

donc réaffirmer la *stratégie dialectique* inaugurale, cette pratique matérialiste assumant l'Histoire en affrontant ses sentences que les noms «marxisme» et «Marx» ont arrêté de dénoter depuis trop longtemps. L'abolition des usages éthérés de ces derniers, et le dépassement des impuissances et des révisionnismes induits que ces usages enveloppent, impose de les réhistoriciser. Les philosophèmes activistes et les idéologèmes critico-scolastiques qui se recommandent aujourd'hui de ces deux noms sont dans l'ensemble symptomatiques d'une situation objectivement transitoire de la société dans son ensemble, et il est impensable de rester spectateur passif de cette transition.

Si cette lecture des références à Marx en France aujourd'hui est juste, il convient alors de marquer ce que suppose et impose leur *repolitisation*. (1) Prendre la mesure de l'état du marxisme et de ses débats et de ses renouveaux au plan européen et international, en partant de l'hypothèse qu'il est un indice parlant de l'état des forces de gauche dans le monde d'aujourd'hui. (2) Corrélativement, se remettre progressivement à la hauteur stratégique et tactique de l'autoritarisme du quatrième âge, post-ultralibéral, du capitalisme – et travailler, en l'espèce, à l'organisation d'une V^{ème} Internationale.

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Marx studies in the Anglophone world

Contemporary Marx scholarship in the Anglophone world revolves around the consolidation and refinement of certain themes and perspectives whose origins can be traced back to the late 1970s and early 1980s (Elson 1979; Mohun 1994). These debates around Marx's intellectual legacy have entailed both a methodological and a substantive re-examination of his major scientific work: *Capital*.

In a nutshell, the methodological discussion has consisted in a novel assessment of the 'Hegel-Marx connection' (Burns and Fraser 2000; Arthur 2003). Whereas in earlier studies the emphasis was mainly in the relationship between Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the 'young Marx' (Mészáros 1970; Arthur 1986), this more recent strand of research has focused on the links between *Capital* and Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Although there are various controversies over the closeness and precise nature of that connection (see Kincaid 2009, for a useful overview of the main issues and positions in this debate), most contributions agree that the structure of the argument in *Capital* is organised in a dialectical form which, at the very least, can be said to draw formal inspiration from the general form of movement of categories that Hegel deploys in his *Logic* (Murray 1988; Reuten and Williams 1989; Smith 1990; Moseley 1993; Smith 1993; Moseley and Campbell 1997; Albritton 1999; Arthur 2002; Albritton and Simoulidis 2003; Ollman and Smith 2008)¹. Thus Marx's presentation is seen as involving a (synthetic) movement from the more abstract or simple form-determinations of the subject matter (i.e. capital), to the increasingly more concrete or complex forms in which it moves and eventually manifests in 'empirical' reality, thereby culminating in the intellectual reproduction of capital as a concrete totality, i.e. as the unity of those many determinations. Inasmuch

¹ Drawing on the approach developed by the Argentine scholar Juan Iñigo Carrera (2008), I have contributed to these methodological debates in Starosta (2003; 2008).

as the passage or transition from one economic form to the next is seen as being driven by the development of the contradictions immanent in each of them, their relationship is generally deemed as internal and grounded in dialectical necessity, in contrast with the externality that inevitably results from the use of formal logic.

The guiding thread of the substantive reconsideration of the Marxian critique of political economy was the critical reaction against what was seen as the (mis)reading of his 'economic' works along Ricardian and/or Left-Keynesian lines throughout most of the twentieth century until the 1970s (as epitomised in the classic texts by Dobb 1968; Sweezy 1968; Robinson 1969; Meek 1973). In contrast to what DeVroey (1982) aptly labelled 'technological' reading to refer to the old orthodoxy, this re-appraisal of Marx's theory entailed a renewed emphasis on the *historical specificity* of capitalist *social forms* (Murray 2000). Although this has led to a wide-ranging rethinking of the structure of Marx's *Capital* as a whole², a great bulk of the discussion has been devoted to shed new light to the simpler determinations of capitalist society and have therefore focused on value, abstract labour and money. The central question was no longer to reduce prices to quantities of labour but, taking cue from Marx's remark in the section on the fetishism of commodities, to comprehend why in capitalist society that content (labour) takes on the form of value, money and, eventually, capital. In other words, for most of these new readings Marx's *Capital* was not to be interpreted as a treatise on 'economic theory' but as a critical investigation of the historically-specific reified forms of social mediation of capitalist society³. However, beyond this common ground, the reaction to the old Ricardian-Marxist orthodoxy has been very varied and has resulted in the emergence of a great diversity of perspectives on the determinations of value as a social form.

