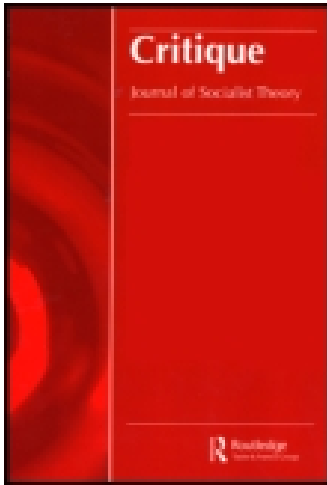


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The Historical Determination of the Capitalist Mode of Production and of the Working Class as the Revolutionary Subject

Juan Iñigo-Carrera

Prominent Marxist theoreticians conceive the working class as a revolutionary subject based on moral or ethical superiority, a natural will for freedom, self-valorization, the need to avoid barbarism, etc. From a materialist viewpoint, human history consists of the transformation of the material conditions of social life through labor. Capitalism is the historically specific development of human subjectivity by transforming the powers of free individual labor into those of the social labor consciously organized by the collective laborer who privately performs it. Thus, the material product of the labor of the working class increasingly consists of the development of its capacity to scientifically organize production, whereas this capacity goes on confronting it as an alien social power embodied in that same product, that is capital, that falls beyond its control. With its free consciousness thus embodying alienation, the working class carries this absolute contradiction inherent in the socialization of private labor (a contradiction that transcends the contradiction between social production and private appropriation) beyond its limit, until revolutionarily organizing labor as a direct social power. As a historical social relation, freedom is transformed by this revolutionary transformation of the materiality of labor: the absence of personal domination based on the objective consciousness concerning one's own individuality as the bearer of productive social powers annihilates the absence of personal domination based on submitting to domination by the social powers embodied in the product of one's own labor.

Keywords: Consciousness; Freedom; Alienation; Working-class; Revolutionary Subject; Method

It is not a question of what this or that proletariat, 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.¹

The Issue

The last quarter of a century has been shown to be particularly hard on the powers of the working class to change society. There where the working class had expropriated the expropriators, the power it acquired seemed to have turned against itself. This power vanished, leaving behind a working class ready to be exploited once again as an extremely inexpensive source of labor power. Things went no better for the working class in other parts of the world. Defeated time after time, it has seen the deterioration of its working conditions which it won after such fraught struggles. Furthermore, its own political parties have competed with the neoliberals in seeing which was most successful in forcing it to retreat.

The situation did not improve for the working class when, weary of party bureaucrats, it turned for support to the theoreticians critical of capitalism. First, the working class was informed that it had lost its condition as the subject able to transform society, since this transformation was a process without a subject.² Then, the working class came to know that the subject had been reinstated, but that it was no longer considered for this role. Far from being the result of the development of universal subjects, social revolution now sprung from the affirmation of a universe of subjects that only had in common their self-vindication as pettily exclusive identities.³ Furthermore, not only did it have to discover that it was no longer the revolutionary subject, but that it did not even exist: work had disappeared, and so had the working class itself.⁴ Later, it emerged that it was not work per se that had disappeared, but the private form in which it was carried out in capitalism. The forced worker for capital was now a 'social worker',⁵ and the working class was itself invited to celebrate the loss of all identity and to live the joy of becoming a 'multitude',⁶ or a 'civil society'.⁷ And what about seizing power? Not even in dreams. The issue, it is claimed, is not

¹ Karl Marx, 'The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Criticism. Against Bruno Bauer and Company', *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, Volume 4 (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 37.

² Louis Althusser, 'Preface to *Capital* Volume One', in Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and other Essays*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 94.

³ Toni Negri, 'Do You Remember Revolution?', in Toni Negri *Revolution Retrieved: Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis, and New Social Subjects (1967-83)* (London: Red Notes, 1988), pp. 233-234. Manuel Castells, *The Information Age. Economy, Society, and Culture. Volume II. The Power of Identity* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 422.

⁴ Jacques Attali, *Millennium. Winners and Losers in the Coming World Order* (New York: Times Books, 1991), p. 101. Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work. The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), p. 197.

⁵ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 409-410.

⁶ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, op. cit., pp. 53-54, 401-402.

⁷ Sergio Tischler, 'La "sociedad Civil": ¿Fetiché? ¿Sujeto?', *Bajo el Volcán*, Vol. 2, Num. 3, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, México, 2001, pp. 176-179.

about the working class seizing in its own hands the powers of human labor alienated as powers of capital, but that capital itself will be quashed by mere indifference.⁸

And yet there is more. Nowadays, the barest reference to necessity, to a historical *raison d'être*, is a scandal and abomination to many of those that proclaim themselves critics of capitalism. Teleology!⁹ 'Exhausted utopias!' 'Grand narratives of emancipation!'¹⁰ Or, worse, attempts of 'totalitarian domination'!¹¹ Such are the sentences passed on any scientific recognition that society advances towards a certain direction. Under the umbrella of pluralism and diversity, all potential for social transformation is reduced to abstract 'desire', 'free will', or 'moral superiority', alien to any development of the materiality of the productive forces of society. No wonder theoreticians themselves end up claiming that poetry, religion and science attain equal rights as practical forms of consciousness in transforming all that exists.¹²

Nevertheless, from the point of view of the supersession of the capitalist mode of production the question remains unchanged: what is to be done? Since the aforementioned issues confront the condition of the working class as a revolutionary subject at its very roots, the only possible answer is to tackle the question of what is to be done by the working class in a radical way. This means starting by taking a critical stance in the face of one's own transforming action from its very roots, from the simplest determination of the social being of the working class.

