

Being a Marxist or objectively recognizing one's own political subjectivity through the dialectical method discovered by Marx¹

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1) On Marxism's interpretive character, or on the objectively unsolvable dichotomy between 'true' and 'false' Marxism.

'Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as communistic by its opponents in power? Where is the opposition that has not hurled back the branding reproach of communism, against the more advanced opposition parties, as well as against its reactionary adversaries?'.²

There is no reason to think that, on writing the passage above, it would have crossed its authors' minds that, in the course of history, the term 'Marxist' would replace that of 'Communist' in this mutually incriminatory usage between governing and opposition parties. Moreover, such an indictment gets an immediate response from the incriminated party; 'Marxist!', says one; 'No, Keynesian!' replies the other. 'Marxist!' reciprocates the accused party as soon as it emerges that a major leader of its opponent has a Communist skeleton hidden in the cupboard. 'If you are not a Socialist at twenty, you have no heart, but if you remain one at thirty, you have no head!' substantiates the other, paraphrasing Clemenceau. Nonetheless, however amusing this tragicomic exchange of recriminations may be, in which a sort of 'Who, me?' attitude prevails, it is a seemingly opposite discussion that is of real interest from the point of view of the political action of the working class. In this discussion each one proclaims him/herself Marxist at the same time that, usually, accuses as "false Marxists" those who also proclaim themselves Marxists but disagree on the interpretation of the point at stake. The question becomes inevitable: What do those who consider themselves Marxists understand by being Marxist?

It is usual practice in this milieu to confidently place the phrase 'According to Marx's theory...' before any personal judgement, and to virulently expell any dissenter from 'the realm of Marxism'. Even Pio IX would have envied such expressions of dogmatic infallibility. However, unlike his case, there has never been among Marxists any conciliar agreement that would anointed one Pope. The world of Marxists is not made in image and likeness of the world of commodities, in which the latter have selected one as the expression of their value-quality. It is, so to speak, a world of plain and simple commodities. Therefore, the dogmatic authority of one Marxist can be called into question by all others. At least outside party and academic hierarchies.

In the absence of a universal accepted authority who could dictate what constitutes 'true' Marxism, no objective resolution can be found to the debate on who can legitimately be defined as Marxist, which leads to the permanent renewal of the argument. Recently, Professor Rolando Astarita has proposed what he considers an unsurpassable

¹ A previous version was presented at the VII Jornadas de Economía Crítica in 2014

² Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich [1848], 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, Vol. 1, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1969, p. 98.

criterion to settle the issue of classification.³ According to him, it is a criterion based on ‘the dialectical idea of a leap from quantity into quality’. Thus, he singles out as mere ‘quantitative variations’ ‘a range of nuances and disagreements with aspects of the theory, however maintaining the core beliefs that form a theoretical and political body with definite characteristics’. Beyond these quantitative variations, ‘there are challenges which involve a qualitative break’. The author presents, as an example, that of the theory of exploitation, which, ‘being (...) one of the defining features of Marxism, the proposition that the capitalist mode of production is not exploitative would not fit, by any means, within the Marxist current of thought.’

In line with this criterion, it seems plain to exclude from the Marxist realm someone who states that ‘[a]ll legitimate income, from work or not, should be protected’,⁴ which in other words means to consider income obtained from exploiting others’ work as legitimate. Yet, this statement is a fundamental principle of ‘Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory’ for those who rule their practice by ‘the important thought of Three Represents’.⁵ And precisely given that the ‘leap from quantity into quality’ has been invoked, a question arises: Would it make sense to exclude from Marxism those who probably comprise the largest number of people that define themselves as Marxists worldwide?

Let us consider another case. Following the cited argument, the conception that ‘capitalism suffers from unnecessary alienation and exploitation’, whose necessity of being transcended ‘flows from a historical world view, based on the evolution of forms of property’,⁶ apparently does not infringe the boundaries of a ‘quantitative variation’. Yet if the limit to the ‘qualitative break’ is premised on the endorsement of Marx’s theory of value, then Roemer’s ‘analytical Marxism’ should clearly remain off-limits, insofar as it rejects it for the analysis of exchange relations. Instead, he states that for such analysis ‘the tools *par excellence* are rational choice models: general equilibrium theory, game theory, and the arsenal of modelling techniques developed by neo-classical economics’.⁷ However, no Marxist within the range of quantitative adequacy has yet succeeded in precluding ‘analytical Marxism’ from being considered a variety of Marxism.

Likewise, a stricter stance could be adopted towards the ‘every man his own Marxist’ view,⁸ considering that a ‘simultaneous dual-system interpretation’ in the derivation of production prices from values rejects Marx’s theory of exploitation, as opposed to a ‘temporal single-system interpretation’.⁹ And how to establish if the *Neue Marx-Lektüre*’s critique of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is just a ‘quantitative variation’ or exceeds the limits of a ‘qualitative break’ from Marxism.¹⁰ Or if the new category of a ‘Marxism without Marx’ is at all plausible within it.¹¹ Or if only those who

³ Astarita, Rolando, ‘Kicillof ¿el ministro marxista?’ [Kicillof, the Marxist Minister?], 2013, in <http://rolandoastarita.wordpress.com/2013/11/20/kicillof-el-ministro-marxista/>.

