, they emerge as the incarnation of desiring machines. Picking up a case in South Korea, the so-called Bitcoin Syndrome reveals how the dangerous elements of the lumpenproletariat come to exist.

Capitalism operates as the mechanism of self-cancellation. It does not produce its buriers but destroyers. The more productive, the more useless. Exchange-values come to replace the essence of use-values. The point Marx tries to make through his critique of capitalism is that exchange-values disguise themselves for use-values. In this way, the lumpenproletariat could be misrecognised as workers. However, they are not. The Bitcoin Syndrome in South Korea apparently exposes the truth of the lumpenproletariat, the “scum of the earth” as Hannah Arendt (1979, 267) named refugees. As non-workers, they are not useful; in other words, they have no human capital. They cannot make a profit by selling their labour power. Bitcoin Syndrome brings into focus the relation between economy and state. Students and young people do not want to work in the old ways but to get rich quick through cryptocurrency trading, a desire the government cannot control and regulate. In South Korea, young people are fascinated by the idea of investing in Bitcoin. They insist that Bitcoin is the only hope for their future, in the sense that it would allow them to rise up the social ladder. According to *The New York Times* on 3 December 2017, “nowhere has the public frenzy been more feverish than in South Korea.” One young man on a TV programme dealing with the issue of the Bitcoin craze argues that “you are always already underclass, even though you have 5000 dollars”. This sentiment is shared by many Korean young people and can be attributed to the neo-liberal cynical credo that “there is no alternative”. Korean young people have suffered from unemployment and economic austerity very long time. In my view, this cynicism is reproduced and enhanced by neo-liberal bio-politics, which reduces humans conceptually to the notion of the “population”. Only statistic data represents them, though not in a round figure, but a flat fragment. The useless scum exists as indicators of consumption, in graphs of desire, but they nonetheless

are not so much passive as aggressive. Their cynicism expresses criticism of capitalism, even though no method is offered to exit the way things are.

What the Bitcoin Syndrome proves is that the lumpenproletariat would demolish the capitalist system if there is a chance of escape from it. The members of the lumpenproletariat are out of order, working as anarchic energy against the state, a flowing and floating population hidden behind the sum of data. They will cancel the capitalist axiomatics by exhibiting their uselessness as labour power, resisting the use of them in the capitalist mode of production. As Marx and Engels say, they are not a revolutionary class, but if there is no longer any revolution breaking through capitalism, how should they find any possible exit from this hellish reality? They do not intend to revolt against the system, but they do have the intention to stay in their uselessness, resisting the way in which capitalism commodifies their labour power. In sum, they do not want to be workers, but capitalists. This is the way of life of being the underclass. It seems that they are definitely complicit in reproducing the given system, but not in the usual way, perhaps in the dangerous conjunctures of desires.

4. Conclusion

In the technocratic-commercial archipelago of urban technopoles, we continue to work because not only are millions of people suffering in loneliness and isolation, living precarious lives, their subjectivity ripped away from them, engineered by others, but because we are them too, teaching, writing and living, without the rule of law and the right to vote. We are those who travel thousands of miles to find work, who live in spaces invisible to mainstream society, disenfranchised, and at the mercy of the abuse of power. Incapable of dreaming alternatives to the status quo: this is the modern day lumpenproletariat. We are them and we too must imagine a different tomorrow. We share the decision to embrace a world in which the lumpen and the philosopher will equally belong to groups-in-fusion focused on the transformation of the world.

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Law, Marxism and Method

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Abstract: Law is crucial to the maintenance and reproduction of capitalism. While Marx never produced a comprehensive theory of law, state and rights, there is much in his work, and in the broader Marxist tradition, that can help us understand the nature and role of law in contemporary capitalism. This paper sketches out some of the key resources from within the Marxist tradition that can assist us in developing Marxist understandings of law, state and rights today. Specifically, the focus is on the question of method, drawing out three key strands from Marx's own work: (i) the importance of dialectical materialist analysis; (ii) the historically specific and transitory nature of capitalism and (iii) the centrality of class antagonism and class struggle. The argument advanced here, in sum, is that Marxist explanations of law, state and rights should foreground these analytical reference points, in order to make the role of law intelligible, and to begin to sketch how movements for fundamental social change might understand and engage with the law.

Keywords: law, state, human rights, Marxism, method, dialectical materialism, class struggle

1. Introduction

Law, in its myriad forms, plays a crucially important role in the maintenance and reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. Rights, property rules, contracts, criminal codes, constitutions, international treaties and the jurisprudential traditions that develop around them, all serve to structure and legitimate social relations within capitalist societies. Notwithstanding the importance of law, in this regard, Marx never produced a comprehensive theory of law, state and rights, on a par with his critique of political economy in *Capital* (Cain 1974; Fine 1984). As a result of this the first generation of Marxists never really developed a thorough theory of the bourgeois state (Lukács 1970, 61), and “the whole of the classical Marxist tradition bequeathed a deathly silence” on the issues of law, state and rights (Hunt 1992, 110).

Throughout the twentieth century, particularly at times of pronounced capitalist crisis, a number of prominent Marxists did seek to develop thoroughgoing accounts of the role of law, state and rights in the reproduction of capitalism. Each of these theorists, from Pashukanis (1978) and Renner (1949) to Althusser (1971), Poulantzas (1978) and Thompson (1975), made important interventions and further enhanced, one way or another, Marxist analyses of law, state and rights. At the same time, each of these interventions has marked shortcomings: from the one-sided and undialectical presentation of bourgeois legality in Pashukanis, through Renner's misplaced reformism, the political quietism of Althusser, and Thompson's unwarranted faith in the rule of law. As such there is much to be gained from revisiting “Marx's Marxism” (Draper 1977, 18) in order to orientate Marxist analyses of law, state and rights today.¹

¹ There is, of course, much interesting scholarship on the relationship between law and Marxism, over and above the work of these canonical thinkers in the Marxist tradition. For a useful overview of the field, see the repository maintained at: <https://legalform.blog>.

In this brief intervention, the central argument put forward is that it is from Marx's method (broadly conceived) that we can gain most in developing analyses of law, state and rights today. In particular, it will be argued that there are three key themes in Marx's work that should inform Marxist approaches to the study of law, state and rights, namely: (i) the centrality of dialectical materialism; (ii) recognising the historically contingent and transitory nature of capitalism; and (iii) foregrounding class antagonism as central to understanding the dynamics of capitalist social relations.

2. The Centrality of Method

The collected works of Marx and Engels contain numerous discrete references to law, state and rights (Cain and Hunt 1979). However, in these various references there is no coherent, consistent theory or perspective. For example, in *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels state their unequivocal opposition to law (Marx and Engels 1845/46, 209), while later in Volume 1 of *Capital* (Marx 1867, Chapter 10) and in his *Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association* (Marx 1864) Marx lauds the successful struggle to have the ten-hour day enshrined in law, as a triumph for the working class. In *The Communist Manifesto* the state is construed in purely instrumental terms as a committee for managing the affairs of the ruling class (Marx and Engels 1848, 486) while at other times its relative autonomy is appreciated and stressed (Engels 1886 and 1890). And finally, across the voluminous collected works of Marx and Engels rights are both derided and defended at different times (O'Connell 2018).

As such, there is little to be gained from what Hal Draper terms "pointless quotation-mongering" (Draper 1977, 17), or attempting to hang a complete Marxist theory of law, state and rights on this or that isolated statement or argument. There is no single or definitive Marxist theory of law, state and rights present in the work of Marx. This is because Marx, in spite of his ambition, did "not produce, as is sometimes supposed, a theory of everything" (Harvey 2012, 5). In place of comprehensive answers as to how to approach and think about the role of law, state and rights under capitalism, what we get from Marx is "methodological suggestions about the questions to be asked and where to start with answering them" (Hunt 2004, 602). This point about the centrality of method is made even more expansively by Lukács, who argued that even if we

"Orthodox Marxism, therefore, does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx's investigations. It is not the 'belief' in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a 'sacred' book. On the contrary, orthodoxy refers exclusively to *method*. It is the scientific conviction that dialectical materialism is the road to truth and that its methods can be developed, expanded and deepened only along the lines laid down by its founders. It is the conviction, moreover, that all attempts to surpass or 'improve' it have led and must lead to over-simplification, triviality and eclecticism" (Lukács 1971, 1).

We may prefer to eschew the language of orthodoxy as antiquated or unhelpful, but even allowing for that, the point that Lukács makes here is of central importance. Namely that while we can learn from what Marx (and Engels) said specifically about law, state and rights, there is no need or value in simply trying to find the one, "correct" Marxist stance on law, state and rights. Rather, we can and should focus our attention on the methodological framework that Marx's work provides us with and use this as the starting point for developing Marxist analyses of law, state and rights adequate to the challenges of capitalism today.

3. Dialectical Materialism

C.L.R. James argues that it is “impossible to deal with Marxism” unless upon the basis of dialectical materialism (James 1999, 44). Similarly, Bertell Ollman argues that all “of Marx’s theories have been shaped by his dialectical outlook [...] and it is only by grasping dialectics that these theories can be properly understood, evaluated and put to use” (Ollman 2003, 4). It is important to recognise both elements of this methodological foundation in Marx’s work – dialectics and materialism. These two elements are crucially related, and integral to one another – as Chase puts it, within this schema materialism provides the roadmap, but would be useless without the compass supplied by dialectics (Chase 1997, 33). As Marx himself noted, he took the dialectical method developed by Hegel and revolutionised it, by shifting the focus from abstract contradictions between ideas, to identifying the material contradictions in social life (Marx 1867, 102-103).

Marx’s appropriation of aspects of Hegel’s dialectical method (abstraction, contradiction, negation etc.) is augmented by his emphasis on materialism. In his well-known Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx elaborates on his materialist philosophy, noting that over time his studies had led him to the conclusion that “neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life” (Marx 1859, 262). Marx develops this point further, when he argues that

“In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (Ibid., 263).

It follows from this that in approaching questions of law, state, and rights, Marxist analyses should begin by stressing the specific historical and material conditions that give rise to particular legal forms. At the same time, this has to be supplemented with a dialectical understanding of specific legal forms not as things, but as complex and contradictory processes and relationships. Not static and one-sided, but dynamic, contradictory and changing. As Chase notes, stasis “represents appearance only, contradiction is the truth. Everything, in an odd but important way, is constantly in the process of becoming its opposite” (Chase 1997, 39).

Adopting this approach means contesting and rejecting liberal and legal formalist understandings of law as the natural embodiment of “human reason” (Montesquieu 1949/1748, 6). Instead, Marxist analyses should stress the specific and complex ways in which particular legal or state forms correspond to and bolster the prevailing mode of production. This does not entail a simplistic or mechanical deployment of the base-superstructure metaphor. Instead, Marxist analyses can and should acknowledge the relative autonomy that legal regimes take on over time, while always stressing the ultimately determining role of the mode of production (Engels 1890). It should be stressed here that it is the production of surplus-value (in the form of profits, interest

and rents) which predominates within the capitalist mode of production, and that this is a social (dynamic, changing and contradictory) relationship, rather than a material thing (Harvey 2012, 15). In this context law, state and rights are elements of the complex set of social relations which contribute to the reproduction of capitalism, and not just epiphenomenal reflections of the material base (Steinberg 2016).

It follows that Marxist analyses should endeavour to avoid the ahistorical, metaphysical and one-sided accounts of law, state and rights produced by liberal and left-liberal critical theorists alike. Instead of either blindly valorising existing forms, or dismissing them out of hand, Marxist analyses should focus on tracing the concrete material relationships that produce and sustain given legal or state forms. Alongside this, Marxist analyses have to be attentive to the complex, contradictory and dynamic character of given legal forms or relationships. Failing to do so runs the risk of falling back into idealist or metaphysical accounts or critiques of law, state and rights that do not touch the reality of social relations, and the possibilities for fundamental change.

4. The Specificity of Capitalism

Dialectical materialism should form the starting point for Marxist analyses of law, state and rights. However, this aspect of Marx's method, in the strict sense, needs to be complemented with two other crucial elements. The first of these flows almost directly from Marx's application of dialectical materialism to the study of social transformation over time. It is the historical contingency and transience of the capitalist mode of production. In this regard, Marx argued that the rational and revolutionary aspect of dialectics "includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation" (Marx 1867, 103). It follows from this that "the present society is no solid crystal, but an organism capable of change and constantly engaged in a process of change" (Marx 1867, 93).

The second point here is as important as the first. The capitalist mode of production, with its attendant social forms, emerges at a specific historical stage, and in due course will be superseded. This leads to what Paul Sweezy refers to as an important "major premise" for Marxists: the transitory character of capitalism (Sweezy 1946, 22). This does not imply teleological certainty, or iron laws of historical development, but adopting an understanding of the capitalist mode of production and its social forms as contingent and transitory is crucial for orientating Marxist analyses of concrete issues in their broader, historical context.

In Marx's broad theoretical schema, capitalism as a historically contingent social form is not static but riven with fundamental contradictions that presage its transformation. Class contradictions (to which we return below) are central here. As Rühle argues, for Marx class struggle becomes a "law of historical evolution" with "socialism as the necessary and logical outcome of that struggle" (Rühle 1929, 392). This latter point provides a crucially important political and theoretical premise for Marxist analysis, namely the inevitability of socialism. This point is well made by James, who argues that

"[...] the inevitability of socialism remains an imperative necessity for Marxists as a conception. The reason is this: we have a lot of objective facts before us, historical events, an immense variety of happenings. When you observe them you have to decide which you support, which will advance the perspectives you have, and which are acting against these perspectives. Which, in other words [...] are leading in the advance toward a socialist society and which are not,

which are leading, with the basic Marxist conception, to barbarism” (James 1999, 44).

The inevitability of socialism, on this understanding, provides a crucial “criterion of judgment” for developing and orientating Marxist analyses (Ibid.).

When it comes to Marxist analyses of law, state and rights, two key implications flow from this aspect of Marx’s methodological framework. The first is that Marxist analyses have to dispute and contest the naturalness of existing legal and state forms. The bourgeois² theorist treats capitalism as natural, inevitable, and self-evident and as such views existing legal forms and relations as “the necessary relations arising from the nature of things” (Montesquieu 1949/1748, 1), or as the “necessary components of a just society” (Harel 2014, 3). In contrast, a central task for Marxist analyses is to show how particular legal forms arise, not as the inevitable product of reason, but contingently, in specific historical contexts coloured by the prevailing mode of production.

The second crucial point which follows, is that not only are given legal and state forms historically contingent, but transitory also. This latter point is particularly important today. For Marx and Engels, the entirety of their political and theoretical work was dedicated to building and supporting a movement which would abolish “the present state of things” (Marx and Engels 1845/46, 49). In contrast, much contemporary Marxism is marked by a quietism (Anderson 1979) which, while holding to the forms of Marxist analysis, has broken with the fundamental idea of Marxism as the theory and practice of human liberation. Instead, Marxism in this vein “becomes a theory of capitalist domination” (Holloway 2012, 516).

Interestingly, we then arrive at a position where both mainstream (positivist, formalist, natural law) and critical accounts of law end up as two sides of the same coin. The former seeking to rationalise or perfect extant legal forms, while the latter engages in a one-sided “thrashing” of prevailing legal norms, but with both ultimately retaining the capitalist mode of production as an unalterable premise. In contrast to either of these perspectives, Marxist analyses should neither valorise the extant order nor succumb to resigned fatalism. Appreciating the historical contingency and transience of capitalism and its attendant legal and state forms, allows for the development of analyses which rejects the false necessity of existing relations (Sweezy 1946, 22), but also provides a criterion for identifying, developing and supporting changes that advance the broader cause of fundamental social transformation.

5. Class Struggle

The final element of Marx’s methodological framework is the centrality of class struggle. Without having the space to go into the debates on class and class analysis in any great depth here, it is important to make a few brief points. Class, for Marx, is the fundamental contradiction at the heart of the capitalist mode of production (Wood 1988; Mészáros 1995). Class exploitation is the defining factor within Marxist analyse, but understood properly it does not discount or discard the other, crucially important, valences of oppression, be it gender, race, caste or sexuality. Finally, class in the Marxist tradition, is best understood as the structural relationship of specific groups of people to control over the appropriation of surplus-value (Draper 1977, 14). Crucially, what

² The term bourgeois is used here to refer to the very broad range of thinkers that view the capitalist order “as the absolute and ultimate form of social production, instead of as a historically transient stage of development” (Marx 1867, 96).

this means is that irrespective of how people subjectively define and understand themselves, as temporarily frustrated millionaires or whatever, the vast majority of people remain, under contemporary capitalism, working class (Mohun 2016).

From his earliest philosophical works, through to his mature political economy and in everything between, Marx stressed the centrality of class antagonism and class struggle to his understanding of how capitalism emerged, functions and develops over time. In his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx had already arrived at a position which stressed the fundamental contradictions between meaningful human emancipation and the institution of private property. From this he concluded that that the "heart" of human emancipation is the nascent proletariat, and that the attainment of such emancipation will necessitate "the negation of private property" (Marx 1844, 187).

As is well known, in *The Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels identified class struggle as the motor force of historical change and charged the international working class with the responsibility of suppressing and transcending the capitalist mode of production (Marx and Engels 1848). It is noteworthy, that not only in these political interventions, but also in his most mature scientific work, Marx returns time and again to the centrality of class struggle. For example, in the Postface to the second edition of *Capital Volume I*, Marx notes that the appreciation which *Capital* gained "in wide sections of the German working class is the best reward for my labours" (Marx 1867, 95). Similarly, in the Preface to the French edition of *Capital*, Marx notes that making the work accessible to the working class is, for him, a consideration which "outweighs everything else" (Ibid., 104).

Class antagonism and class struggle, then, is the "foundation of all of Marx's politics", and fundamentally colours his methodological approach to understanding the capitalist mode of production (Draper 1977, 14). The fundamental dynamic which characterises capitalism is the contradiction between the capitalist class and the working class. As capitalism is a system predicated on the ceaseless expansion of capital, and as this is accomplished through the exploitation of labour there is inherent within the capitalist mode of production an irreducible conflict between the interests of the two classes.

The augmentation of capital results in the exploitation and degradation of labour and the working class. As Marx puts it at the end of Volume 1 of *Capital*:

"[...] all methods for the production of surplus-value are at the same time methods of accumulation; and every extension of accumulation becomes again a means for the development of those methods. It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse [...] It establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital" (Marx 1867, 709).

The processes of capital accumulation and the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production result in a system of inequality and unfreedom for the working class, and the attendant systemic inequality that comes with this (Wright 2005).

In marked contrast to the reality produced by the operation of the capitalist mode of production, the ideology of liberal legalism posits a world of free and equal individuals, engaged in the pursuit of rational self-interest, which legitimates systemic class

inequality and antagonism “by denying their existence” (Wood 1988, 14). As Montesquieu once put it, as soon as the state of nature is abandoned only “the protection of the laws” can make people free and equal (Montesquieu 1949/1748, 111). Likewise, Dicey waxed lyrical about the majestic equality of the law, which “every man, whatever be his rank or condition” is subject to equally (1982/1915, 114). And this tradition is kept alive by contemporary theorists, who maintain that strong legal protections are a “necessary precondition for freedom” (Harel 2014, 7).

In contrast to this idealisation of existing legal rules and forms as natural, neutral and conducive to equality and freedom, a central task of Marxist analyses of law, state and rights is to highlight the role they play in structuring and legitimating societies riven with class inequalities and contradictions. In this regard there is some truth in both the claim that “bourgeois jurisprudence” is “the will of [the ruling class], made into a law for all” (Marx and Engels 1848, 501) *and* the observation that the law is rarely “the harsh, unmitigated, unadulterated expression of the domination of one class” (Engels 1890, 60).

At this point all of the elements of Marx’s method discussed so far come together, as they must in any concrete analysis. Given legal rules, rights or state forms will always be the product of concrete historical developments and contestations. As such any given rule will reflect a combination of the objective requirements of the mode of production, and the subjective balance of forces between contesting classes. It is important to try to bring all of these aspects into relief, in order to avoid all the ills of reification, quietism or simplistic mechanical materialism.

For example, the recent round of proposals for mega-regional trade deals (TTIP, TPP etc. with NAFTA as an early forerunner) are an attempt to address the structural crisis of capitalism (Mészáros 1995). In this regard, these proposed new legal regimes respond to a structural need of the mode of production (restoring profitability), as well as advancing the interests of specific factions of capital. At the same time, these proposed agreements were opposed by broad collations of trade unionists, environmentalist and others throughout Europe, Asia and Latin America. The proposed agreements have, for now, been put on hold, but as and when something approximating the original proposals re-emerges, it will be the product of both the objective requirements of the changing mode of production, and of class struggle.

Generalising from this, Marxist analyses of law, state and rights should stress the role that given legal forms perform in structuring, and ideologically legitimating fundamentally class divided societies. At the same time, Marxist analyses should be attentive to the contradictions prevailing in given regimes, and the potential within them to advance the immediate interests of working class and other subaltern groups. As a matter of politics, informed by the insights of dialectical materialist analysis, it is possible to appreciate that legal rhetoric and rules which “disguise the nature of ruling power” can “simultaneously” become site of struggle “for those who would dislodge that very power” (Chase 1997, 56). This latter point is crucially important, because Marxism provides us with a way of understanding “social reality which [provides] the appropriate theoretical basis for changing it” (Lukács 1970, 93).

Class antagonism and class struggle provide the fulcrum on which Marx’s entire method hinges. It brings together the dialectical materialist understanding of the centrality of material contradictions to social change, with the historical contingency and transience of capitalism. As such Marxist analyses of law, state and rights have to be able to account for the messy and contradictory ways in which legal and state forms fundamentally sustain the extant mode of production, while also mediating and crystallising (for a time) the class antagonisms at the heart of capitalism.

6. Conclusion

As noted at the outset, Marx's work does not provide us with a comprehensive theory of everything, into which we can simply plug in contemporary data and get the correct conclusion. In particular, Marx's work does not provide us with a clear and consistent statement as to how we should approach the important questions as to the role of law, state and rights. With that said, Marx's work does provide us with "a basic and irreplaceable template" (Harvey 2012, 18) upon which we can begin to construct our own analyses of law, state and rights today.

The outline argument presented here is that dialectical materialism, the historical contingency and transience of the capitalist mode of production, and class struggle are the central methodological reference points that we can and should take from Marx to inform the development of Marxist analyses of law, state and rights. It is important to recall in all of this that while Marx may be lumped in with Weber and others in the pantheon of great social scientists, his work represents so much more than just another critical resource. Marx's entire life's work was, as per his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, concerned with understanding the reality of capitalism, so as to change it. There is no easy way to map this revolutionary commitment onto methods for understanding law, state and rights, but that is the challenge which we must confront.

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Two Questions to Marxist Anthropology

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Abstract: “Marxist anthropology” is typically understood as a phase within the history of Euro-American anthropology, which is said to have fizzled out in the 1980s. Since some spectres are difficult to chase, however, Marx’s critique of capitalism continues to haunt the discipline’s output, which is not necessarily couched in Marxist language nor inserted in an explicitly Marxist framework. This essay will not diagnose the reasons behind the waning of “Marxist anthropology” according to the discipline’s professional narrative, but it will eschew such boundaries to concentrate on more urgent issues in criticising contemporary capitalism. Two questions are addressed: 1) How can micro- and macro-social scales in social scientific analysis be integrated? and 2) How can we distinguish between conventional ideas and ideologies through which humans guide their lives under capitalism? Anthropology, I argue, can contribute to a strong critique of contemporary capitalism by attending to these questions, which have been integral in Marxist analysis within and beyond the discipline.

Keywords: Marxist anthropology, scaling, ideology, capitalism, exploitation, modes of production, social science

1. Introduction

“Marxist anthropology” is often characterised as a phase in the history of anthropological theory. According to Sherry Ortner’s (1984) widely cited essay on “Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties”, Marxism emerged as a disruptive theoretical force in a discipline dominated by functionalist and structural-functionalist approaches in the 1960s. Under the impulse of two main strands, one emerging in France and Britain (e.g. Terray 1972; Bloch 2004/1975; Godelier 1977) and another in the United States (e.g. O’Laughlin 1975; Diamond 1979; Wolf 1982), Marxism has been instrumental in getting anthropologists to reconsider the colonial power relations inherent in their discipline, to apply the methods of historical materialism to their traditional field sites, and to insert their enclosed analyses into a wider political economy of capitalism. Beyond this disciplinary wake-up call, as goes the narrative, Marxism had limited explanatory value. As Alan Barnard (2000, 81) notes in his standard *History and Theory in Anthropology*, “over the last decade or more Marxism has declined as a predominant paradigm in anthropology”.

The rise and fall of Marxism is an entrenched narrative within the history of anthropological theory, yet it reveals a certain narrowness of scope. First, it ignores continuities between the anthropological scholarship explicitly labelled as “Marxist” in the 1970s and later scholarship which, without being overtly Marxist, shares an interest in a critical reading of Marx. Direct and indirect engagements with Marx’s work in journals such as *Economy and Society* or *Critique of Anthropology*, themselves growing out of the ferment of 1970s Marxist anthropology, is a testimony to this continued relevance within the discipline. Second, the rise-and-fall narrative ignores the trajectories of Marxism in non-Western anthropological traditions. By focusing on Marxist anthropology in France, Britain, and the United States, this narrative casts aside productive anthropological engagements with Marx, say, in Mexico (Bartra 1974; Palerm 1980; Adame

2011). Moreover, it marginalises continued and explicit engagements with Marxist theory within the dominant centres of anthropological theory (e.g. Littlefield and Gates 1991; Donham 1999; Marcus and Menzies 2005). Lastly and perhaps most importantly, this narrative restricts Marxist anthropology to the confines of the discipline, which not only evicts its wide-ranging political ambitions, but also unevenly fits it to the shape of professional concerns.

This narrow scope, in short, does little justice to the worldwide impact of Marxism within anthropology, while being incommensurate with the ambitions of Marxist anthropologists themselves. As Joel Kahn and Josep Llobera (1981, x) noted: “It is the nature of any approach which takes its inspiration from Marx to break disciplinary boundaries and aim at a unified human and social science in history”. This is easier said than done. As Wessman (1979, 464) lucidly states: “[Marx’s] synthesis has been difficult to emulate, partly because of the times and partly because our intellectual tradition manifests the alienating and individualizing tendencies Marx warned about”. This essay is not intended as an expansion on the usual narrative about “Marxist anthropology”, which would require a serious intellectual history of the continuous and global impact of Marx and his disciples, whether within or beyond anthropology. Nor is it a revisionist account of 1970s Marxist anthropology as the “correct” path from which all further research has erroneously deviated. Rather, this essay is a call to ground anthropological practice within a critical tradition of engagement with Marx’s work which includes – without being limited to – the works of 1970s Marxist anthropologists. The intellectual project is therefore not an empty diagnosis of theoretical fads and their fluctuations within the discipline, but a critical reckoning with and an opening to the possible contributions of Marxist traditions to a historicist, materialist, systematic analysis.

This essay will concentrate on two questions in this vein: 1) How can micro- and macro-social scales in social scientific analysis be integrated? and 2) How can we distinguish between conventional ideas and ideologies through which humans guide their lives under capitalism? These questions do not directly arise from Marxist theory, but in reaction to the intellectual climate in which I am immersed as a professional anthropologist working in the United Kingdom. This position makes me liable to similar pitfalls to the ones in which earlier British and French Marxist anthropologists were ensnared, when their project to expand the study of the world’s societies through Marx’s historical materialism was funnelled into a dated intervention with little consequences beyond the echo chamber of professional anthropology. To avoid this possibility, I hope to show how these theoretical arguments can bear on a contemporary political understanding of capitalist exploitation.