The Social Being of the Working Class: Free Consciousness as the Concrete Form of Alienated Consciousness

Human natural history is the history of the transformation of the material conditions of social life through labor.¹³ The development of the human being as a historical subject is nothing but the development of human capacity to act in a conscious and voluntary way upon the rest of nature, in order to transform the latter into a means for human life. In other words, the development of the human being as a historical subject is the development of the human condition as the subject of production, that is, of human productive subjectivity. This development is the only materialistic concrete starting point, and therefore the only scientific one¹⁴ to generate consciousness as regards any historical process.

The capitalist mode of production starts by dissolving any general direct organization of social labor based on relations of personal dependence, thus turning

⁸ John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), pp. 212–215. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

⁹ Roger Chartier, 'L'histoire ou le récit véridique', *Philosophie et histoire*, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1987, p. 119.

¹⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 37, 38.

¹¹ Durand, Jean Pierre, 'Can we make our own history? The significance of dialectic today', *Capital & Class*, 62, 1997, pp. 143–158.

¹² Paul Feyerabend, *Against method* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 249–50.

¹³ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), p. 10.

¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

the producers into free individuals. Each concrete element of social labor is thus given the specific form of private labor performed independently from the rest. Then total social labor-power is allocated to its useful concrete forms through an autonomous system. As it is performed in a private and independent way,¹⁵ the abstract socially necessary labor (a simple productive expenditure of the human body in whatever concrete form it is performed,¹⁶ and, as such, a natural condition for human existence whatever the social modality that rules it)¹⁷ acquires a historically specific social form. After it materializes into its products, it appears represented as the aptitude of these products to relate to each other in exchange, thus placing their private and independent producers within a social relationship.¹⁸ That is to say, materialized privately performed socially necessary abstract labor is represented as the value that determines use-values as commodities.¹⁹

Since they need to generate their general social relationship through material production, the free individual consciousness and will of the producers that privately and independently organize their social labor are subjected to a historically specific determination. They have to submit to the needs that the value-form of their own material products imposes on them. They must act as personifications of their own commodities; they need to produce value as a matter of life or death. Commodity producers are free from any personal servitude because they are the servants of the social power of their products. Whereas it is the will of the producers that completely dominates the private and independent exercise of individual labor, these same producers are in turn completely subordinated to the social powers of the material product of that self-same labor. From the point of view of the participation of private and independent producers in social labor, their consciousness and will matter only inasmuch as they personify the powers of their commodities. The productive power of their social labor stands removed from the producers themselves as an alienated power, as a power incarnate in their commodities. The free consciousness and will of commodity producers is the specific form within which their alienated consciousness and will exist.

Now, at the same time, only because they are submitted to the domination of commodities, human consciousness and will determine themselves as free from all alien personal domination. In the previous modes of production, starting with primitive communism, there were no individuals freed from relations of personal dependency in the organization of their social labor. Those who stop at the appearances of the circulation of commodities believe that their possessors are abstractly free subjects by nature. Nevertheless, human freedom is but a social relation that in its historical development up to today has only existed and exists under the concrete form of not being submitted to relations of personal dependency

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, op. cit., p. 42.

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, op. cit., pp. 38, 44, 46.

¹⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, op. cit., p. 71.

¹⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, op. cit., pp. 72–74.

¹⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, op. cit., p. 38.

because one is submitted to the social powers of the product of labor. Hence, the development of freedom has no necessity other than that that could emerge from the development of its very alienation.

Therefore, social production is not directly aimed at producing use-values, but at producing the general social relation itself, that is value. In its condition as the objectified general social relation that represents the privately and independently performed social labor, value takes the substantive form of money. Money represents all the concrete modalities of social labor and, therefore, it embodies the potentiality to set into motion all of the modalities that will act as the starting point of the process of social metabolism. Thus, the organization of social production simply does not start from the alienated consciousness of each free individual putting in action his/her part in social labor. On the contrary, alienated consciousness does but express the necessity of the substantive social relation, which puts in action social labor without having as its immediate objective the production of use values, but the expanded reproduction of the very same substantive social relation. Hence, it is about the valorization of value, about the production of surplus value. Such is the capitalist mode of organizing social production. Capital is but the specific historical form in which the capacity to organize the labor of society gets into action as the attribute embodied in a thing that has been produced by previous social labor, with the immediate objective of producing more of that capacity to organize the labor of society as an attribute embodied in the material product of previously performed labor. Capital thus becomes itself the concrete immediate subject of social production and consumption.

