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Historical Transformation and Epistemological Discontinuity

Abstract *Starting from recent formulas of EU bureaucracy for subordinating scientific and educational apparatuses to the needs of the capital and to the requests of its political representatives, the article analyses the interconnection between the historical transformation of the ideological state apparatuses (universities, higher education institutions, research institutes etc.) and the epistemological discontinuity provoked by the triumph of technosciences. The hypothesis to be tested is the following: While the crisis of West European-North American capitalism requires an ever tighter submission of ideological state apparatuses, and especially of scientific and academic apparatuses to the needs of the capital, theoretical practices in the humanities and social sciences have come to the point where they entered into an open conflict with the domination of the capital and have, as a consequence, started to subvert their own institutional supports in the ideological apparatuses of the capitalist state. For this purpose, the article reconsiders social sciences as a compromise formation and, eventually, reassesses the historical materialism as a non-Cartesian modern science.*

Keywords: *transformation of ideological state apparatuses, triumph of technosciences, epistemological discontinuity, social sciences and humanities, capital, historical materialism*

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At the beginning of the millenium, “knowledge” was launched upon a spectacular carrier in the jargon of EU bureaucracy: the slogans of the decade were “knowledge-based economy” and “knowledge society”.¹ When in 2009 Lisbon Strategy was finally dismissed as “a failure”,² EU administration’s targets moved towards more concrete agenda that were to be imposed with constraint: as far as the “knowledge” is concerned, the Commission required that the governments, encouraging technological innovations and minimising the “costs of labour”,

1 “The Union has today set itself a new strategic goal for the next decade: to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. [...] Europe’s education and training systems need to adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment.” (Presidency conclusions. Lisbon European Council, 23 and 24 March 2000.)

2 “Even if progress has been made it must be said that the Lisbon Agenda, with only a year remaining before it is to be evaluated, has been a failure.” (Fredrik Reinfeldt, Swedish prime minister, and Anders Borg, finance minister, *Dagens Nyheter*, 2 June 2009; <http://www.euractiv.com/priorities/sweden-admits-lisbon-agenda-fail-news-221962>, 13. 12. 2013.)

make scientific and educational apparatuses functional to the capital in search of surplus-profits.³ Other institutional mechanisms have been operating in the same direction for quite some time: the Bologna reform has been destroying local academic traditions and imposing institutional domination of empiricist “studies”; agencies of quality assurance have been imposing corporate governance upon academic and scientific institutions, destroying local scientific communities and serving the domination of the “North Atlantic” scientific and academic establishments; governments have been organising the expansion of low-quality private institutions, imposing commercialisation to public institutions and in various ways subordinating scientific and educational apparatuses to the needs of the capital and to the requests of its political representatives.⁴

However, to complete the picture, we should also take into account the processes within the scientific and academic apparatuses themselves. The most obvious among them is the collaboration of academic directions and administrations with the above mentioned operations of governments and EU bureaucracies. Correlatively, what Michel Freitag called “technosciences”,⁵ are occupying increasing portions of research and study programmes.⁶

In this contribution, I will analyse the interconnection between the historical transformation of the ideological state apparatuses (universities, higher education institutions, research institutes etc.) and the epistemological discontinuity provoked by the triumph of technosciences. In particular, I want to investigate the causes of the general assault against

3 »Europe 2020 puts forward three mutually reinforcing priorities: – Smart growth: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation. [...] The Commission is putting forward seven flagship initiatives to catalyse progress under each priority theme: – “Innovation Union” to improve framework conditions and access to finance for research and innovation so as to ensure that innovative ideas can be turned into products and services that create growth and jobs. – “Youth on the move” to enhance the performance of education systems and to facilitate the entry of young people to the labour market.« (Communication from the Commission: Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.)

4 Analyses and interpretations that justify these assertions are accessible in: Avtorska skupina, *Kaj po univerzi?* [Group of authors, *After university?*], Založba /*cf., Ljubljana, 2013.

5 Michel Freitag, *Le Naufrage de l'université*, Nuit blanche, Québec, Découverte, Paris, 1995.

6 For detailed analyses, see: Avtorska skupina, *Kaj po univerzi?*, Založba /*cf., Ljubljana, 2013; and the materials of the research project: *The humanities and social sciences on the periphery: sciences or technocratic instruments?* <http://www2.mirovni-institut.si/hssp/> (13. 12. 2013.)

theory in scientific and educational apparatuses, and the concomitant demise of epistemic reflexivity and social responsibility in the humanities and social sciences. The hypothesis I want to test is the following:

While the crisis of West European-North American capitalism requires an ever tighter submission of ideological state apparatuses, and especially of scientific and academic apparatuses to the needs of the capital, theoretical practices in the humanities and social sciences have come to the point where they entered into an open conflict with the domination of the capital and have, as a consequence, started to subvert their own institutional supports in the ideological apparatuses of the capitalist state. Processes described in the introduction result from the class-struggle of the dominant classes who endeavour to keep the control over the academic and scientific apparatuses and to repress theoretical practices by severing them from their institutional support.

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Social sciences as a compromise formation

Let us take a step back and ask ourselves about the logic of the development of the social sciences and the humanities. A commission that was investigating the present state of the social sciences and whose chairman was Immanuel Wallerstein, described the paradigm of social sciences in the following way:

There were three clear lines of cleavage in the system of disciplines erected to structure the social sciences in the late nineteenth century:

- the line between the study of the modern/civilized world (history plus the three nomothetic social sciences) and the study of the non-modern world (anthropology, plus Oriental studies);
- within the study of the modern world, the line between the past (history) and the present (the nomothetic social sciences);
- within the nomothetic social sciences, the sharp lines between the study of the market (economics), the state (political science), and civil society (sociology).

Each of these lines of cleavage came to be challenged in the post-1945 world.⁷

What is interesting in this presentation of the social sciences is its diereitic scheme which we can graphically present in the following way:

7 Immanuel Wallerstein *et al.*: *Open the Social Sciences. Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1996, p. 36.

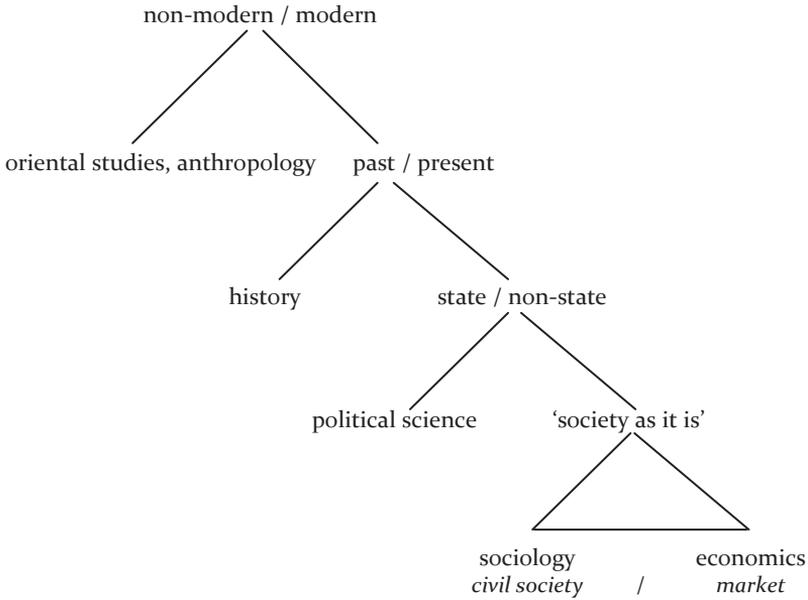


Figure 1: *The system of social sciences*

If we put it in this way, we see that sociology has a double status: it belongs both to the ‘bad’ line of history, anthropology, political science – and to the ‘good’ line of mathematised ‘exact’ social sciences that culminates in economics. The institutionalised system of social sciences is the exact historical accumulation of failures to realize an epistemic ideal to which only economics to a certain extent approaches.⁸

8 Wallerstein and colleagues believe that this scheme represents “the 19th century paradigm” of the social sciences (for the same thesis, cf.: Immanuel Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2001). This contention seems too strong for several reasons: one is that by the end of the 19th century Marx’s *opus* was already completed and Freud’s was just begun; the other is that the process of integration of the social sciences has already begun much before 1945, more precisely at the time when the presumed “19th century paradigm” was supposedly completed by the Durkheimian sociology: radical transformation of epistemic fields in particular disciplines was mostly due to the integration of anthropological procedures into their practices (cf. the ways how Louis Gernet practiced the studies of antiquity, Marcel Granet oriental studies, and Marcel Bloch historiography). Finally, Durkheimian conception of sociology itself pretends to a wholistic science that, in principle, but also in the practice of Durkheim and his disciples, reaches beyond the dieretic scheme of the “paradigm”. It would be more adequate to consider the presumed “19th century” paradigm as an ideological formation, as an *institutional myth* that, by the way of its material existence in the academic apparatuses, has regulated the practices of production and transmission of knowledge in the social sciences and the humanities. As institutional myth, this “paradigm” has been an

In 1706 Giambattista Vico already noticed this internal clash within the sciences.⁹ In his view, there was a method which was developed by the Ancients, and this he called the *topical* method. Contrary to this age-old method, the Moderns were, as Vico acutely noticed, developing the method proposed by Mr. Cartesius, and this he called the modern *critical* method. This critical method is, of course, modelled upon the exact natural sciences, more precisely – upon the Galileian physics. The topical method, on the other hand, takes its inspiration from the ancient rhetoric and the juridical science which both presume that things human always and by their very nature allow for differing and eventually mutually exclusive descriptions that cannot be reduced to each other. Scrutiny of human affairs is a matter of perspective, of the point of view, of the places (*topoi*) from where one looks at them. In human affairs, the most one can strive for is, at least according to the Ancients, to find ways of co-existence and of the necessary co-operation among the irreducibly differing human positions.