2. Scales

How can micro- and macro-social analyses be integrated? This question is formulated according to the concerns of a rather technicist social science, which betrays certain assumptions about the radical difference between micro- and macro-studies, and the uncertain mechanisms whereby they are articulated. Can fine-grained ethnographies on specific groups or localities aggregate into a wider understanding of entire societies or global processes? Can theoretical models of these societies and processes be disaggregated into “micro-foundations”, as sociologists would call them? The micro/macro binary is in many ways unhelpful, because it erects boundaries between methods designed for small vs. large populations – say, participant observation and interviews vs. surveys and censuses – without being attentive to the way in which any study, whether small- or large-scale, makes implicit theoretical assumptions about how they can be aggregated or disaggregated into various units. As Maurice Bloch (2004/1975, xiii)

states in his introduction to *Marxist Analyses and Social Anthropology*: “There are theoretical postulates present in the work of all social anthropologists and [...] these have political significance”.

In this sense, surveys and censuses are not just carried out on a “macro” level: they are based on a theoretical model of a more-or-less rational, more-or-less norm-governed actor who can be representatively captured by statistical methods and expected to repeat his behaviour in predictable patterns. Likewise, the classical 1950s ethnographic study centring on one village or ethnic group is not just conducted on a “micro” level, but with the assumption that an aggregation of similar studies in all villages and all ethnic groups would yield a picture of societies as organs in perfect functional articulation within a worldwide body. This view has been extensively criticised by social anthropologists of all stripes, and 1970s Marxist anthropologists have not failed to point out their narrow positivism (Godelier 1977), ahistoricism (Friedman 2004/1975), and inattention to the violent disruptions imposed by imperial capitalism on supposedly harmonious and unchanging non-Western societies (Gough 1968; Asad 1973). The empiricist fiction that such “micro” studies can aggregate into a healthy “macro” social body denies the very historical forces making this possibility unthinkable.

The canonical ethnographic study from the 1950s bears little resemblance to present-day work in Anglo-American anthropology, which has become more attentive to the historical and political economic dimensions highlighted by Marxist anthropologists in the 1970s. In David Graeber’s words, “Marxism in many ways became the inspiration for a whole series of new approaches [...] that beginning in the 1960s transformed most anthropologists’ ideas about what their discipline was ultimately about [...] All were part of a broad left turn in academic life that probably peaked in the late ‘70s [...], but that permanently altered the basic terms of intellectual debate, ensuring that most academics now think of themselves as political radicals” (Graeber 2001, 25). Graeber criticises those academics who produce “what seem like ever more fervent position papers for a broader political movement that does not, in fact, exist” (ibid.), an epistemological trap in which several Marxist anthropologists seem to have fallen in the 1970s. This trap, incidentally, is most visible in the contradiction between the scope of their intellectual project and their actual knowledge-making practices.

Marxist anthropologists from the 1970s, who did not otherwise constitute a coherent theoretical school (Terry 2007, 2), at least agreed on the apparent contradiction between the intellectual project of Marxism and the (structural-functionalist) anthropological project. Bridget O’Laughlin summarizes this attitude as follows:

I have argued that from a Marxist perspective there can be no autonomous discipline of anthropology. We cannot construct an anthropological mirror in which to find the reflection of the basic universal Man, for all individuals are determined by particular historical social relations. Nor can we find theoretical unity by limiting ourselves to the study of precapitalist or primitive societies, for their similarity lies in what they are not rather than in what they are. (O’Laughlin 1975, 368)

This challenge to the autonomy of anthropology has two sides: one cannot study “universal Man” outside the historical circumstances that produce Him, and one cannot rely on the spurious distinction between “primitive” and “civilized” societies to delimit the scope of anthropology, as though the categories used to study the former had to emerge from a specific discipline with nothing to say about the latter.

In consequence, Marxist anthropologists re-scoped the ambitions of anthropological studies in two ways. Anthropologists like Claude Meillasoux (1964) or those in Joel Kahn and Josep Llobera's (1981) and Alice Littlefield and Hill Gates' (1991) edited volumes sought to apply the conceptual tools of historical materialism to study the colonised societies on which they would otherwise be working. Their ambition was a grounded one in this sense: to insert societies which had hitherto been excluded from consideration by the methods of historical materialism – especially in its Althusserian guise – into a historical and materialist analysis, with attention to the application of concepts such as “mode of production”, “forces of production”, or “relations of production”. In France, this trend was most visible among Africanists, who had extensive debates about whether there was one single “African mode of production” (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1978), or multiple modes corresponding to different labour processes like the “hunting” or “lineage” modes of production (Willame 1971), or different yet articulated modes of production (Rey 1982). While the label “primitive” was criticised by these anthropologists as being unscientific, they remained committed to analysing a type of society (some still called it “pre-capitalist”) which paradoxically was inseparable from the spread of imperial capitalism across the globe.

In a way, this project was fraught from the start. While it produced interesting empirical engagements between Marxist theory and anthropological material, it accepted the professional distinction between small-scale anthropology and large-scale capitalism, while assuming that the methods of historical materialism were perfectly adequate to the study of so-called “advanced” capitalism. The other direction taken by Marxist anthropologists like Maurice Godelier (1977) and Eric Wolf (1982) has been more in the spirit of Marx's analyses. These anthropologists did not begin with a distinction between the small- and the large-scale to observe their mutual correspondence, but with a conceptual understanding of exploitation that can describe *both* small- *and* large-scale populations. In O'Laughlin's words, “Radical anthropology should not consist of showing how the ‘exogenous’ structures of the wider capitalist system impinge on isolated traditional communities or marginal groups, but rather of locating these groups and communities within that structure itself” (1975, 366). The issue of scaling is no longer one of “integrating” small and large scales in this sense, but one of recognising the effects of capitalist exploitation on both scales.

Recent anthropological work on analytical scales would seem to corroborate this insight, since it argues that the act of scaling is a perspectival exercise through which both analyst and subject of study can gauge the size of the worlds in which they live and act (see Carr and Lempert 2016). While such an understanding opens the notion of scaling beyond the spurious micro/macro distinction, it is made relative to an agent's perspective and ability to scale – whether an individual, say, or a corporation. Under this relational definition, no act of scaling has precedence over another except in the loose sense that “power relations” condition some acts as being more “powerful” than the others. A Marxist scaling, however, would not give equal weight to all acts of scaling, because under capitalist relations of production, they always begin within a world where petty and monopolistic capitalists reap the surplus-value generated by their workers' labour. This exploitation, again whether it happens in one shop, in a multinational company, or in a country, is the historical condition under which any Marxist analysis should begin to cut across all scales.

This theoretical stance has an important political consequence: the struggle against capitalist exploitation can begin at any scale or “level” because we are not, in fact, living in a social building where one must take the elevator to move between the micro and the macro floor. There is no elevator, because no mechanical contraption can

“integrate” so-called levels of analysis when the historical constitution of these very levels is both uncertain and relative to various agents’ perspectives. Yet extraction of surplus-value goes on, and no matter how many are affected and where, there remains a critical possibility to organize and fight against this exploitation. This analysis is by no means exhaustive enough to ground activist strategy, but it is necessary to break away from the impression that analysis should somehow be commensurate to scale, when scale is indeed a product of analysis.

3. Ideology

What is the difference between conventional ideas and ideologies? This question would have seemed irrelevant to many 1970s Marxist anthropologists. In a context where the Althusserian creed about the base’s determination of the superstructure “in the last instance” was widely repeated in French and British Marxist anthropology, the main intellectual effort was invested in analysing forces and relations of production. The superstructure became an afterthought in this context, a “structural level” where any political, religious, legal, aesthetic beliefs and institutions that could not be neatly assigned to “the base” were bundled together. There seems to have been little consistency in the way in which the category of the “ideological” was deployed as a consequence, sometimes meaning just illusory beliefs, other times incorporating both beliefs and institutions, sometimes meaning just about any idea at all. Some theorists of the time were dissatisfied with this muddled territory, witness the following reflection by Godelier:

Does this mean that all mental reality is ideological? Are there criteria for distinguishing between those ideas that are ideological and those that are not? Certainly not if we confine ourselves to dubbing as ‘ideological’ any representation of the world that is in the least organized. Ought we then to conform to another more current usage and to term ‘ideological’ those illusory representations which men elaborate concerning themselves and the world, and which serve to legitimise an existing social order, and hence the forms of domination and exploitation of human beings by human beings that may be contained in this existing order? This restrictive definition has the appearance of being Marxist. But is it really, and how does it tie in with the idea we have just put forward, namely, that any social relation necessarily contains an element of thought which is not necessarily either illusory or legitimizing, and which forms part of this relation from the moment of its formation? (Godelier 1986, 129)

This passage captures the main tensions in the concept of ideology. The term itself has had a slippery genealogy (see Kolakowski 1978, 153-154), and it is even more slippery in everyday usage. One consistent usage in corporate news sources and in a contemporary university setting has been to equate ideology with political affiliation (e.g. liberal, conservative, libertarian, “green”, socialist), as if each were available for purchase in an open market of ideas. Under this definition, an ideology is a set of ideas to which citizen-consumers choose to adhere no matter the link between such ideas and their historical context of emergence.

This conception of ideology is seen as being somewhat self-evident, but it is this very self-evidence that is “ideological” in Godelier’s Marxist definition: “illusory representations [guaranteeing] the domination and exploitation of human beings by human beings”. This notion is “more restricted” because it does not include all possible ideas within a society into its fold, as some crude analyses imply. One of the legacies that

Marxist anthropologists in the 1970s have had difficulty shaking off, like many anthropologists in their own time, is the presumption that local knowledge is always somehow misapprehended, and it is the anthropologist's task to "correct" it in some sense. The eclectic application of the term "ideology" or "ideological" to a number of these ideas – local systems of political rule, religious belief, legal reasoning – has had the effect of de-legitimizing local knowledge by supposing the ethnographer's knowledge somehow deeper and less mystified, although the opposite was often the case. There is value in a restricted notion of "ideology" as the mystifying representations of the ruling class or group in this sense, because it avoids the presumption that all ideas within the anthropologist's society of study are illusions except when the ethnographer can demystify them.

Such a definition has been integral in the lineage of Marxist thought since *The German Ideology*, and the difference in each iteration has hinged on what exactly is deemed "illusory" and to whom. It has been clear since *The German Ideology* that it is not a cognitive misapprehension of reality, a hallucination, but a biased representation, a way of apprehending the world which obscures its basic material operations. While arguments on what constitutes the material basis of society in different parts of the world have mobilised the attention of Marxist theorists and anthropologists without end, few have elaborated on how exactly this material basis is obscured. The assumption is that the dominated do not understand the basis of their domination because a certain ideology prevails, and this ideology prevails because, in the words of Marx and Engels, "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force" (Marx and Engels 1845/46, 59).

There have been more fine-grained takes on the issue, including by Louis Althusser (1971) and Slavoj Žižek (1989), who have argued that the material basis of society is obscured not in knowledge – in people's comprehension of the world – but in practice – in the everyday activity reproducing the world in a way which sustains the ideology without requiring sincere belief in it. Such an account is implicitly reproduced in much contemporary political anthropology, where the practice of political agents is considered the site where they reproduce their group ideology as opposed to their (often empty) talk. While it is a generative account to understand *how* the base is obscured in everyday life, this line of reasoning again muddles the ground between ideology and conventional ideas, insofar as both are located at the level of everyday activity with indistinction.

What is needed to establish the distinction once again is a return to Marx and Engels' simple notion that ideology is, after all, the "ideas of the ruling class". This return is not meant to endorse the assumption that the "ideas of the ruling class" necessarily become "the ruling ideas", nor that in some sense these ideas "fool" the dominated into adhering to dominant ideologies according to a crude interpretation of "false consciousness". Rather, it is a call to distinguish analytically between the ideas of the rulers and the ideas of the ruled, which are both differently shaped by capitalist exploitation. Anglo-American anthropologists would not find it difficult to recognise that there is a difference between the worldviews of a worker, a manager and a shareholder, but it takes another step to argue that the one's worldview is not ideological while the other one's is. Yet it is a necessary step to avoid flattening all ideas into the same "market", because ideas – like people and things – are cleaved according to the class divides inherent to capitalist extraction of surplus-value. The question, therefore, is not how an idea is reproduced in everyday activity, but how "ideas of the ruling class" or ideologies

in the strong sense are reproduced by different classes, and what kinds of hybrid consciousness do they create in each case.

The Marxist anthropologist Donald Donham adds an insight to this analysis. Arguing in a similar manner that ideologies are “systems of belief that uphold sectional interests while appearing to express general ones”, he goes on to suggest that this is important “to avoid any simple distinction between ideas that reveal the world and those that hide the world” (Donham 1999, 50). Following E. P. Thompson instead, he argues that “most ideologies contain partial truths, and their ‘falseness’ is due not to blanket error but to unwarranted generalization across contexts. [...] What makes ideologies ideologies is precisely a lack of recognition of the context that renders their claims persuasive” (Ibid., 68-69). The language of “truth” and “falsity” used by Donham is perhaps not the clearest, but the sentiment he expresses is exactly what Kolakowski has described as “the difference between false and liberated consciousness” according to Marx:

“[This difference] is not that between error and truth but is a functional difference related to the purpose served by thought in the collective life of mankind. ‘Wrong’ thinking is that which confirms the state of human servitude and is unaware of its own proper function; emancipated thought is the affirmation of humanity, enabling man to develop his native abilities” (Kolakowski 1978, 175)

The impetus to analyse ideology in these terms, as a set of ideas promoted and maintained by the ruling classes, has an important political purpose which cannot be reduced to the now professionalised understanding of “critical theory”. The goal is not to reproduce the critical theories taught as an inviolable canon in some academic settings, but to scratch through the veneer of apparent “truth” or “common sense” in ideologies of capital, growth, profit, job creation, and the list goes on. Scratching will not remove the veneer to reveal a hidden reality, because ideological analysis should not be about a dramatic unmasking as it is often rhetorically made to be, but it should articulate the connections between capitalist exploitation and the apparently anodyne ideas reproduced by the ruling classes. And while this articulation starts to happen in writing, it cannot be effective unless a systematic mobilisation occurs to change the conditions under which these ideas are reproduced, say, within the current corporate media environment. Otherwise we would risk becoming Marx and Engels’ Young Hegelians, who waged tremendous battles “in the realm of pure thought” (1845/46, 27).

4. Reading the Classics

I wish to conclude with an opening thought on the nature of a reflection on Marx as a classic author. A recent debate has emerged in professional anthropology concerning the “classics” in the field and the importance of revisiting them (see the special issue in *HAU* by Da Col and Sopranzetti 2017). The debate was initially triggered online by the eminent anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, who has written a Facebook plea for all anthropologists to safeguard the large reserve of anthropological knowledge produced since the 19th century, much of which had been created under colonial rule and is no longer integral in undergraduate syllabi or in research conversations. Online criticisms fused, accusing Sahlins of wanting to perpetuate a white colonial project, which elicited impassionate criticisms against and defences of the “anthropological canon”. This debate raises two core questions in fact: 1) What should or should not be part of the canon of writings in the discipline? and 2) Under what historical conditions does devel-

oping a canon become an important knowledge-making practice? These two questions, it seems to me, are also important to bear in mind in a special issue celebrating the legacy of Karl Marx.

The first question in effect leads to the creation of professional boundaries around a given discipline, whether it is anthropology or a certain theoretical Marxology which gets developed within a highly personalised, usually male intellectual lineage (Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci, Adorno, Benjamin, Althusser). These boundaries lead to such intellectual specialisation that the wider thrust of Marxist analysis – the analysis of capitalist exploitation – becomes dissected among what Henri Lefebvre (2016) has called “patchy sciences” (*sciences parcellaires*). This patchiness explains, in part, what ideological role professional intellectuals play within their institutions, even though they might think of themselves as “radicals”.

What is most significant about the so-called decline in Marxist anthropology is perhaps not, in Barnard’s (2000, 81) words, that “former Marxist scholars [moved] away from explicitly Marxist endeavours”, but that this move is the logical consequence of their professional knowledge-making practice, which was ultimately restricted to a disciplinary project. This is not to exempt myself or certain theorists from this ideological effect, but a call to actively work against epistemological “patchiness” in the spirit of Marx’s wide-ranging analyses. These analyses are not just a matter of perspective, as though one could trade viewpoints in a theory market, but they start with the recognition that these perspectives emerge in a context of massive social inequality and exploitation, and any theory designed to hide this fact is “ideological” in this sense.

Thus, the creation of a canon maintains spurious and hierarchical distinctions within and among intellectual disciplines, which is far from the way in which we should interpret Marx and his successors. “Following Marx today as a classic implies, just as different authors recognize it, becoming conscious of the fact that his work is a work-in-progress containing ambiguities and lacunae; it presupposes accepting that Marxisms are only understandable in the plural, because unanimity and uniformity are the negation of its most profound core” (Etulain and Gonzalez 2013, 74).

In other words, Marx’s work cannot be understood as an unquestionable original bound to be repeated by his loyal successors, but it should be understood as a historical experience fostering an ongoing tradition of critique. What makes Marx a classic is the generative potential of his critical work in a world still dominated by capitalist exploitation.

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Marx's Philosophy of Revolution in Permanence: Its Significance for Our Time

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Abstract: How can Marx's ideas help us with the problem of how to make new revolutionary beginnings in a time when the counterrevolution is ascendant, without losing sight of the need to prepare for the equally crucial question of what happens after the revolution? Capitalism has taken various forms as it developed, with the latest shaped by its endemic crisis since the mid-1970s generated by its falling rate of profit. Throughout these stages, the humanism and dialectic of *Capital* remain prime determinants of allowing Marxist responses not to stop at economic analyses but to release, rather than inhibiting, new revolutionary subjects and directions. Critical for the present moment is to take up Marx's humanism and dialectic as crucial dimensions of his philosophy of revolution in permanence. This encompasses not alone the famous March 1850 *Address to the Communist League*, but also the full trajectory of Marx's revolutionary life and thought from the 1844 *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts* through *Capital* to the new moments of Marx's last decade as expressed in his writings on Russia and his *Ethnological Notebooks*. We trace Marx's theoretical/philosophical concept of permanent revolution in a number of his writings, to confront how various post-Marx Marxists addressed or ignored this dimension of Marx's thought, and explore whether this concept can be seen as central to Marx's body of thought, and can assist in the dual task of needed revolutionary transformation – the destruction of the old (negation) and the construction of the new (the negation of the negation).

Keywords: Karl Marx, revolution, permanent revolution, Leon Trotsky, Mao Zedong, Raya Dunayevskaya, Marxist humanism, women's liberation

1. Introduction

If Marx is to mean anything for today, then it must be in helping us confront the problem of how to make revolutionary new beginnings at a time when counterrevolution is ascendant. Short-term economic statistics such as falling unemployment or rising GDP growth cannot cover up the serious crisis in which world capitalism languishes, not only economically but in wars, political reaction, and the bankruptcy of thought. From staggering economic inequality to the flight of climate/economic refugees from Puerto Rico, from genocide in Syria and Myanmar to the rise of the far-right to government in Austria, from President Donald Trump's virtual endorsement of the murderous racist demonstration in Virginia to the sycophantic chorus of intellectuals and pundits rationalising every mendacious utterance of Trump, the world situation screams of capitalism's inability to reverse deepening crises and avert its self-destruction, whether through climate chaos or nuclear war. This is little consolation to those seeking liberation, since the far-right is working overtime to divert and exploit mass discontent.

At the same time, interest in Karl Marx has resurged because of the deep economic crisis, and even more so because of the revolutions that became 2011's Arab

Spring, leading to a worldwide wave that returned revolution to centre stage. The complications that quickly ensued underscored the unfinished nature of the revolutions and movements, and the need for what Marx called revolution in permanence. The Arab Spring, however unfinished, helped inspire revolts, from the town square occupations by *indignados* in Spain to the Occupy Wall Street movement that spread across the US – and, just as importantly, a resurgence of the *idea* of revolution. In each case demands for political freedom against the monopoly of power by a small elite were fused with a quest for fundamental changes in economic relations, in a way that brought to the fore the questions at the heart of Marx's revolutionary life.

Marx's concept of permanent revolution elucidated the need for freedom struggles not to stop at the first stage but to continue on, until human relations were fundamentally transformed, including relations in production that define the economic structure. Today, this can only be meaningfully interpreted as encompassing many facets of human relations, not limited to the economy in a narrow sense.

Though the concept of permanent revolution is most often referred to in terms of the theory that Leon Trotsky developed out of the 1905 Russian Revolution, Marx had in fact referred to the concept several times. Even when Marx's writing on permanent revolution is referred to, most often it is limited to the important March 1850 *Address to the Communist League* by Marx and Engels. Interpretation of that 1850 *Address* has often been reduced to a question of strategy for continuing the 1848-49 revolutions, or criticising the authors for believing that "a new revolution is impending" (Marx and Engels 1978/1850, 278).

Here we wish to consider permanent revolution in Marx not alone as strategy or "action", as important as that is, but as key to his development of a philosophy of revolution. In our view he planted the seeds for such a concept in 1843-44. Marx adopted the term "permanent revolution" – which had probably appeared in the Great French Revolution (Draper 1978, 203; 591-595) – as early as 1843. It was only in the following year that he worked out the foundations of his philosophy and economic theory in his 1844 *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts*. There he critiqued and recreated the Hegelian dialectic, developing its "negation of the negation" as a "consistent naturalism or humanism" (Marx 1967a/1844, 317; 321; 325) that went beyond communism (Marx 1967c/1844). Out of this emerged the inseparability of humanism and dialectics with his concept of permanent revolution. Precisely this unity would be found in Marx's writing and practice around the 1848-49 Revolutions, in his magnum opus *Capital*, in his *Critique of the Gotha Program's* view of labour *after the revolution*, and in his searching for new revolutionary beginnings globally, be it in analyses of the Russian peasant commune or in notes on non-capitalist societies in his *Ethnological Notebooks*.

We argue that this fusion of humanism and dialectics – reflected in Marx's life-work over four decades – provides the ground for interpreting Marx's Marxism as a philosophy of revolution in permanence that has crucial significance for giving action its direction in our day.

2. Permanent Revolution in Marx

2.1. Origin of the Concept as Concretisation of the Hegelian Negation of the Negation: Human Emancipation vs. Political Emancipation

Marx's 1843 essay "On the Jewish Question", while favouring the emancipation of the Jews, argued that a political change was insufficient. Calling attention to "the *rela-*

tion between political emancipation and human emancipation” (Marx 1967b/1844, 221), he contrasted political revolution with permanent revolution:

Political emancipation is indeed a great step forward. It is not, to be sure, the final form of universal human emancipation, but it is the final form *within* the prevailing order of things. [...] In moments of special concern for itself political life seeks to repress its presupposition, civil society and its elements, and to constitute itself the actual, harmonious species-life of man. But it can do this only in *violent* contradiction with its own conditions of existence by declaring the revolution to be *permanent*. [...] The *political revolution* dissolves civil life into its constituent elements without *revolutionizing* these elements themselves and subjecting them to criticism. (Marx 1967b/1844, 227-228; 240)

Therefore, from the beginning, Marx’s concept of permanent revolution involved a vision of totally new human relations. The implicit reference to the barriers met by the French Revolution suggests that the concept was rooted in taking off from the past high point of revolution, yet with cognisance of the counterrevolution within the revolution. The argument suggests that permanent revolution represents a second negation, negating political revolution as the first negation of oppression, in order to achieve full human emancipation.

Marx developed that viewpoint on a profound philosophical level in his 1844 *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts*, though not using the word “permanent”. There he worked out his break with classical political economy, with vulgar communism, and with the dehumanisation of the dialectic by Hegel. This triple break was at the same time the foundation of a new kind of humanism, dialectical and, as Antonio Gramsci put it, “absolute ‘historicism,’ [...] an absolute humanism of history” (1971, 465). The triple break shifts focus from things to the human being as revolutionary subject: from private property to labour as the heart of the contradiction of capitalism, from labour as source of value to the labourer as subject, from the alienation of the product of labour to the alienation of the *activity* of labour, and from history as the movement of consciousness to the self-production of humanity through its own self-activity, with labour as self-development.

Marx arrived at that triple break and new humanism in responding to the rise of proletarian revolt in the 1840s, while at the same time not discarding the Hegelian dialectic and its negation of the negation, but rather recreating it on the revolt’s basis as a “consistent naturalism or humanism [which] is distinguished from both idealism and materialism as well, and at the same time is the unifying truth of both” (Marx 1967a/1844, 325). A key way that Marx directly expresses the second negation is as the need to go beyond communism, to assure no halt at the first negation – the toppling of the exploitative society – but to develop the transcendence of alienation through the appropriation of the wealth of human capacities and needs, or “the actual appropriation of his objective nature by the destruction of the *alienated* character of the objective world” so that there “emerges *positive* humanism, humanism emerging positively from itself” (Ibid., 331). He held absolute negativity to be Hegel’s “moving and creating principle”, which the old materialism did not match. Thus Marx continued, even in his mature work *Capital*, to return to the Hegelian dialectic as “the source of all dialectics” (Marx 1990/1867, 744). In concretising that dialectic of negativity as alienation and its transcendence through class struggles and the relationship between the sexes, Marx in 1844 created a philosophy of revolution in permanence.

2.2. Summing up the 1848 Revolutions: Declaring the Revolution Permanent

After the experience of the 1848-49 revolutions, Marx and Engels concretised that philosophy as theoretical preparation for the next revolution in their March 1850 *Address to the Communist League*. It is best known for insisting on the highest point reached by revolution: a proletarian movement independent of other classes, and the need not to stop with the first phase of revolution but constantly to radicalise it, pushing for a second revolution. This entailed the need for world revolution for the German revolution to succeed.

The *Address* points to a quest for bringing out new revolutionary forces, beginning with the rural proletariat – and it was soon followed by Engels's *The Peasant War in Germany*, one of the most important theoretical writings in Marx's 1850 journal, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung Revue*. Within a few years Marx would refer to the need for "supporting the proletarian revolution with a sort of second edition of the peasant war" (Marx and Engels 1983, 41). Later still he would turn to the question of the Russian peasant commune.

What cannot be separated from the refusal to stop at the first phase of revolution is the bold vision of a new classless society laid out in the *Address*:

While the democratic petty bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible [...] it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, the proletariat has conquered state power, and the association of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians in these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians. For us the issue cannot be the alteration of private property but only its annihilation, not the smoothing over of class antagonisms but the abolition of classes, not the improvement of the existing society but the foundation of a new one (Marx and Engels 1978/1850, 281).

Restating "the conception of the movement as laid down in the circulars of the congresses and of the Central Authority of 1847 as well as in the *Communist Manifesto*" (Ibid., 277), this vision was rooted in Marx's conception of philosophy and revolution. Just as he had projected in 1844 both the overthrow of the old and the need to change human relationships totally, this *Address* projected the interrelation between international extension of revolution and the deepening of the concrete revolution.

2.3. Mature Economic Theory and Forces of Human Emancipation

Without using the term "permanent revolution", Marx developed a new aspect of the concept in his economic theory of the 1850s, relating resistance by non-capitalist countries suffering capitalism's exploitation to his concept of an "era of social revolution" (Marx 1987/1859, 263; Marx 1990/1867, 164 n. 27). A new revolutionary force, the Black liberation struggle in the US Civil War, became part of Marx's theory as he restructured *Capital* in response to the Civil War and the ensuing movement for the eight-hour day. It was then that he added a chapter on the struggles around the length of the working day (Dunayevskaya 2000/1958, 81-91). In so doing, he broke with the concept of theory as a debate with theoreticians, practicing theory instead as a history of class struggles and production relations – and he singled out the underlying philosophy created by the workers:

In place of the pompous catalogue of the “inalienable rights of man” there steps the modest Magna Carta of the legally limited working day, which at last makes clear “when the time which the worker sells is ended, and when his own begins.” (Marx 1990/1867, 416)

The final edition of Volume I of *Capital* produced under Marx’s supervision, the 1872-75 French edition, similarly reflected the impact of the 1871 Paris Commune (Dunayevskaya 2000/1958, 92-102). From that revolution emerged both the discovery of “the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labor” (Marx 1986/1871, 334) and a new force of revolution: women.