As free independent individuals, wage laborers enter their general social relation as personifications of their only sellable commodity, their labor power. This means that the working class has nowhere from which to obtain any historically specific revolutionary powers other than those it gets from its own general social relation, namely, the production of surplus value. To be precise, the history of the production of surplus value is nothing but the history of the production of the material revolutionary powers of the working class and, therefore, of its revolutionary consciousness and will.

The working class constitutes itself as such through its necessarily antagonistic relationship with capital in terms of selling its labor power at its value. Nevertheless, the development of its revolutionary powers is not limited to the development of the formal subsumption of labor to capital. Through the production of relative surplus labor—that is, making labor power cheaper by multiplying the productivity of the labor that produces the worker's means of existence through a continuous technical revolution—labor really becomes subsumed under capital.²⁰ Even in their unity as working-class and in their very process of individual consumption, the workers become an attribute of capital.²¹ Thus, capital produces and reproduces them as

²⁰ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, op. cit., pp. 509–510.

²¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, op. cit., p. 573.

human beings; that is, as bearers of consciousness.²² This happens to the point that capital even rules the laws of their biological reproduction.²³ In the circulation of commodities, the consciousness of the laborers appears to be free. In fact, the consciousness and will of the laborers are defined as the necessary concrete forms taken by the alienation of labor's powers as capital's powers, namely, their own objectified general social relation that has become the alienated concrete subject of social existence.

The Capitalist Transformation of the Materiality of Labor and of the Laborer

Capital constantly revolutionizes the material conditions of production in the pursuit of relative surplus value. This revolution is not merely limited to the kind of a necessary large-scale collective process involved in working in mechanized big industry. As the system of machinery is developed, so capital tends to revolutionize the very material nature of labor. Essentially, labor ceases to consist of the conscious exertion of human strength and ability applied on tools in order to make them act upon an object to transform its use value. Rather, it tends to consist of the conscious expenditure of human body applied to the scientific control of natural forces and to the objectification of this control as an attribute of machinery, so as to make those natural forces automatically act upon tools in order to make the latter bring about the transformation of the object.²⁴

Consequently, commodity producers are collective individuals (formed by doubly-free workers, both in the sense of not being submitted to anyone's personal domination and of being separated from the means of production required to produce their existence that confronts them as an alien social power) who perform their labors in a private and independent way. As independent private producers, these collective producers have complete control of their individual labor processes, but none at all over the latter's general social character. Therefore, their consciousness and will as collectives formed by free individuals must needs submit to the rule of the social powers of the material product of their labor, that is, capital: they must produce surplus value. The free consciousness and will of the members of the collective laborers are the concrete forms of their consciousness alienated in capital.

Capitalist Universality and Fragmentation of the Workers' Productive Subjectivity

The capitalist mode of production tends to determine laborers as social subjects whose freedom develops as the materialization of their own labor processes—which is governed in an alienated way—necessarily tends to transform them into the bearers

²² Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, op. cit., p. 578.

²³ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, op. cit., p. 643.

²⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, op. cit., pp. 386–388; Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin, 1973), pp. 704–707, 713–714.

of a scientific, that is, objective, therefore, free, consciousness that aims to acquire an universal scope. And, as capital moves forward by eliminating the particularities that correspond to the direct application of labor power on its objects from the actual materiality of the labor process, it moves forward by universalizing the attributes of labor power; which means that it moves forward by universalizing the conditions of its reproduction, that is, the attributes of human consumption.

Nevertheless, the capitalist mode of production performs this transformation inasmuch as the conscious organization of social production is, at the same time, the necessary concrete form through which its opposite is able to realize itself. That is to say, inasmuch as conscious organization is the necessary concrete form in which the alienation of the productive powers of human labor is realized under the shape of an attribute of its own material product converted into the general social relation. In other words, inasmuch as it is about the socialization of private labor. Therefore, capital can only develop the universal powers and needs of the subjects of social labor through their opposite, namely, by constantly holding back and atomizing the universality of labor power. By privately socializing labor, capital revolutionizes the materiality of the labor process at the expense of the fragmentation of social labor power by determining the productive subjectivity of the laborers of large-scale industry in three contrasting ways.

Capital first needs to develop the productive subjectivity of the segment of the working class that participates in the collective laborer as the bearer of the latter's capacity to make progress towards universal control on natural forces and towards conscious control on the collective nature of labor. In itself, the development of this productive subjectivity reveals the general trend inherent in the historically specific development of the productive forces of society under the capitalist mode of production. Nevertheless, this does not mean that capital is moving forward without further ado. On the contrary, to begin with, capital itself constantly balances out its own historical general trend, thus turning each advance in the area of control of the natural forces into an objectified attribute of the machine. This means that any form of labor that exerts the aforementioned control becomes simplified, from the manual to the intellectual. At the same time, in the process of expanding its alienated productive subjectivity, the collective laborer broadens his sphere of action by taking charge of his self-coercion and the general representation of capital. The general antagonistic relation between those that personify labor power and those who personify capital permeates the collective laborer and, hence, the working class itself. The individual laborers that are in charge of those tasks appear both to themselves and to others as the very negation of that which they are; namely, members of the class of free individuals that only count on their labor power as a sellable commodity, that is, forced laborers for social capital, members of the working class. Consequently, even the part of the working class determined by capital as the direct bearer of the development of productive subjectivity suffers from the fact that its capacity to become aware of its own orientation as an alienated subject of social production is stunted. Therefore, capital prevents this part of the working class from fulfilling the

