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Das Kapital One Hundred Fifty Year Later

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Both the admirers and critics of *Das Kapital* agree that *it* was one of the most influential books of the 19th century. As Nancy Holmstrom said, it is "an unsurpassed explanation of the very specific nature and development of the system of capitalism." 150 years later, people believe that it still provides a relevant and cogent analysis of contemporary capitalism, notwithstanding the radical changes into the now seamless, globalized market, legitimated by neoliberalism which celebrates "prosperity" while rendering dysfunctions opaque. Most wealth, not value per se, is increasingly based on financialization e.g. mergers and acquisitions, hedge funds etc. speculative "casino capitalism," that together with digitalization and advanced technologies have spurred the rapid growth of a transnational capitalist class. The ascent of "free market" ideologies, the privatization of services, the retrenchments of benefits, the relaxation of regulations, and the destruction of union movements have led to an astronomical rise of wealth. Nevertheless, most of that wealth has been appropriated by a small number of capitalist elites; the majority of workers have generally faced wage/income stagnation, decline in employment. This has often been called the "hollowing out" of the middle classes as jobs disappear and incomes decline. For many younger workers entering the workforces, or older workers whose job skills were acquired several decades ago, the plight is growing precarity, contingency, resulting in insecurity and anxiety along with economic hardships.

Mainstream economists, typically intellectuals allied with the ruling classes, have shown little concern with the dysfunctions of capital inequality, social justice, fair trade or rising poverty. Thomas Piketty (2014) attempted to sound a warning to his fellow economists of the growing disparity between incomes based on wages, versus investments; this inequality has grown considerably worse over the last few years and potentially dangerous. But he offered little to ameliorate this growing disparity other than a global tax on investment incomes.[1] A far more cogent analysis of stagnation, growing inequality and crises has come from scholars informed by *Das Kapital*. The foundations for understanding contemporary capitalism were clearly laid out at a time in which most societies were still rural, industrialization nascent, while banking and finance played a subordinate role.

One could argue, that the central concept linking many aspects of *Das Kapital* was the organization of commodity production, distribution and exchange in which labor power, qua commodity enabled the transformation of raw materials into commodities produced for the market, sold for "exchange value" with the expectation that it would be purchased by a consumer for his/her personal use. Marx exposed the mystifications and illusions of capitalist exploitation, degradation, and dehumanization of laborious toils in the "satanic mills" of industrial capitalism. The workers became alienated, estranged and objectified, devoid of communities, bereft of their species being. With the domination by the capitalist system their labor produced, the worker was rendered powerless, instead of the possibility of creative self-

realization, they became dehumanized objects without meaning, devoid of human dignity. Capitalist production made the social relationships of commodity production c appear as "things. But this social relationship of production was concealed in which the commodity produced was seen as independent of the social relationships of its production – this was what Marx called "commodity fetishism." Capitalism thus created monstrosities of selfhood. In the course of the "working day," the worker's labor increased the "exchange values" of the commodities they produced/transformed, but they were not compensated for the "surplus value," they created. Such commodity production based on wage labor was the basis of capitalist wealth and the proletarian poverty which in turn was the basis of class conflict that would foster social mobilization and indeed revolution. For Marx, the contradictions of capital would lead to its demise. Yet the capitalist system has not only endured, but now dominates most of the world. Can a book written 150 years ago remain relevant? Progressives, indeed Marxist scholars all over the world have held a number of meetings and symposia to attempt to appraise the enduring significance and continued utility of *Das Kapital*.

There are indeed a number of ways to highlight the essential insights of *Das Kapital*, we might start with the nature of commodity production as the central concept linking many aspects of beginning with the organization of commodity production, distribution and exchange which leads us to consider the importance of value (use value, exchange value, surplus value and abstract value). Or perhaps we might consider class dynamics, indeed conflict between workers who sold their labor power to produced goods or provided services in which the surplus value of their work was appropriated by the capitalists and embedded within the "exchange value" of commodities, that is to say the labor congealed within commodities was resold at a higher price but the worker received quite little for his or her efforts.

For Marx the history of all hitherto societies has been a history of class conflict. What is unique about contemporary capitalism, was that capital itself was not simply a resource such as money, as is often assumed, *but a social relationship of production between social classes; a "free" worker sells his labor power to a capitalist as a commodity to produce commodities for the market, the worker has no claims, upon the product, whilst the capitalist eventually resells the labor power embedded in the commodity***–**but at a much higher price that was paid to the laborer for creating its added value. For Marx capitalism was inherently based on contradictions, the dynamics of its exploitation X told by its growth imperatives were such that the ruling classes grew wealthier over time, while at the same time, the inequality would get greater and greater

Further, as Marx showed in his analyses of capitalist crises, from overproduction, to the falling rates of profit, it was an inherently unstable system and is growing inequality made its long-term reproduction problematic. Marx clearly anticipated that the growing concentration of industrial workers, facing onerous conditions, would move from an agglomerated group, a class in itself, to a class conscious of itself only as a class but as the fundamental basis of capitalist exploitation. As the workers began to understand that relationship, as they understood their own power, this would translate into mobilizations for the transcendence of capital. But Marx really hadn't anticipated mass consumption, mass media, and rising wages that enabled

consumerism that would together to shroud the vast adversities of capital and sustain its general growth at least for most of the 20th century. As global capital became increasingly based on financialization and speculation, the ingredients fell into place that led to the implosion of 2008. Since then, the wealth of the ruling classes has skyrocketed while the average family is off today. Throughout the industrial societies, we've seen growing classes of precarious workers, from migrants to older working-class folks without contemporary digital/computer skills and recent college graduates unable to find jobs that promise a stable career, many have taken to a variety of "gig jobs" from dog walking, to rideshare services to handyman services.

To what extent does *Das Kapital* help us understand the economic conditions of today and does its basic understandings of capital remain relevant? To deal with such questions a number of American Marxist scholars came together at the Left Forum in June 2017 and presented two panels dealing with such questions. Both sessions were SRO and the discussions lively. With such a reception, the organizer of the sessions, Lauren Langman joined with Michael Thompson, editor of Logos, in order to publish the papers in this special issue In addition to the original participants, there were contributions by Richard Wolff ,Tony Smith and Daniel Krier.

Notes

[1] See Langman, L., and D. Smith, *Inequality in the 21st Century: Marx , Piketty and Beyond*. Leiden: Brill, 2018

Marx’s Concept of Class

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Concepts of Class

The concept of class poses profound problems for theory and practice. This is true across the academic disciplines and in the confused incoherence around “class issues” when concepts of class surface in economic, political and cultural discourses.

Since 1945, the Cold War and its lingering effects prevented many discussions of social trends, events, and crises from considering their class causes, components or consequences. For many, loyalty to capitalism and/or hostility toward its critics took the form of refusing to use concepts like class. The very idea of class when applied to the US or advanced capitalism anywhere was rejected with claims that it was outdated (since modern capitalism homogenized nearly everyone into a vast “middle class”).[i] Many dismissed class analysis because it was “tainted by a lack of objectivity” (a quality that they located in the concepts they used instead of class). Only quite recently, following the 2008 global capitalist crash, have concepts of class resurfaced in many minds and therefore in much public discussion.

What might be called the return of the repressed discourse of class is problematic because there is no one concept of class. The word, like the concept, entails multiple, significantly different meanings among those who think and communicate using it. Only a small minority of users explicitly identifies and justifies which meaning it prefers. Most users think, speak, and write as if the particular concept of class they use is the universally agreed concept. Because that is not the case, discourses using class categories are often confused and misunderstood. When the relation between class and social change arises as a practical matter, the problematic nature of class as a concept becomes historically urgent.

At least as far back as Ancient Greece people analyzed their own and others’ societies by dividing populations into social sub-groups according to their wealth and/or incomes. Much as they classified populations for some purposes according to gender, height, weight, and age, for other purposes, such as understanding social conflicts, they could and did classify by wealth or income. Classes were the nouns applied to the subgroups derived from applying the verb *to classify*. Economic classifications generated the rich and the poor, the two polar classes. It was then a small step to subdivide populations into further subgroups located in the middle between the rich and the poor. Such subgroups – middle classes – held more wealth and/or received more income than those designated poor but less than those designated rich. Classifications into rich and poor presupposed some notion of private property to provide a boundary between one person’s wealth and/or income and another’s (much as age classifications presupposed some accepted way to measure and thereby differentiate each

individual's age).

Ever since ancient Greece, many people analyzing societies have used that concept of class *defined in terms of owned wealth and/or income* to think, speak or write about social problems and to undertake actions for their solutions. Thus, for example, citizens, leaders, observers, and so on might say that a society suffers from tension and conflict because of its particular divisions among rich, poor, and middle classes. They might offer solutions entailing changed modes of distributing wealth and/or income or perhaps redistributing them after an initial distribution. Their class analyses and class-focused solutions – defined in terms of class qua property – represented what they believed to be useful, effective contributions to social betterment.

Another, equally ancient but quite different concept of class also still in wide usage defines it *in terms of power wielded over others.* People using this concept classify populations they scrutinize into those who give orders to others and those who take and follow orders from others. One is the powerful class while the other is the powerless class: the ruling class and the ruled. As with the property-based concepts of class, those who used power definitions of class also interspersed middle classes, members of society who both took orders from some while giving orders to others. Now as for thousands of years many people make sense of the structures, changes, problems and solutions for societies by examining what they take to be their class structures: their organization into subgroups with more or less power over one another.

With two different concepts of class, class analyses could and did yield different understandings when applied to actual societies. Classifying populations according to who has and does not have property, including middle classes, yields different subgroupings from those resulting from classifications according to the power wielded (or not) over others. The social distribution of property is not identical to the social distribution of power. In any society, the individuals and subgroups who own the most property may or may not wield the most power, and so on. When thinkers and writers used the same term, "class analysis," while defining it differently, confusion could set in. When they were unaware of definitional differences and so did not acknowledge, identify or justify which definition they used, confusion was certain.

Periodically in human history, social revolutions took "class" seriously. Revolutionaries then undertook to change a society's class structure as a key, necessary component of the social transformation they sought. These transformations can be summarized as establishing equality and democracy. Revolutionaries committed to class-qua-property concepts focused on redistributing wealth and income or reorganizing how they were distributed initially. Their goal was a much more egalitarian distribution of wealth and income. In contrast, revolutionaries who conceived of class in terms of power rather than property focused on redistributing power and/or reorganizing how power was distributed initially. Their goal was a much more democratic distribution of power.

Not infrequently, class analyses worked with both property and power concepts although

rarely with much self-consciousness about the problems raised by two different definitions. So, for example, property theorists of class made the simplifying presumption that altering the social distribution of wealth and income would necessarily and correspondingly alter the social distribution of power. Similarly, power theorists of class could run the same determinist argument in the reverse direction: changing power distributions would necessarily alter the social distribution of property. Sometimes, analyses and activists made another, related and simplifying assumption, namely that those with wealth would acquire power too and those lacking either would likely lack the other too.

Across thousands of years of European history, class analyses rose and fell in their popularity and use for understanding social structures, changes, problems and solutions. Likewise the two basic definitions of class alternated in terms of which prevailed or, sometimes, how they were combined into composite definitions. Yet a certain insufficiency and failure dogged the class revolutions that punctuated European history even when they "succeeded" in the sense that revolutionary forces defeated those who wished to avoid revolutionary change.

Despite the progress they achieved, their goals of egalitarian distributions of wealth and income and/or democratic distributions of power were never reached. For many, those failures provoked a fatalism that held the goals themselves as beyond human reach. Others turned to question the thinking that had guided the revolutions. They asked whether something had been missed or misunderstood about social structures, changes, problems and solutions by successive revolutionary movements. If rectified, might that something enable revolutionaries finally to achieve their twin goals of equality and democracy?

Marx's New Concept of Class

Marx was one who asked such questions. In producing his answer Marx generated another new and different concept of class even as he also made frequent use of the ancient property and power concepts of class inherited from previous generations of revolutionaries. Marx believed that those generations had not achieved their basic goals of equality and democracy because they had not understood a basic process in all societies that had worked to undermine their revolutionary projects. Because they did not understand and transform that process, their revolutionary projects failed. Even when their revolutions did achieve significant and socially progressive changes in property and power distributions, those did not progress to the levels of equality and democracy they had hoped and worked for. Often, the progressive changes they achieved could not be sustained beyond a few years. For Marx, the personally transformative example of such limitedly successful revolutions was the French Revolution. It overthrew feudalism but its goals of *liberte, egalite, fraternite* were not achieved.

Marx's *Capital* presented his analysis of the missed social process – basically the production and distribution of the surplus as we shall show below. *Capital* explained how this class-qua-surplus process helped to shape the social distributions of property and power. The failures of previous revolutions (such as the French) to achieve genuine, sustainable equality and democracy (*liberte, egalite, fraternite*) emerge as consequences of their not recognizing,

understanding, and transforming this class-qua-surplus process.

Even though Marx devoted much of his life to the research and exposition of his new surplus conception of class, many readers and followers since have missed the originality of his new and different concept. They read his work instead as if it were an important new application of the old property and power concepts of class to analyzing capitalism. That is indeed one of Marx's contributions. However, to see only that misses the crucial importance of his new class-qua-surplus concept both to understanding and getting beyond capitalism. Marx's focus on the surplus thus carries over into our time too as a key component of critical social analysis demanding recognition and application.

In *Capital, volume 1*, Marx identifies his new notion of class early. He defines it as a distinct social process that occurs together with the physical labor process within the activity known as production. In production, workers labor – men and women use brains and muscle – to transform naturally occurring objects into useful products. They labor with raw material inputs, tools, equipment, buildings, etc. that constitute their means of production. But the labor process is not the same thing as the class process. The class process refers to a different connection among the people engaged in production than the labor connection where they collaborate to produce a specific product.

Class, for Marx, refers to how, in production, a surplus gets produced. All human societies produce such surpluses. However, societies differ in how they organize the production and distribution of this surplus. In Marx's view, there have always been subsets of populations in communities (from families through villages to whole nations) that have performed labor in the production of goods and services. Those subsets have always produced more output than they themselves consumed: the "surplus" output or simply the surplus. That surplus has then been distributed to other persons inside or outside the community.

The class structure of a community or society is then its distinct organization of the production and distribution of surplus. Specific individuals are designated, consciously or unconsciously, by custom or deliberation, to produce the surplus. Those same or other individuals receive the surplus and distribute some or all of it to still others whom we can call recipients of distributed shares of the surplus. Each community or society designates which individuals can receive distributed shares of the surplus, consume them, and thereby live without themselves doing any work to produce the surplus. Likewise, other people are designated to do work that does not itself produce a surplus but rather provides conditions for the labor of the workers who do produce the surplus. Such *enablers* of surplus production by others need to receive a distribution of the surplus produced by those others: that distribution provides the enablers with their own consumption and with the means for performing their enabling functions. For example, a person who keeps the necessary records of what surplus-producing laborers do is such an enabler; so too are the persons who clean up residues of production, who make sure the surplus-producers keep to their tasks, etc. Marx differentiated between "productive" workers (those who directly produced surpluses) and "unproductive" workers (the enablers who provided needed conditions for surplus production). Both productive and unproductive

workers were needed for any class structure to exist and persist, but their relationship to surplus production was crucially different. One kind of worker produced the surplus while the other, the enabler, lived off distributions of that surplus.

The earlier pre-Marxian concepts of class (qua property or power distributions) had no place for such a surplus concept of class. When those pre-Marxian concepts were applied to understand and/or transform societies, the results were class analyses that did not recognize, know, or use the surplus concept. Their social analyses and prescriptions did not take into account how the societies they scrutinized organized the production and distribution of surpluses. They were, in effect, blind to the existence and social effects of society's class (qua surplus) structure.

Marx's *Capital* introduced the class-qua-surplus analysis and advocated using it to transform society. He did so in the belief that past revolutionary projects for social equality, democracy, and liberty, limited to pre-Marxian concepts of class, could have done better and gone further had they also understood and applied the class qua surplus concept. Marx saw his own contribution to theory and revolutionary practice as precisely enabling that application.

Such application meant that revolutionary projects had henceforth to address and change how society organized the production and distribution of its surpluses. If the society's class-qua-surplus structure were not transformed, then even the egalitarian, democratic and other reforms won by revolutionary struggles would be insecure, would eventually be undone by the unchanged class-qua-surplus structure. To cite a modern example, the transformations of property and power distributions achieved by the 1917 revolution in Russia were eventually undone by the unchanged organization of the surplus across the production sites of the Soviet Union.[ii]

In *Capital*, Marx spelled out the change he sought in societies' class-qua-surplus structures, the change required to surpass the limitations of past revolutions. That change was from the past's exploitative class-qua-surplus class structures to the non-exploitative class structure Marx advocated. By exploitative, Marx explicitly explained a class structure in which the people who produced the surplus were different from the people who appropriated and distributed that surplus. In slave economic systems, slaves produced while masters appropriated and distributed surpluses. In feudal economic systems, serfs produced the surpluses appropriated and distributed by lords.

Marx's *Capital* explained that in capitalism, laborers in production – those whose brains and muscles directly converted raw materials and means of production into finished products – thereby added value to the values embodied in the raw materials and means of production used up in production. The "value added" by the direct laborers plus the value of used-up means of production equal the value of the output. "Value" is the metric because, in the capitalist economy Marx was analyzing, products took the form of commodities, products that passed from their producers to their consumers by means of exchanges in markets. Exchange is what attaches value to the products of human labor if and when they pass from their producers to

their consumers by way of market exchange.

For Marx and his value theory, the value of the capitalist product is simply the addition of two components. The first is the value carried over to – embodied in – the finished product in so far as production used up a portion of the raw materials, tools and equipment, and relocated them in the product. The second component is the value added by living labor as it worked on and transformed those raw materials by means of those tools and equipment. Exploitation exists in capitalism, Marx showed, because the value added by direct laborers in their labor activity during production generally exceeds the value paid to the direct laborers for performing their labor activity.

In other words, a portion of the value added by labor in production is a surplus: the excess of the value added by their labor over the value of the wage they receive. The capitalist who appropriates that surplus is the employer in the capitalist system: a person or persons other than the direct laborers who produce the surplus. The capitalist employer also distributes that surplus after having appropriated it. Thus the capitalist exploits the direct laborer (proletarian) much as the master exploited the slave and the lord the serf.

Capitalism did NOT liberate slaves and serfs from exploitation. Rather, it merely changed the form, the particular social organization of continuing exploitation.

Equality and Democracy

Capitalist exploitation negates social movements toward egalitarianism. The exploitation makes production a conflict-ridden tension between the worker and the employer. The former's self-interest leads to demands for higher wages – to enhance and secure his/her standard of living – in exchange for the labor performed. The employer's self-interest seeks to extract more surplus from the direct laborers and pay the least possible to enablers. Usually, the disparity in resources brought to their conflicts favors the employers over the employees. Surpluses appropriated by employers tend to rise faster than real wages. This growing inequality ramifies throughout capitalist societies undermining whatever egalitarian tendencies might characterize their political and cultural aspects.

Of course, capitalism's inequality tendencies can interact with its other dimensions (e.g. capitalist cycles) to provoke political and cultural backlashes that reverse capitalism's inequalities. The reversals prove temporary because they are undone (reversal of the reversal) by capitalism's underlying inequality tendencies. Thus, for example, the US left in the 1930s (CIO unionization drives, large socialist and communist parties) forced a reversal of the extreme inequality built up in US capitalism before 1929. Although that reversal lasted to the 1970s, it was then undone by the reassertion of capitalism's usual underlying inequality tendencies. They reasserted themselves precisely because the underlying, exploitative class-qua-surplus structure of US capitalism had not been transformed by the left's social struggles and reforms of the 1930s or thereafter.

Similarly, capitalism's organization of the surplus directly contradicts democracy and

undermines it too when, temporarily, democratic moments occur. The direct contradiction lies in the organization of typical capitalist enterprises, large, medium and small. A tiny subset of the persons engaged in and by the enterprise usually owns and directs the enterprise: in corporations, for example, this subset comprises major shareholders and the boards of directors they select. The tiny subset can and virtually always does exclude the mass of employees from any participation in ownership or direction of the enterprise. The democratic logic – that persons affected by decisions have the right to participate in making them – is denied entry into the capitalist enterprise. In the market, one-person, one vote is displaced in favor of the altogether different one dollar, one vote. In the US, the democracy celebrated in the political sphere is banished from the economic sphere of social life.

This absence of democracy from the workplace – where adults spend most of their waking lives – undermines the capacity as well as the desire of individuals for democracy in politics. At the same time, the inequalities generated by capitalism provide employers with the disproportionate financial resources to shape politics and culture to their liking as opposed to that of the largely excluded masses. The results in the US are democratic political *forms* but little real democratic *content* of politics. Periodic upsurges of democratic demands and even the occasional achievement of democratic reforms fail to last because the unchanged class-qua-surplus structure of capitalism works systemically against them.

Across *Capital*, Marx elaborates his class analysis of capitalism. In the first volume, his goal is to show where capitalism's production and appropriation of surplus occur. In *Capital's* second and third volumes, Marx explores how capitalists distribute the surpluses they appropriate from direct laborers. The surplus distributions are aimed primarily to secure certain conditions for the continuation of class exploitation, to provide means of production and consumption to the range of enablers of capitalist exploitation, its unproductive workers. These include supervisors who make sure direct laborers do their work, security guards who protect the enterprise, and an army of other enablers such as the secretaries, clerks, various managers, sales and purchasing personnel. This argument is spelled out in detail for the capitalist class process elsewhere.[iii]

Capitalist production of the surplus positions and sustains the producing worker and the appropriating capitalist as its two poles. Capitalists' surplus distributions to unproductive enablers thereby secure their capitalist positions as the surplus appropriators and distributors. The production of the surplus enables its distribution and vice-versa. For Marx, the class structure of the capitalist system refers to its unique organization of the production and distribution of the surplus.

Of course, the class structure's reproduction is not assured or self-contained; it depends on all the myriad dimensions of its environment. The appropriators' surplus distributions merely try to secure the class structure's conditions of existence and reproduction by shaping as many of those dimensions as it can identify with the surplus available for those distributions. The surplus distributions may or may not succeed. Capitalists may not appropriate enough surplus to distributed the requisite quantities. There may be enough surplus, but the appropriators

may divert too much to their own consumption or too little to secure one or another particular condition of existence of the class structure. How the surplus is distributed will shape the evolution of the class structure and thus the amount of surplus it generates. A class structure's continual changes can and eventually do include its transformation into another, different class structure.

The Class Structure of Communism

Aspects of the capitalist class structure and of class-qua-surplus as a concept become clearer when applied to a non-capitalist class structure and, in particular, to the communist class structure as envisioned by Marx. The difference between the two class structures is simple and straightforward. Communist class structures are defined by the absence of exploitation. The producers and appropriators of the surplus in a communist class structure are the exact same people, whereas in the capitalist class structure, they are different people. In an enterprise whose class structure is communist, the productive laborers collectively are also the appropriators of the surpluses they produce. It then follows that they are also the surplus distributors. The productive laborers displace the capitalists who literally disappear from the communist class structure.

Of course, such communist producers/appropriators/distributors of the surplus need to sustain the enablers of the production of the communist surplus, the "unproductive" workers in communist enterprises. The distribution of communist surpluses defines two positions at its poles: the "productive workers" who are also the appropriators and distributors of the surplus, at one pole, and the recipients of distributed shares of the surplus, the "unproductive" workers at the other pole. As in all class structures, the process of distributing the surplus is the object of struggle between distributors and recipients. However, the key difference separating the communist from all exploitative class structures is this: in the latter, the exploiting class interposes itself between the productive and unproductive laborers. In the communist class structured enterprise, the productive and unproductive laborers negotiate directly with one another to determine together both the size and the distribution of the surplus.