In early modernity, the topical method was recaptured and splendidly articulated within the new humanist paradigm – the philological paradigm. Although it had produced important results, it has been disqualified by the advent of Galileian physics, and further marginalised by Cartesian philosophy. It was only during the nineteenth century that philology could again claim scientific dignity with comparative and historical linguistics and with the new social sciences. The development of linguistics led to Saussurian paradigm – the splendid effort of philology to incorporate the modern critical norm. Saussurian linguistics has demonstrated its force, and its limits, during the twentieth century. It now seems to be an obstacle, rather than an incentive to the theorisation of symbolic practices.

important obstacle to theoretical production. However, its impact has been receding since the invasion of the academic apparatuses by the “studies” paradigm that does not even attempt ideologically to determine its problem-field, but starts its operations by borrowing an “object” of inquiry from fashionable political and ideological practices, now mostly in the liberal style (gender studies, media studies, globalisation studies, literary studies etc.). For an early critique of the practice of borrowing the “object” of study, see: Étienne Balibar, *Concepts fondamentaux du matérialisme historique*, in: Louis Althusser *et al.*, *Lire le Capital*, PUF, Paris, 1996, p. 486.

9 Vico, Giambattista: *De temporis nostri studiorum ratione*, pronounced as inaugural oration to the beginning of the academic year in 1706; re-written into a *dissertatio* in 1708. (Latin-German edition: *Vom Wesen und Weg der geistigen Bildung*, Godesberg, 1947; English translation: *On the Study Methods of our Time*, Indianapolis-New York-Kansas City, 1965; French translation: *La méthode des études de notre temps*, in: Giambattista Vico, *Vie de Giambattista Vico écrite par lui-même*, Grasset, Paris, 1981; Italian: *Opere di Giambattista Vico. Le orazioni inaugurali*, I. – VI., Il mulino, Bologna, 1982.)

Social sciences, on the other side, have been a *compromise formation* from the very beginning. As a consequence, their problem has been that their Galileian ideal has not corresponded to their object and to their practical preoccupations of knowing this object. That is why they have been repeating their attempts at a solution, and have repeatedly failed. History of social sciences has been almost a necessary development of a compromise formation which arose when the paradigm of 'the Humanities', *studia humanitatis* that existed in the form of the *septem artes liberales* during the Middle Ages and that started really to flourish under humanism, came under the attack of the modern paradigm introduced by the Galileian physics and its exact mathematical method.¹⁰

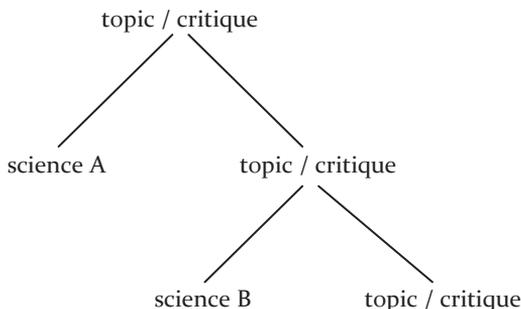
At that moment the humanities broke down into one branch which is philology and which went its own way surviving as the study of language and its formations. While the other line, after having itinerated through centuries without much success, finally led towards the swift series of consecutive constitutions of sciences from the late 18th till the end of the 19th centuries, towards the series which resulted in the 'system' of social sciences, still dominating our institutions. That is why the scheme of this logical ramification (*Figure 1*) is systemic, not historical. Historically, the first social science to constitute itself was economics, and it was already the object of a critical scrutiny at the moment when anthropology only started its epistemic constitution.¹¹ The last to emerge was sociology, with Durkheim and *Année sociologique*, at the end of the century – to complete the 'system'. Sociology, the complementing supplement of the system, is also the social science which most obviously harbours both strands of the system, the mathematical-statistical norm and the ambivalent, perspective-dependent topical approach to human reality.

10 For an early elaboration of this point, see: Viehweg, Theodor: *Topik und Jurisprudenz*, Beck, München, 1974 (5th edition). (Translation into Serbo-Croatian: Teodor Fiveg: *Topika i jurisprudencija*, Nomos, Nolit, Beograd, 1987.)

11 It is utterly simplifying to squeeze epistemic processes into chronological strait-jacket. Still, there are coincidences that are noteworthy at least as mnemonic devices. Adam Smith published the founding book of economic science *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) at the time when Johann Gottfried Herder was writing his first texts that were to infuse a new momentum into philological endeavours by investing them with the key importance for *Nationalbildung* (essays from *Über die Ursprung der Sprache*, 1770, to *Über die Wirkung der Dichtkunst auf die Sitten der Völker in alten und neuen Zeiten*, 1778). In the same year 1859, when Karl Marx first made public his project of the critique of political economy (*Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*), Lewis Henry Morgan sent out his circular letter to collect data on kinship systems world-wide, containing his paper *Laws of consanguinity, and descent of the Iroquois*, the first systematic exposition of what was to become the founding theory of modern anthropology.

In its microcosm, sociology reflects the unsolvable dilemma of the system as a whole, its driving force and its bad consciousness.

If we start from the iterated bifurcation as the formal feature of the system of social sciences, we can re-design this recurring split in general terms, not in its specific occurrences:



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Figure 2: the logic of the system

Constitutive opposition of the system is the opposition between the topical and the critical paradigms. The system is driven by the desire to achieve the critical ideal: at each of the consecutive attempts the system generates a new science which proves to be just another topical construction. And the machine starts again from the same opposition. This sedimentation of failures defines the field we call ‘social sciences’.

The logic of the system presents as irresolvable the contradiction between the topical and the critical methods, lucidly diagnosed by Vico three hundred years ago. However, it is not, as Vico imagined, a contradiction between the method of the Ancients and the method of the Moderns. Vico’s intuition and, to be frank, Wallerstein’s sophisticated systemisation are only savage theorisations of two types of practices. The one is the predominantly technological practice directed toward the mastery over nature, while the other is the savage theorisation of practices that are operated within a human environment.

The scheme actually runs upon the old Aristotelian distinction between the astral world where things are eternal and necessary, and the sub-lunar, human world, the domain, as Aristotle says, of what admits to bear otherness¹², where there can be no knowledge of eternal and necessary

12 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a.20: περι τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον ἄλλως εἶχειν.

laws because it is a world of production and action, of decisions and freedom. While at the other branch of the bifurcation, there is the astral world, the world where necessity and eternal laws are normally ruling.

My proposal is that we should shift from a savage theory to self-reflected theory and to start conceiving theoretical preoccupations as theorisations of practices. There are, to my knowledge, two cases of this procedure in the history of social and human sciences: Marx's historical materialism and Freud's psychoanalysis.

Freud's epistemology

Let us first consider Freud's constitution of psychoanalysis. At the very beginning Freud and his colleague Joseph Breuer were practicing a therapeutic method that they called the cathartic method. The success of the cathartic method depended upon the patient's falling in love with the therapist. The therapeutic success of this method paradoxically depended on its being unsuccessful as therapy, since a therapy which depends on the patient's love for the medicine man is certainly not successful.

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This posed quite hard ethical questions to Breuer and to Freud, and Breuer could not stand it and he gave up. Freud, on the other side, was a much more arrogant person, and he theorised this situation and invented the concept of transference. In Freudian psychoanalysis, the analysis is terminated only when the relation of transference is dissolved. At this point we will mobilise the conceptual tools provided to us by Foucault. In Foucault's terms, Freud was occupying the position of medical authority onto which the truth of the patient is being alienated.¹³ In a traditional medical relation it is the medical doctor who tells the patient the truth about her or his illness. Freud's ingenious insight was that by occupying the position of alienation of the truth he did not for this reason know the truth any more than the patient. The truth was in the discourse that was coming from the patient to the analyst, but in order to come to this truth Freud operated a topical shift, that is, he constituted the position of the therapist into the point from where the discourse of the patient bounces off and comes back to the patient as the truth of her or his unconscious.

13 Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique: une archéologie du regard médical*, PUF, Paris, 1962.