²See in particular the collection of essays on the three volumes of capital published by the group of scholars associated with the International Symposium on Marxian Theory (Arthur and Reuten 1998; Campbell and Reuten 2002; Bellofiore and Taylor 2004; Bellofiore and Fineschi 2009).

³As Bellofiore (2009) notes, in order to grasp the full significance of the Marxian critique, this insight must necessarily lead to the conceptualisation of the essential reality of capitalism as based on an all too real *inversion* between those objectified forms of social mediation (i.e. the commodity, capital) and the human subjects whose practical activity that alienated social objectivity mediates. A further ramification of this is the recognition by several scholars that the 'mature' Marxian notion of alienation amounts to the social constitution of capital as the concrete Subject of the movement of modern society (a point quite forcefully made by Postone 2004). Italian readers might notice here the points of contact with the work of Roberto Finelli, who engaged in an interesting debate on this topic with Chris Arthur in the pages of the journal *Historical Materialism* (Finelli 2007; Arthur 2009). This conceptualisation of capital as the totalising Subject of modernity in turn raises the question of the social determinations of revolutionary subjectivity; in particular, how to ground it as immanent in the alienated movement of capital and not as external to it (Starosta 2004; Starosta 2010, forthcoming).

At one end of the spectrum, one can find what some critical commentators have labelled the 'circulationist approach' (Mavroudeas 2004), for which abstract labour and value can only acquire objective reality through the exchange of products against money on the market (Himmelweit and Mohun 1978; Eldred and Haldon 1981; de Vroey 1982; Williams 1992; Reuten 1993; Kay 1999; Roberts 2004). However, certain limitations of the 'circulationist' approach did not remain unnoticed by other scholars and served as the basis for further recent developments in Marx studies. The challenge for these alternatives was how to avoid both the technological reading of the value-determinations and the antinomies which arose from seeing value as existing only within circulation. Thus, a new variety of approaches emerged which, in their own idiosyncratic way, tried to re-establish the connection between value and the immediate process of production whilst still seeing the former as a specific social form (Likitkijksomboon 1995; Postone 1996; Saad-Filho 2002; De Angelis 2004; Mavroudeas 2004; McGlone and Kliman 2004; Brown 2008)⁴. Finally, some authors seem to offer a middle ground between 'circulationism' and 'production-centred' value-theories, in which exchange provides a necessary first moment in the process of social constitution of value that becomes fully grounded when capital sinks into production (Arthur 2001; Bellofiore 2009).

This re-examination of value as social form has been intimately connected with a rethinking of the nature of abstract labour⁵. One of the main issues at stake has been the level of abstraction of the determinations of capital at which abstract labour should be more adequately conceptualised. The theoretical positions here only partly overlap with the debates over the determination of value. Regardless of whether abstract labour exists in production or in circulation, the question is whether it should be treated as already determined at the level of the commodity-form (involving the unity of both production and circulation) (Murray 2005; Smith 2005), or whether it can be fully grasped only from its mode of existence as work exploited by (or subsumed to) capital (De Angelis 1996; Arthur 2001), or whether the pro-

⁴For a direct critical exchange between production-centred and circulationist approaches, see the recent debate between Kincaid (Kincaid 2007; 2008) and Fine and Saad-Filho (2008).

⁵It has also been accompanied by a reconsideration of the centrality of the money-form for Marx's value-theory. It is now widely recognised that money is the necessary mode of expression of value (and hence the general representative of the social character of labour in capitalism), which means that the latter cannot be unmediatedly expressed in quantities of its own substance. The debate has centred on the precise mediations that lead from content (the abstract character of privately-undertaken social labour) to form (value and, more concretely, money). See the essays in Moseley (2005). The discussion has also addressed the extent to which this re-examination of the concept of money actually needs a 'commodity' theory of money (Campbell 1997; Kay 1999; Williams 2000; Arthur 2004; Bellofiore 2004).

cess of abstraction should be conceptualised as fully posited through the process of capitalist reproduction as a whole (Robles Báez 2004). Beyond these controversies, and clearly in opposition to the ahistorical, naturalistic reading of Marx's value-theory in the old 'Ricardian' interpretations, the 'new consensus' tends to take for granted that abstract labour as a purely historical, specific social form.

However, some more recent contributions have highlighted the textual/interpretative difficulties, and/or conceptual risks of excessive formalism, that arise from expunging all 'physiological' materiality from the determinations of abstract labour (Robles Báez 2004; Brown 2008; Carchedi 2009). As I have argued elsewhere, it is indeed possible to make a consistent case for the generic material nature of abstract labour while still seeing value as a reified or alienated social form specific to capitalism and, more generally, without relapsing into a naturalistic view of economic categories (Kicillof and Starosta 2007a; Kicillof and Starosta 2007b).

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