⁴ Jiang Zemin, ‘Full Text of Jiang Zemin’s Report at 16th Party Congress’, Beijing, 2002, in <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/49007.htm>.

⁵ Jiang Zemin, op. cit.

⁶ Roemer, John, ‘“Rational choice” Marxism: some issues of method and substance’, in John Roemer, (editor), *Analytical Marxism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press - Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1986, pp. 194, 201.

⁷ Roemer, John, op. cit., p. 192.

⁸ Kliman, Andrew, *Reclaiming Marx’s ‘Capital’*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2007, p. 8.

⁹ Kliman, Andrew, op. cit., pp. 5, 189.

¹⁰ Heinrich, Michael, ‘Crisis Theory, the Law of the Tendency of the Profit Rate to Fall, and Marx’s Studies in the 1870s’, *Monthly Review*, Vol. 64, N° 11, April 2013.

¹¹ Freeman, Alan, ‘Marxism Without Marx: A note towards a critique,’ *Capital and Class*, Vol. 34, N° 1, 2010, pp. 84-97.

propose to ‘return to Marx’ in order to fight ‘religious Marxism’¹² are worthy of holding the name -which would imply that to be a real Marxist, one should first have gone somewhere else from where to return. Or if, after all, even the modern emulators of Proudhon could feel welcome by the ‘we are all Marxists now’.¹³ In sum, how to establish on which side of the dividing line drawn for the ‘leap from quantity into quality’ an ‘erratic Marxist’,¹⁴ a ‘Marxist for the long run and Keynesian for the here and now’,¹⁵ or the statement itself that ‘to take ‘liberties’ with the signature of Marx is in this sense merely to enter into the freedom of Marxism’,¹⁶ should be placed.

In turn, Marx himself has been declared unworthy of being reclaimed as a Marxist, as he is said to have professed ‘the ideological, non-scientific character of the concept of ‘alienated labour’ -and thus of the concept of ‘alienation’ that supports it’,¹⁷ which leaves a ‘flagrant and extremely harmful [...]’ influence: ‘the theory of *fetishism*’.¹⁸ He has also been accused by the Marxist Rubin of infringing upon the interpretation of his own theory, for having ‘a few sentences’ in which he brings out the materiality of abstract labor common to all forms of social organization, and which is socially represented as the value of commodities only when it is performed in a private and independent manner, something that ‘cannot in any way be made consistent with the entirety of Marx’s theory of value’.¹⁹ Nevertheless there are also those who furiously blame Marx himself for the generosity thanks to which anyone can be considered a Marxist: ‘We are all Marxists in a Marxian world’.²⁰

The criterion presumably based on the ‘dialectical idea of a “leap from quantity into quality”’ thus proves helpless for establishing the contours of Marxism, other than by lapsing into an arbitrary subjective rule based on the maxim: ‘I, true Marxist; you, false Marxist’. And this inability to avoid arbitrary criteria should come as no surprise. In effect, the difficulty involved in any sort of classification resides in explaining the nature of the qualitative difference that manifests itself in a quantitative difference, instead of proceeding blindly in reverse, that is, by starting from the observation of an alleged quantitative difference in order to derive from it the existence of a qualitative difference whose content remains unexplained. This inverted approach, which proceeds by leaving the quality undefined, cannot surpass the barrier of *smallness* in the difference.²¹ In this case, this means the barrier of the sectarian debate on who is and who is not included.

¹² Harnecker, Marta, ‘Introducción’, in Louis Althusser, *La revolución teórica de Marx*, México, Siglo XXI, 1967, p. 3.

¹³ Bax, Ernest Belfort, ‘The Zurich Resolutions’, *Justice*, 13th May 1893, p. 6.

¹⁴ Varoufakis, Yanis, ‘Confessions of an Erratic Marxist in the Midst of a Repugnant European Crisis’, in <http://yanisvaroufakis.eu/2013/12/10/confessions-of-an-erratic-marxist-in-the-midst-of-a-repugnant-european-crisis/>, 2013.

¹⁵ Lapavistas, Costas, ‘Interview by S. Budgen’, *Jacobin*, in <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/03/lapavistas-varoufakis-grexit-syriza/>, 12/3/2015.

¹⁶ Anderson, Perry, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, London, Verso, 1996, p. 9.

¹⁷ Althusser, Louis, ‘On Theoretical Work: Difficulties and Resources’, in Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays*, Verso, London - New York, 1972, 1990, p. 62.