Underlying Freud's epistemic strategy is the intuition that the truth, in order to be grasped, has first to be alienated. In modern science, the procedure of "alienation" of truth is experimentation.¹⁴ Freud retroactively transformed the savage practicing of the cathartic method into the practice of experimentation. He conceptualised the mechanisms that supported the enamoured patient's perspective (desire, identification, construction of the Ego etc.) on the material obtained from a contingent individual relation in an artificially constructed, i.e., in a non-necessary therapeutic situation. By experimenting with contingent singular cases he formulated necessary universal "laws". In this, Freud's epistemology was genuinely Galileian:¹⁵ he established psychoanalysis as a science of the contingent, i.e., as a modern science.¹⁶

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Freud followed the anti-Aristotelian Galileian epistemology on another decisive point: he deprived the elements constituting the epistemic field of psychoanalysis of any quality but their sheer materiality which consists in their capacity to establish relations with each other. The first effect of the relational nature of psychic elements consists in their functioning as representatives (*Repräsentant, Vertreter*) of external perceptive stimuli (representations, *Vorstellungen*) and of internal instinctual stimuli (affects, *Affekten*). In its negative dimension, the double concept of the psychic element as both *Vorstellungs* – and *Affekt-Repräsentant* made it possible to Freud to free the psychoanalytic epistemic field of biological alibis on one side and of empiricist ideological residua on the other. In its positive dimension, the concept of the doubly representative psychic element opened the possibility to conceive the relations among these elements as mechanisms that can be formalised

14 Modern science is the practice that starts with Galileo Galilei; Galilei's programmatic essay bears the title *Il Saggiatore – The Assayer* (1623).

15 Lacan and Milner consider Freud to be »Cartesian«. This classification resumes their argument that the subject »upon which psychoanalysis operates« (Jacques Lacan, *La science et la vérité*, in: *Écrits II*, Seuil, Paris, 1971, p. 223) is the subject of science, that is, according to their understanding, the subject of Cartesian *cogito*. Although Cartesian *cogito* may well be an adequate rendering of the subject of science within the philosophical discourse, it still misses the sheer quality-free materiality of the subject of science, since it rests upon the minimal *naturwüchsige* identification of the subject of uttering (*énonciation*) with the subject of the utterance (*énoncé*): it is only retroactively, from the point of view of the Freudian *Spaltung* of the subject, as conceptualised by Lacan, that we can conceive Cartesian subject as »gespalten«.

As we consider psychoanalysis as a theory and do not enter into philosophical debate, the Galileian character of the psychoanalytic epistemological break suffices for our argument – regardless to whether it leads to Cartesianism or not.

16 According to Jean-Claude Milner (*L'Œuvre claire*, Seuil, Paris, 1995), Galilei established the modern science by abolishing the Aristotelian dualism of the two cosmic realms..

(*Verdrängung, Verschiebung, Verdichtung* etc.). Freud’s graphic presentation of the “Signorelli” case in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* shows how psychic elements, functioning as representatives of representations and affects (“thoughts”), operate in their sheer materiality, regardless of their repartition into “lexical units” and, *a fortiori*, with no regard to any eventual lexical meaning or reference (Figure 3).¹⁷

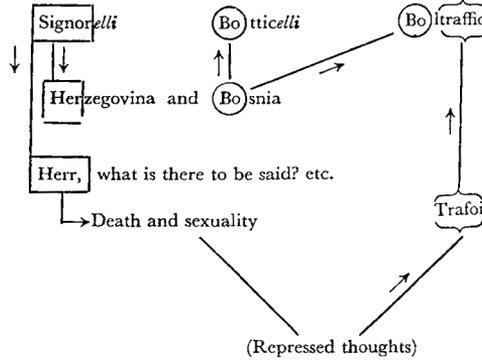


Figure 3: Forgetting the name of the painter Signorelli (Sigmund Freud, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*)

However, Freud’s causality is not linear. Keeping only what interests us here, we could in very general terms say that a sequence of psychic elements pertains to heterogeneous processes and that one series of them (the unconscious ones) overdetermines the others (the preconscious and the conscious ones). In the case “Signorelli”, the repressed sequence “herr” attracts the sequence “signor” towards the repressed thoughts which, in turn, provide part of the supplementary sequence “Boltraffio”. The key to the analysis is the element “her”, represented in the conscious sequence by displacement by the element “bo”. If, following Lacan,¹⁸ we note the element which, in itself, has no sense, but gives the sense to all other elements in the sequence, S_1 and all the other elements S_2 , we can present Freud’s analytical scheme in the following way (signs S_2 mark the conscious series, S_2' the unconscious one):

$$\begin{array}{c}
 S_2 \dots S_2 \dots S_2 \dots \\
 S_1 \\
 S_2' \dots S_2' \dots S_2' \dots
 \end{array}$$

17 Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. VI, p. 5.

18 Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire sur la ‘Lettre volée’, Écrits I*, Seuil, Paris, 1999; id., *Le Séminaire, livre XI*, Seuil, Paris, 1973.

With the same notation, we can present the Vico-type topicality as follows:

$$\begin{array}{c}
 S_2 \\
 (S_1) \\
 S_2'
 \end{array}$$

$S_2 (S_1) S_2'$ is a sequence of argumentation. S_2 is the argument, S_2' is the conclusion and (S_1) the non-explicated link that binds them together – Vico’s *topos*. E.g., the utterance “The weather is fine, let’s go for a walk”, can be decomposed: S_2 = “The weather is fine”; S_2' = “let’s go for a walk”; the fine weather is topically presented as an occasion for pleasure (S_1). The same argument can lead to another conclusion in “The weather is fine; the air strikes may resume.” Here, the fine weather is presented as an opportunity for air attack. Or: “The weather is fine; let’s mow the meadow”, where the fine weather is presented as an opportunity for haymaking.¹⁹

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Marx’s epistemic break

Finally, Marx initial move in *The Capital* is to demonstrate that it is insufficient and false to represent capital accumulation with the formula “money – commodity – money and surplus”: $M - C - M'$.

Marx’s starts from the presuppositions of the classical political economy and re-elaborates them into theoretical concepts. He opens *The Capital* by developing the concept of exchange that corresponds to the simple commodity production, i.e., he produces the concept of commodity exchange. He then proceeds to show how the form of exchange changes when commodity exchange is overdetermined by the logic of infinite accumulation of capital.²⁰ Under this overdetermination the form of *simple* commodity exchange,

19 We take inspiration from Oswald Ducrot’s theory of argumentation in language. For an elaboration of this thematic, see: Rastko Močnik, Ideological interpellation: identification and subjectivation, in: *Encountering Althusser*, Katja Diefenbach et. al. eds., Bloomsbury, London etc., 2013.

20 Marx does not immediately analyse the overdetermination by the capitalist *production*. Before that, he needs to develop the concept of the capital relation of production. He enters into this problematics by the way of intuitive notion of the capital as self-valuating value, $M-M'$. This strategy makes it possible for Marx to distinguish, from the very beginning, his theoretical procedure from that of the classical political economy, and to pose the problem of the relation between the equivalent exchange in circulation and the appropriation of the surplus-value in production; i.e., to pose the problem of articulation between the two “spheres” whose logics are heterogeneous.

“commodity – money – commodity” (C – M – C),

is transformed into the form of *capitalist* commodity exchange or, more precisely, into the form of the capital accumulation:

“money – commodity – money and surplus” (M – C – M’).

The distinctive features of the new form are the following:

- 1) Money now figures as the initial and the final phase of the movement; as a consequence, the process becomes infinite: M’, or part of it, can immediately be made the initial term M of the ensuing sequence.
- 2) For the same reason, the movement appears autonomous: circulation is now severed from production and consumption. In simple exchange, the initial commodity C had been transferred into circulation from production, and the final commodity C (different from the initial one) is subtracted from circulation to be introduced into consumption. In simple commodity exchange the movement of circulation is delimited on both ends. In capitalist exchange, the sequence “frees itself” from production and consumption: the goal of the operation is no more the acquisition of a useful object to be consumed, but the increase of the initially forwarded sum of money to be invested again. The distinction production/circulation becomes irrelevant; or, to be precise, production becomes a possible, but not necessary, phase within the process of capital accumulation.
- 3) In its capitalist form, commodity exchange becomes “disembedded”, as Polanyi would say.²¹ In simple commodity exchange, the cycle of circulation is finite, since it is directly articulated to the two other “spheres”, production and consumption.
- 4) Because of its apparent autonomy and disembeddedness, capitalist exchange can become an autonomous practice, as in “antediluvian” forms of mercantile and usury capital. Since simple commodity exchange is not an autonomous practice, it requires some supplementary ideology (“institution”) within which it is executed (e.g., corporative organisation and its effects, like

21 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*. Fernand Braudel’s determination of capitalism as »counter market« and of capital as a parasite formation upon the market economy aims at the same distinctive feature, but misses the moment of over-determination.

artisan's honour, masterly pride etc.²²); to the contrary, capitalist exchange, i.e., capital accumulation is an autonomous and self-sufficient practice, and comprises its own ideological condition. While commodity fetishism as the ideological component of any commodity exchange does not, by itself, suffice to support its practicing, the specific ideological component of the capital accumulation is able to constitute capitalist commodity exchange into an autonomous social practice.