To reduce *Capital* to the dialectic of capitalism’s development, to miss its humanism, as if the Subject is capital itself and not the human being confronting capital, is to violate the unity of dialectics and humanism that is at the heart of Marx’s theory. *Capital* as a whole refuses to separate economic theory from the need for not simply political emancipation or narrowly economic change but universal human emancipation. This is seen not only in the projection of a future of freely associated labour (Marx 1990/1867, 171; 173), but in the very categories that conceptualise the duality of labour under capitalism throughout the four volumes: abstract labour vs. concrete labour, constant capital vs. variable capital, the dialectical inversion in which object, dead labour (capital, especially in the form of machines), dominates the subject, living labour (the worker). It culminates in the explicit identification of “negation of the negation” with proletarian revolution in the chapter on “The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation” (Marx 1990/1867, 927-930).

2.4. Permanent Revolution as the Multilinearity of World Revolution

That historical tendency was a universal – but only for countries where the capitalist mode of production already predominated, as Marx took pains to point out in his final years, when he fully developed the multi-linear nature of his concept of permanent revolution. Another path to revolution may be possible for non-capitalist societies (Marx 1989b/1877, 196-201). Marx honed in on Russia and the revolutionary potential of its peasant communes in his critique of Nikolai Mikhailovsky and the drafts of his letter to Vera Zasulich, declaring in the preface to the 1882 Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*:

If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that the two complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development (Marx and Engels 1989/1882, 426)

In the last decade of Marx’s life, his search for new paths to revolution, including in technologically “underdeveloped” societies, turned to anthropological and historical studies of societies in non-capitalist lands and pre-capitalist times – this from the author of *Capital*! To Raya Dunayevskaya, Marx’s late *Ethnological Notebooks* disclosed “new moments” on topics ranging from the Man/Woman relationship to societies where other modes of production prevailed, and from ancient communal social forms to revolutionary organisation (Dunayevskaya 1991/1982, 175-197). The new moments were seen not as a break but as a development in continuity with his 1844 humanism and *Capital*. The discoveries of his last decade, she wrote, extended his concept of permanent revolution because they made clear how deep must be the uprooting of class society and how broad the view of the forces of revolution. It led

Marx to projecting nothing short of the possibility of a revolution occurring in a backward land like Russia ahead of one in the technologically advanced West.

A related aspect of permanent revolution, the movement of the negation of the negation, is seen in another important late work of Marx, the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. What is key for this discussion is Marx's attack on the Gotha Programme's inadequate and incoherent projection of "a fair distribution of the proceeds of labour". He does not satisfy himself with proving the meaninglessness of "fair distribution" but outlines how any initial stage of post-revolutionary society is incomplete and still bears the birthmarks of capitalist society. What is necessary is to project the vision of full emancipation, with abolition of the division between mental and manual labour and of the subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and with labour itself becoming not only means to life but the kind of self-activity that is life's prime need (Marx 1989a/1875, 83-88). The movement of second negation is spelled out not only as moving from the first phase of revolution to the next, not only to a second revolution, but moving from the first post-revolutionary order to a new one that develops on its own basis, a positive humanism beginning from itself, as he had put it in 1844. This emerges from a critique of an organisational program, suggesting that he sees the projection of this vision as not only a distant goal but a moving force even before the revolution.

3. Marxist Interpretations of Permanent Revolution

Unfortunately, interpretations of Marx's writings on permanent revolution almost always reduce it to the question of moving quickly from the first, bourgeois-democratic phase of revolution to a second, proletarian-socialist one. This is indeed important, but the whole concept is narrowed when this one point is separated out as a strategy devoid of philosophy.

The best-known theory of permanent revolution is not Marx's but Leon Trotsky's. The name was actually bestowed by a Menshevik critic as a form of mockery, reflecting the suspicion with which much of Second International Marxism viewed Marx's supposedly "Blanquist", too-radical 1850 *Address*. Trotsky, however, was happy to accept the designation. His theory was compatible with Marx's in the sense that it called for continuing the revolution to a second stage. He rejected the Menshevik view that Russia's economic development could not sustain more than a bourgeois-democratic revolution. Trotsky insisted that, while a bourgeois-democratic revolution was needed, it would have to be brought about by the working class and could pass over immediately into socialist revolution in an "unbroken chain" (Trotsky 2010/1930, 145). He rejected the Menshevik position that all countries must follow a single path of development; Russia need not recapitulate England's trajectory. Its revolution could take advantage of the advanced development of class struggles in Western Europe. Thus his theory was rooted in world revolution, with combined and uneven development. However, he downplayed the peasantry as potential subject of revolution, though it was the majority of the Russian population, and even more dominant in countries like China. He disparaged its capability for an independent political role (Trotsky 1977a/1934, 1262). Even with the proletariat, he was fixated on its "immaturity" (Trotsky 1977b/1938, 148). Thus, Trotsky's theory was fatally removed both from Marx's and from contemporary reality.

Mao Zedong, while building on Stalinism, adopted the phrase "uninterrupted revolution" (Marx's "*Revolution in Permanenz*" can be translated as "uninterrupted," "continuous," or "permanent revolution"). This, however, had little to do with Marx's concept. Mao explicitly rejected the Hegelian concept of the negation of the negation

and, in the first instance, used the phrase to anoint the forced labour of the catastrophic Great Leap Forward, and later reduced Marx's concept of proletarian revolution to "cultural revolution" (Lin 1965). Mao's perversion of the concept is clear enough in the constitution adopted by the Chinese Communist Party in 1969:

Socialist society covers a considerably long historical period. Throughout this historical period, there are classes, class contradictions and class struggle. [...] These contradictions can be resolved only by depending on the Marxist theory of continued revolution and on practice under its guidance. Such is China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, a great political revolution carried out under the conditions of socialism by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes.

The whole Party must hold high the great red banner of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought and lead the hundreds of millions of the people of all the nationalities of our country in carrying on the three great revolutionary movements of class struggle, the struggle for production and scientific experiment (Communist Party of China 1969).

In contrast to these interpretations of Marx's concept, the Marxist-Humanist revolutionary Raya Dunayevskaya analysed Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks* and other writings of his last decade as "new moments of the revolutionary philosophic-historic concepts" of Marx (Dunayevskaya 1991/1982, 180-191). She saw them as a new concretisation of Marx's concept of revolution in permanence, and that in turn as a recreation of Hegel's negation of the negation. This concept meant that revolution must continue after the conquest of power to a profound transformation of human relations:

The aim was to show how total the uprooting of the old must be, be it in work, or culture, or leisure, or self. And with it, how total freedom must be, which was the meaning of Marx's "revolution in permanence," that is, to continue *after* the overthrow of the old, at which point the task becomes most difficult, as it involves nothing short of such full *self*-development that the division between mental and manual is finally abolished (Dunayevskaya 2018/1986).

From this work arose her views of Marx as philosopher of revolution in permanence and, in contrast, of what she called post-Marx Marxism as a truncated Marxism that failed to draw on the totality of Marx's philosophy. This dual view of Marx and Marxism meant to her a philosophy that could address the problem of unfinished revolutions of the 20th century – a problem we still face today – including transformation into opposite as in the case of the Russian Revolution turning into state-capitalist totalitarianism, as well as revolutions that stop short, as with Egypt's 2011 revolution. It meant also that revolutionary organisation must be grounded in revolution in permanence, not only as strategy and politics but as philosophy.

Dunayevskaya extended the concept to address women's liberation, seeing it as a dimension of Marx's concept of permanent revolution as early as his 1844 *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts*, where he brought up the Man/Woman relationship as measure of the inadequacy of what he called vulgar communism, but also of how deep and total the social uprooting needs to be. Then the *Communist Manifesto* called for the abolition of the family and "class culture" (Marx and Engels 1976, 501) as well as of private property and the state. She held that his vision of the "absolute

movement of becoming” (Marx 1973/1858, 488) was a translation of “revolution in permanence” (Dunayevskaya 1996/1985, 192; 203). It also meant giving space in a developing postrevolutionary society for what would replace the family as we know it:

We are so backward on the whole question that we will have to go through a lot of stages of actual experimentation, with people having the right to choose. [...] That is why I emphasize that the expression “revolution in permanence” as *Marx* used it [...] was not just a political expression, the overthrow of the old regime. That is only the first stage. Now that you’ve gotten rid of what is, what are you going to do to create the new?

Marx’s Critique of the Gotha Program is the finest critique in the sense of seeing that the revolution in permanence has to continue after the overthrow. Yes, there’s the idea that there’s a transition period, and the state will wither away – but in our age we know that we’ve seen an awful lot not of withering away but the state getting totally totalitarian. So the point is the recognition of what Marx meant by revolution in permanence, that it has to continue afterwards, that it encompasses the criticism that’s necessary, the self-criticism that’s necessary, and the fact that you have to be very conscious that until we end the division between mental and manual labor [...] we will not really have a new man, a new woman, a new child, a new society. [...] You must never forget that the revolution in permanence refers to you too, not just to the enemy, and that it has to be continuous after the day of the revolution and the conquest of power, as much as the day before (Dunayevskaya 1996/1985, 181-182).

We argue that this conversion of Marx’s concept of permanent revolution into the fullness of a philosophy reveals precisely the Marx that is needed for our day.

4. The Significance of Marx’s Revolution in Permanence for Our Day

We need to grapple with Marx not only as economist, politician, organiser, historian, but most crucially as *philosopher* of permanent revolution. For what is so needed for our day is the creation of an overarching vision, a pole of attraction that a revolutionary philosophy can be. That revolutionary philosophy must of necessity be the foundation for a dialectic of organisation.

How can Marx’s ideas help us with the problem of how to make new revolutionary beginnings in a time when the counterrevolution is ascendant, without losing sight of the need to prepare for the equally crucial question of what happens after the revolution? Capitalism has taken various forms as it developed, with the latest apparently suicidal stage – as seen most glaringly in the steady march toward climate chaos – shaped by its endemic crisis since the mid-1970s generated by its falling rate of profit. Throughout these stages, the humanism and dialectic of *Capital* remain prime determinants of allowing Marxist responses not to stop at economic analyses but to release, rather than inhibiting, new revolutionary subjects and directions. Critical for the present moment is to take up Marx’s humanism and dialectic as essential dimensions of his philosophy of revolution in permanence.

This decade has seen no shortage of discontent, resistance, revolt, even revolution. What is needed is not another vanguard party, not another mind-numbing lecture to social movements of the need for a political agenda, strategy, and tactics, nor a fatalistic belief that capitalism will collapse all on its own, or that gathering revolt will spontaneously generate the new society, making theory superfluous. We must reck-

on with the character of this moment, when not only centrist bourgeois politics but fascism on the right and apologetics for Bashar al-Assad's genocide on the "left" are pulling to disorient the masses of people dissatisfied with the ongoing social disintegration. What must be stressed today is the role of a unifying philosophy that points to the need for revolution in permanence, and its potential to act as a polarising force for universal human emancipation, to make real the negation of the negation as the dual rhythm of revolutionary transformation: the destruction of the old and the construction of the new.

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Minding the Gap: Marxian Reflections on the Transition from Capitalism to Postcapitalism

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Abstract: Building on contemporary debates over the past several decades in Marxist and post-Marxist theory regarding the relationship between capitalism and postcapitalism, this essay will explore the enduring relevance of Marx's treatment of this issue in some of his most significant, though increasingly less contemporarily engaged with texts (as *Capital* [Vols. 1-3] and the *Grundrisse* take pride of place). Here, I look toward the middle and early period of Marx's oeuvre to pull out the most important statements and insights regarding the relationship between capitalism and postcapitalism, focusing on *The German Ideology*, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, and *The Communist Manifesto* in order to offer reflections on how Marx's work, 200 years since his birth, offer the contemporary and future left guidance on "minding the gap" between capitalism and postcapitalism as we live, work, and struggle still deeply ensconced within the confines of the decadent capitalist mode of production. Combing close-reading of key relevant texts in Marx's oeuvre with reflective commentary on how Marx's work can speak to the contemporary conjuncture, this paper offers a synthetic commentary on how leftists, both scholars and activists, should approach the question of the relationship between radical praxis within capitalism and the character of potential postcapitalisms that may emerge. This essay is loosely organised around three crucial questions: (1) What can we learn from Marx's discussions on the historical transition and the overall radical intellectual project of dialectical materialism that can assist us in understanding the transition from capitalism to a democratic, egalitarian postcapitalism (i.e., socialism/communism), specifically concerning complexity and time? (2) How does contemporary capitalism reproduce itself social-psychologically (i.e., ideologically) and what are the implications of that for a postcapitalist transformation? (3) What is/are the role(s) of revolutionaries in dealing with the first two questions?

Keywords: Karl Marx, postcapitalism, social psychology, revolutionary change, dialectics, political struggle

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1. Introduction: Marx and "the Gap"

The debates about the enduring relevance of the working class to radical and revolutionary politics and transformational change more generally rage on in the pages of the most popular left publications such as *Jacobin*, *Dissent*, *Salvage*, *Monthly Review*, and *New Politics*, as well as more academic journals like *New Left Review*, *Historical Materialism*, *Socialist Register*, and *Catalyst*, through the work, past and present, of scholars as wide ranging as Vivek Chibber, Ernesto Laclau, Andre Gorz, Chantal Mouffe, Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor, Étienne Balibar, Fredric Jameson, Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, and David Harvey and countless others. The question of

whether the specificities of economic exploitation or other kinds of identity-based oppressions, not necessarily disconnected from a broader system of economic exploitation, are more likely to serve as the most radical basis from which revolutionary subjectivity (understood both subjectively and objectively) could or will spring forth, endures at the paramount concern for contemporary scholars and left activists. Post-(structural) Marxists like J.K. Gibson-Graham leave us questioning whether capitalism as Marx (and Engels) presented it to us can still be understood as a universal(ising) paradigm from which we can understand the contemporary conjuncture. It is my hope here that by returning to some of the hallmark texts of Marx's oeuvre that new insights can be gleaned for our moment, and the moments that follow over the next century, that could better inform our solidaristic orientation towards the present and near- and long-term future – putting aside, but informed by – the debates around identity politics, the working class, and the ostensibly universality of capitalism as a functionally monolithic system.

In the spirit of the aforementioned authors, and many others, the reflective, synthetic “readings” offered here will not attempt to parse Marx's original meaning or intent (nor even to offer some original contextualisation of certain ideas within his broader body of work – though some of this is inherent to make sense of any individual insights). Instead, what I present here will be propositions and guidance drawn from and through Marx's (and in some places Marx's and Engels') works applied in our moment, 200 years since Marx's birth.

This counsel for our times drawn from and through Marx will certainly not be individually original or novel readings, interpretations, or applications of Marx, but the hope here is that by looking back, with critical eyes, conditioned by our historical context, this short essay will be able to combine these reflections in a unique way that will spark further discussion and interest in the continuing importance and value of Marx's most significant works around the relationship between radical praxis within capitalism and the character of potential postcapitalisms that may emerge through these hopefully last, decadent years of capitalism. Absent a single or cohesive redress of all of the fundamental issues related to the “gap” between capitalism and postcapitalism in Marx's work, this short reflective essay will present the various pieces of a response, without deigning to suggest they offer a non-contradictory vision. In that vein, this essay will be loosely organized around three interrelated questions: (1) What can we learn from Marx's discussions on the historical transition and the radical intellectual-activist project of dialectical materialism that can assist us in understanding the transition from capitalism to a democratic, egalitarian postcapitalism (i.e., socialism/communism)? (2) How does contemporary capitalism reproduce itself social-psychologically (i.e., ideologically) and what are the implications of that for a postcapitalist transformation? (3) What is/are the role(s) of revolutionaries in dealing with the first two questions?

Before delving into these three interrelated groups of questions, it is important to frame the purpose of these categories more clearly. Marx is without a doubt one of the most, if not the most, original and insightful critical analyst of capitalism who ever lived. And though many treat Marx's project as a scientific endeavour (a claim I remain agnostic about), Marx's project was undoubtedly a political project against capitalism, aimed at aiding the building of a humane, democratic future for humanity – and our planet more generally beyond capitalism. It is this political project that motivates my reflections here. And while it is a cliché to say that Marx was disinterested in writing recipes for the kitchens of the future, the presentation here will focus on the Marxian insights that may better assist us, the academic and activist left, in having a

viable opportunity to make our own recipes in the kitchens of the future (or at least sketch some floor plans and work orders for the foundations for those kitchens of the future, so maybe our children or grandchildren can be the chefs of those kitchens) (Fraser 2016, 38).

As Marx reminds us in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*:

What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges. (Marx 1978d, 529)

2. The Dialectics of Transition

In order to better appreciate the complexities of any transition from capitalism to socialism, it is important to reemphasise the dialectical quality of the transition from feudalism to capitalism and how this bears on the hopefully eventual transition from capitalism to an egalitarian postcapitalism. In *The German Ideology*, Marx describes how the feudal trade guilds came about through the need for artisans to organize against the “robber nobility”, to orchestrate collective marketplaces, to accommodate “the growing competition of the escaped serfs swarming into the rising towns” (Marx 1978b, 153). From this, in a much more complicated and historically diverse and messy process, the bourgeoisie emerged as an increasingly coherent class position at odds with the dominant feudal relations of production ruled by the aristocracy – the lords.

The overall project of historical or dialectical materialism, it could be argued, is fundamentally about this question of transition – of “minding the gap”. “[Materialism] does not explain practice from the idea but explains the formation of ideas from material practice; and accordingly it comes to the conclusion that all forms and products of consciousness cannot be dissolved by mental criticism [...] but only by the practical overthrow of the actual social relations which gave rise to this idealistic humbug; that not criticism but revolution is the driving force of history” (Ibid., 164). But to say that criticism is not the driving force is not to say that it does not play an important role in the service of revolution (otherwise, Marx’s entire oeuvre would be the most egregious performative contradiction in the history of human civilisation).

Capitalism also did not come into existence everywhere overnight. There are even still places – not many mind you – on Earth that remain untouched by primitive accumulation (and capital accumulation). This is not to diminish the total(ising) power of capital, but rather to remind ourselves that though we must rush things, there is a certain degree to which we cannot rush revolutionary change. Marx never gives us a real sense of how long a revolution takes, or how fast it should proceed. It is unclear if Marx even thought such a determination was one that any person or group of revolutionaries could decide. Embracing the dialectical contradictions of capitalism, as they relate to the struggle for socialism, could very well mean that revolution, the fight to transform life – rooted in the relations of production – and the consciousness it determines might just be a multigenerational project taking place over decades, if not a century or more. We know that people, especially well-conditioned adults, do not tend to change quickly. That fact, combined with the lack of any consistent predictive ability to determine the precise social interpretation and reaction towards the next crisis of capitalism (which there will be repeated iterations of for the duration of the capitalist mode of production), we can merely do our best to organise our conscious-

ness-raising projects in preparation, to shape the narrative of those forthcoming crises. We can certainly do this, but the effects of these efforts may well take a lifetime or more.

There are important implications of this insight, some of which are well-captured in the political-strategic orientation of the quarterly *Salvage* headed by Rosie Warren and China Miéville among others. The project of *Salvage* aims to defend hope against unearned optimism; they see pessimism, radically-oriented and realistically deployed, as the armour to protect hope for when the left actually deserves and needs it most. The practical outcome of this pessimistic hope is that it prevents expectations in any one moment or around any one project or candidate (e.g., Bernie Sanders or Jeremy Corbyn) from getting too high – and then when the basically inevitable happens (inevitable at least at this particular moment of capitalism) and the revolution is not immediately on the horizon after either a tempered success or complete failure, people are disillusioned, lose the (false) hope they had, and lose any functional semblance of faith in the struggle (i.e., there is a huge risk of demobilisation, especially among younger and greener activists). This is the practical implication of the above comments on time: if we do not take time seriously, and accept in a critical, contingent way, that we cannot rush or force revolution (which is not the same as not organising and acting in pre-emptively revolutionary ways – especially as they relate to making things better in the short-term in a way that doesn't make revolutionary transformation more difficult and consciousness-raising more generally), we could indeed do damage to the long-term possibilities for transformational change towards an egalitarian postcapitalism. It is worth again quoting Marx at length here:

And if these material elements of a complete revolution are not present (namely, on the one hand the existing productive forces, on the other the formation of a revolutionary mass, which revolts not only against the separate conditions of society up till then, but against the very “productive life” till then, the “total activity” on which it was based), then, as far as practical development is concerned it is absolutely immaterial whether the idea of this revolution has been expressed a hundred times already, as the history of communism proves. (Marx 1978b, 165).

3. Social Psychology between Capitalism and Postcapitalism

Marx tells us in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living (Marx 1978e, 595).

If we are to find a single guiding thought on how the left should “mind the gap” it must take this oft-quoted passage with the utmost seriousness. Let us first think about why this question is relevant to begin with. Does Marx not imply, if not directly state, that it is the material base of society that determines the social psychology of the people in that society (i.e., that life determines consciousness)? Therefore, if the relations of production are significantly altered or there are novel developments in the means of production that radically alter the reproduction of society, social psychology (or collective consciousness). Against the facile base-superstructure determinism that Marx

is so often caricatured with, it would be impossible for Marx to theorise radical change (G.A. Cohen's slightly more nuanced technological determinism notwithstanding). However, this is quite obviously not the case. People within capitalism oppose capitalism, and according to Marx they organise themselves due to contradictions that emerge within the mode of production and the relations of production more specifically. Cohen is not wrong that these changes and contradictions *can* be rooted in technological developments, but there are far more and deeper forms of contradiction that *can* produce the disjunction between the base and superstructural reinforcement of the relations of production within capitalism (Harvey 2014). Those working within the Marxist tradition throughout the twentieth-century, Erich Fromm being the most significant, explored the specifically psycho-social dimensions of the contradictions of capitalism.

Marx begins here by telling us how the worker within capitalism "becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities" (Marx 1978a, 70). Human beings, the workers who reproduce the fundamental elements of society, are reduced to the equivalent of the commodities they produce and even occasionally buy for themselves (an extension of this analysis has been complicatedly but importantly extended to the household and unremunerated care work by feminist-inspired Marxists in the form of social reproduction theory [see Bhattacharya 2017]).

In *The German Ideology*, Marx rearticulates this understanding in a broader sense of the relationship between material production and ideology: "The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men [sic], the language of real life [...] Men [sic] are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these. [...] Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (Marx 1978b, 154-155). This is Marxian materialism. Not that ideas and consciousness are irrelevant or unimportant, but simply that they are fundamentally conditioned by materiality, specifically as it relates to the material relations of production – and the reproduction of life more broadly. Marx does provide some guidance on how this relationship works, but it is not precise, consistent, or universal. The relationship between life and consciousness, besides the axiom that life determines consciousness, is a complex interplay of diverse forces that cannot be a priori theorised.

For the left this means understanding how factors as wide-ranging as class position, industry sector, gender, race, what television channels your parents watched, what articles and memes your friends share on social media could interact to affect the development of revolutionary consciousness. While it is obvious that Marx did not discuss in any of his writings the attendant ideological impact of television or social media, nowhere does he say that *only* production and class matter. He could have said this. And while there are undoubtedly examples scholars and critics could pull out that imply a kind of class-material reductionism, from the early to the late/mature Marx, the relationship between materiality and ideology (and the psycho-social factors interpenetrating the two porous categories) is taken seriously (the often convoluted protestations of an otherwise excellent theorist of ideology like Louis Althusser notwithstanding). The question that Marx leaves un(der)addressed is: what other dimensions of "life" that determine consciousness, besides material reproduction, matter? I submit that this repeatedly unclarified space, whether intentional or not, is absolutely consistent with contemporary (non-liberal) conceptions of intersectionality (especially those theorised and represented by Angela Y. Davis and Keeanga-

Yamahtta Taylor). It is the materially-based, but not simplistically determined, social processes whereby life determines consciousness where a more humble revolutionary left should focus. This will mean never abandoning the pride of place of workers, but more intentionally appreciating and adapting our strategies and tactics to the complex processes that produce various forms of consciousness. After all, the premise of intersectionality is that by dealing more complexly with the racialised, gendered aspects of work, we will be better suited to make radical progress.

The worker – in a manner not wholly dissimilar from the bourgeoisie – is conditioned by greed and avarice (Marx 1978a, 71). The capitalist is a carnivorous beast and as a result of the broader logic and functioning of capitalism “man [sic] (the worker) no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions [...] and in his [sic] human functions he [sic] no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal” (Ibid., 74). The difference between the manner in which the non-capitalists and capitalists are conditioned is that even without the psycho-social penetration of the psychology of the subjects of the capitalist class, the logic of their class position demands that they behave according to greed and avarice regardless. Workers, while they are subjected to the materially-rooted, ideologically justified and normalised pressures of the mentality of capitalism, they also experience the contradictions between the ideology of capitalism (e.g., freedom, choice, generational improvements, hard work, etc.) – though certainly not with any consistent awareness or acknowledgment or vision of an alternative society with any degree of consistency.

The potentiality remains, despite the workers being reduced the most wretched of commodities, and the attendant alienation they experience. It is this alienation, in addition to the ideological narratives, examples of which are mentioned above, that are the fundamental psycho-social elements of capitalism that prevent the workers from more actively working for the radical change their subject position supposedly has them destined for. So we are left with an analysis where the structures of capitalism produce the objective conditions for both the revolution of the working class and the objective (subjectively-experienced) psycho-social effects that undermine that capacity or opportunity to collective resistance and radical restructuring of society. What then could be the intervening force that could in the course of human history push us in one direction over another (though clearly we are already experiencing the victory of the latter category of revolution-destabilising effects)?

4. The Revolutionary Subject(s) Between Capitalism and Postcapitalism

There are two important books that have come out recently aiming to explore the transition from capitalism to postcapitalism, which are both, in somewhat different veins, rooted in the ostensibly revolutionary potential of emergent political-economic developments in information technologies. While there is much to appreciate in Paul Mason’s *Postcapitalism: A Guide to Our Future* (2015) and Nick Srnicek’s and Alex Williams’ *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (2015) regarding how our worlds are changing and the potential effects of digital evolution and automation technologies can have (in addition to the necessary critiques of Third Way liberalism, neoliberalism, and even [especially in Srnicek and Williams] of the fetishization of localism and horizontalism on the far left), what is most important to my discussion here are the two, interrelated differences between these two books’ arguments.

First, the books differ in how they approach what I would refer to as the teleological question. For Mason, information technology produces material conditions that more or less (and perhaps unironically in his view) go on to produce, as if it is a kind

of political automation, the radical resistances that will push our planet beyond capitalism. *Inventing the Future* makes no such implication. As Fuchs (2016) prefigures in his critique of Mason, for Srnicek and Williams, radical progress is absolutely not an automatic (or automated!) outcome of technological evolution; it is a product of counterhegemonic struggle.

This leads to the second key difference between how these two very readable books approach their theorisations of the transition from capitalism to postcapitalism: whether there is a need to mobilise a coherent democratic, egalitarian vision to animate and connect oppositional forces aiming to build a more just global political economy. For Mason, while he certainly provides excellent progressive policy proposals like universal basic income (an agenda item also advocated for by Srnicek and Williams), his answer is unclear. Given Mason's position on the teleological question, it is not surprising that, despite his attempt to articulate a coherent answer through his "Project Zero", the role of building and struggling over an alternative counterhegemonic political programme in his work is ambiguous at best (Mason 2015, Chapter 10).

For Srnicek and Williams, the answer is fundamentally the opposite – and vociferously so. Struggle over, and the demands constitutive of, such an alternative ideological system must be the sine qua non of an emancipatory transition from capitalism to postcapitalism. Srnicek and Williams argue that the possibility that the forces of capital will be victorious in the evolving forms of class warfare and struggle that comprise capitalism in the ongoing twenty-first century must not be underestimated. In fact, *contra* Mason, *Inventing the Future* asserts this is precisely where our current trajectory will take us, if a radically democratic alternative is not forcefully demanded and successfully empowered. The differences in these texts is even clear from their titles: Mason's is a "guide to our future" – a future that is apparently going to happen – but for Srnicek and Williams, if we're going to have a future worth living for most people on the planet, it will need to be invented.