The significance of this difference is huge. First, capitalists are in the position of distributing portions of the surplus to themselves (as owners, share holders and/or as top managerial executives). These portions are often and for obvious reasons large. The deep tendency toward inequality exhibited in and by capitalism is closely linked to who distributes its surpluses. The small minority that decides the distribution in capitalism serves itself and thereby worsens inequalities over time. The distribution of the surplus decided by productive and unproductive workers democratically acting together and without any capitalist would be much less unequal.

Second, consider the example of a technical change in the methods of production available to an enterprise, a change that both enhances profitability but is also ecologically dangerous or toxic. The capitalist enterprise will likely choose to implement the change because the extra profit means more to distribute. The capitalists making the decision are few and can finance escapes from the toxic consequences in terms of their living locations etc. The communist

enterprise will likely choose otherwise, since its collective decision-makers (productive and unproductive workers deciding democratically) will weigh the health risks and costs that they, their families and neighbors will have to bear if the toxic technology is used. One cause of ecological damage would be reduced by a class change from capitalist to communist class structures in enterprises.

Third, consider the example of moving production from a relatively high-wage to a relatively low-wage location. Capitalists have been doing that in large numbers for nearly half a century, leaving north America, western Europe and Japan for China, India, Brazil and so on. Capitalists made those choices for their enterprises because relocation enabled them to extract more surpluses. They used those additional surpluses to better secure their conditions of existence but also to pay themselves higher salaries, dividends, etc. Had their enterprises been instead organized as communist class structured enterprises, their decision-makers (their productive and unproductive workers together democratically) would have evaluated relocation differently in terms of its impacts on them and their communities. The alternative class structures with their different sets of decision-makers would have identified, counted, and weighed costs and benefits differently and so reached different conclusions and decisions. The massive relocation of capitalist enterprises since the 1960s would have been far, far less of a social phenomenon had communist class structures of enterprise played larger roles in our economies.

On a more general level, inside a capitalist enterprise, its governance – the process of defining and choosing among alternative courses of action in and by the enterprise – is undemocratic. In the corporate form of capitalist enterprise – the major form in our time – the board of directors makes the basic decisions of what, how and where to produce and what to do with the net revenues and the profits. Boards of directors typically include 12-20 individuals elected by shareholders, or more accurately, by the few major shareholders (since elections assign one vote per share and share ownership is highly concentrated). The hundreds or thousands of corporate employees – the vast majority of persons working in those enterprises – are excluded from participating in the decisions made by the board of directors. Those employees depend on and live with the consequences of board decisions but have no role in making them.

The opposite is the case in a communist enterprise. There, the combined productive and unproductive workers collectively and democratically make the decisions assigned to boards of directors in capitalist enterprises. The democracy of enterprise governance intrinsic to the communist class structure supports and reinforces democracy in the governance of residence communities. Democratizing the enterprise – in class terms, converting it from a capitalist into a communist class structure – is a way of converting formal into real political democracy.

The Varieties of Class Analyses

The basic logic of class-qua-surplus analysis entails asking the same basic question wherever and whenever production occurs in any society. If, at any site in a society, human beings are using their brains and muscles to transform objects given in nature into what they or other human beings deem useful objects, then production is happening there. The following question

then applies: is a surplus being produced at that site? If the answer is yes, class analysis follows. That is, the specifics of the production and distribution of the surplus are investigated to determine how they participate in shaping the economic, political and cultural aspects of the society in which the production occurs.

We can answer the class analytical question with a simple "no." Production can occur without the production of a surplus being involved. When someone walks through the woods and carves a piece of wood into a figurine the carver gives to a nearby child, no surplus – and hence no class process – is involved. If, however, the carving in the woods is by a wage-receiving carver with a knife and raw wood provided by an employer who receives and sells the resulting figurines, a surplus is involved. Class analysis does then apply.

So far – and in the tradition of most economic analyses – we have limited discussion to the enterprise as the social site of production. Now we can relax that limit. Production occurs at other social sites such as the household and the state, among others.

In households over the last two centuries, as capitalist class structures have spread across enterprises, capitalist class structures have NOT similarly prevailed among households. Households certainly are sites of production. Raw foods are transformed by labor, tools and equipment into finished meals; unclean rooms and clothing are transformed into neat and clean residences and outfits, and so on. Moreover, the direct performers of the labors of cooking, cleaning, etc. produce more output than they themselves consume, a household surplus. It is possible to identify the appropriator and distributor of that surplus and hence to pinpoint the class structure of the household.

Across most US history, the traditional household displayed an internal class structure quite different from the capitalist class structure of most enterprises. Inside households, no wages or market exchanges or profits existed. Rather, elaborate customs and traditions, often sanctified by religious doctrines and rituals, specified who produced the surplus, when, where and how, and likewise who appropriated it. Traditional rules of home and family life likewise governed to whom (to which enablers) the appropriator distributed what portions of the household surplus to secure the conditions of existence of the household's class structure.

In traditional US households, the adult wife produced the household surplus, often helped by children once they were old enough to work. The husband appropriated the surplus and distributed it to others inside and outside the household in ways likewise sanctioned by traditions and religions. In these households, the surplus-performing wives were not the slaves of their husbands, nor their wage-earning employees. The wives were not equals in a communist class structured household sharing the surplus producing but also surplus appropriating positions inside households. Rather, the typical household class structure in the US most resembles the feudal class structure of medieval Europe.[iv]

It follows that modern "capitalist societies" have a much more complex and variegated class structure than economic analyses and the adjective "capitalist" have recognized. Their

households have often been the sites of very different, non-capitalist class structures. That means that individuals in those societies were engaged with, participated in and were shaped in part by multiple, different class structures. Class-qua-surplus analysis generates a much more complex, nuanced analysis of individuals and groups than merely locating them in relation to property and power distributions or merely locating them in relation to the particular surplus organization of enterprises.

The state may also be a social site of production and class. This occurs, for example, if and when officials of the state establish – as their state function – productive organizations in which surplus are produced, appropriated and distributed. Popular language has often depicted these organizations as "state enterprises" precisely because they do what enterprises outside the state do. Thus state enterprises have become differentiated from "private" enterprises in recognitions of what we here describe as production and class occurring in the state. In the US, for example, state governments own and operate state institutions of higher learning that produce and sell college and university credits to students; the federal government sells postal services and train services to the public; local governments sell transport services; and so on. In such state institutions, surpluses get produced, appropriated, and distributed. Such institutions include productive and unproductive workers. Unlike households, the class structures at the site of the state – in state enterprises – do largely replicate the capitalist structure found in private enterprises.

Class-qua-surplus analyses of the state have some provocative implications. For example, increasing the size and productive role of state enterprises – say at the expense of private enterprises – has nothing to do with any change in the society's class structure from capitalist to something non-capitalist, say "socialist." Such an argument misunderstands what class means or defines it in terms other than the organization of the surplus. Government enterprises can, and in modern times often have been, capitalist in their class structures just as private enterprises have been. More government and less private production merely changes the site of capitalist class structures; it has not been a displacement of capitalism for an alternative system – at least so far as class–qua-surplus is concerned.

Only if the state enterprises were organized to produce and distribute surpluses in a different, non-capitalist way would the shift from private to state production also entail a shift from capitalist to non-capitalist class structures of production. If state enterprises were required to operate as communist class structures, for example, such that their productive workers would also function, collectively and democratically, as appropriators and distributors of the surpluses they produced, then the shift from private to state would coincide with a shift from capitalist to communist class structures of production.

Class and Income

The class-qua-surplus analysis of income is simple and straightforward. An individual obtains income by being a performer of surplus labor (and therefore paid a wage or salary for that performance) and/or by being a recipient of distributions of the surplus. The capitalist is merely

a middle-person, someone who appropriates the surplus and then distributes it. Little income accrues to the capitalist per se (indeed, corporate boards of directors typically receive little pay for their services on such boards).

Productive workers who produce surpluses get wages – the non-surplus portion of the value added by their labor. Unproductive laborers also get wages, but those are portions of the surplus appropriated by capitalists from productive laborers. Capitalists then distribute such portions to unproductive laborers for securing certain conditions of existence of capitalist production. Class-qua-surplus analysis thus differentiates productive from unproductive wages. These are different payments for very different things: either producing surplus or else enabling others to produce surplus. Productive and unproductive laborers may or may not recognize, be conscious of their differences. They may think of themselves as nearly identical, say by focusing on their shared experience of being paid wages. Or they may differentiate themselves by the specific tasks they do such as white collar versus blue collar.

Class-qua-surplus analysis differentiates them otherwise, according to their very different relationship to the organization of the surplus. One produces it while the other enables that production in exchange for a distributed portion of the surplus. From the standpoint of class-qua-surplus analysis, concepts such as “the wage-earning class” or “the working class” are problematic. All wage-earners or workers are not occupants of the same class position. They divide into two different class positions likely to generate different perspectives on how the economy and society function, different notions of what is to be done to improve and change the economy, and different social change strategies.

Of course, if the goal is to unify productive and unproductive workers into a combined social force, then class-qua-surplus analysis would entail the need to recognize and accommodate their class differences to construct and sustain that unity. Assuming the unity because they are all wage-earners, working class, etc. would not be strategically appropriate or likely very effective. Indeed, to head off such unity, capitalists and their ideological supporters have long stressed other differences among wage-earners (age, gender, race, skills, education, ethnicity, white versus blue collar, etc.). Just as constructing unity among them has required learning to recognize and accommodate the reality of those differences, it also requires doing likewise for their class-qua-surplus differences. Otherwise, efforts to build unity risk failure.

Relatively few individuals become rich from the wage or salary payments they earn as producers of surplus. Wealth accrues chiefly to those in a position to secure large portions of distributed surpluses from the surplus appropriators. Major shareholders thus secure wealth by receiving dividend payments. Top managers secure huge salaries and pay packages that are surplus distributions. Lenders and landlords obtain interest and rentals from appropriators of the surplus who secure access to money and land – conditions of their surplus appropriation – by distributing such portions of the surpluses they appropriate. Here lies another importance of private property since that is what allows the owners of means of production (land, money, etc.) to withhold it from production. Those owners enable access to their means of production – so production can occur – only if they get interest and rental payments from the surpluses

appropriated and distributed in capitalist enterprises.

Because a communist class-qua-surplus structure effectively democratizes the enterprise, the productive laborers appropriate and distribute the surplus they produce. The specific recipients of the surplus and how much of it is distributed to each of them is decided by the collective of both productive and unproductive workers. Theirs will be a far less unequal distribution than what results from the undemocratic surplus distribution decisions of major shareholders and boards of directors (who tend to give themselves the largest distributions).

Class Struggles

Marx's class-qua-surplus analysis crucially differentiates class struggles. First of all, the major focus is upon class as the object of struggle, not its subject. Given the complexities of class analysis discussed above, the notion of a "class" as a social actor is very problematical. Class-qua-surplus as the object of social struggles has a quantitative and a qualitative dimension. The quantitative dimension concerns (1) the size of the surplus produced and appropriated, and (2) the sizes of the portions of the surplus distributed to its various recipients. Social groups struggle over those quantitative dimensions. For example, productive workers struggle with capitalists over the size of the wages paid to them, the length of the working day, and other aspects of the production and appropriation of the capitalist surplus. To take another example, capitalists struggle with governments over the size of the portion of the capitalist surplus delivered to governments as taxes on profits. Class struggles over the quantitative dimensions of surplus production and distribution are a more or less constant feature of class structures, slave and feudal as well as capitalist.

Sometimes, accumulated political and cultural conflicts coalesce with economic conflicts to provoke struggles over the qualitative dimensions of class-qua-surplus. Then the object of struggle is, for example, a capitalist class structure for enterprises versus a non-capitalist class structure. In the United States today, a social movement embraces worker cooperatives as a preferred alternative to capitalist corporations. Much of that movement does not yet grasp the relationship between such a movement and Marx's definition of the class differences between these two alternative organizations of enterprises' production and distribution of surpluses. Nonetheless, it represents an early stage in a class struggle over the qualitative dimensions of class.

Notes

[1] Revealingly, at the same time in the USSR applications of class analysis to the USSR were likewise banished on the parallel grounds of their irrelevance to the post-class structure of Soviet society.

[2] See this argument made in detail for the entirety of Soviet history: Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, *Class Theory and History: Capitalism, Communism and the USSR*. New York and

London: Routledge, 2002.

[3] See Resnick and Wolff, *Knowledge and Class: A Marxian Critique of Political Economy*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987, chapter 3; and Wolff and Resnick, *Contending Economic Theories: Neoclassical, Keynesian and Marxian.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012, chapter 4.

[4] See the detailed class analyses of households gathered in Graham Cassano, Ed., *Class Struggle on the Home Front: Work, Conflict, and Exploitation in the Household*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Note that if households were reduced to sites where no production was undertaken, where only consumption occurred, class-qua-surplus analysis would not apply.

Developing Marx's Mode of Production Theory

By | 2018: vol. 17, no. 1

It is not surprising that Karl Marx is having a comeback today, after the 2008 financial crisis, the growing awareness of capitalism's propensity to crises and ecological problems, and the fact that global inequality has increased to an obscene degree – all of which Marx foresaw.

That this is all happening 150 years after the publication of *Das Capital,* Marx's magnum opus, shows the importance of understanding his work. Rather than being outdated, it is even more relevant today than when it was published since the above developments came as a surprise to mainstream thinkers. Capitalism was supposed to get better with time.

Capital is first and foremost an unsurpassed explanation of the very specific nature and development of the system of capitalism, which was relatively new in his day. Since then it has become so ubiquitous throughout the world that its particularities are often obscure to those who live within it, as a fish might be unaware of the nature of water. Some mainstream economists even say that "capitalism" is just Marx's word for an economic system that has actually existed throughout history, equating capitalism with any society that had a market. It is thereby naturalized, seen as an expression of the natural human tendency to exchange, to buy and to sell. Capitalism, as a specific system with a very particular nature, thus disappears. But Marx's masterwork puts the lie to this interpretation, as it shows in detail the inner workings and tendencies of a very distinct kind of economy, radically different from those that existed before, which emerged in a particular historical period for particular kinds of causes. Its prescience makes it easy to see the essential similarities between his world and ours, as globalization has remade the world in its own image, as Marx said it would.

Capital's analysis of this peculiar economic system provides us with the means to understand how this happened and why, as well as to understand both previous economies, and ones that followed capitalism. The key concept is the idea of a mode of production that Marx develops in *Capital,* (although the idea is present in earlier work as well). More than a concept, it is the essential methodological tool for understanding history, different societies and the potentials and limits for change within those social formations.

Implicit also in *Capital,* I would argue, is a moral critique of capitalism and all other class societies, and by implication, a vision of what he often referred to as a "higher form of society."[1] According to Marx exploitation was essential to all class societies, indeed defining of class society, both in general and of each particular form. Given that *Capital* is devoted to an understanding of capitalism, he devoted this work to an elucidation of the form that

exploitation takes in this system, viz., the extraction of surplus value. This has unfortunately led many people to identify Marx's concept of exploitation with the extraction of surplus value and therefore as specific to capitalism. However, this is just the particular form of exploitation in capitalism, as he makes clear in the following quote from Volume I:

"The essential difference between the various economic forms of society, between for instance a society based on slave labor and one based on wage labor, lies only in the mode in which this surplus labor is in each case *extracted* from the actual producer, the laborer."[2]

Or consider this quote, from Volume III:

"The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus labor is *pumped out of* direct producers determines the relations of rulers and ruled."[3]

Notice the words: *extracted from* and *pumped out of.*

From these formulations I infer that in Marx's view:

1) a particular form of coercion and surplus extraction are connected in all class societies; in fact they are constitutive of the relations of production that define a given mode of production.

2) this is a fundamental explanatory feature of all class societies

3) changes in forms of exploitation are critical for understanding historical change.

Exploitation occurs when producers lack control of their means of subsistence and hence, in order to survive they are forced, directly or indirectly, to work for others who appropriate their labor's product. In slavery and in feudalism both the force and the extraction of surplus are clear. In capitalism, neither the force nor the surplus are apparent. Legally speaking workers are free to work for different employers or for none, and employers pay them a wage for their labor. Marx's specific account of how, despite these appearances, workers are forced to work and the capitalist class extracts a surplus from their labor, rests on the labor theory of value. Many critics of capitalism, including some who call themselves Marxists, reject the labor theory of value. For my purposes here, we can leave aside this debate, because Marx has a broader understanding of exploitation in capitalism. Workers, Marx says, "agree, i.e. are compelled by social conditions," (i.e. their lack of means of production/subsistence), to work for others who own/control these resources and who then reap the product of their labor. His account of primitive accumulation explains how this came about, resting, he says, on force and establishing the conditions which then force the producers to work for the owners.[4] With or without the labor theory of value, this is true.

The mode of production analysis helps us to see that exploitation also existed in post-capitalist societies. The fundamental question is always who controls the means of production? In Soviet-style bureaucratic collectivist systems (so-called because the party-bureaucracy owns the means of production collectively via their control of the state), it was the bureaucracy that

controlled the means of production and subsistence, leaving the producers no choice but to work for them. And it was the bureaucracy that controlled the surplus for their needs and purposes. This analysis allows us to see the continuity between the modes of production of capitalism, feudalism, slave systems and the bureaucratic systems, as they are all class societies. But the specific differences between them are equally important.

Each mode of production, as Marx understood it, has certain kinds of structures and tendencies, a certain nature if you will. To continue the quote given earlier, "it is always the direct relationship of the owners… to the producers … which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it… the corresponding form of the state."[5] In capitalism, a competitive market system, each capitalist firm must try to maximize its own profit, in order to beat the other capitalist and get a larger share of the market. So each firm is compelled to grow, to expand, to revolutionize the forces of production in order to produce more while lowering their costs. Whatever the variations and changes within capitalism, – and there are many, as capitalism is a highly dynamic system – this is a constant. Other systems, pre-and post-capitalist, do not have this built-in imperative, this "motor" of to growth. Indeed slavery and feudalism were marked by stasis and crises of underproduction, capitalism by crises of overproduction.

This concept of a mode of production is important for several debates, starting with what changes are and are not possible within capitalism.

Consider gender relations: in developed capitalist countries, women have become more independent from men and more equal both legally and economically than ever before. Nevertheless, they still are subject to sexual predation, as Trump has helped to highlight, their reproductive rights are insecure, and they still do the bulk of caring labor, whether for free, or for low pay. Low paid care work, being wage work, fits the account of exploitation in *Capital,* while the work they do for free does not. Feminists have often criticized Marx on this point, but since *Capital* is intended to elucidate what makes the capitalist system tick, so to speak, unpaid work is irrelevant. Hence this is not a valid criticism in my opinion. Marxist Feminists have developed an enriched account of social reproduction, which tries to *supplement* the account in *Capital,* showing the crucial importance of this unpaid and under-valued work, both in human terms and for capitalism, as it produces labor power on a daily and generational basis.[6]

The extraordinary improvements in gender relations within capitalism raise the question of whether women and men could ever be totally equal in a capitalist society. Liberals think so, contending that 'it's just the remaining influences of patriarchy', and 'if we only leaned in more…" and so on. Some Marxists also seem to imply this is possible by their contention that, unlike class oppression, sex and race oppression are not essential to capitalism. But while they are not *logically* essential, (that is, we can *imagine* a gender and race-neutral version of capitalism), it does not follow that they are incidental; indeed, as Marxist feminists including myself, have argued, they are very likely historically, pragmatically necessary. Consider what women have and have not achieved. What they've achieved are their basic democratic rights, which do not threaten profits, indeed that may augment them. Care work in the United States

is still largely a private responsibility because supporting care as the public good it is would seriously cut into profits. In other countries with more social supports, the advent of global neo-liberalism has meant drastic cut backs in these benefits, as such supports put them at a competitive disadvantage vis-a-via countries without them, like the United States and China. Consider also, the racialization of this type of work, which is mostly done by immigrants and women of color; this allows its under-valuation to be obscured or rationalized as natural and appropriate for "those kinds of women."

Thus capitalism's inherent nature puts constraints on gender and race equality. Today individual women and minorities have moved to the top ranks of society. At the same time however, class differences among women and among blacks have actually increased. Movements that could reduce sex and race oppression for the majority of people must be based on working class struggles, integrating the different dimensions of oppression. Thus the frequent counter-position of class and "identity politics" is misleading, unhelpful, indeed counterproductive.

Another and probably most important example of the capitalist limits to change is the multiple ecological crises facing the planet, which, as Al Gore's charts show, took off with the development of capitalism. Its imperative to grow is simply incompatible with a sustainable environment. As the Southern regions of the United States struggle to recover from hurricanes of unprecedented strength and in the West from devastating forest fires, Americans can no longer imagine that global warming is only a problem for far away places. Those environmentalists who advocate a simpler no-growth economy are one hundred percent correct, but unless they also recognize that this is impossible within capitalism they are another variety of climate change deniers. This point is underlined by the contrast between capitalism and non-capitalist modes of production, as I will try to show after a short detour.

The concept of a mode of production is important for debates as to how to understand various societies transitioning to capitalism, some from "traditional" feudal modes of production e.g. India – and others coming from so-called socialist or communist modes of production. People on the left disagree as to whether capitalism, as Marx understood it, is applicable to both these kinds of societies.

Many post-colonialist thinkers have denied that Marxist analyses are applicable to countries like India because, they argue, India lacks key features of developed capitalism, in particular, it lacks liberal political and cultural institutions. Since India did not make these political changes, and remains deeply colonial in many ways, therefore, they argue, Marxism does not apply to post-colonial societies like India. But Vivek Chibber,[7] using the mode of production analysis, distinguishes those features that are essential to capitalism and those that are not. Marxism does not contend that capitalist development will be *uniform* all over the world. Rather, it claims that *certain* features of capitalism are *universal*. Capital's economic needs – the sine qua non being profit maximization – are the defining ones, they are present in India and in fact they might be aided by the very traditional social hierarchies and oppression that Post-Colonialists deem to be incompatible with capitalism. Even in the West, as Chibber points out, liberal

political forms did not come automatically with capitalism but had to be fought for over many centuries. So the mode of production analysis enables us to see that such traditional societies can be understood in Marxist terms, even though they are different in many respects from developed capitalist societies in the West.

The systems that existed in the Soviet Union and China after their revolutions pose other questions; people calling themselves Marxists have disagreed from the very beginning as to how to characterize them. The mode of production analysis helps us to approach these debates. Though the Soviet Union and China developed under Stalin and Mao, their push for development and growth was not the same as capitalism, either in scope (they had nowhere near the same growth) or in cause. Unless the bureaucracy decided to develop something, it did not happen; there was no *automatic* motor that drove growth as there is in a market system. In fact the cause of growth was more like feudalism in that it stemmed from political rather than economic needs; as feudal lords competed with each other, so these countries competed with other global powers.