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We will grasp this specific ideological component if we consider capitalist exchange as it appears, i.e., as the practice of infinite accumulation of capital. Since the initial phase of the cycle, money, is formally the same as the final phase, the goal of the operation (surplus money, M') is inscribed already in its beginning. Besides, money is doubly inscribed in the process: not only as its goal, but also as the start of the next cycle. This double inscription, we presume, is the *locus* of subjectivation and therefore the privileged place where to grasp the ideological component of the capitalist practice.

As “every ideology interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the operation of the category of subject”²³, there should be a category of the subject at work within the formula of capital accumulation for the capital accumulation to be a viable autonomous practice. Strictly speaking, the formula $M - C - M'$ becomes that of the capital accumulation only when the final term M' becomes the initial term M of the next accumulation sequence. Only then it transpires that M' is not going to be used in a non-capitalist way (e.g., spent for consumption goods or treasured), but will operate as capital – i.e., will be advanced to re-launch the sequence of *Verwertung des Werts*, of valorisation of value. The formula is completed when M' is re-inscribed as M : the condition for the formula to be that of capital accumulation is the double inscription of the signifier M , first as the final term M' and next as the initial term M . The double inscription of M is the “category of the subject”²⁴ operative within the sequence of capital accumulation, it is the *topos* of its specific ideological interpellation.

22 What the authors of *German Ideology* call “*eingemütliches Knechtschaftsverhältnis*” towards labour, *MEW* 3, p. 52.

23 Louis Althusser, *Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État*, in: *Sur la reproduction*, PUF, Paris, 1995, p. 305 (our translation).

24 We assume that a theoretical concept, when being transferred from one theoretical problem field (that of Lacanian psychoanalysis) to another (that of historical materialism), operates in the way of a (philosophical) “category” (as opposed to

$$M - C - \boxed{M'} \\ \boxed{M} - C - M' \dots$$

In this articulation of two homogeneous sequences, it is the subsequent sequence that retroactively determines the “sense” of the preceding one (its being a sequence of capital accumulation and not, e.g., that of treasuring).²⁵ The same material instance (general equivalent, money) substitutes its new *modus operandi* as the advanced capital M to its previous figure of the appropriated surplus M': it is by its second inscription that money becomes capital, that is, “the subject” of the infinite sequence of valorisation of value (*Verwertung des Werts*).²⁶ The individual interpellated into this *locus* of “the substitution of one signifier to the other” (of M to M'), where the initial signifier of the new sequence M “represents the subject (of this process) to another signifier”²⁷ (the

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ideological notion and theoretical concept). Lacan affirms that what “psychoanalysis works upon” is “the subject of science” (cf. Jacques Lacan, *La science et la vérité*, in *Ecrits II*, p. 223) – that is, subject “without qualities”, subject in its pure form (cf. Jacques Alain Milner, *L'Oeuvre claire*, pp. 33 ss.). Lacan offers two formulas to explain what he means by the subject of science. The first is a re-writing of Descartes's formulation: “*Cogito : 'ergo sum.'*” (*La science et la vérité*, p. 230.) The other is its paraphrase that opens into the field proper of psychoanalysis: “*De penser, je suis.* – Thinking, I am.” (*Le Séminaire XI*, p. 36.) We will retain the first formula for the very reason for which Lacan prefers to dismiss it (“I evade the discussion resulting from the fact that this *I think* certainly for us cannot be detached from the fact that [Descartes] cannot formulate it without *telling us it*”; *ibidem*). The *locus* of the subject is then where two discourses intersect, the point of intersection being defined by the double inscription of a signifier: in Descartes's expression, the doubly inscribed signifier is the first-person-singular index, taken in its sheer materiality – for in its “meaning” it indicates first the subject of enunciation/*énonciation* and then the subject of the enunciated/*énoncé*. The link that holds together the two components of Descartes's proposition is the identification of the two, supported precisely by the materiality of the signifier that bridges the gap of the Freudian *Ichspaltung*, splitting of the Ego (that Lacan further develops to introduce the splitting of the subject). In another text (*Ideological interpellation: identification and subjectivation*, in: Katja Diefenbach and others, eds., *Encountering Althusser*), we distinguished two types of ideological interpellation: interpellation by identification (like Descartes's) that dissimulates subjectivation under the Ego-mechanism of identification and where the two discourses in play appear homogenous; and interpellation by subjectivation (like Rancière's “We are all German Jews!”, in Jacques Rancière, *Aux bords du politique*, p. 120) where identification is blocked by the conspicuous heterogeneity of the two discourses. Interpellation by identification is reproductive, while interpellation by subjectivation is disruptive.

25 Since money is the initial term of the sequence it retroactively appears that its purpose (more money) has already been inscribed in its beginning.

26 Marx writes that value transforms itself into an automatic subject, *verwandelt sich so in ein automatisches Subjekt*; it is now »the subject of a process, *das Subjekt eines Prozesses*« (Karl Marx, *Das Kapital I*, Dietz, Berlin, 1973, p. 169).

27 We are using Lacanian formulations implying the concept of subject (subject as metaphor; subject as what a signifier represents for another signifier) as we un-

initial signifier M of the preceding sequence), becomes, in Marx's often used expression, the support, *der Träger*, of the capital process.

The (subjective) intention of the interpellated individual is the creation-appropriation of the surplus ($M \rightarrow M'$),²⁸ while the (objective) sense of the sequence is the transformation of the surplus into another initial investment ($-M_M$). For the (objective) logic of capital accumulation to be reproduced, it suffices that agents of individual capitals pursue their (subjective) "egoistic" efforts to create-appropriate surplus gains.²⁹

derstand that the only *theory* of subject is Lacan's and that a theory of Althusserian ideological interpellation should accordingly be compatible with it.

28 This intention may be a capital owner's lust for profit (appropriation of surplus) or a wage labourer's belief that s/he has to contribute to the competitiveness of the firm s/he is working for (creation of surplus). Althusserian theory of interpellation entails that any real consciousness can be "borrowed", and not only those of the marginal classes (like peasants or petty bourgeoisie), as Lukács affirms in *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács's dichotomy "real consciousness / (possible) class-consciousness" obfuscates the dissymmetry between the ideology of the dominating and the ideology of the dominated. The "real" (i.e., spontaneous) ideology of the individual capitalist is the drive to accumulate capital: it is quite secondary whether the *Träger* of capital experiences this drive "sincerely" or conforms to it as to "an exterior compulsory law, *als äussere Zwangsgesetz*" – in any case the real effect of the individual capitalist's ideology and of his corresponding operations is the formation of the general profit rate which is the material existence of the class-composition of the capitalist class. Contrary to this, the "real" ideology into which an individual wage worker is interpellated is the ideology whose material support is what Italian operaists call the "technical composition of labour power" – that is, some sort of ideology of subordination, orchestrated by the educational apparatus (where the wage worker has acquired her or his skills and "competences") and by the processes of the real subsumption of labour to the capital at the working place. What Lukács calls the proletarian class-consciousness depends entirely on the class-composition of the proletariat *and cannot be theoretically constructed as the "possible" ideology of the proletariat* corresponding to the presumed proletariat's "social position" (as Lukács proposes) – since the class-position of the proletariat has yet to be produced by political action which self-reflectively entails the production of proletarian class-ideology. Theoretical practice intervenes into this production so to say "from the inside" and is an integral part of the proletarian class-composition; correlatively, theory of historical materialism cannot be practiced but as an integral component of the proletarian class-composition. Class-position of the working class is an effect of the proletarian class struggle and is by no means an "immanent" component of the structure of capitalist exploitation. Construction of the proletarian class-position as a ("Maussian") "social fact" already objectifies the destruction of the capitalist domination. One of the tasks of the present text is to describe the interplay of ideological and theoretical components within the proletarian class-composition.

29 Bernard Mandeville's fable according to which private vices may become public benefits obviously holds true only for the class-composition of the capitalist class. – Mario Tronti draws attention to the fact that it is "historically" possible to speak about capitalist in singular; while "the material, socially determined figure of the worker emerges already collectively organised" (Mario Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, Derive-Approdi, Rome, 2006, p. 234).