Lest we stray too far from Marx on the occasion of celebrating his enduring relevance on the 200th anniversary of his birth, these two distinctions, put up against an important similarity between these two books, the decentering of the working class as the inherent revolutionary subject of history, is where we now turn.

While much can and has been said here about the centrality of the working class in Marx's theorisation of the transition between capitalism and postcapitalism (i.e., communism), when thinking about the formulation of radical, revolutionary subject(tivitie)s it is crucial to keep in mind Marx's justifications for the centrality of the working class. They don't have the most to lose (this would be the bourgeoisie). They don't have the most to gain (the lumpenproletariat would). The proletariat is theorised as the transhistorical revolutionary subject (the subject-object of history), because, yes in addition to having a lot to gain, it is their place in the relations of production and the relationship that enables among the class members themselves. The workers work together on a daily basis for hours on end. They are also directly responsible for the material reproduction of all of the classes, including both the working class and the capitalist class. Without the labour of the proletariat society would come to a crashing halt. This is the radical power of the proletariat. Only in a world economy rooted in luxury could a consumer, non-class-based approach to revolutionary action be even remotely viable, and then consumer resistance (i.e., boycotts, sit-ins, and the like) is only likely to be disruptively reformist, as opposed to transformative.

"In order to abolish the *idea* of private property, the *idea* of communism is completely sufficient. It takes actual communist action to abolish actual private property"

(Marx 1978a, 99). While this is an important lesson for all academic leftists, who all too often elide this fact, this statement does not give much direction as to the mechanism through which communist action should proceed. We can accept that a broad conception of the working class is the most likely entity to perform this world-historical actions, but even that does not tell us much about *how* they are supposed to conduct such action.

The (Communist) Party is typically the form and mechanism through which the working class is supposed to exercise its world-historical project.

The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement. (Marx 1978c, 499)

Beyond thinking more broadly about the conceptualisation of the working class (Marx's treatment is typically narrowly confined to the industrial proletariat), despite the increasing proletarianisation of world labour, given the importance of the site of economic production, whether the (products of) labour is (are) physical or immaterial, the latter of which has been an important focus of the work of Hardt and Negri and Jodi Dean especially, certainly a broader conception of the working class is possible. Beyond this, we should think to Marx's use of the Party as an intervening mechanism (here again Jodi Dean's most recent work on the relationship between crowds and the Party is useful, see Dean 2012; 2016). For Marx, the Party is the intervening mechanism. The Party, beyond any rigidly vanguardist interpretation, is composed of those people who've reached a certain level of consciousness regarding the heinousness of capitalism and the desperate world-historical need for a just alternative.

The Party in the twenty-first century is a pedagogical tool as well. It is the practice run (in both senses of the word practice, both as a lower stakes experiments and the process of exercising an already learned skill set – like in the different meaning of football practice and a medical practice). The Party, a group of organised, committed individuals in solidarity, practicing democracy of discussion and unity of action intervenes psycho-socially. They have a social-revolutionary therapeutic role to play. Against the hyper-individualised self-help soothsaying of contemporary psychotherapy, the Party is a radical therapeutic entity that helps the psychologically sick members of the sick system of capitalism properly recognise the systemic basis for their illness (and before that, the recognition of the experience of exploitation, oppression, and alienation as illnesses). The Party is participatory pedagogy and therapy (with the goals of ending the need for radical pedagogy and therapy in the senses that they are needed within capitalism). This is one of the key silences in Marx's key texts. To get to this interpretation, one needs to read a bit between the lines to view the function of the Party – the specificity of which is woefully undertheorised in Marx's work.

Marx, especially in the *Communist Manifesto*, articulates an organic leadership relationship between (and most importantly, among) the Party and the working class, the purported revolutionary subject of history. This relationship needs to be problematised, perhaps more than it already had needed to be, given the impending possibility of automation-driven unemployment. Capitalism is an extremely adaptable and malleable mode of production. While there is always a chance that such fears of mass unemployment are exaggerated, as they have often been throughout the history of capitalism, it is speculated that around 40% of all jobs could be automated by

the middle of the twenty-first century (Frase 2016, 3-9). If this is even close to true, the employed working class as the revolutionary subject of history, the one meant to bridge the gap, to drive the transition from capitalism to socialism, would cease to operate within the relations of production as Marx described. The possibility, again, however exaggerated, combined with the on-going changes to the character of, increasingly digital, labour should give us pause against the more orthodox Marxist impulse to put all of our cards in the hands of a narrowly-defined working class – or in any vaguely defined vanguard or party. While the alternative options for a revolutionary subject would then remain much more complicated, the complexity is no reason to ignore the Marxian demand that we “mind the gap” between capitalism and post-capitalism beginning with the material-ideological conditions as they are, in addition to maintaining belief in the practical strategic value of radical political party organisation as part of an effective class struggle aiming to successfully “mind the gap.” Just as capital(ism) is a relation, is a movement, so too is communism. “Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premise now in existence” (Marx 1978b, 162).

Taking all of the above discussion together, we remain with the more precise question of how to deal with “the gap.” The importance of this gap is expressed quite clearly by Marx:

Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men [sic] on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found a new society. (Ibid., 193)

Radicals on the left, especially over the past several decades have become increasingly interested in localised dialectical opportunities for moving beyond capitalism from within capitalism as the possible (or a possible) resolution to “the gap” – what has been referred to as prefigurative political experimentation. Marx does not say very much in his most noteworthy texts, but there is a key passage from the *Critique of the Gotha Program* that is very much important as we think about the relationship between our radical activities within capitalism and the character of the postcapitalism that emerges (including whether that humane postcapitalism successfully emerges in the first place). Marx states:

That the workers desire to establish the conditions for co-operative production on a social scale, and first of all on a national scale in their own country, only means that they are working to revolutionise the present conditions of production, and it has nothing in common with the foundations of co-operative societies with state aid. But as far as the present co-operative societies are concerned, they are of value *only* in so far as they are the independent creations of the workers and not protégés either of the government or of the bourgeois. (Marx 1978e, 536-537)

The question of how to organise effective resistance into the future is one of crucial import to the left. In many ways, one’s relative treatment of or position on prefigura-

tive politics (local or “folk” politics, as Srnicek and Williams [2015] describe it) likely has to do with the degree to which one is influenced more by the Marxist or anarchist traditions (though this is not always true – see Gibson-Graham for a good example of a more or less Marxist approach that is embedded with prefigurative political formulations). Still, Marxists have yet to develop a consistent or coherent approach to the relationship between local, radical, prefigurative experiments that do not themselves offer any serious threat to the global capitalist order but are nonetheless important symbolic resistances to the current system as well as representing authentic experiments in democratic governance and organization (regardless of the degree of horizontalism).

At their best, local prefigurative political enterprises can begin – or be part of a larger movement – to challenge the psycho-social conditions of capitalism, if still often failing to challenge the global structures and logic of capital. Prefigurative experiments such as cooperatives, which erode the distinction between worker, owner, and consumer, offer the opportunity to organise against the hyper-individualisation, hyper-competitiveness, and hyper-possessiveness associated with (late) capitalism. They offer the potential for worker-owner-consumers to learn and practice the democratic cooperative, solidarity-building skills that are not only central to any effective class struggle within capitalism, but the extent to which they are developed and passed along will also undoubtedly be central to shaping the quality and character of whatever iteration of postcapitalism that emerges. It seems dubious to assume that even if the global structures of capitalism were to implode on themselves, without the development within the late stages of capitalism of alternative ways of being and acting collectively with one another, that people who have been deeply ideologically conditioned by capitalism, would be able to effectively build a democratic, egalitarian postcapitalism on the fly. At their best, and this is to say that many on-going attempts at prefigurative politics fail in this respect, they do have a radical potential so long as they are aimed at building a global movement against capitalism towards a more just alternative – by workers and against the State and the bourgeoisie. Thus, as the above quote from Marx from the *Critique of the Gotha Program* indicates, we should be sceptical of, and critical towards, prefigurative political practices driven by (petit) bourgeois liberals that aim for collaborative relationships with existing State formations and those that are not democratically organised by workers themselves.

5. Conclusion

I hope the takeaway of this reflection essay marking the 200 year anniversary of Karl Marx’s birth is that we need to appreciate, understand, and critically struggle with the relationship between the materially-rooted ideologically instantiated psycho-social conditions of capitalism and the kind of postcapitalism that we want and are able to achieve. This is not an entirely – perhaps not even mostly – explicable relationship, but the value of the question itself, of the relationship itself, might just be the sine qua non of revolutionary transformation which results in a future worth struggling for – a democratic, egalitarian postcapitalism; for Marx, this postcapitalist society was always a communist society. While Marx’s major texts may not be able to provide a clear resolution to the specificity of the relationship between the psycho-social conditions of capitalism and the world-historical development of communism in the twenty-first century, his work does provide us with the unambiguous capacity to think, act, and solidaristically struggle through our own potential resolutions to this question. No other thinker in the history of modern or contemporary thought (at least not one who themselves is/was not indebted to Marx) provides today’s left with a more significant

legacy, not just as a founding figure, but remaining an animating lens through which we can get a better focus on more effective strategies for radical resistance and revolutionary transformation.

We must not only mind the gap; we must act in the gap in such a way that is self- and collectively transformational just as we aim for the transformation of our relations of production and consumption.

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Ideology, Alienation and Reification: Concepts for a Radical Theory of Communication in Contemporary Capitalism

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Abstract: Contemporary capitalism and its dynamics increase the material and ideological role played by the media, building a kind of sociality in which symbolic production becomes abundant. The critique of contemporary capitalism and the praxis to build alternatives to this form of society need to be put in the centre of debating cultural production. Cultural production interacts with the media and the market so that this symbolic field constitutes an increasingly predominant factor in the processes of the formation of consciousness. This instigates us to think about resistance as being necessarily linked to communication and culture. This article discusses the role of Marx's concepts of ideology and alienation for the constitution of a contemporary critique of the processes of the formation of consciousness.

Keywords: contemporary capitalism, communication, alienation, ideology, class struggle

1. Contemporary Capitalism and Communication: Media, Markets and Consciousness

From our point of view, to think of a radical theory of communication nowadays means to advance the critical investigation of the role and meaning of symbolic production in its various manifestations that are mediated with the specific material conditions of contemporary capitalism. Therefore, one needs to approach symbolic production with the category of totality and to reflect critically on the relations of symbolic production, overdetermination and contemporary capitalist society. This seems necessary for developing a communication theory that is not restricted to symbolic appearances (and thus does not limit itself to considering representations as "thing-in-itself", ignoring the importance of material relations of production and life reproduction for its consolidation) and, at the same time, does not leave out the complex mediations that constitute it (thus overcoming a mechanistic approach that reduces the understanding of everything symbolic to mere representations of material determination).

Consequently, to understand the dialectic of the symbolic nature and the social relations of production is a major starting point for a theoretical elaboration that analyses the complexities of the various communicational phenomena in our historical moment. A radical theory of communication also means understanding that such efforts need to be connected to the development of alternatives to capitalism and thus to the social struggles that develop in (and against) this form of social organisation. Understanding the dialectical character of the interactions established between the symbolic nature and the material relations of production, therefore, is of fundamental importance for the analysis of contemporary society's totality that aims to understand the role, meaning and potential of symbolic struggles for the development of alternative/emancipatory projects and the struggles that unfold as part of them.

This article discusses the key elements occupied by communication in capitalism's ideological and material reproduction. One can use Marxist concepts (such as alienation) to think about the formation of consciousness and worldviews in the context of the culture industry. In the same vein, this reflection also uses the notions of ideology, alienation and reification for analysing the relationship between contemporary social movements and communication.

In order to think about the kind of capitalism that we are living in today, let us begin with an observation by José Paulo Netto in his afterword to the new edition of *O Estruturalismo e a Miséria da Razão* (Structuralism and the Misery of Reason), a crucial book by Carlos Nelson Coutinho, who reaffirms the need to understand contemporary capitalism's particularities as a form of society that rules the world and evolves by bringing about new phenomena, thus requiring analytical tools capable of responding to new developments. One should not ignore the transformations that capitalism has undergone since the 1970s and, consequently, the need for theoretical approaches that can account for such transformations:

Capitalism cannot be considered theoretically as it was understood until the 1970s: new problems, new questions and new alternatives come into its reality. But it is necessary to emphasize emphatically that it is and continues to be capitalism – a way of producing/reproducing social relations from the material production of social life's conditions; production based on the exploitation of labour, containing contradictions and inherent limits of its structure and dynamics (of which the latest proof, and certainly not the last, was the situation started by the financial crisis of 2008) (Coutinho 2011, 258; translation from Portuguese).

Recognising the characteristic transformations of contemporary capitalism does not imply that we no longer live in a capitalist system (nor that we have to abandon the central categories needed for its analysis. Analysing how the system itself has tried to overcome its structural crisis of the 1960s and 1970s, the Brazilian economist Marcelo Carcanholo (2011) describes a set of constitutive characteristics of contemporary capitalism: neoliberal reforms that increase surplus-value production and make way for the return to capital's profitability; the expansion of fictitious capital; the increasing transfer of surplus from the periphery to the centre, thus boosting capital accumulation in the main countries in the capitalist world economy; the expansion of markets that, with the opening up of world trade and other measures, provide new spaces for the realisation of over-accumulated capital; and the acceleration of capital turnover in production and circulation, thus increasing profit rates.

Since capitalism's crisis constitutes a situation of the overproduction and overaccumulation of capital, capital must find ways to create and expand spaces for the valorisation of this surplus capital and increased surplus-value production. One strategy for this expansion and creation of new spaces of valorisation for the capital surplus is the use of public policies for transforming public services into profitable markets. The unprecedented development of the culture industry also stands in this context and has caused a qualitative leap in the role that the media play in the ideological reproduction of capitalism.

Much of the capital invested in the service sector is directed to the culture industry, which develops enormously in the form of large communication conglomerates. Television, newspapers, magazines and the entertainment industry playing an increasingly important role in society. Such media are organised in the form of oligopo-

lies and are used to impose neoliberalism as hegemonic discourse in the public sphere. The ideology of “self-regulating” markets’ “autonomy” perspective has widely spread legitimising not only the state’s economic policies but also generating a society that is deeply fragmented and individualised and in which forms of human achievement are seen as isolated and “successful projects” similar to those developed by corporations in the capitalist market.

Along with neoliberalism came the subordination of society to the logic of fictitious capital, which has also affected the realms of communication, culture and processes of consciousness formation. Carcanholo (2010; 2011) argues that it is necessary to get back to the category of fictitious capital developed by Marx (1894) in *Capital* Vol. III in order to understand this process. Fictitious capital is based on a complexification of capital’s typical logic: It has to do with the appropriation of value. Capital is constituted by the appropriation of surplus-value extracted from the productive process. Therefore, human labour produces value in the productive labour process and capital appropriates it.

Fictitious capital results in a relative autonomisation of the production process. At the beginning, with the development of interest-bearing capital, that process maintains a direct relation with productive labour: It takes on the form of loans so that monetary capital is invested that enables the productive process and the extraction of surplus-value. Carcanholo (2010; 2011) points out that the generalisation of this logic is the basis of fictitious capital. A person who receives some sort of income that we call a “periodic income” – from stocks, for instance – is projected as the owner of a total amount that might not exist. In situations where the total value does not exist and is not applied in the productive process, it is still the case that this periodic income represents what that value “could be” if it was applied. The individual who has got this periodic income can sell the right to this periodic appropriation of a certain amount on the market. This sale is made taking into account the value that it would represent if it were the result of existing capital. In this way, the existence of the total amount (that generates this periodic income) is projected. Its existence is constituted by the sale of the right to its appropriation on the market, even if it does not exist at all.

However, the autonomisation of finance capital over production cannot be fully performed. Financial crises express the impossibility of this autonomisation being total or absolute. When capitalism is subordinated to the logic of fictitious capital, the dynamics of appropriation expand to production’s detriment. A reduction of profit rates takes place and, in a downward cycle, capitalist crisis deepens.

Therefore, contemporary capitalism – existing under the hegemony of fictitious capital, which is characterised by “autonomisation” and an apparent detachment from the material determinations that produced it – seems to create as part of this movement representations that are so autonomised that they do not see themselves as a representation of some material referent. Generally, culture becomes a “thing-in-itself” that begins and ends in its own dynamics, supported by technical transformations that allow an unprecedented diffusion of its content, which expands to every layer of social life. The formation of consciousness formation and worldviews are made in direct interaction with the consumption of cultural products. The very dynamics of capital’s reproducibility deepen the fetishist character of such commodities.

Fredric Jameson’s (2002, 268-284) analysis of symbols is an important contribution for understanding the dynamics of the culture industry in contemporary (late) capitalism. Analysing the expansion of the logic of the commodity to the symbolic field and building on the assumptions developed by Theodor W. Adorno and Max

Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1985), Jameson emphasises how forms of culture are inserted into the logic of the commodity so that exchange-value dominates over culture's use-value and cultural consumption over reflection.

The consumption of entertainment as cultural commodity tends to abandon reflection and the ability of individuals to criticise what is consumed. Reality becomes increasingly fragmented. Jameson discusses the role of the culture industry in contemporary society, where we find massive supply of cultural goods and cultural transmission at high speed. The symbolic market constitutes the space for the production, diffusion and consumption of cultural goods whose main characteristic is the fact that humanity abdicates its function as a constructor of reality and becomes a mere passive appropriator of commodities. Humans are relegated to the status of objects. Human achievement is increasingly mediated by the consumption of material and symbolic commodities so that there is a pure focus on what exists, which challenges collective consciousness' imagination and emancipatory struggles for alternative models of society.

2. Marxism and Communication Theory: Emancipatory Praxis and the Concepts of Ideology, Alienation and Reification

In the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production, as Marx demonstrated, every commodity assumes a 'ghostly' form and seems to take on a life of its own. In contemporary capitalism, the logic of fictitious capital deepens the appearance of the commodity's autonomy, which is especially true in the case of cultural goods. In this sense, there does not seem to be an 'outside' of dominant culture. When sociality is strongly shaped by the media and the products of the culture industry and at the same time the consumption of such material and symbolic goods means a permanent logic of legitimation of the real, then the result is the intensification and deepening of the circuits of reification and ideology that influence the formation of consciousness. Consumerism dissociates 'being informed' and 'being entertained' from the social and collective sense of praxis.

The objective reconfiguration of contemporary capitalism not only gives high importance to issues of communication and ideology, but has also resulted qualitative differentiations of consciousness and political struggles. The ceaseless supply of cultural commodities deepens ideology's 'wielding of subjectivity'. In addition to being consumed, experienced and practiced in a reified way, communication is also often perceived in fragmented ways. It is of particular interest how this process influences contemporary social movements, their communication practices and social struggles.

3. Alienation

For such efforts, the concept of alienation is indispensable. The theory of alienation in Marx, starting with the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (Marx 1844), addresses the problems created by the transformation of labour-power into a commodity. It analyses the complex processes of estrangement of the individuals in relation to the social totality in the context of the exploitation of labour. The transformation of the human creativity into a commodity, from which the commodification of the worker itself derives, constitutes the alienation of the work process. Activities that are the creative source of human achievement become painful, exhausting, mere reproduction and a source of suffering. The result of human action appears to the worker as an exteriority that intimidates and turns against him.

Alienation results in a deep fragmentation of individuals. In capitalism, individuals produce and reproduce their lives as isolated individuals. The totality of social rela-

tionships that is the result of human activity appears to the individuals like partial and fragmented systems. In Marx's *Manuscripts*, we can read:

“Till now we have been considering the estrangement; the alienation of the worker only in one of its aspects, i.e., the worker's *relationship to the products of his labour*. But the estrangement is manifested not only in the result but in the *act of production*, within the *producing activity* itself. How could the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself? The product is after all but the summary of the activity, of production. If then the product of labour is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation. In the estrangement of the object of labour is merely summarised the estrangement, the alienation, in the activity of labour itself. What, then, constitutes the alienation of labour? First, the fact that labour is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working He does not feel at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labour*. [...] Lastly, the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another” (Marx 1844, 274).

With the insertion of culture into the logic of commodity production, the culture industry and its commodities occupy most of the non-labour time of individuals, as Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) point out. This free time is filled with commodities that reproduce the logic of alienated labour. As a result, the dynamics of alienation in society are extended and accentuated. The configurations of contemporary capitalism deepen and complicate this process. The establishment of the symbolic market means the promotion of a quality leap in the movement of alienation. The expansion of the logic of capital into the social fabric as a whole operates by transforming qualities into quantities. Large media conglomerates quantify consciousness, knowledge, morality, sensations, desires, identities, sexuality and affects. All human subjectivity, without exception, becomes commodified, i.e. put up for sale in the symbolic market. Marx's formulations in the *Manuscripts* help us to see how such expansion and colonisation of the whole of social life by the logic of exchange value establishes ways of life that are clouded, partial and fragmented.

Marx's theory of alienation is not only valid for media conglomerates, but also relates to the class struggles of social movements and their efforts to construct alternative forms of society. The danger is that anti-systemic political movements that try to operate 'spontaneously' and 'horizontally' end up reproducing isolation, fragmentation and individualisation. Many analyses of the social movements and protests that emerged globally since the beginning of 2011 in the context of the sharpening of the capitalist economic crisis, have highlighted the role played by communication technologies (especially social media). Some of the common characteristics of the communication practices developed, for example, by the movements during the mobilization processes in Tunisia (2011), Spain (2011/2012) and Brazil (2013) reaffirm alienation by advancing individualism and fragmentation.

One ideological idea is that social movements' questioning of how the discourse of large media conglomerates tries to criminalise and badmouth social protests is a spontaneous and horizontal communication process. Studies have shown that communication in social movements is not horizontal, but that there are groups of activists who are particular tech-savvy, take a leadership role and "choreograph" assemblies and their communication processes (Gerbaudo 2012; Fuchs 2014). The claim that individuals form independent opinions and produce and consume information in a self-determined manner independent from each other and without hierarchies (hence the talk about 'Twitter revolutions' and 'Facebook protests') ends up reaffirming alienation. The Marxist theory of alienation helps us to see how the fragmented interaction of individuals reaffirms their subjugation to the real. Symbolic production that ignores such mechanisms risks to reproduce these dynamics.

István Mészáros (2006, 166) points out that the richness of the Marxist theory of alienation lies in the fact that it is not mechanistic or rigid, but inherently dynamic. Alienation does not inscribe a closed and impenetrable circuit between alienated labour and the self-alienation of consciousness. There are spaces for overcoming the historical conditions of alienation. Alienation produces not only alienated consciousness, but also the contradictions that allow the consciousness of being alienated. Overcoming alienation presupposes a totalising and collective praxis rather than a sum of fragmented and isolated experiences of individuals atomised by capitalist sociality. The Marxist theory of alienation provides a series of fundamental contributions for understanding meanings and practices of communication in anti-systemic movements. The conditions of alienation can only be overcome by a totalising rupture that must include a transformation of the social relations of production. Such a fundamental change that aims at building historical alternatives must also incorporate symbolic struggles.

4. Ideology

Also the concept of ideology can inform contemporary communication theory and the relation of communication, consciousness and social movements. Marx and Engels (1845/46) in *The German Ideology* discuss the notions of false consciousness and mystification that are relevant for understanding the topic under discussion.

The classical meaning of ideology in Marx and Engels is that ideologies are distorted representations of a "distorted" reality. Ideology critique seeks to understand how from material relations of production based on alienated work emerge structures that legitimise such relations of production. Ideas become distorted by being presented and perceived in a way that is dissociated from their historical context. The conditions they represent appear as natural and ahistorical. More than simple and intentional lies, ideology is an expression of a particular consciousness that manifests material relations.

"Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears. From this moment onwards consciousness *can* really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it *really* represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of 'pure' theory, theology, philosophy, morality, etc." (Marx and Engels 1845/46, 45)

Ideology is constituted by mechanisms of inversion that dissociate ideas from history and present forms of domination as truths that are independent from society's contradictions. Understanding the role of such ideological forms of inversion and mystification in the production of discourses and cultural goods is a fundamental aspect of the critical cultural analysis. Marx and Engels (1845/46, 59) demonstrate that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force". Ideas that represent bourgeoisie's interest naturalise the class relations of capitalism. Capitalism is taking the absolute starting point of any society so that it is affirmed as a way of life. At the same time, this does not mean that bourgeoisie thinkers cannot come to relevant conclusions regard specific phenomena within this structural limitation.

The concept of ideology allows us to relate the production of meanings in communication processes to class relations and political interests. Ideology demystifies what is presented as universal by the ruling class and thus opens up perspectives for an uncolonised symbolic production and material structures underpinning it. At the same time, the concept of ideology allows us to question claims that antisystemic communication and political practices are mere "narrative disputes". One needs to see that narratives and discourses are deeply embedded into and shaped by material interests.

The danger of seeing communication as independent from material structures is that one does not consider systemic alternatives necessary and reduces political praxis to mere dispute expressed as narratives, discourses or subjective attitudes in the current world. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels (Ibid., 24) use the metaphor of the "valiant fellow" who "had the idea that men were drowned in water only because they were possessed with the idea of gravity" to criticise the philosophical method of the young Hegelians. They point out the ideological character of attempts to solve concrete contradictions by simply combating their representations. Contemporary "valiant fellows" focus on "narrative disputes" as the main horizon of communication in the current social movements. They end up focusing solely on representations and do not place questioning the material referent of culture at the centre of praxis.

5. Reification: Subjectivity as a Commodity and the Social Movement as a Market

Also the notion of reification is important for understanding society, politics and culture today. The logic of dehumanisation works via the symbolic market and constitutes a qualitative leap in contemporary capitalism. The link between neoliberalism, the culture industry and neoliberal ideology promotes the deepening of the process of reification that occurs at any stage of the development of capitalist society. The concept of reification can help us to think critically about the relationship between social movements and the production of communication. It can help us overcome the liberal frameworks that dominate the analysis of the communicative process.

Contemporary social movements often claim that their political goal is to increase the diversity of communication, to multiply voices and to be a mosaic of multiplicities and multiple partial interests. The Ninja Media Collective (Mídia Ninja), a group of alternative journalists, advanced such arguments in the 2013 Brazilian protests. The problem is that communication is framed from within liberal perspectives.

In such perspectives, the formation of consciousness is part of an essentially individual movement, where the collective is a mere sum of individuals and there is no

collective project. The role of communication is reduced to the construction of multiple subjectivities that are as diverse as possible, so that individuals can position themselves in the world. Here we can find exactly the capitalist logic that should be overcome: communication and consciousness appear to construct a democratic 'competitive market' of opinions and worldviews.

In such a mosaic market of subjectivities, the ultimate parameter is the individual as consumer who chooses opinions like commodities in a supermarket shelf and not the collective subject. The concept of reification helps us to criticise this uncritical introjection of the logic of the commodity. Reification appears in the construction of neoliberalism as a generality that derives from a series of partial elements. The reification of social relations and their representations makes domination and exploitation as an objective law that is external to human production.

Individuals establish specific social relations that under the conditions of alienation appear to them as having character of objective laws that cannot be questioned and changed. Social relations, then, are accepted as undoubted 'duty'. In the process of reification, the relations between the various partial systems, between each specific reality, appear to be produced by these partial systems, due to a principle that is internal to them. Thus, the final system, the totality, appears as a formality, not a set formed of material determinations and contradictions with its own dynamics. The concrete totality of the social process, which determines each of its parts, is in the consciousness of individuals replaced by a formal totality that seems to result from intersubjective interactions.

The abolishment of capitalist logic requires the connection of the processes of formation of consciousness with the production of social significations that could overcome the isolation of individual perception through constitution of a collective political subject in a collective and historical political project. This task demands transcending the barriers of symbolic and subjective production by relating subjectivity to the material relations and contradictions of society. Marxism makes indispensable contributions to this political task.