¹⁸ Althusser, Louis, ‘Preface to “Capital” Volume One’, in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 2001, p. 62.

¹⁹ Rubin, Isaak [1928], *Essays on Marx’s theory of value*, Montréal-New York, Black Rose Books, 1990, pp. 134-135.

²⁰ Felix, David, *Marx as Politician*, Carbondale & Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1983, p. 218.

²¹ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich [1812], *The Science of Logic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 435.

Given that the starting point of any classification is the recognition of the qualitative attribute that determines its object, the problem faced is the qualitative definition of what is being Marxist. And the distinctive qualitative attribute that all Marxists share is that they all self-identify as individuals who seek to interpret Marx's writings, and more generally his action, in the positive manner that each of them conceives as adequate. Yet it is not an interpretation which is sought out of scholastic interest. Instead, it is aimed at being applied to the real world in order to interpret its workings in a way that allows the transformation of the existing social order into one which is superior from the point of view of the realisation of the human species being.²² To sum up, *the qualitative attribute that defines Marxists is the self-recognition as political subjects intending to interpret the world in order to change it, by interpreting Marx in the positive way they conceive as appropriate.* And this qualitative attribute remains unchanged, regardless of the claim to be doing a *Marxian* interpretation as opposed to any *Marxist* one, whereby 'Marxian' is seen as 'Marx's own'.²³

The question about the qualitative nature of Marxism leads us to the question of what is the qualitative nature of 'to interpret'. All interpretation is an action in which the subject defines which of the attributes that his/her determinate subjectivity makes him/her discover in the object, are relevant in the determination of the latter's very objectivity and, consequently, of its potentialities. On this basis, the subject thereby confronts the object as if it embodied as its actual necessity that which had been ideally introduced in it by his/her own subjectivity. In other words, the object becomes represented under the appearance of possessing that subjectively-constructed necessity. Whether the interpretation is of a music score, religious texts or -what is our concern- the scientific writings of Marx, such is the subjectively determined essence of interpretation.

Given the interpretive character of Marxism, i.e., given that Marxists define themselves as interpreters of Marx, the fact that they interpret Marx in various ways determines them as different species within the same genus. The plausibility of 'each one their own Marxist' is inherent in the very interpretive essence of Marxism. Hence, it also follows the impossibility of finding an objective criterion capable of drawing the line between 'true' and 'false' Marxists. *The attempt to establish such objective criterion is a contradiction in terms in the face of the interpretive essence of Marxism.* This finding obviously cannot by itself put an end to the mutual accusations of 'false Marxist'. On the contrary, its power resides in explaining why such recriminations have formed, and will continue to form, part of the Marxist subjectivity.

2) Knowledge is the organizational instance of action, or to know is to organize one's own action

Well-known are Engels's citations of Marx's remarks about himself: '...Marx once said to Lafargue: "*Ce qu'il y a de certain c'est que moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste*"'.²⁴ In addition, 'As Marx said of the French Marxists in the late seventies: "*Tout ce que je*

²² Gattungswesen, strictly, but unusual in English, generic being.

²³ 'Marxist theory of value necessarily blocked the understanding of the *Marxian* theory of value'. The interpretative contrast between Marxist and Marxian is widely spread, to the point of thus citing Hans-Georg Backhaus's statement from his *Dialektik der Wertform*, Freiburg, Ca ira Verlag, 1997, p. 69, in the Spanish translation of the text from Elbe, Ingo, *Marx im Westen*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2010, http://enelhorizontedelacrisis.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/ingo-elbe_entre-marx-el-marxismo-y-los-marxismos.pdf. Yet the original uses the term *Marxschen*, which strictly means, 'by Marx'.

²⁴ Engels, Frederick, 'Engels to E. Bernstein, 2/3 November 1882', *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 46, Great Britain, Lawrence & Wishart, 1992, p. 356.

sais, c'est que je ne suis pas Marxist”²⁵ And directly in German, ‘Marx said: “All I know is that I'm not a Marxist”’.²⁶

Were the point to interpret Marx, it could be concluded that his own self-exclusion from Marxism responds only to a formal impossibility: Marxism can interpret Marx, but it would be meaningless to say Marx interprets himself. Alternatively, it could be understood as an expression of Marx’s irony.²⁷ Or a ‘pained lament’ in rejection of Lafargue and his followers’ doctrinary conceptions.²⁸ Or else, as a means of ‘getting rid of’ an ‘aberrant mythology’ about the “creators” of a set of ideological conceptions artificially grouped under the name of “Marxism”, which carries the stigma of ‘obscurantism from its origin’.²⁹

The speculation on how to interpret Marx’s reasons to explicitly reject being a Marxist can go on endlessly. But what does the interpretative character of Marxism really mean from the point of view of our own condition as political subjects willing to take action to change the current social organization? At once, another passage from Marx that focuses on the the nature of interpretation springs to mind: ‘The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways. The point is to *change* it’.³⁰

There is a general agreement among Marxists as to the interpretation of this statement: philosophers are not being criticized for interpreting the world, but for thereafter not acting upon it. In other words, according to this view the point is to interpret the world in order to act on its change on the basis of that interpretation. Nevertheless, let us examine again the nature of an interpretation. Whatever the particular object under consideration, to interpret something is a mode of knowing the potentiality that such object embodies in order for the subject to appropriate it. Interpretation is thus is a form of knowledge. Consequently, in order to resolve the question of the necessity of interpretation as such, we should first inquire into the necessity of knowledge in general.