We here touch the crucial point where theory explains how ideologically motivated individual practices propel objective processes radically differing from their agents' ideological understanding that guides their actions and, in this way, produces those processes and reproduces their contingent structures.³⁰

Ideological component of capitalist practices consists of those forms that "the various forms of capital [...] assume [...] in the ordinary consciousness of the agents of production themselves".³¹ Marx calls these forms of the immediate practical appearance "*die verwandelte Formen*", the "converted forms", for they are a transformation of theoretical concepts he has developed while analysing capitalist production. Simultaneously, ideological forms that are the ideological condition of capitalist practices are also transformed forms of the concepts that sufficed to analyse commodity fetishism, the ideology of commodity exchange.³²

45

Theoretically to situate the converted forms, we need first to examine the following two features of commodity fetishism and its conceptualisation:

- a) Concepts elaborated to theorise simple commodity production (and which can support the analysis of capitalist production, if capitalist production is conceived as an overdetermined form of commodity production) are directly applicable to conceptualise commodity fetishism as the specific, although in itself insufficient, ideology of any commodity production.

30 Marx introduces the motif "*Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es* – They do not know this, but they do it" already when presenting the concept of commodity fetishism (*Das Kapital I*, Dietz, Berlin, 1973, p. 88.)

31 Karl Marx, *The Capital*, Vol. III, Part I, Ch. 1: "The various forms of capital, as evolved in this book, thus approach step by step the form which they assume on the surface of society, in the action of different capitals upon one another, in competition, and in the ordinary consciousness of the agents of production themselves." [End of the first paragraph.]

32 This follows from Marx's treatment of capitalist production and exchange as overdetermined forms of simple commodity production and exchange. This is one of the main features that distinguish Marx from the classics who analyse capitalist production and exchange as if they were simple commodity production and exchange. – The expression "*verwandelte Formen*" appears already in the first volume of *The Capital*: "Diese verwandelten Formen des Mehrwerts können erst im Dritten Buch behandelt werden." MEW, *Das Kapital – I*, p. 589. [Introduction to the Part VII.] – The first systematic treatment of "transformed forms" was presented by Merab K. Mamardašvili in his 1970 text: *Преображенные формы*. <http://www.philosophy.ru/library/mmk/forms.html> – Our translation of "*die verwandelte Formen*" into "the converted forms" is to a certain extent arbitrary. The English translation (Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, edited by Frederick Engels) translates "*diese verwandelten Formen des Mehrwerts*" as "these modified forms of surplus-value"; the French translation (Joseph Roy, edited by Karl Marx) has "[les] transformations de la plus-value".

- b) Commodity fetishism is a necessary ideological component in every form of commodity exchange, but does not by itself suffice to support it in any of its forms. It is an unsaturated ideological component that requires supplementation: in simple commodity exchange it is supplemented by an additional ideology, like that whose material existence are corporations, their regulations and their effects (craft mastery etc.); in capital accumulation commodity fetishism, completed by “converted forms”, becomes the sufficient ideological condition of its practising.

46 The reason for the first feature is that the simplifying hypothesis that commodities are exchanged according to their value is justifiable in simple commodity exchange, since their prices there actually oscillate around their values. This is so because funds in simple commodity exchange do not function as capital, they are not engaged in the search of extra-profit, and in particular they are not transferred from one branch of production into another.³³ Funds are prevented from being used as capital by various regulations (corporate rules, communal laws, princely ordinances etc.) that constitute the extra-economic frame of simple commodity production, and, in its turn, this frame is but the material existence of the ideology into which this kind of production is necessarily “embedded”.

In capitalist production, individual capitals do move from one branch to the other in search of monopoly niches that provide surplus profits. The result of their competition for more-than-average gain will be the formation of the general profit rate, i.e., the tendency to reward each individual capital proportionally to the amount advanced. While individual capitalists’ practices are ideologically guided by “converted forms” (production cost, price, profit), they result in processes of surplus-value creation-appropriation and capital accumulation that can only be analysed in the terms of theoretical concepts (constant and variable capital, value, surplus-value). Theoretical analysis has to situate itself, from the very beginning, within the class perspective,³⁴ and therefore reveals

33 Capitalist production essentially differs from the simple commodity production by the feature that in simple commodity production funds do not move from one branch to another, while in capitalist production they do move. Analysing concrete historical material Braudel arrives to the same structural determination; he concludes that the beginnings of capitalism are due to non-specialised grand merchants; see: *Dynamics of Capitalism*.

34 Surplus-value is produced by the unpaid work of producers; it is first collectively appropriated by the capitalist class as class, and is distributed among individual

the class dynamic that propels ideologically framed individual practices. In this way, converted forms:

- 1) Articulate collective appropriation of the surplus-value by the dominant classes, and its individual distribution (in the tendency) in proportion to the amount of invested capital.³⁵
- 2) Articulate the sphere of capitalist production (whose logic is: the same amounts of socially necessary abstract labour produce the same amounts of value) to the sphere of capitalist circulation (whose logic is: the same amounts of forwarded capital are allotted the same amounts of profit).
- 3) Offer the support for ideological interpellation into the practices that reproduce the capitalist mode.³⁶

Class-composition of the capitalist class is achieved merely by individual capitalists' pursuit of their immediate and individual goal to maximise profits. General profit rate is the material existence of the class solidarity of the capitalist class.³⁷ For the surplus value is appropriated by the *Gesamtkapital*, that is, it is collectively appropriated by the capitalist class as a whole, and only secondarily distributed among individual capitals (and their *Träger* individual capitalists) under the converted form of profit.³⁸ We can already see that the class-composition of the working class and its presupposition, the working class struggle, are radically dissymmetrical with respect to the capitalist class struggle.

Likewise, interpellation into *capitalist* ideology is asymmetrical depending on whether it recruits owners of capital or owners of labour

capitals only in a second moment.

35 Because of the existence of several classes that appropriate the surplus-value, the relation between the set of theoretical concepts and that of the converted forms is not bi-univocal: surplus-value is appropriated as profit, rent and interest.

36 As we shall show in the sequel, this interpellation is asymmetrical depending upon whether it interpellates the *Träger* of capital or those of labour power.

37 "Here, then, we have a mathematically precise proof why capitalists form a veritable freemason society vis-à-vis the whole working-class, while there is little love lost between them in competition among themselves." (Karl Marx, *The Capital*, Vol. III, Ch. 10; <http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch10.htm>)

38 "So far as profits are concerned, the various capitalists are just so many stockholders in a stock company in which the shares of profit are uniformly divided per 100, so that profits differ in the case of the individual capitalists only in accordance with the amount of capital invested by each in the aggregate enterprise, i. e., according to his investment in social production as a whole, according to the number of his shares." (Karl Marx, *The Capital*, Vol. III, Ch. 9; <http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch9.htm>.)

power. With the capital owner or her-his representative the manager, the Ego-identification (the motif) is the profit M' and the *locus* of subjectivation is the double inscription of M in M'/M (the decision to invest the profit).³⁹ With the worker, the motif is “a fair day’s pay for an honest day’s work”, i.e. an appropriate wage *as the price of labour*. “Price of labour” is the point of subjectivation, being a doubly irrational expression that binds together, by deforming them, the two heterogeneous registers of circulation (“price”) and of production (“labour”).⁴⁰

39 To the extent that capital-owners tend to consider their capital as a source of future revenue, they may treat profits as “rents” on their capital possession, and the mere profit-motif may not suffice to support capitalist production and its reproduction (nor may it suffice to secure a properly capitalist interpellation); in this sense it can be claimed that the individual capital-owner (the “capitalist”) is structurally *redundant*. The presently dominant “shareholder value model” thus presents an internal threat to capitalism. Peripheral predatory comprador bourgeoisies, focused on their rents as the prize for their services to transnational capital, likewise introduce hybrid social formations within their jurisdictions. Correlatively social liquidation of individual capital owners (e.g., by nationalisation) does not, by itself, abolish the capitalist mode of production. This is important for the assessment of historical socialisms. – Marx has come to the conclusion concerning the redundancy of the capitalist by a slightly different line of argumentation: “But since, on the one hand, the mere owner of capital, the money-capitalist, has to face the functioning capitalist, while money-capital itself assumes a social character with the advance of credit, being concentrated in banks and loaned out by them instead of its original owners, and since, on the other hand, the mere manager who has no title whatever to the capital, whether through borrowing it or otherwise, performs all the real functions pertaining to the functioning capitalist as such, only the functionary remains and the capitalist disappears as superfluous from the production process.” (Karl Marx, *The Capital*, Vol. III, Ch. 23; <http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch23.htm> .)