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Sexual Capitalism: Marxist Reflections on Sexual Politics, Culture and Economy in the 21st Century

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Abstract: From an apparent impasse and crisis in the 1970s and 1980s – politically and intellectually – Marxism has recovered to offer critical insights into contemporary changes and developments in late capitalist societies. Sexuality has been one area where Marxist critiques of commodification and consumption, reification, cultural production and its hegemonic effects and the structures of feeling and meaning-making that compose contemporary subjectivities have been of significant value in decoding legal, political and cultural changes in the regulation, prohibition and propagation of forms of sex and sexuality. This discussion will draw from some of the most important contributions to Marxist critiques of sexuality, contemporary and historical, to outline the contours of a critique of contemporary sexuality in society, notably Peter Drucker, Holly Lewis, Rosemary Hennessy, David Evans, and Keith Floyd. The Marxist critique of contemporary sexual politics and rights claims both recognises the importance of these struggles and provides a materialist critique that demonstrates both the contemporary power of Marxist analysis and a critical engagement with queer and constructionist “orthodoxies”. Marxism has become a central and important ground for exploring the vagaries of sexuality under capitalism in all its objectifying, commodifying, alienating and exploitative forms.

Keywords: sexuality, politics, culture, community, commodification, political economy

1. Introduction

Critical studies that focus on exploring sex and sexuality in contemporary societies are the site of a curious contradiction. Contemporary engagements with the history, politics and culture of sex and sexuality as *socially constructed* phenomena – which constitute what is now regarded as the “new sexuality studies” (Fischer and Seidman 2016) – have emerged from avowedly post-Marxist, anti-Marxist or non-Marxist positions. Yet the key themes and issues that they raise are complementary to and extended by Marxist analyses. Despite this, Marxist analyses are very much marginalised, and a reader exploring the mainstream of critical literature on new sexuality studies might be forgiven for thinking Marxists have nothing to contribute. This might in part be a product of the failure, until recently, of Marxist and left parties and movements to prioritise sexuality as a focus for critical work and political engagement. For many of those who have fought for lesbian and gay legal recognition, equal treatment, rights, justice and policy change, the words of Edge (1995, 3-4) might still have resonance¹:

[...] the Marxist tradition has no more influence on the modern lesbian and gay movement than it deserves. Gay Marxists who are encouraged by their straight comrades and leaders to shun the very real gains won since the GLF by an autonomous lesbian and gay movement are being seduced into an essentially heterosexist project where gay issues are sidelined.

¹ But see Wolf (2009) on the myth of Marxist homophobia.

More, left parties and movements influenced by Marxist theory and politics have been slow, until relatively recently, to take on the implications of a politics of sexuality and difference (the “Comrade Delta” crisis of the Socialist Workers Party being the most pronounced but by no means first example of the consequences of this neglect).² This does not, however, imply that Marxism has limited relevance in deconstructing contemporary sexual capitalism, particularly in the context of contemporary sexual politics in North America and Europe, where the slow rolling out of legal recognitions and formal equalities seem to have brought about a sense of impasse or exhaustion to radical agendas.³ For example, contemporary characterisations of homonormativity signify a particular legitimacy of non-heterosexual sexualities that might be better seen as an expression of a changing hegemonic regime to incorporate difference and subdue opposition (see Duggan 2002; 2004). Duggan (2002, 179) identifies homonormativity as:

[...] a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.

As Pilkey et al. (2017, 152) observe of Lisa Duggan's critique: “homonormativity is not simply read as the neo-liberal and assimilative dimension of lesbian and gay rights claims but is an apolitical outcome firmly situated – ‘anchored’, as Duggan puts it – in the domestic sphere”.

The celebration of the 200th anniversary of Marx's birth is a suitable point not only to reflect on the areas where Marx's political economy has so clearly influenced world affairs and intellectual understandings of social life; it is also important to explore where Marxism has made a less visible but nevertheless critical contribution. This brief discussion seeks to locate the importance of Marxist insights based upon a materialist political economy and an appreciation of the class nature of social division and conflict in understanding and theorising contemporary sexual politics.

The second section will briefly digest the contribution of Marxism to understanding sexuality and sexual politics. The third section will outline key contemporary analyses and their thematic critiques of commodification, identity recognition, reification and the cultural production of sexual hegemony in deconstructing sexual politics.

2. Locating Marxism within Sexual Critiques

The emergence of sexuality studies since the 1980s has been driven by social constructionist, Foucauldian, queer and feminist studies.⁴ These approaches emerged from post-structuralist and identarian conceptual roots, and focused on the theory and politics of the constitution of identities and subjects. Constructionist approaches focused on the constitution of normativities and discursive practices – constituting sexual

² There is considerable material on this case on the web – see selectively:

<https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/05/comrades-war-decline-and-fall-socialist-workers-party>; <http://socialistunity.com/swp-party-members-write-full-narrative-comrade-delta-rape-case/>; <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/mar/09/socialist-workers-party-rape-kangaroo-court>

³ Indicatively: Claes and Reynolds (2013); Duggan (2002); Conrad and Nair (2014).

⁴ Selectively across these approaches, see Beasley (2005); Fuss (1991); Jackson and Scott (2010).

identities, relations, orientations and practices – through institutional pedagogies.⁵ A key concern is the way regimes of power/knowledge propagate pathologies, prejudices and oppressions, and their naturalisation and normalisation circulate discursively within the social milieu (Seidman 2010). Foucault's (1976; 1984a; 1984b) historical survey of the construction of sexual subjectivities and normativities and their institutional and political contexts in ancient and Victorian societies is the paradigm study for social constructionist analyses. Mort (2000) extended this analysis to emphasise the centrality of medico-moral discourses in the framing of legal and political regulation in the British case since Victorian times.

Feminist perspectives focused more on the gendered construction of sexuality, where women's subjection and oppression are determinant features of sexual oppression (Jeffreys 1990; 2003; Marinucci 2010). Queer perspectives emphasise the fluidity of the constitution of sexual subjects within the context of a foundational and deconstructive understandings of sexual identity and relations, the performative nature of the reinforcement of gendered and sexual roles and their rupturing by transgression (Butler 1999; Hall et al. 2013; Lovaas, Elia and Yep 2013; Sullivan 2003).

With the exception of feminism, which dates back to Mary Wollstonecraft's (2015/1792) *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, these *radical* approaches date back to the 1960s and the emergence of a visible sexual politics, catalysed by the science of modern sexology in the 1940s and 1950s and the political consequences of the social change after the Second World War.

Much overlooked, socialist and particularly Marxist analyses date back to the late 19th century, with Magnus Hirschfeld's Scientific Humanitarian Committee advocating homosexual and transgender rights (see Weeks 1985) and Eduard Bernstein's defence of same-sex sexuality in commenting on the Oscar Wilde case (Bernstein 1895a; 1895b). The early years of the Bolshevik revolution saw the initial steps towards an enlightened approach to sexuality, spearheaded by Alexandra Kollontai (Healey 2001; Kollontai 1972; Porter 1980).⁶ Kollontai's thinking prefigured feminist concerns about women's exploitation in social institutions such as marriage and prostitution, but emphasised private property and class inequality and its resulting poverty and immiseration as casual factors in reinforcing gendered inequality and sexual oppression. These early recognitions of sexual politics, whilst underdeveloped, nevertheless show a concern amongst left leaders and intellectuals for sexual issues.

Reynolds (2003) provides an outline of the development of thinking about sexuality within Marxist thought and also seeks to show how Marxist political economy and critiques of hegemony and alienation have been and continue to be effective in challenging the pathology and later recognition and incorporation of sexual politics. In a more personal framing, Fernbach (1981) weaves the narrative of Marxism and homosexuality from Engels (1884) through to the 1980s. The main two strands of interconnection between Marxism and sexual studies between the Bolshevik revolution and the end of the 20th century were in the Freudo-Marxist concerns of the relationship between psyche, sexuality and politics (Robinson 1969) and the focus on family, gender and personal life (Brown 2012; Zaretsky 1976). Both of these are contributory, if sometimes tangential to a critical focus on sexuality within Marxist critiques, with the exception of the marriage of Freud and Marx in Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse.

⁵ The most cogent articulations of this approach are Seidman (2010) (one of the few introductory texts that explicitly addresses Marxism) and Weeks (2016).

⁶ For a critical account of the subsequent homophobia in Russia from Stalin to the present day see Healey (2017).

Though Marxist analyses have become more prominent at the beginning of the 21st century, sexual radicalism has had affinities with political radicalism. Rowbotham and Weeks (1977) look back at the classical sexologists and rehabilitate Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis as socialists who move forward, however incrementally, critiques of bourgeois prejudice against non-heterosexual normality at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Whilst still within a sexological paradigm, their political momentum significantly contributed to a movement through classic and modern sexology (Alfred Kinsey, William H. Masters, Virginia E. Johnson) to social and cultural critiques of the politics of sexuality.⁷

Likewise, the explosion of sexual politics in the late-1960s and 1970s involved left political movements, influenced by Marxist politics. Robinson (2007) provides a narrative that focuses on the influence of the left on Gay politics in post-war Britain, notably through participation in the Gay Left Collective in the 1960s and early 1970s. The left's participation in sexual politics is a feature of sexual liberation movements across the US and Western Europe, such as the Red Faggots in the Netherlands (indicatively Hekma and Duyvendak 2016; Hekma 2004; Hekma and Giami 2014; Cant and Hemmings 1988; Duberman 2002; Allyn 2001).

Equally, as well as the inspirational politics of Herbert Marcuse (outlined below), Marxist and Marxist-influenced intellectuals developed potent critiques of both the pathologies and prejudices of what Rich (1981) described, from a lesbian-feminist position, as “compulsory heterosexuality”. Hocquenghem (1993), for example, provided a potent Freudian influenced Marxist analysis of homophobia and the constitution of homosexuality as a pathologised yet captivating constitutive subject.⁸ This is not the place for a more comprehensive survey of Marxist contributions to the study of sexuality and the trajectories of sexual politics, but this brief sketch underlines the rich contribution, often either diminished or unrecognised, that Marxists have made to the critique of sexual capitalism.

Contemporary Marxist interventions in the theory and politics of sexuality are perhaps less prominently visible as being “Marxist” in character because they seek to develop a critical synergy with feminism, anti-racism, and other critical perspectives. The relationship between feminism and Marxism as “unhappy marriage” (Hartmann 1979) and analysis conjoining sex and class (German 1989) is a long one. More recently, critical engagements with social reproduction theory (Bhattacharya 2017) and intersectionality (Smith 2015; for a general survey, see Taylor, Hines and Casey 2011) underline a desire for an integrated and plurality of left critique within a materialist conception of social life. At the same time, the analysis of sexual capitalism is still one that benefits from a critical political economy of the material instantiation of sexual lives.

3. A Marxist Analysis of Sexual Capitalism

A Marxist analysis of sexuality in contemporary societies is based upon a political economy that recognises the crucial – if not singular – drivers of capitalism and class in shaping social relationships and their cultural contexts. It posits a relationship between the development of sexual identities, regimes of legal and political recognition and sexual cultures and normativities, and the development of capitalist markets and hegemonic formations of class domination.

D’Emilio (1992) directly links the emergence of homosexuality as a recognisable sexual identity – apart from a labelling based on particular same-sex practices – with

⁷ For the best overview of sexology see Bland and Doan (1998a; 1998b).

⁸ See also Marshall (1996).

the development of wage labour, the sophistication of which challenges and diversifies the family form. This approach ties identity to the labour process. The way in which capitalism produces identities and identity diversification as the labour process becomes more complex. Mirroring the constructionist deconstruction of sexual identities and pathologies, Red Collective (1978, 8) observe the way in which:

[...] perceptions and feelings we have feel natural, human, even eternal, as all capitalist relations do [...] The oppressing structures of monogamy and the various forms of permissiveness within which these personal feelings are felt, make it impossible to become conscious of their specificity (their particularity to this social structure).

Red Collective, developing their critique post-1960s, see the problems with traditional structures of monogamy and permissiveness, as well as sexual identity and its diversification, and tie the constitution of both perceptions and dominant naturalising discourses to the way in which capitalism develops both in commodification and the cultural construction of everyday hegemony. Here, as always, Williams (1977, 112-113) is instructive:

A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure. It is a realised complex of experiences, relationships, and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits. In practice, that is, hegemony can never be singular. Its internal structures are highly complex, as can readily be seen in any concrete analysis. Moreover (and this is crucial, reminding us of the necessary thrust of the concept), it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own.

A Marxist approach to understanding the operation of the structures and discourses that characterise and constrain sexuality and sexual politics does not see disparate institutional pedagogies and the power/knowledge nexus as key drivers, but as the hegemonising strategies by which class power is retained, consent is manufactured and new opportunities for capitalist markets are produced. This reflects Evans (1993), who focuses on the emergent discourses and legal and political shifts towards sexual citizenship as recognition of particularly lesbian and gay identities. In doing so, he emphasises what becomes a key theme for 21st-century analyses – the hollowness of a sexual politics characterised by the driving force of commodification, where sexual recognition is hand in hand with the emergence of new market opportunities and inclusion is on the basis of consumption. Evans recognises that the commodification of sexual life is prefigurative of a depoliticised and commodified lifestyle that divides sexual identities along class and material lines, leading to an absence of economic rights and weakness and limits to legal, political and social rights within the construction of sexual citizenship. Binnie (1995) and the essays in Gluckman and Reed (1997) extend this analysis of how consumption and commodification defines and characterises the public and cultural space occupied by people of diverse sexualities, diluting the potentiality of the critical extension of a politics rejecting the privatised and personalised politics of sexuality to produce political insights.

This ties in with Herbert Marcuse's (1969; 1998) explicit connection of the personal and the political in constructing a radical politics. He rejects Freud's (1957) arguments

for the need for conformity and repression to civilisation. For Marcuse, the objectification and repressive de-sublimation of the human subject constituted their alienation, and extended to both their valorisation under capitalism as a commodity and their repression from a sense of their sensual lives through technology and the everyday process by which lives were lived as objects and through objects. This limits the sense in which sexual freedom necessarily produces a sensual exploration of self and other, and so dilutes the sense of connecting with others that could constitute a counter-hegemonic politics. Marcuse, as with feminists, sees the personal and political as centrally important, but for Marcuse the material determinants of capitalism are central to how both sexual freedom and political freedom are dissipated.⁹

This broad critique of the politics of sexuality under capitalism is reflected in recent Marxist contributions. Lewis (2016) argues for an intersectional radicalism that focuses on the vagaries of capitalism as a central contextualising force. Wolf (2009) reflects a more strident Trotskyist-oriented politics that takes in a range of identity struggles under a Marxist critique of the constitution of post-modern radicalism and its dissolution of class power. Alderson (2016) argues that the constitution of queer politics and contemporary shifts in a more 'tolerant' capitalism mutates radicalism into a politics that sits subversively within parameters that dissipate, and draws from rather than builds opposition to capitalism.

Emphasising the critical importance of materialist political economy, Drucker (2011; 2015) provides a seminal mapping of the relationship between phases of developments in capitalist economies and regimes of accumulation with the social organisation of sexualities in society. With a focus on same-sex identities and relationships, he delineates three regimes of what he describes as "same sex formations", which reflect the cultural and social dominance of particular articulations of same-sex identities in society. He maps these phases as follows: the "invert-dominant" regime existed in the classical imperialist phase of capitalism from the 1870s to the start of the Second World War; the "gay-dominant" regime was part of the Fordist phase of capitalism up until the 1980s; and the "homonormative-dominant" regime started in the neo-liberal phase of capitalism and continues to the present day. The importance of this mapping, which to some extent reflects constructionist characterisations of the emergence of same-sex identity (and other sexual identities such as transgender), from pathology to political contestation through to recognition, is that it attributes strong relationships between how capitalism and class relations develop and how sexual identities and relations develop. There is no easy causal attribution, and there is the question of how mediating variables might delay, defer, suspend or radically change the nature of this relationship.

Drucker recognises that causal attributions theoretically in such a periodisation have to be subordinated to the particular conditions of capitalist development in different regional and national contexts, thus eliding with a materialist analysis that demands that there is a critical analysis focused on the concrete level of class formation, struggle and conflict. Hence there are different forms of both regimes of accumulation and same-sex formations in Europe and North America, Russia and China, Africa, South America and Asia. As Drucker (2015, 60) observes:

⁹ For an interesting contrast of Marcuse with alternative radicals – Foucault and Rubin – see Drucker (2014).

[...] the correspondence between regimes of accumulation and same-sex formations provides evidence for a basic historical materialist assertion: the material relations of production and reproduction constitute the fundamental matrix underlying all of social reality.

One of the strengths of Drucker's framework is to provide a basis for thinking about the forms of same-sex or non-heterosexual identities and relationships that have been legitimated by Fordist and neo-liberal regimes. Here, Drucker distinguishes between "Gay Normality" and "Queer Anti-Capitalism" in reflecting assimilationist positions where sexual identity formation conforms to changing patterns of markets and accumulation regimes, and resistant positions that see in conformity the dissolution of the possibilities of freedom, agency, equality and justice that are central to a sexually free political project. This reflects contemporary critiques of homonormativity and sexual politics. It elides with critical work within sexuality studies, which distinguishes between assimilationist positions (typically reflected in Sullivan 1996) and positions that link sexual recognition with radical politics (such as Conrad and Nair 2014; Gilreath 2011; Sycamore 2008; Warner 1999).

This political critique is important, because it contrasts with a queer politics that is focused on subjective freedom and oriented towards individual and subjective action through a cultural politics.¹⁰ Klein (2000) advances a cogent materialist critique of queer theory that extends this debate and argues that queer theory offers terms of change that are contingent in their possibilities for social change. The individuation of the queer subject potentially leaves queer politics open to the opportunities offered by neo-liberal capitalism on class grounds and subverts social change through a conservative agenda. In a different vein, Floyd (2009) seeks to find synergies between Marxism and queer politics through a critique that sees their common ground in framing and characterising totality and reification within a dialectic between queer theory and Marxism. The question of how far the conceptual critiques of sexuality are conflicting or potentially in creative tension is still a matter for debate.

This focus on the necessity of a politics of sexuality that has at its core radical social and cultural change has historical resonance in Marxist critiques. Dee (2010), in her analysis of the historical emergence and contemporary politics of LGBT liberation, emphasises the fertile ground of Bolshevik and past socialist engagements with sexual politics, particularly at a global level, as well as the crucial role of the left in connecting identity struggles with class politics and the vagaries of capitalist impoverishment.

Field (1995, 167; 172) is particularly eloquent in characterising the weakness of identity politics against the importance of a class critique and is worth quoting at length:

The factor which holds all reformist strategies back is the way that they define and ringfence supposedly 'lesbian and gay issues' as though lesbian and gay oppression simply effects those who have same-sex relationships. The reality is that gay oppression is a weapon of social control. We cannot hope to bring about real change for gay people whilst the system which causes gay oppression remains in place. [...] All 'lesbian and gay issues' are rooted in the politics of class struggle. When ambitious, bourgeois 'community leaders' seek to divorce these issues from wider social and political concerns the lesbian and gay movement becomes atrophied. Being able to rework and reassess the reformist gay rights programme in the context of defending working class interests is a vital step in breaking away from the frustrations and divisions of identity politics.

¹⁰ See Butler (1998) and Fraser (1998) for the seminal debate on queer as cultural.

It enables us to see how the issues which are so close to gay people are of equal importance to the rest of society. Far from losing our identity in this process, we can begin to recognise actual and potential allies all around us. Do we just want the same poverty traps and institutions? Seeking assimilation into what is perceived as 'straight privilege' has led many gay activists to confuse *equal rights* with *equal oppression*.

In this short survey, there is not adequate time to do justice to the richness of both historical and contemporary Marxist critiques. It should be apparent, however, that Marxism has become a central and important ground for exploring the vagaries of sexuality under capitalism in all its objectifying, commodifying, alienating and exploitative forms. It is evident that much has changed in the last 60 years with respect to sexual lives. Weeks (2007, 5-6), in his personal as well as political and cultural reflections on that change, warns of traps in assessing that change¹¹:

The first is a mindless progressivism that assumes that all is for the best in all possible worlds. The second is a declinist approach, which assumes that all change is for the worst and that the quality of our morality – for which we can read sexual behaviour and values – is in hopeless decline. The third approach assumes continuity: yes, superficial things have changed, but in essence power structures have remained resilient.

Weeks' second and third traps might be attributed to Marxist positions, emphasising the limits to change and emphasising the negative features of this change. It is always important to recognise the changing experience of people under sexual capitalism who have suffered degrees of pathology they might regard as absent or less pronounced. The value of Marxist critiques, however, is their diagnostic power as to how we got to where we are, the continuing limits and problems with where we are, and the real possibilities of emancipation moving forward, where sexual capitalism is challenged by a progressive Marxist (but not simply Marxist) politics.

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¹¹ See also Weeks and Reynolds (2013) for a discussion of these traps.

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Thinking the ‘Culture Wars’ and the Present Political Crisis with the Young Marx (and Friends)

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Abstract: We stand at a key juncture: a Western political crisis arose in 2016-17 to match the deep economic crisis of the preceding decade. Events and new social movements of recent years seem to hail the collapse of the project of liberal democracy, though it is hard to see what will replace it. Among the conceptual and analytic tools bequeathed by Marx are those necessary to better understand and anticipate the direction of this key historical moment – from Donald Trump, Brexit and the so-called ‘culture wars’ to the horizon of liberal democracy itself. In this reflection, I suggest some ways in which Marx’s early thoughts on the liberal state and civil society can and should help us to better understand and explain our present predicament. To say that the Young Marx can help us today with what he called ‘the ruthless critique of everything existing’ is not to say that he can do so alone. It is precisely the issues overlooked or ‘fudged’ by Marx and Marxism – gender, sexuality, and race/racism for example – that now sit at the centre of our ‘culture wars’, alongside but never reducible to the contradictions and crises of capitalism. I conclude that it is only with the help of other writers of the 20th and 21st centuries, from Antonio Gramsci to Frantz Fanon and bell hooks, that we can usefully mobilise the Young Marx today, to critique the world as we find it and especially – the very ‘point’ of theory according to Marx – to *change* it.

Keywords: Young Marx, culture wars, intersectionality, bell hooks

*“You also had people that were very fine people, on both sides”
-- President Donald Trump, 2017.*

*“Political emancipation was at the same time an emancipation of civil society from politics and from even the semblance of a general content”
-- The ‘Young’ Karl Marx, 1843.*

1. Introduction

Donald Trump’s response to reporters at a press conference following the murder of antifascist demonstrator Heather Heyer at the Charlottesville “Unite the Right” march by the neo-Nazi James Alex Fields Jr. was emblematic of the present political crisis. The political mainstream responded to Trump’s claim that there were “very fine people, on both sides” with outrage. Not only liberal and left wing commentators and politicians, but also conservative Republicans including House Speaker Paul Ryan, expressed disgust. The BBC North America correspondent James Cook later suggested that Trump’s comments gave “succour to the far right”, and approvingly cited Mitt Romney’s tweet in response: “No, not the same. One side is racist, bigoted, Nazi. The other opposes racism and bigotry. Morally different universes” (Cook 2017). Yet a BBC article entitled “America’s Extremist Battle: Antifa V Alt-Right”, published just six months before Charlottesville, had drawn an identical moral equivalence to that mobilised by Trump. There, the BBC described anti-fascists and the neo-fascists styling themselves “alt-right” as “two groups at the extreme ends of the political spec-

trum” (Yates 2017). Their use of violence rendered the two groups morally equivalent “extremists”, according to this view. So what changed?

The BBC has been one of many fronts in the so-called ‘culture wars’. Accused of peddling “fake news” by the Trump administration early in 2017 (BBC News 2017a), of “pro-remain bias” by Brexit supporters (Maddox 2017), and of anti-Corbyn bias by the Labour left – the latter at least partly substantiated by the BBC Trust, which found that political editor Laura Kuenssberg “broke accuracy and impartiality rules in a News at Six report about Jeremy Corbyn” (BBC News 2017b). These are seemingly extraordinary accusations for an organisation that prides itself on ‘neutrality’. But Tom Mills gets to the heart of the BBC’s ideological ‘neutrality’ in his analysis of structural bias against Corbyn: “Corbynism seeks to develop a political movement that can transcend neoliberalism. It therefore finds itself at odds with the prevailing culture of the contemporary BBC, which in any case has always been orientated towards mainstream politics” (Mills 2017). Political ‘neutrality’, as any first-year undergraduate student of politics should be able to tell you, is an impossibility. At the BBC it really consists of giving equal coverage to dominant forces within the boundaries of mainstream, status quo party politics. It is of course not alone in this – an LSE study of newspapers found that bias against Corbyn was widespread and systematic (Cammaerts et al. 2016).

Traditional media have struggled with the notion that a politician representing a project so ‘other’ to the neoliberal norm should be treated with any seriousness at all, let alone respect. Similarly, while Trump’s comments made the absurdity of taking a ‘neutral’ position on the rise of fascism inescapable to even the BBC, their earlier coverage of antifa and the alt-right drew a moral equivalence because political violence (their story had been inspired by the much-publicised punching of neo-Nazi Richard Spencer by a masked anti-fascist) situated both movements outside the sphere of ‘normal’ politics.

The political crisis experienced by the West today – with Trump and Brexit its two most powerful emblems, but Corbyn, Bernie Sanders, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and myriad other individuals and movements also at stake – is the endgame of neoliberalism and signals the fundamental limits of the liberal democratic state itself. The ‘normal’ politics of Western liberal democracies has been on a *tapering trajectory*, growing ever narrower; the only qualification for fitting within that normal politics being that one represents the (class, race, gender, sexual, cultural) politics of accepting neoliberal norms – what Mark Fisher calls “capitalist realism” (2009). That means accepting not only the privatisations and marketisations of public industries, goods and spaces, but also certain “moral” prohibitions – on raising income tax on high earners or corporation tax on big businesses, both of which are characterised as the real “wealth creators” in neoliberal societies (Whitham 2015).

What the culture wars have so starkly revealed is the horizon of this neoliberal politics and of the liberal democratic state. In his essay “On the Jewish Question”, the ‘Young Marx’ notes how the transition from feudalism and the rise of the bourgeoisie to the status of a ruling class effectively created a “political” state predicated on the “rights of man”, but in which a depoliticisation is underway through the creation of *civil society*. This emancipation and the political “freedom” the Enlightenment engendered was always inherently limited, and its contradictions were bound eventually to be revealed. The bifurcation of our social selves that the liberal democratic state model achieves, the internal schism between the self as a member of a political community and the self as “private” individual, a member of civil society, results, as the Young Marx saw, not in the abolition of religiosity but in its reincarnation. As long

as such a split defines our social life, our ability to make meaningful political progress is curtailed and our political culture becomes an ever-narrower domain. ‘Normal’ politics is reduced to choices between policy-tweaks: to questions of how the state can better facilitate the relationship between the privatised, atomised citizen-as-consumer – the member of civil society – and the market. It is in this political vacuum, this loss of meaningful debate over how we could and should live together as societies, that our present political crisis was born. In this reflection, I therefore draw upon key texts and concepts of the Young Marx to highlight how he anticipated the present crisis. But the Young Marx is not enough to explain and especially to *change* the direction of travel of Western (neo)liberal democracies today; and of course the Young Marx would have us not only ‘interpret’ the world when “the point is to change it”. The social movements of resistance which have led us to the present confrontation with the liberal democratic state embody anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal, and anti-heteronormative values in ways that Marx – young or mature – simply could not account for. Here I reach out to ‘friends’. These friends – Antonio Gramsci, Frantz Fanon and bell hooks – are sympathetic to, but not constrained by, Marxist thought. It is, in my view, essential to incorporate the reflections of such friends if we are to make the most of Marx’s thought today.

2. The “Culture Wars” and the Present Political Crisis

Trump’s election has been viewed as both a product and a propagator of “the culture wars” (for example: Nagle 2017). These so-called “wars” have consisted partly of a revival of left and right wing political cultures that were marginalised or repressed during the allegedly post-ideological ‘happy 90s’, and a conflict being played out between them; largely in the digital spaces of social media and online forums, from 4chan to Twitter. The association of the so-called ‘alt-right’ with such activity has, however, led to confusion. Neo-Nazis across the West have been identified as – and many now actively seek identification as – ‘alt-right’.