Today these systems have changed radically. I will focus on China, the most complex and interesting of the two, relying here on the work of Richard Smith who identifies China today as a hybrid tripartite mode of production – part state-owned, part foreign-invested private-state joint venture export sector, part domestic capitalist.[8] The foreign-invested sector of the economy, which accounts for about a third of industrial output, produces most exports and has created *enormous* growth, (20% in this sector) helping to push China's overall GDP to more than 10% per annum for twenty years up to 2011. **(**The development of this capitalist sector was similar in crucial ways to the development of capitalism in Europe.)[9]

But the other sector, of state-owned enterprises, which produce half of China's industrial output, and which includes the *commanding heights* of the economy, runs on *very different imperatives*. Many of the state-owned enterprises are justly called dinosaurs because they would have gone extinct in a fully capitalist economy. But the government, nominally "communist," cannot afford to let millions of people be unemployed. So the government keeps its zombie companies going producing steel and aluminum it can't sell, building things like ghost cities, an airliner that costs more to produce than it would to import, etc., etc. This makes sense in their bureaucratic mode of production even though they are totally irrational from a capitalist point of view, as Western economists never tire of pointing out. The two systems, or modes of production, simply have different natures, therefore different drivers, and different rationalities.

This combination of market-driven growth in the largest economy in the world and the lack of even the minimal political democratic checks typical of capitalism is driving China toward what Smith has called an ecological apocalypse.

And finally, the mode of production analysis also gives us the key conditions for socialism, a "higher form of society." As Marx conceived it, this is a society where the means of production are under *collective democratic control*, so the conditions for exploitation do not exist. The

producers control the product of their labor and they get it all back collectively. Nor does alienation exist. Both points are expressed in this famous quote from *Capital III****[10]****:* "the *producers rationally* regulate their interchange with Nature, bringing it under *their common control*… with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to and *worthy of their human nature*." Beyond that is the true realm of freedom, he says concluding, "the shortening of the work day is its basic prerequisite."

Such a society would allow for more time with our families and friends, for all kinds of labor that are not profitable under capitalism, be it caring labor to enhance the health and welfare of human beings and of the Earth, artistic, and other kinds of creative work – and more time simply for leisure. Socialism is thus inherently feminist and eco-socialist. But Marx's vision of collective "rational regulation" of production is only possible on a global level, as the level of production has to be sufficient for everyone in the world to have a decent standard of living. Global systems of democratic governance will be required.

Today it is ever more clear that in Rosa Luxemburg's words, humanity's choice is between socialism and barbarism.

Notes

[1] Though this might seem obvious to most readers, it was an object of intense debate in the 1980s. See Norman Geras "The Controversy about Marx and Justice," in *Literature of Revolution* (London: 1986) for an excellent summary.

[2] *Capital Volume 1* (New York: 1967) p. 217.

[3] *Capital Volume 3,* p. 791.

[4] *Capital Volume 1,* p. 714.

[5] *Capital Volume 3,* p. 791

[6] In particular, Lise Vogel *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory,* republished version with Introduction by Susan Ferguson and David McNally (New York 2013); Johanna Brenner *Women and the Politics of Class* (New York: 2000).

[7] Vivek Chibber, *Post-Colonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London 2013)

[8] Richard Smith "China's Communist Capitalist Ecological Apocalypse" paecon.net.

[9] "The Necessity of Gangster Capitalism: Primitive Accumulation in Russia and China," Nancy Holmstrom and Richard Smith, *Monthly Review* February 2000.

[10] *Capital Volume 3* (New York: 1967), p. 820.

Technology and Capitalism 150 Years After Das Kapital

By | 2018: vol. 17, no. 1

Today, one hundred and fifty years after the publication of the first volume of *Capital,* Marx remains our contemporary.

The commodification imperative (goods and services *must* take the form of commodities), the monetary imperative (money is *required* to gain access to the objective preconditions for human life – means of subsistence, means of production), and the valorization imperative (capital *must* be accumulated; monetary returns (M') must exceed the initial monetary investment, M) continue to be the dominant organizing principles of social life today. Social relations continue to take the form of relations among things; it continues to be the case that each individual "carries his social power, as also his connection with society, in his pocket."[1] Human flourishing continues to be systematically subordinated to capital's flourishing. Essential human ends continue to be systematically sacrificed to the end of capital accumulation.[2] Marx's theory helps us comprehend key features of any form of capitalism, including its contemporary variant. It remains indispensable.

It would, of course, be foolish to think a nineteenth century thinker could have anticipated what capitalism would look like in the twenty-first century. Debt levels are now unprecedented.[3] An ever-increasing amount of credit is required to produce the same increment of GDP growth. Price levels of financial assets are stratospheric, with financial crises no more than momentary blips in their relentless ascent. The correlation between productivity advances and real wage growth – previously taken as a stylized fact in textbooks – has been broken. Unemployment declines and real wages (and inflation) barely budge, to the great surprise of economists. Central bank balance sheets have metastasized in ways few could have imagined, let alone anticipated, just a few years ago. Maintaining negative interest rates for extended periods of time is considered reasonable, whereas not too long ago "responsible" commentators would have dismissed the idea as mad. Respected business publications like the *Financial Times* and *The Economist* publish articles anticipate a not too distant future when "helicopter drops" of free money may have to fall on households. The "new normal" of capitalism looks decidedly abnormal, even without taking into account concerns about the environment and political derangement (topics outside our purview here).

I shall argue that Marx's theoretical framework helps us make sense of important peculiar features of contemporary capitalism, no less than features it shares with other variants. In particular, I shall be concerned with the pattern of capitalist development Marx sketched in *Capital*.[4]

We may take investments to commercialize a cluster of radical innovations as the starting point of what can be termed a "systematic cycle of accumulation."[5] Assuming adequate labor power is available and mobilized, and sufficient efficient demand is present, the initial investments can be valorized (M'>M), encouraging increased investments to commercialize the next generation of innovations. As capital is invested, the *acceleration* phase of the cycle takes off. The expansion of credit plays major roles here, funding new firms before they can bring innovations to market, enabling investments to increase more than would otherwise be possible, preventing production and distribution from coming to an abrupt halt when payments fall due before revenues have been received, and so on.[6]

At some point an *overaccumulation* of capital will end the acceleration phase. When this occurs, there will be "a surplus of industrial capital, but in a form in which it cannot accomplish its function. A great deal of commodity capital; but unsaleable. A great deal of fixed capital; but in large measure unemployed as a result of the stagnation in reproduction."[7] Contemporary Marxian theorists have explained why overaccumulation problems arise in detail.[8] When more efficient producers enter a sector armed with product and process innovations, this typically forces the least productive units of capital out of business. But other established units of production have strong incentives to remain operating if they can. They have already invested in fixed capital (machinery, buildings, and so on). If production is shut down now, there will be nothing to show for their past investments; if they continue in operation, they may be able to win at least the average rate of profit on their circulating capital (that is, their investments in raw materials, wages, transportation costs, labor power, etc.). It is also the case that the management and work force of these firms have sector-specific skills that would be difficult to duplicate in any reasonable time period were they to shift operations to a different sector. Further, these units of capital likely have established relationships with suppliers and distributors, relationships that would again likely be difficult and costly to establish in other sectors within a reasonable timeframe. And local governments and universities may be providing important support that would be withdrawn were they to cease operating in the sector. There is, finally, always the hope that if they hold on long enough, they may be able to introduce innovations allowing them to leap-frog over their competitors at some future point.

These considerations are all rational from the perspective of individual producers. But from a collective point of view the result is irrational: entire sectors, and the economy as a whole, tend to be afflicted with excessive productive capacity relative to what markets can absorb. As long as markets grow in sync with increases in productive capacity, this tendency is held in check. Eventually, however, markets cease growing rapidly enough, and excess productive capacity accumulates.

The rise of excess capacity does not immediately lead to an economic crisis, since lending doesn't automatically halt when rapid expansion ceases. Loans continue to be made in the belief that the slowdown is merely temporary. Lenders continue lending because they do not want to write off previous loans, and hope that enough borrowers tied to *other* lenders will fail so that borrowers tied to them won't. Also, when previous paths of accumulation are becoming exhausted, the promise of new possibilities is especially alluring to both borrowers and lenders.

As increasingly desperate investors begin to borrow increasing amounts to chase the “next big thing,” speculative frenzy plays a bigger and bigger role pushing the economy forward. Amidst the resulting speculative bubbles financial fraud thrives like bacteria in a kiddy pool. Marx termed this period, when easily available credit allows an upswing to continue despite growing excess productive capacity, the “overexertion” phase of the cycle. [9]

In Marx’s view, the end of the overexertion phase is preordained, even if its precise timing is indeterminate. Loans made to borrowers at a given moment generally can only be repaid if other lenders roll over loans and expand lending at later moments. When the belief that lenders will lend at the required levels in the future is called into question (often by some event trivial in itself), lending ceases to expand in the present. Loans cease being automatically rolled over, debts begin to be called in. A sharp rise in demand from borrowers, now needing hard cash to meet pressing debt obligations, pushes interest rates sharply higher, making it yet more difficult for others to roll over their debts. A panicked rush to sell off financial assets forces a correspondingly sharp decline in their prices. The balance sheets of those still holding those assets rapidly erode, condemning many of them to insolvency. A generalized credit crunch, in brief, sets off an extended economic downswing.

If a recession or depression is sufficiently severe, overaccumulation can be overcome through some combination of outright physical destruction of past capital investments and the devaluation (lower market value) of what remains. The social costs may be horrific. But from capital’s standpoint the destruction and devaluation of excess productive capacity on a massive scale sets the stage for a new systematic cycle.

Two developments must be noted to update this account. 1. The tendency to overaccumulation difficulties has greatly intensified since Marx’s day. 2. The overexertion phase can persist far longer than Marx foresaw.

1. In the nineteenth century innovation was far less institutionalized than it is today. The basic social unit of innovation is now the national innovation system, including publicly funded federal labs, university labs, a variety of private/public R&D partnerships, public support for start-ups, venture capital funding after “proof of concept” has been established, privately funded R&D undertaken in corporate labs, the system of public and private education that produces new knowledge workers, the infrastructure for storing and distributing scientific-technological knowledge, the legal and marketing firms aiding the commercialization of innovations, tax policies and subsidies provided by the state as incentives to encourage innovation, and so on.[10]

Only a relatively small number of regions have been sufficiently wealthy to establish a national innovation system.[11] Nonetheless, there are now more effective systems in place than in other any period of world history. The U.S. continues to be the biggest investor in research and development, funding a bit over a quarter of the global total. Asian countries (including Japan, South Korea, China, and India) now fund over 40% of global research and development

expenditures. The European share is over 20%. There are now 18 countries devoting two percent or more of their GDP to R&D.[12] This is a positive development, at least as far as the rate of the rate of innovation goes.[13] That, however, is not what ultimately matters in capitalism, where use value considerations are subordinated to monetary imperatives. What matters to units of capital is *the period of time high profits can be won from a competitive advantage due to innovations.*

Whenever an innovation is commercialized in some region that promises to be especially profitable, national innovation systems in other regions across the globe will kick into high gear more or less instantaneously. As a result, other units of capital tend to catch up to the initially innovating firms within a relatively brief period. The mad rush of these other capitals to capture some of the profits appropriated by the initial innovators necessarily tends to lead productive capacity in the given sector as a whole to grow at a faster rate than the market for the innovative good in question. In other words, the most innovative sectors in the world market now tend to be plagued by excess productive capacity more quickly than in previous periods. With the spread of effective national innovation systems, *the period initial innovators enjoy a competitive advantage from innovations necessarily tends to shrink*. The time high profits can be won from innovations tends to be significantly compressed as a result.

2. If the spread of national innovation systems leads to excessive productive capacity in the world market, making it difficult for investment to be valorized with a "normal" amount of credit creation, accumulation can still occur if credit money is created beyond the "normal" range. Productive capacity that would otherwise be socially wasted can then be absorbed, thanks to the artificial expansion of markets fueled by the expansion of credit money. As long as the credit creation continues on a sufficient scale, the severe downswing that is the "default option" of capitalism in periods of global overaccumulation can be deferred. In principle, at least, what Marx termed the "overexertion" phase can be extended indefinitely.

With these two adjustments, the general pattern of capitalist development sketched by Marx in Volume 3 allows us to comprehend how we have arrived at where we are today. In the decades immediately following World War Two there was an acceleration phase in the world market led by the US. It enjoyed a "golden age" due in good measure to a significant competitive advantage in the technologies of mass production. By the late 1960s-early 1970s Japan and Europe had rebuilt their industrial base and had developed effective national innovation systems. Many Japanese and European capitals were more efficient producers of higher quality products than established U.S. firms in crucial sectors (consumer electronics, autos, motorcycles, chemicals, business machines, steel, etc.). U.S. producers, however, did not withdraw from these sectors in the face of more efficient competitors, leading to significant excess productive capacity in the major sectors of the world market. An *overaccumulation* of capital investment in those sectors ended the acceleration phase of the global post WWII upswing, lowering the rate of profit.[14]

Given the pattern outlined in Part Five of Volume 3, a period of excessive credit could be

expected to allow a brief “overexertion” phase, followed relatively soon by a massive devaluation or physical destruction of excess capacity. Given the level of overaccumulation in the world market, the scale of the devaluation and destruction required to remove it was truly enormous. Members of the ruling circles in the U.S. had a strong incentive to avoid the massive harm that would have been inflicted on U.S. capitals, given their relatively weak competitive position in key sectors. Nixon’s unilateral decision to cut the tie between gold and the dollar offered an alternative path forward for capital by allowing historically unprecedented amount of credit to be created. The credit explosion allowed productive capacity to be absorbed that would otherwise have gone unused (and, more importantly for capital, allowed profits to recover from the global downturn of the 1970s).[15]

The recovery of profits justified replacing productive capacity as it became worn out or outdated. It also justified the commercialization of promising paths of innovation. It even justified some regions (like China) increasing investment at an unprecedented rate. What it could not justify was the major increase in the rate of investment required to set off a new “acceleration” phase. Established sectors of the world market either continued to suffer from excess productive capacity, or soon would if the rate of investment spiked upward. If anything, difficulties of excess productive capacity in the major sectors of the world market have intensified with the rapid industrialization of China and other regions in East Asia. Dynamic emerging new sectors experience overaccumulation difficulties quicker than has ever been the case before. National innovation systems across the global are now mobilized to catch up to any innovation shows promise of being profitable. As investment flows into the new sector, too much productive capacity is accumulated too quickly, leading rates of investment to fall.

The newly “normal” features of capitalism that are so profoundly abnormal relative to earlier periods of its history begin to make sense in light of Marx’s categories of “overaccumulation” and “overexertion.”

* The unprecedented explosion of credit money has been needed to avoid a severe global depression on a scale that would make the Great Depression of the 1930s seem mild. Credit expansion has generated “less bang for the buck” over time because with the expansion of productive capacity over time, more and more credit is required to simply keep more and more zombie capitals roaming the planet.

* For the overexertion phase to be extended, it is not enough that markets expand on credit steroids to absorb more of the output of the growing productive capacity. It must be absorbed profitably. At first the sharp rise in credit money did not do this. Capital, and the capitalist state, then declared a war on labor, with capital flight from high wage regions, automation, and anti-worker public policies their main weapons. The previous correlation between productivity advances and real wage increases (and the relative stability of labor’s share of national income), was broken. As the massive expansion of credit continued without inflation in wage or consumer markets, commentators praised Central Banks for having engineered a “Great Moderation,” willfully blind to the underlying shift in social relations. In a rare moment of lucidity Alan Greenspan, then head of the U.S. Federal Reserve, confessed that the moderation

of inflation rested on “the traumatized worker,” incapable of winning wage increases due to the threat of downsizing and capital flight.[16]

* The insane inflation of financial assets makes sense too from this perspective. If the creation of credit money is exploding, and profits are being appropriated, but only a portion of credit money and retained profits are invested in expanding industrial and commercial capitals, then over time an increasingly large pool of idle money capital will be amassed seeking some other form of profitable investment. In periods of excess productive capacity in the major non-financial sectors, credit flows for the speculative purchase of financial assets provides an attractive alternative outlet for valorization. As investment in these assets increases, their prices become inflated. The inflation of financial assets is further reinforced when the retained profits of non-financial firms, and credit flows to them, are used for stock buy-backs and for mergers and acquisitions. The expansion of credit that has enabled capital to avoid a major global depression has simultaneously generated a bloated financial sector, increasingly decoupled from the rest of the economy.

The explosion of Central Bank balance sheets follows more or less automatically. When credit money created by the financial sector stays within the financial sector, speculative bubbles will invariably form, and just as invariably burst. At that point Central Banks face a stark dilemma: bail out the financial sector through injecting yet more liquidity that will fuel yet more inflation of financial assets, or risk a financial crisis that could well mutate into a severe global depression. The former path has been chosen, expanding their balance sheets to barely imaginable magnitudes. Negative interest rates are simply a means of encouraging yet further growth in credit for a yet further extension of the “overexertion phase.” And embracing “helicopter drops” as a possible policy option is a sign of desperation among the more far-seeing organic intellectuals of capital, who realize that when the next recession comes, as it surely will, Central Banks may not be able to stimulate the economy through lower interest rates when they are already at historic lows.

Understanding our present moment in world history demands understanding both the systematic tendency to overaccumulation in capitalism, and how credit expansion (in combination with a war on labor and financialization) can enable the destruction and devaluation of overaccumulated capital to be deferred. Together with many other core ideas not considered in this paper, these concepts from *Capital* make Marx our contemporary in a way that simply is not the case for other social theorists of the last one hundred and fifty years.

No one can say how long Central Banks will be able to prolong the “overexertion phase.” If they can continue things a bit longer, it will be at the cost of a host of social pathologies continuing, including:

* increasingly severe inequality;

* an increasing gap between the level of social needs that could in principle be met with existing technologies and the actual level attained;

*the growing power of oligopolies possessing intellectual property rights;[17]

* deep structural constraints continued to be imposed by the intellectual property rights system on “open source” innovation;

* recurrent financial crises, as credit money fuels the inflation of speculative bubbles in various classes of financial assets; reinforced by the extreme monetary policies required to prevent the collapse of severe speculative bubbles from setting off a global depression;

* the continuing erosion of (all too limited to begin with) “democratic capitalism”; and

* a continuing failure to respond adequately to the horrific environmental costs of capitalism’s ‘grow or die” imperative.

If the long-deferred eradication of excess productive capacity in the world market cannot be deferred, all those pathologies will be combined with a global depression of unimaginable brutality.

Both of those alternatives are barbaric. “Socialism or barbarism” is our real choice, as Marx clearly saw 150 years ago.

Notes

[1] Karl Marx, “Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy” [*Grundrisse*, beginning], *Marx and Engels Collected Works,* Volume 28, (New York: International Publishers, 1986 [1939]), 94.

[2] These claims are elaborated and defended at length in Tony Smith, *Beyond Liberal Egalitarianism,* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

[3] In 1945 total debt in the U.S. economy was $355b. By 2007 the figure had skyrocketed to an astounding $50 trillion. Richard Duncan, *The New Depression,* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2012), 2.

[4] See especially Karl Marx, *Capital,* Volume 3, (New York: Penguin, 1981 [1894]), Chapter 30.

[5] The term is taken from Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century,* (New York: Verso, 1994).

[6] “Credit is thus indispensable here, a credit that grows in volume with the growing value of production and grows in duration with the increasing distance of the markets. A reciprocal effect takes place here. The development of the production process expands credit, while credit in turn lead to an expansion of industrial and commercial operations.” Marx, *Capital,* Volume 3, 612.

[7] Ibid., 614.

[8] See Geert Reuten, “Accumulation of Capital and the Foundation of the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, (15, no. 1), 79–93.

[9] Karl Marx, *Capital,* Volume 3, 619. “(T)he appearance of very solid business with brisk returns can merrily persist even when returns have in actual fact long since been made only at the cost of swindled money-lenders and swindled producers. This is why business always seems almost exaggeratedly heathy immediately before a collapse.” Ibid., 615-16.

[10] Francesco Ramella, *Sociology of Economic Innovation,* (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2016).

[11] This is a major cause of uneven development in the world market, where wealthy regions, able to establish effective national innovation systems, enjoy cumulative advantages, while poorer regions suffer cumulative disadvantages. See Tony Smith, “Piketty On the World Market and Inequality Within Nations,” *Critical Sociology*, (Vol. 41, No. 2, 2015), 401-10.

[12] R&D Magazine, “2016 Global R&D Funding Forecast,” *R&D Magazine*, (Winter 2016), 3-4.

[13] When we consider environmental costs of technological change in capitalism, however, it is not such a positive matter.

[14] Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, (New York: Verso, 2006).

[15] I do not want to downplay the devaluation of capital that did occur in response to the global slowdown of the 1970s. But there was no “’slaughter of capital values’ on a scale sufficient to end [overcapacity and overproduction]” Radhika Desai 2013, *Geopolitical Economy: After US Hegemony, Globalization and Empire,* (London: Pluto, 2013), 24-5.

[16] Bob Woodward, *Maestro: Greenspan’s Fed and the American Boom,* (New York: Simon and Schuster Woodward, 2000), 168.

[17] The rise of a new intellectual property rights regime in response to the global slowdown of the 1970s is perfectly intelligible from this point of view. If the time any unit of capital can enjoy a competitive advantage from an innovation necessarily tends to be compressed, it would seem that extending the intellectual property rights system in scope and enforcement can put this tendency out of play. But the intellectual property rights system has not eliminated the relentless threat of overaccumulation. It has simply meant that more resources have been devoted duplicating innovations in ways that avoid patent infringement (and to legal efforts to defend firms’ own claims and attack the claims of others). And it has consolidated oligopolistic power.

Gender and Capital 150 Years Later

By | 2018: vol. 17, no. 1

We are witnessing an era of conservative backlash on gender rights. Nearly across the board, women make less than men, make up a majority of those in poverty (70% of those in extreme poverty), and face the real prospect of becoming a victim of sexual violence (1-3 internationally).[1]

In the US, for example, women's reproductive rights have been on the chopping block in a variety of ways including efforts to regulate access to abortion by states, attempts to cut funding to Planned Parenthood at both state and federal levels, and attempts to repeal and replace Obamacare that would include ending mandatory coverage of maternity and other basic aspects of women's healthcare. All of these policies would have a profound effect on the lives of all US women, but would disproportionately affect poor women's lives. Perhaps at the 150th Anniversary of the publication of *Capital*, Vol. I it is time to reassess what Marx had to say about the intersections of class and gender.

In this paper, I take up Marx's discussion of the production and reproduction dualism as well as his views on women workers and possibilities for new forms of the family. While Marx sometimes lapses into Victorian morality, I argue that his basic theoretical understanding could possibly be amenable to a feminist interpretation. Despite some ambivalence, Marx tended toward a dialectical model that rejected dualisms of any kind and focused on each side of the dualism as an important moment of the whole process. While his success in overcoming these dualisms in regard to women was sometimes limited, his overall theoretic position seems amenable to feminist revisions.

Production and Reproduction

I would suggest that Marx's discussion of capitalist reproduction and consumption could offer a starting point, albeit in a very undeveloped form, for understanding the specifically capitalist nature of patriarchy. In his chapter on "Simple Reproduction" as well as some material from earlier drafts of *Capital*, Marx begins to strip away the distorted nature of capitalist reproduction as understood by classical political economists. This includes an astute critique of their understanding of the relationship between production and consumption.

In this sense, Marx describes the view of classical political economists who see production and consumption in a one-sided and distorted way. Classical political economy sees the relationship between production and consumption as mostly mutually exclusive. Products are consumed either for productive or unproductive purposes:

> Hence both the capitalist and his ideologist, the political economist, consider only that part of the worker's individual consumption to be productive which is required for the perpetuation of the working class, and which therefore must take place in order that the capitalist may have labour-power to consume. What the worker consumes over and above that minimum for his own pleasure is seen as unproductive consumption.[2]

For capital, consumption appears important only to the extent that working class consumption is kept to a subsistence level in order to produce the maximum amount of surplus value.