very historic potential for which it was created by capital itself: the development of the productive forces of society through the objective conscious organization of social labor. This mutilation of objective consciousness—which takes the shape of its opposite, alienated consciousness—can only be embodied in the very form taken by the scientific method that produces it. Hence, it can only arise from scientific method, being, at the same time, the requisite concrete form of its opposite, that is, ideology.

Secondly, the system of machinery degrades the productive subjectivity of the laborers that develop and use their manual skills in the direct process of production. They become mere appendages of the objectified control of natural forces, i.e. appendages of machinery. Their labor is thus continuously disqualified, deprived of any content beyond the mechanical repetition of an ever-increasingly simplified task. Each leap forward made by capital in the process of appropriating natural forces, that is, each leap forward made by the productivity of labor through the development of machinery, means that capital expels this type of laborer from the direct process of production on a wide-scale basis. And it does the same to those detail laborers still bound by the division of labor in manufacturing. It replaces the necessary intervention of their skillful subjectivity in the direct process of production with the objectified capabilities of a machine. Nevertheless, at the same time that each technical leap forward expels this type of living labor in order to replace it with dead labor, it generates a multiplicity of new areas for its exploitation. These areas emerge precisely as a result of this new step in the degradation of the productive attributes of both types of laborers. Consequently, the development of the productive forces of society ruled by the production of relative surplus value through the use of machinery carries within itself its own negation. It does so by multiplying the working population that it needs to reproduce with an ever-deteriorating productive subjectivity rather than by developing its productive subjectivity.

Thirdly, capital accumulation based on the extraction of relative surplus value by means of the system of machinery transforms an increasing part of the laboring population into surplus population with regard to the necessities of capital. Capital is the general social relation of the laboring population, i.e. the general social relation through which the working class reproduces its natural existence. Therefore, to be transformed into a surplus for capital means to be deprived of the capacity to produce one's own natural existence. Thus, capital extracts up to the last trace of productive subjectivity from the laboring surplus population, condemning it to death. In this brutal manner, capital undermines the contribution that growing segments of the laboring population could make to the development of the productive forces of society.

The global unit of capital accumulation realizes itself in the form of independent national processes. This form, itself a manifestation of the private nature of labor, becomes a basis for the fragmentation of the working class according to the differentiation of its role in the development of the productive forces of society.

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The classic form of the international division of labor is defined centrally by the supply of raw materials for those countries where accumulation assumes its general form from other countries where natural conditions allow for a higher degree of labor productivity in the production and extraction of these raw materials. Consequently, a mass of differential and simple absolute monopoly ground rent flows towards the latter countries. This mass has its source in the surplus value generated by the workers of the importing countries where primary commodities reach individual consumption. Therefore, this surplus value not only escapes appropriation by the individual capitalists from these countries, but also eludes the national process of capital accumulation itself. Then, these national economies set out to recover for themselves the largest part possible of the rent in question. Historically, they have done so in two ways. Both of these have been in association with the landowners from those countries where the rent is appropriated, and which share it out as a condition for their own emergence and reproduction. The first way in which the surplus value in question returns is through the foreign public indebtedness of the country that benefits from the flow of rent to the country in which it originates. This debt accrues interest rates that are significantly higher than normal rates. The second set-up, which has been in force largely since the 1930's crisis onwards, consists of the countries from which ground rent flows outwards being able to recover it by investing industrial capital in the countries where it ends up. Nevertheless, they do not do so in order to carry out production in these countries on the normal scale required to compete in the world market, but only to operate in the countries on a small scale, which corresponds to their domestic markets. These capitals then balance out the negative effect that their restricted scale has on the generation of surplus value by appropriating part of the ground rent through *ad hoc* state policies. At the same time, the same capitals add to this valorization base, (a) the re-use of machinery that has become obsolete in their countries of origin as the scale required to compete in the world market has evolved; (b) the profits that flow to the capitals in question from the local small capitals through the relationship to be presented below and, more importantly; (c) the purchase of the local labor power below its value. The national segment of the working class is thus doubly deprived of its capacity to take part actively in the global development of the productive forces of society. Such is the content of the national processes of capital accumulation in question, albeit the ideological inversion of this content under the label of 'import-substitution industrialization'.²⁵

²⁵ This approach is opposed to the theories of underdevelopment, unequal exchange, dependency and imperialism. The Argentine case is a paradigmatic example of this specific national form of capital accumulation. See Juan Iñigo Carrera, *La formación económica de la sociedad argentina*, Vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2007), pp. 41–85.