The core project of the racist and neo-Nazi groups and individuals styling themselves ‘alt-right’ has been one of opposing a wide range of ‘liberal’ and ‘left’ political positions, especially feminisms, along with women, and all minority ethnicities, gender identities and sexualities. To the extent that we might wish to recognise the existence of “culture wars”, they consist in confrontations between these far-right movements, old and new, and the left-wing, feminist, anti-racist and other activists and intellectuals they despise. But an important third party to this transnational conflict has been the self-proclaimed ‘centrist’ movement that seeks a return to the failed and irretrievable neoliberal norm – the so-called ‘centrist dads’ who continue to appeal to the contradictory normative schema of neoliberalism, while denouncing all forms of radical politics (left, right, and feminist). This “centrist ancien regime” (Lemmey 2018) consists of mostly white, professional, middle/upper-middle class men, often working in political journalism or research, who simply cannot accept that their dogma might have ceased to determine the horizons of normal politics, since they only ever understood it as a pragmatic approach to ‘reality’, and not as a partisan political project at all.

The culture wars represent a profound crisis of the neoliberal state. The strategies and discourses of depoliticisation advocated by neoliberal thinkers like Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, and perfected in practice not, as is often assumed, by Reagan and Thatcher, but through the ‘Third Way’ politics of Clinton and Blair, have begun to reach their logical conclusion. Through the transformation of formal politics in Western liberal democracies by prevailing ideas of ‘pragmatism’, ‘public manage-

ment', 'evidence-based policy' and so on, the Third Wayers sought to render the state, as Friedman once demanded, little more than "an umpire to interpret and enforce the rules" of the "game" of capitalism (Friedman 2002, 15): the interactions between citizens-as-consumers and the various markets providing them with goods and services (including formerly 'public' services). Increasingly, those seeking to use the state as a forum for actual political debate – debate about how we should live together as societies – were accused of 'ideology', of 'playing politics' with what are fundamentally *economic*, scientifically law-governed concerns (from basic human behaviour to the most appropriate, just or efficient way to spend tax revenues on public goods).

Of course, we were already in the grip of a crisis when Brexit, Trump and the culture wars arrived. The financial crash of 2007 had precipitated the widest and deepest international economic crisis since the 1930s. *The Neoliberal Crisis* (Davison and Harris 2015), a short collection of essays by the editors of the journal *Soundings*, originally published between 2009 and 2011, was extremely prescient with regard to the present political crisis (Whitham 2017). Contributor Doreen Massey noted that the economic crisis in the UK had yet to be matched by a "real crisis in the ideological formation" (Davison and Harris 2015, 182), while Stuart Hall and others highlighted the inescapably racialised and postcolonial aspects of neoliberalism, which exists "cheek by jowl with older conservative attachments to nation, racial homogeneity, Empire, tradition" (Ibid., 22). Michael Rustin, in an eerie foreshadowing of Trump's successful White House run, argued that while Obama's election (then in his first term as President) was heartening, representing "a source of hope", the Democrat continuation of the neoliberal project in office could prove so alienating as to ultimately "bring to office a president with a political outlook like that of Sarah Palin" (Ibid., 35). Through their Gramscian analysis of the crisis as a "conjuncture", these authors were able to foresee the Western political crisis that began to come to fruition in 2016. Decades of de-politicisation in the name of 'centrism', combined with deep austerity cuts dressed-up as inevitable and rational policy-making or as a 'belt tightening' moral obligation on ordinary people to absorb the costs created by irresponsible bankers, brought us to a point where ideological struggle – declared "dead" by Blair and others – finds its eternal return. The culture wars are a new left-right politics, played out across a range of old and new political fora (social and traditional media, campus speaking tours, and increasingly among politicians of the mainstream too).

So neoliberal depoliticisation in the name of 'free' market-governed sociality, along with neoliberal multiculturalism, which everywhere proclaims racial equality as its goal (Friedman was convinced that racism was a product of politics and could be eradicated by the cleansing purity of market mechanisms) while continuing colonial trajectories in practice, created the conditions for the present crisis. But its roots can be traced much further back. The Young Marx identified, at the very point of its birth, the horizon of what would become the neoliberal state.

3. The Young Marx: Limits and Contradictions of the Liberal Democratic State

It bears mentioning that the notion of a 'Young Marx' is, like most aspects of Marxist thought, a contested concept within the Marxist tradition itself. Louis Althusser was strongly opposed to what he saw as a "liberal" trend, instigated by "petty bourgeois" critics of Marxism and then taken up *en masse* by "Communist intellectuals" themselves, of developing "humanist" readings of Marx by appealing to his early works (Althusser 1969, 10-11). The Young Marx, from Althusser's perspective, "was merely

applying the theory of alienation, that is, Feuerbach's theory of 'human nature', to politics and the concrete activity of man, before extending it (in large part) to political economy" (Ibid., 46). Essentially, the Althusserian objection is that the Young Marx was in fact not a Marxist, but a Feuerbachian humanist and ethicist. While Marxists like Althusser are right to be sceptical of humanist revisionism, they are constrained by a powerful commitment to its discredited opposite: scientism. It is quite possible to (critically) embrace and draw upon Marxism without either adhering to the notion that it is about generating "scientific knowledge [...] of *history*" (Ibid., 14) or abandoning the insights of *Capital* altogether in favour of a 'human nature'-centred account of alienation. Marx – and especially the Young Marx – was first and foremost concerned with *Kritik*; the critique of existing social "formations", as Althusser calls them. Those of us who seek to continue this practical-intellectual tradition should feel free enough to choose to apply those insights from Marx himself that are most appropriate to the specific social formation(s) we are critiquing (and indeed to splice other ideas into these insights as I do later in this paper). It is my – I hope uncontroversial – contention that to critically explain the contemporary political crisis and its "culture wars", the Young Marx on the origins and limits of the liberal democratic state is more useful than the mature Marx on, say, the fetishism of the commodity or the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.

"Bourgeois" revolutions like that which brought about American independence consisted, for the Young Marx, in a form of "political emancipation" that is "not the final and absolute form of *human* emancipation" (Marx 1978b/1843, 32). Such revolutions may have marked the decisive end of the divine right of kings and the shaking off of the last vestiges of feudal relations, but this transformation was also a fundamental ideological transformation of what was to be considered *political*. As Marx puts it in his essay "On the Jewish Question":

The state abolishes, after its fashion, the distinctions established by *birth*, *social rank*, *education*, *occupation*, when it decrees that birth, social rank, education, occupation are *non-political* distinctions; when it proclaims, without regard to these distinctions, that every member of society is an *equal* partner in popular sovereignty (Ibid., 33).

The 'political state', the birth of which the Young Marx was focused on, culminated in the contemporary (neo)liberal democracy. Western liberal democracies are societies in which state power is exercised in the name of equality ('equality before the law', 'equal rights' and so on) but in the actual material service of inequality (the exploitation and cultural demonisation of working-class people, people of minority ethnic backgrounds, and of women). "Liberty" in liberal states conceived as "the right to do everything which does not harm others", is, the Young Marx argues, "not founded upon the relations between man and man, but rather upon the separation of man from man. It is the right of such separation. The right of the *circumscribed* individual, withdrawn into himself" (Ibid., 42). The central contradiction to which the Young Marx pointed is thus a state of affairs wherein people, freed from the social bonds of feudalism and rendered political actors through the emergence of 'civil society' are simultaneously barred from engaging in any meaningful politics since the end state of human emancipation is assumed to already be achieved, and "the *political character of civil society*" is in fact "*abolished*" (Ibid., 45), its constituents reduced to "man regarded as an isolated monad" (Ibid., 42). When he writes that the transition from feudalism to truly capitalist societies involved the "emancipation of civil society from poli-

tics” (Marx 1978b/1843, 45), the Young Marx’s point is that the ostensible *politicisation* of society in the creation of the liberal democratic state in fact contains within it a *de-politicisation*.

This dialectical reading of the Young Marx, wherein the liberal democratic state formation contains the seed of its own destruction, allows us to look further back, well beyond the dawn of the present crisis, or even the neoliberal acceleration of de-politicisation, and to see the de-politicising tendency in the very form of the liberal states created by the bourgeois revolutions.

Politics as expressed in civil society are, in the Young Marx’s view, effectively a simulation predicated on abstraction and alienation. This is nowhere truer than in neoliberal societies after what Francis Fukuyama (in)famously called the “End of History”. The political, in these societies, is circumscribed to an ever-narrowing range of positions, since the economic base of such societies is not up for debate. Not only the “political economists” targeted by the Young Marx in the *Manuscripts*, but also all mainstream politicians and viable political parties, adopted the position that “every individual is a totality of needs and only exists for the other person, as the other exists for him, in so far as each becomes a means for the other” (Marx 1978c/1844, 101). This is precisely the worldview informing the depoliticising neoliberal politics that brought us to the present crisis. We can think of the ‘Third Way’ politics and ‘new public management’ of the late twentieth century, indeed of the neoliberal turn, as the end point of the liberal democratic state.

4. Friends of the Young Marx

The Young Marx wrote, in a letter later known as “For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing”:

Apart from the general anarchy which has erupted among the reformers, each is compelled to confess to himself that he has no clear conception of what the future should be. That, however, is just the advantage of the new trend: that we do not attempt dogmatically to prefigure the future, but want to find the new world only through criticism of the old (Marx 1978a/1843, 13).

This spirit of radical openness, in striking contrast to the historical scientism and determinism that would become characteristic of much Marxist thought, is especially useful for thinking about how we can engage the Young Marx today. “Criticism of the old” world today necessarily includes criticism of Marx and Marxism. Both have suffered from blind spots, especially on the intersectional but irreducible character of social formations of domination, inequality and exploitation. Feminists especially, but also many anti-racist and post-colonial scholars, have persistently pointed to the failure of Marx and Engels to treat issues of gendered and racial inequality and domination as anything more than epiphenomenal of economic modes of production. This economistic reductionism is inadequate to grasp our present situation. And it is for this reason that I now want to enlist some ‘friends’ of Marx to shed further light on the crisis and its direction.

The friends of Marx I refer to here – Gramsci, Fanon and hooks – constitute by no means an exhaustive or representative sample. To list sympathisers with and developers of Marx(ism) in the fields of these three authors alone – critical social theory, anti/post-colonial and psychoanalytic theory, and intersectional feminism – would be a massive endeavour. Instead I have chosen three authors who I feel speak espe-

cially to the spirit of the Young Marx, and whose insights can be made to speak to the present crisis.

Antonio Gramsci's contribution to Marxist thought has been elaborated in great detail by many authors, over many years. But for understanding the culture wars and the direction of the present crisis, there are a few crucial points it is worth briefly unpacking here. In his refutation of the "economistic superstition" (Gramsci 1999/1916-1935, 215) inherent to popular early 20th-century interpretations of Marxism, Gramsci insists that: "It is therefore necessary to combat economism [...] especially in the theory and practice of politics. In this field the struggle can and must be carried on by developing the concept of hegemony" (Ibid., 216). Like the Young Marx, Gramsci is concerned with the "distinction between political society and civil society, which is made into and presented as an organic one" by liberalism (Ibid., 210) but he sees a similar fallacy being committed by the economistic Marxists of the Second International. Gramsci asks us to recall that for Marx, the struggle that should result in class consciousness must take place "on the terrain of ideologies" (Ibid., 213). The neoliberal hegemony that the "centrist ancien regime" mentioned above seeks to protect or restore through their role in the culture wars consists of a set of "common sense" discourses about politics and economy since, in a "discursive sense, there is a struggle for hegemony, which is played out on the terrain of common sense" (Donoghue 2017, 9).

But the contradictions of Western liberal-democracy run deeper than capitalism. In his classic *The Wretched of the Earth*, the Algerian revolutionary and psychoanalytic theorist and practitioner Frantz Fanon writes:

The violence with which the supremacy of white values is affirmed and the aggressiveness which has permeated the victory of these values over the ways of life and of thought of the native mean that, in revenge, the native laughs in mockery when Western values are mentioned in front of him (Fanon 1967/1961, 33).

In postcolonial Western societies, as in the colonised societies Fanon sought to understand and emancipate, the structures and privileges of 'civil society' have never been universal; they are not extended to the black and the brown, to the colonial and postcolonial subjects. The left, Paul Gilroy notes in his introduction to Fanon's other key work, *Black Skin, White Masks* (2017/1952) "despaired at Fanon's deviations" from Marxist orthodoxy, finding "its own economistic logic disputed by his deeper sense of the sociogenesis of racial inequality" (Ibid., xvii). Marx, it must be recognised, was as much a product of the "European culture" that Fanon understood to function "as a means of stripping himself [Fanon] of his race" (Ibid., 192) as any other Western intellectual of the 19th century. Crucially, unlike Marx, Fanon's enquiries into the (post/anti) colonial led him to find that "scientific objectivity was barred to me, for the alienated, the neurotic, was my brother, my sister, my father" (Ibid., 193). And so Fanon's work was essentially a form of what is sometimes called 'standpoint theory' today. In other words, Marx – as a Great White Man of European intellectual history – may not provide us with all the tools we need to understand the experiences of those subjugated by social relations of structured inequality other than the bourgeois-proletarian one.

So, to account for the present crisis – indeed the whole trajectory of Western history – through Marx alone would be insufficient. At the heart of the crisis and especially the culture wars that brought Donald Trump to power are postcolonial issues:

Police shootings of unarmed black men in the United States and the emergence of Black Lives Matter as a transnational social movement, the '#RhodesMustFall' movement on campuses from South Africa to the UK, the systematic demonisation and harassment of Muslims in the West as part of the so-called "War on Terror", the attempted removal of statues of the slave-owner and Confederate General Robert E. Lee that triggered the Charlottesville neo-Nazi demonstrations and antifascist counter-demonstrations. Neither the Young Marx's critique of the liberal state nor the mature Marx's critique of capitalism is sufficient for a critical engagement with all of this.

In many of her works, the feminist theorist, pedagogical innovator and cultural critic bell hooks uses the helpful term "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" when referring to American (and, we can infer, more broadly "Western") society (hooks 1982; 2000/1984; 1994)¹. Though something of a mouthful, this label is useful because it pinpoints with laser-sharp accuracy three of the core intersecting structural logics that underpin the Western liberal-democratic social model. By continuously referring to white supremacist capitalist patriarchy across her works, despite how cumbersome the phrase is, hooks also brilliantly emphasises the fundamental contradictions and hypocrisies at the heart of more common, euphemistic labels for such societies, including 'liberal democracies'.

Apart from the concept of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, hooks transcends both Marx and the other 'friends' I have alluded to in a further crucial sense. Devoid of both the macho posturing and the scientism that has afflicted so much writing by the "Great White Men" of social theory – Marx and Gramsci included – hooks is able to speak seriously of the importance of *love* and *community* in social movements and society at large (hooks 1994, 263). The cultural trajectory of Enlightenment Man that underpinned the writings of the young and especially the mature Marx is shared with the 'centrist dads' and anti-feminist social media trolls of the culture wars (i.e. the mostly middle-aged, mostly white men who use social media as a platform to seek to publicly discipline women's knowledge through appeals to 'science' and facticity), a good number of whom identify as left-wing. Uncompromising and intellectually brilliant, hooks nevertheless consciously strives to render her work accessible (Ibid., 8) and meaningful to people outside of academia, especially women of colour like herself. While hooks has been accused by some (including White Feminists) of being "merciless" (hooks 2000/1984, xiii), she writes with care and love as much as anger. This extends to hooks' pedagogical theory too – teaching, for hooks, is about creating space for all voices in the classroom, creating conversations and dialogue in place of lectures and the one-way "banking" model of education. I mention this because hooks' work – both her social and her pedagogical theories and analyses – provides clues to the way forward, to the politics that must come after the culture wars, after capitalism. What the left should surely be struggling for in the culture wars is a politics of love, a politics that recognises the intersectionality of inequalities and domination, rather than re-inscribing those very inequalities in leftist form by marginalising feminist, anti-racist and transgender recognition struggles in favour of economistic reductionism.

¹ hooks initially coined the term "white capitalist patriarchy" (a modification of Zillah Eisenstein's socialist feminist term "capitalist patriarchy") in her debut book *Ain't I a Woman?* (hooks 1982) but later added the "supremacist" in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984/2000). In some of her later work, when stressing the international dimensions of Western regimes, hooks opts for "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy". I prefer not to add the "imperialist" since this dimension can arguably be adequately captured by both "white supremacist" and "capitalist".

5. Conclusion

This reflection on how the Young Marx can help us to think about the present political crisis and its so-called “culture wars” is intended to provoke as much as to pay tribute. That 200 years since his birth, this figure can still be rendered pertinent, vital even, to our theorisations, critiques and analyses of crises as if we are “haunted by Marx’s ghost still rattling around in the theoretical machine” (Hall 1986, 32), speaks to the power of his ideas and the eloquence of his writing. But to imagine that our present political crisis could be accounted for with a close reading of *Capital* would be a mistake. Patriarchy, misogyny, heteronormativity, racism, and Islamophobia – the structures and ideologies underpinning liberal democracies *viz.* white supremacist capitalist patriarchies – have other sources than modes of production, and fulfil other social functions than bourgeois exploitation of the proletariat.

What I have sought to show is both what the Young Marx can offer us today and the conditionality we ought to impose upon this offer. We can only usefully deploy Marx to understand our present political crisis if we do so in conjunction with ‘friends’ like those I discuss above. From Antonio Gramsci to bell hooks, we need to bring more voices to bear on our problem, to better understand the dynamics and debates among emergent and ascendant social movements. This theoretical and analytic heterogeneity is essential if we want not only to interpret the world but also *to change it*.

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Marx's Centenary (1918) in the Light of the Media and Socialist Thought

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Abstract: This article takes a historical view on Marx's anniversary: It analyses how Marx's centenary (5 May 1918) was reflected in the media and socialist thought. 1918 not just marked Marx's 100th anniversary but was also the year in which the First World War ended. It was the year that saw the immediate aftermath of the Russian Revolution and the start of the Russian Civil War, the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; the formation of the Weimar Republic, Austria's First Republic, the Czech Republic, the Hungarian Republic, the Second Polish Republic; the founding of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), and the independence of Iceland from Denmark. The cultural forms, in which Marx's centenary was reflected in 1918, included press articles, essays, speeches, rallies, demonstrations, music, and banners. The communists as well as left-wing socialists of the day saw themselves in the tradition of Marx, whereas revisionist social democrats based their politics on a criticism or revised reading of Marx. This difference resulted in different readings of Marx.

Keywords: Karl Marx, centenary, 5 May 1918, bicentenary, 200th anniversary, 5 May 2018, 1818

1. Introduction

We can take Marx's bicentenary as an occasion for having a look at some aspects of his centenary in 1918. 1918 marked not just Marx's 100th anniversary but also the year in which the First World War ended. It was the year that saw the immediate aftermath of the Russian Revolution and the start of the Russian Civil War, the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; the formation of the Weimar Republic, Austria's First Republic, the Czech Republic, the Hungarian Republic, the Second Polish Republic; the founding of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), and the independence of Iceland from Denmark.

The communists as well as left-wing socialists of the day saw themselves in the tradition of Marx, whereas revisionist social democrats based their politics on a criticism or revised reading of Marx. This difference resulted, as we will see, in different readings of Marx.

2. Communists and Left Socialists on Marx's Centenary

After the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) had in August 1914 voted for war credits that had enabled the mobilisation of the German army in the First World War, Rosa Luxemburg, Hermann Duncker, Hugo Eberlein, Julian Marchlewski, Franz Mehring, Ernst Meyer, Wilhelm Pieck and Karl Liebknecht founded the Gruppe Internationale (Group International) that in 1916 became the Spartacus League. Spartacus in 1917 became part of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD), a split-off from the SPD, and turned at the end of 1918 into the Communist Party of Germany (KPD).

Rosa Luxemburg and Franz Mehring

Rosa Luxemburg was imprisoned from 18 February 1915 until 9 November 1916. She was jailed for two speeches in which she had called for conscientious objection. After she had served the sentence, she was not immediately released because she was considered a security threat. At the time when Marx's centenary was celebrated, Rosa Luxemburg was a political prisoner. Writing was, as one can imagine, difficult in prison, but Luxemburg managed to secretly write the *Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in the German Social Democracy* (1916) in 1915. The pamphlet was published anonymously in 1916 and distributed illegally in Germany.

Luxemburg had written the chapter on *Capital Volumes 2 and 3* for Franz Mehring's Marx biography that was published in May 1918 (Mehring 2003/1936). In a letter to Mehring, Luxemburg (2011, 458) wrote on December 30, 2017: "How fine that your *Marx* [...] will soon appear, which is truly a gleam of light in these sorry times. I hope the book will be a stimulus and an encouragement for a great many people and at the same time a nostalgic reminder of that lovely time when one did not yet have to be ashamed to call oneself a German Social Democrat". Convinced by the book's excellence, she nonetheless had doubts about its effectiveness, as she wrote in a letter to Clara Zetkin on 29 June 1918: "I find it magnificent and promise myself it will have a powerful impact on the masses. If only they will read it!" (Ibid., 463).

In her chapter in Mehring's book, Luxemburg points out that the achievement of *Capital* is that "Marx showed for the first time how profit originated and how it flowed into the pockets of the capitalists. He did so on the basis of two decisive economic facts: first, that the mass of the workers consists of proletarians who are compelled to sell their labour-power as a commodity in order to exist, and secondly that this commodity labour-power possesses such a high degree of productivity in our own day that it is able to produce in a certain time a much greater product than is necessary for its own maintenance in that time" (Rosa Luxemburg, quoted in Mehring 2003/1936, 372). The second volume of *Capital* investigates how a whole is developed from the innumerable deviating movements of individual capital" (Ibid., 375). "In the first volume he [Marx] deals with the production of capital and lays bare the secret of profit-making. In the second volume he describes the movement of capital between the factory and the market, between the production and consumption of society. And in the third volume he deals with the distribution of the profit amongst the capitalist class as a whole. [...] In the first volume we are in the factory, in the deep social pit of labour where we can trace the source of capitalist wealth. In the second and third volumes we are on the surface, on the official stage of society. Department stores, banks, the stock exchanges, finance and the troubles of the 'needy' agriculturalists take up the foreground" (Rosa Luxemburg, quoted in Mehring 2003/1936, 376, 377).

"The investigations which Marx pursues in the second and third volumes of *Capital* offer a thorough insight into the nature of crises" (Rosa Luxemburg, quoted in Mehring 2003/1936, 378). One hundred years later after this analysis of Luxemburg was published in the year of Marx's centenary, capitalism has gone through several more crisis stages, of which the latest began in 2008 and created a great recession. New authoritarianisms and new nationalisms emerged in the context of this crisis. Marx and Luxemburg remind us that the capitalist system is inherently crisis-ridden and that crises can within that system at a maximum be suspended temporarily and sooner or later always come back in new forms.

So Franz Mehring was author of one of the first biographies of Karl Marx (Mehring 2003/1936) and a comrade of Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Clara Zetkin. Mehring was one of the people who together with Luxemburg founded the Spartacus

League that became the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). Mehring published on the occasion of Marx's centenary an article in *Leipziger Volkszeitung* on 4 May 1918. He wrote: "Karl Marx's centenary directs our view from a gruesome presence to a brighter future just like a bright sunbeam that breaks through dark and apparently impenetrable cloud layers [...] Tireless and restless critique [...] was his true weapon. [...] To continue working based on the indestructible foundations that he laid is the most worthy homage we can offer to him on his one hundredth birthday"¹ (Mehring 1918, 11, 15).

Max Adler

The Austro-Marxist philosopher and politician Max Adler was a left socialist who was part of the left wing of Austrian social democracy. In May 1918, he published the pamphlet *Die sozialistische Idee der Befreiung bei Karl Marx (Karl Marx's Socialist Idea of Liberation)*. He wrote: "The poet's words '*For I have been a man, and that Means I have been a combatant*'² has for the proletariat through Karl Marx gained the deeper historical meaning that *the proletariat only as struggling class reaches humanity*. The World War's inhumanity has given the proletariat a terrible object lesson of this circumstance. [...] It is only in this context that Marx will again become teacher and leader. The true celebration of his centenary consists not in mere commemoration of his works and teachings, but in keeping alive his revolutionary spirit"³ (Adler 1918, 489).

Antonio Gramsci

Italy at the time of Marx's centenary fought as part of the Allied Powers in the First World War. Antonio Gramsci was at that time a member of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), lived in Turin, where he was PSI secretary, and was the editor of the Socialist Party's weekly *Il Grido del Popolo (The People's Cry)*. On 4 May 1918, Gramsci (1918) published the essay "Il nostro Marx" ("Our Marx") on the occasion of Marx's centenary.

In this article, Gramsci writes that Marx's "only categorical imperative" is, "'Workers of the world, unite!' The duty of organizing, the propagation of the duty to organize and associate, should therefore be what distinguishes Marxists from non-Marxists" (Gramsci 1918, 36). Organisation and political action as such are not necessarily progressive. Also fascists organise in political groups and movements that act politically in public. So what Gramsci leaves out is that for Marx not political practice, but praxis – socialist political practice – is decisive.

Gramsci stresses that for Marx, ideas are not immaterial or fictitious, but grounded

¹ Translated from German. German original: „Wie ein heller Sonnenstrahl, der durch düstere und scheinbar undurchdringliche Wolkenschichten bricht, so lenkt heute der hundertste Geburtstag von Karl Marx unseren Blick aus einer grauenvollen Gegenwart in eine hellere Zukunft [...] die rast- und ruhelose Kritik [...] ist seine wirkliche Waffe gewesen [...] So fortzuarbeiten auf den unzerstörbaren Grundlagen, die er gelegt hat, ist die würdigste Huldigung, die wir [...] [ihm] an seinem hundertsten Geburtstage darbringen können“.

² Goethe (1914, 180)

³ German original: „Das Dichterwort ‚Denn ich bin ein Mensch gewesen. Und das heißt ein Kämpfer sein‘ hat für das Proletariat durch Karl Marx die tiefere entwicklungsgeschichtliche Bedeutung erhalten, daß das Proletariat erst als Klassenkämpfer überhaupt zum Menschentum gelangt. Die Unmenschlichkeit des Weltkrieges hat dem Proletariat drüber einen furchtbaren Anschauungsunterricht erteilt. [...] Hier nun erst wird Marx wieder Lehrer und Führer werden. Die wirkliche Jahrhundertfeier für ihn besteht nicht in einem bloßen Gedenken seines Schaffens und Lehrens, sondern in der Lebendigerhaltung seines revolutionären Geistes“.

in the economy: “With Marx, history continues to be the domain of ideas, of spirit, of the conscious activity of single or associated individuals. But ideas, spirit, take on substance, lose their arbitrariness, they are no longer fictitious religious or sociological abstractions. Their substance is in the economy, in practical activity, in the systems and relations of production and exchange” (Gramsci 1918, 37).

Knowledge labour has today become a key feature of capitalist society. The intersection of ideas and labour in the contemporary economy strengthens Gramsci’s interpretation of Marx, in which there is no strict base/superstructure separation and ideas operate within the economy.

Marx “is a monolithic bloc of knowing and thinking humanity [...] who constructs iron syllogisms which encircle reality in its essence and dominate it, which penetrate people’s minds, which bring the sedimentations of prejudice and fixed ideas crumbling down and strengthen the moral character” (Ibid., 39). Today, we see the rise of new nationalisms and authoritarianisms that use prejudices for trying to divide humanity and distract attention from class conflicts and class structures. Marx’s humanism and method of ideology critique are today of key importance for challenging these developments.