Further, Marx illustrates the alienated nature of this process in which production and consumption are fragmented for the worker:

> The worker's productive consumption and his individual consumption are therefore totally distinct. In the former, he acts as the motive power of capital, and belongs to the capitalist. In the latter, he belongs to himself, and performs his necessary vital functions outside the production process. The result of the first kind of consumption is that the capitalist continues to live, of the second, that the worker himself continues to live.[3]

Here, Marx begins to get at the origins of the public/private distinction as it exists in capitalism. The production of goods for the purposes of producing surplus value is seen as completely separate from the consumption necessary for maintaining the health of the worker.

This, however, is only a one-sided assessment of the process. Consumption is integral to production although capitalist social relations tend to conceal this:

> It is the production and reproduction of the capitalist's most indispensable means of production: the worker. The individual consumption of the worker, whether it occurs inside or outside the workshop, inside or outside the labour process, remains an aspect of the production and reproduction of capital, just as the cleaning of machinery does, whether it is done during the labour process, or when intervals in that process permit… The maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave this to the worker's drives for self-preservation and propagation. All the capitalist cares for is to reduce the worker's individual consumption to the necessary minimum.[4]

But Marx notes that there is another side to this as well. This "drive for self-preservation and propagation" may not be as natural as it appears. In fact, capital fundamentally alters this seemingly "natural" drive. As Marx notes in "Results of the Immediate Process of Production," "capital itself *regulates* this production of labour-power, the production of the mass of men it intends to exploit in accordance with its own needs."[5] Thus, capital has its own unique process for reproduction of workers. It does so in such a way to reduce to a minimum the requirements of the worker:

> As capital, therefore, it is animated by the drive to reduce to a minimum the resistance offered by man, that obstinate yet elastic natural barrier. This resistance is moreover

> lessened by the apparently undemanding nature of work at a machine, and the more pliant and docile character of the women and children employed by preference.[6]

Despite the fact that Marx does not point out that women and children were viewed as naturally pliant because of oppressive institutions and not because of some unchanging nature of individuals, he at the very least begins to describe how seemingly natural conditions are undermined by capitalism.

Overcoming these barriers will have profound effects on the family structure. Marx notes this, as well as the fact that women in the workforce were seemingly less able to fulfill their traditional family responsibilities:

> As was shown by an official medical inquiry in the year 1861, the high death-rates are, apart from local causes, principally due to the employment of the mothers away from their homes, and to the neglect and maltreatment arising from their absence, which consists in such things as insufficient nourishment, unsuitable food and dosing with opiates; besides this, there arises an unnatural estrangement between mother and child, and as a consequence intentional starving and poisoning of the children.[7]

While it is certainly important to criticize Marx for failing to understand the social arrangements that make women responsible for childrearing and other functions of social reproduction, we need not follow Marx completely down this path. What is important to emphasize is that there appears to be some acknowledgement, albeit very undeveloped, that part of the role of motherhood may be socially reconstructed. While he writes of the negative effects caused by mothers not staying at home to work, he reserves particular ire for the "*unnatural* estrangement between mother and child"[8] which leads the mother to end the life of the child. Thus, Marx leaves at least some opening for women's employment as long as there are other arrangements made for children's care. It is the prospect of mothers simply having no positive relationship with their children that Marx finds to be fully unnatural. While Marx's position here remains quite ambiguous regarding the place of women in the workforce, later, Marx makes a strong case for the necessity of change in the family structure—one that is being achieved by women's participation in industry.

In contrast to the political economists that Marx critiques for their one-sided focus on production, Marx sees production and reproduction as a dialectically related whole: "The capitalist process of production, therefore, seen as a total, connected process, i.e. a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capital-relation itself; on the one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer."[9] When viewed "as a total, connected process," reproduction involves more than just the creation of human beings as such. Instead, under capitalism, reproduction involves a social aspect as well that continually "reproduces the capital-relation itself"—the worker and the capitalist. Thus, production and reproduction are not mutually opposed; instead all elements necessary to capitalist production including childrearing are dialectical moments of the whole.

Here Marx notes the way in which reproduction both physically and socially is a necessary feature of the capitalist accumulation process. Capital is the subject that increasingly comes to regulate all activity and comes to dominate new groups, including women and children. It does this in accordance with its own needs rather than the needs of those in society.

While Marx sees production as a primary determinant of the structure of the family and society as a whole, here he is only speaking of the capitalist mode of production in which society has largely ceded its control of social relations to the dictates of the market. This is only an appearance, however: "If production has a capitalist form, so too will reproduction. Just as in the capitalist mode of production the labour process *appears* only as a means towards the process of valorization, so in the case of reproduction it *appears* only as a means of reproducing the value advanced as capital, i.e. as self-valorizing value."[10] Here, Marx seems to be using appearance in a dialectical way in which the appearance is only a part of the whole. In this case, appearance is only one possible manifestation of production. Even under capitalism where labor seems to be only "a means towards the process of valorization," there is much more going on than that. Just as capitalism is reproducing itself and extending its relations to all areas including the family, it also is developing the means to transcend this form.[11] While he does not take up this regarding the family at this point, as we will see later, Marx to some extent applies this logic to the form that the family takes as well, arguing that it is unlikely that the modern Western family would be the final form that the family takes.

Marx's concept of reproduction is more complex than most accounts allow for. It is true that Marx, at least to some extent, ignores childcare and some of the social practices surrounding it. Marx was primarily interested in understanding and transforming the specifically capitalist social system in which he lived. Through careful and systematic analysis, Marx argued that production was a primary determinant of all aspects of social life especially under capitalism where fetishized relations involving commodities tended to dominate over the relations with real individuals.

For this reason, Marx saw it as necessary to focus primarily on production in the public sphere as well as those aspects of the private sphere that directly related to production proper. This does not mean that Marx completely ignored the private sphere and relegated it completely to the ahistorical, "natural." Instead, he argued that the private sphere could only be understood in reference to production. The same was true of reproduction as well; production could only be truly understood once the specific mode of reproduction was understood. Thus, the relations of production may have had analytic priority over other relations; however, these relations must be understood as dialectically related to the whole in order to understand the capitalist, or any other mode of production.

Marx focused on the specific ways in which capitalism reproduced itself through socialization of labor. For Marx, an understanding of any social phenomena could only occur within the context of a specific mode of production and a corresponding social system. Thus, the social elements involved in reproduction, for Marx, contain more than just species reproduction and must be integrated into a whole system that includes both the production of goods and people

as well as their reproduction. Since they are a dialectically integrated whole, where, for example, reproduction is a dialectical moment of production, this avoids many of the problems associated with dual systems theories that treat production and reproduction as analytically separate phenomena.

Women Workers

Far from ignoring women's labor, a large portion of the chapters "The Working Day" and "Machinery and Modern Industry" discussed the work of women and children. The introduction of machinery had a profound effect on the structure of capitalism, since it allowed for women's and children's inclusion in the workforce. It could give strength to those who could not otherwise do certain strenuous tasks. This created a situation where women and children could now be at least as productive—if not more so—than men who did physically taxing work. Consequently, this increased the number of workers involved in industry and significantly affected the lives of women and children. Both were taken out of the home to do these seemingly adult male tasks. This, as Marx noted, would have a profound effect on the structure of the family since it would be more difficult for women to carry out their traditional domestic roles while working in the factory. [12]

Claudia Leeb argues that Marx tended to "reinforce the male/female (strong/weak) opposition in relation to the working-class woman," since they could only enter the workforce through the introduction of machinery.[13] This is all the more apparent since he did not openly question women's weakness in relation to men. While it is probable that Marx was referring to women's supposedly biologically based physical inferiority, taking a more socially based approach in interpreting the statement may be helpful. The crucial point is not whether Marx viewed women as biologically weaker, but that women's position in industry and in private life had changed as a result of the introduction of machinery. Important barriers to women's entry into the workforce had been overcome. Thus, women are not forced to stay in the domestic sphere. Machinery could enhance the abilities of all workers regardless of gender or age.

In addition to their work in modern, mechanized factories, women and young people also represented a large portion of workers in the domestic industries.[14] These industries, which had often not mechanized and produced on a smaller scale, had to compete with modern large-scale industry. The necessity of making up for the lack of technological productivity meant that the workers were exploited even more to stay competitive:

> The exploitation of cheap and immature labour power is carried out in a more shameless manner in modern manufacture than in the factory proper. This is because the technical foundation of the factory system, namely, the substitution of machines for muscular power, and the light character of the labour, is almost entirely absent in manufacture, and at the same time women and excessively young children are subjected quite unscrupulously to the influence of poisonous or injurious substances … the less the social productivity of labour and the technical basis for the combination of labour processes are developed in that branch, the more does the murderous side of this economy emerge.[15]

Thus, in a variety of ways capitalism is able to use existing social inequalities, such as gender, to enhance the extraction of surplus value. This was especially true when capitalism mixed with other less developed social forms.

Women and children were often paid significantly less than men.[16] While Marx did not provide a detailed explanation for this, he pointed to capitalist efforts to bring the cost of the workers' subsistence to a minimum especially in relation to women where the cost needed to "maintain the women of the surplus population is beneath all calculation. Hence nowhere do we find a more shameless squandering of human labour-power for the most despicable purposes than in England, the land of machinery."[17] This was another case where the capitalist interest in profit results in human beings, especially those at the bottom of the social hierarchy, being treated as commodities, all the better the lower price that they realize in the market.

Marx was not content with noting the harsh conditions that women faced in the workforce. He also pointed to the potential for positive effects on the working class as a whole in the labor force and as we shall see later, in family relationships as well. Initially, the introduction of women into the workforce created an impetus to regulate the excesses of capitalism's exploitation of women's labor. With his quotation from the report on the Factory Act of 1844, which regulated adult women's work, Marx noted how "[it] states ironically: 'No instances have come to my knowledge of adult women having expressed any regret at their rights being thus far interfered with.'"[18] This was one of the first attempts to "interfere" with the rights of workers to "freely" negotiate wages with their employers. Thus, the façade of freedom and equality was first torn away from women's and children's labor, since they could not legally protect themselves. While designed for women and children because of their historically subordinate social status, this would later set a precedent for regulations for adult male workers who worked in tandem with women and children. Thus, from 1844 to 1847, the 12-hour day was universal for those under the Factory Act as capitalism acted as a leveler.[19]

Transformation of the Family

Later in *Capital*, Vol. I, Marx returned to his discussion of the transformation of the family. As capitalistic organization of industry spread into the areas previously occupied by domestic industry, it helped to create further ground for the dissolution of the family since it became necessary to regulate "the so-called 'domestic labour', [since] this is immediately viewed as a direct attack on the *patria potestas*, or in modern terms, parental authority."[20] Marx noted that the barriers that were once in place to separate the public and private spheres were being broken down through the incorporation of women and children's labor into industry, outside of the control of the head of household. The state had to at least take over regulation of some of the economic aspects in order to protect the system from collapse—often doing so quite reluctantly.[21]

Marx argued, however, that this form of exploitation and destruction of the family also had some potentially positive effects:

> It was not however the misuse of parental power that created the direct or indirect exploitation of immature labour-powers by capital, but rather the opposite, i.e. the capitalist mode of exploitation, by sweeping away the economic foundation which corresponded to parental power, made the use of parental power into its misuse. However terrible and disgusting the dissolution of the old family ties within the capitalist system *may appear*, large-scale industry, by assigning an important part in socially organized processes of production, outside the sphere of the domestic economy, to women, young persons and children of both sexes, does nevertheless *create a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of relations between the sexes*. It is of course just as absurd to regard the Christian-Germanic form of the family as absolute and final as it would have been in the case of the ancient Roman, the ancient Greek or the Oriental forms, which, moreover, form a series in historical development. It is also obvious that the fact that *the collective working group is composed of individuals of both sexes and all ages must under the appropriate conditions turn into a source of humane development*, although in its spontaneously developed, brutal, capitalist form, the system works in the opposite direction, and becomes a pestiferous source of corruption and slavery, since here the worker exists for the process of production, and not the process of production for the worker.[22]

It appears that Marx was summarizing much of his previous argument regarding capitalism's effects on the family. The old ties based upon an economic system in which most production occurred within the domestic sphere had begun to dissolve as it became more industrially based. Although production does not determine but only conditions the form of the family, these changes in the production of the means of life have had significant effects on the ability of the patriarchal family to function. It created grounds for both the harsh exploitation of new workers under capitalism as well as a non-exploitative form of the family in the new society.

While this is admittedly a brief and abstract discussion of the potential for changes in the family structure, it is important to note that Marx posited this change occurring as a result of the cooperation of all workers, including women and children. Marx was not questioning the introduction of women into the workforce, let alone calling for a family wage. Instead he pointed to the ways in which in the "spontaneously developed, brutal, capitalist form, the system works" against the humane development of workers.[23] Equally significant is his dialectical discussion of how these developments could under the right circumstances be transformed into their opposite, that is, to a new form of the family.

Conclusion

Although Marx's writings on gender and the family are located sporadically throughout his work and he does not provide a completely worked out theory of gender relations, this does not necessarily mean that Marx was not interested in understanding gender relations or that he was sexist. There certainly are some problematic areas in his writings on gender and the family such as his ambivalent position regarding the changing moral status of women as they entered the workforce, here potentially illustrating a moderate Victorian viewpoint. While Marx's

theory remains underdeveloped in terms of providing an account that includes gender as important to understanding capitalism, his categories nonetheless lead in the direction of a systematic critique of patriarchy as it manifests itself in capitalism since he is able to separate out the historically specific elements of patriarchy from a more general form of women's oppression as it has existed throughout much of human history. In this sense, his categories provide resources for feminist theory or at least areas for new dialogue at a time when Marx's critique of capital is coming to the fore once again.

Notes

[1] Morse, Felicity. "International Women's Day 2014: The shocking statistics that show why it is still so important," *Independent*. March 7, 2014. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/international-womens-day-2014-the-shocking-statistics-that-show-why-it-is-still-so-important-9177211.html

[2] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 718.

[3] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 717.

[4] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 718.

[5] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 1061. Emphasis in the original.

[6] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 527.

[7] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 521.

[8] Emphasis added.

[9] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 724.

[10] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 711, emphasis added.

[11] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 621.

[12] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 517.

[13] Leeb, Claudia (2007) "Marx and the Gendered Structure of Capitalism," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*." Vol. 33, no. 7. p. 848.

[14] These were usually small cottage-based plants with few employees and little modern technology.

[15] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 591-592.

[16] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 590.

[17] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 517.

[18] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 394.

[19] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 520.

[20] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 620.

[21] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 620.

[22] Marx, Karl (1976) *Capital* Vol. I. New York: Penguin Books. P. 620-621, emphasis added.

[23] For a discussion of how Marx is ambivalent on the effect of factory work on women's morality, see Brown, Heather. (2012) *Marx on Gender and the Family: A Critical Study.* Bill Books. p. 84-88.

The Vision of the New Society in Marx's Capital

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Marx's *Capital* has been heralded for many things, but providing an exhaustive account of a future socialist society isn't one of them.

And for good reason, since it is exclusively concerned with delineating the law of motion of *capitalism*. Nevertheless, Marx's univocal focus on the critique of capital is precisely what enables him to develop vital insights about the nature of post-capitalist society. This is because *critique* in the dialectical tradition does not merely disclose the limits of a phenomenon but also intimates what lies beyond it.

This is pivotal to understanding what Marx's *Capital* is truly about. It is often called a theory of capitalist development—but this is inaccurate. *Capital* delineates the process of capitalism's *dissolution*, which, in fact, ultimately *thwarts* its development. Its analysis of capitalism's law of motion shows that "under penalty of death"[1] the system must give way to a higher form of social organization—socialism or communism (these terms are completely interchangeable in Marx's work and do not denote distinct historical stages). It should therefore come as no surprise that important discussion of the nature of a post-capitalist society appears in *Capital* itself.

Capital, of course, does not and cannot provide a detailed outline of post-capitalist society. Since a positive alternative becomes knowable only through a negative critique, it can offer no more than *intimations* of the future. However, these intimations—derived from a rigorous analysis and critique of the logic of capital—are of tremendous importance, since they reveal a conception of communism that is radically different from what followers as well as critics of Marx have upheld for many years. In light of the profound impasse facing social movements and radical theorists when it comes to spelling out what a viable alternative to capitalism means in the twenty-first century, it is time to re-examine these intimations with new eyes.

As should be clear from a serious reading of Marx's *Capital*, capitalism is defined neither by the existence of markets nor private property. Its distinguishing feature is rather a specific form of production relations that subjects human activity to the accumulation of wealth in monetary form, in which the augmentation of value is an end in itself. What drives this process is the peculiar social form assumed by labor in modern society. Strictly speaking, "labor" as such is *not* the source of all value. The value of a commodity is determined not by the *actual* amount of time in which it is produced but by the *socially necessary labor time* required to do so on a global level. This social average varies continuously, due to technological innovations that

increase the productivity of labor (see Dunayevskaya 2000: 105). The average is communicated to the agents of social production *post festum*, through the laws of competition.[2] Workers are thereby compelled to produce in accordance with an abstract social average that operates behind their backs. Once this process is set into motion, it becomes impossible for anyone—whether workers or social planners—to exert long-term control of capital. Concrete labor (the varied kinds of labor employed in making discrete products) becomes increasingly dominated by labor that conforms to an abstract average —termed by Marx "abstract labor."

The preponderance of abstract over concrete labor transforms the nature of work, by making it more routinized, machine-like, and abstracted from the sensuousness of the individual. It transforms our relation to nature, since it becomes increasingly viewed as a mere externality that must serve the dictates of capital accumulation. Nature ceases to be seen as having intrinsic value (in the moral sense); natural contingency and human creativity count only insofar as they augment *economic* value—and if they do not, they are ignored or cast aside. And capital's drive for self-expansion transforms the meaning of time, since both workers and capitalists become governed by an abstract, quantitative, and invariable time-determination over which they have no control. The more abstract labor becomes, the greater the amount of value produced. And the more value produced, the more that capitalism is driven to augment value (and profit) ever more. In capitalism, "Time is everything, man is nothing; he is, at most, time's carcass. Quality no longer matters. Quantity decides everything; hour for hour, day by day" (Marx 1976, 127). *Capital* is an endless quest for an infinite magnitude in a finite world.

None of this may seem to have anything to do with a post-capitalist society. However, *Capital's* emphasis on the domination of human activity by abstract universal labor time intimates what must be done to transcend capitalism. It is not enough to simply abolish private property and unregulated markets, since stopping there leave production relations intact. This is no discovery of *Capital*, of course; Marx had already arrived at this insight in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in critiquing "crude communism" for presuming that the mere abolition of private property constitutes the transcendence of capitalism. *Capital*, in its entirety, is the fullest concretization of this critique.[3] And in doing so it poses a far more radical and expansive vision than those who define socialism as the abolition of market anarchy and unorganized exchange. In fact, *Capital* suggests that the alternative to capitalism necessarily *seems* to center on organizing exchange because of the nature of value production itself. The value of a commodity can never be known immediately, by looking at it in isolation; its value becomes manifest only in the exchange relation between discrete commodities. Value is therefore a "social hieroglyphic" (Marx 1977, 167) that is deep, dark, and difficult to understand. It is immediately knowable only on the level of its phenomenal expression—exchange-value. It therefore appears—virtually inevitably—that "rationally" organizing relations of exchange is the *sine qua non* for ending capitalism.[4] Those who remain on the surface of things—which is a great many of us—never get further than this, making it hard to grasp the radical implications of Marx's critique of capital.[5]

Once the proper object of critique is identified, the alternative to it becomes readily visible. Value production renders human relations *indirectly* social, since they are shaped and

dominated by abstract forms such as money. Labor assumes a social or general character not through the self-conscious acts of the producers, but by exchange relations that are imposed upon them from without, *post festum*. The negation of this state of affairs necessitates that labor assume a social character *prior* to the exchange of products, on the basis of the communal character of production. Exchange value—which is the phenomenal expression of value production based on abstract labor—is eliminated once human relations are no longer governed by the drive to augment value. For that to happen, *freely* associated and non-alienated conditions of labor must come into being. Self-determined individuals distribute the elements of production according to their needs instead of being governed by forms that operate independently of them—such as by the state or the market. The labor employed in making products no longer takes on a material quality that is independent of the self-activity of the laborers. This is not simply a matter of forming small, self-contained communities that operate in a world market dominated by value production; it instead requires a communal network of associations in which value production is superseded on a *global* level.

Remarkably, the fullest discussion of Marx's concept of communism is found in the most famous section of Volume One of *Capital*—"The Fetishism of Commodities and its Secret." The fetishism of commodities is dispelled neither by the discovery of labor as the source of value nor the proletariat as the revolutionary class. This is because "the social relations between private labors appears as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but as material relations between persons and social relations between things" (Marx 1977: 165-6). Since fetishism is adequate to the concept of capital, it can be dissolved, Marx writes, only by examining the present from the vantage point of "other forms of production." He writes, "Let us finally imagine, for a change, an association of free men, working with the means of production held in common." In this post-capitalist society, products are "directly objects of utility" and do not assume a value form. Exchange value and universalized commodity production come to an end. Producers decide how to make, distribute, and consume the total social product. One part is used to renew the means of production; the other "is consumed by members of the association as means of subsistence" (Marx 1977: 171-2). Marx invokes neither the market the state as the instrumentality through which this distribution of the elements of production is achieved. It is purely a matter of the self-deliberative acts of the producers. It is a planned distribution of labor time by those who are no longer subjected to socially necessary labor time. This *form* of organizing *time* is the cardinal principle of Marx's concept of communism.

Marx says that the same principle applies here as in commodity production *to the extent that* there is an equal exchange, insofar as "the share of each individual producer in the means of subsistence is determined by his labor time" (Marx 1977: 172). But the content of this exchange is radically different than in capitalism, since it is not governed by *socially necessary* labor time. Socially necessary labor time imposes itself as a person apart, irrespective of the sensuous needs of individuals, whereas actual labor time is the sensuous activity of individuals mediating their relations with nature. There is a parallel with commodity production *only in that there is* an exchange of equivalents, since one contributes a given hour of labor to the community and receives from it goods produced in that same amount of time (a given hour of

labor). But since there is no social average that governs the exchange, generalized commodity production comes to an end.

Many have argued that the abolition of capitalism entails the abolition of labor. This is true, insofar as we are speaking of labor that has the dual character of abstract vs. concrete labor. The *Grundrisse* specifies this by speaking of the abolition of *productive* labor—for which capitalism itself prepares the way. As living labor is progressively replaced by labor saving technologies, the worker "steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor" (Marx 1973: 705). But does the end of productive, industrial labor signal the abolition of *all* forms of labor? What about kinds of labor that are not productive of surplus value in capitalism, such as labor involved in caring, nurturing, teaching, and facilitating—which some refer to as "affective labor"?

In approaching this, it is important to note that *Capital* critiques capitalism on the basis of its own criteria (rather than from some external standpoint, as is true of romantics and idealists). Marx follows the procedure of Hegel, whose *Phenomenology of Spirit* holds that the standpoint for critiquing any given stage of consciousness is established by the criterion of consciousness itself. But critiquing a phenomenon on the basis of its criterion is not the same as normatively endorsing any particular expression of it.

Marx's critics often overlook this when it comes to the distinction between "productive" and "unproductive" labor. Silvia Frederici, for one, has argued that Marx "idealized industrial labor as the normative form of social production" (Federici 2017: 80). However, Marx does not say that industrial or productive labor—which he defines as labor that produces surplus value—is "better" than unproductive labor. On the contrary, he states in *Capital* "to be a productive laborer is a misfortune" (Marx 1977: 644). Nor does he suggest that unproductive labor is *unnecessary* (surely, labor power cannot augment surplus value if it is not reproduced in the domestic sphere). Marx is pursuing a different question—namely, *what social relations are necessary for the production of surplus value*? He does so in order to pinpoint how to abolish value production. With the end of capitalism, the very distinction between necessary and surplus labor, as well between productive and unproductive labor, becomes completely superfluous.