While this form of international division of labor reproduces itself continually, a new form of the same kind of division arises that gives it contemporary specificity. This new form is directly based on the international fragmentation of the productive subjectivity of the laborer in large-scale industry dedicated to production on the world market scale. This fragmentation arises principally from the robotization of the assembly line and the computerized adjustment of machinery. These processes have a two-fold effect on the productive attributes of the laborers. On the one hand, they increase the level of complexity of the labor required to develop control over natural forces and to develop the conscious organization of collective labor; and on the other hand, they simplify to an extreme the manual task of assembly as well as the manual labor, and even the intellectual one, which operate as appendages of machinery. The development of electronic data communications and of transport adds to the counter-movement taken by developments in productive subjectivity.

Through this new development in the international division of labor, global accumulation takes shape through the constitution of a limited number of nations in which capital tends to foster the type of work that expands the productive attributes of the laborer. Capital accumulation determines a second kind of national space as the location for the productive processes that essentially require a labor force whose productive attributes have deteriorated, as it has been determined as a surplus laboring population that is either latent or stagnant. Finally, the global unity of capital accumulation brutally turns other countries into mere repositories for a consolidated surplus laboring population, which it deprives of all productive subjectivity. On the surface, it would appear that the 'globalization' of the production process of industrial capital erases national frontiers. In fact, it rests on the strength that such frontiers have to further cheapen labor power.

In turn, the national differentiation of the laborers' productive attributes is enhanced by the relationship between normal capitals, which prompt the productivity of labor corresponding to the formation of the general rate of profit, and small capitals no longer able to afford to reach that level of productivity. These small capitals have been left behind in the development of labor productive forces. Nevertheless, they continue to produce by balancing their higher production costs against being valorized at the lower profit rate corresponding to the interest rate they would receive if they went into liquidation and they convert this into loan capital. Nevertheless, the sales price set by the compensation arising from higher costs balanced against a lower normal concrete profit rate can fall below the price of production set by the formation of the general profit rate. In this case, the small capitals in question would benefit from an extraordinary profit, well above that corresponding to their normal concrete existence as industrial capitals. However, these capitals cannot avoid competing among themselves for that extraordinary profit, and so it flows away from them in the direction of the normal capitals directly linked to the small ones in circulation. Thus, the former multiply their capacity for accumulation, thanks to the subsistence of small capitals that lack the capacity to

develop society's productive forces.²⁶ This source of profit for normal capitals accrues greater power as small capitals are particularly suited to exert the ruthless exploitation of the labor force whose productive subjectivity is undergoing deterioration, all the more so when this labor force makes up the greater part of the country's laboring population.

Based on these national differentiations, capital acts against its historical tendency towards the universalization of the conditions in which it reproduces the laborers of large-scale industry. It does so by linking the different productive subjectivities of the specialized organs making up the collective laborer to the different conditions in which each national labor power is reproduced. Hence, the intensified international competition imposed on the national segments of the working class adds to its capacity for exploitation. The issue concerning the kind of unity required by the working class to tackle its double fragmentation by capital—based as much on the differentiation of productive subjectivity as on the international division of labor—is at the root of the issue concerning the forms of consciousness capable of organizing political action.

The Historical *Raison d'Être* of the Capitalist Mode of Production

The development of the productive forces of society through the increased socialization of private labor, that is to say, the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, takes concrete shape in the negation of this self-same development through the mutilations that it necessarily carries out on the productive subjectivity of the whole of the laboring population. The concrete form in which the capitalist mode of production develops the productive forces of free labor is sufficient proof that this is not the ultimate social form taken by development. It is a specific historical modality that carries within itself the need for its own overcoming.

The transformation of the nature of labor and of the producer of commodities highlights the historical reason for the existence of the capitalist mode of production: the transformation of the productive powers of free individual labor into the productive powers of collective labor consciously organized by the same collective laborer that performs it, under the contradictory form of the development of social labor as private labor. It is about a labor whose product confronts its own producers as the autonomous bearer of the capacity to put in motion the labor of society and, therefore, as the bearer of a social power alien to them that exerts domination on them. This immanent contradiction of the capitalist mode of production is that which makes it bear in itself the need to supersede itself by engendering the general conscious organization of social production through its own development.

²⁶ This modality taken by the normal equalization of the profit rates under the concrete form of their permanent inequality based on the subsistence of small capitals in activity is the true content of that which political economy inverts when it explains the differences in the concrete capacities to accumulate by the market forms. This inversion goes from the Neoclassical theory of 'imperfect competition' to the theory of 'monopoly capital.'

The Centralization of Capital as the Alienated Property of the Working Class

The advance in the socialization of private labor necessarily takes shape through the centralization of capital, that is, the convergence of individual capitals in direct unity as the total capital of society. It is in the context of political action, which is to say, when it directly expresses the powers of social capital, that the working class embodies the direct socialization of private labor. The revolutionary action of the working class is the necessary concrete form in which the aforementioned constant revolution in the materiality of labor—which at the same time entails its direct socialization—develops its need for being organized as a directly social power that transcends the limits of its private capitalist form. Therefore, this revolutionary action is the necessary concrete form in which the capitalist mode of production fulfills its historical need to supersede itself through its own development.