40 “Finally, *labour* — *wages*, or price of labour, is an expression, as shown in Book I, which *prima facie* contradicts the conception of value as well as of price — the latter generally being but a definite expression of value. **And ‘price of labour’ is just as irrational as a yellow logarithm.**” (Karl Marx, *The Capital*, Vol. III, Ch. 48; <http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch48.htm> ; bold added.) – “Price of labour” or “a fair day’s pay” refers to the existential minimum, the value product of the “necessary labour”, that is, of only one fraction of the labour day; the other part of the “honest day’s work” produces surplus-value and is not paid. The *locus* of subjectivation is then the double inscription of the signifier “wage” in two different series: that of value-distributing “converted forms” and that of value-producing labour (price / the value produced by the necessary labour). While the value produced by the necessary labour appears as being immediately appropriated by the worker as “price of labour” (this ideological appearance dissimulating its being first a *political* category before figuring as an economic category in capitalist’s calculus), capital owner likewise appropriates profit as revenue on capital, this appearance dissimulating that the surplus-value produced by the surplus labour is first collectively appropriated by *Gesamtkapital* and only then distributed among individual capitals as profit. If, as it happens within the “fair wage” ideology, the political dimension of the determination of existential minimum is obfuscated by the juridical fiction of the contract between the capitalist and the worker, then it appears as if its interpellation were articulating two homogeneous series, both “economic”, and the collective class character of the determination of the wage is dissimulated. Interpellation then operates by identification and dissimulates the point of subjectivation supported

The basic form of the capitalist class struggle consists in securing the “normal” operation of the capitalist production of surplus value. Contrary to this, the workers cannot compose themselves into a class unless they, at the same time, resist to the frame of domination-exploitation instituted and reproduced by the capitalist class struggle and, at least politically, organisationally, already break out of it. In their struggle, workers have to establish a historical and structural position that, structurally, exists within the existing historical situation and transcends it, and temporally challenges the present while already belonging to the future. To be able to analyse mechanisms of capitalist production and circulation, theory, as we have already noticed, analogously needs to situate itself upon a paradoxical position of enunciation within the historical conjuncture. However, while on one side the political effort of the workers’ class-composition is an ideological enterprise that is constructive of social topography, theory, on the other side, by demarcating itself from ideology and thus excluding subjectivity from its construction, has to rely for its position of enunciation on an extra-theoretical instance. Let us briefly examine what now appears as a necessary articulation between the working class struggle and theoretical practice.

49

Theory first dismantles the *locus* of subjectivation M'/M by splitting the advanced capital M into constant capital (whose amount is not increased in the process, as it is invested into the means of production) and variable capital (spent for the purchase of the labour power and which is increased in the process by the capacity of the use value of the labour power to produce value greater than its exchange value). This move follows from the theory of capitalist surplus-value production and reproduces the “epistemological break” (*coupure épistémologique*) produced by this theory: it demarcates theoretical procedure from ideology, concretely by blocking its interpellation either in the direct form of the profit-hunt or in the indirect form aimed at the exploited masses and encouraging them to contribute to the competitiveness of the firm

by the signifier inscribed in two series: in the value-producing chain, this signifier differentiates necessary labour from surplus-labour; in the value-distributing chain of converted forms, it distinguishes wage from profit. However, disruptive interpellation by subjectivation, the material base of the class-composition of the working class, only occurs if this signifier *also* marks the distinction between the two chains, their heterogeneity (one being the series of converted forms belonging to the economicist ideology of the capital; and the other being the series of surplus-value producing labour, that can be presented as such only from the working class political perspective): the condition of the disruptive interpellation by subjectivation consists in the doubly inscribed subjectivating signifier’s capacity to indicate its own (heterogeneous) double inscription.

or of “their country”. It is also reproduces the “epistemological rupture” (*rupture épistémologique*) with which historical materialism breaks away from the horizon of classical political economy by articulating two of its already established motifs: the labour theory of value, confined in the classical theory to the analysis of exchange, i.e., of circulation; and the perspective that analyses production as the dominating sphere whose theoretical conceptualisation is the condition for the analysis of other spheres and of their mutual articulation.⁴¹

50

Coincidence of epistemological break (demarcating theory from ideology) and of (intra-theoretical) epistemological rupture dramatically transforms the epistemic field: into the monotonous palpitation of circulation ($M - C - M'$), confined within the sphere of the (exchange) value, it introduces the necessity of the intervention of a particular use value, that of the labour power. What ideologically appears as a homogeneous sequence of exchange values is split, by theoretical intervention, into two distinct sequences: the sequence of the mere transmission of value (the value of the means of production, the constant capital) and the sequence of the production of new value (the value of the labour power, the variable capital). The value that functions as capital is produced within this later sequence. Hence both the variable and the constant capitals result from the workers' unpaid labour. The *locus* of subjectivation of the worker as worker, i.e., the place of the political composition of the working class, is therefore the double inscription of the surplus value of which the workers are expropriated, the inscription of the surplus as the value produced and as the value advanced.

Historical materialism as the theory of the working class struggle conceptualises the *locus* of subjectivation, but does not anticipate upon the concrete ideological mechanisms of this struggle, that is, upon the historical practices of the class-composition of the working class. However, while theoretical conceptualisation disrupts the ideological appearance of homogeneity of the value circulation, it also demonstrates the conceptual identity of its two strands as both resulting from the surplus labour. In this way, historical materialism positively articulates the workers' intuitive hatred of the machine. The permanent technological

41 Foucault is right to insist on Marx's indebtedness to Ricardo (which is actually quite evident from Marx's own references to Ricardo's work). However, Foucault misses the theoretical rupture entailed in Marx's specific re-articulation of the classical labour theory of value, and consequently overlooks the epistemological break that institutes a “new theoretical continent” (as Althusser put it) – historical materialism.

revolution, as the characteristic feature of the capitalist mode, is thus conceptualised as the practice of the real subsumption of labour under capital. It follows that the separation of the immediate producer from the means of production, the constitutive structural feature of capitalist mode, cannot be abolished by mere juridical re-appropriation of the means of production by the collective worker. Even after such re-appropriation (as in historical socialisms), technological innovation remains one of the focal areas of class struggle. Conceived as “neutral”, technological development (i.e. the increase of the productivity of labour) necessarily supports the continuation of the real subsumption of labour (and hence the continuation of the production of surplus-value), as it actually was the case in historical socialisms. Accordingly, future socialisms will have to promote technological development into one of the foci of the working classes’ class struggle.

51

Articulation of heterogeneous logics

The distinction between constant and variable capital establishes a theoretical articulation between the sphere of production and the sphere of circulation and thus opens the possibility for a theoretical analysis of their practical-ideological articulation provided by the converted forms. This distinction specifically opens the way towards the *concept* of the *verwandelte Form* “profit”. It shows that the rate of profit is directly proportional to the rate of surplus value (i.e., the rate of exploitation), and inversely proportional to the organic composition of capital (i.e., the proportion between the total capital advanced and the part advanced for the labour power).⁴² The rate of profit is then a function of the present pressure upon the living labour and of the “cost” of the past victory of the capital over the labour. For organic composition of capital is not just a “static” proportion between the crystallised past labour and the present living labour, it indicates the relation between the past and the present of the class struggle.

“Productivity of capital”, its self-valuing capacity, depends on the conjuncture of the actual labour class struggle (that determines the level of wages, i.e., the amount of the variable capital to be advanced) and on the materialisation of the past achievements of the capitalist class struggle

42 The greater the organic composition of capital (i.e., the smaller the part of variable capital within the total capital advanced), the smaller is the profit rate; the greater the rate of exploitation, the greater is the rate of profit.

in the actual unity of the object of labour and the means of labour, i.e., in the unity of machinery, in *technology* (the constant capital).⁴³

The amount of the variable capital (advanced for the wages) is obviously a function of the actual relations of the class struggle. At a first glance, the amount of the constant capital represents just the cost of technical innovation implying the increase of the value of machinery with respect to the living labour that leads towards the tendency of the diminishing profit rate. However, under conditions of capitalist production, technological innovation does not increase merely the productivity of labour – it increases the productivity of the surplus-value producing labour. It is not only an instrument of maximisation of profit – or, perhaps better: as an instrument of maximisation of profit, technology and its innovation are the instrument of surplus-value extraction, that is, a weapon in the class-struggle. In capitalism, means of production are the means of production of surplus-value, that is, means of exploitation. They are means of subsumption of labour to the capital: technological unity of the means of production determines the *technical composition of the labour power*.⁴⁴ Technical composition of the labour power is the way how submission of labour to the capital determines and models the immediate producer – by submitting her/him to the command of the capital and by qualifying her/him to produce surplus-value under specific technological conditions of the moment. If the worker yields to the injunction to contribute to the competitiveness of the firm or of “her country” (or to some other trick of political or corporate management), she is interpellated to the *locus M'/M*, the place of her subjection to the domination of capital. Technical composition of the labour power is therefore the material existence of the interpellation into submission to the capital in a given historical moment.⁴⁵

The concept of technical composition of the labour power conceptualises technological transformations not abstractly as introduction of “innovations” into capitalist production, but concretely as episodes in the historical processes of the class struggle.

43 For the concept of technology as the unity of the means of production, see: Étienne Balibar, in: Louis Althusser and others, *Lire Le Capital*, PUF, Paris, 1996, p. 478.

44 Mario Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, 1966; Sergio Bologna, *Composizione di classe e teoria del partito alle origini del movimento consiliare*, in: Sergio Bologna *et al.* (eds.), *Operai e Stato. Lotte operaie e riforma dello stato capitalistico tra Rivoluzione d'ottobre e New Deal*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1972.