Eugene V. Debs

Eugene V. Debs was one of the founders of the International Workers of the World (IWW) and of the Socialist Party of America and its predecessor parties. The Socialist Party opposed the USA’s entry into the First World War, which resulted in the First Red Scare. Debs on 4 May 1918, published an article that commemorated Marx for struggling “to destroy despotism in all its form” and to emancipate humankind “from the slavery of the ages”. In November 1918, Debs was sentenced to ten years in prison for sedition. He was released at the end of 1921. Debs and his socialist contemporaries struggled against the authoritarian tendencies of their time. He considered Marx’s works and life as a guiding light for the struggle against authoritarianism. One hundred years later, new authoritarian dangers have emerged. Also today, Marx reminds us of the need “to destroy despotism”.

In Russia, the Soviet government signed the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire on 3 May 1918. Seven members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had voted in favour of such a treaty, four against, four members abstained. The Central Soviet Executive passed the resolution with 112 votes in favour, 84 oppositional votes and 24 abstentions. Not everyone agreed with this decision. In April 1918, a group of Left Communists led by Nikolai Bukharin and Karl Radek published “Theses on the Current Situation” (Left Communists 1918), in which they argued that the Peace Treaty was a “capitulation to international imperialism” and had “negative effect on the spiritual and psychological development of the international revolution” (Ibid.).

Lenin

On the day of Marx’s centenary, Lenin (1918) wrote a response to the Left Communists under the title “*Left-Wing*” *Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality*. Lenin disagreed with the Left Communists’ hasty call for world revolution: “For, until the world socialist revolution breaks out, until it embraces several countries and is strong enough to overcome *international imperialism*, it is the direct duty of the socialists who have conquered in one country (especially a backward one) *not* to accept battle against the

giants of imperialism. Their duty is to try to avoid battle, to wait until the conflicts between the imperialists weaken them *even more*, and bring the revolution in other countries even nearer” (Ibid., 327).

Lenin refers to Marx in order to stress that “Marx was profoundly right when he taught the workers the importance of preserving the organisation of large-scale production, precisely for the purpose of facilitating the transition to socialism” (Ibid., 345). “Socialism is inconceivable without large-scale capitalist engineering based on the latest discoveries of modern science” (Ibid., 339).

Lenin is certainly right in stressing with Marx that post-capitalism needs to use modern technologies for establishing a post-scarcity society so that emancipation from toil and true freedom become possible. But the problem was that Lenin on the occasion of Marx’s centenary did not read Marx thoroughly enough. He adopted an uncritical celebration and uptake of Taylorism, including its de-humanising aspects such as repetitive, monotonous labour. Soviet labour was not less alienated than labour in Western capitalist societies.

The point is that socialist technology needs to be a sublation of capitalist technology, i.e. a simultaneous preservation of the best elements, elimination of negative design features, and the development of new qualities. Marx and Engels spoke in this context already in *The German Ideology* of the appropriation of technology. They make clear that appropriation means a transformation that is at the same time revolution/overthrow/ceasing-to-be and development/coming-to-be: “The appropriation of a totality of instruments of production is, for this very reason, the development of a totality of capacities in the individuals themselves. [...] This appropriation is further determined by the manner in which it must be effected. It can only be effected through a union, which by the character of the proletariat itself can again only be a universal one, and through a revolution, in which, on the one hand, the power of the earlier mode of production and intercourse and social organisation is overthrown, and, on the other hand, there develops the universal character and the energy of the proletariat, without which the revolution cannot be accomplished; and in which, further, the proletariat rids itself of everything that still clings to it from its previous position in society. Only at this stage does self-activity coincide with material life, which corresponds to the development of individuals into complete individuals and the casting-off of all natural limitations. The transformation of labour into self-activity corresponds to the transformation of the earlier limited intercourse into the intercourse of individuals as such. With the appropriation of the total productive forces through united individuals, private property comes to an end” (Marx and Engels 1845/46, 87-88).

Marx further developed the idea of appropriation as dialectical becoming in the *Grundrisse*. Only a dialectic of old and new elements of technology makes possible that what Hardt and Negri (2017) based on Marx call the appropriation of fixed capital results in “*disposable time*” ceasing to have “an *antithetical* existence” (Marx 1857/58, 708), “the powers of social production” – including the “general intellect” – becoming “the real life process” (Ibid., 706), the “free development of individualities” that “then corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free” (Ibid.). Social production means for Marx that human subjects exist “in mutual relationships, which they equally reproduce and produce anew” in a “constant process of their own movement, in which they even renew themselves even as they renew the world of wealth they create” (Ibid., 712). In a society of the commons, humans produce truly in an open, dynamic process and so do not stop developing technologies, but give new qualities to old technologies and create entirely new technologies.

Today, in the age of digital capitalism, we can not simply in a Leninist manner appropriate capitalist digital technologies by stopping at socialising the ownership of Facebook, Google, Amazon, Apple, etc. One also needs qualitative changes of digital technologies. So for example turning Facebook into a co-operative ownership does not automatically change its individualistic structures that enable the accumulation of online reputation. Socialisation and co-operation has to include a qualitative transformation of Facebook's platform design structures and policies.

Socialist Party of Great Britain

Jack Fitzgerald was in 1904 one of the founders of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. He was the editor of the Party's journal *Socialist Standard*, where he in May 1918 published an article on "The Centenary of Marx". In it, Fitzgerald (1918) wrote: "Of *Capital* it is no exaggeration to say that no work ever written on economics has attracted so much attention and attempted criticism. Every professor of political economy and every petty journalist feels bound to criticise, without having troubled to read, Marx's unanswerable exposure of the present system. The two great features of *Capital* are the solving of the riddle of Value and the demonstration of the appropriation of Surplus-Value". 2017 was the 150th anniversary of the publication of *Capital Volume 1*'s first edition. Fitzgerald's judgment certainly also holds true one hundred years later: Marx and *Capital* are heavily discussed, but too many people make claims about both without having thoroughly engaged with them.

3. Reformist and Revisionist Social Democracy on Marx's Centenary

Arbeiter-Zeitung, the daily newspaper of the Austrian social democrats, wrote on the day of Marx's centenary: "And yet, we do not celebrate a dead person today when we commemorate Marx. His name is today still a battle cry as good as it was then when the thirty-year old threw his Communist Manifesto into the world. He is still today awakening sleeping souls and is today still collecting, uniting and spearheading the proletarians of all countries"⁴ (*Arbeiter-Zeitung* 1918, 1).

Other than Luxemburg, Liebknecht and Zetkin, Karl Kautsky did not clearly oppose the German Social Democrats' support of war credits. From 1916 onwards, Kautsky opposed the First World War, which led in 1917 to the creation of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD). Kautsky's criticism of Marxists' nationalist support of the First World War on the occasion of Marx's centenary was at the same time also a piece of self-criticism: "The celebration of the 100th birthday of our master will be the first act since the outbreak of the World War for which the proletarians of all countries unite"; Marxism was "partly dispersed into national parties that abet national hatred and the national lust for conquest of their governments and dominant classes"⁵ (Kautsky 1918, 1). Kautsky reminded the readers that Marx had opposed

⁴ German original: „Und doch, nicht einen Toten feiern wir heute, wenn wir Marxens gedenken. Sein Name ist heute noch ein Kampfruf – so gut wie damals, als der der Dreißigjährige sein Kommunistisches Manifest in die Welt schleuderte. Er ist heute noch der Wecker schlafender Seelen, heute noch Sammler und Einiger und Vorkämpfer der Proletarier aller Länder“.

⁵ „Die Feier des hundertsten Geburtstages unseres Meisters wird seit Ausbruch des Weltkrieges die erste Handlung sein, zu der sich wieder die Proletarier aller Länder vereinigen“. Marxismus ist „zum Teil in nationale Parteien zersprengt, die nationalem Haß und nationaler Eroberungsgier ihrer Regierungen und herrschenden Klassen Vorschub leisten“.

Realpolitik and had favoured revolutionary politics. For Marx, the proletariat was revolutionary and therefore “constantly driven by a wide goal that transcends existing society”⁶ (Kautsky 1918, 3).

Joseph Schumpeter was in 1918 professor of political economy at the University of Graz and worked in a commission of the German government that prepared the nationalisation of some parts of German industry. He was not a follower of Marx’s theory, but in a newspaper article published on the day of Marx’s centenary he praised Marx as political economist and sociologist. “What is unique about him is that he was the inseparable penetration of researcher and fighter, that he only conducted research in order to give direction to struggles and only struggled in order put the results of his research into action”⁷ (Schumpeter 1918, 3).

Vorwärts has since 1876 been the newspaper of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. Wilhelm Liebknecht was one of the founding editors. *Die Neue Zeit* was the Party’s theoretical journal and existed from 1883 until 1923. At the time of Marx’s centenary, German social democracy was split into the Spartacus League that later in the same year became the Communist Party of Germany, the centrist Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD) and the rightist Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). Interestingly, *Die Neue Zeit* and *Vorwärts* formulated different positions on how to think about Marx’s centenary.

Heinrich Cunow, who in the years from 1917 until 1932 edited *Die Neue Zeit* – the academic publication of German social democracy –, wrote about Marx’s 100th birthday: “Marx protrudes among the geniuses whose names are engraved into the plaques of honour and who lived during the nineteenth century’s second half as conquering the realm of the intellectual history. [...] His work has not come to an end. The spirit of this man, whose mortal remains have now been covered by Highgate Cemetery’s lawn since more than 35 years, still exerts vital power. [...] Marx’s enormous influence on theoretical-political economy, the interpretation of history and proletarian struggles in almost all European states proves well enough his importance”⁸ (*Die Neue Zeit* 1918, 97-98).

On the day of Marx’s centenary, *Vorwärts* reported on its title page that Marxists were deeply split: In Russia, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks would kill each other. In France, the celebrations planned by Marx’s grandson Jean-Laurent-Frederick Longuet would have been circumvented by war-supporting socialists. In Germany, “the split of the Party is an accomplished fact”⁹ (*Vorwärts* 1918, 1). “In Germany, the Marx celebrations must limit themselves to appraisals of the master in the press and festivities

⁶ „ist stets getrieben durch ein weites, über die bestehende Gesellschaft hinausgehendes Ziel“.

⁷ „Und das Einzigartige an ihm ist, daß der Forscher und der Kämpfer in ihm einander untrennbar durchdringen, daß er nur forschte, um seinem Kämpfen die Richtung zu geben und nur kämpfte, um das Resultat seiner Forschung durch die Tat zu vertreten“.

⁸ German original: „Als ein Welteroberer auf dem Gebiet der Geistesgeschichte ragt Marx unter den Geistesgrößen der zweiten Hälfte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts hervor, die auf die Steintafeln des Ruhmes ihren Namen eingegraben haben. [...] sein Wirken ist nicht beendet. Noch immer geht von dem Geist dieses Mannes, dessen sterbliche Hülle nun schon seit mehr als 35 Jahren der Rasen des Friedhofs von Highgate deckt, eine lebendige Kraft aus. [...] Der enorme Einfluß den Marx auf die Entwicklung der theoretisch-politischen Ökonomie wie auf die Geschichtsbetrachtung und die proletarischen Parteikämpfe in fast allen europäischen Staaten gehabt hat, beweist zur Genüge die Bedeutung des Mannes“.

⁹ „ist die Parteispaltung vollendete Tatsache“

in closed circles“¹⁰ (*Vorwärts* 1918, 1). The article on the one hand justifies rightist German Social Democrats' support of the First World War. On the other hand, it is a deeply pessimist piece that expresses sorrow over the bad status of Social Democracy and its 1917 split into two parties (the USDP and the SPD). Marx was in the article seen as someone who did not matter in 1918, but would matter again in the future: “So Karl Marx's intellectual work can be a measure for the greatness of the working class at a later time“¹¹ (*Vorwärts* 1918, 2). It becomes evident how class struggle and socialism formed a mere lip service for revisionist social democrats.

At the time of the split of the Party into a pro- and an anti-First World War faction in 1915, Rudolf Hilferding was the newspaper's chief-editor and *Vorwärts* supported the anti-war position. But Hilferding was replaced by Friedrich Stampfer as chief-editor in 1916 so that the newspaper at the time of Marx's centenary represented the Party's mainstream positions of Friederich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann. Scheidemann was Chancellor of the Weimar Republic when right-wing paramilitaries under Waldemar Pabst murdered Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in 1919, which was tolerated by Scheidemann's Minister of Defence Gustav Noske.

4. How the News Media Reported on Marx's Centenary

In London, where Marx lived from 1849 until his death in 1883, socialists planned a celebration of his centenary in Finsbury Park. An advertisement printed in the *Daily Herald* on 4 May (see Figure 1) makes clear that eight trade councils and over one hundred trade union branches and co-operatives supported the event that was planned to take place in Finsbury Park on 5 May. It should have featured speakers on eight platforms. The Herald also printed the resolution that the organisers (The North London Labour Demonstration Committee) planned to read out on all eight platforms:

This mass meeting of London workers, on the centenary of the birth of Karl Marx, recalls with gratitude his devoted labours on behalf of the cause of International Socialism. Having no quarrel with the workers of any country, it extends fraternal greetings to them all, paying particular tribute to those Russian comrades who have waged such a magnificent struggle for their Social and Political emancipation. It emphatically protests against the continuation of the present Capitalistic war, and urges the workers of all lands immediately to meet in conference and arrange a “Peoples' Peace” on the basis of “no annexations and no indemnities”. It further vigorously protests against the continued imprisonment of those holding a conscientious objection to military service, and demands their immediate and unconditional release. It demands full political and civil rights for all workers, including soldiers, sailors, and civil servants. Finally, it reaffirms its belief in the solidarity of the workers of all lands, in the cause of International Brotherhood and goodwill amongst all peoples. Workers of London rally behind your Banners! Demonstrate your belief in the Solidarity of the Working Class the World over – of Internationalism, Brotherhood and Goodwill amongst all Peoples. Rally! Rally!! Rally!!!” (*Daily Herald*, May 4 1918, 11).

The Home Secretary prohibited the public event. In the USA, the *New York Herald* reported that in London, the “celebration of the centenary of the birthday of Karl Marx,

¹⁰ „In Deutschland muß sich die Marxfeier auf Würdigungen des Meisters in der Presse und auf Festlichkeiten in geschlossenem Kreise beschränken“.

¹¹ „So kann das geistige Werk von Karl Marx ein Maßstab sein für die Größe der Arbeiterklasse einer späteren Zeit“.

the German Socialist, arranged to be held in a London park tomorrow, has been prohibited by the Home Secretary on the ground that it would be likely to cause disorder and make undue demands on the police. The principal organiser of the meeting was a pacifist weekly paper and several trade unions cooperated. There were to have been bands and banners and speeches, with resolutions against a 'capitalistic war'" (Marx Celebration Halted, *New York Herald*, 5 May 1918, 2).

MAY CELEBRATION

GREAT RANK & FILE LABOUR DEMONSTRATION

IN

FINSBURY PARK, SUNDAY NEXT, MAY 5th, 3.30 p.m.

Supported by 8 Trade Councils and over 100 Trade Union Branches,
Co-operative Societies, &c.

8 Platforms	50 SPEAKERS	7 Processions
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WELL-KNOWN SPEAKERS IN THE TRADE UNION AND POLITICAL WORLD

GREAT PROCESSIONS

with Bands and Banners will start from the following points:

Edmonton Town Hall, 1.30 p.m.	Holloway Prison, 2.45 p.m.
Camden Town N. L. Riv. Stn., 2.15 p.m.	Tottenham, Northumberland Pk., 2 p.m.
Hackney Town Hall, 1.30 p.m.	Walthamstow, Standard Corner, Black-horse Road, 1.30 p.m.
Highgate Archway Tavern, 2.30 p.m.	

Figure 1: Advertisement for a rally celebrating Marx's centenary in London's Finsbury Park (data source: *Daily Herald*, May 4 1918)

In the USA, the *New York Times* on the same day ran an overall appreciative piece titled *Today is 100th Anniversary of Marx's Birth*: "Few men have more profoundly influenced the life and thought of their own and succeeding generations than the great author of 'Das Kapital,' upon whom the world has, with questionable accuracy, conferred the title 'Father of Modern Socialism'. [...] The great war seems destined to mark the close of the era of Marxism in Socialist history. [...] The centennial of Marx's birth may be regarded, at the same time, as the end of Marxian socialism" (Spargo 1918, 11-12).

The Globe was a London-based newspaper owned by William Maxwell Aitken, who at that time was Britain's Minister of Information in David Lloyd George's government. It is of course interesting but not surprising that the Minister of Information at that time was a media baron who controlled the *Daily Express* and *The Globe*. At the same time, Alfred Harmsworth, who owned the *Daily Mirror* and *The Times* and had founded the *Daily Mail* (that at that time was owned by his brother Harold Harmsworth), was the British government's Director of Propaganda. Putting the owners of large newspapers in control of propaganda and information policies constitutes a direct state-capital-nexus that undermines the freedom of the press and makes sure that there is pro-government reporting. In this particular case, the political appointments served the purpose of war propaganda and the opposition to socialism and pacifism.

This circumstance becomes evident in a piece printed in Aitken's *The Globe* on 2 May 1918, under the title "Pacifists Seek Trouble" that reported there is "every indication" that in respect to the planned "Pacifists' demonstration [...] arranged to be held in Finsbury Park [...] the British public will take the matter in their own hands and give the demonstrators a short shrift [...] unless the authorities step in and prohibit the meeting" (*The Globe*, 2 May 1918, 3). So the newspaper called on the state to prohibit the Marx meeting and on anti-socialists to violently disrupt it. Tellingly, next to this report *The Globe* featured a large call with the title "HELP to advance the British Financial Front" that calls the readers to buy National War Bonds. "YOUR COUNTRY needs £25,000,000 every week from the sale of National War Bonds. The money must be found. Are you doing your utmost to help? [...] Find out where you can cut expenses, and lend your country the money saved. [...] You are personally responsible for some part of that £25,000,000. Rich or poor – man or woman – it is to you that our sailors and soldiers look to provide the means of victory. They have faith in you. Prove that your faith is well-founded. Give them your support" (*The Globe*, 2 May 1918, 3).

Also *The Times* that was owned by the UK-government's Director of Propaganda Alfred Harmsworth reported negatively on Marx's centenary. On 2 May, it reported *The Times* reported that "Labour's May Day will be next Sunday, the centenary of Karl Marx, when there will be a procession to Highgate Cemetery, and flowers will be placed on Marx's grave". The conservative newspaper titled this short news piece "May Day. Anti-Socialist Demonstrations at Glasgow" and wrote in it that the May Day demonstrations in Glasgow were "one of the largest of recent years", but that there were "a number of exciting incidents", including spectators shouting "go and join the Army" (*The Times*, 2 May 1918, 3). On May 1, *The Times* ran a short news item titled "Karl Marx Unhonoured" that reported that in France, a "proposal to celebrate the centenary of Karl Marx [born 5 May 1818] has been rejected by the executive committee of the Federation of the Seine".

The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported about a celebratory event in Chicago, writing that an "admission charge of 35 cents and a wardrobe tip of 15 cents straight assured the exclusion of many and limited the attendance of the 'Gigantic Karl Marx Celebration' to the 150 who had the price". The article spoke in its headline of the attendees as "elite Bolsheviki" and wrote that "every third tie was of crimson" (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 May 1918, 3). To remind its readers of what should happen to socialists, the newspaper right next to this article printed one titled "Socialists Here Face Inquiry for Anti-War Stand".

The Scotsman reported on May 6 that the "peace demonstration, widely advertised as rank and file labour celebration of the centenary of Karl Marx [...] was prohibited by an order of the Home Secretary. Nevertheless, a crowd numbering between 500 and

1000 people assembled at half-past three, and grouped themselves around improvised stands" (*The Scotsman*, 6 May 1918, p. 7).

In Germany, the liberal *Berliner Volkszeitung* published an article about Marx's centenary that criticised "the self-indulgent overestimation of this centenarian"¹². "The number of owners has not just not continuously decreased, but has (thanks to the development of stockholding) steadily become larger. The 1,000-year Reich of the Proletarians is deferred to the distant future"¹³ (Fiedler 1918, 3). "For decades to come, the idea of the International, his favourite organisational plan, seems to be buried in the abyss that the World War has ripped up between the nations"¹⁴ (ibid.).

Overall, we can see from this incomplete review that the reactions to Marx's centenary ranged from taking his work and life as an inspiration for the struggles of the time on the one side of the spectrum to on the other side radical dismissals of Marx's works and politics that also featured calls for the use of violence to impede celebrations.

5. Conclusion

The cultural forms, in which Marx's centenary was reflected in 1918, included press articles, essays, speeches, rallies, demonstrations, music, and banners. One hundred years later, we can find besides all of these cultural forms of commemorating Marx's bicentenary also expressions of engagement, inspiration, interest and rejection that take on the form of memes, social media, documentaries, radio and television reports, movies, novels, exhibitions, souvenirs, books, collected volumes, etc. One should in this context not turn Marx into a depoliticised cultural spectacle (Marx for Marx's sake), but rather take the opportunity to treat him as undead and as capitalism's walking dead, who reminds us of the necessity to critically theorise and politically criticise capitalism and to struggle for alternatives (Marx for the sake of a commons-oriented society). We need to repeat Marx today.

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¹² „die maßlose Überschätzung dieses Hundertjährigen“

¹³ „Die Zahl der Besitzenden ist nicht nur nicht beständig kleiner, sondern sogar (dank der Entwicklung des Aktienwesens) beständig größer geworden. Das tausendjährige Reich des Proletariats rückt in weite, ungreifbare Ferne“

¹⁴ „Auf Jahrzehnte hinaus scheint der Gedanke der Internationale, sein organisatorischer Lieblingsplan, in der Kluft versunken zu sein, die der Weltkrieg zwischen den Völkern aufgerissen hat“.

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Karl Marx

Rosa Luxemburg

Translated from German to English by Christian Fuchs

Abstract: Marx died on March 14, 1883. Exactly twenty years later, on March 14, 1903, Rosa Luxemburg's reflections on Karl Marx were published in German in *Vorwärts*, the newspaper of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. *tripleC* publishes an English translation of Luxemburg's essay on the occasion of Marx's bicentenary. Christian Fuchs' postface "Karl Marx and Rosa Luxemburg" asks the question of how we can make sense of Rosa Luxemburg's reading of Marx in 2018. Source of the German original: Luxemburg, Rosa. 1903. Karl Marx. *Vorwärts* 62: 1-2.

Keywords: Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Marx, revolutionary Realpolitik, socialism, working class, capitalism

"The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways;
the point is to *change* it"

Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach (1845, 5)

Twenty years ago, Marx laid his towering head to rest. And although we only experienced a couple of years ago what in the language of German professors is called 'the crisis of Marxism', it suffices to throw a glance at the masses that today follow socialism alone in Germany and at socialism's importance in all so-called civilised countries, in order to grasp the immensity of the work of Marx's thoughts.

If it mattered to express in few words what Marx did for the contemporary working class, then one could say: Marx has uncovered the modern working class as historical category, that is, as a class with particular historical conditions of existence and laws of motion. A mass of wage-workers, who were led to solidarity by the similarity of their social existence in bourgeois society and looked for a way out of their condition and partly for a bridge to the promised land of socialism, arguably existed in capitalist countries before Marx. Marx was the first who elevated workers to the working *class* by linking them through the specific historical task of conquering political power in the socialist revolution.

Class struggle for conquering political power was the bridge that Marx built between socialism and the proletarian movement that elementarily rises up from the ground of contemporary society.

The bourgeoisie has always shown sure instinct when it followed the proletariat's *political* aspirations with hatred and fear. Already in November 1831, when reporting on the working class' initial impulses on the continent to the French Chamber of Deputies, Casimir Périer¹ said: "Gentlemen, we can be relieved! *Nothing* politically has emerged from Lyon's labour movement". The dominant classes namely considered every political impulse of the proletariat as an early sign of the coming emancipation of the workers from the bourgeoisie's paternalism.

¹ Note [CF]: Casimir Pierre Périer (1777-1832) was a French banker and politician, who served as France's ninth Prime Minister (1831-1832).

It was only Marx who succeeded in putting working class-politics on the foundation of conscious class struggle and to thereby forge it into a deadly weapon directed against existing society's order. The *materialist conception of history* in general and the Marxian *theory of capitalist development* in particular form the foundation of contemporary social democratic labour politics. Only someone to whom the essence of social democratic politics and the essence of Marxism are equally a mystery can think of class conscious labour politics outside of Marxian theory.

In his *Feuerbach*, Engels (1886) formulated the essence of philosophy as the eternal question about the relationship between thought and being, the question of human consciousness in the objective, material world. If we transfer the concepts of *being* and *thought* from the abstract world of nature and individual speculation, whereto professional philosophers stick with iron determination, to the realm of societal life, then the same can in a particular sense be said about *socialism*. Socialism has always been the feeling for and the search for means and ways to bring being into accord with thought, namely to bring the historical forms of existence into accord with societal consciousness.

It was left to Marx and his friend Engels to find the solution to a centuries-old painstaking task. Marx has revealed history's most important driving force by discovering that the history of all hitherto-existing societies is *in the last instance* the history of its relations of production and exchange, whose development manifests itself under the rule of private property in the political and social institutions as class struggle. Thereby we gained an explanation of the necessary disparity between consciousness and being in all hitherto-existing forms of society, between human will and social action, and between intentions and results.

Humanity first uncovered the secret behind its own societal process thanks to Marxian ideas. Furthermore, the discovery of the laws of capitalist development also expounded the way that society took from its natural, unconscious stage, during which history was made in the manner that bees construct their honeycombs, to the stage of conscious, deliberate, true *human* history, wherein for the first time society's will and action come into accord with each other so that the social human will for the first time in millennia do *that* what (s)he *wants* to do.

To speak with Engels (1886/87, 270), this final "leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom" that only the socialist revolution will realise for society as a whole, already takes place *within the existing order* – in *social-democratic politics*.² With the Ariadne thread of Marx's theory in its hand, the workers' party is today the only party that *knows* from the historical point of view *what it does* and therefore does *what it desires*. This is the whole secret of social democracy's power.

The bourgeois world has long been puzzled by social democracy's astonishing resilience and steady progress. From time to time there are single senile silly-billies who, blinded by special moral successes of our politics, advise the bourgeoisie to learn a lesson from 'our example' and from social democracy's secret wisdom and idealism. They do not understand that what is a source of life and fountain of youth and energy for the aspiring working class-politics is deadly poison for the bourgeois parties.

² Note [CF]: It should be noted that in 1903, when Luxemburg published this text, no linguistic distinction was drawn between social democracy and communism. Communist parties had not yet been differentiated from social democratic parties. When Luxemburg therefore speaks of social democracy, she means movements and parties that aim at the fundamental transformation of society that brings about the abolition of capitalism.

Because what is it that in fact gives us the inner moral strength to endure and shake off the biggest repression, such as a dozen years of the law against socialists,³ with such laughing courage? Is it for instance the disinherited's keenness to pursue small improvements of their condition? The modern proletariat is unlike the philistine and the petty bourgeois not willing to become a hero for the sake of everyday comforts. The plain, sober bigotry of the world of English trade unions shows how little the pure prospect of small material gains for the working class is capable of creating a moral flight of fancy.

Is it the ascetic stoicism of a sect that as among the original Christians flickers up all the more brightly the more persecution there is? The modern proletarian is, as heir and pupil of bourgeois society, far too much a born materialist and a healthy sensual human of flesh and blood to alone draw love and strength for his ideas from torture in accordance with slave morality.

Is it, finally, the 'justice' of our cause that makes us so impregnable? The causes of the Chartists, the followers of Weitling,⁴ and the utopian socialist schools were no less 'just' than our cause, but nonetheless they all soon succumbed to modern society's resilience.

If the contemporary labour movement victoriously shakes the manes, defying all the acts of violence of the enemy world, then this is especially due to its calm understanding of the lawfulness of the objective historical development, the understanding of the fact that "capitalist production" begets "with the inexorability of a natural process [...] its own negation" (Marx 1867, 929) – namely the expropriation of the expropriators, the socialist revolution. It is this insight, from which the labour movement draws the firm guarantee of its final victory, not just impetuosity, but also the patience, the power to action and the courage to endure.