In any metabolic process, the subject needs to expend its body in order to appropriate objects from its environment, thereby reproducing itself as a subject. The production of knowledge is the moment of this metabolic process in which the subject consumes its body in order to appropriate its own potentiality faced with that offered by the object from its environment. That is, knowledge is the moment of the subject’s self-reproduction process by which it virtually appropriates its condition as such subject in order to regulate the full expenditure of its body that is needed to effectively act upon, and thereby actually appropriate, the object. Hence, knowledge is the process by which the subject organises its own action of effectively appropriating the object in order to satisfy its own purpose. In this condition as a moment of the subject’s bodily expenditure in order to organise its action, knowledge is an inner instance of this action itself, the action in its own unfolding. Therefore, the point is not that the philosophers stopped short of acting once they have interpreted the world. The point lies in the fact that the very form

²⁵ Engels, Frederick, ‘Engels to C. Schmidt, 5 August 1890’, *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 49, Great Britain, Lawrence & Wishart, 2001, p. 7.

²⁶ Engels Frederick, ‘Engels to P. Lafargue, 27 August 1890’, *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, Volume 49, Great Britain, Lawrence & Wishart, 2001, p. 22.

²⁷ Althusser, Louis, ‘Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle’, in Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays*, op. cit., p. 17.

²⁸ Vincent, K. Steven, *Between Marxism and Anarchism: Benoît Malon and French Reformist Socialism*, Berkley, University of California Press, 1992, p. 74.

²⁹ Rubel, Maximilien, ‘La légende de Marx ou Engels fondateur’, in M. Rubel, *Marx critique du marxisme*, Paris, Payot, 1974, pp. 19-21 (my translation).

³⁰ Marx, Karl [1845], 11th Thesis on Feuerbach, ‘Thesen über Feuerbach’, *Marx-Engels Werke*, Band 3, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1978, p. 7 (my translation).

of their knowledge of the world, the fact that they interpret it, has been the necessary form of ruling their action in a manner which makes it impotent to change the world. The question we are facing here does not refer to the content of the interpretation but to the very form of the process of knowledge that results in an interpretation. In other words, it refers to the method of this knowledge.

Conscious knowledge, i.e. a kind of knowledge which knows itself as such -or more simply, *consciousness*- is the form of knowledge generically inherent to human beings. Consciousness is the way each human being carries in his/her person the capacity to rule his/her own individual action as an organ of the process of social metabolism.

Scientific consciousness, or scientific knowledge, is a specifically determined form in which the human subject rules his/her action upon the object. Under this specific modality, the subject aims to virtually appropriate his/her own potentiality faced with that of the object without allowing, in this process, his/her own subjectivity to posit -whether ideally or actually- determinations in the object which are alien to it. Accordingly, it is a form of knowledge through which the subject aims to ideally apprehend the determinations of his/her own subjectivity, as if the latter were an external object itself. Its method, i.e. its form, thus has a twofold objective character. Hence its power to transform reality.

A question arises here as to why, if scientific knowledge is in itself but an inner moment of the self-organisation of human action in the manner most powerful for changing the world, is it conceived in contemporary society as sundered from action: on one hand, there is theory; on the other, practice. At most, the positing of that constitutive separation between theory and practice is then followed by the claim that both should be placed in a correspondingly external relationship whose concrete form can never be clearly defined. In fact, this divorce between scientific knowledge and action underlies the Marxist interpretation which submits that the problem with philosophers is that they know but do not act thereafter.

3) The scientific method of logical representation as a historically specific social relationship, or free scientific consciousness as a form of alienated consciousness in capital.³¹

In the capitalist mode of production, consciousness is determined in a historically specific way. The general social relation, hence one's own social being, confronts individuals as an objectified existence external to their person. This objectified social relation, which is the product of privately-performed social labour, carries the power to set into motion social labour itself with no immediate goal other than its self-multiplication. Such is capital's generic determination. Thus, human subjects are free from relations of personal dependence in the organization of their lives because they are subordinated to the social powers objectified in capital. To put it briefly, free consciousness is the form taken by consciousness alienated in capital.³²

Capital's need for scientific knowledge embodies a contradiction. In order to produce relative surplus value through the system of machinery, capital needs to subordinate production to science. However, inasmuch as scientific knowledge is simply

³¹ Henceforward, this text is based on the chapter named 'Dialectic method. Critique of scientific theory', by Iñigo Carrera, Juan, *El capital: razón histórica, sujeto revolucionario y conciencia* [*Capital: Historical Reason, Revolutionary Subject and Consciousness*], Buenos Aires, Imago Mundi, 2008.