As Rosa Luxemburg argued, for capitalism "only that work is productive which produces surplus value…while all the toil of the women and mothers of the proletariat within the four walls of the home is considered unproductive work. This sounds crude and crazy, but it is an accurate expression of the crudeness and craziness of today's capitalist economic order." She added, "Millions of proletarian women produce capitalist profit just like men, in homework industries" (Luxemburg 2006: 241). It is possible to produce profit without producing surplus value. That doesn't make one less important.[6]

So can labor that is not productive of surplus value play a critical role in a post-capitalist society? Marx thinks so, as seen both from *Capital* and his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program*. In discussing the initial phase of socialism or communism, he writes that the producers "do not

exchange their products; just as little does the labor employed on the product appear here *as the value* of these products, as a material quality possessed by them, since now, in contrast to capitalist society, individual labor no longer exists in an *indirect* fashion but *directly* as a component part of the total labor" (Marx 1989: 86). Generalized commodity exchange is possible only if there is a social substance—abstract labor—that makes it possible for products of labor to be universally exchanged. But with democratic, freely associated control of the means of production, abstract labor comes to an end. And since abstract labor is the substance of value, value production also comes to an end—not only in the higher but also in the "lower," *initial* phase of communism.

But labor itself does not come to end. Instead, *actual* labor time serves as the measure for distributing the elements of production. Marx writes, "The individual producer receives back from society—after the deductions have been made—exactly what he gives to it. What he has given to it is his individual *quantum* of labor." Individuals receive from society a voucher or token that they have "furnished such and such an amount of labor (after deducting his labor for the common funds)" and from it obtains "the social stock of means of consumption as much as the amount of labor costs" (Marx 1989: 86). As in *Capital*, Marx is *not* suggesting that the worker's labor is computed on the basis of a social *average* of labor time. Here, labor time simply refers to the actual amount of hours of work performed by the individual in a given cooperative.

These passages should not be read, in my view, as a normative projection of how a socialist society emerging from the womb of capitalism *ought* to be organized. Marx is not writing blueprints for the future. It may be that a voucher system is unviable given certain circumstances, just the relative weight assigned to labor may be different today compared with when Marx wrote 150 years ago (the same is true of the length of any initial phase). Marx is instead trying to think out how a fundamental break can be made from value production even when labor as a socially constitutive activity that mediates our relations with nature remains integral to social existence.[7]

Nevertheless, Marx's discussion in the 1875 *Critique* is widely misread—including by many independent Marxists. An essay in a recent issue of *Endnotes*, for instance, takes Marx's discussion of distribution according to actual labor time as signifying that "For Marx, it is only in the higher phase that domination is actually overcome" (Endnotes 2015, 186). This is clearly not so, since in the lower phase there are no classes, no alienated labor, no commodity exchange, and no value production. Nor does Marx suggest that in the lower phase "the same principle will apply as in bourgeois society." He instead writes that "the same principle prevails as in the exchange of commodities" (Marx 1989, 86)—and that in a *formal* sense alone, in that a *quid pro quo* prevails in which one labors so many hours and receives goods and services made in that many hours. But the form of this exchange (which is superseded in a higher phase) is a world removed from the exchange of *abstract* equivalents in capitalism, which of course takes place behind the backs of the producers. Far from "universalizing" domination as "the precursor to the end of domination" (Endnotes 2015, p. 185), Marx's discussion of distribution according to *actual* (not abstract!) labor time posits the liberating conditions that make it

possible to ultimately reach “From each according to their ability, to each according to their need.”

While *Endnotes* gets tied up in knots when it comes to the lower phase, it does not critique Marx’s discussion of a higher phase, in which labor no longer serves as the measure for distributing the elements of production. But it runs into a problem here as well, since Marx explicitly holds that labor is not abolished in a higher phase of communism either! In a *higher* phase, “labor has become not only a means of life but the prime necessity of life” (Marx 1989: 87). To be sure, labor as a means toward an end, as an instrumental activity defining industrial capitalism, is abolished long before this. However, Marx’s discussion of distribution according to actual labor time in *Capital* and the *Critique of the Gotha Program* does not refer to productive labor that augments value, since the value-form is abolished by the time of the lower phase. He does not conflate all kinds of labor with instrumental labor. “Labor” also includes *affective* activities, such as caring, nurturing, and sharing, as ends-in-themselves. As he writes in *Capital*, “labor is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore…common to all forms of society in which humans live” (Marx 1976: 290).

Many feminist theorists have criticized Marx—rightly in my view—for saying little about women’s domestic labor in *Capital*.[8] This limitation may be explained by Marx’s effort to emphasize the deleterious impact of labor performed for the sake of augmenting surplus value. But it is still an unfortunate limitation, since it has made it easier for some to read *Capital* in a narrow, productivist manner—such as by defining communism as the realm in which the power of industrial labor is fully actualized. However, it does not follow from this that Marx’s “concept of *communism* ignores the largest activity on this planet” (Federici 2017: 90)—the affective labor often carried out by women. The opposite is in fact the case. *Capital* focuses on productive, instrumental labor because that is the kind of labor that can and must be dispensed with in a new society—after all, where there is no value production, there can be no labor that augments surplus value. But he does not suggest that all forms of labor, including affective ones, come to an end. Since his concept of communism envisions a wider and more enriched scope for the affective labor that is de-valued in capitalism, it is consistent with efforts to conceive of social relations based on caring, nurturing, and loving.

I am not suggesting that affective labor as it exists today can by itself constitute the alternative to instrumental, alienated labor. Affective labor is clearly shaped by class relations and has become increasingly commodified—as anyone who works in health care and education can attest. However, there is a big difference between affective and productive labor even in capitalism: The later can be automated very nearly out of existence whereas jobs that require “uniquely human characteristics such as empathy, creativity, judgment, or critical thinking will never succumb to widespread automation” (Smith 2014). There is an even bigger difference between them when it comes to socialism, since productive labor that augments surplus value *must* be abolished for there to be any chance to exit from capitalism, whereas affective labor that is freed from class domination and commodification can become the basis of totally new human relations.

Contrary to the claim that Marx's distinction of productive and unproductive labor devalues the contributions of those working outside the factory, I argue that this very distinction enables a Marxian critique to value that which capitalism devalues—affective forms of labor that are not a mere means to an end, but function as ends in themselves. If he had treated affective labor as value creating, then the abolition of value production would also entail the demise—and ultimately, the devaluation—of affective labor itself. This would rob us of access to the source from which totally new human relations can be developed as the alternative to the all-dominating power of capital.

The objective conditions facing us today are very different from those prevailing when Marx wrote *Capital*—even if the logic of his argument anticipates them. Foremost among these is that the displacement of living labor by machines and automated devices has proceeded so far that it seems naïve to presume that that the expropriators will be expropriated simply by obtaining public ownership of the existing productive apparatus. Given the nature of today's capitalism, it appears that a radical supersession of the very distinction between productive and unproductive labor, as well as between labor and other forms of human interaction, is a necessary condition for a post-capitalist future. This does not mean that the working class has eased to be the subject of its own emancipation; the industrial working class was never more than 35% of the wage earners of a given nation, and at no time in history has there been more wage earners than today (there are several *billion* of them). But it does mean that the logic of capital is generating a world defined by underemployment, unemployment and precariousness, in which racism, sexism, and environmental destruction are increasingly pivotal. A *humanist* response to the crisis of capital, as against a class-reductionist one, is called for.[9]

Of course, many today refrain from envisioning the transcendence of capitalism now that the industrial proletariat is a shrinking percentage of the workforce, and focus instead on capital's all-pervasive dominance. Some have even tried to read such a standpoint back into Marx, by distinguishing between the "esoteric" Marx who coldly analyzed the logic of capital versus the "exoteric" Marx who supported workers' struggles and proletarian revolution. But such a separation between subjective and objective is alien to dialectics—and Marx was, if nothing else, a dialectician. He never made a secret that *Capital* was written to and for the dispossessed. That sets the standard for what needs to be done in light of the radically different realities of our era.

Notes

[1] Marx writes in *Capital*, Vol. I, chapter 15, "Modern Industry, indeed, compels society, under penalty of death, to replace the detail-worker of today, grappled by life-long repetition of one and the same trivial operation, and thus reduced to the mere fragment of a man, by the fully developed individual, fit for a variety of labors, ready to face any change of production, and to whom the different social functions he performs, are but so many modes of giving free scope to

his own natural and acquired powers" (Marx 1977, 618)

[2] It is important to note (contra to the neo-classical theory of competition, which even some Marxists tend to follow) that it is not competition that drives value production; rather, the drive to level the playing field by having discrete units of capital adhere to socially necessary labor time *expresses* itself on the surface level of society, in competition.

[3] See for instance *Capital*, Vol. III: "Capital…now receives the form the social capital…in contrast to private capital, and its enterprises appear as social enterprises as opposed to private ones. This is the abolition of capital as private property within the confines of the capitalist mode of production itself" (Marx 1981, 567).

[4] While the most obvious form of organizing exchange is the statist command economies of Soviet-type societies, Marx's critique of Proudhon, who opposed the state in favor decentralized producer cooperatives, indicates that there are other varieties as well.

[5] This is especially expressed in the tendency of many commentators on Marx to emphasize the distinction between the use-value and exchange-value of a commodity (a notion that was no discovery of Marx's), while neglecting the all-important distinction between value and exchange-value.

[6] It is no secret that without unproductive labor within the domestic sphere, productive labor in the public sphere cannot be maintained and reproduced. But that is a separate issue from whether the former is productive of surplus value. By analogy, laboring activity cannot be maintained without breathing; but that does not mean that breathing is the source of a commodity's value. I need not add that this does not make breathing any less important or "necessary."

[7] For more on this, see Hudis 2013.

[8] For an excellent survey of these debates, see Brown 2012

[9] For more on this, see Hudis 2015.

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Das Kapital and Me

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This presentation is about time-travel, but not 150 years into the future. We'll go back, then forward to the present.

Let's begin by stepping into our time-travel machine, and going back, not 150 years, but 50 years. More precisely, 47 years, Columbus, Ohio, mid-summer 1970. We enter a large, three-story house near the campus of Ohio State University, go up the stairs, and there we see a long-haired, bearded hippie, who is living in this "commune" with his wife, four brothers, their wives, and three children, one of them his.

He's in the small study, pouring over a book, reading it very carefully—like the mathematician he was, trying to understand each sentence before moving to the next, reading every footnote, outlining the book as he read. Never before had he read anything like this. It was upending his world. He'll never get over the experience.

That person, of course, is me. I've never gotten over the experience.

Some autobiographical context: I'd been a very Catholic math major at the University of Dayton, who went on to graduate school at the University of Virginia. I got my Ph.D. in mathematics, then, in the fall of 1969, I began teaching at the University of Kentucky.

During my five years at UVa, I'd become active in the Civil Rights movement. I'd also, during this period, abandoned my fierce anti-Communism and attendant support for the war then raging in Vietnam.

At the University of Kentucky, I began to question my career choice. I was mainly teaching differential equations to budding engineers, most of whom would soon be joining the military-industrial complex. I began reading Thoreau. "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation," he said. I could see my future.

Then came the tipping point: Kent State. Shortly thereafter, the ROTC Building at UKy was burned to the ground. The next day I found myself sitting on a lawn with students and some faculty, holding a bag of the marshmallows that had been given us to throw at the advancing National Guardsmen. But they started teargassing us before coming within marshmallow range.

That night, eyes still smarting, I decided to make a career change: give up math, go back to school, this time in philosophy–so that I could study and teach about things relevant to leading

a meaningful life. Some weeks later I notified my department chair that I wasn't coming back in the fall, that I had been accepted into the Ph.D. program in philosophy at Ohio State.

It was that summer between my leaving mathematics and beginning philosophy that I decided to read *Capital*. Until then, despite my move leftward, I'd taken it for granted that capitalism was about freedom, whereas communism was totalitarian. There were problems with our current system to be sure, racism and militarism, but we were making great strides. Segregation had been declared illegal. The Voting Rights Act had been passed. President Johnson had declared "war on poverty." And the anti-war movement was gaining strength. Indeed, Robert Kennedy had come out against the war—and would almost surely have won the presidency in 1968 had he not been murdered.

But now, after finishing *Capital*, the world looked very different.

Fast-forward 48 years, then back up some months—to April, 2017. I'd just finished teaching a large segment of *Capital* in my graduate Marxism course. It was a full class, fifteen students, with a couple of others sitting in. Among the enrollees were five young Jesuit scholastics, i.e., young men aspiring to become Jesuit priests. Lots of interest in Marxism these days–frankly, more than I've ever seen since my own graduate student days.

What was it like this time, reading *Capital*—as compared to reading it in 1970? That's what I want to think about. There is, of course, much, much I could say. Let me make just a couple comparisons, focusing on several things that most impressed me during my first reading.

What Impressed Me Then

If you've read *Capital*, I'm sure you remember Part I, perhaps with a shudder. Marx takes the reader on a long and very abstract journey that begins with commodities, and ends, eventually, with money. Then comes the much shorter Part II, "The Transformation of Money into Capital." First, we have just barter: C-C. Then money is introduced, itself a commodity, C-M-C. It's no longer necessary for me to find someone who not only has what I want, but is willing to trade it for what I have to offer. But with money now in circulation, we can have M-C-M. Then, suddenly, things get strange. Throughout, Marx has been assuming the "labor-theory of value," the classical theory of both Adam Smith and Ricardo, which maintains that, ultimately, the exchange-value of a commodity is determined by the amount of labor it took to produce that commodity. So, at each stage of the progression from C-C to C-M-C to M-C-M, equals exchange for equals. Needless to say, Marx knows that this is not strictly true, but he's making simplifying assumptions to get at the underlying structure of a complex phenomenon. This is not at all strange to a mathematician. I was used to constructing greatly-simplified models, then proving theorems about them. (I still defend the labor-theory of value as an indispensable tool in understanding how capitalism works. It's certainly vastly superior to the "marginalist" theory that replaced it.)

Here's what has suddenly gotten strange. At each stage of development, equals have exchanged for equals. But suddenly, under capitalism, we get M-C-M', where M' is greater than

M. How is that possible? Our model of capitalism is very simple: supply and demand are in equilibrium; everyone is equally skilled; there is no cheating or deception. Yet Marx wants to argue that even under these idealized conditions, it's possible for the capitalist to make a profit. But how?

I scratched my head as I read this? How, if equals always exchange for equals, can the capitalist (who, in this simple model, contributes none of his own labor to the process) turn M into M'.

I was blown away by Marx's answer. The capitalist pays full value for all the commodities he purchases—raw materials, tools, and . . . your labor power, i.e., your *capacity* to work. Not your *labor*—as mainstream economics tell us—but your *capacity* to labor.

How much does he pay for *this* commodity? Well, as the labor-theory-of value tells us: the amount of labor it took to produce that commodity, just as is the case with every other commodity. This makes sense. After all, what will you do with the wage you receive? You'll buy food, clothing, shelter. That is to say, you pay for the labor that has been expended producing the items that you will consume, giving you the capacity to work. The prices you pay for these items reflect the quantity of labor that went into producing that food, clothing, etc.

Okay, fair enough. And how long will you have to work to repay this debt? Marx's answer: *much longer than the labor expended by those other workers on your behalf.* For one key economic variable is *not* determined, under capitalism, by the invisible hand of market competition: *the length of the working day*! You will have to work longer than necessary to give back to society the value of what you have received—and that *surplus value* belongs to the capitalist. Which is to say, capitalism is, in a fundamental sense, no different from a slave or feudal society. In all these cases, those who work produce their means of subsistence, and then work more to produce the things consumed by the slaveowners, lords—and capitalists. Of course, there is one crucial difference: in the first two cases, the exploitation is obvious. In the case of capitalism, it is not, for this outcome is the result, not of force, but of an invisible hand setting the prices that free and legally-equal individuals use in determining what to do with their lives. The "free market" determines wages, not colluding capitalists. Or so it seems.

In working through all this, three things stood out for me, things I'd never thought about before:

1. *Capitalist exploitation is essentially invisible*—since we can't see, when we purchase something, how much labor-time went into producing it. We know how long we had to work for those wages, but not how long it took others to produce what we buy with them.
2. The market, even in its most perfect and idealized form, plays no role in setting the length of the working day. That is set by *class struggle*. There is no inherent tendency under capitalism for productivity increases to translate into more leisure for workers.

3. *Capitalism requires unemployment*— "a reserve army of the unemployed," both to supply workers, when needed for industrial expansion *and* as a disciplinary stick to keep workers in line.

In addition to these and a number of other theoretical points, the *concrete empirical and historical analysis* Marx laid out in *Capital* also much impressed me, in particular:

1. *The hideous conditions of industrial work (and other forms of labor in Britain) as it rose to become the dominant economic power*—conditions, well-documented by the factory inspectors quoted at length by Marx. I was shocked by the "brutal truth" Marx noted, quoting "the fish-blooded bourgeois doctrinaire," Destutt de Tracy: "In poor countries the people are comfortable; in rich countries they are generally poor."[1]
2. *The astonishing history of "primitive accumulation*," the answer to the question I'd never thought about before: How did it come to pass that a new, every-growing class should come into being consisting of individuals with no automatic access of means of production, *"free" laborers*, free, as Marx says, in a double sense—free to dispose of their labor-power as they choose, but also free from any access to means of production apart from selling this very special commodity. If I'd thought about it at all, it was in line with the "insipid childishness everyday preached to us in defense of private property": diligent, intelligent, frugal people who, over time, accumulated wealth and property, and the "lazy rascals expending their substance and more." [2] It had never occurred to me that "the emancipation of means of production" is "written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire" nor that "The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for commercial hunting of black-skins signalized the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production."[3]

When I finally finished *Capital*, and reflected on the experience, I found that I'd been convinced that *capitalism is a fundamentally unjust economic order: exploitative in its origin, exploitative in its daily operation, and exploitative at its theoretical core*. That is to say, it was Marx's *moral critique* that got to me. It persuaded me then. It persuades me still.

What was not convincing, however. was Marx's famous conclusion in the penultimate chapter, "Historic Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation." Here Marx offers a projection into the future: Capital becomes ever more centralized as the big fish eat the little fish, "the expropriation of many capitalists by a few." Capitalism also expands geographically, "entangling all people in the net of the world market." True enough, but then comes the punch line: Along with this grows misery, oppression and degradation—and with this grows the revolt of the working class. "The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated."[4]

I must say—this passage took me by surprise. I'd been following the argument very carefully to

this point—but I didn't see how this conclusion followed from what had preceded it. Why couldn't capitalism keep expanding—and keep the standard of living of the proletariat rising as well—as had been the case in all capitalist countries in my lifetime. To be sure, by the early 70s there were ecological arguments in the air. The Club-of- Rome-commissioned *Limits to Growth* was published in 1972, about the time the economist Kenneth Boulding famously remarked: "Only a madman or an economist thinks exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world."[5]

But that wasn't Marx's argument. Clearly his conclusion was *Marxian hope*, not *Marxian science*. It was Marx remaining faithful to his youthful vision, expressed so vividly in *The Communist Manifesto* (written when he was 30, well before he'd made it to the British Museum and begun the economic research that would lead to *Das Kapital*.): the bourgeosie "produces its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable."[6]

I can't say I was disillusioned or disappointed by this dramatic conclusion to this amazing book. There was no way that Marx could have "proven scientifically" that a new and vastly better world would inevitably come to pass. If he had attempted a careful, methodical "proof," it couldn't have worked—as he surely must have known.

Instead he offered a hopeful, Hegelian ending, particularly hopeful when supplemented by the observation that "this struggle should be far less violent and protracted than the preceding expropriation of the many by the few."[7]

Reading Capital Then vs. Now

Let's return to the three claims I mentioned deriving from Marx's theoretical analysis: 1) the invisibility of capitalist exploitation, 2) the determinants of the length of the working day, and 3) the necessity of unemployment under capitalism.

Re. 1: I was much struck by Marx's theoretical demonstration that exploitation under capitalism is essentially invisible—which I found quite convincing. But at some level, this "exploitation" seemed odd, given the fact that the standard of living for workers—and everyone else—had been steadily improving over the past quarter century (since the end of WWII). But then I realized that this fact in no way refuted Marx's claim. For if increases in productivity decreased the amount of labor necessary to produce the goods that workers were consuming by a greater percentage than the length of the working day was declining, they could actually be *consuming more* than before, while also be *more exploited*. How much less they could be working while consuming the same amount remains invisible.

Indeed, the degree of Marxian exploitation is even more opaque today than it was in the 70s. Back then, the financial system was relatively transparent. The stock markets had been relatively stable for years. Banking was boring. No longer. To quote Paul Krugman, "How did things get so opaque? The answer is 'financial innovation'–the alphabet soup of CDO's and SIV's , RMB's. and ABCP's".[8]

It should be noted that the invisibility of capitalist exploitation in a key component of the system's resilience. Since the inner workings of the system are incomprehensible to the vast majority, it is far easier to blame the government when conditions become dire than the "invisible hand" of an opaque economic system.

Re. 2–the fact that market plays no role in determining the length of the working day.

In 1970 the issue of overwork did not seem pressing. Although the eight-hour day, proposed in 1886 did not become law until a half-century later (1938) and had not come down since, labor conditions did not seem bad and seemed to be improving: most workers got time-and-a-half for overtime, paid vacations, maternity-leaves for women.

Keynes certainly thought that the long-term trends were good: "What work there still remains to be done will be as widely shared as possible–three hour shifts, or a fifteen-hour week." This was written in 1930. His prediction was for "a hundred years hence," i.e, 2030—thirteen years from now.[9]

How close are we now? Well, as James Surowieki reports in a 2014 *New Yorker* article, a 2008 Harvard Business School survey of thousands of professionals found 94% worked 50 or more hours per week (not 15), and almost half worked more than 65. In finance, it's even worse. Junior investment bank analysts at Goldman Sachs had to be told not to work, on average, more than 75 hours/week. A nine-year study of two big investment banks showed people spent up to 120 hours a week on the job—and begin to break down after 4 years: depression, anxiety, immune-system problems, and decline in creativity and judgment.[10]

Re. 3: The necessity of unemployment

This came as a shock to me when I first read it—something I'd never thought about, the need for "a reserve army of unemployed." Indeed, the reigning ideology of the day was Keynesianism. Keynes acknowledged that there exists no tendency in *laissez-faire* capitalism toward full employment—contrary to what the pre-Keynesian mainstream had dogmatically asserted. But, the new mainstream asserted, the government can step in and employ suitable monetary and fiscal policies to ensure full employment. Which seemed to be true in 1970. That was a time, long past, when no one, at least no one I knew, had to worry about getting a job. No need to go to college. A high-school degree was more than good enough. Marx seemed to be wrong about this one.

But then the Vietnam War ended—and with it the "Golden Age" of capitalism, or what Thomas Piketty calls "les trente glorieuses." Suddenly we had "stagflation"—not enough unemployment to keep inflation in check. Milton Friedman's argument for a "natural rate of unemployment" was quickly adopted by the mainstream—though not without a name-change. (We don't want to say publicly that capitalism requires unemployment, so we'll call it NAIRU—the non-accelerating inflationary rate of unemployment. We certainly don't want to proclaim publicly that unemployment was the necessary disciplinary stick to keep this "free" workforce in line.)