The path is set by the working class taking into its own hands its alienated general social relation, i.e. the working class appropriating social capital. This is a task that can only be undertaken by centralizing capital as state property.²⁷

The complete socialization of private labor, that is the absolute centralization of capital as the property of a global state, is the necessary course of the political action of the working class as the highest form of the development of the productive forces of society in the capitalist mode of production. Nevertheless, this is not its real end. Indeed, a process of capital accumulation where the complete fulfillment and control of the labor process were in the hands of the wage laborers and capital was the collective property of these same laborers under the necessary modality of state capital, would be the most developed form of the alienation of human powers as capital's powers. In it, the separation of the laborers from their means of production would be complete, which is to say that the laborers would be directly confronted with these means—that is, without needing to be mediated by the figure of the capitalist—as an objectified autonomous power not only alien to them but also one to which they would be completely subordinate.

The Conscious, therefore Free, Organization of Social Life

The private character of labor, plain and simple, means that the free consciousness that organizes each unit of social labor is deprived of the capacity to control its own social scope. This scope confronts it in an inverted form as the social power that its product—capital—imposes upon it to embody the general unity of social labor. Insofar as free consciousness necessarily personifies the social power belonging to its product, it is determined as an alienated consciousness.

In its complete development, the free consciousness bearer of alienation directly takes form in the materiality itself of the labor process. At this point, work materially consists of applying a scientific consciousness—that is, one that is objectively aware of its own determinations and, as such, one that advances asserting its freedom—to

²⁷ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 243.

develop control on the natural forces in order to objectify them in machinery, namely, to multiply the capacity to organize the process of social metabolism. Nevertheless, that same product, i.e. the multiplied capacity for organization, confronts its producers under the specific social form of surplus value. That is, it confronts its producers as an alien social power that belongs to the material product of their labor and to which their objective consciousness itself is submitted. It is about an automatic organization of social life in which human labor consists of the development of the capacity to consciously control that very organization, simultaneously having as its immediate object the multiplication of the capacity to automatically organize social life beyond the consciousness of its producers.

The absolute limit to the capitalist development of the productive forces of society lies in this negation of the complete domination of the very powers of social labor. Therefore, the ultimate capitalist barrier to the development of productive forces lies in the mutilation imposed on free consciousness by its determination as the form of existence of alienated consciousness. The overcoming of this barrier necessarily entails the annihilation of private labor as the way of organizing social labor, thus giving birth to the general conscious organization of the latter.

This step forward in the development of productive forces thus takes a specific material concrete form. Namely, it takes the form of a social revolution in which the material subject of this development, i.e. the working class, does not limit itself to the annihilation of the bourgeoisie by transforming capital into an immediately social property. It annihilates capitalism itself, and, by doing so, annihilates the general political representative of capital, that is, the state. And by annihilating capitalism, the working class reaches its own end. The new general social relation takes shape in the consciousness and will by means of which the laborer directly determines him/herself as an individual organ of social labor. Freedom is no longer about not being subject to the personal domination by another at the expense of submitting to domination by the social powers that belong to the product of one's own labor. Now, freedom consists of not submitting to the personal domination of another because one holds complete sway over the social powers of one's own labor. It has developed as the complete objective consciousness concerning one's own individuality as the bearer of productive social powers. Therefore, it is about the general conscious organization of the process of producing social life. Free consciousness, i.e. free individuality, has become the general social relation.²⁸

The historically specific revolutionary powers of the working class to overcome the capitalist mode of production do not arise from the realization of 'right', 'justice', or 'equality' as opposed to capitalist 'unnatural' injustice and exploitation;²⁹ nor from the realization of the 'dialectic of the moral life';³⁰ nor from the 'increase of an

²⁸ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, op. cit., p. 156.

²⁹ Eduard Bernstein, *The Preconditions of Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 141. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), pp. 180–181.

³⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 61.

internal self-determination or self-morality³¹; nor from the fact that the mere antagonistic relationship that exists between the exploiters and the exploited in class struggle engenders an abstract accumulation of experience;³² nor from the ‘autonomy’ achieved by class struggle with respect to its determination as the necessary concrete form of the socialization of private labor;³³ nor from the ‘autonomy achieved by the working class’ consciousness with respect to capital, be this—in relative terms—by means of the production of a revolutionary ‘doctrine’,³⁴ or by means of its ‘self-valorization’;³⁵ nor from the ‘democratization’ of capitalism through the apparent standoff between an abstractly free consciousness and an abstractly alienated consciousness by means of ‘market socialism’;³⁶ nor from the production of a working class consciousness able to develop itself by itself beyond the exhaustion of the development of productive forces;³⁷ nor from the need to avoid ‘barbarism’ or ‘catastrophe’ vis-à-vis the mechanical impossibility of capital reproduction;³⁸ nor from this mechanical impossibility itself;³⁹ nor from the resistance of the laboring surplus population in its desperate struggle to survive.