The first condition of successful politics of struggle is understanding the movements of the opponent. But what is the key to understanding bourgeois politics down to its smallest ramifications and the labyrinths of daily politics so that we are equally protected from surprises and illusions? The key is nothing more than the insight that one must explain all forms of societal consciousness in their inner turmoil from the interests of classes and groups, from the antagonisms of material life and in the last instance from "the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production" (Marx 1859, 263).

And what gives us the capability to adapt our politics to new appearances of political life, such as for example world politics, and especially to assess it, also without special talent and profundity, with the depth of judgement that gets to the core of the appearance itself, while the most talented bourgeois critics only scratch on its surface or get caught up in hopeless antagonisms at every glance into the depth? Again, nothing else than the overview of historical development based on the law that the "mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life" (Marx 1859, 263).

What is it that provides us above all with a measure for avoiding in the selection of struggles' ways and means aimless experiments and utopian escapades that are a waste of energy? Once the direction of the economic and political process of contemporary society has been understood, this understanding can act as a measure not just

³ Note [CF]: The Chancellor of the German Empire Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) introduced the "Law against the public danger of Social Democratic endeavours" (better known as *Sozialistengesetz* – anti-socialist law) in 1878. This law was in effect until 1890 and prohibited meetings, publications, unions and associations guided by socialist principles.

⁴ Wilhelm Weitling (1808-1871) was an early communist writer and activist.

of the overall direction of our campaign plan, but also of every detail of our political efforts. Thanks to this guideline the working class has managed for the first time to transform the idea of socialism as the ultimate aim into daily politics' divisional coins and to elevate the everyday political detail work to the big idea's executive tool. There was bourgeois politics led by workers and there was revolutionary socialism before Marx. But only since Marx and through Marx has a *socialist working class-politics* existed that is at the same time and in the fullest meaning of both words *revolutionary Realpolitik*.

If we understand by Realpolitik a politics that only sets itself achievable goals that it pursues to obtain by the most effective means in the shortest time, then the difference between proletarian class-politics that stands in the Marxian spirit and bourgeois politics is that bourgeois politics is real from the standpoint of *material daily politics*, whereas socialist politics is real from the standpoint of the historical *tendency of development*. Exactly the same difference can be found between a vulgar economic theory of value that conceives of value as a thing in appearance from the standpoint of the market stall and Marxian theory that conceives of value as a societal relation in a particular historical epoch.

But proletarian Realpolitik is also revolutionary in that it goes in all the parts of its endeavours beyond the bounds of the existing order in which it operates, by consciously regarding itself only as the preliminary stage of the act that turns proletarian Realpolitik into the politics of the ruling, revolutionary proletariat.

In this manner, Marx's theory penetrates and enlightens everything – the moral power, by which we overcome perils; our tactics of struggle, even its last details; our critique of opponents; our everyday agitation, by which we win the masses; our entire work down to the tips of the fingers. And if we here and there indulge in the illusion that our politics is today with all its inner power independent from Marx's theory, then this only shows that our praxis speaks in Marx's terms although we do not know it, just like Molière's bourgeois spoke in prose.

It suffices that we visualise Marx's achievements in order to understand that bourgeois society made him its deadly enemy because of his concept of the working class's socialist revolution. It became evident to the dominant classes that overcoming the modern labour movement meant overcoming Marx. In the twenty years since Marx's death, we have seen a constant series of attempts to destroy Marx's spirit in the labour movement's theory and praxis.

The labour movement has from the start of its history navigated between the two poles of revolutionary-socialist utopianism and bourgeois Realpolitik. Wholly absolutist or semi-absolutist pre-bourgeois society formed the historical soil of the first. The revolutionary-utopian stage of socialism in Western Europe is by and large concluded by the development of bourgeois class rule, although we can observe single relapses into it until today. The other danger – getting lost in bourgeois Realpolitik's patchwork – has only emerged in the course of the labour movement's strengthening on the floor of parliamentarism.

The idea was that bourgeois parliamentarism would provide weapons for *practically* overcoming the proletariat's revolutionary politics and that the democratic union of the classes and social peace brought about by reforms should replace class struggle.

And what has been achieved? The illusion may have here and there lasted for a while, but the unsuitability of Realpolitik's bourgeois methods for the working class became immediately evident. The fiasco of ministerialism in France⁵, the betrayal by liberalism in Belgium⁶, the breakdown of parliamentarism in Germany⁷ – the short dream of “quiet development” strike by strike broke to pieces. The Marxian law of the tendency of the sharpening of social contrasts as foundation of class struggle asserted itself. And every day brings new signs and wonders. In the Netherlands, 24 hours of the railway strike like an earthquake overnight opened up a yawning gap in the middle of society, from which class struggle blazed out. Holland is on fire.⁸

So in the light of the “march of the worker battalions”, the base of bourgeois democracy and bourgeois legislation breaks down like a thin ice sheet and again and again makes the working class aware that its final goal can *not* be achieved on this base. All of this is the result of the many attempts to ‘practically’ overcome Marx.

Hundreds of industrious apologists have made the *theoretical* overcoming of Marxism their life-task and the springboard of their careers. What have they achieved? They have managed to create in the circles of the faithful intelligentsia the conviction that Marx's works are ‘one-sided’ and ‘exaggerated’. But even those of the bourgeois ideologues, who can be taken serious, such as Stammler⁹, have understood that nothing can be achieved with “‘a bit more or a bit less’ half-truths” against “such a deep and profound theory”. But what can bourgeois academia oppose to Marxian theory *at a whole*?

Since Marx has emphasised the historical standpoint of the working class in the fields of philosophy, history, and economics, bourgeois research in these fields has lost the thread. The classical philosophy of nature has come to an end. The bourgeois philosophy of history has come to an end. Scientific political economy has come to an end. In historical research, as far as there is not the dominance of an unconscious and inconsequent materialism, an eclecticism shimmering in all colours has taken the place of any unified theory. So there is the relinquishment of the unified explanation of the process of history, i.e. of the philosophy of history as such. Economics oscillates between two schools, the ‘historical’ one and the ‘subjective’ one. The one is a protest against the other. And both are a protest against Marx. The first one negates economic theory, i.e. the knowledge in this field, in principle in order to negate Marx, whereas the

⁵ Note [CF]: Luxemburg here alludes to the fact that the socialist Alexandre Millerand participated as Minister of Commerce, Industry, Posts and Telegraphs in the bourgeois French government of Prime Minister Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau from 1899 until 1902.

⁶ Note [CF]: In April 1902, there were wildcat strikes in Belgium that turned into a general strike for the abolishment of the plural voting system that privileged the rich. Under the impression of these working class protests, the leader of the Belgian Labour Party, Emile Vandervelde, introduced a motion for the introduction of universal suffrage to the Belgian Parliament. The motion was defeated. Introducing universal suffrage required another general strike in 1913 and took until 1919. Representatives of the Liberal Party were, just like the Belgian Labour Party, opposed to the absolute majority rule of the Catholic Party under Prime Minister Paul de Smet de Naezer, but repeatedly opposed electoral reforms.

⁷ Note [CF]: Before the end of the German Monarchy in the November Revolution 1918 and the founding of the Weimar Republic, the German Reichstag did not have full political power. Political decisions were often taken by the government independent of the Reichstag.

⁸ Note [CF]: In 1903, Dutch railroad workers organised a general strike in solidarity with other workers for the right to strike and unionise.

⁹ Note [CF]: Rudolf Stammler (1856-1938) was a legal theorist and the main representative of neo-Kantian legal philosophy in Germany.

other one negates the only – objective – research method that first turned political economy into a science.

Certainly the social science book fair every month brings whole mountains of products that result from bourgeois industriousness to the market. And the thickest volumes written by ambitious, modern professors are put out at large-scale capitalist, machine-like speed. But in such diligent monographs either research buries its head like an ostrich into the sand of small, fragmented phenomena so that it does not have to see broader connections and only works for daily needs. Or research only simulates thoughts and “social theories” that are in the last instance just reflexes of Marx’s thoughts that are hidden under overloaded tinsel ornaments that appeal to the taste associated with commodities of the ‘modern’ bazaar. Autonomous flights of thought, a daring glance into the distance or an invigorating deduction are nowhere to be found.

And if social progress has again created a new series of scientific problems, then again only the *Marxian* method offers ways for solving them.

So it is everywhere just theorylessness, epistemological scepticism, that bourgeois social science is able to oppose to Marxian knowledge. Marxian theory is a child of bourgeois science, but the birth of this child has cost the mother her life.

Therefore, the upturn of the working class has knocked the weapons out of bourgeois society’s hands that the latter wanted to use on the battlefield against Marxian socialism. And today, 20 years after Marx’s death, bourgeois society is all the more powerless against him, but Marx more alive than ever.

Of course, contemporary society has one comfort left. While society struggles in vain to find a means to overcome Marx’s theory, it does not notice that the only real means of doing so are hidden in this theory itself. Because it is through and through historical, Marxian theory only claims temporally limited validity. Because it is through and through dialectical, it carries in itself the definite seeds of its own dissolution.

If we abstract from its unchanging part, namely from the historical method of research, then Marxian theory in its most general outlines consists of insights into the historical way that leads from the last ‘antagonistic’ form of society, i.e. societies that are based on class conflicts, to the communist society that is built on all members’ solidarity of interests.

Marxian theory is especially, just like earlier classical theories of political economy, the mental reflex of a particular period of economic and political development, namely the transition from the capitalist to the socialist phase of history. But it is more than just a reflex. The historical transition that Marx identified can namely not take place without Marxian knowledge having become the knowledge of a particular class in society, the modern proletariat. That Marx’s theory becomes the working class’ form of consciousness and as such an *element* of history is the *precondition* for the realisation of the historical revolution formulated in Marx’s theory.

Marx’s theory proves to be true continuously with every new proletarian who supports class struggle. So Marx’s theory is at the same time part of the historical process and is also itself a process. Social revolution will be *The Communist Manifesto*’s final chapter.

Consequently, the part of Marxian theory that is most dangerous to the existing order of society will sooner or later be ‘overcome’. But only *together* with the existing order of society.

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About the Author

Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) was a leading socialist politician, Marxist theorist, anti-militarist and proponent of democratic socialism. She opposed the First World War, which led to her and Karl Liebknecht's departure from the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and their founding of the Spartacus League. Luxemburg opposed war, nationalism and imperialism and wrote on issues such as the relationship of reform and revolution, the mass strike as political strategy, war and peace, the logic and development of capitalism, the Russian Revolution, or theory and praxis. Among her most important publications are *Reform or Revolution* (1899); *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906); *The National Question* (1908/1909); *Introduction to Political Economy* (1909/1910); *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913); *The Crisis of Social Democracy (The Junius Pamphlet)* (1916); *The Russian Revolution* (1918). On January 15, 1919, right-wing extremist paramilitaries murdered Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Luxemburg has until today remained a highly influential figure in socialist politics and theory.

Postface: Karl Marx & Rosa Luxemburg

Christian Fuchs

Mr. 62. 20. Jahrg.

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Karl Marx.

„Die Philosophen haben die Welt
nur verschieden interpretiert, es kommt
aber darauf an, sie zu verändern.“
11. Theze Marx' über Feuerbach.

Vor zwanzig Jahren hat Marx seinen gewaltigen Kopf zur Ruhe
gelegt, und trotzdem wir erst vor wenigen Jahren das erlebt haben,
was man in der Sprache der deutschen Professoren „die Krise des
Marxismus“ genannt hat, so genügt ein Blick auf die Massen,
die heute dem Socialismus allein in Deutschland folgen, auf seine
Bedeutung im öffentlichen Leben aller sogenannten Kulturländer,
um das Verh. des Marx'schen Gedankens in seiner Tiefenhaftigkeit
zu fassen.

sich schon innerhalb der heutigen Ordnung – in der
socialdemokratischen Politik. Mit dem Friedesfaden
der Marx'schen Lehre in der Hand ist die Arbeiterpartei heute die
einzige, die vom historischen Standpunkt weiß, was sie thut,
und deshalb thut, was sie will. Darin liegt das ganze Ge-
heimnis der socialdemokratischen Macht.

Die bürgerliche Welt stugt seit langem vor der erstaunlichen
Unverwundlichkeit und dem steten Fortschritt der Socialdemokratie.
Von Zeit zu Zeit finden sich einzelne greifbare Stundstücke, die,
durch besonders moralische Erfolge unsterblicher Politik gebildet, der
Bourgeoisie raten, sich an uns „ein Beispiel“ zu nehmen, von der
geheimnisvollen Weisheit und dem Idealismus der Socialdemokratie

Wenn wir nämlich als Realpolitik eine Politik erkennen, die sich
nur erreichbare Ziele setzt und sie mit bewährten Mitteln auf dem
bürgerlichen Wege zu verfolgen weiß, so untercheidet sich die pro-
letarische Massenpolitik im Marx'schen Sinne darin von der bürger-
lichen Politik, daß die bürgerliche Politik vom Standpunkte der
materiellen Tageserfolge real, während die socialistische
Politik es vom Standpunkte der geschichtlichen Ent-
wicklungsstendenz ist. Es ist genau derselbe Unterschied
wie zwischen einer vulgärökonomischen Werttheorie, die den Wert
als eine dingliche Eigenschaft vom Standpunkte des Marktes, und
der Marx'schen Theorie, die ihn als gesellschaftliches Verhältnis
einer bestimmten historischen Epoche aufstelt.

Dead or Alive?

Rosa Luxemburg's reflections on Karl Marx were published in German on March 14, 1903, in *Vorwärts*, the newspaper of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. It is a text about Karl Marx's life and death, the life and death of his ideas and politics, the life and death of socialism, class struggles and alternatives to capitalism. Karl Marx was born on May 5, 1818, and died on May 14, 1883. First published on the occasion of Marx's 20th year of death, *tripleC* publishes the translation of Rosa Luxemburg's tribute to Marx as part of the celebration of his bicentenary. Just like Marx's critical political economic theory and progressive politics were much needed 20 years after his death, they are also needed and remain alive 200 years after his birth and 135 years after his death. Marx is alive as the ghost that keeps on haunting capitalism as long as the latter continues to exist.

Luxemburg stresses that bourgeois ideologues try to declare Marx's ideas and politics dead. They did so in 1903. They do so in 2018. Writing in 1903, she says: "In the twenty years since Marx's death, we have seen a constant series of attempts to destroy Marx's spirit in the labour movement's theory and praxis". 115 years later, the situation is not so different. Much attention is given to Marx on the occasion of his bicentenary. One can discern a bourgeois from a socialist engagement with Marx: bourgeois readings of Marx today argue that he was wrong and his ideas died with him or were already dead while he was alive. What they mean is: "TINA – There is no alternative to capitalism". Socialist readings acknowledge two facts: (a) Marx's ideas and politics continue to be of high relevance for understanding and criticising contemporary capitalism. (b) Marx's thought is dialectical and historical, which means that his basic categories have also evolved with the history of capitalism and the development of Marxian theory. They are not static and fixed, but need to be dialectically developed for today.

There is a dialectic of continuity and change of capitalism that manifests itself in the way that Marxian theory uses Marx's categories to explain capitalism today.

Many of us are today probably less optimistic than Rosa Luxemburg in 1903 about socialism's subjectivity because far-right ideology has in recent years been much more strengthened than left worldviews and politics. But in objective terms, socialist and Marxian analyses and politics remain absolutely vital: Capitalism has since 2008 been in a deep crisis that has evolved from an economic into a political and ideological crisis. It cannot be ruled out that a new World War will be the result of proliferating new nationalisms. Capitalism's crisis and the high levels of inequality, precarious life and precarious labour in the world do not just show how much we need Marx's ideas today. The political-economic situation evidences the need of socialism as an alternative to capitalism and social struggles for democratic socialism and socialist humanism.

Bourgeois Readings of Marx

When the socialist movement became larger and larger at the time of Rosa Luxemburg, bourgeois thinkers' criticisms of Marx proliferated. So for example in 1896, Eugen Böhm-Bawerk published *Karl Marx and the Close of His System*. Böhm-Bawerk came from an aristocratic family (his full family name was Böhm Ritter von Bawerk) and was Minister of Finance of the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1895 until 1904. At the very start of his essay, Böhm-Bawerk (1949/1896, 3) leaves no doubt that he advances a critique of Marx because the latter had become known to "wide circles of readers". Böhm-Bawerk for example argues that the "fundamental proposition that labour is the sole basis of value" is "dialectical hocus-pocus" (Ibid., 77) and that Marx's theory is "a house of cards" (Ibid., 118). Today, also, criticisms of Marx proliferate together with the wider attention that is given to his works. So for example ideological media such as *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, one of the ideological mouthpieces of German capital, claim that Marx was a "false prophet" and that "his central predictions were quite wrong" (FAZ 2017).

How right Marx's assumption was that a theory of economic value is a theory of time and labour in capitalism, still becomes evident in at least two respects today: a) Capital regularly reacts negatively to demands for the legal reduction in working hours without wage cuts. b) There is a tremendous mismatch between those working overtime on the one hand and those who are unemployed or precariously employed or conduct unremunerated labour on the other hand. Capital tries to maximise the hours worked per year by a single employee and to maximise the average amount of commodities workers produce per unit of time in order to increase profits. "Economy of time, to this all economy ultimately reduces itself" (Marx 1857/58, 173).

The Working Class

Luxemburg stresses that Marx's most important insight was that production, class relations, the exploitation of the working class and class struggles form the heart of modern, capitalist society. Given Luxemburg's stress on the importance of the working class in Marx's works, politics and thought, reading her text today brings up the questions: Who is part of the working class today? What are the prospects for working class struggles?

The composition and qualities of the working class have changed since the times of Marx and Luxemburg. Class theory today needs to account for phenomena such as precarious freelance labour, knowledge and service labour, the transformation of labour by digital media technologies (digital labour), the vast amount of the unemployed, new forms of unremunerated labour, etc. In addition, working-class consciousness

poses a complex problem today whose analysis requires the combination of class analysis and ideology critique. Where is the working class today? Who is part of it? What does its consciousness look like? What are the prospects for the self-emancipation of the working class today? Peter Goodwin (2018) in his contribution to this special issue pinpoints these and other important questions that Marxist theory needs to answer today in respect to the transformation of society's class structure.

Luxemburg speaks of the "immensity of the work of Marx's thought", whereby she points to the fact that Marx was an intellectual worker. He partly worked as a journalist to earn a living, but by and large depended on Engels and other sources of funding for financing his and his family's life. He had to lead a life in poverty. Today, as the general intellect has become an immediate productive force, intellectual work has become generalised. Higher education and as a consequence highly skilled labour has become much more prevalent. Knowledge work has become an important form of labour accounting for a significant share of value-added. We have experienced the rise of mass intellectuality. Mass intellectuality has under capitalist conditions been accompanied by new forms of precarity and exploitation and does not imply that knowledge workers are automatically conscious of their class status.

Praxis

Luxemburg's text shows a somewhat exaggerated historical optimism that considers socialist revolution as highly likely. But these passages should not be mistaken for historical determinism and the automatic breakdown of capitalism. In the paragraph where she refers to the passage from Marx's capital that says that capitalism creates its own negation, Luxemburg uses the conditional form "If the contemporary labour movement [...wins]", which indicates that the "final victory" is all but certain and depends on the unpredictable outcomes of class struggles.

In the context of the First World War, she stressed this openness of the historical process in a pointed manner by arguing that in situations of severe crisis we face the choice between "the reversion to barbarism" and socialism (Luxemburg 1915, 388). "*This world war* means a reversion to barbarism. The triumph of imperialism leads to the destruction of culture [...] Thus we stand today, as Friedrich Engels prophesied more than a generation ago, before the awful proposition: either the triumph of imperialism and the destruction of all culture, and, as in ancient Rome, depopulation, desolation, degeneration, a vast cemetery; or, the victory of socialism, that is, the conscious struggle of the international proletariat against imperialism, against its methods, against war" (Ibid., 388-389). "Socialism will not fall as manna from heaven. It can only be won by a long chain of powerful struggles" (Ibid., 388).

Luxemburg in her essay makes clear that the transition from capitalism to communism can only become a reality if the content of Marx's theory guides political consciousness. The implication is that if ideologies (such as nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-socialism, neoliberal entrepreneurship, etc.) and other developments forestall critical consciousness and critical action, then capitalism will continue to exist (unless society as such breaks down because of nuclear war or other disasters).

Norman Geras writes in his book *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg* that Luxemburg's Marxism is radically different from "that determinist science of iron economic laws which is the usual foundation of fatalism and spontaneism" (Geras 2015, 19). He argues that passages stressing necessity and chance of social development can be found next to each other in many of Luxemburg's works. Formulations such as the one about "socialism or barbarism" imply that "[t]here is not one direction of development, there are several, and the role of the proletariat under the leadership of its party is not

simply to accelerate the historical process but to decide it. Socialism is not the inevitable product of iron economic laws but an ‘objective possibility’ defined by the socio-economic conditions of capitalism” (Geras 2015, 28). Geras points out that for Luxemburg, barbarism signifies capitalism’s collapse. Every economic crisis is a partial collapse of capitalism. But barbarism also entails fascism, warfare, genocide, nuclear devastation, the ecological crisis, etc., which are all immanent potentials and realities of capitalism. So capitalism itself is barbarism. For Luxemburg, the collapse of capitalism and the creation of socialism are not identical (Ibid., 35). Luxemburg’s interpretation of Marx fuses “objective laws with the revolutionary energy and will, which, on the basis of that theory, attempt actually to change the world” (Ibid., 37).

It should be noted that in the passage from *Capital Volume 1* that Luxemburg discusses, Marx (1867, 929) speaks of a “natural process” and not, as incorrectly translated in the version used in the Marx & Engels Collected-Works, of a “law of Nature” (see Fuchs 2016, 69-70, for a discussion of the translation of this passage from German to English). The difference is that in 19th-century science, laws of nature were considered deterministic, whereas processes in nature always have a certain level of unpredictability. The full passage reads:

“But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation. This is the negation of the negation. It does not re-establish private property, but it does indeed establish individual *property on the* basis of the achievements of the capitalist era: namely co-operation and the possession in common of the land and the means of production produced by labour itself” (Marx 1867, 929).

What Marx says here is that communism is the negation of the negation of capitalism and entails co-operative work based on the common ownership of land and the means of production. Capitalism negates itself in its own development through crises. Communism is capitalism’s negation of the negation. The preceding paragraph ends with Marx’s famous call and demand that the “expropriators are expropriated” (Ibid.). This formulation implies that the process Marx talks about only takes place if there are active subjects who in the course of a revolution take the means of production into common ownership. The question of the revolutionary negation of the negation is for Marx not one of automatic breakdown, but of class struggle and revolution (see Fuchs 2016, 322-324 for a detailed discussion of this passage).

Materialism

Luxemburg stresses Marx’s materialist concept of society. But what does it mean that the production of material life conditions society, including individual and collective consciousness? Matter in society is neither simply the economy nor tangible things we can touch. By matter in society, Marx refers to the process of social production. That consciousness is grounded in material life means that the human individual, its thoughts and language, are not isolated and cannot exist in isolation, but only in and through social relations with other humans that are relations of production, in which they co-produce the economy, political and cultural life: “The ideas which these individuals form are ideas either about their relation to nature or about their mutual relations or about their own nature. It is evident that in all these cases their ideas are the conscious expression – real or illusory – of their real relations and activities, of their production, of their intercourse, of their social and political conduct. [...] Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., and precisely men conditioned by the mode

of production of their material life, by their material intercourse and its further development in the social and political structure” (Marx and Engels 1845/46, 36). The implication is that ideas, communication, politics, culture, art, science, philosophy, etc. do not form a superstructure detached from an economic base, but are themselves realms of economic production that have at the same time non-economic qualities. Whereas the base/superstructure metaphor is misleading, it is preferable to talk about the material character of society as a dialectic of the economic and the non-economic.

Left Socialism’s Revolutionary Realpolitik

Luxemburg interprets the politics that Marx stands for as revolutionary Realpolitik. She opposes revolutionary Realpolitik to “revolutionary-socialist utopianism” and “bourgeois Realpolitik”. At the time of Luxemburg, the bourgeois Realpolitik of the Left took on the form of revisionist social democracy that stood under the influence of Eduard Bernstein’s doctrine of reformism and society’s mechanical evolutionary development into socialism. Left utopianism took on the form of the anarchist propaganda of the deed.

Isn’t the situation of the Left today quite similarly facing the two dead ends of utopianism and bourgeois Realpolitik? On the one end, we find bourgeoisified social democrats, who advance a purely reformist parliamentary politics that has succumbed to neoliberal ideology. The meaning of social democracy today is as a result completely opposed to the meaning it had at the time of Luxemburg as well as at the time of Marx. On the other end, we find radical social movements, who believe in the power of horizontalism and prefigurative politics. They limit politics to civil society and in an anarchist manner want to change society without taking power. Such movements overlook that the state is itself an important terrain of struggle, that it is a mistake to leave this battleground to bourgeois parties, and that changing society simply cannot start from the outside of society, but requires power and resources that come from the inside of the system and are in a dialectical process of revolutionary sublation turned from the inside out. So whereas contemporary social movement politics is by and large a version of abstract, idealist anarchist romanticism, social democracy has completely adapted to the system. Rosa Luxemburg reminds us that Marx argued for the politics of revolutionary reformism that is based on a dialectic of reform and revolution. Parliament and governments are terrains of struggles that should be strategically appropriated for improving the conditions of struggles. The Left needs both a civil society wing and a party that interact dialectically.

If the Left does not want to leave politics to the forces that dominate today – nationalists, the far-right and neoliberals –, then it needs to reinvent a left socialism that in a similar vein to the political understanding of Marx and Luxemburg is based on dialectics of party/movements, organisation/spontaneity, leadership/masses, reform/revolution. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2017, 278) argue in this context: “The taking of power, by electoral or other means, must serve to open space for autonomous and prefigurative practices on an ever-larger scale and nourish the slow transformation of institutions, which must continue over the long term. Similarly practices of exodus must find ways to complement and further projects of both antagonistic reform and taking power”.

Against Positivism

Rosa Luxemburg in her reflections on Karl Marx also advances a critique of positivist science and positivist social theory. Positivist research is eclectic, fragmented, theoryless, and follows trendy fashions: “Autonomous flights of thought, a daring glance

into the distance or an invigorating deduction are nowhere to be found". Positivism cannot explain society's big problems and questions, the large connections of moments within society. It lacks a focus on society as dialectical totality. The academic war that neoliberal academia and postmodernism have for decades waged against Marxist theory has in contemporary society resulted in an academic landscape that is quite similar to the one that Luxemburg criticises.

There is much talk about interdisciplinarity, but in reality interdisciplinarity lacks critical theory and philosophy and is little more than a fancy catchword that aims at turning the university into a business school and corporation and research via the focus on STE(A)M into corporations' and capitalism's vassal. In the social sciences and humanities, postmodernism has resulted in a focus on small-scale micro-studies (typically studies of micro-phenomenon A in country or city B), a neglect of understanding society as totality, and a neglect of the development of grand social theories. While academia gets ever more uncritical, society's global problems get worse. The rise of computational social science and big data analytics is a typical example of how the focus on positivism (in this case via large-scale data analysis) and the lack of grand theories threaten and destroy the critical potentials of the social sciences and humanities (Fuchs 2017). Marxian theory poses a counter-model. It is a true form of inter- and transdisciplinarity that allows situating specific phenomena in their broadest academic and societal context and aims at producing knowledge that helps advancing human emancipation.

200 years after Marx's birth, his approach is urgently needed in research, theory, politics and society at large. That 'Marx is needed' means nothing more than that the critique of capitalism and class is an urgent theoretical and political task. Only Marxian theory and praxis can advance knowledge and a form of politics that help us to overcome the severe problems posed by nationalism, inequalities, ecological devastation, authoritarianism, wars, genocides, and economic and political crises. We need to repeat Marx today.

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