³² See also Iñigo Carrera, Juan, *Conocer el capital hoy. Usar críticamente "El capital"*, [Knowing capital today. Using 'Capital' critically], Buenos Aires, Imago Mundi, 2007, pp. 55-62.

a specific form of the production of surplus value, science has to reproduce the alienation of consciousness in capital. While it must be an objective consciousness, it must also confront itself in a non-objective way, falling prey to the appearance of being an abstractly free consciousness. Therefore, it is a science that needs to present the foundations of its objectivity as originating from outside itself, more specifically, as founded on a philosophical representation that is conceived as emerging from a pure abstractly free subjectivity.

Logical representation is this contradiction resolved, i.e. developed. It represents real connections by taking the forms in which the determinant necessity appears as already realized, as if they did not simultaneously embody a necessity of their own to be realized. On this basis, real existences are defined as incapable of self-movement. Thus, nothing in the real world is conceived as being able to bear within itself the need -i.e. to be the subject- of its own transcendence. It seems that all movement must be bestowed upon them externally. Thus posited as incapable of self-movement, all real forms are represented in thought as if they were abstract immediate affirmations. In this way, free consciousness can only be free consciousness. Likewise, alienated consciousness can be nothing but itself. But there is no way in which free consciousness could be a concrete form of alienated consciousness. At most, according to so-called dialectical representation, both can be put together contradicting each other externally, albeit each one of them as its correspondingly abstract immediate affirmation.

Once real existences are devoid of their necessity, i.e. turned into concepts, the representation of their motion must impose upon them a constructive necessity that relates them externally in thought, so as to build a conceptual system. However, as a means to scientific knowledge, this constructive necessity must represent the outward manifestation of the objective relationships among its objects. The systematization of the said constructive necessity is the logic of representation. The appearance as immediate abstract affirmations effectively corresponds to the expression of the real quantitative determination considered in itself. On this basis, the logical construction starts conceiving of concrete forms as devoid of a necessity to be realized, thereafter representing that necessity through the relations of measure observed among them. Although the very quality of the necessity at stake remains unknown, it is still possible to act upon the relations of measure among such forms, thereby modifying quantities until they correspond to a different qualitative form. Here lies the power of logical representation to transform the existing material conditions as a historical specific form of developing the productive forces of society ruled by the production of relative surplus value. It can measure everything objectively, without inquiring on the objective necessity of anything. In particular, without inquiring on the objective necessity of the knowing subject's own subjectivity.

Nonetheless, the very form of this logical representation does not just hinder the possibility of discovering that the progress in freedom implied in the capacity for action that this mode of knowledge confers, is the necessary form in which alienation self-develops. Its power in this respect takes a concrete form which is of particular interest here. Logical representation starts by conceiving of real concrete forms as abstract immediate affirmations. Therefore, the real necessity that determines them can only be grasped by representation through the greater or smaller degree of recurrence in which such real concrete forms appeared at the beginning. Hence, logical representation itself reaches a logically inevitable conclusion: by virtue of its own constructive character, which is necessarily external to the real necessity which it attempts to appropriate by means of thought, logical representation makes it impossible to attain any certainty of an objective knowledge before acting. Consequently, the conclusion is drawn that logical

representations, hence scientific theories, are indeed different ways of interpreting reality. They are but ideological constructions. And this eventually culminates in the view according to which the claim that all scientific knowledge is ideologically determined by its very nature, is seen as the most genuine expression of a critical consciousness, historically able to overcome its current form.

Such conclusion, stemming from the very form of logical representation whatever its content may be, is not an abstract epistemological question but concretely concerns working class political action. It entails the naturalization of the capitalist mode of production and, thus, a way of depriving the working class of its condition as revolutionary subject. Any interpretation of a real determination is, in itself, the negation of a knowledge that has transcended all appearance. The interpretation of the determination of one's social being is the negation of its full objective knowledge. Yet the full objective knowledge of the human being's determination as an individual organ of the social life process, born by the consciousness of each member of society, is the necessary form taken by the general social relation in a society founded on the general conscious organization of that process. Thus, the claim that objective knowledge is bound to remain an interpretation renders the general conscious organization of social life impossible. In other words, the claim that logical representation is the natural, therefore insurmountable form of scientific knowledge necessarily implies that the supersession of the capitalist mode of production by socialism/communism is impossible. So it is. By its very form - i.e., its method- logical representation is a form of objective consciousness proclaiming 'the end of History'.