Each of these reasons presupposes that working-class consciousness imposes itself—on its own account—upon the actual determination of the social being of the working class as an attribute of capital. Therefore, they are all idealistic inversions to which the materialistic point of view must be opposed. The capitalist mode of production is nothing but the form in which society develops its material productive forces by means of the accelerated socialization of free labor (i.e. by means of the generation and advance of the conscious organization of social labor performed by the direct producers themselves) by aiming for the multiplication of that socialization as the immediate object of social production and consumption. Therefore, this form of the organization of social production takes action directly aimed at reproducing the same mode of organization in a qualitatively and quantitatively expanded scale. Hence, its specific need to revolutionize the very materiality of the labor process, transforming it in the exercise of human faculties to submit natural forces to their conscious control exerted as a direct social power. Yet, for that reason too, the direct

³¹ István Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (London: Merlin Press, 1986), pp. 188–189.

³² Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), p. 76.

³³ John Holloway, ‘The Great Bear: Post-Fordism and Class Struggle’, in Werner Bonefeld and John Holloway (eds) *Post-Fordism & Social Form: A Marxist Debate on the Post-Fordist State* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 100.

³⁴ Louis Althusser, ‘Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle’, in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays* (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 1–42.

³⁵ Antonio Negri, *Marx au-delà de Marx* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois Éditeur, 1979), p. 182.

³⁶ David Schweickart, *Against Capitalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). John Roemer, *A Future for Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

³⁷ Leon Trotsky, *The Transitional Program & the struggle for socialism* (Sydney: Resistance Books, 1999), pp. 23–24.

³⁸ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2003), pp. 366, 466–467. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, op. cit., p. 282.

³⁹ Henryk Grossman, *The Law of Accumulation and breakdown of the capitalist system* (London: Pluto Press, 1992), pp. 619–620.

producers are presented with the product of their own social labor as an alien power that dominates them; that is, as the very denial of their conscious organization of social labor, which is to say, as capital. Therefore, the capitalist mode of production constantly revolutionizes the materiality of the labor process in a way that entails the necessary overcoming of its own reproduction. Only because it is completely determined as an attribute of its own alienated material product, and as it cognizes itself completely in this determination as the necessary form of the advance in the conscious socialization of labor, the revolutionary action of the working class is today the complete expression of liberating action.⁴⁰

The Consciousness of the Working Class as the Negation of the Negation of Free Consciousness

The need inherent within the capitalist mode of production to develop itself towards its own overcoming into the general conscious organization of social production immediately presents us with the process of the development of consciousness. A consciousness able to organize the totality of the process of social production must have attained the power inherent in the fullness of objective knowledge, that is, it needs to be a completely free consciousness. Nevertheless, it cannot reach this condition as an offspring of the previous overcoming of the capitalist mode of production. On the contrary, this overcoming is the offspring of the complete development of free consciousness. Therefore, complete free consciousness must necessarily be the most genuine product of the capitalist mode of production itself. More concretely yet, it must needs be the product of the social subject that the capitalist mode of production objectively determines as the bearer of its own overcoming, resulting from the same process in which the subject undertakes this overcoming. In a nutshell, the consciousness in question can only be developed as the product of the political action of the working class in the process of overcoming the capitalist mode of production. This action takes, as its necessary concrete form, the advance in the socialization of private labor by means of the centralization of capital as an alienated social property, which is to say, as the property of the state. The consciousness of the working class able to overcome the capitalist mode of production can only be developed as a concrete necessary moment of the aforementioned process of capital centralization.

Yet, the consciousness of the working class is determined as an attribute of capital and, therefore, as a form of alienated consciousness. Above all, the free consciousness of the working class is the necessary concrete form of its alienated consciousness. Hence, it is the negation of free consciousness under the appearance of being a free consciousness. Therefore, the consciousness that bears the overcoming of the capitalist mode of production cannot be developed as the abstract affirmation of

⁴⁰ Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring (Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science)* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976), p. 144.

the free consciousness of the working class. It can only be developed as the free consciousness of the working class that determines itself as an alienated consciousness advancing in the denial of its own alienation. That is, as a consciousness whose freedom resides in determining itself as the negation of the negation of free consciousness.

The production of the scientific consciousness of the working class concerning its own historical potential is not an abstract scientific matter. It is a specific moment necessary to the political action of the working class in the class struggle.