45 This is why there is no neutral education or skill-acquisition.

Theory and class struggle

A historically given *technical composition of labour power* is confronted by a *political composition of the working class* historically produced by the workers' class struggle. Although, in every particular historical moment, class struggle is determined by the particular technical composition imposed upon the labour power by the dominant mode of production, class response to such a technical composition is the response of the working class, not of the particular labour power trapped in its given historical technical composition. It is in this sense that class composition is *political*: it effectuates a *recomposition* of the entire class, of all the various sectors of workers involved in various historically existing modes of production, dominant or not, and in the many variants of the dominating mode. Class composition is political as far as it challenges the "technical determinism" of various historical technical compositions and reaches beyond the divisions imposed upon the labour power by the technical existence of the capital as constant capital. By destroying the fragmentation of workers resulting from the existence of various technical compositions of labour power as various historical types of capital domination and exploitation, political class composition not only produces political unity of the working class, it also challenges the domination of the dominating mode of production.

53

While political composition of the working class results from the class struggle of the working class under the conditions primarily determined by the technical composition of labour power, technical composition of labour power results from the class struggle of the capitalist class combating the working class political composition. Accordingly, technical composition of labour power is the response of the capitalists' class struggle against the historically *antecedent* political composition of the working class. This would mean that working class has a historical advantage over the capitalist class under the condition that they succeed in their political class composition. Permanent technical revolution as one of the basic features of the capitalist mode should accordingly be considered not only as the consequence of the competition among individual capitals to appropriate extra-profit (as it is perceived by the capitalist ideology), it should primarily be conceived as the result of the permanent struggle of the capital to break down the political class composition of working classes.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ According to operaist theory, each phase of capitalism is marked by a specific class composition of the working class whose main agent is the hegemonic group

In one sense, class composition of the working class is political as it organises workers across the divisions imposed by the modes of production of surplus-value that historically exist in a concrete social formation. Accordingly, it breaks down the economist horizon of the bourgeois ideology. It establishes its proper horizon that reaches beyond the capitalist production of surplus-value and the correlative equivalent exchange in circulation. As it reaches beyond the wage-relation, it resists both the capital relation as a whole and its specific crystallisation in the technical composition of labour power. As it breaks down the economist ideology, it also dismantles its correlate, the bourgeois ideology of an autonomous juridico-political sphere and its material existence in the bourgeois state and its apparatuses. This means that the working class composition is political in a more radical sense: it establishes within the existing relations of domination-exploitation a “material existence” that belongs to their historical conjuncture but does not “belong” to their structure. It is destroying the existing structures of domination-exploitation by the introduction of a radically different set of relations (of non-exploitation, solidarity, equality).⁴⁷ This means that the historical temporality of the working class class struggle is heterogeneous to the temporality of the capitalist class class struggle. This further means that revolutionary liquidation of the capitalist mode is a historical possibility in every one of its phases. According to this analysis, the very historical “development” of the capitalist society, its passing through various “phases”, result from the capitalist class’s endeavours to prevent the revolution, to break down the composition of the working class and to delay the revolution. In sum, it is working class’s class struggle that propels the history of capitalism while it lasts and at the moment of its end.

within the working class. Phases of capitalism can accordingly be determined as follows: during the period 1848-1871, the hegemonic group are urbanised mass workers at the beginnings of big industry; during the period 1871-1917, the hegemonic group are professional workers of precision industries; 1917-1969, the hegemonic group are the mass workers of the fordist industry; after 1969, the hegemonic figure would be the ‘social worker’.

47 Mario Tronti offers an appropriate formulation that we need to radicalise: “This superior level of development, internal to the capital, is precisely the working class: we have otherwise already called it the key that opens the mechanism of capitalist production” (Mario Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, p. 230; translation mine). We would reformulate Tronti’s statement as follows: “This alternative mode of sociality, in antagonistic contradiction to the capital, is the working class: its politically constructed class-position offers the place of enunciation from where the mechanism of capitalist production can be theoretically analysed.”

The contradiction between the workers' class struggle and the capitalist class struggle can be schematised in the terms of the confrontation between technical composition of labour power and political composition of working class in the following way:⁴⁸

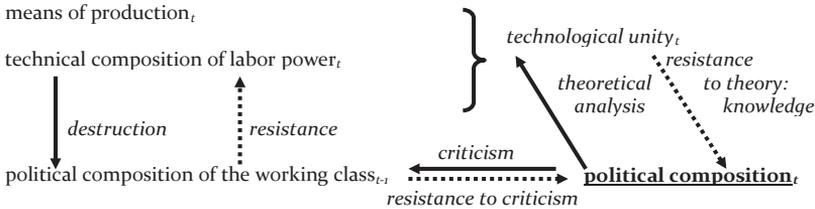


Figure 4

Let us illustrate the relation between the working class political composition and the practice of theory on the historical example of “otzovizm”. After 1906, sharp debates arose in Russian Social-democratic Party about whether to participate to the “Second Duma” or to boycott it. The radical left wing advocated boycott with the argument that Duma is a monarchical and bourgeois political apparatus and should therefore be destroyed, together with the bourgeois monarchy, by the proletarian revolution. Against this position, called “otzovizm”⁴⁹, Lenin argued that, in class-terms, Duma was even worse, since it was the political apparatus of the landlord and reactionary bourgeois counter-revolution; however, Duma was also an ideological apparatus and, as such, it should be used by revolutionary parties for their agitation and propaganda, as a subsidiary field of struggle integrated into the over-all class struggle predominantly led outside the Duma and whose immediate

48 Index “t” refers to a moment of historical time; index “t-1” refers to the preceding moment. The expression “political composition of the working class_{t-1}” accordingly means: “the political composition of the working class of the preceding historical moment”. – The scheme attempts to render Marx’s idea about the proletarian revolution in “The 18th Brumaire”: “The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. [...] proletarian revolutions [...] constantly criticize themselves, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their opponents only so the latter may draw new strength from the earth and rise before them again more gigantic than ever, recoil constantly from the indefinite colossalness of their own goals – until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves call out: *Hic Rhodus – hic salta!*”

49 From the Russian verb «отозвать» – “to call back, to recall” (the representatives of the revolutionary parties from the Duma – the tsarist parliament).

political goal was the formation of a constituent assembly by revolutionary means.⁵⁰ The positions opposed in this debate were both theoretically justifiable: but only one was politically correct. By introducing a theoretical distinction (political apparatus / ideological apparatus) into the field of theory, Lenin blocked the common-sense reference to the theoretical discourse spontaneously practiced by the *otzovist* ideological discourse. With the introduction of the theoretical distinction, ideological reference to the other discourse ceased to be self-evident: the distinction as an operation within the theoretical discourse re-affirmed the heterogeneity of the two discursive fields, the theoretical field where the distinction has been made and the ideological field where the debate was pursued and where the theoretical distinction also produced its effects. With Lenin's distinction, theoretical discourse could no more be presented as the "key" to the meaning of the ideological discourse. As a consequence, ideological interpellation could only proceed by subjectivation, and no more by identification (as in the *otzovist* discourse): "referential discourse" (theoretical discourse) having been explicitly presented as heterogeneous, interpellation itself needs to establish the frame where the "reference" to the other discourse becomes possible, i.e., where the intersection between the two discourses produces the *locus* of subjectivation, the doubly inscribed signifier.

In this case, the doubly inscribed signifier is a difference, not a meaningful "lexical unit"⁵¹: what, in theoretical discourse, operates as the dif-

50 "[...] there is a contingent of the organised proletariat that has been sent into the enemy camp and is carrying on work closely *connected with* the struggle of the proletariat *as a whole*. For us there is only one, single and indivisible, workers' movement—the class struggle of the proletariat. All its separate, partial forms, including the parliamentary struggle, must be fully subordinated to it. For us it is the extra-Duma struggle of the proletariat that is decisive." (Vladimir I. Lenin, Report of the Commission Formed to Draft a Resolution on the State Duma, May 18 (31), 1907, The Fifth Congress of the Russian Social-democratic Labour Party; in: Vladimir I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 12, Progress Publishers and Foreign Languages Press, Moscow; <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1907/5thcong/12.htm> 22. July 2013).