Besides agreeing that the point is to interpret the world by positively interpreting Marx in order to change it, Marxists unanimously coincide that all social relations are of a historical nature. Now, we have already stated that consciousness is the form in which each human subject carries in him/herself the capacity to organize his/her own individual action as an organ of the process of social metabolism. Therefore, consciousness is the form in which each person carries his/her general social relation. In short, consciousness is a form of the general social relation. But it is not so abstractly, simply by virtue of its content. Its very form -i.e., its method- is an expression of the general social relation. Therefore, its method is a historical social product itself. According to Marxists, however, all general social relations might be historical, but not quite so the method of scientific knowledge, which is seen as naturally taking the form of logical representation and, in that condition, as one or another way of interpreting the world.

So much so that even someone who asserts that '[concerning Marxism] orthodoxy refers exclusively to *method*',³³ and that 'to grade the methods objectively in terms of their value to knowledge is itself a social and historical problem',³⁴ cannot find any specific about historical materialism, as regards the very form of representation, other than an abstract reference to a 'mediated totality'.³⁵

³³ Lukács, Georg, *History and Class Consciousness*, Cambridge MA., The MIT Press, 1971, p. 1. Notably the English translation does not include the direct reference to Marxism present in the original edition, included here between straight brackets.

³⁴ Lukács, Georg, op. cit., p. 164.

³⁵ Lukács, Georg, op. cit., p. 164. In this manner, Lukács considers that '(t)he goal of these arguments is an *interpretation*, an exposition of Marx's theory *as Marx understood it*' (ibid., p. xliii). On the one hand, he clings to the appearance that 'theory' -i.e., the organizational moment of an action based on logical representation- may have an existence and finality abstracted from that action itself. On the other, that there can be a 'practice' devoid of the concretely determined integrity of its own organization. Subsequently, 'theory' and 'practice' are placed in a relationship of 'correspondence' (or lack of it) out of their mutual exteriority. Only in this way can an action in which the subject affirms his/her concretely

Nevertheless, logical representation is not the *natural* form of scientific method. It is a historically determined form of social relationship in which ideology, thus the negation of objective knowledge, becomes affirmed under the appearance of its opposite, i.e. scientific method.

4) The reproduction of the concrete by means of thought, or dialectical knowledge as a historically specific form of the objective consciousness of the working class as revolutionary subject.

Thus far we have recognized the specific historical determination of logical representation as the necessary form of objective consciousness in the capitalist mode of production. It is the necessary form of the production of relative surplus value which, as such, deprives its subject -more concretely, the working class as a political subject- of the possibility of becoming objectively aware of its powers as historical subject. A question immediately arises: which is, then, the form of objective knowledge inherent to the working class's own historical subjectivity, with the capacity to organize the supersession of the capitalist mode of production?

This kind of knowledge does not come to a halt in the face of the appearance that the concrete existence upon which we intend to act is devoid of any objective potentiality to be actualized. If it lacked this potentiality, any action aimed at transforming the concrete existence under consideration would be utterly impotent. Consequently, our process of cognition must confront this concrete existence by means of an analysis that recognizes it precisely in its condition as an actual existence which, at the same time, embodies a potentiality to be realized. But in order to act upon this potentiality, our knowledge needs to account for its necessity. And the latter resides in the very form as an actual existence of the concrete object we are facing. In turn, this actual existence is the product of the realization of a potentiality which determined it as such actual existence. In other words, our analytical process must pierce deeper into the concrete existence that constituted the starting point in search of the necessity which is already realized in it. The point now is therefore to discover the form in which the initial concrete still existed as a pure potentiality to be actualized. Upon which, we must then account for the necessity of the newly discovered concrete existence.

Schematically put, we faced at the beginning concrete existence A , whose potentiality α could be realized by means of our action. In order to account for the necessity of this potentiality, and thus of our own action, we must account for the necessity of A as an already realized actual existence. We analyse A , and find that it is the concrete form in which concrete existence B had realized its own potentiality β . We must now explain the necessity of this newly discovered potentiality, which we do by moving to the analysis of B as an already realized existence. We thereby arrive at concrete existence C , whose potentiality χ is realized under the concrete form of B . As should be clear from this schematic presentation, the analysis does not consist, as it does according to logical representation, in the abstraction of a recurring attribute. Instead, this dialectical analysis moves through the discovery of the necessity-content that determines each concrete existence which, in turn, can only be done by facing the necessary concrete form of realization of the said content. As a consequence, this form of analysis renews on each turn the inquiry into the necessity of its object, without being able to stop until discovering it under its simplest and most general form of actual existence. The simplicity and

determined social being be represented as if it were organised by a 'false consciousness', and not by his/her necessary concrete form of consciousness (ibid., pp. 224-225).

generality of the latter stems from embodying no potential necessity other than that of self-transcendence or self-actualization, that is, of affirming through self-negation. This analysis thus culminates when facing matter, that is, objective existence, under its simplest and most general form.