Capital's needs concerning scientific cognition face a contradiction. To increase relative surplus value by means of the system of machinery, capital is compelled to submit all production and consumption to science. Nevertheless, insofar as scientific cognition is simply a concrete form of the production of surplus value, science must reproduce the alienation of human consciousness in capital. At the same time, it has to be an objective consciousness, it needs to be a consciousness that looks upon itself in a non-objective way by accepting the appearance of being an abstractly free consciousness. For this reason, it is about a science that needs to appear as if the foundations of its objectivity were rooted outside itself. These foundations must appear to arise from a pure abstractly free subjectivity, as if they were based on a philosophy,⁴¹ grounded in turn on the appearance of free individuality inherent in the circulation of commodities.⁴²

Logical representation is this contradiction solved. It starts by basing its objectivity on the conception of real concrete forms as if they were empty of any necessity to be realized and, therefore, as unable to affirm themselves through their own negation. Thus conceived as lacking any potentiality to get into motion by themselves, and consequently expelled from science even the very question about the possibility of apprehending in thought their necessity by ideally following it in its real development, thought can only place them into relation by imposing an external constructive necessity upon them; that is, logic: 'Logic—mind's *coin of the realm*, the speculative or *mental value* of man and nature—its essence which has grown totally indifferent to all real determinateness and hence unreal—is *alienated thinking*, and therefore thinking which abstracts from nature and from real man: *abstract thinking*.'⁴³

Thus, logical representation is able to conceive free consciousness as the abstract opposite of alienated consciousness. Moreover, it could even conceive consciousness as the externally contradictory unit between free consciousness and alienated consciousness, these being two opposite poles. But it excludes from the field of scientific knowledge any possibility of discovering free consciousness as the necessary

⁴¹ Carl Hempel, 'The Theoretician's Dilemma', in H. Feigl, M. Scriven and G. Maxwell (eds.), *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), p. 83.

⁴² Karl Popper, 'The Logic of the Social Sciences', in T. Adorno, H. Albert, R. Dahrendorf, J. Habermas, H. Pilot and K. Popper, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 96.

⁴³ Karl Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts 1844' in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Volume 3 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), p. 330.

concrete form of alienated consciousness, since such relation violates any logical consistency.

Given the external character of the constructive necessity followed to conceive in thought the real concrete forms with respect to their proper one, logical representation itself arrives at the logically unavoidable conclusion that it cannot produce the certainty of an objective knowledge before acting.⁴⁴ Therefore, scientific theories based on logical representation are recognized by their own producers as necessarily stopping at appearances and, therefore, as being unable to go beyond interpreting reality in different ways.⁴⁵ They are but ideologies based on each one's philosophy. In logical representation, ideology manifests itself in the form of its opposite, namely, scientific method.

Marx opposes the 'reproduction of the concrete by way of thought'⁴⁶ to logical representation. Reproducing the concrete by way of thought implies that the course taken by the progression of ideas must follow the development of the necessity inherent in the actuality of the real concrete upon which action is going to be performed. Therefore, the movement of thought cannot introduce any necessity alien to its real object, nor force a conceptual point of departure. It can only start by accounting for the necessity of the simplest form presented by its object. That is, dialectics on its feet. Science, namely, the production of the objective consciousness, is thus carried out in a concrete form that immediately corresponds to its content. Therefore, when it is developed by the alienated subject, it unavoidably faces this subject with the evidence of his/her own alienation, whichever the appearance of abstract free subjectivity he/she has started from.

Since it begins, unavoidably, by discovering its own historical condition as an alienated consciousness, this consciousness can only be a product of capital inasmuch as the latter needs to annihilate itself through the conscious general organization of the social metabolism. Therefore, dialectical cognition as practical criticism can only arise as the immediate expression of the general interests of the working class; namely, as the expression of the latter's power to abolish itself as a class by constituting the society of freely associated individuals. Only inasmuch as it expresses this necessity is dialectical cognition able to advance upon the immediate concrete forms of the political organization of privately-performed social labor and of the transformation of natural forces into human instruments. Nevertheless, when it does so, it brings to these fields the revolutionary powers it obtains from its very historical reason of existence.

As long as it remains the prisoner of the self-same scientific method that operates as the objective consciousness capable of producing relative surplus value while seeing itself in a non-objective light, namely, of logical representation, the scientific consciousness of the working class is unable to discover that, in the capitalist mode

⁴⁴ Karl Popper, 'The Logic of the Social Sciences', op. cit., p. 104.

⁴⁵ Jürgen Habermas, 'The Analytical Theory of Science and Dialectics', in T. Adorno, H. Albert, R. Dahrendorf, J. Habermas, H. Pilot and K. Popper, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, op. cit., pp. 160-161.

⁴⁶ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, op. cit., p. 101.

of production, freedom is but the concrete form of alienation. Therefore, it weakens itself within its own historical powers, for it sees itself as an abstractly-free consciousness. Nevertheless, as the very process of capital accumulation imposes the development of direct control over the social character of labor, it follows that the conscious action of the working class needs to move towards overcoming this appearance. It needs to leave behind the exteriority of logical representation in order to rule itself by means of the reproduction of the concrete in thought, that is, by means of dialectical cognition. Marx's *Capital* is, in itself, the development (carried out for the first time and given a form that allows its social reproduction) of the alienated consciousness of the working class that produces itself as an alienated consciousness aware of its own alienation and of the historical powers it derives from it. In *Capital*, this consciousness unfurls to the point where it reaches the general determinations that relate to the revolutionary action of the working class in which the aforementioned historical powers are fulfilled inasmuch as they produce the material conditions for the conscious, and thus free, organization of social life.