Needless to say, Marx's point is compelling today. It's striking that today no "reputable" politician or pundit talks about ending unemployment or, for that matter, "ending poverty"—globally or even here at home. The only proposals on offer are (dubious) plans to "grow the economy" in hopes of decreasing somewhat the levels of unemployment and poverty.

Bottom line: The things I found compelling when reading *Capital* in 1970 are even more compelling now than they were in 1970. I can think of no exceptions.

Conclusion: One Other Matter

When I read *Capital* in 1970, I became convinced that capitalism is a deeply unjust, immoral system. But there was a huge, looming question that Marx did not address. Is there an economically viable *alternative* to capitalism that is morally preferable? Marx, in his "Afterward to the Second German Edition" of *Capital* sneered at critics who reproached him for not providing, in his words, "recipes for cookshops of the future."[11] Marx responds to his critics, not in his own words, but by quoting other reviewers, who affirm that "Marx only troubles himself about one thing: to show by rigid scientific analysis . . . . both the necessity of the present order of things, and the necessity of another order into which the first must inevitably pass." But, of course, Marx has shown no such thing. At that point in his argument, as I noted earlier, he invokes, consciously or not, the Left-Hegelian faith of this youth that the world will inevitably become more rational—and hence more "just." (It's worth pointing out that he concludes this "Afterword" by invoking Hegel, now treated, he says, as "a dead dog," and "openly avowing [himself] to be the pupil of this mighty thinker.")

I've never faulted Marx for not offering a detailed blueprint for a post-capitalist society. Marx was, at this stage of his life, committed to a "scientific investigation" of the facts of this world. But at that time, there was no data to which to appeal in constructing an economically viable blueprint.

In 1970 this was no longer the case. At that time there was a lot of data out there, not only various "communist" states experimenting with different models: Soviet central planning, the "Chinese road to socialism," Yugoslav self-managed socialism, East Germany, Hungary, Cuba, but also the proliferation of cooperatives—most notably the "Mondragon" experiment in the Basque region of Spain, and the network of industrial cooperatives in Northern Italy.

I was fascinated by all this, and immediately began researching the topic—which became my dissertation, then the book that got me tenure at Loyola, then the focus of most of my subsequent writing. Along the way, I frequently revisited *Capital*—and saw things I hadn't noticed that first time through. First of all: that Marx's argument does not rule out market socialism. As Marx makes clear in that first part of *Capital*, capitalism emerges only when a very special commodity emerges, namely *labor-power,* only when a large class develops who must sell this special commodity to those who own the means of production, and who can thus tell them what to do.

But what if we had a market economy based on worker-self-management, one in which the

workers themselves controlled their enterprises? It was then that I noticed Marx's footnote in *Capital* to the Rochdale cooperative experiments, which "showed that associations of workmen could manage shops, mills and almost all forms of industry with success, and they immediately improved the condition of the men, and did not leave a clear place for the masters."[12]

Then there was that moral dimension to Marx's theoretical critique of capitalism. What exactly was wrong with the fact that the surplus value created by the working class is appropriated by the capitalists, who, unlike their class predecessors (slave owners and feudal lords), invested most of this surplus in developing new technologies that increased the productivity of labor? It occurred to me that Marx was suggesting here a *democratic* critique. Even if the increased productivity did, over time, lead to a higher standard of living for the workers, the fact of the matter is, investment determines the future of an economy, affecting almost everyone. And yet the vast majority of those who will affected have no say in those decisions.

Indeed, I've since argued, Marx's overall critique of capitalism is a democratic critique. Workers in enterprises have no democratic control over their conditions of work, nor do workers in society at large have any democratic control over the long-term development of their society.

These considerations suggested to me a model of socialism that I've come to call "Economic Democracy," a form of socialism in which democratically-run enterprises compete in (regulated) markets, while investment funds come from a network of *public* banks, investment priorities determined democratically.

I'll end on that note. Needless to say, I could say much, much more about Economic Democracy.[13] Here I am simply noting a key inspiration—a book published 150 years ago that transformed far more than a single bearded hippie.

Notes

[1] Karl Marx, *Capital*, v. 1 (International Publishers, 2003), p. 606.

[2] *Ibid*., p. 667.

[3] Ibid p. 669, 703.

[4] *Ibid*. p. 715.

[5] Quoted in Mancur Olsen and Hans-Martin Landsberg (eds), *The No-Growth Society* (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 97.

[6] Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (International Publishers), p. 21.

[7] Marx, *Capital,* p. 715.

[8] Paul Krugman, *New York Times*, December 3, 2007.

[9] John Maynard Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," in *Essays in Persuasion* (New York: Norton, 1963), pp. 368-72.

[10] James Surowieki, "The Cult of Overwork," *New Yorker*, Jan. 27, 2014

[11] Marx, Capital, p. 26.

[12] *Ibid*. p. 313, N2.

[13] For a detailed exposition, see David Schweickart, *After Capitalism, revised edition* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2011)

Review Essay: Symbolic Politics: The Chiaroscuro World of Media and Democratic Participation

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Laura Iannelli. *Hybrid Politics. Media and Participation*. London: Sage, 2016.

Dan Mercea. *Civic Participation in Contentious Politics: The Digital Foreshadowing of Protest*. London: Macmillan, 2016

Laura Iannelli's review of research literature on media and democratic participation is a worthy reference book, yet one offering sophisticated analysis and asking important questions. She argues that "newer" media (social media internet sites, interactive internet news) are not superseding "older" media (broadcast news, newspapers) but rather are interacting with them in important and tricky ways. "Older" media remain powerful and often determinative of the frameworks and possibilities for resistance. Hybridity, as used here, attends to the way fields and frameworks become constructed, as evidenced in the internet typically being treated as a separate site of politics. The study of these media in isolation, as she indicates, clearly risks "analytical fallacies." So hybridity studies caution us against one-dimensionality and assert that dialogue between frameworks produces more accurate and insightful social scientific observations, and better serve democratic participation.

Hybridity studies freely cross levels and categories as, for example, when elites and non-elites form hybrid content across media via 'dual screening' (e.g. using mobile devices to watch broadcast media) that can be used to check facts or to comment critically on, say, Fox or MSNBC broadcasts. Today online discussions of politics on mainstream television often occur simultaneously with broadcasts. Indeed her focus on the case study research on the use of Twitter throws into question usual top-down and bottom-up constructs in media. To the contrary, these constructs combine as when content from 'bottom' bloggers, fans, and 'activists' is picked up and spread by parties, think tanks, and major media. The key thesis here is that social media platforms add to, rather than substitute for, existing power relationships. Hybridity of this kind nonetheless can form a preliminary stage for a synthetic or total conception of new logics of participation.

Mercea and Iannelli, like chiaroscuro artists, use dark areas to illuminate their complex subjects. The hybridity literature rejects the notion that "old media" participation necessarily is false and ineffective. Audiences can "poach" media texts, that is, "participate both in the symbolic struggles over the dominant meanings of the cultural media texts, and in the production, curation, and circulation of new media texts."[i] The questions then are why democratic agents must resort to this subterfuge, and how successful they are at it. Henry Jenkins acknowledges deep skepticism about the possibility of real change occurring via interpretive guerrilla tactics.[ii] Iannelli responds by citing the example of poaching by the Spanish party Podemos's Pablo Iglesias, who analyzed the Spanish scene through 'Game of Thrones', using the media's own deceptive entertainment to elucidate political reality.

The multidisciplinarity within a general template symbolic interactionism is difficult to grasp, and Iannelli does a fine job of discussing ways in which disciplines should inform each other, attenuate demarcations, and how interactions might generate fruitful areas of study. The intellectual heritage of "structuralism" strongly runs throughout Ianelli's overview. From symbolic interactionism through Bourdieu's "social capital", Saussurian and Tel Quel-inspired semiotics to symbol-based analysis and the adaptation of Marxian language to media as "the ownership of the means of production of symbolic forms," this language of the symbolic, in this case, is infused, unlike many other studies, with a sober awareness of structuralist critique so as to bring it down to earth.

Ianneli and Dan Mercea are concerned with the decline of modern democracy and with recent anti-Enlightenment trends, but the use of the language of the symbolic to answer questions of how media promote democratic participation, act against it, or both, must beweighed critically, since symbolic politics has been defined as "a publicly displayed deception that is used to detract from actual political reality."[iii] The symbolic approach though tries to maintain an Enlightenment aspect in its search for democracy and in its belief in the value of social scientific research in furthering this aim, while the research acknowledges a "darker" side to everyday life in liberal democracies. Acknowledging this "dark" side helps us to identify mechanisms by which anti-democracy forces operate, and uses this awareness to refine critical research and tactics.

Hybrid Politics, however, tacitly favors liberal reformism over revolutionary ideas. The hopefulness of symbolic politics is to be found in what amounts to spotting 'flecks of light,' each instance having emancipatory potential. Hence, this approach equivocates between dark and light – an image, Mercea states, that "evades the bombast of either downhearted despondency or unbridled optimism."[iv] Iannelli's highly conceptual work focuses on the relations between media and sites of action. The domain of what she terms communication ecologies is social movements, which run parallel to but often are inconsequential regarding real configurations of political power.[v] While one may hope that communication ecologies produce a new participatory culture, while avoiding a McLuhanesque fetishization of technology, their contribution looks to be just that – a hope.

Iannelli and like-minded scholars want to be objective yet also champion participatory

democracy, so they accordingly must question their own enterprise. Does 'symbolic' discourse exacerbate the very problems it describes? How much radicalism is permissible, and at what cost to objectivity? Are hybrid forms of power the same as power itself, or exist only as concepts? Social scientific research evidences a certain liberal tepidity with regard to justice and to real democracy. Can research within liberal state idioms aid meaningful participation? Is it possible to study the presidential campaign of Barack Obama in 2008, as Andrew Chadwick does,[vi], without endorsing establishment power? One risks studying only the epiphenomena of power.

Iannelli begins with Chantal Mouffe's 'agonistic' politics, while Mercea ends with Mouffe but is critical of her attempt to radicalize liberalism via agonism. For Mouffe 'politics is the continuation of war by other means lite',[vii] while Iannelli describes 'the political' as "consigning conflict to the sphere of symbolic exchanges." But Mouffe, Ianelli and Mercea all want to have it both ways, that is, to 'radicalize pluralist democracy' while brushing away revolutionary thought. To perform this sleight of hand, revolutionary snippets are deployed ('the means of production of symbolic forms'). So research then sounds friendly to radical ideas while actually casting them into the shadows.. Even more problematic is an unwitting adoption of counterrevolutionary discourse. Mouffe buys into some conservative propaganda, such as "the death of communism" (i.e. the end of all radical alternatives). Mouffe and Iannelli insist they want radical action but do not want an organized left (not even revisionism, thank you), and instead want to replace it with mediated symbolic forms.

An example of mediated forms is "jamming," which is the subversive use of advertising, media symbols and narratives, turning meanings upside down or inside out – except that not only dissenters employ it. When the Democratic Party passes as "left", when the pre-Corbyn Labour Party virtually scorns laborers, and when the Parti Socialiste in France ceases to be a socialist party while still bearing the name, 'jamming' then supports discourses of counter-democracy. Observational research unaccompanied by revolutionary intent or action risks reifying its own categories, and thus becoming an agent of the foe, especially when tried and true organizing tactics have been deemed obsolete. Here Mouffe unhelpfully urges a search for forms of democratic participation which do not require formation of a revolutionary class.[viii]

Iannelli stresses that subversive media effects possess liberatory potential. Yet one must ask whether studying media's sites of resistance is a distraction from an exploitative historical situation which cannot be changed by reformism, and further ask whether cultivating "sites of resistance" within a "mediatized" political machine is a panacea. One can expend great effort seeking incremental gains in media sites of symbolic resistance, which themselves are indelible parts of an anti-democratic power structure. Yet many of the champions of this approach want to depict media-manufactured meanings as subjective and without prior constraints, in contrast to, for example, ideology theory[ix] The problem then is that symbolic resistance of this pallid kind actually aids enemies of democracy, and a focus on the media without examining other key elements of anti-democratic ideology, such as religion and the education system, risks leaving us with irrelevant or incomplete analyses.

Mercea analyzes the relationship between digital media networks and manifestations of democratic participation. His case studies are Occupy Den Haag (Netherlands), Stop A.C.T.A.[x] (worldwide), Save Rosia Montana (Romania), and the Camp for Climate Action (U.K). The preceding work of W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg[xi] is central, auguring a transformation in collective action. Mercea is hopeful about communication ecologies, which are forms of participation more individuated and less dependent on political organizations; methods of doing politics that are less "brokered." Mercea, like Iannelli, is attempting to find out how "the networked communication of contention may help reassess and revitalize democracy." What he turns up isn't all that promising.

Mercea argues that protest is becoming more 'casual' and personalized, in contrast to familiar forms which are the province of established organizations. The book proceeds to examine participatory coordination and "informal civic learning", decision-making in protest organizations using social media, and use of networked communication to create new modalities of participation, such as Facebook and Twitter, Mercea questions Bennett and Segerberg's proposition that the informal transient organizations erected on social media mirror and match the coordination capacities of traditional protest organizations Mercea ultimately is critical of interpreting this research approach as portending a "counterdemocracy."

In 1970 Carole Pateman called for attentiveness to the sociological evidence regarding democratic participation[xii]. Mercea's argument, like Iannelli's, is centered in sociological research but begins with the questionable assumption that protest has greatly increased in the last twenty years. This observation involves redefining protest. In tandem with this assumption is a shift of conceptual focus from social movements to what Mercea nebulously calls "contentious politics". The obvious question is what "politics" is if it is not contentious? Mercea, unlike some radical feminists, does not address this inherent redundancy. Mercea also bypasses the question of the fraught relationship between theory and social and political research, even if he mentions in passing Hannah Arendt's theorization of the necessity to the political of that which is new, that which has not yet been experienced.[xiii]

Mercea trusts in multidisciplinary social scientific research to best elucidate questions. Out of this research should come new logics of (networked, communicative) action. Mercea prefers to ignore the overarching world which determines the very possibility or impossibility of certain logics in favor of a focus on the scintillae of new knowledge that non-traditional democratic actors' networked communication that lead to meaningful new trajectories and patterns of participation.

Revolutions and social movements are carried out by relatively few, in terms of actions which make a difference. A problem for the left, organized and otherwise, is how to attract new active participants. Contentious Politics proposes 'protest camps' as one means of making "claims," one of many means in "action repertoires" of protest groups. Mercea asks for more research into promoting democratic form of claims-making, and this quest is a valuable one. "It is interesting to look at social media constituencies as a possibly disenfranchised area of

movement organization called upon to enact decisions on collective action in whose making they will not participate." The "casual protestors" then would respond to techniques of enfranchisement provided by networked communication. Mercea is interested in the ways protest camps "might mobilize audiences which are otherwise disconnected from the issue at hand…" Mercea, though, reports dispiriting results regarding the unaffiliated. He reports that networked communication was no lynchpin in the crystallizing a collective identity among FânFest participants, and, as for mobilization "the unaffiliated did not tend to use the internet to recruit others, as did the affiliated".[xiv]

Authenticity and Effectiveness

Mercea's 'digital prefigurative protest' research is interwoven with questions that are valid within the research's own discourse, and yet one cannot help but discern the almost stubbornly symbolic nature of these questions. In chiaroscuro painting, artists vary the values of light and dark to bring their subjects into dramatic clarity. Most prominently, the technique uses the faces of figures. Faces, consistent with the discourse of the symbolic and its signification, are considered in human consciousness as a symbol, or outward presentation, and behind them is the less accessible mind or the brain, the locus of personhood. Mercea runs the risk of illuminating only faces in a narrative that eschews important questions. What is authentic in a person is not determined by the face, or an institution by its surface, no matter how much light is shone on it or at what angle.

Shouldn't the question of authentic participation be central? We otherwise run the risk of overvaluing logics of action which are utterly irrelevant to power politics. In his treatment of prefigurative protest, Mercea elides the entire history and discourse of revolutionary politics in favor of the pure theorization of a symbolic order. Thus, the prefigurative jettisons moral action which aims to live as if true democracy already existed for a world of prefabricated political discourses. Mercea's prefigurative is something which does not know where it is going, except in the wrong direction: "For many of the theoreticians of prefigurative politics, the problems presented by revolutionary politics can be avoided by simply redefining them out of existence."[xv]

Authenticity is an important question. While it might it be argued that these book sidelines or ignore this question, both Mercea and Iannelli have compiled an enormous amount of research, and not every question can be asked. Researchers in the social sciences narrow their focus and choose their questions, with the idea that it is the research taken altogether that elucidates. And yet, two problems emerge here. The first is a practical problem of recent protest in Western countries. This protest, as a whole, has been a disaster as measured by effectiveness. Moreover, the extremist forces of anti-democracy, through false frameworks and other tactics, have made protest ineffective or rendered them in the service of an anti-democratic agenda. The second problem is the question of social science research contributing to the antidemocratic phenomena, as it in fact measures epiphenomena which the reification of (non-revolutionary) establishment ideologies and methods have produced in the first place. In terms of social science itself, the question is whether effectiveness is a suitable criterion, and my

answer is that it can be. In Egypt in 2011 the protests inspired by Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution shifted the basis on which political science poses its questions, and the audience to which political science presents its research, from the state to the revolution.[xvi] Such a shift can discredit legitimization of the state or its apparatuses.

Closer to home, the Occupy 'movement' was a protest amped with heavy use of social media. Mercea examines new recruitment, finding that even "a loose activist collective identity did not appear to be absolutely central to participation" and that "mobilisation into activism and the formation of a collective identity, it would seem, have stubbornly remained the province of unmediated socialisation." The research Mercea considers and undertakes wants to break barriers to civic engagement, but do new media forms really bring in newcomers? in the U.S. social media sites indeed are lighting up with troubled citizens' concerns. So might one be hopeful that Mercea's research foreshadows a networked movement for real change. Yet, on this score, Mercea and Iannelli both sometimes seem to insist on a forced and false optimism.. Indeed, any attempt to be optimistic looks like the generating of a secondary symbolic world, of a research discourse separating itself from reality and in love with its own irrelevant luminousness.

Adopting the discourse of 'rights', but mixing in revolutionary rhetoric, Occupy Den Haag members sang heartily about world peace, toying with a mélange of political lineages. I watched with dismay as a confused array of conservative, progressive, and revolutionary positions were smeared across Occupy's palette. I also watched as, unbelievably, members of the 1% were ushered before cameras on Occupy's livestream to address Occupy Wall Street. What was somewhat hopeful was that it was offsite neophytes participating via social media who asked, "But, aren't these speakers the very persons against whom we are protesting?" Occupy was overwhelmed by spectacle over logic, by performance over result, which was an absence of real change. I also watched a young man from Occupy Edmonton in the bewildered center of the spotlight. It should have been easy to become enthralled with an image of an attractive fellow who symbolized a militant and progressive agenda, but he only sat there looking mesmerized by the camera, bewildered by his own mediatization, and yet elated by the sight of his own image. He symbolized what Occupy was, a "movement" that had fallen in love with itself,[xvii] and was an exemplar of ineffectiveness in a morass of internal contradictions. Internal contradictions? Is it possible that from the ashes of these ineffectual logics might emerge their active opposite? Mercea and Iannelli try to anticipate a desirable future, but moving our focus away from organizational action leaves us with a symbolic logic that obscures the nasty fact that an anti-Enlightenment, anti-democratic agenda is moving steadily forward, happy to encounter only symbolic challenges.

Notes

[i] Iannelli, 55.

[ii] See, for example, Iannelli, 56, and Jenkins, Henry, 'Whatever Happened to Participatory Television. An Interview with Adam Fish, Part One,' Confessions of an ACA Fan. The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins , April 27, 2017;

https://henryjenkins.org/2017/04/what-ever-happened-to-the-promise-of-participatory-television-an-interviewwith-

adam-fish-part-one.html

[iii] Sarcinelli, Ulrich. 'Symbolic Politics'. The International Encyclopedia of Communication. Blackwell, 2008 (Online):

www.blackwellreference.com/public/tocnode?id=g9781405131995_chunk_g978140513199524_ss132-1

[iv] Mercea, 6

[v] See Boggs, Carl. Social Movements and Political Power. Emerging Forms of Radicalism in the West. Philadelphia:

Temple University Press, 1989, 75.

[vi] Chadwick, Andrew. The Hybrid Media System. Politics and Power. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 113.

[vii] The reference is to Clausewitz, Carl Von. On War. Trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007,

28. The translation here and elsewhere reads, contrary to the popularly repeated version, "War is merely the continuation of policy by other means".

[viii] See Mouffe, Chantal. The Return of the Political. London: Verso, 2005, 6.

[ix] See Thompson, J.B. Media and Modernity. A Social Theory of the Media. Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 1995. Louis Althusser's conception of ideology , in which ideology 'interpellates' subjects, is perhaps political theory's homologue to the symbolic universe of sociologically comprehended subjects. See Althusser, Louis, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. Notes Toward an Investigation.' Althusser, Louis. Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971. Transcribed to Marxists Internet Archive at

https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm

[x] A.C.T.A. stands for The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement

[xi] See Bennett, W. Lance, and Segerberg, Alexandra. The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics . Cambridge U. Press, 2013.

[xii] Pateman, Carole. Participation and Democratic Theory . Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge U. Press, 1970.

[xiii] Mercea, 9.

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Review: John Lahr, Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh

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John Lahr, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*. (W.W. Norton, 2015).

Prior to his death in 1983, Tennessee Williams had twice designated Lyle Leverich, a San Francisco-based theater producer who had never written a book, as his authorized biographer, but those individuals controlling the Williams Estate were less enthusiastic. Thus, impressed with the success of his biography of Joe Orton, the Williams Estate attempted to enlist John Lahr to write the authorized biography of Tennessee Williams. Lahr declined and Leverich devoted the better part of a decade to writing the book that would become *Tom*, a thorough account of the playwright's early years and the intended first installment of a multi-volume biography of Williams.

The publication of *Tom* was stalled for five years by Maria St. Just, Williams's longtime friend and literary executor, who, according to Lahr's own account of the situation in *The New Yorker*, had determined that "[t]he only authorized voice about Williams was to be [hers]." Finally, after enduring a five-year delay, Leverich published *Tom* in 1995 to critical and popular acclaim. Aging and fearing that he would be unable to complete the second volume in the series before his death, Leverich asked Lahr to complete the project for him. This time, Lahr agreed and *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*, the result of an additional decade's worth of research into the playwright's life, stands as the definitive biography of the man many consider to be the greatest American playwright since Eugene O'Neill.

The turbulent circumstances surrounding the writing and publication of Leverich's and Lahr's biographies of Williams, in many ways, echo the tumultuous life Lahr documents in *Mad Pilgrimage*. While the figure of the playwright dominates the stage in this distinctly American drama, much of the story's action is driven by the supporting cast. In Lahr's account, the perpetually connection-starved Williams was as likely to draw delusional, abusive, and parasitic hangers-on into his sphere as he was to inspire a near-religious devotion in his closest friends and the most ardent champions of his work. Recognizing that "the drama in his connections to these people" is very much at the heart of Williams's story, Lahr "intentionally let their voices butt up against one another on the page" (xiv). When combined with the many revelatory passages from Williams's voluminous epistolary legacy (much of which had never been previously published), the words of those men and women closest to the playwright help form a sort of oral history of the man.