So far the course of our process of cognition has proceeded by inquiring into the objective content's necessity, starting with the analysis of the latter's realized form of existence. Conversely, at the juncture in which the analytical process culminated, the only necessity to account for at our disposal is that of the content's equally necessary forms of realization. No sooner than this content realizes its potentiality under its necessary concrete form, the resulting concrete existence confronts us as an actual existence whose necessity we already know, but which, however, embodies a potentiality whose realisation we still need to follow by means of thought. In this way, we move forward from the simplest and most general expression of determination, reproducing by means of thought the realization of that determination under its necessary concrete forms. This *synthetic* process stands in stark contrast with that of logical representation, which revolves around the removal of simplifying assumptions. In order to clarify this point, let us briefly return to our schematic presentation.

At this juncture, we already know the necessity of C as an actual existence which embodies the potentiality χ . Thus, in order to make progress in the knowledge of our action's necessity we must follow the actualization of potentiality χ in its concrete form B , etc. Eventually, this path will lead us to confront concrete existence A again, but now as an existence whose determination we objectively know, given that we have followed the unfolding of its necessity by means of thought. Likewise, we thereby also know A 's necessity in its form of existence as potentiality α , whose realization is still pending. In turn, we can therefore recognize which form of our action can act as a concrete mode of realization of potentiality α , in the transformative shape that we, as determinate subjects, consciously and willingly intend. In other words, the subject of an action organized by means of this kind of knowledge, finds that in order to govern his/her own potentiality vis-à-vis that of his/her object, he/she needs to ideally follow both the object's necessity as well as his/her own through their unfolding. Furthermore, this process cannot come to a halt until reaching the point in which each necessity is respectively revealed in its determination as a potentiality of the object whose necessary concrete form of realization is but the transformative potentiality of the subject. It is a dialectical process of cognition which takes shape by reproducing in thought the motion unfolded in reality by the development of the subject of action's own necessity with respect to that of his/her object.

The dialectical process of individual knowledge that faces its object as an already constitutive portion of social knowledge, cannot take for granted the latter's existence and represent it as the foundation of its own objectivity. Otherwise, it would cease to be a reproduction of the concrete in thought and develop the exteriority of a representation, i.e. it would become an interpretation. Its own form leads it to penetrate by itself in the real concrete it faces in order to, subsequently, ideally reproduce the latter's potentiality, as a mode in which the subject organises his/her action.

Thus, recourse to already existing dialectical knowledge only provides the subject with the possibility of approaching the concrete upon which him/her will take action, equipped with a guideline on the necessity which must be sought in the object under consideration. What was an intricate search with no guide but its own wandering about in the purely original process of cognition, turns into the possibility of directly inquiring if the already-known necessity is at stake in the process of *re-cognition*. It is, however, just a guide. Once the process of recognition discovers in its singular concrete a different necessity from the one to which previously-existing knowledge was pointing to, or

discovers one which transcends the latter, it thereafter itself becomes a purely original process of cognition. Therefore, each individual reproduction of dialectical knowledge inevitably subjects existing social knowledge to criticism, thus making it account for its continuing validity.

In fact, Marx makes our process of recognition confront the specificity of this form of dialectical knowledge at the very onset of the development of scientific knowledge: 'I do not start out from "concepts" [...] What I start out from is the simplest social form in which the labour-product is presented in contemporary society, and this is "the commodity"'.³⁶ Accordingly, as the starting point is a concrete and not its concept, the necessity that guides its unfolding cannot be external to such concrete. And it is Marx too who, in the following remark, makes our process of recognition account for this determination within our object, i.e. within the method of dialectical knowledge: 'Logic [...] is *alienated thinking*, and therefore thinking which abstracts from nature and from real man: *abstract thinking*'.³⁷

Without a concept as starting point and an abstract ideal necessity to follow, Marx places our process of recognition before the need of explaining why, due to this concrete determination, the method of scientific knowledge in question is necessarily *the opposite of the unfolding of a conceptual system*, however dialectic this may be: 'It will be necessary [...] to correct the idealist manner of the presentation, which makes it seem as if it were merely a matter of conceptual determinations and of the dialectic of these concepts. Above all in the case of the phrase: product (or activity) becomes commodity; commodity, exchange-value; exchange-value, money.'³⁸

Likewise, Marx confronts our process of recognition with the need of wondering why *it is not a matter of opposing a scientific unfolding of the concept to dogmatic or doctrinal conceptions*: 'Just as from the dialectic movement of the simple categories is born the group, so from the dialectic movement of the groups is born the series, and from the dialectic movement of the series is born the entire system. Apply this method to the categories of political economy and you have the logic and metaphysics of political economy [...] which makes them look as if they had newly blossomed forth in an intellect of pure reason'.³⁹ And, finally, he makes our process of recognition account for the dialectical method in its unity as the '*reproduction of the concrete by way of thought*',⁴⁰ *in contrast to logical representation and its conceptual systems*.