51 The doubly inscribed signifier operates as a "meaningful lexical unit" only in the case of the pre-established frame of ideological interpellation where interpellation works as interpellation by identification, and the referential discourse is presented as homogeneous to the discourse that refers to it. As a consequence, the referential discourse operates as the "key" to the meaning of the discourse that refers to it. – It should be noted that our spontaneous understanding of speech practices is largely deformed by the ideology of the "national language" (to which Saussurian linguistics offers a comfortable theoretical alibi). Nation is a historical construction that provides for the totalising effect "society" under the conditions of individualism and ideological pluralism (for a more detailed elaboration, see our: *Das "Subjekt, dem unterstellt wird zu glauben" und die Nation als eine Null-Institution*, in: H. Böcke *et alii*, eds., *Denk-Prozesse nach Althusser*, Hamburg-Berlin: Argument, 1994). Na-

ference between two types of apparatuses, the political apparatus and the ideological one, figures in ideological discourse as the difference between a partial form of the proletarian class-struggle and “the struggle of the proletariat *as a whole*”. An important practical consequence follows: the part should be subordinated to the whole.⁵²

In general terms, the relation between theoretical practice and the proletarian political-ideological practice can be resumed as follows. Theoretical distinction does not offer any pre-fabricated sense or meaning to the political practice and its ideological discourse. The difference it produces within theoretical discourse merely indicates the place of enunciation of the ideological discourse, i.e., the proletarian class-position. Since theoretical distinction cannot be established without reference to the proletarian class struggle (as it establishes the difference between two modes of this struggle), it presupposes the proletarian class-position as already established. In the factual terms, this presupposition may be weak or even “false” (in the sense that it does not refer to any as yet objectively existing class-position): it nevertheless *indicates* the position from where the proletarian class ideology can be developed. It befalls to the political practice, that is, to *ideological* operations, to produce the socio-historical “objective fact” of the proletarian class-position at the *locus* of this theoretical index. Ideological discourse has to work with the contingencies of the historical situation and inscribes, at the *locus* of subjectivation, a conjunctural signifier capable to trigger the interpellation. It does not follow from the theoretical distinction “political / ideological apparatus” that, in proletarian political discourse, the former should be interpreted as an obstacle to the proletarian class struggle, and the later as the field of its partial investment. This political and conjunctural “meaning” of the theoretical distinction has to be produced independently by the political discourse itself. By making the theoretical discourse “strange”, by affirming its heterogeneity and discontinuity with respect to the ideological-political discourse,

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tional language, as the material existence of the nation as a zero-institution, guarantees interpellation by identification as it establishes and reproduces the fiction of a lexical meaning of linguistic items. It does not secure the domination of any specific ideology (to the contrary: it is pluralistic and guarantees mutual translatability and comprehensibility of any number of possible ideologies) – it guarantees the possibility of ideological domination in general.

52 Lenin explicitly underlines the asymmetry between the parliamentary form of proletarian struggle and its extra-parliamentary forms: “The part must conform to the whole, and not vice versa. The Duma may temporarily serve as an arena of the class struggle as a whole, but only if that whole is never lost sight of, and if the revolutionary tasks of the class struggle are not concealed.” (*Ibidem.*)

Lenin's operation evacuates the simplistic *otzovist* reference that takes theoretical discourse as homogeneous to ideological discourse and does not recognise the specificity of theory – that is, it ignores the epistemological break.

Non-Cartesian modernity of historical materialism

Specific articulation of ideological discourse and theoretical practice in proletarian politics follows the epistemological commitment of modern science.⁵³ Galileian mathematisation of nature abolished the Aristotelian dualism separating the celestial world where everything is “eternal and necessary” from the sublunar world which is variable. In modern science mathematically marked necessary relations receive specific conjunctural values for each particular case. Analogously, historical materialism abolishes the dualisms like “structure / action”, “constraint / freedom” etc. In historical materialism, theoretical operations indicate the position from where correct political operations can be enacted in particular historical conjuncture, and mark the field of reflection where these operations are possible. However, no rule of translation from theory to ideological discourse and political action can ever be determined. It befalls to the political reflection to establish that the distinction “partial and subordinated struggle / proletarian struggle as a whole” can be politically correctly affirmed after the theoretical distinction between the political and the ideological apparatus has theoretically eliminated the dead-end of the political blockade performed by the counter-revolutionary Duma. And even after this political operation, the task to mobilise the “contingent of the organised proletariat to be sent into the enemy camp” still needs to be accomplished, together with the permanent task of the articulation of the partial struggle of this contingent “with the struggle of the proletariat *as a whole*”.

In historical materialism, articulation of the “necessary” and the “conjunctural” is therefore more complicated than in the case of the mathematized modern science where since the 19th century the grill established by the algebraic notation is conjuncturally filled-in in each particular case. Algebraic notation provides, so to say, the conditions of enunciation, while concrete numbers represent the conjunctural material. Cartesian subject depends upon this epistemic practice and is construed as a double inscription, marking, on one side, the pure form of

53 Hence Engels's “scientific socialism” is not necessarily a positivist residue; under the condition, as we shall see, that it is not understood in “Cartesian” terms.

the subject's thinking and, on the other side, the possibility of the absence of any conjunctural material in the act of thinking (its absence being eventually supplemented by the thought of the subject's existence). The pattern underlying the possibility of this double inscription and its concomitant illusion of ego-saturation is the minimally "natural" or "pseudo-organic" tie that links the enunciation (*énonciation*) and the enunciated (*énoncé*). No such minimal naturalism is possible in historical materialism since there is no predetermined relation or symmetry between the enunciated and the enunciation. The position of enunciation does not even pre-exist to the enunciated, as it is only indicated in theoretical discourse and actually produced by the ideological discourse.⁵⁴ In fact, the relation between the two discourses, the theoretical discourse and the ideological-political discourse cannot be informed in the terms of "enunciation / enunciated".

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Both the theoretical and the political discourse "refer to" the proletarian class position: theoretical discourse *indicates* it by its theoretical operations (like conceptual distinctions etc.); political discourse *produces* it as the social reality of the class-composition of the proletariat by establishing the material conditions of interpellation by subjectivation. Theoretical discourse being a discourse without a subject, it is the discourse of de-subjectivation (of re-iteration of the epistemological break). From the point of view of the theoretical discourse, the conditions of successful interpellation by subjectivation are contingent: they cannot be theoretically determined in advance and can only be analysed retroactively.⁵⁵

From the point of view of the ideological discourse, the translation of theoretical distinction (political / ideological apparatus) into an ideological one (the part / the whole), is a conjunctural operation that produces its own *locus* of interpellation by subjectivation: it has to invent the referential discourse that allows for the double inscription of the

54 In Cartesianism, the position of enunciation is guaranteed by the act of thinking itself *under the condition that it is enunciated by the philosopher* (be it in the minimalistic mode of "interior monologue"). Cartesian *cogito* therefore presupposes much more than the operation of methodological doubt: it can only work if it is uttered, and therefore requires the existence of *some* ideological apparatus. Lukács's ontologisation of the enunciation-guarantee in the "class position" presumably existing before any historical enunciation of the "consciousness" can accordingly be viewed both as a sociological vulgarisation of Cartesianism – and as its (unwilling and unwitting) demystification.

55 Traditionally, politics was an "art" (we would now say a "technique") and not a theory; while theory has no direct ideological appeal.

subjectivating signifier. In Lenin's polemics against *otzovizm*, the doubly inscribed signifier is the trait that, within the referring ideological discourse, distinguishes "agitation and propaganda" in the Duma from "political work among the masses" outside the Duma, while, within the referential ideological discourse, it distinguishes "the part" from "the whole". It is because the subjectivating double inscription of interpellation is a distinction, a "pure" signifier that does not possess any intrinsic meaning of its own but generates the meaning of the terms it opposes within the two hierarchically ordered ideological discourses, that the ideological operation (and the political polemics of which it is a component) can be articulated to a theoretical debate without erasing the heterogeneity of the ideological and the theoretical fields.

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We can conclude that theoretical elaborations of historical materialism are strictly dealing with the materiality of signifier and exclude any appeal to an eventually presumed *naturwüchsig*, "pseudo-natural" or "pseudo-organic" support or tie among the terms of their operations. In this sense "theoretical continent" (as Althusser calls it) of historical materialism belongs to the horizon of modern science – while at the same time it breaks away from its Cartesian philosophical articulation.

Primljeno: 5. decembra 2013.

Prihvaćeno: 20. decembra 2013.

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Rastko Močnik

Istorijska transformacija i epistemološki diskontinuitet

Rezime

Polazeći od skorašnjih formula EU birokratije putem kojih se naučni i obrazovni aparati podređuju potrebama kapitala i zahtevima njegovih političkih predstavnika, ovaj rad analizira uzajamnu povezanost istorijske transformacije ideoloških aparata države (univerziteti, ustanove visokog obrazovanja, istraživački instituti itd.) i epistemološkog diskontinuiteta koji je izazvan trijumfom tehno-nauka. Ispitivaćemo sledeću hipotezu: iako kriza kapitalizma u Zapadnoj Evropi i Severnoj Americi zahteva sve čvršće podređivanje ideoloških aparata države – naročito onih akademskih i naučnih – teorijske prakse u humanističkim i društvenim naukama su doslele tačku otvorenog sukoba sa dominacijom kapitala, čime su sledstveno počele da podrivaju sopstvena institucionalna uporišta u ideološkim aparatima kapitalističke države. U tu svrhu, rad preispituje društvene nauke kao jednu kompromisnu formaciju i, naposljetku, iznova razmatra istorijski materijalizam kao ne-kartezijansku modernu nauku.

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ključne reči: transformacija ideoloških aparata, trijumf tehno-nauka, epistemološki diskontinuitet, društvene i humanističke nauke, kapital, istorijski materijalizam