As an astute critic of the theater, however, Lahr does not allow the consistently tempestuous, often salacious character of Williams's personal life to overshadow the man's literary legacy. Rather, he manages to balance the narrative of the playwright's life with a comprehensive interpretation of his work. Fortunately for Lahr, Williams "was the most autobiographical of American playwrights" and the theater provided him with "a kind of cleansing" by enabling him to make sense of the turmoil "of his dimly understood but persecuting internal world" by placing it on the stage (33-34). Thus, no matter how far *Mad Pilgrimage* follows Tom Williams—the deeply neurotic man—down the murky avenues of his psycho-social landscape, Tennessee Williams—the titan of Broadway—is always clearly in view.

Born on March 26, 1911, Thomas Lanier Williams III, the man who would reinvent himself as Tennessee Williams "grew up in . . . haunted households where secrets and the unsayable suffused daily life with a sense of masquerade, creating an emptiness as palpable, elusive, and corrosive" as anything the playwright would ever bring to life on the stage (42). Between CC, an emotionally abusive and parsimonious father who "drew an iron curtain around his own feelings, refusing to discuss" his own demons on the comparatively rare occasions he was not on the road as a traveling salesman; Edwina, a "prim and protective" mother who "described her love to her children rather than demonstrating it;"

Rose a "disoriented and delusional"—and very possibly schizophrenic—sister; Dakin, a brother jealous of his mother's preference of Tom over himself, and the Reverend Dakin, a grandfather whose "interest in the 'Grecian vice' belied his position as a pious Episcopal Minister, Tom Williams's childhood was defined by unspoken conflict, roiling resentments, and repressed tensions (41, 35, 58, 53, 41). As a writer forged out of the oppressive milieu of closeted desires, abandoned dreams, stifled passions, and unacknowledged trauma, Williams's "family was never far from his mind" and "[i]n a sort of séance with the ghosts of his past, their narratives and their voices were perpetually reworked into his cast of characters," forming what Gore Vidal aptly called Williams's "basic repertory company" (35).

Indeed, in Lahr's capable hands, Williams's family life emerges as the thematic ligament that unites much of his work, from 1941's *Battle of Angels,* "a personal, opaque, overwrought…parable about…a penny-pinching husband" and "a dutiful desolate wife…trapped by economic circumstance into a humiliating, loveless marriage" to 1982's *A House Not Meant to Stand,* in which "comic images of Williams's humiliated past" including his "ornery, bombastic father" are skewered in a theatrical "funhouse of mirrors" (17, 573). Perhaps not surprisingly, the legacy of the playwright's traumatic upbringing often finds its most poignant expression in Tennessee Williams's enduring classics. In *The Glass Menagerie*, for instance, Lahr examines how "the omnipresent weight of CC's abandonment: the grief that punished and unhinged the Williams family" hovers over the Wingfield's unhappy home (59).

Similarly, in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Stanley's "unruly, self-centered testosterone" owes as much to the legacy of his "blinkered and belligerent" father as to the violent "sexual menace" of Williams's then-partner Amando "Pancho" Rodriguez y Gonzalez (123, 143). And while "Williams's compassionate interpolation of [Maria St. Just, née] Britneva's character into"

Maggie's unswerving tenacity in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* may be a more crucial instance of the playwright's life inspiring his art, his father's abandonment and grandfather's closeted inclinations likely found expression in Brick, who is both "a monument to absence" as well as a "homosexual with a heterosexual adjustment" (301, 287, 304). Lahr takes pains, however, to avoid falling into the trap of simple biographical criticism, expanding his analysis to consider the many ways in which the broader psychological tensions of Williams's frenetic inner life found expression on the page and on the stage.

The playwright, in Lahr's unsparing words, was "a borderline personality with tenacious addictive and depressive tendencies," a genius plagued by hypochondria, who lived much of his adult life in a "drugged-out paranoid blur" because confronting naked, unfiltered reality was often too much for him to bear (348, 490). At once profoundly needy and frustratingly aloof, deeply compassionate and punishingly withering, Williams formed a series of codependent romantic and platonic relationships that almost invariably incubated the tensions, resentment, and hostility out of which so much of his work for the theater gained their immediacy. Following his brief but intense relationship with Kip Kiernan, the man on whom "many of the subsequent steamy male heroes" (Val in *Battle of Angels*, John Buchanan in *Summer and Smoke*, Alvaro in *The Rose Tattoo,* as well as Brick and Stanley in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *A Streetcar Named Desire,* among others) Williams conjured, the playwright spent his remaining decades seeking relationships that would replicate the youthful fervency of that ill-fated connection (94). Similarly, Williams's terror of death and obscurity fueled a unquenchable thirst for approbation. Between his unceasing pursuit of romantic fulfillment and his unslakeable desire for critical and public approval, Williams had a tragic habit of burning out the relationships most dear to him. Alienating in his behavior and alienated by those he drove away, Williams found inspiration for much of his writing in the emotional wreckage of his relationships.

Perhaps the most notable instance of Williams's wresting beauty out of personal pain occurred during the mid-1950s, as Williams's relationship with longtime partner Frank Merlo deteriorated, leaving ""[b]oth men [feeling] aggravated, sad, confused, unheard, unable to separate but unsure of how to continue." (328) According to Lahr, "Williams's struggle to keep his relationship intact was played out, unconsciously, in his drama" of the period where "the idea of the couple was continuously subverted, dramatized as a travesty (*Baby Doll*), a tragedy (*Orpheus Descending*), or an impossibility (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*)" (328-29). The "violence" of the playwright's mid-fifties work, Lahr contends, "was an expression of Williams's elemental rage, which the process of playwriting tapped into and released" in such a way that, on the stage, "[n]o connection was allowed to exist without being spoiled, falsified, mocked, obliterated, robbed of its goodness, or lost forever" (329).

Towards the end of Williams's life, as his relationships with the likes of Audrey Wood, Elia Kazan, Maria St. Just, and his own brother Dakin, grew strained and dissolved into acrimony, his late work represents "a complete stylistic departure" in which "dereliction, delirium, and denial" take center stage (573). Estranged from many of his closest friends, Williams surrounded himself with the ghosts of his past, penning a series of self-consciously

autobiographical “memory plays” such as 1981’s *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* and *A House Not Meant to Stand* that “were written in [a] wistful vein. . .blending elegance and anxiety” to produce the “psychic atmosphere” of “non-communication” and “emotional absenteeism” that Williams had first experienced with his mother and re-experienced during his final years (572).

In Lahr’s hands, the story of Tom Williams does not end happily or on a triumphant note. While not friendless, Williams did die a lonely man, full of self-doubt, and without much drive to enjoy life. A dispute over the dispersal of his physical remains precipitated the fight over his literary remains that prevented Leverich from publishing *Tom* for several years. Still, for a man who struggled mightily with a “sad little wish to be loved,” Lahr reminds us, Tom Williams did bring Tennessee Williams into the world, and Tennessee Williams was able to create “characters so large that they became part of American folklore” (601). So, while Tom Williams may have lived a tumultuous and lonely life, as Tennessee Williams he used that unenviable position to pull back the curtain and shine a spotlight on the psychological and emotional currents of 20th Century American life as no one else has done. Lahr’s great gift to Williams’s legacy is reminding us of the human reality that pulses through the greatest of our literature.

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Review: Alexander Gallas, The Thatcherite Offensive: A Neo-Poulantzasian Analysis

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Alexander Gallas. *The Thatcherite Offensive: A Neo-Poulantzasian Analysis* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016)

Nicos Poulantzas is a thinker awaiting a revival of interest. A theorist of states, classes, and the dynamics of fascism and authoritarianism, his work has some obvious relevance for contemporary political problems. Born in Greece in 1936, he relocated to Germany and then France for graduate study and was effectively exiled after 1967 by the rule of the Greek colonels. In *Political Power and Social Classes*, published at the end of the sixties, and in *State, Power, Socialism*, a decade later, Poulantzas developed a complex conceptual model for understanding the workings of capitalist states. Both books were quickly translated into English and published by what was then called New Left Books, subsequently Verso Books. According to Poulantzas, the state was not a simple instrument of capitalism (what Marx and Engels called "a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie."), but a site defined by the divisions of the capitalist class as well by larger divisions between the working class and the bourgeoisie. And where his contemporary, Ralph Miliband, presented a capitalist state as that which mainly does the ruling class's bidding. Poulantzas argued for a greater separation of powers between capitalists (who are devoted to short-term concerns about profits) and the state (which can devote itself to the long-term health of capitalism).

States are also "fractional", riven by intra-class divisions between the different fractions of capital (finance capital, agri-capital, industrial capital, etc.); there is no single ruling class that could seize state machinery for its own ends. Miliband and Poulantzas would continue their dispute in a famous exchange of articles in the *New Left Review*. Two later books, *Fascism and Dictatorship* (1970) and *Crisis of the Dictatorships* (1976), merged the theoretical with the empirical, studying events in Poulantzas' native Greece as well as elsewhere in Europe. He committed suicide in 1979, after a year-long period of worsening depression.

For all the cogency of his writings, though, Poulantzas has remained overshadowed by Althusser and Gramsci, his two major forebears. To date, there has only been one dedicated study of Poulantzas, Bob Jessop's eponymous 1985 book, now out of print, as well as a select compendium of his writings, published by Verso a decade ago. Alexander Gallas' study of Margaret Thatcher's eleven years of government – readable, engaged and provocative – has the parallel aim of boosting Poulantzas' conceptual tools and their value for understanding states, classes and populist authoritarianism.

The spine of Gallas' book is another dispute between competing Marxist camps; Bob Jessop and a number of comrades who sarcastically became known as the "Gang of Four", against Stuart Hall and his writers at the now-defunct *Marxism Today* magazine. Both were attempting, from 1979 onwards, to understand the phenomenon of Margaret Thatcher

"Hall at al. primarily examined how the Thatcherites conducted the "battle for the hearts and minds" of the population and stressed that their "ideological offensive" triggered a profound shift in political discourse. In contrast, the gang of four focused on investigating how the Thatcherites acted with and shaped "the specific institutional form of the connections between the state, civil society and the economy, and the distinctive organisation of the state system itself"… the analyses of Hall et al. displayed an ideational bias, while those of the gang of four showed an institutional bias. In other words, Jessop at al. primarily operated in the field of political economy, and Hall et al. in that of political ideology."

Recognising that the Jessop-Hall debate was actually focusing on two subtly different aspects of British politics, Gallas constructs a multifaceted theoretical apparatus that brings both approaches into frame; base and superstructure are merged in a thorough political history of the Thatcherite period. Gallas, though, leans more toward the Jessop end of the spectrum, unsurprisingly given that this book emerged out a doctorate supervised by Jessop.

Reflecting his Poulantzasian commitments, Gallas begins his story before 1979 and continues into the Major era and the early years of Blair's premiership; this is a study of shifting forces within the British state, the ways in which those forces restructured the economy, and alterations in perceptions, attitudes and popular ideology. It is not a study of Margaret Thatcher herself. The social origins of the Thatcherite movement are located in shifts within the capitalist class as well as between capital and labour. The wealthier established elite of the Conservative Party fell out of step with an emergent and disgruntled petit-bourgeoise. The government of Edward Heath, advocating a "One Nation" Toryism, was increasingly seen as a damp squib. The successful miners' strike of 1974, which brought down Heath's government, confirmed the dangers of organised labour for the Tories. Enoch Powell, an apostate from the Conservatives, advocated racism and laissez faire monetarism, an apparently popular melding but one that lacked a supporting party structure.

Keith Joseph was another John the Baptist – he began flying the flag for monetarism in the early 70s, but decided against running for Tory leader himself, having faced "strong criticism for his proposition that the right to have children should be restricted for poorer Britons." Thatcher filled this void, lambasting the Tory "Wets" for their failures. But she took on other targets too: "she time and again operated on the grounds of a politics of fear, fuelling moral panics by invoking perceived threats to the British nation that she then could use to legitimise authoritarian forms of social control directed against minorities and her political enemies." In time, Thatcher and her allies would come to develop a "Two Nations" politics, claiming to represent a nation of hard-working "real" Britons, against a Nation of parasites, lazy dole-cheats, immigrants, feckless single mothers, terrorists and assorted other social pariahs.

Much of this was already being signposted before her accession to power. Gallas holds to a kind of intentionalist interpretation of Thatcherism, seeing later policies echoed in pre-1979 policy documents. This is perhaps overstated. As he himself points out her own "ideological orientation" was still forming in the mid-1970s. Gallas, though, does carefully enumerate a precise chronology of Thatcherism; a pre-history prior to 1977 and a period of coalescing until 1979, paralleled by crises within the then-ruling Labour Party; the first half-decade of formal rule, during which the Thatcherites carried out class-politics by stealth and were not yet ready for a direct confrontation with opponents in the labour movement; four years of instability and confrontation from 1984-88, with the Miners' Strike as the central event; another four years of entrenchment from 1988 to 1992, though with the paradox that Thatcher herself lost power at the high-tide of Thatcherism; and finally a longer process of losing control. Blair, in office from 1997, is presented as the heir of Thatcher. According to Conservative politician Conor Burns, Thatcher once remarked that "Tony Blair and New Labour" were her greatest achievements. In Gallas' periodisation "Thatcherism" continued to 1999, after which Blair and New Labour changed tack, with different class forces coming to the fore.

Gallas also uses his retelling of the Thatcherite narrative to pinpoint the problem of Poulantzas' "class reductionism" and the ways in which he subsumed gender relations into class relations; for Gallas, both are invested in each other. Privileging class over gender (or race) cannot not explain the full scope of the Thatcherite Offensive. One of Poulantzas' major ideological innovations – that "the state" was not just the sum of its institutional parts but also included families, the church, schools, since all of these serve as conduits for the propagation of capitalist ideology – is, however, not drawn upon. Gallas is certainly alert to rhetoric of Thatcher in this regard; religious piety was a favoured topic and in one of her most notorious declamations (later disavowed), Thatcher told *Woman's Own* magazine in 1987 that "There is no such thing" as society, rather "There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first." Yet Gallas' discussion of such claims remains at the level of superstructure, avoiding discussion of how Thatcher changed the base reality of families.

Gallas' conclusion is that Thatcherism was successful in the short term – *pace* Stuart Hall, her regime did succeed in terms of class politics and achieving hegemony (to the degree that full hegemony is possible). But Unemployment remained a perennial problem throughout the Thatcher years, topping three million in 1984. Manufacturing jobs dropped year-on-year and on more than one occasion, the Thatcherites tried and failed to put full-throated monetarist policies into place. Inflation remained high throughout the 1980s. Thus, following Jessop and his Gang of Four, Gallas concludes that Thatcherism was a failure in the medium-term, in its attempts to successfully restructure the British economy.

It is a challenge to read Gallas' book and not have contemporary American politics come to mind – a right-wing leader, disdainful of both accepted norms of political conduct and of perceived weakness in their own party; a Left collapsing into acrimony and failing to mount a serious challenge (despite this new leader never gaining a majority of votes); a nostalgia for the imperial past and the notion that soft-authoritarian rule could "Make Great Britain Great

Again" (the slogan Thatcher used for her failed 1950 electoral campaign); Manichean two-nations ideas that divided the landscape into those who had a right to belong, and a host of evil interlopers – antinomies that found their logical fulfillment in Thatcher's talk of Britain being "swamped" with immigrants. Certainly there are differences between Thatcher and Trump; the former was never so crude, never so enamored of overt white supremacy, never so willing to rile up the popular masses. But the similarities are also quite blatant.

And just as with *The Thatcherite Offensive*, Nicos Poulantzas offers a robust set of conceptual tools for understanding the Trumpian Offensive. Competing power centers within the state; divisions between Silicon Valley capitalists (who look out to the world and fund the Democrats) and manufacturing capitalists (who favor protectionism); a white proletariat willing to make an inter-class alliance with industrial capital; a petit-bourgeois class (probably Trump's biggest demographic) who feel squeezed between larger forces that they can't control and who hanker for an imagined golden age of US capitalism. These are familiar elements in the Trumpian debacle and Poulantzas' theoretical tool box offers revealing ways for understanding all of them. Gallas' book is a worthwhile push for bringing Poulantzas into contemporary political analysis.

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Jeremy Walton, Muslim Civil Society and the Politics of Religious Freedom in Turkey

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Jeremy Walton, *Muslim Civil Society and the Politics of Religious Freedom in Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Since the very beginning of the Turkish Republic in 1923, both scholarly and popular accounts have frequently tended to frame the country – their object of analysis – in a way that produced two effects: First, these accounts frequently described the movement of ideas, social norms, ways of thinking, and forms of political organization from Europe into Turkey. In some sense, this decision reflected the self-consciously Westernizing projects of the country's ruling elite. more problematically, this importation resulted in a mode of understanding of Turkey that focused primarily on the way that processes 'outside' the country – whether developmentalism, democratization, modernization, globalization, or neoliberalism, to name five of the most important – were imported 'into' Turkey. The consequence of this conceptual blind spot was the second effect: Scholarship on Turkey tended to take for granted the assumed stability of these processes in the places from which scholars wrote. In evaluating the extent to which Turkey's experience conformed to or diverged from a given model, some of this scholarship likewise failed to interrogate the complicated dynamics of and within the United States of America and Europe.

Where once many scholars looked at Turkey and asked, "Why Turkey wasn't more like _____," many scholars of Turkey now look at their own countries and ask, "How is my country becoming more like Turkey?" This is, perhaps, small consolation, but it does signal a helpful shift from a situation in which Turkey was studied according to others' models to one in which the specificities of Turkey teach us something of broader relevance. One exemplary example of that shift was an essay written by the novelist and essayist Ece Temelkuran in which she reflected on the lessons that observers of American politics and Donald Trump might draw from the situation she knew best: A Turkey run by the Justice and Development Party for 15 years and now effectively under the control of President Recep Tayyıp Erdoğan. Noting Erdoğan's propensity for outlandish statements and outright lies that became accepted as the new horizons of the normal, she warned those in the United States that trying to argue with figures like Donald Trump, Nigel Farage, or others was "like trying to play chess with a pigeon. Even if you win within the rules, the pigeon will clutter up the pieces, and finally it will shit on the chessboard, leaving you to deal with the mess."

Jeremy Walton's *Muslim Civil Society and the Politics of Religious Freedom in Turkey* has nothing to do with pigeons or chessboards, but, like Temelkuran's work, Walton's ethnography provides a way of thinking about religion, state sovereignty, and liberal political subjectivity that is relevant well beyond Turkey's borders. Not simply an analysis *of* Turkey, *Muslim Civil Society* gives us a sophisticated account of one way we might understand the politics of religion *from* Turkey. As he notes in his Introduction, this book "focuses on how a romance of independence from state power… has fueled a distinctive mode of 'nongovernmental politics' on the part of both Alevi and Sunni actors within civil society." But, Walton insists, 'civil society' cannot be conceptualized as an objective pre-existing object of study, somehow set within a "domain of primordial, nonpolitical belonging and identity" (p. 4). Rather, his book analyzes a set of overlapping, competing, and contradictory ways that a variety of actors deploy 'civil society' as both political horizon and normative frame to authorize certain mediations of Islam and render others impossible. How, why, and for whom do appeals to 'religious freedom' in contemporary Turkey simultaneously "[enshrine] a liberal image of the religious subject as autonomous, self-regulating, and nonpolitical" while "decoupling questions of political sovereignty from those of governance in pursuit of the newfound ideal of 'religious freedom'" (p. xix)? Rather than provides a normative answer to that question, Walton's account usefully compares and contrasts the different ways that three civil society organizations deploy, contest, and consolidate particular definitions of religion and freedom. They are the Nur Community, the movement known as Hizmet, and a set of self-identified Alevi foundations.[1]

Walton organizes his book into two main sections. The first section – the Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2 – provides the reader with a quick but accessible entry into Turkey's recent history and maps out five different public mediations of Islam in Turkey. Walton juxtaposes four of these mediations – the statist, mass, partisan, and consumerist – with a fifth, that of 'civil Islam.' In relation to those four, he argues, civil Islam helps to make possible two key kinds of subject, "the self-determining individual and [the] voluntaristic community [who] inhabit and emerge from a field of power defined by liberal governmentality" (p. 104). In turn, these subjects both make possible and are reconfirmed by discourses of 'religious freedom.' Oftentimes, appeals to religious freedom are framed as opening up a space for individuals to express their faith without government intrusion, but Walton's ethnography makes a key contribution in showing us that those appeals to religious freedom in fact require a political configuration that positions the individual, the community, and the state in particular ways.[2] As Walton observes, "Nongovernmental actors and activists envision civil society as a simultaneously political and nonpolitical domain" (78).

In the book's second section, he sketches out the distinctive spatial and temporal practices of civil Islam (respectively, Chapters 3 and 4). His spatial analysis takes us through a variety of devotional practices and spaces, ranging from Friday prayers to visits to the shrine of Hacı Bektaş to the reading circles of the Nur Community. In doing so, he draws out the ways that definitions of religion – and thus definitions of religious subjects – are closely connected to particular ways of using space. When he turns to history, Walton situates his analysis relative to the ways that Turkey's neoliberal experience has made it possible for individuals and communities to "face up to history" in ways that challenge the Turkish state's sovereignty over

modes of history telling. But rather than celebrate individuals' freedom to learn history for themselves, *Muslim Civil Society* challenges us to attend to the very different possibilities that Sunni and Alevi civil society organizations have for narrating their histories in and in relation to the state. Space and history come together in the book's final analytical chapter on the Ottoman chronotope of Istanbul. In one key encounter, he observes that Istanbul's Ottoman-era buildings – many of which have been restored and then transferred to a range of civil society organizations – play an important role because they "permit the simultaneity and synthesis of public Muslim virtue and nongovernmental political activism" (p. 190). Held up as material exemplars of an authentic civil identity – and thus ostensibly outside the 'politics' of the state – these Ottoman-era buildings are in fact deeply enmeshed in the operations of state power. As a result, these buildings and the chronotope they help to naturalize a civil society that in fact alienates large numbers of people, in particular many residents of Istanbul who identify as Alevi.

One of the great strengths of this book is also, perhaps, a limitation. Much of the ethnographic research that forms the heart of this book's argument took place over 18 months between 2005 and 2007. In the decade since, Walton has continued to return to, research in, and write about contemporary Turkey. As a result, *Muslim Civil Society* is able to provide us an important meso-scale account of political, cultural, and religious change in Turkey that avoids both ahistorical analysis and an overly historical analysis that searches for the 'roots' of the present in the deep Ottoman past. *Muslim Civil Society* is also a carefully crafted book; even if one might quibble about the exact boundaries, Walton's mapping out of his five mediations of public Islam is convincing, effective, and provides an important revision to commonplace analyses of Turkey that juxtapose only the 'religious' and the 'secular.'

But – and as Walton allows – Turkey seems to have changed in important ways over the past decade, both as an object of scholarship and as a lived experience. In English in the United States, several books in anthropology and sociology have traversed a similar terrain, including Berna Turam's *Between Islam and the State* (2007), Kabir Tambar's *The Reckoning of Pluralism* (2014), Brian Silverstein's *Islam and Modernity in Turkey* (2011), Cihan Tuğal's *Passive Revolution* (2009) and *The Fall of the Turkish Model* (2016), and Joshua Hendrick's *Gülen: The Ambiguous Politics of Market Islam in Turkey and the World* (2013). In focusing on the paradoxical nonpolitical politics of religious freedom, Walton's book makes a new contribution to this literature, but part of the challenge of *Muslim Civil Society* is analyzing research from a decade ago in light of the shifts in the literature.