On advancing in this manner, we recognize *Capital* as the historically-unprecedented unfolding of the reproduction in thought of the necessity that determines the historical *raison d'être* of the capitalist mode of production and, as a consequence, the action of the working class as bearer of its revolutionary supersession through the development of a community of freely associated individuals. In other words, a community of individuals with the power to organise their action for objectively knowing their own determinations beyond any apparent exteriority. Marx has produced this unfolding by giving this original knowledge an objective social existence suitable for appropriation by others, i.e. by giving it the form of a published text.

After *Capital*, all reproduction in thought that moves through the determinations unfolded in it, becomes thus determined as a process of recognition from a social point

³⁶ Marx, Karl [1879-80], 'Notes on Adolph Wagner', *Later Political Writings*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 241.

³⁷ Marx, Karl [1844], 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts 1844' in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Volume 3, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975, p. 330.

³⁸ Marx, Karl [1857-8], *Grundrisse*, London: Penguin Books, 1993, p. 151.

³⁹ Marx, Karl [1847], 'The Poverty of Philosophy', in *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, Volume 6, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976, p. 165.

⁴⁰ Marx, Karl [1857-8], *Grundrisse*, op. cit., p. 101.

of view. But it is not a matter of *interpreting* it. It is truly about confronting the real forms of capital ourselves, in order to attain our potentiality as historical subjects on reproducing such forms by means of thought. However, we can undertake the task with the enhanced power we acquire with the availability of the ideal reproduction of those real forms as already developed in *Capital*. In this sense, we have a two-fold advantage compared to Marx. First, we have the product of Marx's social labour to empower our progress towards the free organization of the process of human life. Second, we face the immediate object of our action, capital, under much more developed historical forms than those that Marx confronted in his time. Concrete forms that existed as barely emerging potentialities then, lie now before us in their full actuality. All of which leaves its mark on our responsibility as historical subjects, whose action towards superseding the capitalist mode of production involves, as a necessary inner moment, the collective production of a consciousness capable of organising our own action with the objective power of dialectical knowledge.

If in the course of reproducing by means of thought of a concrete upon which we are taking action we confront different forms from those faced by other subjects in their own inquiry, our reproduction will cease to be a process of recognition from a social point of view to become an original process of cognition. Let us take, in this sense, the specific case of a divergence from the forms discovered by Marx himself. At this stage of our discussion, it should be clear that at stake here is not the organization of our action as organs of the process of social life by means of one or another way of *interpreting* Marx. Thus, insofar as the question actually is that of acting on the basis of an objective knowledge of our own determinations with the potentiality to transcend the appearances which characterise all interpretation, we shall not undertake an ideal *representation* of the concrete. In line with the interpretive character of such representation, the difference between one's own claim and Marx's writings, even if contradicting the latter openly, are settled by maintaining that the former is in fact 'what Marx really meant'. Subsequently, the next step is to propose a certain organization of social action founded on such interpretation. However, in all this it is never acknowledged that the proposed course of action is founded on its advocate's own ideal construction. Instead, it is presented as if it had entered the realm of theoretical representations under the aegis of the *true* Marx, i.e. as *Marxist theory* or simply *Marxism*.⁴¹

By contrast, in its self-recognition as the organizational instance of its subject's action, the reproduction of the concrete by means of thought cannot lay claim to the ability to speak in someone else's name, even if the concrete forms it has gone through in its development are identical to those already presented by this other individual. Needless to say, the same goes for non-identical forms. Hence, instead of speculating on the hermeneutics or philological readings of *Capital*, we might as well summarize the point by stating that 'what Marx found on his scientific development was Marx's problem; what we encounter on facing our real concrete, whether the same as Marx's or not, that is our problem'.⁴²

Finally, and by way of concluding remark: Why, when we undertake this path and objectively recognize that the capitalist mode of production means exploitation and

⁴¹ Particularly notorious examples of this practice are *Ricardian Marxism's* reduction of value to its content, or the reduction of value to its form, as done by *Rubinist Marxism*. Both reductions lead to the representation of human freedom as a natural attribute thus avoiding its recognition as a historical social relation born out of the production of commodities as a necessary form of the consciousness alienated in them. And both reductions are the grounds for the inversion of the *critique of political economy* into *Marxist political economy* precisely insofar as the naturalization of an abstractly free individual is intrinsic to political economy (See Iñigo Carrera, Juan, *Conocer el capital hoy...*, op. cit., pp. 107-187).

⁴² Iñigo Carrera, Juan, *Conocer el capital hoy...*, op. cit., p. 8.

alienation of the worker as an attribute of capital, should we degrade that objective knowledge by referring to it under name types designating interpretations of reality? Is it not the case that, when we state with certainty that the Earth revolves around the Sun, or that blood circulates through arteries and veins, we do it on the basis of objective knowledge and not because we are Copernican or Harveyist?

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