The bigger challenge is – and as Walton avers – to contextualize his research in relation to Turkey's recent history. By one count, there have been three constitutional referendums (2007, 2010, 2017), two local elections (2009 and 2014), and four general elections (2007, 2011, and two in 2015), and Turkey's first popular presidential election (2014). There were the Gezi Protests (summer 2013), the corruption allegations against President Erdoğan and his family (December 2013), the long-running purge against Hizmet and supporters of its leader Fethullah Gülen (2014-present), renewed violence against predominantly Kurdish regions in the country's southeast (2015-present), bombings in Reyhanlı, Istanbul, and Ankara, and

ongoing fallout from the violence in Syria. And then there was the failed coup attempt of July 2016. In short, Turkey's recent history has been punctuated by a staggering range of events that could bear on some of Walton's arguments about politics, individual freedom, and the forms of social organization. In fairness, that would be a very different book, but it does signal a distinct challenge of writing about Turkey.

Yet *Muslim Civil Society* is not simply a book about Turkey. What makes it particularly interesting is the way that it opens up a way of thinking about the politics of religion in a place like the United States of America, particularly since the November 2016 election of Donald Trump. One of the many debates since the election has turned on the question of 'politicization.' Defenders of President Trump often claim that his opponents are too quick to politicize things like (Christian) religious belief or (Confederate) heritage. They claim that these forms of belief and heritage cannot be political because they are located with the realm of civil society. Any government intervention into the realm of belief or heritage, such as laws that ban discrimination or government decisions to remove Confederate statues, is framed as a violation of the fundamental autonomy of 'civil society.' But what Walton's work helps us see is the way that any appeal to a non-political and thus autonomous civil society in fact depends upon a particular configuration of state power and (some) individuals' willingness to be governed. Far more than simply helping us learn about Turkey, *Muslim Civil Society* also provides a new lens to think about ongoing debates in the United States today.

Notes

[1] It was the Hizmet Movement, led by the religious leader Fethullah Gülen, that is alleged to have carried out the July 2016 coup attempt in Turkey. As Walton notes, that coup attempt took place immediately after his finishing the final revisions on this book.

[2] Compare, for example, the various versions of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act that have been passed by numerous state legislatures around the United States of America.

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Review: Bhaskar Sunkara (ed.), The ABC's of Socialism

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Bhaskar Sunkara (ed.), *The ABC's of Socialism*. Brooklyn: Verso, 2016.

It can be difficult to remember amidst the daily news onslaught that there was not so long ago a real chance that America would elect a real progressive to the White House, one who openly though sometimes confusingly spoke about the value of socialism. The majority of anti-Trump groups are focused on mobilizing a resounding "No!" to the regressive policies of the new administration, and rightly so: Trumpism promises not only to sink America into a paranoid-schizoid sea of xenophobia but also to help the super-rich profit while doing so. Indivisible, the locally-focused movement that has blossomed around a guide created by former congressional staffers on how to resist the Trump agenda, is exemplary in this regard. Indivisible aims explicitly to be to Trump what the Tea Party was to Obama: a visible, disruptive, and strategic obstacle. While rejecting their views, Indivisible lauds the Tea Party for having "thought thoroughly about advocacy tactics," and their guide is in many ways a repurposed Tea Party action memo.

As important as this work is, it does not address the underlying structural causes behind Trump's election nor does it offer much in the way of an alternative vision for America. "No!" is needed at the present moment, but so too is a recognition of the increasing income and wealth inequality over the past 40 years, which has left many Americans desperate, anxious, vulnerable, and grasping at whatever change they can get. Trump's election wasn't just the result of a rising tide of vitriol stirred up by a ham-actor fascist agitator. It was also a sign of the deep frustration with and distrust of a neo-liberal establishment that has done very little to stem growing alienation and immiseration.

Thankfully there are groups out there like Our Revolution and the Justice Democrats, who offer very specific progressive platforms in recognition of the fact that impoverishment and instability were at the root of Trump's victory. The Justice Democrats call out the "corporate wing of the party" and are aiming at nothing less than replacing *every* establishment politician in congress, both Republican and Democrat, in 2018. Our Revolution, the organizational heir to the Sanders campaign, is also working at the local level to support new progressive leaders. Both groups are doing important and necessary work in the effort of revitalizing American democracy, but there is a particular itch that neither are scratching. Both organizations, and indeed most leftist organizations that have grown substantially in the wake of Trump, give people something to *do*, but neither are doing a great deal to help them *understand* how we

arrived at this particular predicament. The explanation always seems either to be bad people, or bad, rich people, and neither explanation is particularly convincing. The present is undoubtedly a time for action, but it should also, even more importantly, be a time for searching and uncomfortable self-reflection. The Trump era is and will continue to be a disaster, but an even greater disaster would be a failure to really question what it means to be on the "left" in an increasingly frightening period of human history.

In the effort to aid this process of reflection, the socialist magazine *Jacobin* has released a short pamphlet on *The ABC's of Socialism*, available on their website for free in digital form and for $5 in print form. *Jacobin* has a monthly print circulation of 25,000 and a monthly web circulation of 1,000,000, and with chapters of the Democratic Socialists of America sprouting up around the country (their membership has tripled since Trump's election), the *ABC's* is going to have a very large audience. *Jacobin* has become, for better or worse, the preeminent voice of socialism in America.

The ABC's of Socialism is designed like a board game: the reader begins at square one with "I might be a socialist but…" and then advances through a set of common objections, including "Isn't America already kind of socialist?", "But at least capitalism is free and democratic, right?", and so forth. Each objection (thirteen in all) receives a response in a short chapter, some of which are truly remarkable for their clarity and brevity. Nivedita Majumdar swiftly demonstrates the absurdity of labeling socialism "Eurocentric" – "Is it Eurocentric to argue that Bangladeshi garment workers have as much at stake in fighting for their economic rights… as workers laid off at American Walmart stores?" (65) – and Vivek Chibber justifies the socialist focus on the working class. For Chibber, it is not simply that "workers face all sorts of indignities and material deprivation," for "after all, there are lots of groups who suffer indignities and injustices – racial minorities, women, the disabled. Why single out workers?" (121). The answer refers us to the critique of capitalism: as the source of surplus-value, workers are in the best position of any group to enact structural change in capitalist society. And Chibber stresses that "this isn't just a theory. If we look back at the conditions in which far-reaching reforms have been passed over the past hundred years, reforms which improved the material conditions of the poor, or which gave them more rights against the market – they were invariably based on working-class mobilization" (126).

Other essays, sometimes on account of the immensity of their topics, sometimes on account of the narrowness of their approaches, are missed opportunities. Erik Olin Wright's challenge to the idea that capitalism is free and democratic reads like it is from a different era. When, for instance, Wright tells us that it is not free and democratic for corporations to decide to relocate a factory or that "9-5 is tyranny," it feels as if he has walked right into the standard retorts: "Of course capitalists can move the businesses. They're *their* businesses! Of course socialists think the 9-5 is tyranny. They're *lazy*!" Rather than recite complaints against the elites, Wright's essay could have pointed out that capitalists, when they move those factories to places where wage-labor is cheap, are themselves not acting "freely" according to their own "private interests." They are merely obeying the bottom line, being "capital personified," and may be quite personally troubled by the relocation. The idea that capitalists themselves are "free," in

other words, needed to come in for inspection. Furthermore, the essay was a chance to raise the contradiction between the productive capacities of capitalism and the social constraints on realizing the goods enabled by those capacities. 9-5 might not be tyranny in a vacuum, but it sure looks like it if the majority of the workday is demonstrated to be surplus labor time.

Joseph Schwartz tackles the objection that socialism typically ends in dictatorship and while he admirably shows that historically, it is the socialists who have fought, and the capitalists who have supported, the authoritarian regimes that claim to be "socialist," once again a crucial piece is missing. Schwartz points to the myriad ways in which capital*ists* have propped up dictators throughout the twentieth century, but he does not delve into the ways in which capital*ism* creates the kind of social discontent that is manipulated by fascist agitators to scapegoat already marginalized subgroups. Not just individual capitalists but the system itself is the issue. Especially after the 2016 election, Max Horkheimer's well-known dictum must be reasserted: those who are unwilling to talk about capitalism should stay silent about fascism.

Recognizing that socialism often gets pinned for emphasizing class and anti-capitalism to the neglect of other concerns, the new socialists stress *intersectionality*, or the ways in which varying forms of institutional oppression are related. The *ABC's* is exemplary in this regard, its middle chapters devoted to the relationships of anti-racism, feminism, environmentalism, and pacifism to socialism. The last of these, which reads at moments like a history of American imperialist wars since the Spanish-American war, is a somewhat confusing addition to the *ABC's*, and a lengthy one at that. It raises the argument that the money spent on war abroad could be used for social welfare programs at home, but this point, as well as the general conclusion that "one has to differentiate between the violence of those fighting to maintain injustice, and those fighting against injustice" (117), does not seem particular to socialists, nor does it seem like a particularly urgent objection to socialism.

The essays pertaining to the first three, by contrast, are among the strongest in the book, demonstrating as they do the insufficiency of these struggles without a fight against capitalism while also admitting a tendency of socialists to be blindered by class. Despite an initially confusing discussion of slavery as fulfilling the "labor needs of capital" (74), which employs Marx's thoughts on what he calls "primitive accumulation" without addressing them as such, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor manages cogently to articulate the "divide and rule" strategy wherein working class groups are pitted against each other along racial lines, the need to win "ordinary whites to an antiracist program" in order to build "a genuine, unified mass movement capable of challenging capital" (78), and the historical links between anti-capitalism and anti-racism. Nicole Aschoff similarly covers a great deal of ground in a small amount of space, explaining how capitalism both assumes and reinforces a gendered division of labor and critiquing the "'take-power' feminist strategy" of women like Sheryl Sandberg, Hillary Clinton, and Anne-Marie Slaughter, who offer "a feminism that doesn't challenge capitalism" (89).

Special mention should be made of Alyssa Battistoni's contribution, which is also wide-ranging in its pithiness but works to bring the reader in to the socialist imaginary as well. Battistoni emphasizes that eco-socialism is not about "preserving an idealized concept of pristine,

untouched nature. It's about choosing the world we make and live in" (102). Simultaneously fending off the ideas that socialism involves either "clamp[ing] down on popular consumption" (98) or keeping "the capitalist engines… roaring" (96) in the hands of workers, she holds up conscious decision-making as the real good of a socialist society, which would "make decisions about producing and implementing new technologies based on democratically chosen aims, rather than producing and consuming wastefully in order to keep various industries profitable" (100-1). The vision articulated here is remarkably disarming, tidily dismissive as it is of misleading stereotypes, and also quite concrete: "Instead of an endless cycle of working and shopping, life in a low-carbon socialist future would be oriented around activities that make life beautiful and fulfilling but require less intensive resource consumption: reading books, teaching, learning, making music, seeing shows, dancing, playing sports, going to the park, hiking, spending time with one another" (98).

The one fault of the essay lies in a criticism of traditional Marxists, who "held that communism would arise amid post-capitalist conditions of superabundance" (96). Battistoni is certainly right to take issue with a particular *version* of Marxism, but the critique does not salvage the key of insight of Marx's that capitalism *is* driving revolutions in the means of production that have made possible a new kind of society. Marx, I think, would agree with Battistoni that "we need not only to seize the means of production, but to transform them" (97) but would add that it is only thanks to capitalism's development of these means that the possibility of transforming them is on the table. At stake here is a problem – that of taking the dialectical sting out of socialist thinking – that unfortunately runs throughout the *ABC's*.

The weakest sections of the book are those that deal with the most general and abstract concerns, such as the chapters on the compatibility of socialism with human nature and whether or not life will be fun and exciting in a socialist society. Not surprisingly these are also the chapters where the particularity of the authors' standpoints shines through the argument. Grappling with the objection that capitalism is "much more suited to human nature – a nature dominated by competitiveness and venality," Adaner Usmani and Bhaskar Sunkara reply simply that people are more complex than that: sure, they're greedy and competitive *sometimes*, but "they also engage in remarkable acts of kindness and, even in difficult situations, show deep regard for others" (31). "People are complex" is clearly an inadequate response, and one wonders immediately why the authors do not mention the ways in which capitalist social relations are structured in such a way as to compel us to be selfish, cold, worried about our relative statuses, feeling out of control, etc., and thus that what is often taken to be natural in human beings is in fact *social* in origin. This line of critique, dating back to Rousseau's distinction between natural and moral inequalities in the *Second Discourse,* has been a mainstay of socialist thought, so why fall back on "people are complex"?

This is where the particularity comes in: Usmani and Sunkara disagree with the idea that "we're plastic – that there is no such thing as human nature. Progressives do sometimes make this claim, often arguing with those who see people as walking, talking utility-maximizers. Despite its good intentions, this reproach goes too far" (31-2). It's difficult to know who precisely the authors have in mind when they speak of a human nature-denying progressive,

but my hunch is that it is the postmodern academic who touts the constructedness of all identity and who has done so much to undermine the reason that *Jacobin* champions (their motto is "Reason in revolt"). Usmani and Sunkara might be correct that a certain kind of purportedly critical discourse has been extremely damaging to leftist politics, but they throw the baby out with the bathwater when they conclude, "of course there's a human nature!" An essential ingredient of the socialist theoretical lens is a recognition that we are compelled by capitalism to *be* in an historically-specific way.

Danny Katch's concluding chapter, which holds up socialism as exciting and vibrant in a way that capitalism is only for a select few, raises a similar objection. Katch points to Russia in the 20s as "a messy and thrilling creation of tens of millions of people groping toward a different way of running society and treating each other" (136) and argues that, so long as we like dealing with the conflict and arguments of a democratic society, socialism could never be the grim and dreary dystopian future it is so often portrayed to be. "To be an effective socialist," he concludes, "it is extremely helpful to like human beings. Not humanity as a concept but real, sweaty people" (138). Once again, the historical specificity of the issue is not addressed: it is a real question, for one, why the kind of excitement that Katch associates with capitalism – "new gadgets for the rich people, wild parties for celebrities, amazing performances to watch from your couch" (133) – is excitement at all, and thus why *Jacobin* would even choose to address the problem of whether or not socialism will be "fun," let alone conclude the book with it. Given also the point raised above – that capitalism compels a certain kind of behavior that is selfish, cold, and inconsiderate – it is misleading and moralizing to hold up "liking real people" as a precondition of being an effective socialist. *Not* liking people on account of their brutal instrumentality and unthinking adherence to the increasingly inane products of the culture industry is just as good a reason to be a socialist as any.

The weakness of these chapters exemplifies the crux of the problem with the *ABC's*: the message seems to be that if you are a reasonably complex, aesthetically sensible people-person, then socialism looks like a pretty good option, once the historical muck is washed off and it's brought up to speed with the times. I am immediately reminded of a *Portlandia* sketch where Father Timothy (played by Ed Begley, Jr.) implores his audience in an advertisement to "consider church an option." What is missing here is the *dialectical force* of the original vision: Marx did not envision one way of addressing many of the world's problems. He rather laid out what the contradictions of capitalism have made *necessary*. To fail to achieve the historically novel form of rational society that the capitalist mode of production has made possible is, for Marx, to condemn capitalist society to an accelerating and destructive *ir*rationality.

One might object that the purpose of the *ABC's* is to be an introduction and that the intricacies of the dialectic needn't be covered in a primer, but this concern is neither academic nor very difficult to put in simple terms. We imagine post-scarcity, leisure-filled futures – everything from Battistoni's hipster paradise to *Star Trek: The Next Generation* – for the same reason that we imagine post-disaster, *Mad Max* futures: because capitalism has made them possible. Both were quite literally unthinkable before capitalism, as both are very much in play today, but the longer we wait to achieve the former, the closer we get to putting ourselves definitively on the

path to the latter.

When Rosa Luxemburg famously claimed that the options for a capitalist society are socialism or barbarism, she meant that socialism is not just about making the world fairer, about choosing to side with the workers and against the capitalists for a more rational society. It's about stemming the tide of *ir*rationality that threatens to engulf capitalists and workers alike. Trump should be a sign to us all, no matter your identity, no matter your lot in our eco-apartheid, no matter who you think deserves what, that socialism is not an "option." It is an opportunity, and one whose window is rapidly closing.

Review: Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber, The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy

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Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017

Every now and then, one comes across a book that is so out of touch with reality, it could only have been written by an academic. When the reality that the author is out of touch with happens to be academia itself, one might be tempted to guess that the author is not an academic. But *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* reveals that sometimes the limits of academic aloofness know no bounds. Authors Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber attempt in their book to apply the lessons of the slow food movement and other slow philosophies to higher education. They argue that the academy has been taken over by a corporate model of governing, forcing professors to work in rushed and efficiency-driven ways that undermine the very nature of academic work, which requires thoughtfulness, pleasure, and time. They outline three areas of academia – teaching, research, and collegiality – where tenured professors feel a pervasive sense of stress and time pressure and suggest strategies for overcoming such obstacles in order to retrieve a sensible intellectual life.

It is difficult to disagree with many of the conclusions that Berg and Seeber put forward. Of course professors need time to think and write. Of course professors should enjoy teaching and should avoid spending too much time online. Even the advice that is trivial and banal ("Follow your heart." "Don't give up hope.") is perhaps not wrong. I suspect that these innocuous recommendations are part of the explanation for the positive praise the book has received.

But conclusions are different from an argument, and the argument of the book continually falters. The central argument attempts to link the corporatization of the university with the need for a slow philosophy in higher education. The idea that the modern university is increasingly run more like a business is certainly true and the serious problems with such a model have been well documented by others. Certainly, one such problem is the extent to which professors have more tedious bureaucratic responsibilities to perform. Nevertheless, the idea that the corporatization of the university is single-handedly or fundamentally responsible at least for tenured professors feeling busy and stressed is something of an exaggeration.

The busyness, lack of time, and the mountains of work of academic life are not imposed

principally from a business or managerial perspective that has hijacked college administrators, though they may well add to it. Instead, it stems from the (technological, economic) culture at large and the nature of academic work itself. If a professor compulsively pokes around in the library and spends more time on email than he wants to, there is no immediate reason to think that he is trying to please his college's administration. Our cell phones and our social media accounts make us busier and stressed even before the pressures imposed by deans and provosts come into the picture. Moreover, as Berg and Seeber point out more than once, academic work by its nature is never done. So the fact that professors are always extremely busy cannot necessarily be put down as a singular function of a nevertheless expanding corporate model of education.

Almost all of the evidence presented in this book is anecdotal. For example, the claim that it is more and more difficult for professors to find social support is merely a view expressed by two of Berg and Seeber's colleagues. A narrative or an observation about empty hallways on college campuses seems appropriate for a trade magazine, but not a peer-reviewed book published by a reputable academic press. But even if such evidence were convincing and accurate, the further claim that such lack of social support is caused by the corporatization of the university requires more than a hunch about a "climate of accounting," even if academic management in many places were modeling itself after Wells Fargo.

Berg and Seeber's book would approach a strong argument if it had emphasized the steady and significant decline of tenure-track faculty, which certainly is an important effect of the corporate model of university governance and one that contributes to the culture of speed in the academy. Instead, the authors apply their observations exclusively to full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty, ignoring the way in which the university culture, by and large, has resisted demanding that its full-time faculty do work quickly and "efficiently." We see this especially in several features that (still) structure the university, such as tenure, the academic calendar, and the sabbatical, features that Berg and Seeber rarely, if ever, mention. Tenure virtually guarantees that a professor will not be fired—or indeed in anyway penalized—for failing to "produce". Tenured and tenure-track faculty as a percentage of teachers in higher education, however, have dropped precipitously. In 1969, about 78% of faculty were tenured or tenure-track. Forty years later, that figure dropped to about 33%.[1] While this decline is deeply troubling, Berg and Seeber pay virtually no attention to it and in the process overlook the slow benefits that tenure offers. Full-time professors who remain in academia are generally committed to teaching at most four courses a semester, leaving unstructured time in the summer or between semesters to work on research. And while a high teaching load makes publishing more difficult, it commonly corresponds with less pressure to publish in the first place (although perhaps the primary motive for entering the profession by most faculty is to do meaningful research). Sabbaticals are under some pressure as a cost-saving measure, but even at small colleges they remain fairly common. Or at least, if one wanted to show that business concerns in the academy were eliminating room for intellectual rumination, one should show that sabbaticals are seriously endangered; but Berg and Seeber do not even mention them. If tenured professors are not honest about the privileges we few still enjoy, we risk alienating even more the contingent faculty who enjoy almost none. At one point, Berg and Seeber

describe one busy professor's admission that it took him more than 10 years to write his book as an "act of everyday rebellion." But this is simply the normal course of things in academia.

How much Berg and Seeber understand about the slow movement they are trying to apply is not clear. The slow philosophy is not merely a matter of challenging the frantic pace of contemporary culture. It is about recovering an older way of doing things that prioritizes quality over quantity, that reconnects ends and means, mind and body, when these things have been divorced in a technocapitalist culture of endless consumption. Consider the paradigmatic slow movement: food. The idea of slow food is to reclaim eating in such a way that we know where our food is coming from and how it is prepared. Fast food treats nourishment (if it can still be called that) as a commodity, without any understanding or concern for how nourishment is produced. Slow food, by contrast, reminds us that the activity of eating has standards of excellence, that it can engage us fully, that we can be involved in both production and consumption and can enjoy both. Hence, the slow philosophy appropriately applies to activities that are fundamentally embodied: eating, gardening, sex, medicine, playing music, and so on.

Berg and Seeber realize the significance of embodiment when it comes to teaching, as they effectively argue against digital mediation as a second-rate substitute for genuine teaching and learning. However, they fail to retain this significance in the remaining parts of the book, as the argument devolves into a laundry list of complaints about the pressures academics face more generally.

A less significant failure than the book's argument is its writing, but this is also worth mentioning because it illuminates the more significant failure. First, the "Slow Professor Manifesto" that Berg and Seeber provide in the preface suffers from a surprising dearth of normative statements. Their approach, recall, is narrative and testimony, which apparently doesn't lend itself well to constructing manifestos. Second, *The Slow Professor* comes in at fewer than 100 pages of text. The authors claim that this was a "careful choice" because they did not want to write something that their colleagues were too busy to read. In other words, they wanted to enable their colleagues to continue in their hurried and harried professional choices. Third, the authors' voices are lost in a sea of name-dropping and quotations. At one point, the first and last names of six different scholars are mentioned in the course of two sentences. The significance of mentioning these authors and their precise words is rarely made clear. Is it really necessary to quote an author who said "thoughts take time"? Is the quotation "you can't put a good conversation on your vita" so important that it needed to be provided twice? The authors appear more interested in fulfilling a recently-imposed scholarly standard of having sufficient citations of their colleagues' work (a standard that tends to be concerned more with quantity than quality) rather than doing the hard, slow work of exploring the nature, purpose, and development of the university and how it requires leisure to achieve its aims.

One suspects in the end that the authors are merely writing a defensive screed against a perspective that is rather popular outside the university: that professors are lazy free-riders. Aside from this perspective being occasionally true, those of us to whom it does not apply

almost never consider or worry about it. Berg and Seeber suggest that perhaps we should and that is as far as the worthiness of the book goes. The outside perspective is underdescribed and unaddressed. Many people not only think that professors are lazy, but also that whatever work professors actually do (particularly scholarship in the humanities) is pretty worthless. Unfortunately, *The Slow Professor,* concerned only with the travails of the 'chosen few' tenured faculty, fails to undermine that suspicion.

Notes

[1] Adrianna Kezar and Daniel Maxey, The Changing Academic Workforce," Trusteeship Magazine May/June 2013. Accessed at https://www.agb.org/trusteeship/2013/5/changing-academic-workforce

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